

THOMAS SHEPARD: FROM NONCONFORMIST TO ORTHODOX TO
PERSECUTOR; SHEPARD'S ROLE IN THE
ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY

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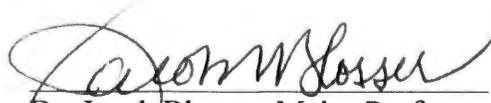
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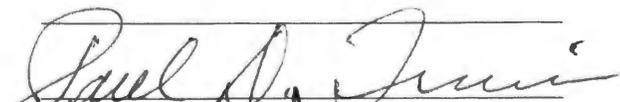
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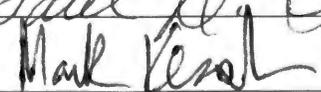
I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Melba Chance entitled "Thomas Shepard: From Nonconformist to Orthodox to Persecutor; Shepard's Role in the Antinomian Controversy." I have examined this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Masters of Arts with a major in History.



Dr. Jacob Blosser, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:





Department Chair

Accepted:



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ABSTRACT

MELBA CHANCE

THOMAS SHEPARD: FROM NONCONFORMIST TO ORTHODOX TO PERSECUTOR; SHEPARD'S ROLE IN THE ANTINOMIAN CONTROVERSY

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While traditional history paints Anne Hutchinson as the central cause of the Antinomian Controversy, this paper explores the role of Thomas Shepard as the controversy's central figure. It traces Shepard's role as a Puritan Nonconformist in England, to his role in establishing Puritan Orthodoxy in New England, to his role as chief persecutor of New England dissidents, chiefly Anne Hutchinson. I will show, through Shepard's autobiography, journal, and other sources that Shepard, persecuted by Archbishop Laud for conscientious dissent became New England's "Laud" by persecuting others for their own conscientious dissent. While historiography has blamed the victim, Anne Hutchinson, for the Massachusetts Bay crisis, I will show that Thomas Shepard—out of his desire to bring all others into conformity to his theological interpretations—not Hutchinson, was the chief instigator of the Antinomian Controversy.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since 1636, historians have been trying to make sense of why the Massachusetts Bay Colony—the Puritan “city on a hill,” an example of Christianity done right—nearly collapsed only a few years into its existence. Most historians have centered the controversy on Anne Hutchinson, an educated woman of high social status who is probably best known as the bold Massachusetts woman who held religious meetings in her house in defiance of church mandates, or the heretic who was banished and excommunicated because of radical religious ideologies, or the ring leader of the antinomians—a religious sect accused of negating the relevance of moral law because they were living by faith under God’s grace.

These images were left by documents—diaries, journals, sermons, pamphlets, and Hutchinson’s trial transcript—written exclusively by men and mostly by Hutchinson’s religious and political opponents. Historians have largely used these documents to preserve a negative image of Hutchinson as the central antagonist in what has been called the Antinomian Controversy of 1636-1638.¹ I will argue that historians have largely overlooked the role of religious and political opponent Thomas Shepard in agitating hostility against Hutchinson and others who he considered religious and political threats to himself and the community. I will argue that Thomas Shepard, rather than Anne

¹ [Timothy D. Hall, 2010, 144-151]; [Miller, 1956]

Hutchinson, is the central antagonist and bears primary responsibility for the religious dispute that plagued the Massachusetts Bay Colony in the mid to late 1630's.

Historians Jon Butler, Perry Miller, and David Hall give excellent overviews of Puritan theology and ideology, the roots of which rest in the Protestant Reformation. Puritans petitioned the English Crown for a Royal Charter and in 1630 migrated to the New World. They established the Massachusetts Bay Colony as, in the words of founder John Winthrop, a "City on a Hill"—a community to "keepe the unitie of the spirit in the bond of peace" in order to incur God's favor, or to incur divine wrath should the community "deal falsely" with God.² The colony's male leaders—all church members—felt tremendous pressure to eliminate any person or idea that might threaten either the community's success or their positions of power. David Hall places Puritan theology within the era's larger belief spectrum, suggesting latent Medieval beliefs in magic and the occult help explain seventeenth century Puritan prescriptive suspicion of assertive women, associating female assertiveness with threats to the existing social order.³ The Antinomian Controversy emerges within this context.⁴

Hutchinson's seventeenth century opponents began the historical diatribe against her in the fall of 1636. Massachusetts Governor, John Winthrop, in his "Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines," labeled Hutchinson an "imposter" and "the breeder and nourisher of all these distempers." From

² [<http://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/winthrop.htm>]

³ [David D. Hall, 1990]

⁴ [Butler, 1990]; [David D. Hall, 1990]; [Miller, 1956]

his description of 1636 and following events, all the blame for communal unrest could be laid at the feet of Anne Hutchinson, whom he derisively called “this *American Jesabel*” (emphasis Winthrop’s).⁵ Assistant Governor Thomas Dudley delivered a scathing speech at Hutchinson’s trial in which he accused her of starting the disturbance and of creating a “‘potent party in the country’ which ‘endangered’ the puritan commonwealth.”⁶ When his own reputation and career were at risk, even John Cotton, her former mentor and advocate, called Hutchinson “a Woman with *many unsound and dangerous principles* (emphasis is Cotton’s).”⁷ These and other negative epithets have tainted the historical portrayal of Anne Hutchinson.

Thomas Hutchinson’s eighteenth century history of Massachusetts placed Anne Hutchinson at the controversy’s center and allowed the era’s historians to make Anne Hutchinson into a female militant—a view she would never have acknowledged.⁸ The foremost mid twentieth century Puritan historian, Perry Miller, largely perpetuated the historical perspectives of Hutchinson’s opponents by reiterating her opponents’ position that she “was to be cast out as unsavory salt.”⁹ Perry’s treatment of Hutchinson as the banished radical heretic has made its way into modern historians’ descriptions of Anne Hutchinson.

Jon Butler’s award winning account of early colonial religion simply references Hutchinson as one of “three major religious disputes” that “revealed dangerous

⁵ [David D. Hall, 1990, 201-218, 310]

⁶ [Timothy D. Hall, 2010, 62]

⁷ [David D. Hall, 1990, 370]

⁸ [Winship, 2005, 148]

⁹ [Miller, 1956, 18, 29]

perfectionist impulses lurking within Puritan theology.” Butler notes that Hutchinson was brought up on “treason and sedition charges” and was expelled as one of the “most vocal dissidents,”¹⁰ but does not question the validity of the era’s view of Hutchinson or the role others might have played in the controversy. Similarly, Edwin Gaustad and Mark Noll, editors of *A Documentary History of Religion in America to 1877*, introduce Anne Hutchinson as a “dissenter” who “raised Puritan anxieties and troubled the still waters.”¹¹ John Adair, in his book expounding seventeenth century Puritan beliefs, also accuses Hutchinson of beginning the controversy.¹² None of these historians question her opponents’ harsh charges or their hostile descriptions of her attitudes, behaviors, or role in the religious dispute.

Michael McGiffert, editor of *God’s Plot*, Thomas Shepard’s published autobiography and journal, refers to Hutchinson in his preface as “the antinomian apostate.”¹³ Similarly, in the preface to his documentary history of this religious controversy, historian David D. Hall depicts Anne Hutchinson as a radical prophetess and “lay religious leader who challenged the authority of the ministers.”¹⁴ Neither of these historians counters the negative labels placed on Hutchinson, but both accept those labels as valid descriptions of her based on her opponents’ perceptions.

Hutchinson is presented as an example of religious dissent, heresy, and supposed sexual deviancy in Merry E. Wiesner-Hanks’ examination of religion in the early modern

¹⁰ [Butler, 1990, 59]

¹¹ [Edwin S. Gaustad and Mark A. Noll, 2003, 96]

¹² [Adair, 1998, 173]

¹³ [McGiffert, 1972, 28]

¹⁴ [David D. Hall, 1990, ix-xi]

world.¹⁵ Similarly, Hutchinson is lumped with “radical spiritists” and “others of Antinomian tendency” in Patricia U. Bonomi’s treatment of religion in colonial America.¹⁶ Likewise, Phyllis Mack uses the negative imagery of Hutchinson’s opponents in declaring that Hutchinson, like Eve, was seen as “the archetypal symbol of destructive female intelligence” who “used her wit and eloquence to entice her neighbors in the Massachusetts Bay Colony into heresy.”¹⁷

Hutchinson biographer, Eve LaPlante, acknowledges that her late twentieth century high school history class still portrayed Anne Hutchinson only as the leader of the antinomian religious sect who was banished for heresy.¹⁸ Hutchinson biographer, Timothy Hall, confirms that opponents’ depictions of Hutchinson have “for centuries... shaped how her story has been told by historians and biographers.” According to Hall, historians relying on opposition remarks made “Hutchinson the architect of a powerful, unified opposition movement” responsible for “undermining [ministers’ and magistrates’] authority and threatening the colony with anarchy.”¹⁹

Alternately, historians have ignored the role of Thomas Shepard in planting seeds of doubt and discord upon his 1635 arrival into a community that for nearly five years had coexisted peacefully with slightly differentiating religious ideologies. Puritan historian Perry Miller infers Shepard is one of New England “divines,” or prominent ministers, but does not examine how Shepard’s initial inquiries began dividing the

¹⁵ [Wiesner-Hanks, 2000, 220, 227, 244, 261]

¹⁶ [Bonomi, 2003, 19, 20]

¹⁷ [Mack, 1992, 31, 42]

¹⁸ [LaPlante, 2004, xx]

¹⁹ [Timothy D. Hall, 2010, 62-63]

community along ideological lines.²⁰ Most of the aforementioned historians—if they discuss Shepard at all—note him simply as a prominent first generation minister, or the minister of the Newtown church who was largely responsible for codifying Puritan confessionals. Some reference him as a founder of Harvard, and some as one of the ministers trying to rescue the colony from Anne Hutchinson’s heretical teachings.²¹ My research shows Thomas Shepard in a much more divisive role: as a religious and political agitator with a history of confronting, condemning, and eliminating those he deemed a threat to his own power and prestige.

I will build on recent social and cultural historical scholarship which supports the premise that Anne Hutchinson was the “fall girl” in a much broader religious and political controversy centered on Shepard and his followers. Historian Timothy D. Hall suggests historical documentation written by Hutchinson’s adversaries intentionally presents her in a negative light but notes other sources present her as a godly gentlewoman operating within her socially accepted sphere.²² Michael Winship suggests the real controversy was the political struggle between such men as Shepard and Henry Vane—newly elected governor, a friend of Hutchinson, and a staunch supporter of the religious ideology in opposition to Shepard. Winship discusses Winthrop’s and Shepard’s insecurities as possible motivations for targeting Hutchinson and other perceived rivals.²³ Jon Butler acknowledges the religious/political power struggle resulting from the “myth” of Calvinist orthodoxy, the lack of Massachusetts Bay ministerial unity, and the problems

²⁰ [Miller, 1956, 18]

²¹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 3-23]; [McGiffert, 1994, 3-29]; [Mack, 1992, 19]

²² [Timothy D. Hall, 2010, 1-21]

²³ [Winship, 2005, 41-66]

of increased colonial legalism spearheaded by Shepard and others.²⁴ Even noted Puritan historian, Perry Miller, while predominately discussing Puritan prescriptive theology and its impact on Massachusetts Bay development, addresses the competition and potential jealousies between prominent ministers and magistrates like Boston Church teacher John Cotton, Newtown minister Thomas Shepard, and former governors Winthrop and Vane.²⁵ Patricia Bonomi acknowledges the influx of ministers in the late 1630's—which would include Shepard—increased ministerial authority within the Colony, inferring a power struggle between differing theological camps.²⁶

Michael Ditmore suggests that historians have typically depicted Hutchinson's case as one of “persecution or condescension,” depending on which ministers' accounts are referenced, reflecting the era's oppositional theological interpretations. Using the Hutchinson trial transcript, he focuses on the phrase “immediate revelation,” addressing what that phrase would have meant to Hutchinson, how her interpretation might have differed from how historians have defined the phrase, and how opposition ministers would have taken her “confession” as a threat to their religious and societal authority. He notes inconsistencies, such as quotes from Shepard's journal referencing similar wording regarding immediate revelation as used by Cotton and Hutchinson.²⁷ Baird Tipson examines Shepard's various remarks regarding his own desire for divine revelation and the nuanced meanings of that concept for first generation Puritans. Tipson analyzes

²⁴ [Butler, 1990, 55-63]

²⁵ [Miller, 1956]

²⁶ [Bonomi, 2003, 18-19]

²⁷ [Ditmore, 2000, 349-392]

Shepard's codified confessionals, his prescriptive ideology, and reasons why Antinomian ideas were seen as such a threat to men like Shepard, suggesting their reliance on God's Spirit rather than ministerial interpretation paralleled early Reformation threats against papal and Catholic institutional power for similar reasons.²⁸

Recently published primary documents also suggest Shepard was intent on eliminating opposition to his theological interpretations and practices. In a letter from Shepard to Hugh Peter, in which Shepard thanks Peter for a sizeable book donation to Harvard's library, Shepard declares his patience for "godly men" temporarily deluded, but professes no toleration for those who disagree with his interpretation of truth, declaring his abhorrence of those who claim "pretence of conscience." He declares it is the ministers' job to "awaken and purge God's floure of such chaff."²⁹

I will build on recent social and women's history that suggests part of the controversy centered on male fears of assertive women's perceived threat to the existing social order. Phyllis Mack provides wonderful insight into seventeenth century fears that women visionaries would threaten or destroy social structure. Mack notes that women visionaries were often associated with antinomianism and quotes Shepard in a sermon equating human vanity with female corruption represented in the "monstrous cloth," a term referencing menstrual rags. Mack chastises historians for "treating women's spirituality as a metaphor for something else" rather than reflecting how women

²⁸ [Tipson, 1978, 64-80]

²⁹ [The University of Chicago Press, 1898, 105-107]

visionaries saw themselves.³⁰ Similarly, Merry Wiesner-Hanks affirms the notion that 17th century male religious leaders often linked “sexual deviancy and religious heresy;” she notes that in Hutchinson’s trial as well as that of several Quaker women, “Puritan clergy accused them of adultery, lascivious conduct, and breaking up families” and practiced linking monstrous births with monstrous religious ideas.³¹ Elizabeth Reis explores the seventeenth century belief that women were evil by nature and uses the witch trials to illustrate the predominant belief that confession led to repentance and salvation, while denial proved guilt and led to banishment or death.³² Ann Withington and Jack Schwartz use Hutchinson’s trial transcript to support their thesis that Hutchinson’s “confession” of immediate revelation was not a mistake on her part, but a deliberate rejection of the legal tactics used by her opponents in an attempt to expose the trial for the political power play that it was, claiming “this was not a trial of justice...but a trial of power to solve the political problem of maintaining social order.”³³

Why did Shepard plant seeds of discord in an otherwise harmonious setting? What did Shepard hope to gain by calling into question the spiritual legitimacy of Cotton, Wheelwright, and Anne Hutchinson? Was there any spirit of competition between the Boston Church and Shepard’s Newtown Church? Does Shepard’s autobiography or journal lend any understanding to why he was so insistent in eliminating any theological interpretation or practice other than his own? Why did ministers, who debated theological

³⁰ [Mack, 1992, 19, 88-89]

³¹ [Wiesner-Hanks, 2000, 227, 261]

³² [Reis, 1999, 137-8]

³³ [Ann Farifax Withington and Jack Schwartz, 1978, 226-240]

issues in public, seek out a woman who discussed theology within the confines of her home? Why did ministers and magistrates violate their own rules in prosecuting Anne Hutchinson? Was Shepard jealous of Hutchinson's intellect, scriptural grasp, or ability to draw significant crowds to hear her teaching? Why have historians referenced Hutchinson as the controversy's central figure, taking at face value the documents written by her opponents?

