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Celibacy in the British North American Colonies,

c. 1600-1750

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by

Devon Elizabeth Van Dyne

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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Professor Michael Meranze, Chair

This dissertation studies singleness in the British North American colonies through the lens of religion. It investigates the fate of celibacy in the Protestant tradition after the Reformation, when critics of the Catholic Church dislodged the requirement of a chaste priesthood and dissolved the monasteries. In instigating these changes, reformers overturned a centuries-old hierarchy that ranked celibacy above marriage. For many Protestant groups, matrimony came to take on special importance; not merely an outlet for concupiscence or a way to increase the church, matrimony became an earthly reflection of the heavenly union between God and his creation, offering spiritually-edifying lessons about the nature of Christ's love. However, as this dissertation shows, even though celibacy lost its place as an ecclesiastical institution within Protestantism, it still remained a feature of Christian life that Protestants would grapple with for centuries. Despite reformers' dismissal of celibacy and elevation of marriage, many believers continued to insist that singleness presented a meaningful spiritual vocation.

Efforts to integrate celibacy back into the Protestant tradition were especially evident in British North America, which served as a refuge for a variety of religious groups from Europe and came to harbor a markedly diverse set of perspectives on the single life. Previous scholarship on early America has emphasized the importance of marriage and the family to the colonial enterprise, but this dissertation shows that colonists in fact carved out various alternatives to normative notions of marriage, family, and procreative sexuality. By studying the different religious groups that mingled on American shores—Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, Anglicans, Pietists, and others—I show how the colonies fostered a thriving conversation about the place of celibacy in the church. That conversation took new form during the Great Awakening, an event that witnessed both a growing interest in celibacy and a backlash against it. Though the reaction against the revivals ultimately helped push celibacy to the margins of American religion, the Awakening nevertheless created a particularly enduring model of singleness, one that opened up yet more space within Protestantism for the celibate practices the Reformation had tried to root out.

The dissertation of Devon Elizabeth Van Dyne is approved.

Christopher J. Looby

Craig Bryan Yirush

Michael Meranze, Committee Chair

University of California, Los Angeles

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VITA

2003	B.A., History Pacific Lutheran University Tacoma, Washington
2010	M.A., History University of California, Los Angeles
2009-2011	Teaching Assistant Department of History University of California, Los Angeles
2013	C.Phil., History University of California, Los Angeles
2013-2014	Lead Writing Tutor History Department Writing Center University of California, Los Angeles

Introduction

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him...And Adam said, This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh: she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man. Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh.

— Genesis 2:18-24

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: It is good for a man not to touch a woman.

— 1 Corinthians 7:1

In 1719, Puritan minister Cotton Mather penned *A Glorious Espousal*, an essay urging readers to take up the offer of marriage that Christ extended to all believing souls.¹ Christ, Mather assured them, had not just been speaking of the church in general when he proclaimed, “*I Marry my self unto you,*” but to “every *Individual Believer,*” proposing to all who would receive him, “*Come with me, my Spouse. Thou hast ravished my heart.*” The marriage that Christ forged with his followers was intended to serve as the “Grand Pattern” for the marriages they forged here on earth, a model for their most important human relationships. God had, after all, shown his people again and again the value of matrimony: instituting marriage between “our *First Parents*” in “*Paradise*”; having Jesus perform the “First of those *Miracles*” at a wedding in Cana; and—most significantly—using marriage as the very “Figure” to describe the relationship between himself and his church, the only metaphor capable of conveying “the marvellous *Relation, and Affection, which He bears unto His Chosen People.*” As Mather reiterated for his readers, “*Thy Maker is thy Husband.*”²

¹ All scripture quoted in this dissertation comes from the King James Version of the Bible.

² Cotton Mather, *A Glorious Espousal* (Boston: Kneeland, 1719), 5, 11, 2-3, 12.

Then, on the last page of his forty-six page essay praising marriage as God's great gift, Mather paused. Here, in his closing paragraphs, he glanced briefly at a section of scripture that complicated his message: the seventh chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians, where the apostle declared in his opening line, "It is good for a man not to touch a woman." Paul went on to warn the Corinthians that those who marry will have "trouble in the flesh," unable to devote themselves to a spiritual spouse because they were too wrapped up in their earthly ones.³ The competing demands of Paul's counsel in 1 Corinthians 7 and God's actions in Genesis 2 had long been a sticking point for Christians. For centuries, ecclesiastical authorities had found a balance by reserving celibacy for those who served the church (that they may, in Paul's words, "attend upon the Lord without distraction") and designating marriage for laypeople (as befitting Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone").⁴ For Mather, however, the balance was different. While he too stopped briefly at Paul's letter, he did so only to show that the apostle's concerns no longer applied. Dismissing the discrepancy between 1 Corinthians 7:1 and Genesis 2:18 in a single line, Mather declared with joy, "What a Rare Course is taken, that instead of cause to have it said, *It is Good that a Man should not touch a Marriage*, it shall still hold Good, *It is not Good for Man to be alone!*"⁵ God's message in Genesis had finally trumped the apostle's in 1 Corinthians.

