

American Christian women activists have, historically, had two motivating tendencies: a desire for direct spiritual experience and/or a concern for the pragmatic effects of religion in improving society. Are there parallels among Mormon women?

RECURRING TENDENCIES IN THE HISTORY OF AMERICAN CHRISTIAN WOMEN

By Amanda Porterfield

IN NOVEMBER 1637, ANNE HUTCHINSON WAS brought before the General Court of Massachusetts Bay Colony and sentenced to banishment. The magistrates of the court disapproved of her considerable influence in Boston, especially among women, and objected to the meetings she held in her house, where she explained the sermons delivered by her minister, John Cotton, and compared his knowledge of grace with the lack of it in other ministers. The court regarded her as a threat to social order and convicted her of dishonoring the ministers and magistrates to whom she owed filial respect. In the prolonged examination that preceded this sentencing, Hutchinson proved herself to be knowledgeable in scripture and quick in her own defense. She justified the meetings held in her house as conforming to the "clear rule in Titus, that the elder women should instruct the younger" and claimed that such gatherings were "in practice before I came." She explained that she began to hold meetings in her home to prove to her neighbors that she did not believe such meetings were "unlawful." To the irritation of her examiners, she defended her willingness to "harbour and countenance" those among her male associates already found guilty of sedition by invoking the religious principle that had led all Puritans to New England: "That's matter of conscience, Sir."¹

Hutchinson's sense of righteousness eventually destroyed her defense. In a burst of confidence, she revealed more than her examiners needed to condemn her. When asked how she

knew some of the ministers in Boston were "wrong," and that others, like John Cotton, were "clear," she replied that the Holy Spirit showed her the difference. When pressed as to how the Spirit did this, she retorted with a question of her own, quickly exposing her belief that she was divinely inspired: "How did Abraham know that it was God that bid him offer his son, being a breach of the sixth commandment?" she asked. "By an immediate voice," answered Deputy Governor Thomas Dudley. "So to me by an immediate revelation," rejoined Hutchinson. "How! an immediate revelation," exclaimed Dudley. But Hutchinson persisted: "By the voice of his own spirit to my soul." She further instructed the Court that God would intervene to free her from persecution: "[T]his place in Daniel was brought unto me and did shew me that though I should meet with affliction yet I am the same God that delivered Daniel out of the lion's den, I will also deliver thee."²

These claims proved to Hutchinson's examiners that she had elevated her religious experience to the status of biblical revelation and herself to the status of Abraham and Daniel. As John Eliot defined the problem while the court moved toward sentencing her, it was fine to have "an expectation of things promised" in scripture, "but to have a particular revelation of things that shall fall out, there is no such thing in scripture." In the view of the Puritans presiding at her trial, Hutchinson's claim that God would free her from her persecutors as he had saved Daniel from the lion's den was a "delusion"³ that undermined her obligation to submissiveness as a subject and a woman, and it threatened their authority.

The intellectual contest between Hutchinson and the magistrates of the General Court defined fundamental differences between radical and more moderate Puritans. While radicals

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argued that the Holy Spirit inspired Christians directly and that Christians were aware of that direct inspiration, other Puritans argued that Christians knew the Spirit only indirectly, through reading or listening to the inspired truth of biblical texts. On questions of the Spirit's indwelling, the nature of fellowship in the Spirit, the value of lay prophecy, and the relative merits of prescribed or spontaneous prayers, radicals emphasized the authority of individual experience while others emphasized the Spirit's conformity to social order and rationality.⁴

Such questions about the Holy Spirit's activity reflected Puritan preoccupation with defining the normative characteristics of religious experience and personal faith. This preoccupation can be understood as part of a general concern in Puritan culture to define the nature of subjective experience and the extent of its authority. In Puritan culture, which was in transition between fear of external authority and reliance on conscience, questions about the nature of religious experience were paramount. Thus the examination of Anne Hutchinson, her claim to divine inspiration, and her banishment were part of a larger intellectual debate about the relationships between subjective feeling and moral conscience, and moral conscience and social order.

The General Court magistrates respected the claims of conscience, so long as they did not challenge their own authority or the authority of duly appointed ministers. Hutchinson's position was no less complicated: she had elevated her personal experience above all political authority, while at the same time subjecting her intelligence to that experience and its defense. She was committed to a force inside herself she believed she could not control, and at the end of her examination, she did not restrain herself from making the claim to immediate inspiration she must have known would condemn her. Her claim to immediate inspiration lent authority to her subjective experience, but it also involved a certain element of passivity and irresponsibility. She believed in the power of the Holy Spirit working in her, but during the church trial that followed her examination by the General Court, she suggested that the de-



MARK BREWER

ANNE HUTCHINSON

Her commitment to the Holy Spirit is a recurring tendency in the history of American Christian women—to assert publicly the ultimacy of one's subjective religious experience in a way that challenges social convention.

scriptions of the working of the Spirit she had given to the General Court were probably unreliable.⁵ In other words, she relinquished any public claim to intelligibility.

THE PRIMACY OF
SUBJECTIVE EXPERIENCE
From Anne Hutchinson to Mary Daly, there has been a tendency to celebrate women's prophetic experiences and to associate social convention with oppressive patriarchy.

