

Anne Hutchinson

Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643) emigrated to the Massachusetts Bay Colony from Lincolnshire, England in 1634, after John Cotton, her mentor and minister, was banned from the pulpit in England. She was highly intelligent and well versed in the Bible, as well as skilled in medicine and midwifery. She quickly became a leader in the community in

Boston, eventually moving from explaining Cotton's sermons to others to preaching her own. Her sermons challenged the authority of church and government over individuals and came under criticism, especially after some of her supporters refused to take up arms against the Pequot tribe with whom the colonists were in conflict. In 1637, she was tried for sedition and heresy, when civic leaders brought charges. Prosecutors were also judges, and the outcome was not in doubt: she was excommunicated and departed for Rhode Island, where dissident Roger Williams had founded his own colony. She died in New York in an Indian raid.

From The Examination of Mrs. Anne Hutchinson, at the Court of Newton, November 1637

GOVERNOR JOHN WINTHROP: Mrs. Hutchinson, you are called here as one of those that have troubled the peace of the commonwealth and the churches here; you are known to be a woman that hath had a great share in the promoting and divulging of those opinions that are the cause of this trouble, and to be nearly joined not only in affinity and affection with some of those the court had taken notice of and passed censure upon, but you have spoken divers^o things, as we have been informed, very prejudicial to the honor of the churches and ministers thereof, and you have maintained a meeting and an assembly in your house that hath been condemned by the general assembly as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex, and notwithstanding that was cried down^o you have continued the same. Therefore we have thought good to send for you to understand how things are, that if you be in an erroneous way we may reduce you^o that so you may become a profitable member here among us. Otherwise if you be obstinate in your course that then the court may take such course that you may trouble us no further. Therefore I would entreat you to express whether you do assent and hold in practice to those opinions and factions that have been handled in court already, that is to say, whether you do not justify Mr. Wheelwright's sermon and the petition.

MRS. ANNE HUTCHINSON: I am called here to answer before you but I hear no things laid to my charge.

WINTHROP: I have told you some already and more I can tell you.

HUTCHINSON: Name one, Sir.

divers: diverse, various

cried down: complained of

reduce you: lead you back

WINTHROP: Have I not named some already?
 HUTCHINSON: What have I said or done?
 WINTHROP: Why for your doings, this you did harbor^o and countenance^o those that are parties in this faction that you have heard of.
 HUTCHINSON: That's matter of conscience, Sir.
 WINTHROP: Your conscience you must keep, or it must be kept for you.
 HUTCHINSON: Must not I then entertain^o the saints^o because I must keep my conscience?
 WINTHROP: Say that one brother should commit felony or treason and come to his brother's house, if he knows him guilty and conceals him he is guilty of the same. It is his conscience to entertain him, but if his conscience comes into act in giving countenance and entertainment to him that hath broken the law he is guilty too. So if you do countenance those that are transgressors of the law you are in the same fact.
 HUTCHINSON: What law do they transgress?
 WINTHROP: The law of God and of the state.
 HUTCHINSON: In what particular?
 WINTHROP: Why in this among the rest, whereas the Lord doth say honor thy father and thy mother.
 HUTCHINSON: Aye, Sir, in the Lord.
 WINTHROP: This honor you have broke in giving countenance to them.
 HUTCHINSON: In entertaining those did I entertain them against any act (for there is the thing) or what God has appointed?
 WINTHROP: You knew that Mr. Wheelwright did preach this sermon and those that countenance him in this do break a law.
 HUTCHINSON: What law have I broken?
 WINTHROP: Why the fifth commandment.
 HUTCHINSON: I deny that for he [Mr. Wheelwright] saith in the Lord.^o
 WINTHROP: You have joined with them in the faction.
 HUTCHINSON: In what faction have I joined with them?
 WINTHROP: In presenting the petition.
 HUTCHINSON: Suppose I had set my hand to the petition. What then?
 WINTHROP: You saw that case tried before.
 HUTCHINSON: But I had not my hand to [not signed] the petition.
 WINTHROP: You have counseled them.
 HUTCHINSON: Wherein?
 WINTHROP: Why in entertaining them.

harbor: provide with shelter or lodging

countenance: support, encourage

entertain: show hospitality to

saints: members of the Puritan congregation

saith in the Lord: preaches with divine inspiration and/or in conformity with Christian doctrine

HUTCHINSON: What breach of law is that, Sir?
 WINTHROP: Why dishonoring the commonwealth.
 HUTCHINSON: But put the case, Sir, that I do fear the Lord and my parents. May not I entertain them that fear the Lord because my parents will not give me leave?
 WINTHROP: If they be the fathers of the commonwealth, and they of another religion, if you entertain them then you dishonour your parents and are justly punishable.
 HUTCHINSON: If I entertain them, as they have dishonored their parents I do.
 WINTHROP: No but you by countenancing them above others put honor upon them.
 HUTCHINSON: I may put honor upon them as the children of God and as they do honor the Lord.
 WINTHROP: We do not mean to discourse with those of your sex but only this: you so adhere unto them and do endeavor to set forward this faction and so you do dishonor us.
 HUTCHINSON: I do acknowledge no such thing. Neither do I think that I ever put any dishonor upon you.
 WINTHROP: Why do you keep such a meeting at your house as you do every week upon a set day?
 HUTCHINSON: It is lawful for me to do so, as it is all your practices, and can you find a warrant for yourself and condemn me for the same thing? The ground of my taking it up was, when I first came to this land because I did not go to such meetings as those were, it was presently reported that I did not allow of such meetings but held them unlawful and therefore in that regard they said I was proud and did despise all ordinances. Upon that a friend came unto me and told me of it and I to prevent such aspersions took it up, but it was in practice before I came. Therefore I was not the first.
 WINTHROP: For this, that you appeal to our practice you need no confutation.^o If your meeting had answered to the former it had not been offensive, but I will say that there was no meeting of women alone, but your meeting is of another sort for there are sometimes men among you.
 HUTCHINSON: There was never any man with us.
 WINTHROP: Well, admit there was no man at your meeting and that you was sorry for it, there is no warrant for your doings, and by what warrant do you continue such a course?
 HUTCHINSON: I conceive there lies a clear rule in Titus that the elder women should instruct the younger and then I must have a time wherein I must do it.

confutation: argument or evidence to disprove the charge