

“Figuratively speaking, Mrs. Eddy is already as tall as the Eiffel tower,” wrote American author Mark Twain. “She is adding surprisingly to her stature every day.” The newly built Eiffel Tower, the main symbol of the 1889 world’s fair in Paris, was by far the tallest building in the world at that time. It was hailed as a model of courageous innovation and achievement—a wondrous monument to man’s ability. Twain’s comparison was a tribute to Mary Baker Eddy’s towering accomplishments and her unique fame in the world.

The fact that Twain focused so much of his colorful remarks, critical analysis, and biting humor on Eddy, was a testament to her prominence. Like any popular comedian in any era, humorist Twain explored topics of universal relevance, including current events and the influence of famous people—the things that were on everyone’s mind. By 1910 at the height of her career, every move Eddy made was monitored and publicized by the news media. A mere wave of her hand seen through a window could make the newspaper front page headlines in Boston, where her organizational headquarters dominated the city skyline.

When Twain referred to Eddy as “the Boston Pope” it was not a compliment, but it reflected the wide recognition of Eddy’s strong leadership within the movement she launched, which Twain noticed was “spreading with a constantly accelerating swiftness.” She founded a world religion—a new expression of Christianity for a scientific age, which she called “Christian Science.” By the end of Eddy’s career there were more than eleven hundred established Christian Science congregations across the globe, with a new church being dedicated every few days. Twain believed that Eddy could very well “conquer the half of Christendom.”<sup>1</sup>

Mark Twain was not the only prominent American to recognize the influence of Mary Baker Eddy. One of America’s leading journalists, Arthur Brisbane, wrote of her after an interview, “Mrs. Eddy has accumulated power in this world. She possesses it, she exercises it, and she knows it.” To women’s rights leader

Susan B. Anthony, Eddy's towering accomplishments were a wondrous monument to woman's ability:

No man ever obtained so large a following in so short a time. Her churches are among the largest and most elegant in Boston, Chicago, and other cities.<sup>2</sup>

In addition to her churches, Eddy established her own publishing company to extend her reach through books, magazines, and literature. Sales of her book *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* were brisk and profitable. Eddy had a staff of professionals dedicated to managing her public relations and lobbying lawmakers, and a team of lecturers who took her message to public halls throughout the world. The international daily newspaper she founded, *The Christian Science Monitor*, quickly established itself as a trustworthy news source and a model for American journalism.

Eddy had achieved this prominence despite all normal expectations of her gender. From Eddy's platform of international fame and financial success, she announced that the time had come for woman to be a force in the public sphere:

In natural law and in religion the right of woman to fill the highest measure of enlightened understanding and the highest places in government, is inalienable, and these rights are ably vindicated by the noblest of both sexes. This is woman's hour, with all its sweet amenities and its moral and religious reforms.<sup>3</sup>

At the very start of Mary Baker Eddy's career in the early 1870s, when she was struggling to find an audience for her ideas, another woman had the attention of the American people. During those years, Victoria Claflin Woodhull was being hailed as "the most prominent woman of our time."<sup>4</sup>

Woodhull ran for president of the United States of America. It was the first time a woman had announced candidacy for the highest place in American government. To support her campaign for the 1872 election, Woodhull published her own week-

ly newspaper, authored books, and lectured throughout America, frequently filling the largest halls to overflowing.

But in the year 1875, Woodhull was most identified with the philosophy of social freedom, commonly called “free love.” Eddy must have had Woodhull in mind when she wrote:

It was about the year 1875 that *Science and Health* first crossed swords with free-love, and the latter fell *hors de combat*; but the whole warfare of sensuality was not then ended. *Science and Health*, the book that cast the first stone, is still at work, deep down in human consciousness, laying the axe at the root of error.<sup>5</sup>

Those who first read Eddy’s words would certainly have remembered Victoria Claflin Woodhull and her campaign. Between 1870 and 1876 when Eddy was laying the foundations of her Christian Science teachings and organization, Woodhull brought free love to the forefront of American thought by publicly declaring war on the institution of marriage and promoting social freedom as the more enlightened alternative. She announced to her audiences all over America:

I am conducting a campaign against marriage, with the view of revolutionizing the present theory and practice. I have strong convictions that, as a bond or promise to love another until death, it is a fraud upon human happiness; and that it has outlived its day of usefulness. These convictions make me earnest, and I enter the fight, meaning to do the institution all possible harm in the shortest space of time; meaning to use whatever weapons may fall in my way with which to stab it to the heart, so that its decaying carcass may be buried, and clear the way for a better institution.<sup>6</sup>

Woodhull waged her ideological war against marriage with a take-no-prisoners intensity. In an attempt to weaken the institution of marriage and demoralize its defenders, she triggered the most explosive sex scandal of the nineteenth century involving some of the most prominent public leaders in the country.

Eddy entered the war in defense of marriage. Within a short chapter called “Marriage” and throughout the 1875 first edition of her book *Science and Health*, she weighed in on marriage-related issues being discussed in the civic dialogue. Eddy’s disagreement with free-love philosophy turned into a public confrontation in 1876 when Woodhull came to lecture in Eddy’s home town of Lynn, Massachusetts.

Victoria Claflin Woodhull and Mary Baker Eddy were not the only public figures to frame their issues as a battle. In the dynamic American society dedicated to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness,” the discussion around the institution of marriage was often phrased in terms of warfare. The American Civil War was still a fresh memory at that time. It was a violent conflict over African slavery and also whether the union between the states could be dissolved. The nation faced the question of whether individual rights and liberty belonged equally to all or only to a portion of the population. Through the loss of about one million American lives, it was resolved that the union could not be broken and that slavery would no longer be tolerated in America.