IN recent years, a number of feminists have recognized the relevance of Anne Hutchinson to their own issues. For example, Rosemary Skinner Keller, Lyle Koehler, and Ben Barker-Benfield all celebrate Hutchinson as a heroic proto-feminist and condemn as patriarchal oppressors the Puritans who banished her. Thus Barker-Benfield represents the theological concerns of Hutchinson's examiners as a thinly disguised rationalization for male dominance. He interprets Hutchinson's radical commitment to the Holy Spirit as a response to the exclusion of women from the "priesthood of believers" promised in

covenant theology. He argues that John Winthrop, the presiding governor at her examination, "recognized that response; and that his own reaction was largely influenced by what he perceived as a sexual threat."⁶ Barker-Benfield is rightly sensitive to the similarity between Hutchinson's situation and the polarized situations faced by some feminists in his own day, but his partisan sympathy for Hutchinson and hostility to Puritanism leads him to overlook some larger implications of that similarity.

From a broader perspective, Hutchinson's commitment to the Holy Spirit can be seen as an example of a recurring tendency in the history of American Christian women—to assert publicly the ultimacy of subjective religious experience in a way that challenges social convention. Recent examples of this tendency are found among feminist theologians who celebrate women's prophetic expressions and spiritual insight and who associate social convention with the evils of patriarchy and with men's rational, linear thinking. One of the most influential spokeswomen for such a position is the renegade Catholic

theologian Mary Daly, whose criticisms of Catholic sexism in the late 1960s developed in the 1970s and 1980s into an antinomian indictment of Christian misogyny and a joyful celebration of the natural characteristics of women.

Although she no longer considers herself Christian, Daly's commitment to criticizing Christianity is well-precedented in the history of Christian theology. Among those to whom her theology is heir, Daly has specifically identified Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, whose ideas serve as "springboards" for her own. Although she reinterpreted Tillich's existential idealism in feminist terms and came to attack his theology as insufficiently liberating, Daly developed her thinking out of his, which identified subjective experiences of ecstasy with divine being and criticized Christianity for supporting the constraints of middle-class morality.⁷

Daly differs from Hutchinson in her explicit feminism, general hostility to men, and post-Christian embrace of paganism, but she is similar in her advocacy of immediate inspiration and in her moral outrage against all who deny inspiration or seek to frame it in the context of social convention. These similarities and differences are evident in Daly's prose. Thus in her celebration of the "Wild wisdom and wit (of Wonderlusting women), which cut through the mazes of man-made mystification, breaking the mindbindings of master-minded doublethink," and in her assertion of a "subliminal connection . . . between the spirits represented by the names *principalities* and *powers* . . . and the spirits of Elemental, Untamed women," Daly is as righteously confident of her inspiration as Hutchinson was. She rejects the submissiveness to Christ that Hutchinson gloried in, but shares Hutchinson's eagerness to publicize her feelings and speak out against potential challengers. While Hutchinson claimed she was united to the body of Christ through the Holy Spirit and that the Spirit spoke directly to her, Daly interprets criticism of such claims as misogynist suppression of female authenticity. Thus Daly calls her readers to interpret "portrayals of Christ as the one who 'disarmed the principalities and powers' . . . as . . . justifications for male breaking, humiliating, and gloating over" the elemental spirits of women.⁸

Many of Daly's views can be found in the writings of other feminist theologians. Although Daly's complete rejection of Judaism and Christianity represents a kind of extreme, her tendency to identify the spontaneous, natural feelings of women as sacred and the systematic ideas of men as oppressively profane is common in feminist theology. This tendency among Christian feminists is well-represented in the writings of Sharon Welch. Welch restates Daly's claim that "patriarchy is the prevailing religion of the entire planet and its essential message is necrophilia," an obsessive love of death and violence. But Welch maintains her ties to Christianity by placing herself in the tradition of Christian theologians since the nineteenth century who have called for a radical critique and reinterpretation of Christian faith. Welch follows Daly in identifying patriarchy as the ultimate evil but retains a Christian framework for this position by defining patriarchy as the sin true Christianity should overthrow. Similarly, Welch places

Daly's sharp distinctions between the evils of men and the virtues of women in the context of liberation theology, suggesting that Christianity should be understood in terms of women's appreciation of freedom, diversity, and change rather than in terms of men's desire for transcendence, power, and security. And Welch follows Daly in denouncing interpretations of Jesus as "a model of sacrificial love" that encourages "women to accept, rather than actively resist, their own victimization." Thus Welch does not reject Jesus but only those interpretations of him that focus on his sacrificial love rather than on his exemplification of freedom.⁹

This tendency among feminist theologians to contrast liberation with sacrifice, and female righteousness with male oppression, can be framed in the context of a recurring debate in American religious history about the relationships between emotional feeling and moral conscience, and between moral conscience and social order. While feminist theologians often balance their desire for freedom from oppression with a strong commitment to social justice, many are like Hutchinson in their tendency to polarize moral conscience and social order, and to conflate moral conscience with emotional feeling. They might be considered heirs to the religious outspokenness of Hutchinson, whose interpretation of the Holy Spirit has become wholly and explicitly identified with feminism.

SPIRITUALISM AND WOMEN'S RIGHTS

Nineteenth-century spiritualism's emphasis on individual rights resonated with women who were expected to suppress their individuality in the service of men.

