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The Great Hen Squabble and Regulating the Godly Path

The Dewy family's servant had not yet completed her morning chore of emptying the chamber pot when she dumped its contents on Goody Ingerson, their next-door neighbor. The unexpected assault was retaliation because Ingerson had killed some of the Dewys's hens. In 1714 the Dewys owned more than 120 chickens, and as their closest neighbor, Ingerson grew tired of the fowl scampering through her property. The Ingersons chased those chickens out of their garden, barn, and barley field, and even had to scurry the unwanted guests out of their house. To show her frustration and send a message about the wandering brood, Goodwife Ingerson wrung a few necks. Goodwife Abigail Dewy prepared her servant for the next attack by weaponizing their chamber pot. However, despite a stench-covered head, Ingerson managed to kill two more hens. She quickly passed them off to her daughter, with directions to run straight home. Tensions further escalated, and a small brawl almost erupted when Goody Dewy entered the fray carrying a whipping cord. Yelling from her front porch, Dewy ordered her chamber-pot-wielding servant to apprehend the young girl fleeing the scene. Luckily, the Ingerson daughter escaped the servant's clutches before Dewy could mete out a flogging, and both mother and daughter made it home safely (perhaps to a chicken dinner).

The case of the great hen squabble went to court, where the Connecticut magistrates ordered the Ingersons to pay for the dead chickens. However, when the court asked Abigail Dewy if she did indeed order her servant to drag Ingerson's daughter back to the Dewy house by the hair, she lied and said no. The Dewys may have won the court case over property loss,

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but Abigail's lie would not be forgotten. Soon thereafter, her Westfield congregation censured her for the sin of lying.[1]

Abigail's father-in-law, Thomas Dewy, had faced censure charges decades earlier, in 1683. Slow to repair his mill after a storm destroyed it, Dewy was upset when neighbors started building their own mill upstream, diverting his water supply. Late one night, he tore down their dam and hid their tools. His congregation censured him for the destruction of property. The minister even delivered a sermon on the irregularity of such behavior and the problems Dewy had caused the community.[2]

Like other New England families, the Dewys were subject to the scrutiny of civil and ecclesiastical forces to police their behavior. In order to regulate this godly path, Puritans formed church covenants, monitored families, patrolled communities, and created civil laws that enforced ecclesiastical rules. Officials utilized both the courts and the churches to reprove transgressions. Church discipline was an integral tool in recovering wayward men and women in a society that believed one sinner could be the ruin of all.

ESTABLISHING A COVENANT

The men and women of New England had a communal responsibility to watch over one another, lead their town down the Christian path, and direct public affairs in a Christian manner. When Governor John Winthrop gave his famous sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity," aboard the *Arabella* in 1630, he explicated the Puritans' community obligations: "In such cases as this the care of the public must over sway all private respects, but which not only conscience, but mere Civil polity doth bind us … having before our eyes our Commission and Community in the work, our Community as members of the same body."[3] Part of being a good Christian demanded taking responsibility for the public good.

When Puritans migrated to New England, their first task was to establish a covenanted church. As in the case of Dorchester, sometimes

[1] Edward Taylor, *Edward Taylor's "Church Records" and Related Sermons*, vol. I of the *Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor*, ed. Thomas M. Davis and Virginia L. Davis (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 237–41.

[2] Taylor, *Church Records*, 183–85.

[3] John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal, "History of New England," 1630–1649*, ed. James Kendall Hosmer (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1908).

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founders formed a church before they even arrived in Massachusetts Bay. In Dorsetshire, England, minister John White organized the migration. On March 20, 1630, his group met at Plymouth, England, where White preached, held a day of fasting and prayer, and 140 passengers covenanted together and chose John Warham and John Maverick as their ministers.[4] Roger Clap, who boarded the *Mary & John*, wrote, "The Lord Jesus Christ was so plainly held out in the preaching of the gospel unto poor lost sinners, and the absolute necessity of the new birth, … that our hearts were taken off from Old England and set upon heaven."[5] They arrived in Mattapan, as Indians called it, on June 30, 1630, and began building their town.

Before they commenced building ships, roads, and fences, the people of Dorchester built a meetinghouse,[6] a crude building with a thatched roof (entry stairs added only years later). The residents also used this building as a depot for military stores and nightly guarded it from attack. Erected on Allen's Plain, near the corner of Pleasant and Cottage Streets, the meetinghouse was the center for town activities, and they scheduled weekly town meetings on Monday mornings, requiring every man to attend.[7] Believed to be the original town government in the colonies, Dorchester also pioneered the system of choosing male residents as selectmen to oversee civil matters and patrol the town to keep order.[8] The church stood as the center of the town's religious, social, and civic life.

[4] Records Commissioner, *A Report of the Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, Containing Boston Births from A.D. 1700 to A.D. 1800* (Boston: Rockwell & Churchill, City Printers, 1894), 7; Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester* (Boston: Ebenezer Clapp, Jr., 1859), 18.

[5] Captain Roger Clap, *Memoirs of Captain Roger Clap* (Boston: Greenleaf's Printing Office for Samuel Whiting, 1731), 6.

[6] James Blake, *Annals of the Town of Dorchester, 1750* (Boston: David Clapp, Jr., 1864), 12. Blake dates the meetinghouse to 1633, but other sources date it 1631. Carol Zurawski Whitney, "Seventeenth-Century Survey of Dorchester" (PhD diss., Boston University, 1979), 17; Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 33; Dorchester Massachusetts Tercentenary Committee, ed., *Dorchester in the Old Bay Colony: 1630 Old and New 1930* (Dorchester: Chapple Publishing Company Ltd., 1930), 12.

[7] The meetinghouse did not actually move to Meetinghouse Hill until 1673. See Whitney, "Seventeenth-Century Survey of Dorchester," 107; *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 32; Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records* (Boston: Rockwell and Churchill City Printers, 1883), 3.

[8] *Dorchester Town Records*, 7.

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Establishing a church and adopting a covenant were central to organizing a town. When founding a new congregation, colonists signed a "Profession of Faith and Covenant" pledging themselves as a Christian community to be responsible for one another. In the Dorchester covenant, founders outlined Christian conduct and duties:

Dorchester, the 23rd day of the 6th month, Annon 1636

> Wee … joyne o'selves together in Church Comunion, from o' hearts ackowledging o' owne unworthines of such a priviledge of the least of Gods mercyes, & likewise acknowledging o' disability to keepe coven' wth God or to p'fourme any spirituall duty … bind ourselves solemnely … to walke together … [p]romising first & above all to cleave unto him as … o' onely spiritual husband and Lord … bewayling fro o' hearts o' owne neglect thereof in former tyme, and our polluting o'selves therein wth any sinfull inventions of men.
>
> And lastly wee do hereby Coven' & p'mise to further to o' utmost power, the best spirituall good of each other, and of all and every one that may become members of this Congregacon, by mutuall Instruction reprehension, exhortacon, consolacon, and spirituall watchfulness over one another for good.[9]

Similar to those throughout New England, the Dorchester covenant affirmed the most important Puritan tenets: that members were bound together to fulfill the agreement with God, to watch over one another, and to be pious. Richard Mather explained that "our church covenants are with the Lord himselfe … For watch[under] & duties of edification one towards another are but branches of the Lords Covenant, being duties commanded by the Law … with that people of Israel … The neglect whereof … brought judgement upon them all."[10] Covenants were social contracts, and in congregations throughout Massachusetts Bay, people expected to fulfill their contract through communal service.[11] Each community member had the responsibility of maintaining the godly path by assuring that everyone in town was "walking orderly" and that the civil government would carry out its duties in a Christian way. Dorchester's covenant stressed the necessity of "binding together" as a "right ordered" community, and it was the members' duty to "further the spiritual good

[9] Charles H. Hope, ed., *Records of the First Church of Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1636–1734* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1981), 6.