The "Rare Course" that Mather and his Puritan predecessors had taken upended centuries of Christian thinking, but it was rare in another way as well: their dismissal of celibacy was only one view among many circulating in the colonies. Whether Pietists in Maryland, Quakers in Pennsylvania, or early Methodists in Georgia, other colonists insisted that celibacy remained a vital religious practice. Even in Mather's own Massachusetts, his position would not remain

³ 1 Corinthians 7:28

⁴ 1 Corinthians 7:35

⁵ C. Mather, *Glorious Espousal*, 46.

dominant much longer. Two decades later, those who came from the same Congregationalist background began to question his accounting. If “*Thy Maker is thy Husband,*” then no earthly spouse ought compete; a “glorious espousal” with Christ demanded not the embrace of earthly marriage, but its relinquishment.

How various religious groups in the colonies dealt with that fundamental tension underlying Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:1 is the subject of this dissertation. Mather was able to reconcile so quickly the disagreement between both verses because he was indebted to over a century of Puritan thinking on the subject, as were his readers, who—given his lack of further explanation—presumably would have had no trouble understanding how it was that Genesis came to take precedence over Corinthians. In this dissertation, I trace how exactly Mather and his coreligionists arrived at that point, as well as how other religious groups in the colonies reached very different conclusions. Of course, the debate that Mather distilled into two Bible verses was actually much larger. It reached beyond those two parts of scripture and beyond his concern about balancing earthly and heavenly devotion, extending to questions about ministerial authority, about cultivating selfhood in relation to God and in relation to others, about the role of the body in spiritual experience, about how to hasten Christ’s return, and about the thorny issue of being alone that Mather—and Genesis—advised against. Nonetheless, though the problem fanned out in different directions, the contradiction that Mather highlighted remains central to this dissertation, as various religious groups sought to resolve a longstanding Christian dilemma for which the Bible offered no clear counsel.

I argue that the process of working out this problem ultimately led colonists to reinvent within Protestantism itself the celibate practices that the Reformation had tried to root out. The different ways in which colonists reintegrated celibacy into their own spiritual frameworks gave

British North America a remarkable variety of perspectives on the single life, perspectives that were shaped by both old and new forces. On the one hand, when colonists grappled with the issue of celibacy, they drew on a much wider discourse that had been unfolding among Christians for centuries. As Peter Brown has shown, the idea that sexual renunciation offered greater religious experience stretches back even before the birth of Christ, with practices that Christians later retooled in countless ways until the Catholic Church institutionalized celibacy during the eleventh century.⁶ Europeans renewed the conversation with especial vigor during the Reformation, and it continued to resurface whenever European Christians clamored for religious revitalization. The colonial American conversation on celibacy was thus the latest iteration of an ongoing effort to work out the place of singleness, sex, and marriage in the church.

On the other hand, however, the particular ways in which colonists entered this discourse were the result of more recent and local factors. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries had spawned a wide array of religious groups whose distinctive theologies offered very different stances on celibacy. When members of those groups migrated to British North America, the colonial environment itself reshaped their thinking and practice. The lack of well-developed infrastructure, the extraordinary religious variety, the pockets of religious toleration, the regular infusion of people and ideas from Europe, and the heated revivalism of the Great Awakening all made the colonies fertile ground for experimenting with new forms of celibate practices and living arrangements. Though many of those opportunities would close down after the Great Awakening, colonists had for over a century carved out alternative notions of marriage, family, and procreative sexuality.

⁶ Peter Brown, *The Body and Society: Men, Women and Sexual Renunciation in Early Christianity* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988).

Any investigation into the history of celibacy must grapple with the fact that the meaning and usage of the word itself is unstable. “Celibacy” comes from the Latin root *caelebs*, which simply means unmarried or single, and the Oxford English Dictionary still defines it as the “the state of living unmarried.”⁷ In usage, however, the word “celibacy” has come to take on two connotations that exceed its definition. First, celibacy can connote a particular type of being single, one pursued deliberately out of religious devotion. Second, celibacy can mean a particular kind of chastity, not temporary or situational, but one that is, again, pursued deliberately in fulfillment of a lifelong religious commitment. In the Christian tradition, these two usages have not always aligned. Some people have pursued celibacy within marriage, using it to mean sexual renunciation rather than singleness. Other Christians have been celibate in the sense of being unmarried, but not in the sense of being chaste. And within both of those categories, people have pursued celibacy to widely divergent degrees of duration, voluntariness, and zeal.