During this same time period, the women’s rights movement was gaining momentum, questioning whether women were really free citizens. The nature of the marriage union was directly or indirectly the focus of much of the women’s rights debate, which from the very beginning often used emotionally charged terms associated with warfare and slavery. The free-love movement took those analogies to their logical conclusion by declaring marriage to be the worst form of slavery and setting a goal of abolishing the institution.

Meanwhile, Mary Baker Eddy was fighting for a higher platform of human rights through Christian Science, which she saw as a return to the spirit of the very earliest Christians who were healers. To Eddy the worst form of slavery was the belief that a mortal material body is the master of mankind. She described the war she was fighting:

It is a revolutionary struggle. We already have had two in this nation; and they began and ended in a contest for the true idea, for human liberty and rights. Now cometh a third struggle; for the freedom of health, holiness, and the attainment of heaven.<sup>7</sup>

But Eddy's revolution involved improving marriage, not abolishing it.

Looking back on the ideological conflict of this period, Eddy framed the free-love issue in biblical terms—as she did in writing on any topic. Just as a tree is known by its fruit, so would free love be known by its fruit. Eddy's efforts to lay “the axe at the root of error,” was the sort of biblical battle weapon expressed in this citation:

the axe is laid unto the root of the trees: therefore every tree which bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. (Matt. 3:10, Luke 3:9)

Eddy believed her teachings would eliminate free love from society, not through coercion or physical force, but by causing a change in human consciousness—a shift away from materialism, selfishness, and sensuality.

There was a very personal dimension to Mary Baker Eddy's war against free love as well. Biographer Robert Peel briefly mentioned that in the gossip around the town of Lynn, Massachusetts, Eddy was accused of practicing free love. In a footnote, Peel attributed this gossip in part to the public influence of Victoria Woodhull, whom he described as a “flamboyant exponent of free-love.” In the early to mid-1870s, Eddy was teaching small classes on her healing method, developing a theology, and writing manuscripts for her small circle of students. By 1876 her theology would be more defined and she would begin establishing it under the name Christian Science. But in this early phase of her career, the townspeople of Lynn, Massachusetts, were not sure how to think about her unconventional activities.<sup>8</sup>

On top of this, circumstantial evidence supported the distrustful suspicions of her neighbors. Eddy was a single woman

at that time, known to be charming and attractive, but also carrying the social stigma of separation and divorce. Some of her early students were young single men who frequently visited her at home. This alone was enough to suggest improper behavior. But in fact, there was much more going on within her close community of students to fuel the flames of the local gossip.

To really understand how and why Eddy crossed swords with free love in the mid-1870s, the story needs to start at the very beginning of the American experience. Mary Baker Eddy's revolution had deep roots in Protestant Christianity. Likewise, Victoria Claflin Woodhull's revolution was an outgrowth of the American free-love movement, which had begun several decades after the establishment of the American Republic—this “new nation, conceived in liberty, and dedicated to the proposition that all men are created equal” as United States President Abraham Lincoln famously described it. The undeveloped American continent offered European settlers the opportunity to create new forms of community to express their ideals. It was an unprecedented era of reform, change, and experimentation. Rethinking society also meant rethinking marriage. The Protestant Christian establishment and the counterculture free-love movement were both made possible by American freedom.

And so the battle for the soul of marriage begins.

AMERICA'S NINETEENTH-CENTURY  
**CULTURE WAR**



Horace Greeley

Elizabeth Cady Stanton

Lucy Stone

Isabella Hooker

Mary Livermore

Susan B. Anthony

Martin Luther

Emanuel Swedenborg

Mary Baker Eddy

Victoria Claflin Woodhull

John Calvin

Andrew Davis

Henry Beecher

Theodore Tilton

John Winthrop

John Humphrey Noyes

Harriet Beecher Stowe

Steven Andrews

Abigail & John Adams

Antoinette Blackwell

Mattie & Katie Fox

Karl Marx

THE BATTLE  
FOR THE SOUL OF  
MARRIAGE



## **Marriage and American Freedom**

*As dutiful descendants of Puritans, let us lift their standard higher, rejoicing, as Paul did, that we are free born.*

*Mary Baker Eddy*

*Free love means nothing more and nothing less, in kind, than free worship, freedom of the press, freedom of conscience, free trade, free thought.*

*Victoria Claflin Woodhull*



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## The Puritan Ideal of Marriage

“My ancestors came to America to worship God according to the dictates of conscience,” Mary Baker Eddy wrote in her monthly magazine, *The Christian Science Journal*. “The first settlers of the State, they planted the standard of pure and undefiled religion before God and man. So shall the children of Puritans speak at this day in the words of St. Paul, ‘I was free born,’ and seek a higher inheritance, even the liberty of the sons of God.”<sup>9</sup>

To say that Eddy valued her Puritan heritage would be an understatement. She praised her own religious education received from Puritan parents. She described the Puritan character of marriage as “its true basis.” She saw “puritanical honesty and virtue” in marriage as the “stability of this covenant.” In her scathing rebuke of Victoria Claflin Woodhull, Mary Baker Eddy clearly aligned herself with Puritan values on marriage when she wrote:

For one, we honor the Puritan faith and fidelity of our mothers and fathers in the relations of husband, wife, or parent, and say let well enough alone.<sup>10</sup>

In the Puritan faith, relations of husband and wife were modeled on their concept of marriage as partnership, companionship, even friendship. Their marriage ideal was central to their culture and it may have been one of their most influential and long-lasting cultural innovations. Eddy considered herself and her followers to be among the “dutiful descendants of Puritans.” Within her own religious denomination, Eddy honored and encouraged marriage as well as many other aspects of the Puritan culture upon which New England and the city of Boston were founded.<sup>11</sup>