I will use Shepard's autobiography and journal, Winthrop's journal, the Hutchinson trial transcript (recorded largely by Winthrop), letters written by Shepard, along with other primary documents and recent historical scholarship to argue that Thomas Shepard, rather than Anne Hutchinson, played the prominent role as agitator and creator of the Antinomian Controversy out of his need for prestige and control and to secure his political and religious success. I believe my research will enhance current scholarship and further illuminate Shepard's motivations in targeting those he saw as his religious and political competition. I will explore Shepard's role as persecuted Non-conformist in England, his role as colonial orthodox conformist, and his role as New England's chief orthodox persecutor. I will suggest that Thomas Shepard was the man behind the colony's polarization and that Shepard, motivated by a desire for power and possibly jealous of Hutchinson, was the central antagonist in the religious dispute that temporarily divided the spirit of unity and the bond of peace in this city on a hill.

CHAPTER II

THOMAS SHEPARD AND NON-CONFORMITY IN ENGLAND

“December 16, 1630. I was inhibited from preaching in the dioceses of London by Dr. Laud, bishop of that diocess. As soon as I came in the morning, about eight of the clock, falling into a fit of rage, he asked me, what degree I had taken in the University? I answered him, I was a master of arts. He asked, of what college? I answered, of Emmanuel. He asked how long I had lived in his diocess? I answered three years and upwards. He asked, who maintained me all this while? charging me to deal plainly with him, adding withal, that he had been more cheated and equivocated with by some of my malignant faction than ever was man by Jesuit. At the speaking of which words he looked as though blood would have gushed out of his face, and did shake as if he had been haunted with an ague fit, to my apprehension, by reason of his extreme malice and secret venom. I desired him to excuse me, he fell then to threaten me, and withal to bitter railing, calling me all to naught, saying, you prating coxcomb! do you think all the learning is in your brain? He pronounced his sentence thus; I charge you that you neither preach, read, marry, bury, or exercise any ministerial function in any part of my diocesses, for if you do, and I hear of it, I will be upon your back and follow you wherever you go, in any part of the kingdom, and so everlastingly disenable you. I besaught him not to deal so, in regard of a poor town; and here he stopt me in what I was going on to say. A poor town! you have made a company of seditious, factious bedlams, and what do you prate to me of a poor town? I prayed him to suffer me to catechize in the Sabbath days in the afternoon; he replied, spare your breath, I will have no such fellows prate in my diocess; get you gone, and now make your complaints to whom your will? So away I went, and blessed be God that I may go to him.”³⁴

Thomas Shepard was one of many ministers persecuted by the Church of England for challenging specific teachings and practices which violated the consciences of those the Church of England labeled nonconformists. Shepard rejected the Church of England's Book of Common Prayer and its accompanying ceremonies. In his edited version of

³⁴ [Bradford, 1908-1909, 69-70] This is a letter introduced by Increase Mather as a manuscript from Thomas Shepard regarding the latter's encounter with Archbishop Laud.

Thomas Shepard's life published in 1853, "John A. Albro, D. D., pastor of the First Church and Shepard Society"³⁵ of Cambridge, quotes one of the early nonconformists, "We reject...those forms of prayer and of public worship which are imposed upon the consciences of men by human power, as essential parts of divine service..." Albro explains nonconformists objected to the rituals prescribed in the Book of Common Prayer because "every part of it, without exception, was made a matter of necessity, and not of choice." According to Albro, Shepard observed "the very yielding of conformity to such a service would 'miserably castaway the liberty purchased by Christ for his people.'" Nonconformists rejected the Book of Common Prayer as "a grievous burden upon their consciences" since so many rituals were "taken from the Roman Mass book." Nonconformists cited such things as Catholic "holidays," "feasts," "the sign of the cross in baptism," "kneeling before the bread and wine in the Lord's Supper, etc." as evidence, in their opinion, of "filling the church with idolatry and superstition." Albro, writing about Puritan history some two hundred years later, asks, "Why, then, should our fathers be branded as narrow-minded bigots, and wicked disturbers of the peace of the church, for refusing obedience to demands which no human governor has a right to make, and asserting a liberty guarantied by the great charter of the kingdom of God?"³⁶

³⁵ [Shepard, 1853, 1:vii]

³⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxv-lxvi] This work is "a reproduction of an original work published before 1923 that is in the public domain" of the U.S. Volume 1 includes John A. Albro's edited version of Thomas Shepard's life along with Thomas Shepard's published sermons, "Sincere Convert," "Sound Believer," and published tracts: "The Saint's Jewel, Showing How to Apply the Promises," "Certain Select Cases Resolved Tending to the Right Ordering of the Heart," and "The First Principles of the Oracles of God."

Nonconformists practiced a theology that for them was more focused on actual Scriptural teachings than behavioral carry-overs from Roman Catholicism.

Shepard's own theology developed out of his years of perceived abuse and neglect, his own doubts about God's love for and acceptance of him, and his recurring feelings of atheism³⁷ Thomas Shepard apparently spent his first three years in a godly yet nonconformist household. His father, William, left a prosperous grocer's business in his hometown of Fossecut, near Towcester, in the late 1500's to take his family to Banbury³⁸ "for the sole purpose of enjoying the light of an evangelical and effective ministry...in order to promote the welfare of his soul." John A. Albro notes that "Mr. Shepard was blessed with a pious mother." Young Thomas was exposed to religious dissidence as his parents left "a quiet and respectable establishment, like the English church, for such preaching as was at that time heard from Puritan pulpits." Albro's version of Shepard's life reveals Shepard's "the darker season:" a childhood and teen years rife with tragedy, inhospitable relatives, neglect and "domestic tyranny" until he was finally able to attend university, where he felt himself called into the ministry.³⁹

Shepard, in his autobiography, credited various ministers with sermons that "did much affect me," and "did much awaken me" to God's hatred of sin but mercy for the sinner. Over time and through sermons, his own meditation, and God's revelations through Scripture, Shepard declared "the Lord recovered me and poured out a spirit of

³⁷ For a thorough autobiographical background of Shepard's early experience, see [McGiffert, 1994, 35-50]

³⁸ Shepard grew up and ministered primarily in central and southeastern England. For a Medieval map of the area, see <http://www.ac-family.org/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=11390&tree=AC-Family> . For a modern map of the area, see <http://www.ac-family.org/genealogy/getperson.php?personID=11390&tree=AC-Family>.

³⁹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xiii-xviii]

prayer upon me for free mercy and pity.” Shepard’s theology of grace over papal ceremonies evolved from one of his revelations: “I found therefore the Lord revealing free mercy and that all my help was in that to give me Christ and to enable me to believe in Christ and accept of him, and here I did rest.” Shepard rejected the Church of England’s teachings that rites and rituals were essential elements to worship, claiming that performing such rites violated his conscience and that relying on Christ’s grace and mercy eliminated reliance on such rituals for structural legitimacy. Shepard’s theological core, based on his own experiences, was “to show the people their misery,” to show “the remedy, Christ Jesus,” and to explain “how they should walk answerable to this mercy, being redeemed in Christ.”⁴⁰ Shepard claimed, “The Lord let me see into the evil of the English ceremonies, cross, surplice, and kneeling.”⁴¹ To Shepard, the Church of England’s emphasis on keeping all the rites and rituals found in its Common Book of Prayer bordered on pagan practices since Shepard found no basis for those practices in Scripture, and therefore violated his conscience of remaining true to following biblical teachings and practices. Archbishop Laud persecuted Shepard for rejecting England’s orthodox teachings in favor of adhering instead to Shepard’s conscience.

Shepard participated in unauthorized meetings to discuss doctrine as a matter of conscience, to discuss Anglican sermons, and to identify what nonconformists perceived as heretical teachings among the Anglican orthodox. For example, while living in Essex County in 1627, Shepard met in the home of Thomas Weld, discussing doctrine with such

⁴⁰ [McGiffert, 1994, 43-50]

⁴¹ [Ibid., 52]

Puritan notables as Weld and Thomas Hooker.⁴² Historian Stephen Foster notes, “The godly engaged in a variety of private meetings, both regular and occasional. These included exercises for the ‘repetition’ of sermons, for clearing dark places in scripture, and ...for strengthening the faith of genuine professors.” These unauthorized meetings, or “conventicles,” had been in existence “as early as 1583, and therefore subject to both secular and ecclesiastical censures.” Foster contends, “For seventeenth century Puritans these activities became important features of their spiritual progress from an early age.” Prominent Puritan leaders like Governor Winthrop, Thomas Hooker, and Thomas Shepard all participated in such private gatherings, which “became forums for the criticism of official policy in church and state.”⁴³ Far from believing Laud’s charge that they instigated heresy by denouncing the practices and authority of the Church of England, these English Puritans believed “it was their duty...to break off from the public church, and to assemble, as they had opportunity, in private houses, or elsewhere, to worship God in a manner that *might not offend the light of their consciences.*”⁴⁴ (Emphasis mine.) John A. Albro credits these non-conformists with sowing “the whole of England with good seed, which, nourished by the blood of martyrs, has continued to bring forth good fruit to this day.”⁴⁵ Clearly the Church of England and those labeled nonconformists had very different views of what constituted truth and heresy; each believed their own views revealed truth and their opponents’ view exuded heresy.

⁴² [McGiffert, 1994, 48]

⁴³ [Foster, 1981, 626-627]

⁴⁴ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xlvii]

⁴⁵ [Ibid., xxxvi]

The Church of England responded to such unauthorized meetings with even more vehement persecution. Archbishop Laud and other Church of England bishops actively persecuted Shepard and those nonconformists who were convinced the Church of England required non-biblical worship practices. Persecution included public humiliation, silencing, and threats of fines or imprisonment. According to historian Stephen Foster, “Laudian attempts to put down private exercises merely drove them deeper underground.”⁴⁶ Shepard went underground; he was hidden by supporters, traveled under an alias, and eventually fled the country in an effort to avoid the English orthodoxy’s legal sanctions and to pursue the freedom to teach what Shepard deemed truth as defined by his own conscience and theological interpretations.

John A. Albro places Shepard in a long list of true believers intent on not conforming to perceived heresies in the Catholic Church and its subsequent Anglican replacement. Albro traces the evolution of Puritanism and the “true church” from twelfth century Waldenses, who rejected papal authority and teachings they deemed man-made. Albro describes them as “a few faithful witnesses for the truth who testified and were persecuted” and hails them as those, who “unaffected by the errors and unawed by the power of Rome, retained the doctrines and observed the discipline of the primitive church.”⁴⁷ Called *Cathari*, or pure, they were also labeled *Lollards*, after one of their prominent leaders, Raymond Lollard and were persecuted continuously for not

⁴⁶ [Foster, 1981, 628]

⁴⁷ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xxxii]

conforming to papal precepts.⁴⁸ Albro notes fourteenth century reformer, John Wycliffe, sixteenth century reformers, Luther and Calvin, and those seventeenth century Puritans, including Shepard—who left England to start the true church in the New World—as examples of individuals unafraid to challenge and resist papal and Anglican authority as well as anti-scriptural teachings and behaviors. English reformers challenged Henry VIII’s *Act of Supremacy*, which severed England from Rome’s power, giving England’s king authority over England’s church and requiring English ministers to take the “oath of supremacy—an oath which transferred their allegiance, as Christians, from Christ to the King of England.”⁴⁹ Dissenters continued to criticize Anglican liturgies and “Popish vestments,” insisting that a true reformation would “leave none of the vain pomp and foolish pageantry of Romanism behind” but would instead would “make all the rites, ceremonies, and doctrines of the church conformable to the rules laid down by Christ and his apostles,” relying solely on “the authority of God’s word.”⁵⁰

Albro relates Queen Elizabeth’s intense desire for conformity to her definition of worship, illustrated by her legislation demanding uniformity in prayer books and various church rituals. According to Albro, Elizabeth “hated the Puritans worse than she did the Papists...” and “persecuted the conscientious Nonconformists with...cruelty.”⁵¹ Punishments ranged from suspended ministries, to fines, imprisonment, and denial of basic right of a trial by jury. Dissenters were “condemned without being confronted by the witnesses against them.” According to Albro, Elizabeth’s tactics included lengthy

⁴⁸ [Ibid., xxxii-xxxiii]

⁴⁹ [Ibid., xxxviii]

⁵⁰ [Ibid., xlii]

⁵¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xliv]

questionings designed to “trap” uncooperative priests, expulsion of dissenting priests from their parishes, and barring nonconformist priests from worship.⁵² Such nonconformists were in turn labeled heretics by the Church of England. All were persecuted to some extent; for example, Wycliffe’s bones and collected works were later ordered burned by the Bishop of London and the Council of Constance. Others were “suspended from their livings, deposed, fined, imprisoned, and their families and interests ruined, for refusing to conform to the established ritual.”⁵³ King James, at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604, “assailed the Nonconformists with much coarse, vulgar, and abusive language,” proclaiming at one point, “I will make them conform themselves, or else I will harry them out of the land, or else do worse.”⁵⁴

The above encounter between Thomas Shepard and Archbishop Laud illustrates the vehemence with which early English Puritans were actively persecuted for their perceived non-conformity to orthodox Anglican teachings and practices. Archbishop Laud spent five years hunting down and trying to suppress Thomas Shepard for what the Anglican orthodoxy deemed heresy, but what Shepard deemed “the truth of Christ which we professe[d]...”⁵⁵ Shepard perceived many Church of England practices as man made structures to which he was not obligated by conscience to follow. Archbishop Laud labeled Shepard a nonconformist for refusing to pattern his sermons after the Common Book of Prayer, for rejecting prescribed ceremonies as anti-Scriptural and therefore idolatrous, and for depending on Scriptural rather than the state’s authority to determine

⁵² [Ibid., xlvi]

⁵³ [Ibid., xxxiv, xlv]

⁵⁴ [Ibid., li-lviii]

⁵⁵ [McGiffert., 1994, 35]

not only what should be taught but also appropriate disciplines for disobedience. Shepard, upon being labeled a dissident by Laud, observed that “Satan then began to rage, and the commissaries, registers, and others began to pursue me and to threaten me, as thinking I was a nonconformable man.” Shepard recounts “all the malice of the ministers round about me,” and references the newly appointed Archbishop Laud as “a fierce enemy to all righteousness and...a scourge to his people,” remembering that Laud made “many railing speeches against me, forbade me to preach, and not only so, but if I went to preach anywhere else his hand would reach me.” Shepard recounts several instances of divine rescue, contending that “the Lord delivered me out of the hand of that Lion.”⁵⁶ Perhaps Archbishop Laud felt Shepard’s teachings dismissing the importance of the Church of England’s Common Book of Prayer along with most of the church’s ceremonies threatened his own power as Archbishop. Shepard at least felt threatened with bodily harm for his anti-Church of England stance and certainly believed Laud targeted him as a nonconformist.