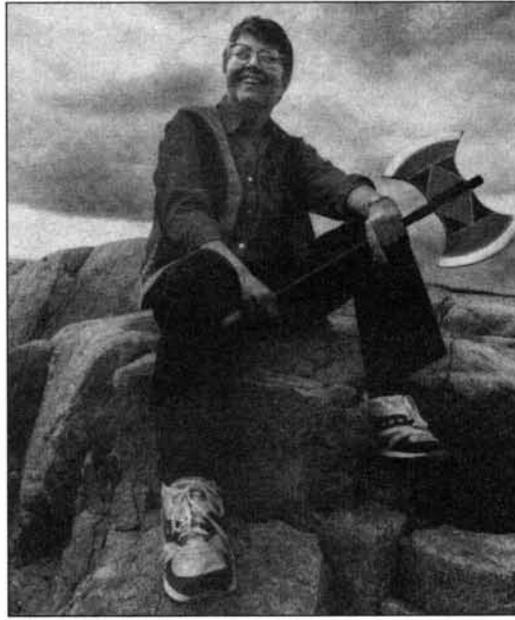
A MID-POINT between Hutchinson and her intellectual heirs among current feminist theologians can be found in the mid-nineteenth-century religious movement known as spiritualism. In the late 1840s, spiritualism emerged among Hicksite Quakers, who had separated in 1827 from less radical members of the Society of Friends. Hicksites rejected what they perceived to be the worldliness of less radical Quakers and sought a return to the devotion to the inner light within the individual Christian that had characterized John Fox and other early Quakers. Hicksites were among the first to seek out the Fox sisters, who heard rappings from the spirit world in their farmhouse outside Rochester, New York, and among the first to incorporate communications with the dead within the context of Protestant theology.¹⁰ In the tradition of Anne Hutchinson, Hicksite Quakers prized the indwelling of the Holy Spirit and believed that it could speak directly through Christians. However, Hicksite Quakers who became spiritualists were less mystical and more individualistic than Hutchinson was. While Hutchinson believed that election and immortality were successive stages of being swallowed up in the spirit body of Christ, spiritualists believed that individuality persisted after death.

This individualism was closely associated with women's concerns. In a culture in which children frequently died in childbirth or from birth defects or childhood diseases, and in which middle-class women had relatively little outlet outside

of religion and domestic life, spiritualist beliefs in communication with the spirits of deceased loved ones helped women cope with losses they suffered. Moreover, the spiritualists' deep concern for individual rights resonated with many women, who felt enormous tension between being taught to focus on the development of their characters and those of their children, and at the same time being expected to suppress their individuality in the service of men. Spiritualists managed this tension by embracing beliefs and practices that encouraged individual expression but that also subjected women to the control of higher forces.

As a recent historian of spiritualism has shown, most spiritualists were female and the whole spiritualist movement was associated with what one nineteenth-century writer called "the persuasive accents of inspired woman's tongue." The male mediums who did exist were perceived to speak with the characteristics of feminine voice.¹¹ But interestingly, the most salient characteristic of this feminine voice was passivity. Although spiritualists were often quite outspoken with regard to women's rights, that outspokenness was believed to have its origin in women's innate capacity to serve as vehicles for messages from the spirit world. Thus mediums often spoke out publicly against slavery and against laws and customs that oppressed women, but they were perceived able to do so by virtue of being in a state of trance and, hence, not fully conscious. It is important to note that this perception enabled women's public speech in a culture that otherwise disapproved of it, although it would be a mistake to view spiritualism as a device that women consciously exploited in order to speak. The call for women's rights in antebellum America emerged partly in the context of earnest and widespread beliefs in the existence and activity of a spirit world. The most pragmatic of the women's rights leaders, including Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Lucretia Mott, and Susan Anthony, did not commit themselves to such beliefs, but many of the boldest advocates of women's rights in antebellum America, including the Grimke sisters, did.¹²

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MARY DALY

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perceded by Christian Science and theosophy. Christian Science addressed women's concerns about health and death while positing a politically conservative and extremely idealistic form of Christianity. The founder of Christian Science, Mary Baker Eddy, defined Jesus as a healer who had mastered the scientific principle that matter did not exist and that belief in matter produced sickness and evil. Although her belief in the supremacy of mind over matter can be seen as an outgrowth of spiritualism, Eddy rejected spiritualism because its tendency to materialize the spirit world enabled practitioners to exercise a negative power over others, a power that she called "malicious animal magnetism."¹³ In the same vein, while spiritualism had allowed women to express desires for political and legal rights, Eddy eschewed such materialisms.

Theosophy was more open to women's rights, although it, too, elevated the spirit above such mundane realities as politics and the law. Founded in the 1870s by Henry Olcott and Russian immigrant Helene

Blavatsky, theosophy combined spiritualism's belief in spiritual communication (especially through women) with Eastern and ancient philosophies. Olcott and Blavatsky popularized some of the mystical writings of Hinduism and Buddhism, which they believed to be related to gnosticism in the West. In anticipation of Mary Daly and other goddess theologians of the present day, Blavatsky argued that witches burned in early modern Europe were practitioners of a form of magic derived from ancient gnostic wisdom and celebrated gnosticism for its belief that wisdom, personified by the goddess Sophia, was female.¹⁴ As Janet Nelson has discovered, Daly relied on the writings of Matilda Joselyn Gage, who carried forward Blavatsky's concept of Christianity as the suppressor of women's religion.

In their concern for women's rights and criticism of male oppression, the spiritualists in antebellum America and their theosophical successors anticipated later feminist concerns for social justice. But feminist theologians like Daly and Welch go beyond spiritualists and theosophists in their rejection of any

supernatural spirit or spirit world, or any supernatural justification for feminism. Indeed, they have come to define God in terms of women and have relinquished belief in any spiritual reality that could be described as independent or antecedent to feminism. What they have not relinquished as heirs to the spiritualist and theosophical traditions is commitment to the authority of personal inspiration. Like spiritualist and theosophical beliefs in female receptivity to the spirit world, Daly's commitment to subjective inspiration is reminiscent of Hutchinson's radical and ultimately passive reliance on the Holy Spirit.

