

HOLY TROUBLEMAKERS & UNCONVENTIONAL SAINTS



DANEEN AKERS



ANNE HUTCHINSON

ANNE HUTCHINSON AWAKES ON THE MORNING OF NOVEMBER 7, 1637. SUNSHINE streams through her bedroom window, alighting on her face. She feels butterflies in her stomach and a sense of dread rise up in her body: Today will be a long and difficult day. For a moment, she tries to calm herself and put aside thoughts about the day ahead. She lies still for a few minutes, enjoying the warm bed before she must get up, stoke the fire, and prepare breakfast for her 11 children.

Getting out of bed, she wraps herself in her shawl. Like she does every morning, she takes time to read a chapter in her well-worn Bible and pray. This morning she prays a little longer than usual. She needs all of the strength, patience, and levelheadedness that she can get because this is the day she must stand trial in her community after being accused of stirring up trouble. “I must not fear or be dismayed,” she says to herself. “He who is unseen is yet with me.”

Why does Anne have to stand trial today? She’s a woman who has been speaking



her mind about her religious **convictions**. And people have been listening to her. In his opening statement, Governor Winthrop, who acted as both the chief prosecutor and chief judge at Anne's trial, accused her of upsetting **gender roles**: "Mrs. Hutchinson, you are called here as one of those that have troubled the peace...you have spoken of diverse things, and you have maintained a meeting that hath been condemned as a thing not tolerable nor comely in the sight of God nor fitting for your sex...You have rather been a husband than a wife."

In the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637, Anne's **spiritual** leadership in the community was unacceptable to the men in charge. First, Anne was a woman, and the powerful men who ran the church and the colony did not believe that a woman could

teach anyone about God. But, most alarming to them was that Anne was popular. She'd started a weekly gathering in her home for women to talk, pray, and discuss that week's sermon. Anne, a gifted teacher and speaker, shared her thoughts with the women, and they found her convincing. Soon, they brought their husbands, too. Before long, Anne was preaching to 80 people a week in her home.

“
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”

Anne believed in what is called a gospel of grace; people are covered by the grace of God and do not have to prove their **salvation** by doing good deeds. This was not what many of the male **ministers** preached at the time. They preached that good works were a requirement of salvation. Additionally, Anne believed that God could reveal inspiration directly to a person's heart through an "indwelling of the Holy Spirit." And that Divine revelation had more authority in a person's life than what a minister might say God required. This was deeply unsettling to the religious men in charge of the colony. At that time, there was no **religious freedom** or separation of church and state. The men running the church and the men running

the colonial government worked together closely. They saw Anne's teachings as a threat to their authority.

Anne was not a stranger to religious persecution. Growing up in the late 1500s in a small town in England as the daughter of a minister and a schoolteacher, Anne had seen her father jailed several times for preaching things that were considered outside of the usual teachings of the church. Watching him had taught her not to be afraid to speak her mind about her religious convictions, even when the threat from the **religious establishment** might be truly frightening.

Her family believed in education, including educating girls. This wasn't typical at the time, but Anne read widely from her father's home library. She'd always had big questions about religion and **theology**. Anne was a **Puritan**, as were all of the colonists in the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Puritans were Protestant **Christians** in England who thought the Anglican Church in England had not done enough to "purify" itself of **Catholic** traditions and practices. The Anglican Church officials had enormous political power and felt threatened by the Puritans, so they often jailed Puritan ministers and leaders. Eventually, many Puritans moved to the new British colonies in what they called the "New World." (Of course, it wasn't really "new" as **Indigenous** people had been living in North America for thousands of years. It was only "new" to Europeans.)

Anne and her husband greatly admired the preaching of a Puritan minister named John Cotton, and when Cotton moved to the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1633 in order to escape persecution for his beliefs, they moved, along with their children, to join him. Anne's husband was a successful cloth merchant while Anne was a **midwife**, helping women deliver their babies. She also knew a great deal about plants and herbs that could relieve pain and treat illnesses, so she was readily accepted into her new community. As she helped more and more babies be safely born, women in particular trusted and respected her.

A journal from the governor at the time described Anne as a woman whose "ordinary

talk was about the things of the Kingdom of God. Her usual conversation was in the way of righteousness and kindness.” So when Anne started holding home Bible study meetings, she was already a respected woman in the community who was admired for her knowledge, dedication to God, and kindness.

At the trial that November day, Anne did not have a lawyer. She was 47 years old and pregnant. She faced 49 men, including many ministers and leaders of the colony who had the power to hand down binding judgments. She was the first female defendant of the Massachusetts court. Despite the odds against her, Anne held her own against the men accusing her of disturbing the peace and teaching others in a way that they felt was inappropriate for a woman. All arguments had to be based on the Bible, as the Bible was considered the faultless word of God.

Anne continually reflected on a verse in the **New Testament** book of Titus that says that “elder women should instruct the younger” (Titus 2:3-5) as a scriptural justification for her meetings. The men tried to argue that she had gone beyond what that part of the Bible allowed for a woman. But what upset the men the most was her firm belief that God had spoken directly to her through the Holy Spirit. They couldn’t tolerate the idea of God speaking directly to a woman, and they thought it was a dangerous example. So, after a two-day trial, Anne was banished from the colony as a **heretic**.

Anne had to go into exile along with dozens of her followers, meaning they had to leave their homes and not return. Anne must have been disappointed, but her convictions never wavered. She told the court, “You have no power over my body, neither can you do me any harm—for I am in the hands of the eternal Jehovah, my Savior.”

Anne, her husband, and her children, along with dozens of her followers who either chose or were forced into exile along with her, walked for six days through the snow to reach a boat to take them to the Rhode Island Colony, which was governed by Roger Williams, a man who believed in religious freedom.

Anne’s influence can be seen in the religious liberty that became enshrined into law



★ ANNE HUTCHINSON ★

in the Rhode Island colony. A few years later, Anne's husband died, and the Massachusetts Colony was threatening to take over the Rhode Island Colony. She knew the same men who had exiled her as a heretic still saw her as a threat and could harm her should she remain. She moved with her younger children and household further south to an area in modern-day New York City that was then controlled by the Dutch. Unfortunately, she moved directly into an area that was part of a two-year conflict between the Dutch and the local Siwanoy tribe. She was killed in a conflict in 1643.

Anne's influence remains strong today. Although she lost her trial, she helped set the stage for religious freedom. Many people watching her trial disagreed with how it was handled, and eventually the need to separate the power of the church and the laws of the state became a defining characteristic of the young U.S.

Many of Anne's descendants have been key leaders, including Presidents Franklin D. Roosevelt, George H. W. Bush, George W. Bush, and Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes. The Hutchinson River in southern New York is named after Anne, one of the only rivers named after a woman. And many schools, libraries, and other landmarks are named for her.

In 1987, the Massachusetts Governor pardoned Anne Hutchinson and revoked the 350-year-old banishment order that Governor Winthrop had issued. Anne had won her trial in the eyes of history.

Anne likely wouldn't be surprised by the long-term impact of her teaching. She always remained steadfast in her beliefs and conviction that God was leading her. "Now having seen Him which is invisible, I fear not what man can do to me," she said.

*How might you bravely stand up for
something you believe in?*

“
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