Dissenters like Shepard went into forced hiding. Shepard moved around quite a bit to stay ahead or out of the way of Laud’s attempts to silence him. According to Shepard’s autobiography, he left his ministry in Colne⁵⁷ for a remote and secretive position in Buttercrambe,⁵⁸ declaring he was “resolved to follow the Lord to so remote and strange a place, the rather because [he] might be far from the hearing of the malicious

⁵⁶ [McGiffert, 1994, 50-54]

⁵⁷ Colne is in south central England, approximately 90 miles west of London.

⁵⁸ Buttercrambe is in northeastern England, near York, approximately 180 miles northwest of London.

Bishop Laud who had threatened [him] if [he] preached anywhere.”⁵⁹ Pursued by Bishop Richard Neile—an avid Laud supporter—Shepard fled to Heddon⁶⁰ where he “might preach there in peace, being far from any bishops.” Pursued and silenced by local priests and Bishop Thomas Morton, Shepard relates, “I preached up and down in the country and at last privately in Mr. Fenwick’s house.”⁶¹ According to John Albro, “Such a ministry as this, lifting up its voice like a trumpet amidst the smooth preaching and dead formalism of the church ...could not, at that period, be long tolerated by the ruling powers.”⁶²

Shepard paints himself the persecuted saint in his autobiography, claiming Laud persecuted him “for the truth of Christ” to such an extent he and his family had to hide “from the knowledge of our enemies and from their malice.”⁶³ As Shepard grew in favor with those ministers whom he regarded as mentors, he also grew in verbally opposing Laud and the Church of England’s “dead formalism.” Shepard labeled Laud a “fierce enemy to all righteousness” and a “scourge to his people” exhibiting “extreme malice” and “secret venom.”⁶⁴ Shepard believed that since his nonconformist preaching rejecting formalism and teaching only Scripture represented “truth,” his blatant defiance of Archbishop Laud’s decrees was justified. While Shepard acknowledged God’s hand in silencing him to teach him humility, Shepard emphatically believed God was on the side

⁵⁹ [McGiffert, 1994, 53]

⁶⁰ Heddon is in the Newcastle area, approximately 70 miles northwest of Buttercrambe in the more remote regions of Northern England.

⁶¹ [McGiffert., 1994, 56]

⁶² [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxiv]

⁶³ [McGiffert, 1994, 35]

⁶⁴ [Ibid., 51]

of the Puritans in opposing what nonconformists deemed heresy. Shepard saw himself and other persecuted Puritans who left England as the “pure church...to be planted far away from the enormous corruptions and abuses of Old Christendom.” He described Laud’s attempts to squelch what to the Church of England was arrogant rebellion as “malicious purposes.”⁶⁵ In the above encounter with Archbishop Laud, Shepard felt he was being summoned “like a culprit” to explain his theological positions, and compared Laud’s “shameful violence and brutality” with his own “meekness and humility.”⁶⁶ Shepard claimed Laud’s zeal was merely for the externals of religious practice and criticized Laud’s “ambition to increase the political power of the church,” labeling Laud as “envious, passionate, vindictive, cruel, and implacable.”⁶⁷ Laud’s opponents described him as oppressive and narrow minded, with a “stupid and a ferocious intolerance.”⁶⁸ One of Shepard’s biggest complaints against Laud was the latter’s use of tyrannical power “against all who had conscientious scruples” about the Church of England’s teachings and practices. John Albro contends early seventeenth-century Puritans concluded “the assumption of human authority in matters of religion was a great evil,” and that the state had no right to “fix the mode in which men shall worship God.”⁶⁹

Albro, while undoubtedly biased in Shepard’s and the nonconformists’ favor, describes the Church of England’s attempts at conformity as “unreasonable, unnecessary, and impractical...fetters...which, if they did not crush the life of devotion

⁶⁵ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxviii]

⁶⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxvvi]

⁶⁷ [Ibid., lxxvii]

⁶⁸ [Ibid., lxxviii]

⁶⁹ [Ibid., lxxix-lxxxx]

out of the church, would one day be burst asunder with violence and universal tumult.”⁷⁰ According to Albro, Puritan dissenters believed the Church of England could have remained united if those in charge had “left something to the judgment, discretion, and *conscience* (emphasis mine) of those who had begun to ‘breathe the pure air of the Holy Scriptures.’”⁷¹

The Church of England, however, did not consider the “judgment, discretion or conscience” of dissenters, but instead used every means at their disposal to stamp out what to the orthodoxy was unacceptable heresy against the king, the king’s church, and ultimately the king’s authority. Some nonconformists, including Shepard, decided the only viable option was emigration to New England. Albro notes, “Many others were preparing to follow them into the wilderness, where they could worship God according to his word.”⁷² Shepard, initially intent on staying the course in England, declared, “I stayed till Mr. Cotton, Mr. Hooker, Stone, Weld went to New England...And seeing I had been tossed from the south to the north of England and now could go no farther, I then began to listen to a call to New England.”⁷³

For protection, Shepard traveled incognito; Puritan sympathizers repeatedly hid, moved, and rescued him. Albro relates, “They were surrounded by enemies, and constantly liable to be discovered and arrested by the savage pursuivants.” John Winthrop, first governor of Massachusetts Bay, recorded Shepard’s arrival in his journal on October, 1636 aboard the *Abigail*. Winthrop’s editors note that “four of the chief

⁷⁰ [Ibid., xxxvi]

⁷¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xli.]

⁷² [Ibid., lxxxix]

⁷³ [McGiffert, 1994, 57]

passengers—Shepard, [John] Jones, [Hugh] Peter, and [Henry] Vane—are not registered and appear to have slipped on board without certifying their conformity to the Church of England.” The editors’ study of the *Abigail’s* passenger list suggests “further evidence that a good many of the New England emigrants were circumventing the English authorities.”⁷⁴

English Puritans spent decades struggling with how to remain part of a church structure whose core teachings and practices—namely, following the Common Book of Prayer, kneeling, making the sign of the cross in baptism, and wearing priestly vestments—nonconformists felt, were contrary to God’s word and their own consciences. Many of these nonconformists, Shepard included, ultimately decided their highest loyalty was to their own conscience, not the orthodoxy’s prescribed doctrines. Puritan historians identified this era as the “epoch of the *Separation*” and the “year of *Nonconformity*.”⁷⁵ Puritans endured fines, imprisonment, and punitive legislation intended to force conformity, but the result was increased nonconformity as well as driving “many of the most useful ministers into obscurity.”⁷⁶ Puritans were not willing to separate from the Church of England; their desire was to rid the church of teachings and practices deemed non-Scriptural. Even later Puritans like Shepard did not advocate separating from the Church of England, but were still forcibly excluded from organized worship for adhering to doctrines at odds with the orthodoxy. Albro records, “The reigning powers were very willing to have these conscientious people excluded from the fellowship of a church

⁷⁴ [Winthrop, 1996, 156-157, notes]

⁷⁵ [Ibid]

⁷⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xlvi]

which they loved with all her faults.”⁷⁷ Puritans saw such behavior as “tyrannical” attempts to force conformity “by the terror of fines, imprisonment, and banishment.”⁷⁸ Both sides saw their positions on forced conformity as matters of spiritual life and death. Those with political power used all means necessary, including their religious positions, to disenfranchise, disable, and intimidate anyone seen as a potential threat to their continued control. In short, Puritans viewed the Church of England’ maneuvers as little more than strong arm tactics intended to protect the orthodoxy’s positions of power.

By the 1630’s, both English orthodox members of the Church of England as well as dissident, nonconformist Puritans were certain their own interpretations of Scripture and accompanying rituals represented “truth.” Both groups believed that conforming to or allowing alternate perspectives violated their own consciences, jeopardized church purity as they saw it, and rendered Christ useless. From the Puritan perspective, “conformity was not a question of mere expedience, but of right and wrong, of obedience and sin” in which they “dare[d] not violate [their] consciences and so destroy [their] avowed principles.”⁷⁹ Albro, speaking years later for the nonconformists and assuming the powers of hindsight notes, “If any latitude had been allowed, [the Puritans] would never have separated from the Church.”⁸⁰

Shepard believed Laud was going to make an example out of him, so Shepard fled and stayed hidden with a variety of friends until he made the decision to leave for Massachusetts. Shepard justified his incognito itinerancy. He used scriptures to justify

⁷⁷ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xlix]

⁷⁸ [Ibid., lx]

⁷⁹ [Ibid., lxvii]

⁸⁰ [Ibid., lxv]

behaviors and theological interpretations he considered fighting for truth, but which Laud deemed defiant. Shepard maintained his ministry, even when expressly forbidden to do so by the orthodox powers. Shepard saw his role as one of “influence which he might exert in securing and defending” the various liberties offered in the New World which were increasingly unavailable to nonconformists in England. Although Shepard was urged by many to stay in England and continue a more secretive ministry in the non-populated northern regions, Shepard decided it was not worth his personal safety and his family’s comfort to stay “when he might exercise his talent publicly and honorably in New England.” Those Puritans remaining in England viewed the flight of men like Shepard as “a treacherous and cowardly flight from the duty of suffering.”⁸¹ In these early years just prior to Puritan departures for New England, Shepard put himself in the same ilk as John Cotton, John Wilson, and other prominent English Puritan nonconformists. All believed they were “going forth...at the call of God and conscience.”⁸²

⁸¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xc]

⁸² [Ibid., lxxxix]

CHAPTER III
THOMAS SHEPARD AND NONCONFORMITY:
ESTABLISHING ORTHODOXY IN THE
MASSACHUSETTS BAY COLONY

“As there are four principal means and causes, or ways, whereby man ruins himself, --1. Ignorance of their own misery; 2. Security and unsensibleness of it; 3. Carnal confidence in their own duties; 4. Presumption or resting upon the mercy of God by a faith of their own forging,--so, on the contrary, there is a fourfold act of Christ’s power, whereby he rescues and delivers all his out of their miserable estate.

The first act or stroke is conviction of sin.

The second is compunction for sin.

The third is humiliation or self-abasement.

The fourth is faith...Let them seek for mercy and deliverance *in this way* (emphasis mine), out of which they shall never find it; let them begin at conviction and desire the Lord to let them see their sins, that so being affected with them, and humbled under them, they may by faith be enable to receive Jesus Christ, and so be blessed in him. It is true, Christ is applied to us next by faith, but faith is wrought in us in that way of conviction and sorrow for sin; no man or will come by faith to Christ to take away his sins, unless he first see, be convicted of, and loaded with them. I confess the manner of the Spirit’s work, in the conversion of a sinner unto God, is exceedingly secret, and in many things very various; and therefore it is too great boldness to mark out all God’s footsteps herein; yet so far forth as the Lord himself tells us his work, and the manner of it in all his, we may safely resolve ourselves, and so far, and no farther, shall we proceed in the explication of these things. It is great profaneness not to search into the works of common providence, though secret and hidden (Ps xxviii.5 and xcii..6) Much greater is it not to do this unto God’s work of special favor and grace upon his chosen.”⁸³—Thomas Shepard, “The Sound Believer”

⁸³ [Shepard, 1853, 1:116-117]

“The course I took in my preaching was (1) to show the people their misery; (2) the remedy, Christ Jesus; (3) how they should walk answerable to this mercy, being redeemed by Christ.”⁸⁴ –Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography*, 1635

From the moment he set foot in New England, Thomas Shepard began establishing his own version of orthodoxy to which he and the ruling political party would demand increasing levels of conformity. Shepard’s primary tactics to secure New England’s orthodoxy included setting up strict confessionals for acceptable church membership, using his own enumerated sermon criteria based on his own experiences to exclude those not adhering to his experiential theological interpretations, and stirring up fellow ministers and magistrates against perceived dissidents and colonial nonconformists deemed as destructive threats to communal unity and divine protection.

Shepard arrived in New England with several former supporters from England, many of whom had secretly housed and/or helped to support him in his attempts to evade Archbishop Laud’s persecutions. Shepard and his entourage, which John Albro numbers at around sixty, purchased homes vacated by former Newtown (Cambridge, MA) minister, Thomas Hooker and members of the temporary Newtown church who, along with Hooker, had migrated to Connecticut. Shepard had to go through a colonial mandated procedure to officially establish a permanent church in Newtown, but his methodology exhibited a grandiose style and meticulous precision not used by other churches prior to his arrival, but which would become somewhat standard issue for future assemblages.

⁸⁴ [McGiffert, 1994, 50]

Historian Michael McGiffert, referencing Shepard's church at Newtown notes, "Membership in this church was not taken for granted, as in the parishes of England these people had left behind." McGiffert observes, "Spiritual legitimacy depended on getting the right people in and keeping the wrong people out." He quotes Shepard's *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*: "Matter fit to ruin a church is not fit to make a church." McGiffert contends, "Members were admitted by a method peculiar to New England—one that most of the world's Christian communions would have dismissed as improper or impolitic." While confessing one's faith was a common enough Puritan practice, Shepard insisted that prospective members follow his example in telling "what work of grace the Lord had wrought in them," which McGiffert claims "was definitely unusual."⁸⁵

Shepard's autobiography reveals that his salvation journey was characterized by constant difficulty obtaining sufficient assurance of a legitimate union with Christ. He confessed that in his youth he "did not regard the Lord at all" but became "foolish and proud" until the Lord made him "resolve to set upon a course of daily meditation about the evil of sin and [his] own ways." He admitted that while he was "troubled for this sin" he did not truly know his own sinful nature. Eventually, through the power of various sermons, Shepard's constant meditation on "the evil of sin, the terror of God's wrath," and his own "misery," God taught him about "the vanity of the world [he] never saw before," including Shepard's own "atheism" and "temptation to all kind of religion." Shepard discussed his battle with pride, acknowledging "though [he] desired to be a preacher, yet it was honor [he] did look to" even while he "felt a depth of atheism and

⁸⁵ [McGiffert, 1994, 135-136]

unbelief.” Shepard admits to questioning whether his beliefs were the result of his Puritan-influenced education. He confessed, “I felt all manner of temptations to all kind of religions,” and wondered “if I had been educated up among the Papists I should not have been as verily persuaded that Popery is the truth or Turkism is the truth.” He considered for a time the teachings “of Grindleton”—a group in Yorkshire led by Roger Brereley, who were “spiritual seekers and perfectionists” and “regarded by their critics as antinomians or ‘familists.’⁸⁶ Shepard’s early search for salvation and assurance led to his often repeated formula which he believed was a meditation given directly to him by God: “Be not discouraged therefore because thou art so vile, but make this double use if it: (1) loathe thyself the more; (2) feel a greater need and put a greater price upon Jesus Christ, who only can redeem thee from all sin.” Yet Shepard admits, “I had no assurance Christ was mine.”⁸⁷ This formula, however, would become his standard criteria for others’ legitimate acceptance into Christ and his church.