RELIGIOUS EXPERIENCE AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCE

Women as far removed from one another as Anne Bradstreet and Eleanor Roosevelt have demonstrated a tendency to mediate religious experience through self-control and concern for moral conscience.

THE tendency to elevate inspiration above pragmatic consideration for social convention has not been the only recurring tendency in the history of American Christian women. No less significant or influential has been the complementary tendency to filter personal religious experience through deliberation about social purposes and consequences. This tendency has not been any less religious, necessarily less feminist, or always unmixed with the tendency to celebrate religious impulse. But it is more deliberately self-conscious and more accepting of social convention.

A good example of this tendency can be found in the writings of Anne Hutchinson's contemporary in seventeenth-century New England, Anne Bradstreet. In contrast to Hutchinson, Bradstreet did not prophesy in public, nor did she attribute metaphysical objectivity to her internal voices. As befitting the daughter and wife of high-ranking officials in Massachusetts Bay government, Bradstreet's criticisms of her social order were more circumspect than Hutchinson's and apparently designed not to provoke outrage or fear. But her deliberately modest and highly educated form of self-expression allowed her a great range of self-expression and earned her lasting fame as a poet, while Hutchinson's more radical and more unconscious claim to authority led to her notoriety and, ultimately, to her exile and death.

While Hutchinson viewed the Spirit as an absolute and wholly external power that seized and spoke to her without her help, Bradstreet did not attribute such aggression to the Spirit, or so little control to herself. In her poem, "The Flesh and the Spirit," she depicted Flesh and Spirit as two sisters she happened to overhear debating their respective assets beside a stream. As the author of a poem rather than a prophet seized by a power outside herself, Bradstreet presented the Spirit as she wanted the Spirit to be seen. And her picture of Spirit and Flesh as siblings emphasized the Spirit's human qualities.¹⁵

Bradstreet established her authority and skill as a poet by using the Puritan ideal of pious modesty to her own advantage. In "The Prologue" to her book of poetry, *The Tenth Muse*

Lately Sprung up in America, the first book of poetry written by an American, Bradstreet referred to her "foolish, broken, blemished Muse," and insisted that great epic verse was beyond her power: "To sing of wars, of captains, and of kings, / Of cities founded, commonwealths begun, / For my mean pen are too superior things." Following this disarming expression of modesty, she proceeded to write about wars, captains, kings, and commonwealths and to castigate every "carping tongue" that denigrated "female wits." This ironic dimension in Bradstreet's verse is compounded by the further irony that her censure of carping, misogynist tongues had no apparent referent in her own social experience. As one of her twentieth-century critics commented, "We have no contemporary reference to [Bradstreet] or her poetry which is not somewhere between admiration and adulation."¹⁶

Bradstreet's reliance on irony was not simply a means to her public renown, but an important ingredient in her moral and religious thought as well. Thus her elegy for her eighteen-month-old granddaughter Elizabeth turns on a statement about God's inhumanity that indirectly attests to her own humanity as a woman and a poet. She admits that death should be accepted when it comes as a natural culmination of age: "By nature Trees do rot when they are grown. / And Plumbs and Apples thoroughly ripe do fall." But the death of an infant is unnatural, and Bradstreet's rocky lines acknowledging God's omnipotence speak against his justice: "plants new set to be eradicate, / And buds new blown, to have so short a date, / Is by his hand alone that guides nature and fate." Thus before God's power, Bradstreet makes a heartfelt bow, the religious and moral significance of which lies in its difficulty.¹⁷

One twentieth-century heir of this Christian tradition of indirect female assertiveness is Eleanor Roosevelt. Although no woman in her own lifetime was more involved in public life, or more eager to succeed in attaining her political goals, Roosevelt repeatedly downplayed her political activism and its importance in her life and portrayed herself as primarily a wife and mother. She framed her efforts in behalf of social reform in the context of the very values that limited women's participation in public life and realized that it was on these terms that the chances of realizing her political goals were greatest. Thus in 1928, when she was working full-time on Al Smith's presidential campaign, she gave an interviewer for the *New York Times Magazine* the impression that she never allowed politics to "interfere with her devotion to her home," and that she "believe[d] that a woman fitted to serve her community or her country can show that fitness best in the management of her own home." Like Bradstreet's claiming ineptitude for epic verse as a prolegomenon to writing it, Roosevelt's claim to domesticity appeared in the same month as a strongly feminist article she wrote for *Redbook*, which called women to organize themselves to demand more equality in politics and claimed that "Politically, as a sex, women are generally 'frozen out' from any intrinsic share of influence." Roosevelt criticized male politicians who would support a woman for office only if they knew "their ticket cannot win the district selected." She also criticized women who professed themselves "horrified at the

thought of women bosses bartering and dickering in the hard game of politics with the men."¹⁸

Roosevelt was discreet about the fact that she and her husband had different homes and different friends after 1920. She was also discreet about her involvement in campaigns for social reform, especially if those campaigns might have upstaged her husband. She did not even attend the Democratic Party convention that nominated Al Smith for president, and when her husband was elected governor of New York in 1928, she resigned as editor of the *Women's Democratic News*. Although her name no longer appeared on the masthead of that forum of political and social reform, according to her recent biographer, "she continued to write most of the editorials, raise most of the money, and do most of the troubleshooting."¹⁹ As her leadership became increasingly well-established, Roosevelt accepted the role of a public representative of concern for social welfare. But her tendency was always to subordinate her public persona to her causes.