In this dissertation, the word “celibacy” will be used to capture all of those variations. Just as it does not have one set meaning in practice, it does not have one set meaning in the pages that follow. Colonists renounced sex both inside and outside of marriage and both temporarily and permanently. They also remained unmarried for a range of reasons, in response to factors both within and beyond their control. I therefore stray from the strict dictionary definition of celibacy as meaning simply “unmarried” and endow it with its religious connotation and various usages, seeking to encompass the manifold ways in which Christians have deployed it. I am not interested in every variety of singleness in the colonies, but only in those that intersected with faith. This is not to say that every unmarried or chaste colonist in this study deliberately sought

⁷ “celibacy, n.” *OED Online*. September 2014. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/29455?redirectedFrom=celibacy>.

out celibacy as a religious vocation, but it is to say that, even for those who did not, I am interested in the ways in which their experiences were read by themselves and others through the lens of religion. For example, single Puritan males who were hauled before the town selectmen for the crime of living alone were likely not pursuing a religiously-inspired singleness, but their singleness was assessed in a way that reflected the place of singleness in Puritan theology. Similarly, the bulk of unmarried Catholic men in colonial Maryland were also likely not single out of religious commitment, but their religious commitment certainly affected how they and their neighbors understood their single state. The ways in which I use words like “celibacy,” “singleness,” and “the single life” (a common term from the time period) throughout this dissertation will therefore shift depending on the particular context—sometimes meaning sexual renunciation, sometimes not; sometimes meaning lack of marriage, sometimes not; sometimes meaning a deliberately-pursued, devout singleness, sometimes not—but the discussion will always be framed in the register of religion.

It should be noted that the particular history this dissertation tells is primarily, though not exclusively, a northern and a white one, the populations among whom the vast majority of the recorded conversation about celibacy took place. It should also be noted that, though I have tried to tell this story in terms of both the theologies of celibacy and the experiences of celibate people, the available sources for different religious groups did not always allow for an even-handed balance. And though I have cast my net wide, not all of the colonies’ religious diversity is represented in these pages. My decisions about which groups to focus on stemmed from which groups were most active in the discourse, whether they viewed the single life with praise or reproach.

It is, in fact, the sheer variety of religious options that make British North America an especially useful site for studying the evolution of ideas about celibacy. A number of different religious groups collided on American shores, giving the colonies an unusually diverse set of perspectives on singleness. Many of those groups came to the colonies for the express purpose of practicing their faith more freely than they could in Europe. Part and parcel of that mission was the opportunity to push their ideas about celibacy further, whether they embraced it as Quakers did or renounced it like Puritans. More radical religious groups, particularly the Pietists who arrived in the late seventeenth century, were attracted to the fledgling colonial environment for the very reason that it offered the chance to launch projects in monastic living. With denominational boundaries growing increasingly rigid in Europe, the colonies became an important site for testing out new forms of celibate vocations and communities. Even for groups with less radical aims, like Catholics and Anglicans, the exigencies of the colonial environment required them to grapple with celibacy differently from their coreligionists across the Atlantic, in turn revising longstanding practices both inside and outside of Protestantism.

Though this is a history about the American colonies, it is one that necessarily begins at the Reformation, when conversations about the place and purpose of celibacy in the Christian tradition exploded. In 1517, when Martin Luther nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to a Wittenberg church door, he set off a sequence of events that would forever change the way Protestants thought about sexual renunciation and about unmarried people, reversing a centuries-old hierarchy that ranked celibacy above marriage. When Protestants dropped celibacy as a requirement of the priesthood and dissolved the monastery, they eliminated any institutional support for the practice of lifelong celibacy within their own tradition. This transformation was both material and conceptual. It was not just that those who wanted to pursue religious vocations

no longer had a place to do so, but that celibacy no longer served a vital function. In a spiritual framework that dismissed transubstantiation, championed the “priesthood of all believers,” and stripped sexual purity of any intrinsic spiritual merit, there was little need for a class of devout celibates. Sexual purity, for instance, was no longer necessary to handle the host if the host was no longer the actual body and blood of Christ, but only a sign of the body and blood. Nor was sexual purity necessary to help priests intercede to God if all believers were deemed equally capable of intercession. And if lifelong virginity no longer conferred spiritual privilege or proffered closer intimacy with the divine, then the cloistered life no longer presented a worthwhile religious vocation.

Reformers who overturned these longstanding Catholic practices believed that they were hearkening back to a more pure—what they called “primitive”—form of Christianity, before centuries of Catholic corruption and papal mismanagement led the church astray. The problem, however, was that the elements of primitive Christianity were not always clear. Protestants divided amongst themselves over where the sources of authority on the primitive church lay. Their divisions were especially apparent on the issues of celibacy and marriage. As the discrepancy between Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 7:1 reveals, the Bible itself offered contradictory advice, requiring Protestants to employ different methods to determine the place of marital status. Some turned to the patristic practices of the early church, leading them to praise celibacy as the *vita angelica*, the life of the angels. Others scoured different parts of scripture, which took them in the opposite direction, favoring marriage over singleness. Still others dismissed scripture entirely on this particular matter, relying instead on direct revelation from God to lead them to marriage or celibacy.