Governor John Winthrop records Shepard calling a meeting of representatives from all the colony’s churches to come help the new church “constitute their bodye.” Winthrop’s first hand account of Shepard’s initial confession describes Shepard as “a godly minister” who “sent to all the neighbor Churches for their Elders” to meet in “a great Assembly” where Shepard “prayed with deepe Confession of sine” then proceeded

⁸⁶ Antinomians were those who believed that once in Christ, the Christian was no longer bound by civil law; familists held that once God’s Spirit filled a believer, lust was no longer an issue, so that sexual expression outside marriage was not a problem. Both groups were accused in England of threatening civil and familial order by teachings that challenged state, church, and family institutions. See [McGiffert, 1994, 44, notes]. Shepard accused his New England theological opponents, specifically Anne Hutchinson, of being both an antinomian and familist.

⁸⁷ [McGiffert, 1994, 42-47]

to inquire what “rules” the colony used to determine church membership. Since none were established, Shepard offered suggestions; his confession, which included a declaration of “what worke of Grace the Lord had wroughte” in him, became a model for Newtown as well as other local churches. Shepard used Ephesians 5:27 as the premise for his ministerial endeavors in New England: “That he might make it unto him self a glorious Church, not having a spot or wrinkle, or anie suche thing: but that it shulde be holie and without blame.” Winthrop observed, “mr. Shepherd made an Exhortation to the rest of his bodye about the nature of their Covenant & to stand firme to it & Comended them to the Lord in a most heavenly prayer.”⁸⁸ Albro references Winthrop’s eye witness account “of this solemn transaction,” which he contends “is exceedingly interesting for the light which it throws upon the manner of constituting churches” in the early 1630’s.⁸⁹

Shepard actively coached prospective members in confessional protocol—a formula McGiffert notes Shepard spelled out in great length. McGiffert contends Shepard’s formula consisted of “Do it right....and do not overdo it.” Shepard warned that when a person related “a long story of conversion” there was “a hundred to one” risk that “some lie or other slip not out with it” and that the individual “will sometimes covertly commend himself” in his attempt to relate piety. Shepard warned against “odd confessions” that related “extravagant, enlarged discourses of the set time of their conversion” and used “ill application of Scriptures, which makes such long doings, and

⁸⁸ [Winthrop, 1996,168-169]

⁸⁹ [Shepard, 1853I, 1:cx]

are wearisome and uncomely.” To avoid such error, Shepard coached potential church members to relate only experiences and Scriptures “such as may be of special use unto the people of God, such things as tend to show, Thus was I humbled, then thus I was called, then thus I have walked, though with many weaknesses since; and such special providences of God I have seen, temptations gone through; and thus the Lord hath delivered me...etc”⁹⁰

Recorded confessionals include such coached recurring phrases or themes. For example, Edward Hall “saw more of his misery” until “the Lord did humble him” and “here he saw his unbelief” which “made him loathe himself” but by which he “was brought nearer to the Lord.” Francis Moore declared “The Lord revealed...that he was miserable” and “having many doubts...the Lord wrought farther humiliation” which eventually did “endear his heart to the Lord.” Elizabeth Olbon “saw more of her sin” so that she “fell down in discouragements” until she “longed for Christ” and “saw she must come to a naked Christ” whereupon she “witnessed the Lord’s love to her.” Confessional after confessional repeats the basic formula of acknowledging a state of misery, accepting total humility before Christ as the only answer, and—while maintaining actions did not redeem them—declaring some acceptable action to prove one’s total dependency on Christ.

Other common confessional criteria included citing specific verses given the prospective member by God as evidence of God’s grace, giving credit to specific

⁹⁰ [Shepard, 1853, 2:284, 631] This volume includes “The Parable of the Ten Virgins.” [McGiffert, 1994, 137]

ministers or sermons for spiritual revelation, and acknowledging one's doubts as proof of sincerity. Confessions not conforming to the accepted pattern were suspect. A case in point is Nicholas Wyeth, who was grilled mercilessly with such questions as "Do you remember nothing about your misery and way of mercy?" "Do you remember nothing how God hath tendered Christ to you?" "What effects did [Christ's mercy] work?" "Are you not one unfruitful tree to be hewn down?" McGiffert notes that such scrupulous "cross examination" shows "how well they had mastered Shepard's formula and how ready they were to apply it critically."⁹¹

Shepard was able to convince fellow ministers and magistrates to support his codified confessionals. Shepard's confessionals became so much the accepted standard that within months of Shepard's initial ceremony, the Boston church had a renewal of its own Covenant and "made a large explanation of that which they had first entered into."⁹² Within another month, Winthrop recorded an entire church denied formation for not adhering satisfactorily to the standards set by Shepard. Richard Mather, father of famous Massachusetts minister Increase Mather and grandfather of even more famous Massachusetts minister Cotton Mather, attempted to start a new church in Dorchester after most members of the preceding church moved to Connecticut. Like Shepard in Newtown, they also had a day where the colony's magistrates and fellow ministers met to decide if they could start a new church. Winthrop noted, "after some of them had given prooffe of their giftes: they made Confession of their Faith: which was approved of: but

⁹¹ [McGiffert, 1994, 150-225]

⁹² [McGiffert, 1994, 171]

proceeding to manifest the worke of Godes grace in them selves. The Churches by their elders, & the magistrates &c: thought them not meete at presente to be the Fondation of a Churche.” Winthrop explained the reason they were denied church status at that time was “that most of them (mr mather and one more excepted) had builded their Comfort of salvation upon unsonde grondes,” which Winthrop defined as basing their salvation on emotion, dreams, or changed lives. The ministers counted as “errors” some at Dorchester who “had come to hate sine because it was filthy but onely lefte it because it was hurtful” and so had “never truely closed with Christ...but had made use of him onely to helpe the imperfection of their sanctification & duties.” The ministers concluded that because the Dorchester applicants did not voice their beliefs in the newly accepted verbiage, those applicants were relying on themselves rather than God’s power.⁹³ McGiffert contends, “Shepard led in blocking the formation of a church at nearby Dorchester in 1636—at a time when the requirement of public confession was just beginning to be worked out in practice—because he thought the would-be founding members defective.” McGiffert concludes, “The colony’s magistrates and ministers, including Shepard, took steps to consolidate orthodoxy’s authority...The requirements of confessions, with their pervasive conformities, were initiated as one means among others to confirm control through consensus.”⁹⁴

In addition to formulated confessionals, Shepard used enumerated sermons—much of whose theological conclusions were based on his own spiritual experiences—as

⁹³ [Winthrop, 1996, 173-4]

⁹⁴ [McGiffert.1994, 138-140]

criteria for Christian legitimacy and to secure some level of orthodoxy. Shepard's autobiography reveals a man whose spiritual journey constantly dealt simultaneously with unbelief, self-doubt and vanity, an unrequited desire for "immediate revelation" and acceptance of a nebulous faith assurance. His sermons enumerated steps to spiritual legitimacy that mirrored his own experiences and once again became a standardized test for colonial spiritual legitimacy.

Shepard recorded numerous occasions in his collegiate life where sermons focused on God's wrath and the intolerable terror and torment in store for non-believers which "did much awaken" him, causing him to "set upon a course of daily meditation about the evil of sin" and his actions. His own conversion resulted from sermons stressing "the wrath of God and the terror of it and how intolerable...the torment...of eternity would be."⁹⁵ He preached to others their need to realize "thou hangest but by one rotten twined thread of thy life, over the flames of hell every hour."⁹⁶ He distinguished minute lines between being "troubled for this sin" and truly understanding his "sinful nature." He believed various ministers were sent to speak to him as he struggled with his "depth of atheism and unbelief." He spoke in his autobiography how God continually humbled him through the loss of wives and children, through persecution, and through dangers of various kinds. Not coincidentally, he preached, "God heweth thee by sermons, sickness, losses, and crosses, sudden death, mercies, and miseries."⁹⁷ He "staggered so much by unbelief" and on many occasion felt his "faith...was battered and shaken." He

⁹⁵ [McGiffert, 1994, 43]

⁹⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:35]

⁹⁷ [Ibid., 43]

admitted questioning, “Is there a God and a Christ? . . . Is this God in Christ mine or no? . . . There were those things made me doubt most of my sonship.”⁹⁸

In his sermons, Shepard stressed the need not just for conviction of sin, but also for “compunction . . . humiliation . . . and sorrow” for sin, declaring that people should “seek for mercy and deliverance in this way” since by any other means “they shall never find it.” He wrote pages and pages explaining the minute differentiation between the above prescribed necessary steps to true faith, between his prescribed levels of faith, and between his understanding of God’s specific ordered actions of “justification,” “reconciliation,” “adoption,” “sanctification,” and “glorification” that legitimize the believer. For example, Shepard defined “conviction” not merely as awareness of sin, but as “a precedent sight,” claiming “what the eye sees not, the heart rues not.” He proceeded to delineate true from false conviction, concluding only true conviction would lead seekers to the next level. Shepard declared, “Their sins they know, but what the evil of them is, alas! they know not; but when the Spirit comes to convince, he makes them see what they do, and what is the exceeding evil of those sins.” Shepard warned, “if he have but one objection or doubtful scruple not answered, he is not fully as yet convinced, because full conviction . . . scatters all dark objections.” Shepard asserted, “in seeing things notionally they see them not really,” and “when the Spirit comes to convince, he so convinceth . . . that the soul stands before God, crying, O Lord, guilty, guilty.” He

⁹⁸ [McGiffert, 1994, 43-45, 125-131, 114]

concluded, “When thus the Spirit hath let into the soul a clear, real, constant light to see sin and death, now there is a thorough conviction.”⁹⁹

Shepard struggled with vanity. He confessed in his journal, “Pride was my sin . . . I did not grow weaned from all created glory of honor, wisdom, esteem of others, etc.”¹⁰⁰ He revealed a level of vanity as he recorded numerous “bests” in his life: God took him from “the worst town...to the best place for knowledge and learning;” “ the Lord was not content to give [him] good means but the best means and ministry and help;” “the Lord provided for [him] of all things of the best;” he was given “the best in the house” for his lodging; he married “the best and fittest woman” for him. Shepard admitted, “I began to grow secretly proud and full of sensuality.”¹⁰¹ He acknowledged his early resistance to God “until I came to that height of pride” from which God humbled him, convincing him of his “guilt and filth of sin, especially self-seeking and love of honor of men in all [he] did.”¹⁰² Despite such pride issues, Shepard struggled with self doubt, questioning his “own ability to think of anything fit to be preached.” He derided his “weakness: how blind and unbelieving I was and thence unfit to teach others.”¹⁰³ True to form, he recorded sermons enumerating how to “live a life of love...according to the rule of the moral law,” showing “how to apply the promises,” illuminating “the right ordering of the

⁹⁹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:115-274]

¹⁰⁰ [McGiffert, 1994, 88-89]

¹⁰¹ [McGiffert, 1994, 57]

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 74-75]

¹⁰³ [*Ibid.*, 49-55, 130, 124]

heart,” and defining what constituted “the sound believer.” Repeatedly, Shepard’s prescriptive religion mirrored his own struggles.¹⁰⁴

Shepard kept a journal of God’s early personal revelations to him as he meditated in the fields during his seminary years, yet confessed, “I did much desire that the Lord would speak immediately to me as to the prophets, that so I might certainly feel and know this living God.” Shepard, having never felt or received such an immediate revelation, dismissed the notion as an evil “temptation to think that the Lord did not desire my company...because he had no need of me, had no reason to desire me but reason to shut me thus out.” Shepard noted, “I saw the Lord by not giving immediate testimony stablished me the more in faith,” and concluded that while the prophets had heard directly from God, “we are to look for it and so to hear it mediately by man, yet with the expectation of the same spirit that taught them, to instruct us.”¹⁰⁵ Shepard consequently taught that seeking or claiming immediate revelation was a doctrinal error since it would “forsake the scriptures and wait for a spirit to suggest immediately God’s inmost thought” toward him.¹⁰⁶ He seemed unable to concede to others a legitimate spiritual experience denied him.

Shepard discussed the numerous steps he had taken to find his own assurance of salvation. He believed the more he loathed himself, the more he would be aware of his need for Jesus, but confessed that even as a licensed minister he still had no assurance about his own salvation. He encouraged his followers to constantly “mourn... lament...

¹⁰⁴ [Shepard, 1853, 1:275-331]

¹⁰⁵ [McGiffert, 1994, 125-128]

¹⁰⁶ [Ibid., 112]

and loathe not only thy sins, but thyself.”¹⁰⁷ After all, that is what Shepard had done. Shepard never truly felt a solid sense of assurance regarding his own salvation; he expected his followers to also doubt. McGiffert asserts, “Doubt, they were told, was instrumental to faith... The blessing of absolute assurance belonged to no one.” Their assurance was “transient and incomplete—as indeed, in Shepard’s spiritual calculus, it was supposed to be.”¹⁰⁸

Shepard’s early sermons exhibited an extremely analytical approach to conversion. Shepard taught, “God must wound, and cut deep, and stab, and thrust to the very heart, else men will never yield, never awaken, till God’s fists be about men’s ears, and he is dragging them to the stake.”¹⁰⁹ Shepard mandated conformity to his conversion model in his Newtown church; conformity to his conversion model then spread to the rest of the colony. Even his titles—*The Sincere Convert*, *The Sound Believer*—(emphasis mine) imply specific criteria must be met for legitimacy. In chapter three of *The Sincere Convert*, Shepard elaborated on humankind’s fallen condition, emphasized the need to be constantly mourning over sin, and implied that lack of such consistent mourning was proof of insincerity. He placed much importance in the power of ministers and their sermons, implying at times that one could not truly understand one’s sinful state without ministerial assistance. Shepard taught that a man who lived “under a sound minister” would surely be convicted for sin, but “take him from the minister... and he grow cold

¹⁰⁷ [Shepard, 1853, 1:80]

¹⁰⁸ [McGiffert, 1994, 140]

¹⁰⁹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:89]

again.” He kept his congregation in a perpetual state of non-assurance, asserting that insincere sinners were “ready every moment to drop into hell.”¹¹⁰

Shepard’s published sermons contained points and sub-points and sub-points beyond those; he created lists for everything: types of sin, levels of sin, types of believers, types of non-believers, steps to true repentance, reasons for non-repentance, specific “strait gaits which every one must pass through before he can enter into heaven,” reiterating over and over again how hard it was to be truly sincere and how much one must labor and strive to attain salvation. His enumerated points were not unique; what was unique was Shepard’s insistence in following his interpretative “steps” for Christian legitimacy. The editor of the Boston Doctrinal Tract and Book Society noted two hundred years after Shepard’s death, “His [Shepard’s] power as a preacher has seldom been equaled, and his writings have had...great influence in the formation of Christian character.” The editor also noted that “Shepard’s style of writing is somewhat peculiar. He abounds in numerical divisions and subdivisions, and sometimes these divisions and subdivisions are so intermixed as to make it difficult to distinguish the one from the other.”¹¹¹ Shepard’s critics described his writings as “austere,” suggesting that insistence on conformity to Shepard’s salvation methodology only succeeded in “checking the freeness of salvation.” Those critics accused Shepard of creating “stumbling blocks,” which “infected [believers] with the ancient errors” of legalism.¹¹²

¹¹⁰ [Ibid., 26-35]

¹¹¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:ii]

¹¹² [Ibid., clxxxiv]

In addition to formulated confessionals and enumerated sermons designed to legitimize Christians, Thomas Shepard helped establish Puritan orthodoxy in New England by rallying support and securing conformity from other colonial ministers and magistrates. Shepard's influence on the colony's theological interpretation and behavioral responses grew tremendously his first year. John Winthrop noted in his journal that the General Court, "with some other ministers"—undoubtedly Shepard was among them—requested that John Cotton help the magistrates devise "a body of fundamental laws" which would codify the colony's accepted beliefs. While Massachusetts did not adopt "Cotton's Code," Winthrop's editors note it was used as the New Haven colony's legal code framework.¹¹³ It is evident that Shepard's insistence on conformity to formulated confessionals for church membership, his extremely analytical approach to conversion and Christian legitimacy—summed up in his lengthy and delineated teachings on "conviction, compunction, and humiliation,"¹¹⁴ and his constant play on semantics in his enumerated sermons with which he narrowly defined the "true" definition of selected spiritual terms and to which he expected other ministers to emulate, were all designed to create theological conformity in Massachusetts Bay.