[10] Richard Mather, *An Apology of the Churches in New-England for Church Covenant* (London: T. P. & M. S. for Benjamin Allen, 1643), 7.

[11] Although John Cotton first created a covenant while still in England, covenant was distinct to New England Puritanism. New England clerics expended great energy defending the covenant to English nonconformists.

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of each other." As a religion with communal and individual responsibilities, Puritanism required dual roles for its congregants.

The other side of Puritan responsibility dealt with personal religiosity and the state of one's soul, or piety. Puritanism required everyone to examine their souls and sinfulness on a daily basis, ever striving for signs that they were saved and ever plunging themselves into a state of despair over their sinful natures. Because of this, creating a covenant was not a rote exercise and could be fraught with challenges to prove that members were sincere and pious. Puritans even passed a law that allowed new congregations to form only with the approval of a council composed of magistrates and church elders from nearby towns. When one of Dorchester's original ministers, John Warham, left with half the congregation to establish the town of Windsor, the remaining residents were concerned that they were no longer covenanted. When the other Dorchester minister, John Maverick, died soon thereafter, residents immediately sought a new minister who could rectify the situation and save their godly mission. They turned to Richard Mather, who had just arrived from England. On the advice of respected Massachusetts Bay ministers John Cotton and Thomas Shepard, Mather accepted the offer from Dorchester. He felt pressured to accept the ministry and believed that if he did not relent, "a tribe … should perish out of Israel" because they were essentially without a formal church. On April 1, 1636, the people of Dorchester assembled before the ministers and magistrates of nearby communities who would examine their worthiness. To some of the examiners, including Thomas Shepard, most of the individuals questioned had not experienced a true spiritual awakening and instead based their knowledge of salvation on unsound religious tenets.[12] Shepard and others believed that the Dorchester applicants failed to define salvation in terms of God's grace and instead based it "upon dreams and ravishes of spirit by fits; others upon the reformation of their lives; others upon duties and performances."[13] They ruled that the Dorchester congregation verged on heresy by confusing sanctification as a path to justification, rather than a sign of it.[14]

[12] Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 50; B. R. Burg, *Richard Mather* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1982), 33.

[13] John Winthrop, quoted in Burg, *Richard Mather*, 33.

[14] Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 3; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944 [1966]), 1; Cohen, *God's Caress*, 10.

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The decision to deny the request humiliated Mather.[15] He immediately began to hold religious meetings, teaching the correct doctrine on grace. Later that year, the council approved the gathered church at Dorchester. This experience left Mather all the more determined to keep his congregation pure.

The covenant of grace is central to understanding Puritan theology. Puritans believed God made several agreements with people. The first agreement was the covenant of works that God made with Adam. In exchange for eternal life, Adam had to obey God's laws. Humans broke that covenant with Eve's original sin, losing their immortality. Puritans believed that although mankind broke the covenant of works with their wicked sins, through his grace, God formed a new covenant, which he did not base on human behavior. The second agreement was the covenant of grace that Abraham originally formed in the Old Testament when he promised his faith alone. In the covenant of grace, God predestined some people, called "the elect," to be saved. Sanctification, or good works, was not a path to salvation, but a sign of election. Thus, Puritans continually searched for signs that they were among the elect – or what they would call "visible saints."

The uncertainty of whether one would be saved to rest in heavenly peace with God or be doomed to eternal hellfire caused a great deal of anxiety for Puritans. Predestination had its costs. One could never be sure. Historian Charles Cohen describes an anxious cycle: "Sorrow over sin, intensifying into hatred of it, despair of perceiving one's incapacity to achieve salvation, awareness of faith, despondency passes into joy, peace of conscience, and love of God."[16] Such assurance of salvation led to the sin of pride, and thus the course resumed, in search for signs of justification.[17] Dorchester's Roger Clap exemplified this cycle of hope and doubt. When he believed he was saved, he said that God "transport[ed] me as to make me cry out upon my bed with loud voice

[15] It was Mather's second humiliation in Massachusetts Bay. He applied for membership in the Boston First Church and was originally denied the request based on his defense of his ordination in England by a bishop. It took him months to accept the Boston standard belief of a "laying of the hands." He did finally gain membership to the church.

[16] Cohen, *God's Caress*, 76.

[17] For a discussion of this cycle, see Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 69–70; and Cohen, *God's Caress*, 110. For an example, see Thomas Shepard, *Confessions of Thomas Shepard*, ed. George Selement and Bruce C. Wooley (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1981).

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He is come, He is come. And God did melt my heart at that time so that I could, and did mourn and shed more tears for sin."[18] This anxiety was reflected in many Puritan diaries. With much consternation over his fourteen-year-old daughter, Betty, Samuel Sewall recorded in his diary the grief and angst she experienced. Throughout 1696, Sewall expressed grave concerns over his daughter, who showed "signs of depression and sorrow" as she prayed to work through her salvation. She would burst into tears after reading a sermon, convinced she would burn in hell. If her father tried to offer solace with a biblical reading, her fears increased with newfound sins. Her parents eventually called in a pastor to counsel her. Betty's mother encouraged her to pray more, but Betty believed she was too much of a sinner for God to hear her. She would wake with nightmares, inconsolable. Spring brought Betty some comfort, as if through her constant prayer she finally believed she was among the elect. However, on a Sabbath day in May, tears prevented Betty from reading her Bible. She cried hard, because she feared she had once again fallen into sin. Her father tried several methods to relieve her anxiety. He prayed with her and eventually decided to send her to Salem for a summer sojourn. But through the fall, Betty's anxiety continued. Sewall recorded, "she weeps so hard that she can hardly read: I talk with her and she tells me of the various temptations she had, and that she was a reprobate."[19] It was a painful process that was never ending for the true "moral athletes" concerned about their salvation (Figure 1.1).[20]

The second generation of Puritans renewed their covenants during times when they were especially anxious about the spiritual health of their communities. On March 4, 1677, the Dorchester congregation gathered to renew their covenant and reinforce its call to duty and piety. They "rebuked" themselves for all the violations of the covenant and vowed to "reform our owne hearts, by endeavoring to recover ye spirit life & power of godliness." In addition to increasing piety, the congregation promised to reform their families and the "general

[18] Clap, *Memoirs*, 13.