Roosevelt's willingness to yield the limelight was not a cynical form of political art, but an outgrowth of a habit of deference to others that developed into a political art. This habit of deference was initially shaped by a sense of inferiority instilled in her by the neglect and early deaths of her parents, and reestablished, after her 1905 marriage, by her mother-in-law's authoritarian intrusiveness and her husband's infidelity. These hard experiences were undoubtedly one source of Roosevelt's lifelong compassion for the suffering of others. But her commitment to political activism in 1920 was also the result of a deliberate decision to rise above her feelings of abandonment and inferiority and live on her own terms as fully as she could.²⁰

No less important, Roosevelt's tendency to minimize her own accomplishments also grew out of an indifference to celebrity she associated with Christian conceptions of selfhood and duty. After her death, one of her friends characterized her as "thoughtful, serious, with a terrible sense of duty. Good New England conscience at work all the time." This



ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

She repeatedly downplayed her political activism and her private religious beliefs and framed her efforts for social reform in the context of the very values that limited women's participation in public life, such as primary commitment to home and husband.

sense of duty was a prominent aspect of the Christianity that figured importantly in her worldview. She grew up "in a family where there was a deep religious feeling," and when she became an adult, her commitment to Christianity was well-known to her family and friends. During her early years in the White House, she carried a prayer in her purse reminding her "to think seldom of your enemies, often of your friends and every day of Christ."²¹

Roosevelt was rarely explicit or demonstrative about her religious beliefs. In campaigning for the relief and reform programs of the New Deal, she invoked the Sermon on the Mount in her arguments for a "New Social Order" based on the teachings of Jesus, but this public expression of religion was unusual. She preferred going to church at Hyde Park, where she was most likely to be unaccompanied by reporters and photographers. And in an essay published in 1932 titled, "What Religion Means to Me," she asserted that churchgoing and churchwork were only "outward symbols" of the "inner growth" that

was the purpose of all religions and the hallmark of civilization. It did not trouble her that some people might achieve this inner growth "without the help of what might be called religious routine." She believed that "true religion has nothing to do with any specific creed or dogma." True religion was that "faith in the heart of man [that] makes him try to live his life according to the highest standard which he is able to visualize." She argued that "real civilization" could be reached only "through a revival of [this] true religion."²²

Roosevelt's commitment to Christianity was emphatically this-worldly. After her death, the pastor of her Hyde Park church during the last twenty years of her life reported that she did not believe in personal immortality. And she was more skeptical of spiritualism than was her husband; he thought one should remain open-minded about spiritualist claims whereas she completely rejected them. Also in contrast to her husband, who often reminded his speech writers not to omit the "God-stuff" at the end of his scripts, she felt that religious language could be out of place in the public arena. Thus

during her tenure as chairman of the Human Rights Commission of the United Nations, she was happy to make the Declaration of Human Rights more acceptable to representatives of Communist countries by changing "all men are created free and equal," which implied the existence of a Creator, to "all men are born free and equal," which did not. Not wanting the religious beliefs of her fellow Americans to become an obstacle to accord, she offered a lighthearted warning against religious self-defense: "I thought for those of us who are Christians, it would be difficult to have God defeated in a vote."²³

In her political activism and in her association of Christianity with public benevolence, Roosevelt went far beyond Anne Bradstreet. Although Bradstreet defined herself in terms of others no less consistently, her circle of others was much more circumscribed. But Roosevelt was like Bradstreet in her investment in modesty as a social skill as well as a personal virtue, and in her pragmatic commitment to developing her own talents in the context of conventional social expectations. Unlike Anne Hutchinson and Mary Daly, who developed their talents in opposition to ideas they perceived to dominate their societies, Roosevelt and Bradstreet developed their talents as extensions of ideals of womanhood that were widely shared among their contemporaries.

MISSIONARIES AND THE MIDDLE GROUND

As representatives of the pragmatic tendency to self-control, Mary Lyon and the missionaries of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary occupy a middle ground between Bradstreet's cultivation of her own moral conscience and Roosevelt's public benevolence.

A MIDPOINT between the largely private sphere of Bradstreet's benevolence and the much more public sphere of Roosevelt's benevolence can be found in the missionary activism of New England women before the Civil War. Their pragmatism distinguishes them from the spiritualists who were their contemporaries, and is exemplified in Mary Lyon's founding of Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1837 as a school for women's advanced education and missionary training. In 1833, Lyon relinquished an earlier plan to expand the already-existing female seminary headed by Zilpah Grant in Ipswich where she was second in command. As Lyon described her change of mind to Grant, "I feel more and more that the whole business must, in name, devolve on benevolent gentlemen, and not on yourself or on myself. . . . Fewer needless, unkind remarks will be thrown out, less jealousy will be excited, and our private influences will be more extensive and useful in directing matters for the good of the institution." As she explained more specifically,

There is danger that many good men will fear the effect on society of so much female influence, and what they will call female greatness. They will think and say, "Miss Grant and Miss Lyon want to do some great thing, to have a large sum of money raised, and a great institution established, and to see themselves at the head of the whole, and then they will be satisfied."

I imagine I have seen a little of this already, and if more interest were to be felt in the cause, more jealousy might be excited.²⁴

After establishing her independence from Ipswich and selecting a committee of well-respected men to represent her publicly, Lyon decided to present her plan for a publicly endowed institution for the advanced education of women as a necessary wing of the missionary enterprise. Many New England Protestants of modest means contributed to missionary causes, and Lyon carefully linked her appeal to their benevolence as missionary supporters with an appeal to their self-interest as parents of young women who could afford an advanced education only if it was priced considerably below the tuition at private female seminaries. Thus the first circular describing the organizational plan of the new seminary announced that "contributions" would "furnish" both "buildings and furniture," that "Teachers . . . possessing . . . a missionary spirit" would "receiv[e] only a moderate salary," that life in the seminary would be "very plain and simple" and require students to take responsibility for domestic work, that room, board, and tuition would be sold "at cost," and "The whole plan . . . conducted on the principles of our missionary operations," such that any "surplus" would be "cast into the treasury [from which] further reductions [in] expenses [would be made] next year."²⁵ By proposing the new seminary as an object of missionary benevolence as well as a center for inculcating it in young women, Lyon established the principle of advanced education for women and brought the first publicly endowed institution for women's higher education into being.