This dissertation maps out these different responses, showing how the Reformation—despite abolishing celibate religious orders—opened up a host of other issues regarding the place of sexual renunciation and singleness in the church, issues that Protestants would wrestle with for centuries to come. Chapter one lays out the Reformation critique of celibacy and follows it from German-speaking areas of the Continent across the Channel to England, where the effort to dislodge clerical celibacy met with more resistance. Though the Church of England ultimately dissolved the monasteries, dismissed the requirement of a chaste priesthood, and elevated the place of marriage, many Anglicans continued to hang onto the longstanding Christian notion that celibacy was the higher calling—the *vita angelica*—where believers could devote themselves fully to God like the angels in heaven. Anglican ambivalence on the issue was written into the very doctrine that eventually permitted clergy to marry: Article 32 of the Thirty-Nine Articles, which presented marriage and singleness as equally viable options.

Puritan dissenters, however, developed very different ideas about celibacy from their Anglican counterparts. The root of their disagreement stemmed from competing notions of primitive Christianity. Because Anglicans—like Catholics—still considered patristic precedent a legitimate source of authority on the original church, they continued to venerate celibacy. Puritans, on the other hand, put less stock in patristic tradition, believing that the ultimate source of authority was scripture. They read Genesis 2 as evidence that God’s overall design for humankind was marriage, and therefore saw celibacy as a deviation from the divine plan. That left them, however, with the dilemma of how to interpret Paul’s endorsement of the single life in 1 Corinthians 7. By reading Paul’s counsel as conciliatory advice for a fallen world, they sought to redress his concerns regarding marriage by forging more godly marital unions, which they

hoped would hasten their recovery of the primitive church. In the Puritan vision of reform, devout lifelong singleness no longer had any place.

Chapter two follows the Puritan story across the Atlantic, where New England became a testing ground for Puritan ideas about celibacy and marriage. Because Puritans sought to recreate the apostolic church on American shores, marriage became a central part of the colonial project at the same time that singleness became especially threatening to it. In a fledgling colonial environment, the family was to serve as both the key site shoring up social order and the place where Puritans practiced the type of affection and obedience owed to God. Husbands and wives learned about the love of Christ by loving each other, a form of spiritual edification their single counterparts lacked. As a result, the Protestant critique of celibacy became a different sort of problem in New England, no longer limited to those who took priestly vows or joined celibate religious orders, but one that extended to any Puritan who lived outside of marriage. All strayed from God's proclamation in Genesis 2:18, "It is not good that the man should be alone," lacking access to critical modes of religious knowledge and becoming more vulnerable to sin. New Englanders crafted laws, sermons, and conduct literature designed to help single people avoid the problems of being alone, embedding them in family units until God called them to marriages of their own.

Puritans may have created little room for celibacy in the colonies, but that was not the case for other religious groups. Chapter three shows how Catholics and Quakers introduced celibacy into the colonial religious landscape and reclaimed the contributions of unmarried people. Though both groups stood on opposite ends of the Reformation divide, they valued a celibate ministry and praised the sacred space of the cloister, seeking to offer both practices to all believers. In doing so, Quakers opened up opportunities for celibacy within Protestantism while

Catholics decoupled celibacy from institutional control—moves that innovated upon longstanding Christian practice by creating models of celibacy that could function without ecclesiastical support. The results of their efforts, however, were highly gendered. Among Quakers, pursuing a ministerial career made celibacy much more important for women than for men. Among Catholics, opportunities for men to carve out lives of devout singleness expanded, while opportunities for women to do the same all but closed down.

Chapter four discusses the effects of Europe’s “quasi-monastic revival” on the American colonies.⁸ I trace how the renewed interest in sexual purity in late seventeenth-century Europe spread across the Atlantic and added yet more diversity to the colonial scene. In the aftermath of the English civil wars and the Thirty Years’ War, European religious reformers championed celibacy as a way to revitalize the faith and morals of a weary people. Around the turn of the century, Anglican missionaries and Pietist immigrants brought these new ideas and practices to the colonies, transporting radical theological texts, sending out celibate ministers, and planting the first cloisters on British American soil, offering colonists the opportunity to pursue celibate vocations. The transatlantic networks that Anglicans and Pietists forged and the monastic living arrangements they modeled introduced a much more radical strain to the colonial discourse, preparing the way for revivalism.

Chapter five describes a watershed moment in the history of American celibacy, when over a century of discourse became newly problematized during the Great Awakening. While previous conversations had been confined to the theological writings of religious leaders and to a small number of adherents on the radical fringe, the revivals that erupted during the middle third

⁸ “Quasi-monastic revival” is Sarah Apetrei’s term, from “‘The Life of Angels’: Celibacy and Asceticism in Anglicanism, 1660-c.1700,” *Reformation and Renaissance Review* 13, no. 2 (2011): 251. I use it in this dissertation to refer to the renewed interest in celibacy that emerged in both England and continental Europe in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

of the eighteenth century brought celibacy to the forefront of debate. Anglican missionary John Wesley, for example, encouraged his followers to remain single, separatist Sarah Prentice advocated sexual renunciation, “free love” Baptists exited their civil marriages to embrace chaste “spiritual” ones, and Pietist groups attracted record numbers of converts to their monastic communities. Even people who did not resort to the more extreme measure of absenting themselves from marriage and sex still worried about how their religious rebirth affected their most intimate relationships. The Great Awakening thus pitched in especially sharp relief the issues that had long marked conversations about celibacy, ushering them into the spotlight. In turn, the backlash against the revivals’ enthusiasm pushed celibacy further to the margins, ultimately shrouding in suspicion anyone who would make claims on the religiously-inspired single life.