[19] Samuel Sewall, *The Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1973), 356–59.

[20] Charles Cohen describes Puritans as moral athletes because of the continuous cycle of fear and doubt that Puritans put themselves through in contemplating their salvation. See Cohen, *God's Caress*.

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FIGURE 1.1. Public worship in Plymouth. *Source:* Print Collector/Hulton Archive/Getty Images.

growing evil of this time," confronting sins such as profanity, vanity, drunkenness, idleness, uncleanness, lasciviousness, and slander.[21] The renewal was a vow to correct the transgressions that occurred over the past two generations and to refocus the congregation on its godly endeavor.

To ensure that the next generation's children were bound to the same responsibilities, pastor Josiah Flint held a special meeting the day after they renewed the covenant. On March 5, 1677, Flint met with the "seed of the church," the young people of Dorchester over the age of sixteen, and gave a short speech urging them to accept church discipline even though they were not yet full church members. He asked them to consider that they had already benefited from living under a covenant and that God now called them to submit. Sixty-one young men and thirty-five women personally gave their assent to government by the church.

[21] Hope, *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 18–20.

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CHURCH MEMBERSHIP

Defining church membership was an early debate. John Warham agreed with ministers such as Thomas Hooker who favored open church membership, while John Maverick supported other Boston clerics, led by John Cotton and John Davenport, who restricted membership to visible saints. By 1633, due to pressure from Cotton and other Boston ministers, it was increasingly difficult for those congregations favoring open membership.[22] This debate was the main reason Warham left Dorchester and, along with Hooker, moved to Connecticut, where leaders could institute their own membership practices.[23] Richard Mather adopted the Boston clerics' idea of limiting church membership to visible saints, the elect. He was so concerned about the purity of his church that while some colleagues asserted it was better to admit ten hypocrites than to keep out a single Christian, Mather argued just the opposite. He quoted Ecclesiastes, "One sinner destroyeth much good," and lectured from the pulpit about the grave misfortunes of those who did not gain membership:[24]

> As dolefull & dreadfull as it is, yet till a man attain this benefit of justification, all his sins do remain in Gods sight as fresh & clear as the very day when they were first committed … the guilt of those sinnes did cleave unto them, fresh in the sight of God … all unbelieving sinners, unjustified persons, whether alive or dead, the guilt of all their sinnes doth remain upon them to this day.[25]

To become a visible saint, a person had to have an experience (or knowledge) that they were saved. Such conversion experiences frequently involved visions or dreams during prayer.[26] The pastor and church elders would interview the potential member about the experience and his or her ideas of faith. The laymen then voted on the person's acceptance into

[22] Burg, *Richard Mather*, 28–29; Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*, 98; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 86–90; E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570–1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

[23] For John Winthrop's account of the move, see Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*, 173. See also Maude Pinney Kuhns, *The "Mary and John": A Story of the Founding of Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1630* (Rutland: Charles E. Tuttle, 1943), 3.

[24] Middlekauff, *The Mathers*, 53.

[25] Richard Mather, *The Summe of Certain Sermons upon Genes:15.6* (Cambridge: Samuel Green, 1652), 32.

[26] See Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983). For a discussion on the psychology of conversion, see Cohen, *God's Caress*.

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the congregation. As Dorchester's John Spur and Nathaniel Wiet realized in 1678, acceptance through that process was not guaranteed. When the men met with the pastor and church elders, their answers were so vague and insincere that the congregation issued a censure for contemptuous carriage. Neither Spur nor Wiet ever addressed the censure and eventually were excommunicated.[27]

FAMILY GOVERNMENT

A godly society required not just a covenanted church, but also pious and well-regulated families. Historian John Demos described the Puritan family as "a little commonwealth": they were the first line of defense for an orderly society.[28] Ministers believed that a good father ensured the religious, social, and economic welfare of his family. In 1659, Increase Mather explained to a council of ministers that it was "the duty of the elders and the church to call upon parents to bring up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord."[29] In 1669, the Boston First Church empowered its elders to inspect families for adequate religious edification.[30] Indeed, Cotton Mather referred to the family as the "first society," and, as patriarchs, men were to lead the family in its religious education and prayer. Ministers emphasized that families needed to be pious and orderly, fulfilling both aspects of the covenant.

Throughout Massachusetts Bay, both civil and ecclesiastical authorities were charged with policing family. With the focus on male lapses in family order, the courts enforced the duties and responsibilities men held as the heads of family government.[31] Courts considered family government so crucial to a community's holy commonwealth that they routinely intervened in family affairs. In 1639, the court ordered a young man to marry a woman he sullied. After first being whipped, branded

[27] Hope, *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 79–80. By 1678 many young people who were baptized signed documents attesting that they were under church government even though they were not full members. John Spur would be released from his excommunication in 1696 and dismissed to the church in Taunton.

[28] John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

[29] Increase Mather, "A Disputation Concerning Church-Members and Their Children," cited in Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 140.

[30] Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 133–40.

[31] For a discussion of family government, see Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; and Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*.

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with an R on his cheek, and made to pay a fine to her parents, Aaron Starke then married Mary Holt.[32] The court issued several fines to protect Goodwife Egleston when her husband bequeathed her to another man, who then disparaged her with unkind words.[33] Courts routinely ordered men to pay child support. In 1645, the Hartford court had Leonard Dyks whipped, sent to jail and hard labor, and his wages held until he agreed to pay child support to a young woman, Ruth Fishe. That same year, the court ordered that Matthew Williams should have his wages held until he paid child support to Susan Cole.[34] The courts thus sought to protect the communal good through well-ordered families.

Congregations also upheld the tenets of family government. For example, when the Plymouth church censured Abigail Billington for fornication, a church elder used that opportunity to warn fathers "to keep up family government."[35] If fathers lived up to their Puritan duty of running an orderly and godly family, then pious daughters would not stray.[36] Historian M. Michelle Jarret Morris tells the story of Daniel Gookin, a respected Massachusetts Bay leader, who was infamous for his wayward dependents. His children and servants were charged with a host of lascivious and raucous sins – from dancing and drinking to fornicating.[37] Gookin was accused of having a disordered household.

Family order extended to servants as well. William Chapman challenged the social and moral order when he married Elizabeth Bateman, a fellow servant of Captain John Cullick, after failing to get permission from their master. Causing further disruption, Chapman became angry over Cullick's response and "said diverse unsufferable scandals and reproaches" about the captain and his family. The courts fined Chapman, sent him to jail for two weeks, ordered family discipline, and bound him to good behavior.[38]

[32] Connecticut Historical Society, *Records of the Particular Court of Connecticut, 1639–1663* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1928), 54, 56.