English Puritans—including Shepard—resisted the Church of England's forced interpretations of Scripture, rites, and rituals which violated the consciences of nonconformists. This resistance led to vocal attacks on those perpetrating theological conformity, as well as attacks on those resisting conformity. As Thomas Shepard

¹¹³ [Winthrop, 1996, 195 (notes)]

¹¹⁴ For the highly descriptive delineation of this part of Shepard's theology, see [Shepard, 1853, 1:115-237]

solidified his own brand of Puritan orthodoxy outlined in his formulated confessionals and enumerated teachings, some in Massachusetts began to interpret Shepard's prescriptive theology as a message of works that relied on "doing" the "right" things in the "right" way—rather than relying on God's grace alone—for salvation. This perceived message of works over grace violated their consciences in the same way the Church of England's teachings had violated Shepard's conscience, and would lead to vocal attacks by Massachusetts' dissidents on those ministers attempting to force theological interpretations and methodologies on nonconformist Puritan congregants. Shepard's push for theological conformity based on his understanding and experiences led to a show down between his supporters (the "orthodox") and his opponents (the dissenters or nonconformists)—between perceived legalists and perceived antinomians. Shepard responded to nonconformity with vehemence equal to that of his English nemesis, Archbishop Laud.

CHAPTER IV
THOMAS SHEPARD AND NONCONFORMITY:
PERSECUTOR OF DISSENTERS

“No sooner were we thus set down and entered into church fellowship but the Lord exercised us and the whole country with the opinions of Familists, begun by Mistress Hutchinson, raised up to a great height by Mr. Vane too suddenly chosen governor, and maintained too obscurely by Mr. Cotton, and propagated too boldly by the members of Boston...”¹¹⁵ –Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography*

Within one year of his arrival, Thomas Shepard began a systematic attack on those who challenged his formulated confessionals and codified steps to Christian legitimacy as a “covenant of works” rather than a “covenant of grace.” The central dividing issue was whether a believer’s assurance of salvation came only from faith in God’s grace or from some external work that evidenced God’s grace. John Albro, as well as the compilers of John Winthrop’s journal, identifies Shepard and those who supported an evidentiary “work of grace” as part of the “orthodox” party, which, by definition, references those “conforming to established doctrines.”¹¹⁶ In this case, the established doctrines included Shepard’s formulated confessionals, in which believers had to effectively identify what “work of grace the Lord had wrought in them” in order to be accepted into the church.¹¹⁷ Winthrop’s journal identified two political/theological

¹¹⁵ [McGiffert, 1994, 67]

¹¹⁶ [Merriam-Webster, 2003, 876]; [Winthrop, 1996, 211 (notes)]

¹¹⁷ [McGiffert, 1994, 136]

“sides.” Winthrop noted one “side” consisted of Governor Vane, John Cotton, John Wheelwright, William Coddington, and other lesser figures, including Anne Hutchinson. On the “orthodox” side were Thomas Shepard, former governor, John Winthrop, Boston’s preacher, John Wilson, Deputy Governor Dudley, and other prominent elders in area churches. Winthrop voiced a common belief of both sides, “that two so opposite parties could not contain in the same body, without apparent hazard of ruin to the whole.”¹¹⁸ John Winthrop described the division in his *Short Story*: “Now you might have heard one of them preaching a most dangerous Sermon in a great Assembly; when he divided the whole Country into two ranks, some (that were of his Opinion) under a Covenant of Grace, and those were friends to Christ; others under a Covenant of Workes, whom they might know by this, if they evidence their good estate by the Sanctification: those were (said he) enemies of Christ.”¹¹⁹

Thomas Shepard described what he considered the “erroneous’ Antinomian position: “The principal opinion and seed of all the rest was this, viz., that a Christian should not take any evidence of God’s special grace and love toward him by the sight of any graces or conditional evangelical promises to faith or sanctification, in way of ratiocination (for this was evidence and so a way of works), but it must be without the sight of any grace, faith, holiness, or special change in himself, by immediate revelation in an absolute promise.”¹²⁰ Historian David D. Hall explained the nonconformists’ position as one that “insisted on treating sanctification as a ‘work.’” Hall claims John

¹¹⁸ [Winthrop, 1996, 239]

¹¹⁹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 210-211].

¹²⁰ [McGiffert, 1994, 67]

Cotton's 1633 sermons renouncing "good behavior" as a "'work' that any hypocrite could perform" set the stage for Antinomian sentiment that "'sanctification' could amount to no more than a 'righteousness of ones own.'" Anne Hutchinson, devoted student of Cotton, took his words to heart. Hutchinson's "personal sense of communion with the Holy Spirit," her "immediate awareness of the Spirit" led her and others in the "free grace" party to believe "those who received the Spirit never had to doubt their estate again," so that "any striving after 'signs' of grace was a sure sign that grace had not been granted."

Hall also describes the "alternate route to assurance" preached by Thomas Shepard, claiming "this route involved a ceaseless striving after grace by the saints and the unregenerate alike."¹²¹ Shepard's *Sincere Convert* continually urged believers to "strive" and "labor" for their salvation. He declared, "Where the work of grace is begun, sin loses strength," then proceeded to enumerate concrete ways to "make an exchange of what thou art or hast with Christ for what Christ is or hath," concluding that by "so taking him...thou shalt have salvation with him." Shepard further encouraged believers to "use duties as evidences of God's everlasting hope to you when you be in Christ."¹²² Shepard's *The Sound Believer* asserted, "The Spirit puts forth variety of acts in the soul; as it acts us to good works, it is the spirit of obedience; as it infuseth habits of grace, so it is the spirit of sanctification."¹²³ Hall contends Shepard "argued that sanctification could

¹²¹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 16-19]

¹²² [Shepard, 1853, 1:45,51-52, 62, 69, 106]

¹²³ [Shepard, 1853, 1:169]

be used as a valid sign of justification, or election” and that “the differences of opinion between the ministers were a serious threat to the unity of Massachusetts.”¹²⁴

John Winthrop observed the growing two-party division in the colony; he differentiated “Mr. Wheelwright and those of his party”¹²⁵ from the opposition party, which included Shepard, Winthrop, and most other colonial ministers. Winthrop identified the theological division lines: “Thus every occasion increased the contention and caused great alienation of minds...and 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.”¹²⁶ John A. Albro claimed that for a time both theological “sides” claimed John Cotton as an advocate. Albro notes, “Mr. Cotton...for a while bore no decided testimony against the errors that were dividing and distracting the church. The consequence was, that he was claimed by both parties in this controversy; the Antinomians declaring that their doctrines were legitimate inferences from his preaching, and had his sanction; the Orthodox, on the other hand, affirming that he adhered to the common faith, and disavowed their [Antinomian] heretical sentiments.”¹²⁷ The “orthodox” party—those following Thomas Shepard’s prescriptive theology—was as intolerant of anyone—male or female—who dared question their doctrinal legitimacy,

¹²⁴ [David D. Hall, 1990, 16-19]

¹²⁵ Wheelwright’s party included John Cotton, Henry Vane, and all those members of the Boston church who had signed a petition trying to add Wheelwright to Boston’s teaching staff. All who signed the petition were sanctioned, fined, disenfranchised, or banished by the group led by Thomas Shepard and former Governor Winthrop unless they recanted their support of Wheelwright. For more on the petition issue, see [Winthrop, 1996, 226-244.]

¹²⁶ [Winthrop, 1996, 208-209]

¹²⁷ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxvi]

labeled by dissenters as a “covenant of works,” as dissenters were of anyone questioning their theological interpretations, labeled a “covenant of grace.”

Shepard launched a systematic attack first on prominent ministers like Cotton and Wheelwright; he supported ousting Governor Vane, then led attacks on dissident lay supporters, on the entire Boston church, and finally on Anne Hutchinson. Shepard sent letters to John Cotton demanding written responses to theological grilling. He prevented the Boston church from adding John Wheelwright to its official teaching roster. He questioned the spiritual leadership of Governor Henry Vane, and spoke vehemently against lay persons such as Anne Hutchinson for daring not only to question his theological interpretations but also to brand them “a covenant of works.” Shepard thus became to Puritan dissenters in Massachusetts what Archbishop Laud had been to Puritan dissenters in England. Shepard and his newly created “orthodox” party used many of the same tactics as Laud—silencing, disenfranchisement, public humiliation, and banishment—as they sought conformity from their most outspoken critics: John Cotton, John Wheelwright, Henry Vane, numerous elders and freemen, and finally Anne Hutchinson. John A. Albro noted, “The peace of all the churches in the colony was violently disturbed by the opinions and practices of the Antinomians, which were first promulgated in this part of the world by Mrs. Hutchinson...Mr. Shepard bore a distinguished part in that controversy, and exerted no small influence in bringing it to a triumphant conclusion.”¹²⁸

¹²⁸ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxiv]

While Shepard intimated that the problem began with Anne Hutchinson, other documents suggest that Shepard spent his first year in the colony primarily questioning and attacking fellow ministers and magistrates, attempting to conform them to his theological interpretations. In fact, although Shepard arrived in Massachusetts in October of 1635, John Winthrop, undisputed early historian of the colony, made no mention whatsoever of Anne Hutchinson or any church divisions until October of 1636—an entire year after Shepard’s arrival. Winthrop noted in his 1636 entry that Hutchinson, “a woman of ready wit and bold spirit, brought over with her two dangerous errors” which he identified as claiming the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and denying behavior as evidence of God’s grace.¹²⁹ For the next several entries into mid 1637, Hutchinson is not mentioned at all; however, Winthrop does speak at length about increased tensions between the Boston Church, specifically John Cotton, John Wheelwright, and Henry Vane, and the rest of the colony’s ministers, who were greatly influenced by Thomas Shepard. The Boston church supported Winthrop’s political rival and sitting governor, Henry Vane, and continually questioned Shepard’s extremely detailed descriptions of what it meant to be a “sincere” or “sound” Christian. Shepard, after failing to bring key Bostonians into conformity to his teachings, labeled the Boston Church the center of colonial dissidence. Shepard labeled nonconformists like Anne Hutchinson

¹²⁹ [Winthrop, 1996, 193]

“Famillists;”¹³⁰ later historians such as John A. Albro called Massachusetts nonconformists “Antinomians.”¹³¹

One of Shepard’s earliest confrontations was with Boston’s popular teacher, John Cotton. While in England, Shepard greatly admired Cotton, declaring “I saw the Lord departing from England when Mr. Hooker and Mr. Cotton were gone.”¹³² But historian David D. Hall notes that within a year of Shepard’s arrival, “Shepard expressed his dismay at the themes of Cotton’s sermons” and sent a rather pointed letter in early 1636 demanding an explanation of perceived nonconformist theology in the Boston church. Shepard, claiming he was “clearing up the truth” wanted Cotton to “give us satisfaction” on a few key questions concerning Christian legitimacy, specifically Cotton’s take on teachings regarding immediate revelation and Cotton’s view regarding the importance of identifying what work confirmed one’s faith. Shepard warned that “the inferences made upon such speeches, will be very dangerous” and that “some members...may doe your people and ministry hurt.” Although Shepard claimed he had not written “to begin or breed a quarrel; but to still and quiet those which are secretly begun” and which he feared would “flame out unless they be quenched in time,” Shepard’s confrontational tone began dividing the colony into orthodox and non-orthodox camps.¹³³

Peter Bulkeley, another orthodox minister, who later helped preside over the 1637 synod which severely attacked perceived dissidents, also wrote questioning Cotton’s

¹³⁰ [McGiffert, 1994, 67-68]

¹³¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxiv]

¹³² [McGiffert, 1994, 57]

¹³³ [David D. Hall, 1990, 24-29]

theological soundness.¹³⁴ In late 1636, orthodox ministers called Cotton, along with fellow minister John Wheelwright and Anne Hutchinson to a conference led by Shepard to explain and defend alleged nonconformist teachings. According to Winthrop's journal, "Mr. Cotton...gave satisfaction to them...and so did Mr. Wheelwright;" Anne Hutchinson did not.