By studying the various ways in which celibacy emerged among different religious groups and in different moments during the colonial period, I hope to shed light on our understanding of singleness in early American history. Scholarship on people who lived outside of normative marriage and family units is a small but growing field, one that is currently more developed in disciplines other than history and in time periods and places other than the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonies.⁹ Two seminal works have begun the task of bringing single people into the narrative of early America: John Gilbert McCurdy’s *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* and Karin A. Wulf’s *Not All Wives:*

⁹ To date, most of the studies we have on singleness are by scholars who are literary critics, or who focus on the nineteenth or twentieth centuries, or who study England. A brief list of book-length examples includes: Judith Bennett and Amy M. Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250-1800* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1999); Christine Jacobson Carter, *Southern Single Blessedness: Unmarried Women in the Urban South, 1800-1865* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006); Lee Virginia Chambers-Schiller, *Liberty, A Better Husband: Single Women in America, the Generations of 1780-1840* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1984); Howard P. Chudacoff, *The Age of the Bachelor: Creating an American Subculture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850-1920* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985).

Women in Colonial Philadelphia.¹⁰ Like this study, both McCurdy and Wulf show that early America—contrary to the standard narrative—offered space for people to live outside of marriage. Unlike my own conclusions, however, they locate those opportunities well into the eighteenth century rather than during the earlier colonial period.

For both scholars, the key moment in the history of singleness is the American Revolution. McCurdy finds that, in the seventeenth century, unmarried men who lacked households of their own were classed in the same category as other dependents, in company with children, servants, and women.¹¹ After the Revolution, however, bachelors successfully asserted their rights to the full benefits of male citizenship on the grounds that they paid taxes and served in the military. It was thus not until the Early Republic that singleness became a viable option for most men. The Revolution played an equally important role for Wulf's single women in the Delaware Valley, but to opposite effect. Wulf finds that colonial Philadelphia in the first half of the eighteenth century harbored a thriving community of unmarried women: some twenty percent of the city's households in the late colonial period were headed by women.¹² Philadelphia's Quaker heritage and the economic opportunities it afforded as a busy urban center made it more welcoming towards unmarried women than other places in the colonies.¹³ On the

¹⁰ John Gilbert McCurdy, *Citizen Bachelors: Manhood and the Creation of the United States* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Karin A. Wulf, *Not All Wives: Women of Colonial Philadelphia* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2000). Unmarried people have of course entered other early American historians' work, but they have most often done so on the periphery of larger stories or as examples of transgressive manhood or womanhood. See, for example, John Demos, *Entertaining Satan: Witchcraft and the Culture of Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982); Carol F. Karlsen, *The Devil in the Shape of a Woman: Witchcraft in Colonial New England* (New York: Norton, 1987); Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery—American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York: Norton, 1975); Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England, 1650-1750* (New York: Knopf, 1980).

¹¹ Daniel Vickers and Anne S. Lombard also discuss the importance of colonial men demonstrating their status through marriage and household management. Vickers, *Farmers and Fishermen: Two Centuries of Work in Essex County, Massachusetts, 1630-1850* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 1994); Lombard, *Making Manhood: Growing Up Male in Colonial New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003).

¹² Wulf, 15.

¹³ Christine Stansell, studying women in nineteenth-century New York City, has reached similar conclusions about the degree to which unmarried women were enmeshed in and vital to their local communities. Stansell, *City of*

eve of revolution, however, the city's Quaker influence declined and its political culture transformed. Masculinity became more firmly associated with independence while femininity was linked to dependence, subsuming unmarried women into the same category as wives even if they were self-supporting property owners and taxpayers.

This study enables us to see a different side of singleness than the key works that have dominated the field. By approaching singleness through the framework of celibacy, I reposition Wulf's and McCurdy's narrative and timeline. While both authors consider religion, it is only one part of their projects.¹⁴ They look at singleness through a wide-angle lens, showing how economic, legal, political, and social factors all shaped the lived experiences of unmarried people and the ideology surrounding singleness. While that broader view opens up insights in ways that a study centered on religion cannot, it also obscures the fact that the conversations Wulf's Philadelphians and McCurdy's bachelors were having were part of a much older discourse with origins that crossed over into religion. The Reformation had fundamentally changed the way Christians thought about people who lived outside of marriage. While the sixteenth-century Protestant critique was initially lodged against avowed celibates, it soon spread further, mapping complaints against an unwed Catholic clergy onto anyone who remained unmarried.