[33] Connecticut Historical Society, *Records of the Particular Court*, 34.

[34] Connecticut Historical Society, *Records of the Particular Court*, 35.

[35] *Plymouth Church Records, 1620–1859* (New York: John Wilson & Son, 1920), 197.

[36] For a discussion of family, see Demos, *A Little Commonwealth*; Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977); Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*; and Lawrence Stone, *The Family, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1500–1800* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977).

[37] M. Michelle Jarret Morris, *Under Household Government: Sex and Family in Puritan Massachusetts, 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013), 13–14.

[38] Connecticut Historical Society, *Records of the Particular Court*, 124–25.

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With the "little commonwealth" as the cornerstone of social order, Puritans created laws forbidding single men from living alone. In 1669, the Massachusetts General Court passed a law that placed single men in family homes so they could "walk orderly and submit to family government." Dorchester selectmen followed the court's direction and found homes for the sixteen single men on their list. The selectmen were fulfilling their duties to the community described in the covenant. What began as "Christian watchfulness" became civic service. Town officials also placed single men in families so they had models for proper manly behavior and industry. These men may have been very pious, but the town wanted assurances they would also work hard and conduct themselves properly in public. Of course, it was unthinkable for single women to live alone. Under the laws of femme covert, women were the property of their fathers, and afterward their husbands. Widows were the interesting, and sometimes complicated, exception.[39]

Towns also policed how parents instructed their children. The Dorchester selectmen and church elders conducted a joint survey of their residents in 1669 to "inquire of persons as to their manner of living, and whether they profited by public or private instruction."[40] Certainly the civil and church leaders were interested in the same issue: how to keep people walking on the orderly path of godliness. If men failed in their Christian duty as fathers, it was up to the community to help. Courts, selectmen, town officials, and churches all sought to discipline wayward Puritans.

CREATING LAWS FOR A GODLY SOCIAL ORDER

Churches had no formal power over civil government, but they did have significant informal power to influence legislation, town meetings, and judicial decisions. Puritan men and women expected their civil authorities to follow the word and law of God. New England ministers developed such expectations from John Calvin's teachings, which explained

[39] For a discussion on the challenges and issues concerning widows, see Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton Press, 1987). Karlsen links widowhood to witchcraft, arguing that property-owning widows without male heirs were especially prone to witchcraft accusations. Without sons, a widow controlled her own wealth.

[40] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 211.

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that the church and state must be separate, but both must work in the service of God.[41]

In a sermon delivered in 1638, Thomas Hooker preached that choosing public magistrates was a right that belonged to the people, through God, but that they must follow God's law and will in choosing their officials. Hooker connected the duty to God with the duty to community. Early colonial laws were influenced by Puritans' ideas of God's laws. Ideas such as Hooker's became the groundwork for the Fundamental Orders of 1638, written by one of Connecticut's founders, Roger Ludlow. The Orders were a series of laws agreed upon by the three river towns, Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield. The Orders established the process for holding elections and calling meetings for general assemblies or courts. Ludlow clearly rooted the government in a godly endeavor:

> The word of god requires that to mayntayne the peace and union of such a people there should be an Orderly and decent Government established according to God ... Doe therefore ... conjoyne our selves to be as one ... Commonwealth ... enter into Combination and Confederation together to mayntayne and presearve the liberty and purity of the gospel of our lord Jesus wch we now professe, as also the discipline of the Churches whch according to the truth of the said gospell is now practiced amonst us.[42]

Under Ludlow, the Connecticut courts expanded the Orders of 1638 into the Code of 1650. Similar to the Orders, the Code established civil law based on the law of God. The Code of 1650 mandated due process, protecting the liberties and privileges granted by God. The Code protected individuals from arbitrary power by creating a series of laws and General Court orders. It also made clear that the word of God was superior to any civil law. It outlined death sentences for anyone who worshipped another God, anyone deemed to be a witch or consort of the Devil, and anyone who blasphemed the name of God.

Moreover, the Code of 1650 created a series of laws that regulated religious practices and behaviors. It allowed civil government to mandate church attendance and ensure that "the peace, ordinances and rules of

[41] Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*, 1, 122; Bruce C. Daniels, *The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development, 1635–1790* (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979), 65; Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain*, 239–40; Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*, 55–58. Erikson describes the relationship between church and state that "magistrates would act as a secular arm in the service of the church ... while the ministers would provide the final authority for most questions related to long-range policy."

[42] Daniels, *The Connecticut Town*, 65–66, 177.

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Christ be observed in every church, according to His Word." The Code explained that if a resident had contempt for the word of God, it was an attack not only on the church, but on civil government as well. Anyone in contempt of God's holy ordinances could face charges before the court *and* his congregation. As a warning to others, officials would stand an offender upon a pillory during lecture day, with a sign that read, in capital letters, "AN OPEN AND OBSTINANTE CONTEMNER OF GOD'S HOLY ORDINANCES." The Code also described the duty of Christian watchfulness to keep a "vigilant eye over their brethren and neighbors" to assure godly behavior. The Code was deeply invested in creating a godly social order; however, there were also lines that separated civil from ecclesiastical powers. The Code explained that civil authority could not strip someone from an ecclesiastical position, and nor could the church relinquish anyone from a civil position.

The Fundamental Orders and the Code of 1650 resembled the Massachusetts Bay Colony's 1641 Body of Liberties.[43] Each document detailed individual liberties and protections, along with laws regarding religious practice and observance. Each strived for a godly community, with tight social controls and a clear ecclesiastical interest in civil affairs. Leaders in Massachusetts and Connecticut disagreed about voting status and membership, but they shared ideals about Christian watchfulness, a civil government based on the word of God, and a system of censures and punishments for those who transgressed.

Throughout New England, town governments and courts also enforced godly standards set forth in church covenants and Puritan doctrine. In Dorchester, each elected selectman policed a group of families and was responsible to maintain order. Selectmen summoned residents for a host of offenses, including idleness, drinking, entertaining sin, corruption, and even playing kettle pins. In 1679, the First Church of Dorchester censured Abigail Merrifield for fornication. The civil court also found her guilty and sentenced her to a fine of "three pounds or whipt with twelve stripes."[44] Merrifield was a repeat offender, eventually excommunicated.

[43] It was either written or cowritten by Rev. Nathaniel Ward. Edward J. McManus argues that most of the form and content came from proposals by John Cotton. See Edward J. McManus, *Law and Liberty in Early New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993), 9. However, according to Winthrop's journal, they chose Ward's draft. See Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*, 279–80.

[44] See Hope, *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 81–82, 106; Allyn Bailey Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court, 1671–1680*, vol. I, 2 vols. (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1933), 1018.