After the Seminary opened, Lyon encouraged missionary interest among her students in every way she could. Her pragmatic management of a series of revivals reportedly made it more difficult not to be a Christian at Mount Holyoke than anywhere else.²⁶ She encouraged committed Christians to meet regularly to discuss their faith and responsibilities to others, gathered, for special instruction, students who were hopeful of conversion, and made those left out feel their exclusion. As one of her friends observed about her effectiveness in leading recalcitrant students to conversion, "She never begged and besought her pupils to serve God, as though the infinite could not do without them. . . . Sometimes she would lift the curtain, and give her auditors a glance into the holy of holies," at which point a reluctant student might be encouraged to see that there was "no vacant seat" and be forced to admit that "Heaven will be full without her."²⁷

The early missionaries educated at Mount Holyoke avoided overt publicity, much like Bradstreet, whose book of poems was first published without her knowledge or name. But also like Bradstreet, who wrote epic poetry of sweeping historical proportions, nineteenth-century female missionaries loved historical panorama; they studied the histories of many nations and saw themselves figuring modestly but importantly in the glorious work of God's redemption. While they shared their society's conventional belief that women were unsuited for public life, these missionaries moved in the direction of Roosevelt's public activism by devoting their lives to the ser-

vice of others. And like Roosevelt, they enlarged their opportunities for responsibility and influence through that devotion. Indeed, they often found their work as educators and teachers so fulfilling that they willingly absented themselves from America, where women's opportunities for work were more limited. Of course, separation from New England culture was considered a great sacrifice, especially in times of sickness, but the willingness with which many of these missionaries made that sacrifice suggests enjoyment of responsibility as well as capacity for self-denial.

For example, Rose Murphy Edwards's experience on leaving Holyoke in 1851 as a missionary to the Choctaws in U.S. Indian Territory was the high point of her life. According to her daughter, Edwards's "health was much broken after the first few years, but she had great executive ability, and an affection for [the Choctaw] people which was greater than any she ever felt for others. She often said the ten years spent there were the happiest in her life." Fidelia Fiske's experience in Persia was

no less rewarding. From Seir, where she stopped in 1843 on her journey to Urmiah to found a girls school for Christian Armenians, she wrote her uncle, "I go out among the women and children of this village very often, and enjoy it very, very much." Not long after she became settled in Urmiah, Fiske began to generate revivals among her students that spread through their families, where they affected several priests and bishops and helped precipitate a reformation in the Armenian Church.

Similarly, Mary Lyon's niece, Abigail Moore Burgess, a student and teacher at Mount Holyoke before her departure for India in 1846, influenced a considerable number of Hindu women and children. In addition, her fellow missionaries in the area around Ahmednuggar became so reliant on her cheerful administrative ability that they were devastated when she died of a breast abscess in 1853.²⁸

Antebellum missionaries from Mount Holyoke were similar to spiritualists in several important respects. Both were enthusiastic about enlarging their opportunities as women,



MARY LYON

Midpoint between the private and public spheres of benevolence, Mary Lyon's missionary activism in founding Mount Holyoke Female Seminary in 1837 combined women's private spiritualism with social reform in a way even men championed.

but equally ready to insist on their own submissiveness to higher powers. Thus missionaries were eager for responsibility as educators and religious leaders but sure that if they exercised any positive influence, they did so only as instruments of Providence. And spiritualists were eager to claim women's rights but hesitant to advance those claims without associating them with the authority of the spirit world. Missionaries and spiritualists also shared a strong commitment to the elevation of women, and both associated that elevation with Christianity's emphasis on the importance of each individual. Finally, like spiritualists, missionaries held concrete beliefs in personal immortality. For example, one of Fidelia Fiske's correspondents apologized for not providing more details of a revival at Mount Holyoke but consoled Fiske by assuring her, "You will know all about this interesting scene in Heaven."²⁹

Spiritualist theology differed most from the theology of Mary Lyon and her missionaries in its focus on direct communication with the spirit world. The missionaries regarded belief in direct communication with the spirit world much as Anne Hutchinson's examiners regarded belief in immediate inspiration, namely, as a prideful and embarrassing delusion they scrupled to avoid. In the tradition of New England theology stemming from Jonathan Edwards and his theological heirs, Mount Holyoke missionaries measured the authenticity of their religious experiences in terms of the degree of disinterested benevolence those experiences produced. This pragmatic tendency, which missionaries shared with Bradstreet and Roosevelt, did not diminish their belief in divine grace, but it did draw attention to the close relationship between the effects of grace and the nature of grace itself. In contrast, belief in mediumship gave spiritualists the confidence to advocate women's rights, much as belief in immediate inspiration gave Hutchinson the confidence to preach against the leaders of her society; but the spiritualists' radical commitment to subjective experience exalted that experience beyond criticism and discouraged women from analyzing their religious experiences in terms of the ef-

fects of those events on others.