Historian David D. Hall notes, "Cotton...continued to preach sermons that disturbed his fellow ministers." Winthrop's journal records that orthodox ministers "drew up a list of 'points, wherein they suspected Mr. Cotton did differ from them, and...propounded them to him, and pressed him to direct answer, affirmative or negative, to every one.'" ¹³⁵ Winthrop noted, "The rest of the ministers, taking offence at some doctrines delivered by Mr. Cotton...drew out sixteen points...entreating him to deliver his judgment directly in them...Some doubts he well cleared, but in some things he gave not satisfaction."¹³⁶ Since Cotton's reply did not satisfy all the ministers; he remained on their suspicious list for the next year. Shepard wrote that teachings supported by Cotton "did gender about a hundred monstrous opinions" which the elders "having used all private brotherly means with Mr. Cotton first, and yet no healing hereupon, they publicly preached both against opinions publicly and privately maintained."¹³⁷

Shepard directed another attack on Hutchinson's brother-in-law, John Wheelwright, who had been a persecuted Puritan minister in England—just like Hooker, Wilson, Cotton, Shepard, and others who had migrated earlier. Cotton, the Hutchinson's,

¹³⁴ [David D. Hall, 1990, 34-42]

¹³⁵ [Ibid., 43]

¹³⁶ [Winthrop, 1996, 206]

¹³⁷ [McGiffert, 1994, 67]

and others petitioned for Wheelwright to be another teacher at the Boston church. John Winthrop protested, indicating the church didn't know Wheelwright well enough to give him the position, but encouraged him to take a preaching position at a new church in Mount Wollaston some miles away. Winthrop's journal editors conclude, "By engineering Wheelwright's removal to Mount Wollaston, John Winthrop was protecting this chief ally in the Boston church, the pastor, John Wilson," who was unsurprisingly part of Shepard's orthodox party.¹³⁸

The orthodox party asked Wheelwright to give a fast day sermon; Shepard and other orthodox ministers used the occasion to judge whether Wheelwright would conform to their doctrinal dictates, specifically whether he would denounce the notion of immediate revelation and denounce that seeking a sign of God's grace denoted a "covenant of works." Wheelwright did not conform. Wheelwright directly and indirectly compared the orthodox party to pagans, Pharisees, the Antichrist, and Philistines. He made stinging statements which the crowd understood as simultaneously defending nonconformist ideology and criticizing the orthodox. Wheelwright asserted, "Those that are justified by Christ must not looke to be saved by sacrifice, but by the mercy of Christ." He declared that Christ's presence in one's life "taketh away all cause of mourning and weeping," and boldly proclaimed the true Gospel was the "revelation of Jesus Christ . . . [which] doth hold forth Jesus Christ and nothing but Christ." Wheelwright verbally accosted Shepard's theology by claiming Christ alone was the believer's "wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification and our redemption," and

¹³⁸ [Winthrop, 1996, 196 (notes)]

asserting “we are not able to do any worke of sanctification . . . but it must be the Lord Jesus Christ that must apply himself and his righteousness to us.”¹³⁹

Wheelwright’s sermon inflamed the crowds; he was convicted of sedition—a sentence that his fellow nonconformists protested. The General Court deferred sentence, but decided the next court should meet in Newtown instead of Boston—very convenient to remove any decision making into the “covenant of works” party’s stronghold. Winthrop’s journal editors note this was “another defeat for the Boston church. By moving the May court of election from Boston to Newtown, the orthodox party improved its chances of unseating Vane as governor.”¹⁴⁰ Shepard asserted, “Mr. Wheelwright, a man of a bold and stiff conceit of his own worth and light, preached . . . a sedition sermon, stirring up all sorts against those that preached a covenant of works.” Shepard noted, “The magistrates took courage and exiled Mr. Wheelwright” and others “until many that held with them before were ashamed of them.”¹⁴¹

Shepard’s orthodox party did succeed in replacing Governor Vane by effectively disenfranchising many of the opposition. Winthrop reported that Governor Vane decided to return to England to take care of family business. Vane apparently burst into tears on at least one occasion when supporters urged him to stay the course in Massachusetts. The General Court denied his departure request until he changed his reasons, and a special election was called to replace him, but was postponed several months. Elders of the various churches called upon local ministers to help solve the growing tensions between

¹³⁹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 153-172]

¹⁴⁰ [Winthrop, 1996, 211]

¹⁴¹ [McGiffert, 1994, 67-68]

increasingly polarized parties. Vane “took great offense” at the meeting, since it did not follow protocol by involving him. One of the opposition ministers, Rev. Hugh Peter, responded that Vane’s jealousy saddened the ministers and concluded all the problems resulted from Vane’s leadership, pride, new notions, and idleness. John Wilson chimed in with a “very sad speech” that warned against impeding separation and “laid the blame upon these new opinions risen up amongst us, which all the magistrates, except the governour and two, others, did confirm, and all the ministers but two.” Winthrop’s journal editors note this was a direct appeal from Wilson to the colony for help against Vane, Cotton, Wheelwright and others, now that Wilson had lost nearly all support from the Boston church.¹⁴²

Shepard and Winthrop’s orthodox party outnumbered the nonconformists and so finagled through some very un-orthodox legal proceedings. Bostonians presented a petition to be read before election proceedings. Still sitting Governor Vane was agreeable, but Deputy Dudley of the orthodox party ruled the reading out of order. Vane refused to commence the election process until the reading, so Deputy Dudley decided “the people should divide themselves, and the greater number must carry it.” Vane’s orthodox opponents left the building and held the elections outdoors, replacing Vane with Winthrop, maintaining Dudley as Deputy, and omitting all nonconformist candidates for any position on the court. When Vane, Cotton, and others appeared as deputies from their church, the Court denied their admittance. Winthrop noted, “Mr. Vane, Mr. Coddington,

¹⁴² [Winthrop, 1996, 202-204]

and Mr. Dummer, (being all of that faction,) were left quite out.”¹⁴³ The men approached again, “and the court not finding how they might reject them, they were admitted.” Winthrop’s journal editors contend, “This election, the most hotly contested in early Massachusetts, returned John Winthrop to the colony leadership [so that] control of the colony reverted to the men who had dominated the scene in 1630-1633.” At a later General Court, Winthrop noted that “Mr. Wheelwright and those of his party had been clearly confuted and confounded.” Winthrop gave examples: “One William Aspinwall...was dismissed...disfranchised...and banished.” “John Coggeshall was another deputy...also dismissed, and after disfranchised.” Wheelwright was also banished.¹⁴⁴ Shepard’s orthodox party, in an effort to crush any further dissidence from colonial nonconformists, “disenfranchised eight others” and “ordered 75 persons disarmed”—a “very severe punishment” in that era. The disarmament had its intended results: it “helped to persuade 35 additional Antinomians to acknowledge their fault.”¹⁴⁵

Despite the fact that battle lines were drawn between orthodox and nonconformist theologies as early as 1636, Anne Hutchinson’s name does not appear in Winthrop’s journal or in Shepard’s letters to Cotton. From Shepard’s arrival in 1635 until the summer of 1637, the ministers and magistrates who spoke, wrote, and argued in the public sphere remained the key players the controversy. Within that sphere, nonconformists were humiliated, decried, silenced, disenfranchised, and banished. Eventually, the only major opposition was Anne Hutchinson, who shared the free grace theological mindset, but

¹⁴³ [Winthrop, 1996, 214-215]

¹⁴⁴ [Winthrop, 1996, 214-215, 239-40]

¹⁴⁵ [Ibid., 241-2, notes] For the full trial transcript, John Winthrop’s shortened account, and Boston Church’s response, see [David D. Hall, 1990, 195-395]

who—as a woman—did not participate in the public exchange between ministers and magistrates. She never wrote a tract, never preached a sermon, never published her theological arguments; she taught other women in her home. John A. Albro claims, “Mrs. Hutchinson was a woman of a masculine understanding, and of fiery zeal in religion” who was “well beloved...embraced...and blessed” by Cotton and her community. Albro contends “She was treated with great respect” by Cotton and other prominent men, which did “awaken her vanity, and give her great influence with the people.”

The orthodox party accused her of holding illicit meetings with women “in imitation of the brethren” and pretending to teach while actually distorting male sermons from Cotton and others as she “ventured to broach some opinions of her own.”¹⁴⁶ Hutchinson defended her home teachings, citing the Titus 2: 3-5 passage—which instructed older women to teach younger women—as well as citing the Puritan practice of conventicles which her accusers also used. When asked at her trial if she had ever taught men, she replied, “There was never any man with us.” When pressured to admit that one of the two weekly meetings held in her home did include men, she assured the court that no woman ever taught when men were present. General Court assistant John Endicott asked her pointedly, “Who teaches in the men’s meetings none but men, do not women sometimes?” Hutchinson replied, “Never as I heard, not one.”¹⁴⁷ Why was she singled out as the central culprit in this theological/political tug-of-war? Why have

¹⁴⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxv]

¹⁴⁷ [David D. Hall, 1990, 314-317]

historians for the last three hundred years continued to paint her as the cause of Massachusetts Bay Colony's near implosion?

Hutchinson could not be silenced or disenfranchised since she was not part of the public sphere. Shepard, along with several other orthodox ministers, found a way to bring Mistress Hutchinson into the public sphere. Hutchinson was called to appear before Winthrop and other orthodox magistrates after she met with the group of orthodox ministers, which included Hugh Peter, George Phillips, Zechariah Symmes, John Wilson, John Eliot, Nathaniel Ward, and Thomas Shepard. These ministers invited Anne Hutchinson to a private meeting "to speak her thoughts concerning the ministers of the Bay." According to trial transcripts, Hutchinson was hesitant at first to speak to the ministers, but did so when they assured her they "came for plain dealing and telling you our hearts." She said, "I would deal as plainly as I could," and proceeded to explain in that private setting why she believed any minister who indicated that a work of grace evidenced salvation preached a "covenant of works."¹⁴⁸

At her trial, these same ministers—refusing to speak under oath or produce any written notes of the private meeting—repeatedly accused Hutchinson of claiming they were, among other things, "not able ministers of the gospel," that they preached "a covenant of works instead of a covenant of grace," that they were "not sealed," and that "Mr. Shepard...did not preach a covenant of grace clearly." Hutchinson hesitated to voice her opinions in open court, claiming, "It is one thing for me to come before a public magistracy and there to speak what they would have me to speak and another when a man

¹⁴⁸ [David D. Hall, 1990, 325]

comes to me in a way of friendship privately there is difference in that.” She deftly defended her statements made to the ministers, claiming her comments made in that private meeting among supposed friends were misconstrued and taken out of context. She denied telling any of the ministers they were under a covenant of works, testifying, “To preach a covenant of works and to be under a covenant of works is another business.” She appealed to her Bostonian pastor, John Wilson, who apparently recorded the encounter, “If our pastor would shew his writings you should see what I said, and that many things are not so as is reported.” Conveniently, Wilson responded, “Sister Hutchinson, for the writings you speak of I have them not, and this I must say I did not write down all that was said and did pass betwixt one and another, yet I say what is written I will vouch.” John Eliot also attested, “Our brethren did intreat us to write and a few things I did write the substance of which hath been her spoken and I have it in writing therefore I do avouch it.” Eliot also conveniently did not have any written records with him and apparently decided such hard evidence in this trial was unnecessary. He informed the court, “I am loth to spend time therefore I shall consent to what hath been said.”¹⁴⁹

Anne Hutchinson was initially charged with “keeping two public lectures” and “reproaching most of the ministers...for not preaching a covenant of free grace,”¹⁵⁰ but the charges could not be proved. Even so—though her accusers had no hard evidence and refused to speak under oath—the orthodox magistrates in charge forcefully asserted her

¹⁴⁹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 319-326]

¹⁵⁰ [Winthrop, 1996, 240]

guilt. Deputy Governor Dudley averred, “I called these witnesses and you deny them. You see they have proved this and you deny this, but it is clear. You said they preached a covenant of works and that they were not able ministers of the new testament.” Governor Winthrop concurred, “Here are six undeniable ministers who say it is true and yet you deny that you did say that they did preach a covenant of works and that they were not able ministers of the gospel.” Shepard admitted at her trial that he and other ministers had encouraged Hutchinson to share her doctrinal interpretations with them in a private conversation, promising her words would not be used against her. Shepard later reneged, stating, “I am loathe to speak in this assembly concerning this gentlewoman...but I can do no less than speak what my *conscience* (emphasis mine) speaks unto me.” Shepard went on to defend the orthodox ministers, claiming, “Let us strive to speak to the *consciencs* (emphasis mine) of men, knowing that if we had the truth with us we shall not need to approve our words by our practice and our ministry to the hearts of the people, and they should speak for us and therefore I have satisfied myself and the brethren with that.” Ironically, while Shepard claimed his testimony and life’s vindication came from adhering to his conscience, Hutchinson’s accusers condemned her for adhering to her conscience. Governor Winthrop denounced her testimony, stating, “You did profess then that it was out of conscience that you spake.” He asserted “You make the case worse, for you clearly shew that the ground of your opening your mind was not to satisfy them [the orthodox ministers] but to satisfy your own conscience.”¹⁵¹

¹⁵¹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 323-325]

While Shepard conveniently forgot most of the particulars of what he or the other ministers said at their private meeting, he shared in court what the orthodox ministers claimed Hutchinson had said, concluding, "I am sure she was in an error," but thought "it may be but a slip of her tongue." Shepard indicated all she had to do was acknowledge her error, conform to Shepard's interpretation, "be sorry for it, and then we shall be glad of it."¹⁵² Of all those the orthodox party harangued, Anne Hutchinson was the only one who steadfastly did not cave in to their strong arm tactics. She was not convicted of either two original charges, but was eventually convicted and banished for a totally different reason: claiming immediate revelation from God. She was not only banished, but also excommunicated from the Boston Church which had once so vehemently supported her and the nonconformist position. At that trial, former Hutchinson ally John Cotton tried repeatedly to get Hutchinson to change her ideological verbiage to avoid excommunication and pled with the orthodoxy, "we must suffer her with patience." Shepard countered, "I will have this Church consider whether it will be for the Honor of God and the honor of this Church to bare with patience soe groce an offendor." Shepard wanted nothing less than her total rejection of nonconformist interpretation and total subjection to orthodox theology. Shepard declared, "Mrs. Hutchison should take Shame and Confusion to herselfe for her groce and damnable Errors, she shall cast Shame upon others and say thay are mistaken...I fear it doth not stand with true Repentence. I confes I

¹⁵² [McGiffert, 1994, 323-324]

am wholly unsatisfied in her Expressions...I should be glad to see any Repentance in her: that might give me Satisfaction.”¹⁵³

McGiffert contends that Shepard’s own doubts, temptations, and longings for immediate revelation “were points of emotional kinship” with Hutchinson, claiming “it is plausible to suggest that in putting down the Antinomian apostate, Shepard was suppressing the Antinomian propensities of his own passionate spirit”—the same type of nonconformist attitudes and behaviors that rendered him just a few years ago on English orthodox Archbishop Laud’s hit list.¹⁵⁴ Within two years of his arrival, Shepard effectively divided the Massachusetts Bay colony along orthodox and nonconformist lines. Wheelwright was banished, Cotton was harangued and eventually cowered, and others were disenfranchised, fined, and even imprisoned. The only prominent non-public dissident, Anne Hutchinson, was also effectively banished and excommunicated.

Shepard’s orthodox party’s epithets of colonial nonconformists resembled those Archbishop Laud attributed to English Puritan dissenters. Governor Winthrop, in his “A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines,” deplored nonconformists for their “boldness, pride, insolency, alienations from their old and dearest friends, the disturbances, divisions, contentions they raised amongst us, both in Church and State, and in families, setting division betwixt husband and wife.”¹⁵⁵

Thomas Shepard labeled nonconformist teachings “monstrous” and an evil

¹⁵³ [David D. Hall, 1990, 387, 377]

¹⁵⁴ [McGiffert, 1994, 28]

¹⁵⁵ [David D. Hall, 1990, 209]

“contagion.”¹⁵⁶ He specifically referenced Hutchinson as “a very dangerous Woman” with “corrupt opinions” guided by “a spirit of Delusion and Error.” Shepard railed against Hutchinson’s nonconformist ideology at the close of her second trial at the Boston church, where he actively encouraged her excommunication. Shepard’s vehement denunciation called Hutchinson “a Woman this day that holds diverse erroneous opinions;” Shepard claimed she “never had any true Grace in her heart,” but “hath shewed herself to be a notorious imposter.”¹⁵⁷ John A. Albro contends the orthodox described colonial nonconformists as “heretics of the worst and most dangerous sort,” whose opinions were “absurd, licentious, and destructive,” and who, “wherever they took root they produced the bitter fruits of alienation, hatred, and slander.” Critics accused colonial nonconformists of trying to “destroy the reputation of all those ministers who held the commonly-received doctrines,” and of encouraging “ignorant men and women to become preachers.” The orthodox party blamed the nonconformist’s “fanatical spirit” for church and colonial divisions; Shepard’s party labeled nonconformists “disturbers of the peace” spreading “mischief” and “errorists” who fed on “their own conceited revelations.”¹⁵⁸ Shepard’s orthodox party treated Massachusetts’ nonconformists similarly to how the Church of England had treated Shepard and other Puritan dissenters in England. Shepard led fellow English dissenters, who had been persecuted by Archbishop Laud and the Church of England, to his own brand of orthodoxy using similar means: codified

¹⁵⁶ [McGiffert, 1994, 67]

¹⁵⁷ [David D. Hall, 1990, 353, 365, 383]

¹⁵⁸ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxvii-cxix]

theology, intimidating any opposition, and verbally haranguing those considered nonconformists. English Puritan dissenters had become New England's orthodoxy.