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Between 1674 and 1679, Samuell Rigby sometimes served as a constable, but more often he appeared in court and church to answer to various censure charges. In 1674, he first appeared in town records for neglecting his "calling, living a dissolute life, [and being a] trouble to the selectmen."[45] Similarly, Robert Styles appeared twice before the Suffolk County Court on charges of not attending church and neglecting his calling. This was after the selectmen cited him for his idle ways. Styles must have ignored their orders, for on his second appearance, the court added a charge of "not submitting to authority."[46]

The selectmen scoured the town for idle men, as Puritans believed that "idleness was the Devil's work." In a godly society, everyone should be busy working to serve God. The selectman tried to force an entire family out of Dorchester in 1673. Thomas, Jonathan, and Joseph Birch plagued the town with their lack of employment, industry, and godliness. Selectmen questioned Thomas about his public behavior, had the court order Jonathan out of town, and had frequent meetings with Joseph over finding a trade. The selectmen finally had to refer them to the county courts. At one point the selectmen ordered Constable Samuell Rigby to place Joseph Birch with a good master. In another instance Birch complained that he "had no iron nor coals" but promised that "he would endeavor to reform." In 1677 the court finally ordered Joseph to pay a fine or sit in the stocks for his drunken conduct.[47]

The selectmen focused on outward conduct – public displays of behavior that could be witnessed by the community. Dorchester selectmen had several interactions with the widow Elizabeth George, who kept an ordinary. The widow faced court and church censures for "entertaining sin," for often allowing sundry visitors to get drunk, and occasionally for "selling drinke without a license." However, the selectmen contended

[45] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 226; Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 195.

[46] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 223; Forbes, ed., *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 915. The court ordered that he "put forth" his children, presumably because his idleness resulted in poverty and he could not take care of them. When the Selectmen met with Styles again in 1679 about his idleness and placing his children, he refused because his wife did not want to give up her children. Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 181.

[47] See Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 223–30; Forbes, *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 258, 266; Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 182, 214.

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that she kept the ordinary better than her husband had, and in fact, they held their meetings at her tavern. In 1679 selectman William Sumner even offered to help oversee the ordinary because she was getting so old.[48] The Dorchester selectmen policed residents' behavior as part of their covenant to watch over one another, to ensure that each person "walk[ed] orderly."[49]

Idleness represented a failure not just of Puritan duty, but also of manly expectations. Dorchester men who could not provide for their families threatened ideas about what it meant to be a man. The town provided relief to those suffering financially because of a family death, old age, disability, or other problems that might prevent a man from working, but men did not receive it without a cost to their reputations. In 1679 the selectmen called on Francis Ball to discuss his "outward estate" after he requested town assistance. They told him to place his children in another home, something Ball explained that his wife was unwilling to do. He received free shoes that year from a widow's donation to the poor, and the church collected money and two half bushels of corn for him. Frances Ball appeared on relief records as early as 1655 and received rent and money for the next three decades. Ball lived in the town for at least seventeen years and was a member of the church, but his small "outward estate" and his failure to live up to male expectations as the head of a family worried the selectmen.[50]

Civil and ecclesiastical authorities were also concerned with residents running their household economies properly, as evidenced not only in the great hen squabble, but in records of the earliest generation of settlers as well. In Dorchester, the settlers named the original commons "Cow Pastures" and another common area "Calf Pastures," for cows

[48] See Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 206, 240; Hope, *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 92; Forbes, *Records of the Suffolk County Court*, 814, 957, 1015, 1160. See also Sharon Salinger, *Taverns and Drinking in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 115, 164–65, 168. Salinger explains that many widows ran ordinaries to escape "poor relief" when their husbands died.

[49] For an analysis of deviant Puritans, see Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*. Erikson does not distinguish between deviant men and women but argues that Puritans used discipline/policing to permanently exclude a deviant class. While certainly there were some "misfits," most censured individuals were not permanently excluded from church and did include some people of status.

[50] Frances Ball appeared on relief records as early as 1655 and received rent and money for the next three decades. See Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 119, 177, 220, 236, 247, 261, 319.

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were plentiful, as were hogs.[51] By 1633 they enacted "many orders ... and penalties" regarding cattle and fences.[52] Problems with fences became a recurrent theme throughout New England's history. In 1647 the selectmen organized a committee to view the fences in the great lots and "apportion each man his share" to control the damage.[53] Hog control first appeared in a 1633 order. As late as 1673 an order by the selectmen required Robert Spur and Obediah Hawe to watch for hogs unringed or unhooked and to demand payment from the owners for wayward swine.[54] Additionally, selectmen paid hunters to kill wolves that preyed on livestock. However, it was not just wild animals that impeded the colonists' livelihood. In 1657 the selectmen enacted a penalty of twenty shillings to "offending parties" who polluted roads by "lumbering them up with manure, wood, timber, stones, building of hovels, styes for swine, saw-pits, and clay-pits."[55] Cows on the roads sometimes caused trouble, such as on the night of September 17, 1661, when Major General Humphrey Atherton traveled home from Boston and was fatally thrown from his startled horse when it ran into a cow in the middle of the road.[56] Many of the people admonished by the courts and selectmen found themselves also being disciplined by their congregations.

CHURCH DISCIPLINE

Most Massachusetts Bay churches followed similar standards when censuring their members. In 1644 John Cotton wrote that church discipline represented the "key of order." Such a key "is the power whereby every member of the Church walketh orderly himself ... and helpeth his brethren to walk orderly also."[57] In 1648 Puritan minister Thomas Hooker explained the necessity of church discipline: "[God] hath appointed Church-censures as good Physick, to purge out what

[51] Whitney, "Seventeenth-Century Survey," 17.
[52] Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 3.
[53] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 179.
[54] Record Commissioners of the City of Boston, *Dorchester Town Records*, 3.
[55] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 186–88.
[56] Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 191; Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal*; Blake, *Annals*, 22.
[57] John Cotton, *The Keyes to the Kingdom of Heaven and Power Thereof* (London: M. Simmons, 1644), B7.

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is evill, as well as Word and Sacraments, which, like good diet, are sufficient to nourish the soul to eternal life." Hooker believed that church members must watch over one another, "each particular brother (appointed) as a skillful Apothecary, to help forward the spiritual health of all in confederacy with him."[58] John Cotton explained that the church put this power in the hands of the laity to prevent abuse of power by the clergy.[59] Voting on censure cases meant that the laity had some authority over their fellow church members. They had to determine the merits of an accusation, judge the sincerity of a confession, and mete out a judgment.