## John Winthrop and the City on a Hill

On June 6, 1630, after two storm-tossed months at sea, the Winthrop Fleet of eleven sailing ships was only a few days away from its destination of Massachusetts Bay. America was in sight—the New World. It may have been at this moment, aboard the ship named *Arbella*, that John Winthrop wrote these now famous lines:

we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us.<sup>12</sup>

Originally designed for carrying freight, the ships on this voyage were carrying a cargo of 700 colonists, including men, women, and children of all ages, 240 cattle, 60 horses, 40 goats as well as other animals, one ton of baggage per family, plus a crew of 400 sailors. They all had left the Boston, England, area in early spring and were on their way to their new colony in New England where they would found the city of Boston, Massachusetts. This was the first large wave of the Great Migration, which brought about twenty thousand English emigrants to America between 1620 and 1640.<sup>13</sup>

Economic opportunity was a strong incentive for these early colonists to uproot themselves from their ancestral homes, perhaps never to return. In England, many of them had been essentially serfs, laboring their whole lives on someone else's land with no hope of ever improving their lives. Even John Winthrop, the landowner of Groton Manor and a college-educated lawyer, had felt a discouraging financial strain caused by recent economic hardships and a heavy tax burden imposed through dubious means by an unpopular king. But in New England, anyone could own land and keep the fruits of their own labor.<sup>14</sup>

The incentive may have been largely financial, but what inspired and motivated the Great Migration was religious zeal. Among this group were some of England's most fervent Christians, who had been recruited for the colonization project by the most reform-minded Christian clergy. Winthrop had had a

transforming religious experience during a sorrowful time where God filled him with “such power of faith” and “sense of his love” as made his “heart melt with joy.” After this deepening of his religious convictions, Winthrop, like many others in this group, was no longer content with the Church of England at that time, which seemed to many of these devout Christians to be hopelessly corrupted. The move to America offered the opportunity to improve their society, government, and church—to create a civilization that was more pure than that of England. In the metaphor of Jesus’ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14), they would be a city on a hill, the light of the world, shining brightly in dark times.<sup>15</sup>

As the *Arbella* neared its destination of Massachusetts Bay, John Winthrop outlined the spirit of the new nation he hoped to help establish in America in his now-famous work, “A Model of Christian Charity.” Winthrop had been elected governor of the colony even before the group left England because of his reputation for integrity. In his mission statement, he made high demands:

That which the most in their churches maintain as truth in profession only, we must bring into familiar and constant practice. . . . [W]e must love one another with a pure heart fervently.

He envisioned a society where every member—rich and poor, prominent and lowly, righteous and regenerate—would be knit together into one united body, charitable toward each other even in financial concerns. Winthrop concluded with a charge of responsibility similar to that which Moses had given to the Israelites as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. These New England settlers had been given a “special commission” by God and must be faithful in their Christianity, strictly observe God’s commandments, and avoid “the common corruptions of this evil world,” otherwise their new civilization would certainly experience a figurative shipwreck. Winthrop warned:

if our hearts shall turn away, so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced, and worship other Gods, our pleasure and profits, and serve them; it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it.

In Winthrop's role as governor, he worked with clergy and other community leaders to create a new form of government for the colony that supported their religious ideals. At times Winthrop was challenged by people who disagreed with his approach. Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were two such influential individuals in the earliest years of the new settlement of Boston. They each actively promoted their alternative views to the point that it threatened the unity of the colony. Winthrop handled their challenges by inviting them to go start their own colony in Rhode Island, and he banished them from Massachusetts.<sup>16</sup>

Even at the time, Winthrop was severely criticized for his banishments, especially of Anne Hutchinson, by those who expected the newly settled American colony to practice greater religious tolerance. A theological aspect of the Hutchinson conflict was her objection to New England leaders putting so much importance on law and right living—an approach she condescendingly called “legalism.” To Winthrop supporters, she and her followers were “opinionists.” Winthrop believed Hutchinson's views to be “dangerous errors” that would encourage sexual licentiousness. The leading Boston clergyman, Reverend John Cotton, who wrote the first legal codes for Massachusetts, agreed with Winthrop that without a focus on encouraging right behavior, “more dangerous evils and filthy uncleanness and other sins will follow than you do now imagine or conceive!”<sup>17</sup>

As governor, Winthrop confronted every type of issue in the colony, including all sorts of sexual activities that he believed “tended to the frustration of the ordinance of marriage.” His approach to elevating humanity was to set a high standard for behavior through law that recognized the covenant between

God and man. He expected people to “quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority” in order to preserve their own liberties.<sup>18</sup>

Winthrop recognized two types of liberty: natural and civil. “Natural liberty” meant the choice to do anything, good or evil. Natural liberty was “that great enemy of truth and peace, that wild beast, which all the ordinances of God are bent against, to restrain and subdue it.” To Winthrop, “civil liberty” meant the moral law. This was “a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest. This liberty you are to stand for . . . . It is of the same kind of liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free.”<sup>19</sup>

Winthrop was a prominent community leader for nearly twenty years, an important historian of early American settlements, and as early as a generation later, Winthrop was extolled as “the father of New England.” Two and a half centuries later, a statue of John Winthrop would be installed in the National Statuary Hall in the United States Capitol Building to represent the state of Massachusetts. He has sometimes been referred to as an American founding father. Today he is remembered as a Puritan.<sup>20</sup>

Among the millions of immigrants who eventually came to the region later known as the United States of America, the Puritans were a tiny minority, yet their influence on America has been disproportionately large because of their foundational role. They laid a legal and organizational framework for a new society, which influenced neighboring settlements as they developed. Alexis de Tocqueville, in his 1835 commentary *Democracy in America*, wrote:

The civilization of New England has been like a beacon lit upon the mountain tops which, after warming all in its vicinity, casts a glow over the distant horizon. . . . The founding of New England was a novel spectacle and everything attending it was unusual and original.<sup>21</sup>

Even in today’s culturally diverse America, including immigrants of every race, culture, and religion in the world, the Unit-

ed States Presidential Proclamation for the Thanksgiving Day national holiday typically includes mention of the 1620 arrival of the sailing ship *Mayflower* at Plymouth Rock near Boston. As part of their first history lessons, young school children in America draw pictures of early colonists wearing black hats with flat brims, sharing the harvest of their first crops with friendly indigenous people. United States politicians often refer to the Winthrop's vision of America as a city on a hill. These New England settlers who had such an influence on the shaping of America were also the cultural and religious influence for Mary Baker Eddy, including her views on marriage.