Understanding how religion informed the initial terms of the conversation helps us better understand the political, economic, and social dimensions that Wulf and McCurdy highlight, as the men and women in their studies were enmeshed in worlds where the religious and the secular were often impossible to tease apart. Focusing on religion also helps us see the broader temporal

Women: Sex and Class in New York, 1789-1860 (New York: Knopf, 1986). Clare A. Lyons's work suggests another reason why unmarried women may have been particularly welcome in colonial Philadelphia. She argues that the city fostered a wide range of alternative modes of sexuality, desire, and relationship. Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble: An Intimate History of Gender and Power in the Age of Revolution, Philadelphia, 1730-1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006).

¹⁴ Wulf especially engages with religion, devoting a chapter to discussing Quaker influences on single women. See pp. 53-84.

and geographical context of Wulf's and McCurdy's studies. Quaker ideas about single womanhood, for instance, did not come solely from within Quakerism itself, but from the ways in which Quakers defined themselves against other religious groups who were talking about the same issues: Biblical interpretation, primitive Christianity, ministerial authority, and the balance between earthly and heavenly affections. Looking at female Philadelphians' singleness through the more specific lens of religion links their stories back to the larger Atlantic world and to a wider Christian discourse.

Though Wulf and McCurdy offer the only book-length studies, Erik Seeman's work on radical religion discusses the spiritual dimensions of singleness. His article on celibacy in New England offers one of the few investigations of the religiously-inspired single life in the early colonial period.¹⁵ Seeman argues that seventeenth-century New Englanders viewed celibacy and single people in a much more negative light than their counterparts across the Atlantic. He attributes this difference to three main factors. First, because New Englanders grounded their society so firmly in the patriarchal family, unattached adults seemed to be attacking the most important institution undergirding colonial order. Second, New Englanders feared that, because single people could not restrain their sexual desires, they would act on them outside of marriage, again threatening the stability of the patriarchal family. And third, because only a very small proportion of New Englanders never married, single people appeared more unusual and unconventional than they did in England, where nearly fifteen to twenty percent of some birth cohorts remained single.¹⁶ When more people turned to radical forms of singleness during the eighteenth-century Awakening, they made celibacy seem all the more dangerous. By the time the Shakers arrived in the 1770s, New Englanders were poised to respond with both verbal

¹⁵ Erik R. Seeman, "'It is Better to Marry than to Burn': Anglo-American Attitudes Toward Celibacy, 1600-1800," *Journal of Family History* 24 no. 4 (1999): 397-419.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 398.

opposition and physical violence. They pushed the Shakers, and in turn the practice of celibacy, to the very margins of American society, until by the nineteenth century, singleness no longer riled an explosive response because it no longer posed a threat.

While I agree with Seeman's overall argument that New Englanders were particularly antagonistic to celibacy and that the backlash against eighteenth-century radicalism further marginalized single people, I depart from his characterization of the seventeenth century. The reasons that Seeman cites for New Englanders' hostility to singleness are functional rather than theological in nature: because the family undergirded colonial society, those who stood outside of it seemed all the more threatening, and because the vast majority of New Englanders married, single people appeared rare outliers. While Seeman does look at how the Reformation diminished the place of celibacy in the Protestant tradition, he does not take into account the variety of ways in which Protestants responded, nor the reasons why Puritans reacted the way they did. England had less hostility towards singleness in part because Anglicans continued to venerate patristic traditions even after dismantling clerical celibacy. In New England, however, antagonism to celibacy was sewn into Puritanism itself; it did not emerge as a consequence of Puritans' emphasis on the family, though it was certainly reinforced by it. Instead, Puritans' opposition to celibacy and to single people stemmed from their theology: single people violated God's command in Genesis 2:18, while Edenic marriages were vital in recovering the primitive church.

As Seeman's article indicates, historians have appreciated the role that the Great Awakening played in shaping attitudes towards celibacy, but here too this dissertation seeks to expand the historiography. Scholars looking specifically at singleness during the revivals have focused on two main groups: early Methodists and New England separatists. Within the large

body of work on Anglo-American Methodism, both Henry Abelove and Anna Lawrence have studied in depth John Wesley's personal interest in celibacy and the ways in which his coreligionists responded to his views.¹⁷ Abelove argues that, though Wesley encouraged his followers to practice celibacy, the vast majority of them did not. Instead, Methodists reworked Wesley's organizational structures—such as sex-segregated seating at meetings, separate bands for men and women, and an unmarried ministry—so that they were no longer arranged along same-sex lines. Lawrence revises Abelove's conclusions by arguing that many Methodists did in fact embrace Wesley's call for celibacy, especially women. Female Methodists found alternatives to marriage by serving as lay exhorters and meeting leaders, and some used their newfound faith as justification for exiting troubled marriages or resisting undesirable suitors. Male Methodists too drew on celibacy, though largely because of the pragmatic functions it served for itinerant preachers.