Censure cases included a consultation with the minister, intervention by the elders, and a final vote from the male laity. Often, prior to a censure case appearing before the congregation, the church elders would meet with the sinner to give counsel and urge confession. Ministers consulted the elders on the nature of the sin and discussed those who refused to repent. Ministers and elders were supposed to handle private sins, while only public sins were tried before the congregation. Generally, public sins were those transgressions committed in front of one or two witnesses. In reality, the distinction was blurred, and "public sin" became any sin that people found out about. Congregations dropped censure cases when witnesses could not substantiate the sin. In 1727, when the Plymouth congregation tried censuring Lydia Cushman for drunkenness, she swore that an illness caused her strange behavior. Without witnesses to corroborate her inebriated state, the congregation dismissed the charges. Four years later Cushman faced another censure for drunkenness, and this time witnesses were able to describe her antics and the congregation suspended her.[60]

Sinners did not face their congregations for most private sins, which often dealt with impiety and struggles with faith. Congregations never charged a sinner with impiety. When Samuel Sewall wrote in his diary about his struggles over his "spiritual weakness and temptations," he met with his pastors, who encouraged him to pray. However, when Thomas Sargeant uttered "blasphemous" words about the Holy Ghost in a public

[58] Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (London: Printed by A. M. for John Bellamy, 1648), 33.

[59] See Cotton, *Keyes to the Kingdom of Heaven*. This practice of lay voting power was unique to the congregational churches of the Puritans. Presbyterians had elders and lay leaders meet privately to discuss and decide censure action.

[60] *Plymouth Church Records*, 235.

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meeting, he was censured.[61] One man kept his struggles to himself, while the other expressed his outwardly.

A sinner had to confess in front of the entire congregation. While women frequently had the option of having their confession read for them, the brethren and the sisters in the meeting hall still focused their attention on her. As the minister or deacon read her confession, all eyes were on the sinner. Censure cases were supposed to be lessons for everyone, to encourage the entire community to walk orderly by using the sinner as an example. Each censure became part theater and part religious edification. The congregation listened for key words and phrases that displayed humility, sincerity, and penitence. The sinner had to convey true remorse in front of neighbors, family, friends, and foes. There was a fine line between displaying the humility necessary for forgiveness and humiliating yourself in front of your community. More than one sinner cracked under such social pressure. Men lost their voices, women cried, and some simply refused to appear for years on end.[62]

Over three generations, Puritans consistently emphasized the need for church discipline. In 1680, the second-generation Puritan churches adopted the Cambridge "Platform of Church Discipline," which further explained the purpose of censures:

> The censures of the church are appointed by Christ for the preventing, removing, and healing of offenses in the church; for the reclaiming and gaining of offending brethren; for the deterring others from the like offences; for purging out the leaven which may infect the whole lump; for vindicating the honor of Christ, and of his Church, and the whole profession of the gospel; and for preventing the wrath of God.[63]

[61] Sewall, *Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 4, 32–33.

[62] For a discussion of Puritan psychology, see Cohen, *God's Caress*; and Erikson, *Wayward Puritans*. For a discussion on social controls, see E. Brooks Holifield, "Peace, Conflict, and Ritual in Puritan Congregations," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXIII (Winter 1993): 551–70; Raymond A. Mentzer, *Sins and the Calvinists: Morals, Control, and the Consistory in the Reformed Tradition* (Kirksville: Sixteenth-Century Journal Publishers, Inc., 1994); Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, *Religion, Family and the Life Course: Explorations in the Social History of Early America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1992); William E. Nelson, *Dispute and Conflict Resolution in Plymouth County, Massachusetts, 1725–1825* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981).

[63] *The Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms of Church Discipline, with the Confession of Faith of the New England Churches, Adopted in 1680* (Boston: T. R. Marvin, 1829), 54–55.

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In 1701 Westfield's minister, Edward Taylor, wrote that censures "recover the Poore Soule from his wound [of Satan], and take the Captive out of the hand of the adversary; As also to keep the Holy Place clean from being defiled."[64] Hooker, Cotton, and Taylor all emphasized the importance of church discipline for maintaining a holy community.[65]

Even though ministers could not formally direct the course of accusations, censures, or confessions, some ministers tried to use their influence more than did others.[66] Edward Taylor frequently offered to instigate a censure case or help write a confession. He had varied results. While several congregants used his help with their written confessions, many in the congregation did not readily accept his intrusions into disciplinary matters. In 1712 Benjamin Smith petitioned to have his aging father-in-law legally put under his care. Taylor sided against Smith, going so far as to write a letter to the court at North Hampton. Smith, frustrated, called for Taylor's letters to be read at a conference held to handle the matter, whereupon an irate Taylor argued that he did not intend the letters to be read publicly. In his diary he fumed that Smith had belittled him to the committee. Taylor tried to have Smith censured for "disobedience, provoking a minister, impenitency, false speaking, and threats." When his congregation refused to call a vote on Smith's alleged sins, Taylor threatened to suspend church services. He did not administer the Lord's Supper during the entire seventeen-week ordeal. Five months after the case ended Taylor issued two disciplinary sermons to his congregation. Although Taylor wanted Smith to repent, the laymen held the ultimate power of censure and did not honor their minister's strong demands.[67]

At times the male laity explicitly admonished the clergy for trying to sway the disciplinary process. In 1709 colonial leader and magistrate

[64] Taylor, *Church Records*, 174.

[65] For a discussion of church discipline, see Charles Francis Adams, *Some Phases of Sexual Morality and Church Discipline in Colonial New England* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1891); Gerald Harris, "The Beginnings of Church Discipline: 1 Corinthians 5," *New Testament Studies* 37 (1991): 1–21; Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints*; Wilberforce, *Church Courts*.

[66] For a discussion of lay and ministerial power, see Nehemiah Adams, *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard* (Boston: Pierce and Parker, 1832); Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd*; Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*; Hall, *Lived Religion*; Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard*; and Selement, "The Meeting of Elite and Popular Minds at Cambridge, New England, 1638–1645," *William and Mary Quarterly* 41, no. I (1984): 32–48.

[67] See Taylor, *Church Records*, 215–25.

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Samuel Sewall was particularly upset when Pastor Pemberton had a young woman, Hannah Butler, renew her baptismal covenant by offering a confession of faith, which the congregation accepted with a silent vote. During the process, Pemberton revealed that she had sinned against the seventh commandment, "thou shalt not commit adultery." Sewall was outraged that Pemberton did not give the congregation previous notice so they could have the opportunity to fully investigate whether or not Butler had sufficiently repented. "Ignorant Consent is no Consent," Sewall wrote in his journal. Pemberton must have had a history of bypassing the process, as Sewall was clearly not the only member angered over Pemberton's maneuver. Sewall also noted that he heard that Pemberton promised the congregation he would never do it again.[68]

Exchanges could get tense when the male laity disagreed with ministers, elders, or each other. In 1640 when Boston's notorious scoundrel Richard Wayte was accused of stealing, overcharging for goods, lechery, keeping evil company, and drunkenness (more on him later), the male laity refused to take the minister's advice to remove his admonishment. Historian Helle Alpert explains that "many members independently formed their own opinions and voiced them, even though they differed from the recommendation of the elders: they simply did not share the elders conviction of Wayte's sincerity."[69] While some were unmoved, other men argued that they needed to learn more about Wayte's late-night antics with "wicked" people. The pastor, John Wilson, and church elders were angry when two brethren, Goodman Button and James Johnson refused to vote. Even Governor Winthrop intervened to convince the laymen to accept Wayte's confession, attempting to reason with them that "searching other men's souls could be uncertain." Winthrop's suggestion is interesting, because searching other men's souls was exactly what the congregation was mandated to do as a covenanted church. But, clearly, Winthrop's comment illustrated the discord within the congregation on how exactly to discern sincerity. In Winthrop's estimation, Wayte met the standard: "For my owne part … I cannot but acknowledge my self satisfied and my heart, it ready to imbrace him … The church may doe what they will."[70] The disgruntled laymen prevailed

[68] Sewall, *Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 627.