## **Martin Luther and the Protestant Christians**

Those whom historians have called Puritans would not have used that label to describe themselves. They called each other "the godly." The term "Puritan" was coined in the mid-1500s as an insult. It was a politically motivated smear against nonconforming Christians—those who called for change in the Church of England, which was a state-run church controlled by a monarchy. In a social context, Puritan was a derogatory term for a person who would stay at home on a Sunday to read the Bible instead of playing games or dancing. Historians use the term for a Christian movement between the early 1500s and 1700 that originated in England.<sup>22</sup>

The Puritans wanted to reform and revitalize Christianity—to purify it! They were part of a larger Protestant Christian movement that protested the long-standing control of religion and government throughout Europe by the Roman Catholic Church.

Martin Luther was one of the first and most famous Christians to reject Catholic teachings on salvation. All Christians agreed that humanity was corrupt. In the Bible, the first man and woman, Adam and Eve, disobeyed a commandment of God; they sinned. This "original sin" caused all humanity to be

cursed and banished from paradise, thus explaining the woeful human condition. But Protestants and Catholics disagreed on how sinners could be redeemed, or saved from destruction—the way of salvation.

Catholic practices in the early 1500s included church fundraisers where people could buy their salvation. In 1517 Martin Luther publicly disputed this theological approach in favor of seeing salvation as a gift of grace from God. To Luther, salvation could not be bought with money or earned through doing good works, and it did not require the intervention of priests. Accepting as authority the Bible—not priests—and having become “convinced by the testimony of Scripture” that his thinking conformed with biblically based divine law, Luther expressed the spirit of the Protestant movement when he told church authorities, “My conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot and will not recant anything, for to go against conscience is neither right nor safe. Here I stand; there is nothing else I can do. God help me. Amen.”

Likewise following the dictates of conscience, in 1526 William Tyndale translated the New Testament of the Bible into English and published it in defiance of church rules. Church officials eventually punished him for his defiance by having him burned at the stake—the standard punishment for religious heretics. Tyndale’s risk-taking is an example of how fervently the Protestant Christians wanted everyone to read the Bible for themselves in their own language, and to have a copy of the book.

To the Puritans, no possession was more valuable than the Bible, and no activity more important than reading it, studying it, discussing it, and striving to follow the teachings of it. They believed the Bible described timeless principles for living a godly life, which could be thoughtfully applied to their own lives in their own era. The Bible was the final authority in how to live a God-centered life. Biblical “law spiritually interpreted,” according to William Tyndale, came through grace and an absolutely sincere Christian love, which “written in thine heart, are the

keys which open all the scriptures unto thee.” In the same spirit of biblical interpretation, Mary Baker Eddy would write her book *Science and Health* and eventually call it “Key to the Scriptures.”<sup>23</sup>

The Puritans valued heartfelt transformation of personal character and moral conscience. They adhered to John Calvin’s Reformed branch of the Protestant movement, which took the rejection of Catholic theology a step further than Luther. To Calvin, Christian salvation required overcoming sin through repentance, reformation, and regeneration. But God’s gracious salvation was not chosen by the individual through free will. Salvation was initiated by the sovereign God, acting according to a divine plan established before the world began. Because it seemed that not everyone would be transformed before death, and thus saved from eternal punishment, it logically followed that only some were predestined for salvation—God’s elect. Presumably, the Puritans were God’s chosen people, and the human experience was a time to do preparation work for eternal life. This Calvinist doctrine of predestination was adopted by the Congregational and Presbyterian denominations of Reformed Protestant Christianity.

Puritans observed the Sunday Sabbath by reserving the whole day for church services and meetings, charity work, prayer, reading the Bible, and household discussions on Christian teachings. They were prolific writers on theology for a broad audience (writing in English, rather than Latin), tireless evangelizers, and outgoing teachers, spreading their views throughout Europe, and later in the American colonies.

Puritan views of church and Christianity were not welcome within the state-controlled Church of England, so the nonconforming Puritan religion developed as a subculture outside the church in homes and local communities. But all residents in England were required by law to attend their local Church of England. In their reform efforts, Puritans wanted simpler, more substantive religious worship. They wanted church edifices without elaborate ornamentation, services with less ritual and

more inspired sermons, and biblical scholars for clergy. As the religious movement grew, government church officials saw it as a political threat. Puritan efforts to resist papist influences under Catholic-leaning King Charles I were sometimes disruptive and even destructive. Those participating in the rebellion were removed from their church roles and faced criminal charges. The religious and political conflict in that period was the reason for the Great Migration of the 1630s—both why Puritans wanted to go to America, and why the king was glad to have so many of them leave England.<sup>24</sup>

Some early Boston-area settlers first lived as political refugees in the more culturally diverse and religiously tolerant country of Holland, a center of commerce and international trade. But one leader, William Bradford, cited “the great licentiousness of youth in that country and the manifold temptations of the place” as one of the motives for leaving Holland for Plymouth colony in America. Ultimately, these devout Christians preferred the risks of the long, dangerous journey across the Atlantic Ocean and a difficult life in the undeveloped American colonies of New England over exposing their children to what they saw as corrupting cultural influences.<sup>25</sup>