I depart from Lawrence and Abelove in the ways they approach Wesleyan celibacy. Both ground Wesley's ideas firmly within the logic of Methodism itself, but very little of Wesley's thinking on celibacy was wholly his own. Though they both gesture to the ways in which Wesley was influenced by celibate Pietists and to the fact that he was not the only voice championing sexual renunciation, they still analyze his thinking in the more narrow context of mid eighteenth-century Methodism. Doing so leads them to describe his praise of the single life as "highly unusual," as a curious feature that set early Methodists apart from all but the most

¹⁷ Henry Abelove, "The Sexual Politics of Early Wesleyan Methodism," in *Disciplines of Faith: Studies in Religion, Politics, and Patriarchy*, eds. Jim Obelkevich, Lyndal Roper, and Raphael Samuel (New York: Routledge, 1987), 86-99; Henry Abelove, *The Evangelist of Desire: John Wesley and the Methodists* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990); Anna M. Lawrence, *One Family Under God: Love, Belonging, and Authority in Early Transatlantic Methodism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Anna M. Lawrence, "'I thought I felt a sinful desire': The Question of Celibacy for Eighteenth-Century Methodists," *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* 85, no. 2-3 (Summer-Autumn 2003): 176-93.

radical groups.¹⁸ This study, by contrast, argues that Wesley's ideas were not a one-off but rather the natural extension of a much longer conversation, one that had played itself out even within High Church Anglicanism. Wesley's turn towards celibacy emerged from the late seventeenth-century quasi-monastic revival that had taken root inside the official church, influenced by Continental mysticism and longstanding calls for primitive Christianity.

Placing Wesleyan celibacy in its wider context allows us to see the larger flowering of interest in celibacy during the Great Awakening. The ideas Wesley developed not only aligned with more radical believers, but also with his fellow Anglican missionaries who helped fuel American revivalism. Most notable was George Whitefield, who worried about the compatibility of marriage and religious devotion and who helped spread ideas about celibacy far beyond early Methodists. In 1742, when Whitefield issued the same call to "Espousals with *Jesus Christ*" that Cotton Mather had issued twenty years earlier, many colonists responded very differently, no longer shoring up their earthly marriages, but distancing themselves from them.¹⁹ The various ways in which colonists responded to Whitefield's plea make sense only if we understand how they—along with Whitefield, Wesley, and European radical Pietists—were all sharing in a set of much older and wider concerns. Such concerns were especially likely to surface during periods of spiritual crisis and renewal, whether the sixteenth-century Reformation, the seventeenth-century religious wars, or the eighteenth-century revivals that swept both sides of the Atlantic.

The other way in which scholars have approached celibacy during the Great Awakening is by looking at New England radical separatists. Erik Seeman has studied Immortalists like Sarah Prentice and Richard Woodbury, both of whom believed that sexual renunciation helped

¹⁸ Abelove, "Sexual Politics," 87.

¹⁹ George Whitefield, *The Marriage of Cana: A Sermon Preached at Black-Heath and Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1742), 32.

not just their souls, but their bodies achieve eternal life.²⁰ William McLoughlin has studied how small Baptist sects in Rhode Island linked celibacy with corporeal incorruptibility and moral perfection, much to the consternation of less radical Baptists who were eager to establish their faith as a viable denomination.²¹ My differences from both scholars are not so much in the larger contours of their arguments, but in the ways in which their more narrow context limits the conclusions they are able to draw. Though both McLoughlin and Seeman step back to take in the long view—looking at different Biblical passages, at the precedent of sexual renunciation in the Christian tradition, and at Puritan ideas about marriage, singleness, and gender—they do not consider the still more immediate influences: quasi-monastic revivalists in Europe and English missionaries like Wesley and Whitefield, all of whom sought a more primitive form of Christianity. The backward-glancing nature of the latest reiteration of the debate is important. Seeman, for instance, argues that Immortalists were issuing a direct challenge to ministerial authority, but it is also true that their ideas—of becoming a more able conduit to God, of reserving the body for Christ, of achieving spiritual virtue through sexual virtue—invoked another kind of ministerial authority: the Catholic priesthood. For all the ways that separatists presented heterodox challenges to their orthodox pastors, they also circled back, reintegrating into the Protestant tradition the very concepts that the Reformation had tried to shake.

As is clear from the ways I am seeking to broaden the context in which we think about early American celibacy and single people, my dissertation is indebted to scholarship on early modern Europe. Sarah Apetrei and B.W. Young have done the most to flesh out the quasi-

²⁰ Erik R. Seeman, “Sarah Prentice and the Immortalists: Sexuality, Piety, and the Body in Eighteenth-Century New England,” in *Sex and Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Merril D. Smith (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 116-31; Erik R. Seeman, *Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1999).

²¹ William McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty: The Baptists’ Struggle in New England, 1630-1833* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1991).

monastic revival in late seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century England, tracing not only its emergence in London, but also its links to Pietists across the Channel.²² Scholars of Continental Pietism, in turn, have studied how celibacy emerged among German-speaking Protestants with renewed vigor after the Thirty Years' War, forging ideas that would reach their fullest fruition not in Europe, but in the North American colonies.²³ And scholars of evangelicalism have shown how eighteenth-century revivalism erupted on both sides of the English Atlantic.²⁴ In the same way that this dissertation attempts to expand the American story of singleness, it also attempts to speak back to these English and Continental histories, showing how the discourse on celibacy in British North America reflected and innovated upon ideas and practices in Europe.