If deliberate attention to the effects of their own subjective states on others, and to the means of replicating those states in others, made antebellum New England missionaries more successful than spiritualists were in realizing their goals, missionaries did not think twice about the erosion of other cultures that was associated with conversion. And they did not even think once about the enculturation of their own beliefs in personal immortality. While the spiritualists' commitment to women's rights has stood the test of time, at least among academics, the missionaries' goal of converting the world to their own belief in personal immortality has been judged less kindly, even by later missionaries.³⁰

LDS WOMEN BLEND TWO TENDENCIES

LDS women prize both the direct expression of religious experience and the concern to interpret that experience in terms of communal order.

AFTER the Civil War, the "social gospel" and its critique of otherworldly theology affected missionary activism profoundly. The Social Gospel's more direct emphasis on human welfare altered missionary activism at Mount Holyoke and set the precedent for the this-worldly Christianity of Eleanor Roosevelt. The Social Gospel also prepared the way for liberation theology, with its emphasis on Christ as a liberator from social injustice, which in turn provided inspiration for feminist theology. But while liberation and feminist theologies emphasize the conflict between prophetic truth and social convention, Eleanor Roosevelt's theology was characterized more by pragmatic concern for monitoring and improving the effects of religious belief. This pragmatic concern for effects may seem timid and inauthentic, even as their confrontationalism might seem overbearing and counterproductive to pragmatists.

In conclusion, it is important to note the limitations of this paper's comparison of two recurring tendencies in the history of American Christian women. However significant these tendencies, many others might be detected as well. Moreover, the two tendencies that have been the subject of this paper have been rather narrowly interpreted with regard to ethnic and denominational traditions. The paper has focused primarily, although not exclusively, on two recurring tendencies among women with backgrounds in New England Protestantism and needs to be followed by further discussion of how these and other tendencies have played themselves out among different groups of American Christian women. It will be important to place the tendencies discussed here in relation to the history of African American Protestant women, in relation to Protestant women outside the New England Reformed tradition. It would be particularly interesting to examine these two tendencies in light of the history of Mormon women. While many other Christian women have emphasized one tendency to the exclusion of the other, Mormon women have emphasized both prophetic expression and concern for self-control and social order.

NOTES

1. "The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson at the Court at Newtown," *The Antinomian Controversy, 1636-1638: A Documentary History*, ed. David D. Hall (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1968), 312-14.
2. Hall, "Examination," 337.
3. Hall, "Examination," 343.
4. See Geoffrey F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), passim.
5. For discussion of Hutchinson's lack of regard for her own language, see Patricia Caldwell, "The Antinomian Language Controversy," *Harvard Theological Review* 69:3-4 (1976): 345-67.
6. Rosemary Skinner Keller, "New England Women: Ideology and Experience in First-Generation Puritanism, 1630-1650," *Women and Religion in America* Vol. 2, *The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods: A Documentary History*, ed. Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983), 132-44; Lyle Koehler, *A Search for Power: The "Weaker Sex" in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1980); Ben Barker-Benfield, "Anne Hutchinson and the Puritan Attitude toward Women," *Feminist Studies* 1 (1973): 65-96, quotation from 66.
7. Mary Daly, *Pure Lust: Elemental Feminist Philosophy* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984), 29n; Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), 127.
8. Daly, *Pure Lust*, xi, 183-84.
9. Sharon D. Welch, *Communities of Resistance and Solidarity: A Feminist Theology of Liberation* (New York: Orbis Books, 1985). For further discussion of Daly's importance to feminist theology, see Amanda Porterfield, "Feminist Theology As a Revitalization Movement," *Sociological Analysis* 48:3 (1987): 234-44.
10. Ann Braude, *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women's Rights in Nineteenth-Century America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1989), 10-25.
11. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 23-24.
12. Braude, *Radical Spirits*, 58-60, 84-90.
13. Robert Peel, *Mary Baker Eddy: The Years of Discovery* (New York: 1966), 195-99; Stephen Gottschalk, *The Emergence of Christian Science in American Religious Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 166; Edwin Franden Dakin, *Mrs. Eddy: The Biography of a Virginal Mind* (New York: 1929), 337-38; Mary Baker Eddy, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* (Boston: Church of Christ Science, 1934; orig. 1875), 562-65.
14. Helene P. Blavatsky, *Isis Unveiled: A Master-Key to the Mysteries of Ancient and Modern Science and Theology*, vol. 2 (Pasadena: Theosophical University Press, 1972), 1-53; Bruce F. Campbell, *Ancient Wisdom Revived: A History of the Theosophical Movement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 1-29; also see Thomas Tweed, *The American Encounter with Buddhism 1844-1912: Victorian Culture and the Limits of Dissent* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992), 48-77; and Mary Farrell Bednarowski, "Women in Occult America," in *The Occult in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Howard Kerr and Charles L. Crow (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983).
15. Anne Bradstreet, "The Flesh and the Spirit," *The Complete Works of Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Joseph R. McElrath Jr. and Allan P. Robb (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), 175-76; Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 108-09.
16. Jane Eberwein Donahue, "'No Rhet'ric We Expect': Argumentation in Bradstreet's 'The Prologue,'" in *Critical Essays on Anne Bradstreet*, ed. Pattie Cowell and Ann Stanford (Boston: G. K. Hall, 1983), 218-25; Porterfield, *Female Piety*, 112-13.
17. Anne Bradstreet, "In memory of my dear grand-child Elizabeth Bradstreet, who deceased August, 1665 being a year and half old," *Complete Works*, 187; Randall R. Mawer, "Farewell Dear Babe: Bradstreet's Elegy for Elizabeth," *Critical Essays*, 205-17; Porterfield, *Female Piety*, 113-14.
18. Quoted in Blanche Wiesen Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt, 1884-1933* vol. 1 (New York: Viking, 1992), 373, 367.
19. Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, 371, 384.
20. Cook, *Eleanor Roosevelt*, passim.
21. Thomas F. Soapes, "Oral History of Interview with the Honorable Justine Wise Polier," 8 December 1977, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library transcript, 63; Eleanor Roosevelt, "Values to Live By," *Jewish Heritage* 1:2 (spring 1958): 44; Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor and Franklin: The Story of Their Relationship Based on Eleanor Roosevelt's Private Papers* (New York: New American Library, 1973; orig. 1971), 466, 507.