Puritan religious leaders were college-educated at a time when most people in English society were illiterate. Between all the graduates from Oxford and Cambridge colleges who immigrated to America, plus graduates from Harvard College—founded in Cambridge, Massachusetts, a few years after the first Puritans landed—first-generation New England America may have been the best-educated community in the world. This early focus on education would continue as the Boston area became an American center for higher education—the home of some of the most prestigious colleges and universities in the world.<sup>26</sup>

In New England, the Puritans created an egalitarian middle-class society where everyone could learn to read and write, home ownership was normal, and all laws applied equally to rich and poor, highborn and lowborn, master and servant. They organized themselves into small township communities of sub-

sistence farms and home-based businesses centered around their church and governed democratically at the local level. They intended to create a highly religious society (even a theocracy), but in the spirit of the Protestant reformation, they immediately established more separation between church and the government than there was in England and Europe.

As a side note, as important as their religion was to them, Puritans did enjoy leisure activities too. They played games and sports and had feasts to celebrate special occasions. They wore fashionable, bright-colored clothes – although they chose simple and modest clothing design. It was only on Sunday that they wore the black formal clothes with which they have since been associated. Puritan clergy wore black to distinguish themselves from Catholic priests who wore white.<sup>27</sup>

Boston clergyman John Cotton formally separated from the Church of England and established the Congregational Church to be a more pure church for God's elect. Attendance at Cotton's church was voluntary, and membership was selective. To become a member, an applicant needed to agree with church doctrines, show evidence of right living, and profess faith by publicly testifying about conversion through divine grace. The Congregational Church had similar Calvinist reform theology as the Presbyterian denomination established in England and Scotland, but following the "New England Way," as promoted by Reverend John Cotton, each Congregational Church was governed democratically by the local members. This was Mary Baker Eddy's church until she founded her own.<sup>28</sup>

## **Protestant Reformation of Marriage**

During the Protestant Reformation Era, Catholics and Protestants disagreed on many points of Christian theology. The definition of marriage and views on sexuality were among the most contentious of their disagreements. The doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, which had dominated Europe for a

thousand years, promoted abstinence as necessary for living a truly Christian life. The church clergy—priests, nuns, and monks—took a vow of celibacy and lived apart from ordinary society. To Catholic clergy, marriage was for common people—God’s provision for preventing sinful promiscuity among those too spiritually weak for celibacy.<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, Protestant leaders saw marriage as an important part of God’s design. They focused on the statement of God in the Adam and Eve story of creation in the Bible, “It is not good that the man should be alone” (Genesis 2:18). Not long after he wrote his widely published criticism of church policies, Catholic priest Martin Luther broke his vow of celibacy to marry a nun, and together they had six children. He set a new standard for marriage among clergy, which has since been followed by Protestant Christians.

Luther believed laws prohibiting priests from marrying were “of the devil.” Another Protestant leader, Heinrich Bullinger accused Catholic clergy of being dishonest in their celibacy. Bullinger thought singlehood was more sinful than married life. He wrote:

For if we judge the tree by the fruits, I pray you, what fruits of the single life may we recite? What filthiness, what bawdry, what adulteries, what fornications, what ravishings, what incests and heinous copulations may we rehearse? Who at this day liveth more unchaste or dishonest, than the rabble of priests and monks do?<sup>30</sup>

Another point of disagreement between Catholics and Protestants was the nature of the marriage commitment. Catholic doctrine defined marriage as an indissoluble bond. Marriage vows were an oath to God, which according to the biblical law of Moses could not be taken back, therefore divorce was not an option. A legal separation was possible after blatant adultery, but remarriage was forbidden. A marriage could be annulled, which left both husband and wife free to remarry because the first marriage was ruled invalid, but this was extremely rare.

The effect in common practice when a marriage became intolerable was abandonment, often followed by unmarried cohabitation that produced children outside wedlock. These informal marriages were problematic because neither society nor the law recognized the family relationships as legitimate.<sup>31</sup>

Protestants objected to the extent of church control over marriages in Europe. Catholic officials established a highly restrictive set of rules for marriage eligibility, but church officials could grant exceptions. Because marriage determined property ownership, family alliances, inheritance rights, and succession of government positions, the church held powerful authority and control over individual lives. It seemed sometimes that church officials decided on marriage eligibility for political reasons. The most famous case was England's King Henry VIII who wanted to remarry so he could have a legally recognized son to succeed him as king. When for apparently political reasons, the Catholic Church refused to annul his first marriage to his brother's widow, in 1534 King Henry VIII separated England from the Catholic Church. He established the Church of England and put more sympathetic church officials in charge of the decision on his marriage annulment.<sup>32</sup>

When the Puritans came to America they had the freedom to establish laws that reflected their religious beliefs, including their idea of marriage. In their first legal codes they established marriage as a civil matter, governed by a civil magistrate and civil courts. They wanted marriage to be governed by impartial law, not the whims of politically influenced clergy. Yet they still considered marriage a holy union. The government was separate from the church, but civil authorities, including those who oversaw marriage, were devout Christians. One Puritan wrote that marriage is a

high, holy and blessed order of life, ordained not of man, but of God, . . . wherein one man and one woman are coupled and knit together in one flesh and body in the fear and love of God, by the free, loving, hearty, and good consent of them both, to the intent that they two may dwell together as

one flesh and body, of one will and mind, in all honesty, virtue, and godliness, and spend their lives in equal partaking of all such things as God shall send them with thanksgiving.<sup>33</sup>