Shepard ultimately centered orthodox control in Newtown; he pitted Newtown against Boston, claiming "The Lord kept me from that contagion," and maintaining "The Lord was graciously pleased by giving witness against them to keep this poor church spotless." Shepard boasted that his orthodox party used all means "for crushing and curing these sorts."¹⁵⁹ Winthrop noted, "every occasion increased the contention, and caused great alienation of minds; and the members of Boston (frequenting the lectures of other ministers) did make much disturbance by public questions, and objections to their doctrines, which did any way disagree from their opinions; and 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."¹⁶⁰

Thomas Shepard used sermons to create his orthodox theology; he used sermons to maintain orthodox control over the colony. Sermons had been instrumental in Shepard's own spiritual journey; it stands to reason he would employ their use in aiding the spiritual journey of the colony. Three of his most famous, "The Sincere Convert," "The Sound Believer," and "The Parable of the Ten Virgins" permeated colonial hearts and minds with orthodox theology. John A. Albro notes, "Innumerable sermons were preached against the erroneous doctrines. Conferences were held...Every thing which individual influence could do was done to root out these pestilent opinions, and to restore

¹⁵⁹ [McGiffert, 1994, 67-68]

¹⁶⁰ [Winthrop, 1996, 208-209]

peace t the distracted colony.” Albro contends, “One of the means by which he destroyed the influence of the heretics in his own congregation was the delivery of that admirable course of sermons upon the parable of the ten virgins.” Albro further claimed, “In the midst of all this excitement and confusion, Mr. Shepard continued steadfast in the faith; and through his vigilance, faithfulness, and discriminating ministry, the church of Newtown was preserved from the least taint of this heresy...He had the satisfaction and the honor of being a principal instrument in bringing this unhappy excitement to an end.”¹⁶¹

Shepard’s orthodox party—through covering Cotton, ousting Vane, silencing and banishing Wheelwright, disenfranchising countless others, and finally banishing and excommunicating Anne Hutchinson—effectively gained control of Massachusetts’ ministers, magistrates, mindsets, and methodologies. After Hutchinson’s banishment, Shepard further solidified his position and power in the colony by helping to found Harvard College, which moved the center of theological control from Boston to Newton, or Cambridge—the home of Shepard’s congregation and the core of his support. Shepard claimed Newtown was chosen since “through God’s great care [Newtown was] kept spotless from the contagion” of nonconformists.¹⁶² Shepard described Harvard as “a nursery of knowledge in these deserts.” Shepard, as the theological institution’s first overseer, helped establish the college “to indoctrinate young male citizens so as to prevent a charismatic radical like Hutchinson from ever again holding sway in

¹⁶¹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cxix-cxxii]

¹⁶² [McGiffert, 1994, 70]

Massachusetts.”¹⁶³ Shepard garnered control of the colony’s theological education; he thereby secured his orthodoxy’s control in Massachusetts for many succeeding generations.

¹⁶³ [LaPlante, 2004, xxi]

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

“The sin of schism, therefore, which has been so often charged upon our Congregational fathers, does not lie at their door. Laud himself, the greatest enemy the Puritans ever had, lays it down as a maxim, that ‘schism is theirs whose the cause of it is; and he makes the separation who gives the first cause of it, not he that makes an actual separation upon a just cause preceding.’ ‘They who talk so much of sects and divisions,’ says Locke, ‘would do well to consider whether those are not most authors and promoters of sects and divisions, who impose creeds and ceremonies, and articles of men’s making, and make things not necessary to salvation the necessary terms of communion; excluding and driving from them such as, out of conscience and persuasion, can not assent and submit to them, and treating them as if they were utter aliens from the church of God, and such as were deservedly shut out as unfit to be members of it; who narrow Christianity with bounds of their own making, which, the gospel knows nothing of; and often, for things in themselves confessedly indifferent, thrust men out of their communion, and then punish them for not being of it.’”¹⁶⁴

Thomas Shepard and most of the other Massachusetts ministers and magistrates had been persecuted in England for matters of conscience. These men refused to conform to some practices within the Church of England, namely following the Book of Common Prayer, kneeling, using the sign of the cross at baptism, and wearing clerical vestments. Shepard and other English nonconformists believed such practices were man-made, non-Scriptural, superstitious papist rituals to which “true” Christians owed no allegiance. Shepard pleaded with Archbishop Laud to understand that rejecting those state mandated rites was a matter of conscience for Shepard: to violate his conscience would be blatant disobedience to God. Archbishop Laud refused to consider or concede to nonconformist

¹⁶⁴ [Shepard, 1853, 1:1]

theology and actively persecuted such dissidents through silencing, fines, imprisonment, and banishment.

Thomas Shepard endured public humiliation at the hands of Archbishop Laud and other orthodox bishops in the Church of England. He was ridiculed, silenced, threatened with fines and with imprisonment. Fleeing persecution, Shepard traveled the length of England, preaching wherever he could what his conscience dictated. He hid from orthodox authorities, traveled incognito, used false names, blatantly refused to submit to practices he deemed heretical, and eventually left England of his own choice, claiming, “Although it was true I should stay and suffer for Christ, yet I saw no rule for it now the Lord had opened a door of escape.” Shepard, along with countless other, fled to New England where “the Lord let me see the glory of those liberties” where he could “live among God’s people as one come out from the dead” and “exercise [his] talents publicly.”¹⁶⁵ Regardless of the various levels of persecution, Shepard maintained his perceived spiritual integrity, refusing to compromise his soul. The Church of England and the Puritan nonconformists came to an impasse. As John A. Albro observed, “many parts of conformity...he [Laud] could have yielded to, but not *all*, and nothing less than all would satisfy the bishops.”¹⁶⁶

Later historians studied the events in England which led to so many Puritan dissidents leaving to establish their New England “city on a hill.” John A. Albro, referencing the Church of England, observed that its “assumption of human authority in

¹⁶⁵ [McGiffert, 1994, 58]

¹⁶⁶ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxxx]

matters of religion was a great evil” and caused many to overtly reject “the doctrine, so cruelly reduced to practice, that the state has the right to fix the mode in which men shall worship God.”¹⁶⁷ Albro, as well as many twentieth century historians concluded those events didn’t have to turn out the way they did. In a 1909 meeting of the Massachusetts Historical Society, the record states, “a defence had been found...for the tyranny of Laud...on the ground that they were all entirely honest, but failed to understand the English people of their day. This does not better the case. It is the business of men in positions of such authority to understand their nation; to ask themselves every day whether they do understand it, especially when they find their favorite measures opposed.”¹⁶⁸ Could the same be said for Shepard’s orthodox party in Massachusetts?

Puritan dissenters in England—of which Shepard was paramount—defied Church of England teachings and rituals in an effort to remain true to their own consciences. Ministers like Shepard rejected teachings of “a church that made conformity to such things an indispensable condition of its fellowship, and used its power so tyrannically against all who had conscientious scruples about them.”¹⁶⁹ Shepard offered to converse with, be taught more fully by, and attempted to submit to Archbishop Laud if the Archbishop would only respect Shepard’s conscientious objections and allow Christian fellowship to supercede rigid orthodox legalism. From Shepard’s perspective, no such compromise was possible with the Church of England’s “my way or the highway” mindset. Shepard rejected the Church of England’s mandated man-made worship rituals

¹⁶⁷ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxxxix-lxxx].

¹⁶⁸ [Bradford, et al., 1909, 70]

¹⁶⁹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lxxix]

which Shepard and other nonconformists felt violated their consciences. Yet, upon establishing himself in Massachusetts, Shepard created his own theological orthodoxy, codifying acceptable Christian behavior through formulated confessionals and enumerated sermons. Shepard persecuted those who rejected his behavioral mandates as a man-made “covenant of works” which nonconformists claimed violated their consciences. Did Shepard adopt a similar rigid, legalistic mindset once he established his orthodox theology in the new colony?

In England, both the orthodox and the nonconformists felt justified that they were acting in a way that protected truth and guarded hearts and souls against eternal destruction. While Shepard and other dissenters adhered to conscience, Archbishop Laud persecuted nonconformists believing he was saving the church from dangerous heresy. According to historian Michael McGiffert, the Archbishop persecuted dissenters like Shepard, who preached publicly or privately “in the homes of Nonconformist patrons” and threatened England’s “campaign for Anglican uniformity.” In short, Shepard perceived Laud as mandating rites and rituals that violated the consciences of those striving to worship according to Scriptural rather than man-made modes. Laud perceived Shepard as a dangerous nonconformist to the religious power structure in England at the time.¹⁷⁰ Laud called Shepard a “prating coxcomb,” and promised to “be on [his] back . . . to everlastingly disenable [him].”¹⁷¹ Once Shepard established his colonial orthodoxy, nonconformists accused him of teaching a man-made “covenant of works” evidenced in

¹⁷⁰ [Shepard, 1853, 1:xi]

¹⁷¹ [McGiffert, 1994, 51]

his formulated confessionals and enumerated proofs of Christian legitimacy. Such nonconformists claimed to be following their conscience by teaching that grace alone evidenced salvation. Shepard, like Archbishop Laud, similarly believed he was stamping out heresy that threatened the life and prosperity of Massachusetts Bay. In England, the orthodox eventually succeeded in ousting those who refused to conform. Shepard's orthodox party similarly succeeded in silencing, cowering, or banishing colonial nonconformists.

Thomas Shepard, after his arrival in New England, transitioned from nonconformist to orthodox, from persecuted to persecutor. Did he realize his own strict theological interpretations might appear as rigid legalism to others? Did he consider that ministers like John Cotton and John Wheelwright, magistrates like Henry Vane, or lay people like William Aspinwall, John Cogshall, William Coddington¹⁷² and Anne Hutchinson had conscientious objections to his teachings and practices, which to them demanded "works" to evidence salvation? While Thomas Shepard demanded the right to stay true to his conscience in England by rejecting the Church of England's non-Scriptural worship modes, he consequently denied fellow colonial Puritans the same freedom of conscience and persecuted those who rejected his formulated confessionals and enumerated sermon criteria as a "covenant of works."

Archbishop Laud considered Shepard every bit as much a threat to the purity of the Church of England as Shepard considered nonconformists a threat to the purity of the Massachusetts Bay colony. So why have historians not branded Shepard an Anglican

¹⁷² [David D. Hall, 1990, 250, notes]

heretic or a New England persecutor? John Albro makes an interesting observation referencing Archbishop Laud's encounters with Thomas Shepard and other nonconformists: "we must remember that the report of those proceedings was originally made by a professed enemy of the Puritan divines, who was as much inclined to flatter . . . the king . . . as he was to misrepresent the character and the arguments of those whom he hated."¹⁷³ Puritan historians have noted, "The character of Laud . . . has been very differently drawn by the friends and the enemies of the Puritans." Albro noted that Laud's character portrayals range from "an angel of light, and with the beauty of a holy martyr" to "one of the most hateful incarnations of the spirit of evil."¹⁷⁴ That is quite a span of epitaphs, but historians are fortunate to have not only written records of those supporting Archbishop Laud and the Church of England, but also private journals, letters, and published sermons of nonconformists like Shepard so that the discriminating mind can study both perspectives and perhaps view the incident more objectively.

Why have historians recorded the theological battle between Archbishop Laud and Thomas Shepard from both perspectives, but New England's "Antinomian controversy" from primarily the orthodox perspective? On what sources have historians relied to reconstruct and evaluate the theological happenings in Massachusetts Bay from 1636-1638, known to most scholars as the "Antinomian Controversy"? John Winthrop, political rival of Henry Vane and a dependant on the orthodox party for his gubernatorial reinstatement, kept a meticulous journal on many of the era's proceedings. After the

¹⁷³ [Shepard, 1853, 1:lix]

¹⁷⁴ [Ibid., lxxvi]

Hutchinson trial, he also wrote and had printed *A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New-England*. Historians have for decades accepted Winthrop's account as "the official history of the Antinomian Controversy."¹⁷⁵ Winthrop's journal editor Richard Dunn asserts, "For 350 years, Governor John Winthrop's journal has been recognized as the central source for the history of Massachusetts in the 1630's and 1640's."¹⁷⁶

Historian David D. Hall notes that Winthrop, who lived across the street from Anne Hutchinson, "disliked what he saw from the start," blaming her, the Boston Church, and her supporters for stirring up public opinion against Winthrop over the governor's role in John Wheelwright's denied Boston church teaching position; the incident nearly got Winthrop officially censured.¹⁷⁷ Winthrop's journal barely mentioned Hutchinson until after Winthrop's political showdown with sitting Governor Henry Vane, which resulted in Winthrop's reinstatement as governor and the General Court's subsequent actions silencing ministerial and lay opposition to the orthodox party. Until mid 1637, according to Winthrop's journal, Thomas Shepard, along with John Winthrop and others of the orthodox party primarily targeted male nonconformists, specifically John Cotton, John Wheelwright, Henry Vane, and the male church members who supported nonconformist theology. Winthrop's journal began targeting Anne Hutchinson in early 1638 as her public trial advanced. He wrote, "divers other foul errors were discovered... maintained by Mrs. Hutchinson and others," and noted several church elders found her

¹⁷⁵ [David D. Hall, 1990, 199]

¹⁷⁶ [Winthrop, 1996, xi]

¹⁷⁷ [David D. Hall, 1990, 199]

“to persist in maintaining those gross errors,”¹⁷⁸ His journal account of her trial and excommunication proclaimed, “It was a happy day to the churches of Christ here, and to many poor souls, who had been seduced by her, who, by what they heard and saw that day, were (through the grace of God) brought off quite from her errors, and settled again in the truth.”¹⁷⁹ This account, written by an anti-Hutchinsonian, influenced later historians’ accounts of the “crisis.”