22. Tamara K. Hareven, *Eleanor Roosevelt: An American Conscience* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975; orig. 1968), 50–52; Eleanor Roosevelt, "What Religion Means to Me," *Forum* 88 (December 1932): 322–24.

23. Thomas E. Soapes, "Oral History Interview with Reverend Gordon Kidd," 7 June 1978, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library transcript; Joseph P. Lash, *Eleanor: The Years Alone* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1972), 70–71; Hareven, *An American Conscience*, 234.

24. Mary Lyon letter to Zilpah Grant, 4 February 1833, in Edward Hitchcock, *The Power of Christian Benevolence Illustrated in the Life and Labors of Mary Lyon* (Northampton: Hopkins, Bridgman, and Company; Philadelphia: Thomas, Cowperthwait, and Company, 1852), 172.

25. "To the Friends and Patrons of Ipswich Female Seminary," printed circular, February 1834, excerpted in Hitchcock, 175–76.

26. Louise Porter Thomas, *Seminary Militant: An Account of the Missionary Movement at Mount Holyoke Seminary* (South Hadley, Mass: Dept. of English, Mount Holyoke College, 1937), 25.

27. Hitchcock, *Christian Benevolence*, 154, 156.

28. For the quotation about Rose Edwards, see Clara Edwards Pauling to Anne Edwards, 6 April 1904, Rose Murphy Edwards file, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives. Fidelia Fiske to Ebenezer Fiske, 12 September 1843, in Fidelia Fiske's Letterbook, 13 March 1843 to 27 March 1844, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives. For discussion of the revivals in Fiske's school in Orooomiah and their impact on Nestorian Christianity, see "Revival at the Female Seminary," containing a letter of 28 February 1846 from Mr. Stocking, in *The Missionary Herald* 42 (1846): 235–37, and excerpts from Mr. Stoddard's journal, *Missionary Herald* 43 (1847): 52–54. For description of Abigail Burgess's life in India, see the letter of 4 May 1953 from Mr. Wood and the testimony from Henry Ballantine in *The Missionary Herald* 49 (1853): 251–52.

29. Lucy Lyon to Fidelia Fiske, 9 April 1843, "Journal kept for Miss Fidelia Fiske," Journal #1, Mount Holyoke Journal Letters 1843–1891, Mount Holyoke College Library Archives.

30. See William R. Hutchinson, *Errand to the World: American Protestant Thought and Foreign Missions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 125–75.



INTERIORS

for Paula

Strange,
 how comfortably safe
 cocooned another's room can be. How
 a body comes to rely
 on familiarity: the soft blue room
 two chairs, a lit candle
 her face opposite mine. Odd
 that I look forward to seating myself
 in her hard, wooden rocker with my spine
 aligned so my shoulder blades
 are the only part of me touching. Here
 it's not the I of me. It is this body
 drawing every syllable, word
 from the cavity beneath my ribs
 across shores of olive skin
 into her deep black lake eyes.
 The Chinese say the ear
 is another person attached to us
 at birth, an overseerer, guide.
 A cluster of cells
 capable of decoding the nuances of sound,
 the rhythm, tone
 of things said. The ear, then,
 an inherent disciple of clarity.
 Hear me. Your body offers you
 this process of pouring words,
 emptying to make room
 for the whole of the self, to gather
 like a Tibetan monk's sacred bowl
 reaching out under mountain pines, to fill

—PAMELA J. PADGETT



ROUND TRIP

(Medical Mission: Karen Refugee Villages)

At thirty-three thousand feet,
cumulus blues to black around strangers
strapped nine abreast in the growl of night
unraveling from the throat of the jetstream.

Slim women cart colas, coffees, teas and nuts,
then offer the entrees—

 chicken, beef or sashimi—
nine thousand miles and counting
from the second-growth rain forest
where underfed refugees yielded
their bamboo huts for our camp mats
and charcoal in clay pots to brew our cocoa.

The forest people overlooked
our awkward copies of their
bath-and-laundry modesties
in the hot afternoon river.

And that picturesque scene
 for which we held no camera—
 a family boating to the village—
did not interpret itself at once.

Rather, a few nightfalls after,
while we pondered the gap between
our donated imports—

 antibiotics
 analgesics
 vitamins—
and symptoms spoken daily in local fevers,

the village midwife sketched in our missed photo of
“woman recumbent with family on river boat.”

Home-brew dulled the mother's pangs through
two days' hard labor to stillbirth
 as she hemorrhaged to death.

The husband wrapped wife and child in burlap
and poled his boat two days back upstream
 for the burial.

At thirty-three thousand feet,
turbines insist our need to tally sums.

We add rainstorms, eardrops,
 gospel readings and gecko calls
to voices compelling more than
 crickets and cicadas
battalioned to louden the dark,

and we know, at best,
 half of why,
and we see
 somewhat less of how;

 gone for the glimpse
 and homing, now,
where all godly maxims wait loaded,

 we wait cautious
 in the life and death
of answers opening fire.

—R. S. CARLSON