The Puritans also changed marriage law in America by allowing divorce in the earliest colonies. Divorce was not common or socially acceptable, but it was possible. The intention was to prevent the disintegration of the family from marital problems. This early legalization of divorce (it would be more than two hundred years before England legalized divorce) reflected the desire of the settlers of New England for all marriage-like relationships to be legally recognized unions.<sup>34</sup>

New England law supported marriage to the extent that husband and wife were required to live together, and if an Englishman immigrated to a Puritan colony without his wife, he could be sent back to England on the next ship. Or if a man relocated to another town without his wife or moved in with another woman, he might be fined by authorities and sent back to his wife.<sup>35</sup>

In another divergence from English law, the Puritans forbade wife beating. Puritans objected to the “rule of thumb” standard of law common in Europe, which allowed a husband to physically punish his wife for disobedience so long as the stick used was thinner than a man’s thumb and the beating did not draw blood. Puritan law, theology, and customs required husband and wife to live together peaceably. Benjamin Wadsworth put it this way in his book *Well Ordered Family*:

The Great God commands thee to love her. How vile then are those who don’t love their Wives. . . . If therefore the Husband is bitter against his wife, beating or striking of her (as some vile wretches do) or in any unkind carriage, ill language, hard words, morose, peevish, surly behavior; nay if he is not kind, loving, tender in his words and carriage to her; he then shames his profession of Christianity, he breaks the Divine Law, he dishonours God and himself too, by this

ill behavior. The same is true of the Wife too. . . . The indisputable Authority, the plain Command of the Great God, required Husbands and Wives, to have and manifest very great affection, love and kindness to one another.<sup>36</sup>

To the Puritans, marriage held a high place in the life of a Christian. There was no family member or relationship more important in a person's life than a husband or wife. In a book on godly household government, Thomas Gataker wrote:

There is no society more near, more entire, more needful, more kindly, more delightful, more comfortable, more constant, more continual, than the society of man and wife, the main root, source, and original of all other societies.<sup>37</sup>

A primary motive for marriage was companionship. A wife ideally was "a friend and comfort for society, but also a companion for pleasure." Husband and wife were to be "two sweet friends" who share whatever comes along in life. Richard Baxter described marriage this way:

It is a mercy to have a faithful friend that loveth you entirely, . . . to whom you may open your mind and communicate your affairs. . . . And it is a mercy to have so near a friend to be a helper to your soul and . . . to stir up in you the grace of God.<sup>38</sup>

With companionship being such an important part of marriage, Puritans married for love. But love was expected as a result of marriage, not necessarily as a prerequisite. Puritans tended to be rational, careful, and prayerful in selecting a marriage partner. According to Puritan scholar Edmund Morgan, they thought of love not as romantic madness, but something "warm and tender and gracious." Clergy encouraged the marriage of equals, using criteria that included similarity of age, wealth, social status, and religious faith. The selection of a marriage partner involved both the young adults themselves and their parents. Parents could not force their children into marriage, nor could a son or daughter marry without the permis-

sion of both sets of parents, who negotiated inheritance and gifts of property to the couple as part of the engagement contract.<sup>39</sup>

The love and companionship aspect of the Puritan ideal may seem unremarkable to us today because this standard is so widespread now, but before the Puritan era, this was not the expectation of marriage. For thousands of years in Western culture, marriage was primarily about forming family alliances, strategic financial interests, producing heirs, and getting work done, and it was sometimes socially acceptable to seek love outside the marriage relationship. The Puritans established a standard of strictly monogamous marriage as a partnership. But along with the new model came new expectations and challenges.<sup>40</sup>

Puritan preacher Thomas Hooker, suggesting marriage as being for this mortal experience only, was certain there is “no marrying in Heaven.” The secret to success in marriage, according to New England minister Thomas Thatcher, is to have low expectations:

Look not for Perfection in your relation. God reserves that for another state where marriage is not needed.<sup>41</sup>

Another area of disagreement between Catholics and Puritans during the Reformation Era related to sexual intercourse. Catholics defined chastity as virginity. Catholics saw sexuality—even within marriage—as an evil to be abstained from as much as possible. Sexual intercourse was for procreation only. Church officials designated an abundance of holy days throughout the year when married couples were prohibited from having sex. Puritans had no such holidays. They taught that married sex is chaste. They encouraged abstinence from sex before marriage, and “active, honest, and devoted love” during marriage.<sup>42</sup>

The youth in Puritan culture did not always follow the teachings on abstinence. There were brides in colonial New England who were already pregnant on their wedding day. But

abstinence was upheld as the cultural norm and as the best practice.

A custom in the northern American colonies, called “bundling,” allowed couples to occasionally share a bed for the night in the girl’s family home as part of their courtship before marriage, especially during engagement. This was done in the winter months when days were short, nights were cold, and a social visit might require a walk of ten miles or more. Home furnishings did not include any couches then, and bed sharing was common even between strangers.

In bundling, the courting couple was expected to stay clothed and sometimes a board was put between them or other physical restraints. They could enjoy the intimacy of pillow talk into the night, and it was a more practical choice than having the couple sit up all night burning firewood and candles, or sending the young man to walk through the bitterly cold night back to his own home. Visitors from Europe were surprised by the uniquely American custom of bundling. The practice showed a high level of confidence in youth to abide by the cultural expectation of abstinence.<sup>43</sup>

Sexual offenses were taken seriously in early New England. According to American law historian Lawrence Freidman, fornication (nonmarital sex) was the most commonly prosecuted crime in Massachusetts. Punishment typically included some element of public shaming, with a goal of reforming the offender and encouraging marriage. The punishment for “ante-nuptial defilement” (premarital sex), even during engagement, might include a fine and a whipping – a much less severe punishment than for extramarital sex, but still a strong incentive for keeping clothes on.<sup>44</sup>

The Puritan view of sexuality is summarized in this part of John Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost*:<sup>45</sup>

Hail wedded love, mysterious law, true source  
Of human offspring, sole propriety  
In Paradise of all things common else.