While Winthrop’s journal account lays the blame for the “Antinomian controversy” at Anne Hutchinson’s feet, his later published account—*A Short Story of the Rise, reign, and ruine of the Antinomians, Familists & Libertines, that infected the Churches of New-England*, was a scathing account of how God turned the tables on and censured specifically Anne Hutchinson, bringing on her party “[God’s] displeasure against their opinions and practices.”¹⁸⁰ Even though both his journal and *Short Story* chronicled misunderstandings, debates, and confrontations between ministers and magistrates, Winthrop’s *Short Story* begins by explaining, “And when our Commonwealth began to be founded, and our Churches sweetly settled in Peace... our wise God... sent a new storme after us, which proved the sorest tryall that ever befell us since we left our Native soyle.” He identified the source of that storm as Anne Hutchinson. Winthrop denounced specific nonconformist theological errors, listing nonconformist

¹⁷⁸ [Winthrop, 1996, 247]

¹⁷⁹ [Ibid., 245-250]

¹⁸⁰ [David D. Hall, 1990, 214]

opinions as “a litter of fourscore and eleven of their brats hung up against the Sunne, besides many new ones of Mistris Hutchinsons.”¹⁸¹

It is interesting to note that Hutchinson’s name is the only one mentioned in the majority of Winthrop’s *Short Story* “preface.” Winthrop excused misunderstandings among the Massachusetts Bay men—none of whom were named in his preface. Winthrop acknowledged, “Their [male nonconformists] judgements and expressions also were in truth, farre differing from theirs [male orthodox] upon point of tryall, but if it came to passé, that they [male nonconformists] were brought face to face to make it good... they would winde out with some evasion or other, or else say, I understood him so: for it was so frequent with them [men] to have many darke shadows and colours to cover their opinions and expressions withal, that it was a wonderfull hard matter to take them tardy, or to know the bottome of what they said or sealed.” Winthrop did not excuse Anne Hutchinson, but asserted, “the last and worst of all, which most suddainly diffused the venome of these opinions into the very veines and vitals of the People in the Country, was Mistris Hutchinsons double weekly-lecture, which she kept under a pretence of repeating Sermons.” Winthrop claimed she used her home meetings to “vent her mischievous opinions as she please, and wreathed the Scriptures to her owne purpose.” Winthrop was convinced “she had spread her leavin so farre, that had not providence prevented, it had proved the Canker of our Peace, and ruine of our comforts.”¹⁸²

¹⁸¹ [David D. Hall, 1990, 201-202]

¹⁸² [David D. Hall, 1990, 207-208]

Winthrop's *Short Story* chronicled the various errors ascribed to John Wheelwright, as well as the General Court's handling of other alleged dissidents. It contained Winthrop's version of Anne Hutchinson's trial and excommunication, along with the subsequent miscarriages of Hutchinson and her friend, Mary Dyer. While the "crisis" involved many individuals—most of them men—Winthrop labeled only Hutchinson "This American Jezebel," claiming that through her banishment "that Church which by her means was brought under much infamy, and neere to dissoulution, was hereby sweetly repaired." Winthrop's diatribe against Hutchinson seemingly knew no bounds. Hutchinson gave birth to her last child in her forties; the child was deformed and died. Winthrop accused Hutchinson of delivering "30 monstrous births," noting "how the wisdom of God fitted this judgement to her sinne every way, for looke as she had vented misshapen opinions, so she must bring forth deformed monsters." Winthrop declared, "Thus the Lord heard our groanes...and freed us from this great and sore affliction...and hath given the Churches rest from this disturbance." Winthrop prayed God would "grant these Churches as full a riddance from the same or like Opinions, which doe destroy his truth, and disturbe their peace."¹⁸³ According to Richard Dunn, Winthrop's journal editor, Winthrop "reported on the punishments that God meted out to the political and religious rebels who rejected the Massachusetts church-state system" while refusing to mention his own troubles as providential signs of disapproval. Much like Archbishop Laud and other Church of England bishops who persecuted English Puritan nonconformists, Winthrop "argued for the correctness of his own position, and then showed how his adversaries

¹⁸³ [David D. Hall, 1990, 201-310]

were deservedly punished for their sins.” According to Dunn, Winthrop apparently consulted at times with Thomas Shepard on how to “present confidential and controversial topics,” and was told by Shepard, “yow will haue the harts and prayers of many in the compiling of the History.” Dunn contends Shepard “urged him to be completely candid: ‘surely Sir,’ he wrote, ‘the woorke is of god.’”¹⁸⁴ Winthrop’s orthodox perspective, supported and encouraged by Thomas Shepard, has been foundational to the negative historical interpretation of Anne Hutchinson.

In addition to Winthrop’s journal and published account of the “Antinomian controversy,” other surviving documents include Thomas Shepard’s autobiography, journal, letters, and sermons. Shepard wrote his autobiography and later kept a journal, wherein he also recorded the “filthy opinions” of his opponents, describing how “the enemies began to be crushed and were perfectly subdued” by the orthodox party which, by 1637, controlled most churches and the General Court. Even the court records were transcribed by orthodox adherents; most of the official documents surrounding the 1636-1638 “crisis” which later historians used to reconstruct and evaluate the event were written by Shepard, Winthrop, and others of the orthodox party. While there are letters, sermons, and documents from nonconformists like John Cotton, Henry Vane, and John Wheelwright, there are no known written records from Anne Hutchinson. Her recorded opinions, beliefs, and trial comments were done at the hands of her accusers. If later Puritan sympathizers and Shepard enthusiasts such as John A. Albro recognize that Archbishop Laud’s accounts of English Puritan nonconformity were one sided and

¹⁸⁴ [Winthrop, 1996, xxxvii, xxxiii]

skewed against his opponents, it is not unreasonable to suspect the “orthodox” account of the “Antinomian Controversy,”—as recorded by Thomas Shepard, John Winthrop, and other orthodox supporters—was also one sided and skewed against their opponents. Historians have for decades relied on these one sided documents to construct an almost epic saga of the Puritan experiment. One example is Cotton Mather’s late seventeenth century “Magnolia Christi Americana.” Historian Sacvan Bercovitch claimed this “work of history” containing “an amount of material relating to the early settlement of New England which we find no where else” was Mather’s “design to endeavor THE CHURCH HISTORY *of the Country*.” Bercovitch calls Mather’s work “the supreme achievement of American Puritan literature,” contending Mather “recasts fact into image and symbol, and raised the story of New England into a heroic world.” According to Bercovitch, Mather “transforms the ‘plain history’ of New England into a myth.”¹⁸⁵

These primary documents expounding the “Antinomian controversy” from a predominantly orthodox perspective indicate that the “controversy” was not as theological as even those orthodox authors later made out to be. Evidence suggests that at the heart of the controversy was not Anne Hutchinson, but rather a political power struggle intended to decide which “party”—orthodox or nonconformist—would ultimately control the Massachusetts Bay colony. Winthrop observed in the heat of battle between John Cotton and Thomas Shepard that Cotton preached a sermon indicating there was little real difference between the “works’ and “grace” theological messages; implying most differences were a matter of semantics. Winthrop noted, “Mr. Cotton...

¹⁸⁵ [Bercovitch, 1966, 337-350]

stated the differences in a very narrow scantling; and Mr. Shepherd... brought them yet nearer, so as... few could see where the difference was: and indeed it seemed so small... they might easily have come to reconciliation.”¹⁸⁶ Referencing Winthrop’s observation, journal editor Richard Dunn contends, “This statement has helped to persuade some...that the Antinomian controversy was an absurdly pointless dispute... Cotton... was actually being forced to choose between continued alliance with Hutchinson and Wheelwright or alliance with [John Winthrop] and the orthodox majority.”¹⁸⁷

Thomas Shepard revealed a potential underlying power struggle in his autobiographical diatribe against alleged “antinomians and familists.” Shepard acknowledged Vane was “too suddenly chosen.” Shepard claimed Cotton was aligned with dangerous followers whom he “maintained too obscurely.” Shepard cast suspicion on the Boston church, since some members “propagated too boldly” opinions Shepard decried as “means of which division by these opinions the ancient and received truth came to be darkened, God’s name to be blasphemed, the churches’ glory diminished, many godly grieved, many wretches hardened, deceiving and being deceived, growing worse and worse.” While Shepard accosted the nonconformist Boston church, Shepard praised his orthodox Newtown congregation for remaining “spotless” and hosting the 1637 synod that effectively moved the religious and political seat from Boston to Newtown (Cambridge).¹⁸⁸ Thomas Shepard played a leading role in establishing colonial orthodoxy’s religious and political control through codified confessionals and sermons,

¹⁸⁶ [Winthrop, 1996, 216]

¹⁸⁷ [Ibid., 216, notes]

¹⁸⁸ [McGiffert, 1994, 67-68]

both of which were used systematically to determine spiritual legitimacy and subsequent church membership and voting rights. Shepard became adept at shutting down anyone who challenged his orthodoxy; he blamed the ensuing turmoil on his opponents, and emerged in the eyes of supporters as one of, if not the, leading theologians of the era.

In addition to Winthrop's and Shepard's implications of colonial power struggles, sufficient evidence exists supporting the premise that Newtown and Boston vied for spiritual and political control of Massachusetts Bay. In John A. Albro's "Life of Thomas Shepard," Albro notes Newtown was originally "selected as the site of town which the settlers intended to fortify, and make the metropolis of the Massachusetts colony." He records that Governor Winthrop began construction on a house in Newtown and Deputy Governor Dudley "completed a house for himself, and removed his family, with the expectation that this was to be the seat of government." When Governor Winthrop decided to move to Boston instead, "the scheme of a fortified town here was abandoned."¹⁸⁹ As Governor, Winthrop moved the seat of colonial government to Boston, depriving Newtown of that prestigious position. While elections for governor and the magistrates were still held in Newtown, Boston grew faster and had more immigrant appeal. The Boston church quickly outstripped Newtown's congregation. The Reverends John Wilson and John Cotton elicited greater religious followings in Boston, causing that city's church to become the colony's largest. Even without hosting the seat of government, Newtown might have grown faster had its leading minister not taken much of Newtown's population out of Massachusetts to neighboring Connecticut. Albro

¹⁸⁹ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cvi]

suggests Newtown's first preacher, Thomas Hooker, along with most original congregants, moved from Newtown to Connecticut in part for "the avowed grounds of their desire to remove so far from the parent colony," but also so "that Mr. Hooker's light would shine more brightly, and be more conspicuous, if it were farther from the golden candlestick of the church in Boston."¹⁹⁰ Albro implies perceived competition between Newtown and Boston prompted Hooker's move and once again left Newtown lagging behind Boston in colonial importance.

Newtown (Cambridge) lost out on an expected level of prestige when the seat of government moved to Boston. Thomas Shepard came to Newtown believing it was his "duty to desire the fruition of all God's ordinances which [he] could not enjoy in old England."¹⁹¹ According to historian Michael McGiffert, "New England... gave Shepard the physical security, stable identity, and public acceptance that he needed." McGiffert asserts, "In his Cambridge ministry Shepard acquired a reputation... for exceptional evangelical efficacy."¹⁹² It is plausible that Shepard wanted ministerial accolades in New England denied him in old England and used events in the "Antinomian controversy" to tip the scales of power and prestige in Newtown's—and his—favor.

Even within Boston, political power struggles prevailed. During the "Antinomian Controversy," the General Court moved from Boston to Newtown, elevating the latter's colonial prominence and power. But still residing in Boston, the former Governor John Winthrop wanted his job back; to do so, he needed the orthodox party's political support.

¹⁹⁰ [Shepard, 1853, 1:cviii]

¹⁹¹ [McGiffert, 1994, 57-58]

¹⁹² [Ibid., 6-7]

Deputy governor Thomas Dudley observed that Winthrop was a power hungry individual, who, by his actions and alliances, “intended to make himselfe popular, that he might gaine absolute power, & bringe all the Assistentes under his subjection.”¹⁹³ It is plausible that John Winthrop allied himself with Thomas Shepard’s orthodox party and used events in the “Antinomian controversy” to secure his political power and eliminate potential political opposition.

Anne Hutchinson was not the center of the “Antinomian controversy;” she was the fall girl. Anne Hutchinson was part of the Boston church, but unlike her male nonconformist counterparts, she did not compete for political power or prestigious preaching positions. She did not write and publish cherished sermons, tracts, or historical accounts of the Massachusetts colony. She held meetings in her home—in the private sphere—and could not be coerced into conformity through threats of silencing or disenfranchisement. Yet Hutchinson, along with John Cotton, Henry Vane, John Wheelwright and others, was an outspoken critic of Thomas Shepard’s formulated confessionals and his orthodox party’s codified theology which she deemed was a “covenant of works.” Historian Richard Dunn contends that she found Shepard and Winthrop’s “Puritan orthodoxy to be spiritually dead” and posed “a serious challenge” to Shepard’s attempted conformity since her home meetings “rivalled in influence the clerical conferences of ministers and elders.” Thomas Shepard and his orthodox party could not pressure Hutchinson in the same ways they could pressure fellow ministers or magistrates. The orthodox party had to find a way to bring Anne Hutchinson into the

¹⁹³ [Winthrop, 1996, 77]

public sphere in order to simultaneously ruin her credibility, oust her from the colony, and protect their positions. Allowing Hutchinson to remain in Boston challenging orthodox teachings threatened Shepard's orthodox hold on the colony. Dunn suggests that those in the orthodox party, including Shepard, believed that if they "could not defeat her, [they] might be forced out of the colony [themselves]." ¹⁹⁴

It is plausible that Thomas Shepard established New England orthodoxy for spiritual prominence and power resulting from suppressing nonconformist ideology. It is plausible that Shepard's Newtown-based orthodox party targeted nonconformists like John Cotton and John Wheelwright out of jealousy over Boston's spiritual and material success. It is plausible that John Winthrop supported Shepard's orthodoxy to regain gubernatorial power. It is plausible that colonial men, accustomed to dealing with each other's different opinions within the public sphere, felt threatened by a strong woman operating in the private sphere. It is plausible that Thomas Shepard and his orthodox party used the "Antinomian controversy" to force nonconformist males to capitulate or renounce their ability to effectively participate in colonial church and state. It is plausible that Shepard, in an effort to secure prestige, power, and prominence in Massachusetts, used the "Antinomian controversy" to eliminate the one element in the private sphere—Anne Hutchinson—that threatened his control.

Thomas Shepard's cycle of conformity had come full circle. Shepard was the persecuted nonconformist in England, rejecting what he believed was the Church of England's man-made worship modes and demanding to believe and preach what his

¹⁹⁴ [Winthrop, 1996, 193, notes]

conscience dictated. He spearheaded the orthodox party in Massachusetts Bay, establishing formulated confessionals and enumerated sermons used in Newtown and the rest of the colony as criteria for spiritual legitimacy. He became a primary persecutor of New England nonconformists who not only rejected his codified theology as a “covenant of works” but also insisted on believing and teaching what their consciences dictated. Shepard’s motives securing colonial orthodoxy seem to include a desire to secure his own ministerial and political power by eliminating all opposition. After successfully cowering or eliminating male opposition in the public sphere, Shepard targeted the one female whose private sphere exploits threatened his colonial control. Historians, by relying on primary documents hostile to Anne Hutchinson and nonconformist ideology, have for decades upheld the orthodox view that she caused the late seventeenth-century colonial crisis. Alternately, historians have ignored the role of Thomas Shepard in creating, sustaining, and using that crisis for his own gain. It is the opinion of this author that Thomas Shepard’s and his orthodox party’s political aspirations to regain and maintain colonial control, coupled with the religious and political competition between Newtown and Boston, were the real causes of controversy in 1636-1638 Massachusetts. Anne Hutchinson was not the cause of the “Antinomian controversy;” she was the scapegoat.

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