[69] Helle M. Alpert, "Robert Keayne: Notes of sermons by John Cotton and Proceedings of the First Church of Boston from 23 November 1639 to 1 June 1640" (PhD diss., Tufts University, 1974), 89.

[70] Alpert, "Robert Keayne," 313.

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and excommunicated Wayte, but not without some hard feelings in the congregation.

High status or wealth could not shield a sinner from censure. Famed minister John Cotton's son was excommunicated from the Boston First Church in 1644 for "uncleane practices" with three women.[71] Thomas Dudley served as governor of Massachusetts Bay and was one of the founders of the town of Cambridge and Harvard College. His eldest daughter, Anne Bradstreet, was a poet and the first New England woman to be published. His son Joseph would also serve as governor. However, Boston First Church excommunicated Governor Dudley's daughter Sarah in 1647, after a series of scandalous events. Sarah was married to Benjamin Keayne, son of merchant Robert Keayne. Benjamin went on a business trip to England, and when he was reunited with Sarah, he accused her of giving him syphilis. Her well-connected father was seemingly able to get her a divorce, but she was eventually excommunicated for "evil carriage" with another man.[72] And, as Chapter 5 illustrates, money and social position did not protect Ann Hibbens from excommunication or hanging.

At times families discreetly dealt with wayward children to protect them from censure. Governor Joseph Dudley and Judge Samuel Sewall found themselves at odds as they each tried to protect their own children from the rebuke of censure and public ridicule. Sewall's son Samuel was married to Dudley's daughter Rebekkah, and their marriage grew rocky from multiple miscarriages and infant deaths. While Samuel turned to drink, Rebekkah found comfort with another man and gave birth to an illegitimate son. The families fought and hurled accusations at both parties, and Samuel lived off and on with his parents as the family patriarchs negotiated. After one trip to visit the unhappy couple and an encounter

[71] Richard D. Pierce, ed., *The Records of the First Church of Salem, Massachusetts, 1629–1736* (Salem: Essex Institute, 1974), 60–61; Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 98. He was readmitted a month later after a sincere confession.

[72] Pierce, *Records of the First Church of Salem*, 25; Bernard Bailyn, ed., *The Apologia of Robert Keayne: The Self-Portrait of a Puritan Merchant* (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1964), 576; T. H. Breen, *The Character of the Good Ruler: A Study of Puritan Political Ideas in New England, 1630–1730* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 37. There are no records of what could be the first divorce in the colony; however, Sarah did eventually remarry, indicating she did divorce Benjamin.

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with Rebekkah's alleged lover, Judge Sewall lamented of his son, "Lord save him and us."[73] Eventually the families reached an agreement that kept the couple together – and out of the church or courts.[74]

MINISTERIAL EXPECTATIONS AND PURITAN DOCTRINE

Puritan ministers called on all their congregants to be both pious and dutiful, to watch over the community, and to be humble, passive, and meek before God. The clergy defined a single Puritanism for both the men and women in their congregations, following Calvin's edict of a "priesthood of all believers."[75] Puritan doctrine asserted that souls were spiritually equal and had equal access to church membership, redemption, and God.

Puritan doctrine described souls as feminine. When minister Thomas Shepard lamented the sinful nature of human souls, he compared the soul to a woman. "When the soul sees that all its righteousness is a menstrous cloth, polluted with sin … it begins to cry out, How can I stand or appear before him with such continual pollutions."[76] In their call for a feminized piety, ministers used feminine metaphors to explain a Puritan's relationship to Christ.[77] When William Brattle delivered sermons in Cambridge in the late seventeenth century, he described conversion as the process of turning a lion into a lamb, explaining that "for tho men before conversion may be compared to wolves, lions and after conversion he is lambs & kids." And he compared the "marriage of ye lamb" to Christ, the bridegroom. He lectured that "ye bride makes herself ready … fit for ye entertainment of a great king; it is ye solemn marriage of ye lamb." Brattle lectured, "When Christ comes as a Bridegroome he comes personally … There is great preparation of ye wedding … Is ye solemn marriage of ye Lamb to ye whole church … he comes as husband to dwell with his wife." Brattle described a feminine supplicant congregant who waited for Christ as an eager bride.[78] Historian Amanda Porterfield argues that

[73] Sewall, *Diary of Samuel Sewall, 1674–1729*, 728, 732, 815, 835–36.

[74] Part of the negotiations ensured that the illegitimate son would have no claim to the Sewall inheritance.

[75] Leslie J. Lindenauer, *Piety and Power: Gender and Religious Culture in the American Colonies, 1630–1700* (New York: Routledge, 2002), xvi.

[76] Thomas Shepard, *The Sound Believer*, quoted in Mack, *Visionary Women*, 19.

[77] See Reis, *Damned Women*, 39, 101.

[78] William Brattle, Sermons Delivered in Cambridge, ms., William Brattle II, Misc. Volume, Massachusetts Historical Society.

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ministers demanded female piety from their congregations as a vehicle for social cohesion.[79] All Puritans needed to be supplicant to Christ, and thus the church, to ensure order in this new society.

Many Puritan clerics utilized the metaphor of the laity as bride and Christ as bridegroom, including John Cotton, who wrote about waiting for Christ. In a 1651 sermon, Cotton asked his congregation, "Have you the strong desire to meet him in the bed of loves … and desire to have the seeds of his grace shed abroad in your hearts and bring forth the fruit of his grace?"[80] John Oxenbridge of Boston described a "royal reception" that Christ the bridegroom would offer his bride.[81] Shepard also expressed his submissiveness to Christ as a bridegroom, writing that he received Christ as a "husband" who he "lusted" for. When Shepard's wife lay sick in childbed, he felt guilty because he lusted more for his wife than for Christ. "I began to grow secretly proud and full of sensuality delighting my soul in my dear wife more than in my god."[82]

Edward Taylor, who was also a poet, frequently used feminized imagery to describe one's relationship with Christ. In his poem "Let Him Kiss Me with the Kisse of His Mouth," he prayed for a kiss and Christ's "sweet love." He wrote erotically that "the prayers of love ascend in gracious tune to him as musick, and as heart perfume." Taylor described a feminized spiritual eroticism. He wrote that he would "prepare his soul as a 'feather bed … with gospel pillows, sheets and sweet perfumes' to welcome Christ the lover." Historian Richard Godbeer asserts that Taylor described the soul as a womb waiting to be implanted by Christ's seed. Joseph Rowlandson preached a jeremiad, "The Possibility of God's Forsaking a People," in which he compared Christ to a father and Puritans to a wife: "He is a Father, and a tender-hearted Father … Can children be willing their Father should leave them? He is a Husband … a loving, careful, tender husband too; can the Wife be willing to part with

[79] Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

[80] Donald E. Stanford, ed., *The Poems of Edward Taylor* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1960), 142, 164, 212, 230, 248, 259, 295, 362–63, 448; John Cotton, *Christ the Fountain of Life*, 36–37, quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 54; and Cotton, *Practical Commentary*, 131, quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 54.