By thee adulterous lust was driven from men  
Among the bestial herds to range, by thee  
Founded in reason, loyal, just and pure,  
Relations dear, and all the charities  
Of father, son, and brother first were known.  
Far be it, that I should write thee sin or blame,  
Or think thee unbefitting holiest place,  
Perpetual fountain of domestic sweets,  
Whose bed is undefiled and chaste pronounced.

However much Puritans sometimes seemed to glorify marriage and the loving companionship it ideally represented, the most important relationship to the Puritan was one's relationship to God. All other loves, including the very best love marriage could offer, needed to be subordinate to a love for God. To support that sentiment, public display of affection was discouraged—it was considered "lewd and unseemly behavior"—and even private communications between husband and wife showed some level of restraint. Marriage, however wonderful it might be, must serve God. The purpose of marriage for a couple was, according to one Puritan minister, "Not for their own ends, but to be better fitted for God's service and bring them nearer to God."<sup>46</sup>

Thomas Hooker and other American Puritan clergy believed God graciously prepared the human heart for salvation and spiritual life through stages of regeneration; the first stage was a broken heart and loss of confidence in worldly ways. This was the activity of the divine, driving the individual away from sin, through reformation, and into union with Christ.<sup>47</sup>

## **The Godly Household**

The household was the most important institution in Puritan society. The success of church and state depended on the orderliness of the households, which were expected to uphold Puritan values of Godliness. The household was in many ways the

most important level of government. If an individual got in trouble with the law, the courts would often release the criminal to the head of that person's household for sentencing and punishment.<sup>48</sup>

The household was a school for proper behavior, work ethic, career skills, reading, and writing. The typical Puritan household was an extended family, including elderly members as well as children, plus boarders, live-in servants and apprentices. Parents commonly sent their teenage children to live in other households, contracting them out to work as servants in exchange for vocational training. Girls learned household management, and boys learned a professional trade through an apprenticeship. All children learned discipline and good manners. The household was an important educational institution—a home-based vocational school system used by people of all economic levels.<sup>49</sup>

The husband was responsible for performing the daily duties of leading the household in prayer and study of the Bible in the morning and evening—a practice that created a culture intimately familiar with the Bible. Puritans commonly read the entire Bible at least once a year and memorized many citations and sections. Husbands were required by law once a week (at the least) to teach their children and servants “in the grounds and principles of religion.” To convey the Calvinist doctrines that summarized their theology, they used a teaching method called catechism—a question and answer form of teaching where children read, memorized, repeated aloud, and then explained their understanding. The husband led the ministry and his wife assisted.<sup>50</sup>

In Puritan society, the husband was the head of the household. A wife was expected—even implored by ministers—to submit to her husband's authority. Husband and wife were unequal under the law, yet husband and wife, of all unequals in Puritan society, were “nearest to an equality, and in several respects they stand upon even ground,” as Puritan author Samuel Willard wrote. In practice, the wife was in charge of managing

the household, including the children and the domestic servants. Willard explained, “for tho’ the Husband be the Head of the Wife, yet she is an Head of the Family.”<sup>51</sup>

Puritan society was hierarchical, with men having all official authority, but this had less to do with superiority and more to do with division of responsibility. The husband was the head, and the wife was the heart—equally appreciated and indispensable parts of the body of the household.

Puritan views included the theological germ for both the equality of the sexes and racial equality. Seen spiritually, everyone had equal value, according to the religious teachings of Willard:

All the Members in a Family are therein equal, in that they have Souls equally capable of being saved or lost: And the Soul of a Slave is, in its nature, of as much worth, as the Soul of his Master.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, the prolific writers of the Puritan movement voiced the idea of the inherent equality of the sexes, as in this statement made by Robert Bolton in the mid-1600s:

Soules have no sexes. . . . And if thy wives soule were freed from the frailty of her sexe, it were as manly, as noble, as understanding, and every way as excellent as thine own.<sup>53</sup>

Because of a wife’s value as a marriage partner (the most important relationship in life) and as manager of the household (the most important level of government), a married woman held a high status in Puritan society. Women could not be forced into marriage, were protected from physical assault, had direct access to the courts for redress of grievances, and could divorce if necessary. Husbands were expected to treat wives as partners, not servants. Also, women were educated to a level that was unprecedented. According to historians Catherine Clinton and Barbara Epstein, in the early Puritan colonies women were treated better and had more rights than perhaps anywhere else in the world—certainly in Western civilization.<sup>54</sup>

The fact that Anne Hutchinson regularly led theological discussions with dozens of women and even some prominent men in her large home across the street from Governor John Winthrop shows a remarkable openness to female leadership in the earliest Puritan colonies. She developed such a large following that she influenced the outcome of elections. However, Hutchinson's eventual banishment from Massachusetts reinforced the traditional notion that beyond the household was the realm of men—even in this revolutionary new civilization of New England. Two centuries would pass before that tradition would be challenged. Yet Puritan theology recognized a great potential for women, exemplified by this statement by Samuel Torshell in his 1645 book *The Woman's Glory*:

Women are capable of the highest improvement and the greatest glory to which man may be advanced.<sup>55</sup>

Mary Baker Eddy saw no conflict between her heritage of “the Puritan standard of undefiled religion” and her leadership as a woman. Eddy wrote:

As dutiful descendants of Puritans, let us lift their standard higher, rejoicing, as Paul did, that we are *free born*.<sup>56</sup>

In Mary Baker Eddy's later life, she adapted the Puritan model of the household as a vocational and religious school to her work as a spiritual teacher. At the height of her career, Eddy had a large household full of her religious followers who worked in housekeeping, cooking, grounds keeping, or secretarial duties. Residents read the Bible daily and were given assignments for spiritual practice along with their household duties. Just as the Puritans brought their practice of religion into every activity they did, so Eddy's household workers were expected to bring their spiritual practice into their daily chores. Some of these workers received special teaching such that after three years of faithful service they received a Divinity degree. One significant difference between Eddy's early twentieth-

century household and the typical seventeenth-century Puritan household was that the household was headed by a woman.<sup>57</sup>

## **The Revolutionary Pursuit of Happiness**

English Puritans were not the only immigrants who came to America. Even on the earliest ships to New England some did not share the Puritan religious zeal or theology. Catholics, Anglicans, Quakers, and people of other religious affiliations also came to America, and there were early French, Dutch, Finnish, Swedish, and Spanish settlements. But the English Puritans' family oriented colonies had a much higher growth rate than the others, and by 1660 they were the largest European population in America. Then, for a century after the Great Migration, few additional immigrants made the voyage, allowing the Puritans to firmly establish their culture throughout New England before waves of other types of immigrants arrived. Their Calvinist theology became the standard against which all other variations of Christianity in America would be compared for at least the next two centuries.<sup>58</sup>

By one estimate, as many as 90 percent of American citizens at the time of the American Revolutionary War shared a general religious culture of Protestant Christianity. Even as an increasing number of immigrants come to America for different reasons and from different religious backgrounds, the Puritan establishment was effective in maintaining a strong cultural influence through its educational system, including Harvard College, which trained clergy and government leaders.<sup>59</sup>

Even as the population expanded westward and new states were established, Massachusetts was directly or indirectly the model for the laws of other American states as they were created. Monogamous legal marriage was codified in law and any other form of sexuality was a crime. For nearly two centuries after the recognized end of the Puritan Era—certainly through

the 1860s—Puritan-influenced Protestant Christianity dominated American culture and marriage law.<sup>60</sup>

Of all the founders of the American Republic, John and Abigail Adams had one of the most interesting and influential marriages. Harvard College graduate John Adams led the cause of independence from the British monarchy in 1776, helped lay the philosophical foundation for the federal government, and became the first vice president and second president of the United States of America. Throughout the revolutionary activities and his presidency, his wife, Abigail, was involved as his primary political advisor, and she maintained a remarkable level of financial independence and self-determination within their marriage. He was always faithful to his wife and called her his “best, dearest, worthiest, wisest friend in this world.” In so many ways, their partnership marriage exemplified the Puritan ideal, which essentially became the American ideal of marriage.<sup>61</sup>

The American Revolutionary War had many causes. Disagreement over the concept of marriage was one of them. During the 150 years between the arrival of the *Arbella* and the Declaration of Independence, when the American colonies had been mostly left alone to write their own laws and govern themselves, most states adopted marriage laws similar to Massachusetts, where marriage was administered by the government and divorce was allowed. In the early 1770s when Britain was trying to assert greater control over the colonial governments, they aggravated conflicts with the American colonists by imposing English marriage law.

Thomas Jefferson wrote in the Declaration of Independence about “repeated injuries and usurpations” of England’s King George III and his refusing “his Assent to Laws, the most wholesome and necessary for the public good.” One of the ways Jefferson was personally affected was the overturning of a Virginia divorce bill he had written. Britain would only allow the colonists to write laws in accord with English law, and because divorce was not allowed in England, British officials voided di-

voke laws enacted by American legislatures and nullified American divorces that had already been granted.<sup>62</sup>

After independence, the revolutionary generation had the opportunity to begin rethinking their whole legal system as part of the American experiment, summarized by this key sentence from the Declaration of Independence:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.

In Virginia, Thomas Jefferson immediately began changing the area of the law that would eventually become known as “family law.” In the spirit of revolution, he wanted laws to be “adapted to our republican form of government, and . . . corrected in all its parts, with a single eye to reason, and the good of those whose government it was framed.” The question was what type of laws would best promote the public good in the American Republic?<sup>63</sup>

One shared belief among founders was the importance of integrity, honesty, and virtue in maintaining the republic. In one famous statement, John Adams warned of the dangers of “human passions, unbridled by morality and religion.” He expressed the general sentiment of the founders:

Avarice, ambition, revenge, and licentiousness would break the strongest cords of our Constitution, as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other.<sup>64</sup>

Even as America became an increasingly diverse and dynamic society, Puritan-influenced leaders worked to defend their religious ideals and maintain a moral code for America. What Mary Baker Eddy called “the Puritan standard of undefiled religion” was still being preached and practiced in rural New England in her youth in the 1820s and 1830s. At the height

of her own prominence as a religious leader, Eddy spoke in glowing terms of the “grand old divines” of the Congregational Church of her childhood. Her admiration of these clergy extended to the figurative battles they fought for their faith:

Why I loved Christians of the old sort was I could not help loving them. Full of charity and good works, busy about their Master's business, they had no time or desire to defame their fellow-men. God seemed to shield the whole world in their hearts, and they were willing to renounce all for Him. When infidels assailed them, however, the courage of their convictions was seen. They were heroes in the strife; they armed quickly, aimed deadly, and spared no denunciation. Their convictions were honest, and they lived them; and the sermons their lives preached caused me to love their doctrines.

Eddy saw her own theology as an outgrowth of the religious principles taught to her as a “child of the Church, an eager lover and student of vital Christianity” by “those old-fashioned leaders of religion.” Like these heroes of her youth, Eddy would in turn spare no denunciation in defense of her doctrines, including her Puritan-influenced views on marriage.<sup>65</sup>