[81] John Oxenbridge, "Conversion of the Gentiles," ms., Ms. SBd-56, Massachusetts Historical Society, 1690.

[82] Adams, *Autobiography of Thomas Shepard*, 27, 39.

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her husband?" He warned his listeners that they could be left orphans and widows if they abandoned Christ.[83]

Ministers also expected their followers to be self-critical and debasing, a demeanor considered feminine. Even in his own autobiography, Shepard used such feminine language, consistently describing himself as unworthy, torturing himself with doubt and loathing. He wrote, "He is the God that convinced me of my guilt, filth of sin, self-seeking, and love of honor … and humbled me … and to loath myself the more."[84] As he considered joining the ministry, he wrote that he was "like a vile wretch in the use of God's gifts" and that he was "so unholy" that his "spirits began to sink."[85] When lecturing on prayer, Brattle reminded his listeners of the need for a feminized demeanor: "They ought to pray unto God with an abasing and humbling sense of [guilt] upon their hearts … they ought to pray with a deep sense of their unworthiness … and even thus with ye deepest of self-abasement and inward humility." In one of John Cotton's sermons, he urged his listeners to "break open the stony doores of your heart … and to give you an heart to give up your soule and body and spirit" to Christ.[86] In another sermon he preached how patience, humility, and zeal could lead to righteousness, and he pointed to faith, love, knowledge, and meekness as the path to purity of heart.[87]

Sermons consistently extolled the virtues of humility, submissiveness, and a childlike dependence on Christ. In 1631 William Perkins described his parishioners as children breastfed with the milk of the scriptures.[88] Ministers used metaphors of pregnancy and motherhood to describe the relationship with Christ. John Rogers taught that "every child is pregnant … with the seeds of all sin." The metaphor of pregnant sin called on a Puritan to imagine his body nourishing sin, like a pregnant woman nourishes her child. Such imagery blurred the distinction of body and

[83] Neal Salisbury, ed., *The Sovereignty and Goodness of God, Together with the Faithfulness of His Promises Displayed: Being a Narrative of the Captivity and Restoration of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1996), 149–52.

[84] Adams, *Autobiography of Thomas Shepard*, 73.

[85] Adams, *The Autobiography of Thomas Shepard*, 24–-25.

[86] Everett H. Emerson, ed., *Gods Mercie Mixed with His Justice; or His Peoples Deliverance in Times o Danger by John Cotton, 1641* (Gainesville: Scholars Facsimile Reprints, 1977), 25.

[87] Emerson, *Gods Mercie*, 40–42.

[88] William Perkins, *Works*, quoted in Stephen Baskerville, "The Family in Puritan Political Theology," *Journal of Family History* 18 (1993), 161.

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soul and asked the godly to feminize themselves. Ministers expected such feminized piety from both male and female congregants.[89]

Ministers may have called for a feminized piety, but New England men were not going to adopt such a demeanor publicly and would seek to regulate social behavior in a more gendered fashion.[90] Doctrine did not define censure in any gendered way; the same rules regarding sins and confession should have applied to men and women alike. However, as a public performance, the laity developed different standards for both. It was easier for them to expect women to be obedient, humble, and self-critical. Laymen did not necessarily want to humiliate their fellow man in the same way. As Puritans created new social norms, ideas of masculinity varied between laymen and ministers. More traditional gender concepts won out over the theological ideas of the feminized soul.

TRADITIONAL GENDER ROLES

Although gender ideologies were in flux in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the strong pull of patriarchy continued to maintain that women were weak and men were strong. Several historians – including Phyllis Mack, Elizabeth Reis, Amanda Porterfield, Susan Juster, and Carolyn Merchant – have examined the understanding of masculinity and femininity during that time. Protestant reformers, philosophers, and scientists explained how women's bodies and souls were unstable, causing them to be irrational, weak, emotional, and dependent. Mack explains how society believed that female bodies were more "wet and spongy," which made her "lustful, irrational, emotional … moody, and impulsive, which is why men needed to control them."[91] Protestant John Knox, in a 1558 tract to discredit women as political rulers, asserted that

[89] John Rogers, *Death the Certain Wages of Sin*, 95, quoted in Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America*, 68. For a discussion of the body/soul and feminized soul, see Reis, *Damned Women*, 93–120; and Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Engendering Puritan Religious Culture in Old and New England," *Pennsylvania History* 64 (1977): 105–77.

[90] Recent historians of early American religion have called attention to the disjuncture between lay-cleric belief systems in the scholarship, such as Hall, *Worlds of Wonder*; Cohen, *God's Caress*; and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990). Countering this recent historiography, and asserting that the laity agreed with their ministers, is Selement, *Keepers of the Vineyard*.

[91] Mack, *Visionary Women*, 25–26. See also Juster, *Disorderly Women*, 5.

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because women were physically and mentally weaker, they were meant to be obedient servants to their husbands.[92] John Calvin argued that it was because of Eve's original sin that women were forced into the role of the subservient wife.[93] Seventeenth-century society viewed men as strong and rational. Men were not judged by their inherent nature, but rather by their social status and public reputations. Men were public beings, associated with the material world, while women were understood to be private, internal, and spiritual.[94]

The male laity charged with church discipline did not conform to the clerical prescriptions, instead developing a different pattern of ideas and practices that can be traced through the church records. Censure cases illustrate how laymen did not accept the requirements of feminization and created censure patterns that allowed men to retain their public masculinity by focusing not on their personal piety but on their public actions and duties. The laity used church discipline to define and fix rules, which consequently gendered souls, sins, and censure practices.

Through courts, town governments, and churches, Puritans policed behavior to ensure that congregants honored their contract with God. Whether it was Goodwife Dewy, censured for lying about the great hen squabble, or members with other sinful offenses, church discipline was central to regulating the godly path. As the following chapters will explore, how laymen enforced church discipline had important consequences for men, women, and Puritanism itself.

[92] John Knox, "The First Blast of the Trumpet against the Monstrous Regime of Women," quoted in Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature: Women, Ecology and the Scientific Revolution* (San Francisco: Harper Row, 1980), 145.

[93] Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, 146.

[94] For a further discussion of "weak" women, see also Karlsen, *Devil in the Shape of a Woman*; and Merchant, *The Death of Nature*.

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