Using celibacy to expand the study of singleness in early American history not only contributes to our understanding of religion, but also of sexuality. At the same time that colonists created room for celibacy in the Protestant tradition, they also opened up space for non-normative modes of desire and affiliation. Writing in the wake of Foucault, scholars studying the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries have shed light on the transition from a sexual regime based on acts to one based on identities. Referencing Foucault's two-stage theory, Stephen

²² Apetrei, "The Life of Angels," 247-74; B.W. Young, "The Anglican Origins of Newman's Celibacy," *Church History* 65, no. 1 (1996): 15-27. Both Amy M. Froide and Bridget Hill have described a similar opening up of Protestantism to make room for the single life, identifying in late seventeenth-century England a movement to establish Protestant nunneries. That movement, however, was guided more out of practical than religious motivations, with English gentlemen seeking to create outlets for daughters and sisters who failed to marry. Froide, *Never Married: Singlewomen in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Hill, "A Refuge from Men: The Idea of a Protestant Nunnery," *The Past and Present Society* 117 (Nov. 1987): 107-30.

²³ Among the many works on Pietism, I found especially helpful A.G. Roeber, *Hopes for Better Spouses: Protestant Marriage and Church Renewal in Early Modern Europe, India, and North America* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2013); F. Ernest Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century* (Leiden, Neth.: E.J. Brill, 1973); Daniel L. Brunner, *Halle Pietists in England: Anthony William Boehm and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge* (Göttingen, Ger.: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993). Particularly useful in illuminating transatlantic connections are F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden, Neth.: E.J. Brill, 1971); Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

²⁴ See especially Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press); Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

Shapiro writes that “eighteenth-century studies...has been left with a container with too few compartments,” as scholars have found elements of both regimes coexisting in early America.²⁵ Richard Godbeer, for example, locates the inchoate formation of a homosexual identity in the popular discourse on sodomy in seventeenth-century New England, but finds that laypeople proved much more tolerant of their neighbors’ “sodomitical actings” than colonial and church officials.²⁶ Christopher Looby finds a similar “preformation” of a homosexual identity in eighteenth-century bachelorhood, and Clare A. Lyons shows that colonial Philadelphians were comfortable with a wide range of sexual practices, including sex outside of marriage and homoerotic desire.²⁷

More recently, scholars have sought to push the study of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century sexuality beyond sex itself. Bruce Burgett has called for investigations into the “sensuality” of the early modern period, broadening our understanding of what constitutes sexuality by paying attention to “other discourses of appetite, affection, and sensation.”²⁸ Heather Love has found Burgett’s framework especially helpful in studying never-married women. Her investigation into the desires and relationships of nineteenth-century writer Sarah Orne Jewett reveals how loss and loneliness have inhered within the history of same-sex love. By shifting her focus away from a more narrowly-defined notion of sex, Love is able to recover

²⁵ Stephen Shapiro, “Sexuality: An Early American Mystery,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 189.

²⁶ Richard Godbeer, “‘The Cry of Sodom’: Discourse, Intercourse, and Desire in Colonial New England,” in *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 101.

²⁷ Christopher Looby, “Republican Bachelorhood: Sex and Citizenship in the Early United States,” *Historical Reflections/Reflexions Historiques* 33, no. 1 (2007): 90; Clare A. Lyons, “Mapping an Atlantic Sexual Culture,” in *Long Before Stonewall: Histories of Same-Sex Sexuality in Early America*, ed. Thomas A. Foster (New York: New York University Press, 2007), 164-203; Lyons, *Sex Among the Rabble*.

²⁸ Bruce Burgett, “In the Name of Sex,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 60, no. 1 (Jan. 2003): 188.

the painful feelings and longings that had “nowhere in particular to go” in nineteenth-century America, feelings that our more celebratory narratives of queer history often miss.²⁹

All of these scholars have gone a long way towards addressing the problems that Jennifer Manion describes as “heteroessentialism,” the presumption that “historical actors are heterosexual, that sexual acts and desires are aimed at members of the opposite sex, and that the incidence of same-sex desire or intimacy has no bearing on the meaning of heterosexuality.”³⁰ This dissertation seeks to challenge those presumptions even further. Studying celibacy forces us to check not just the idea that historical actors were heterosexual, but that people in the past expressed their most fervent desires and formed their most intimate relationships on the basis of sex at all. Theodora Jankowski argues that the renunciation of sex can be in itself a form of queerness, serving to “disrupt the regime of heterosexuality.”³¹ Read in this light, celibacy offers us a new way to approach the history of sexuality and of queer sexuality in colonial America, revealing the “disrupt[ing]” stance of colonists who removed themselves from sexual circulation.

When focusing on the religious dimensions of singleness and sexuality, we are able to see, for example, the truly radical contribution of a woman like Susanna Anthony, whose deepest longings were directed neither towards men nor women, but towards God. While scholars have viewed her chastity and her Congregationalism as evidence of a conservative strain in early American religion, reframing her through the lens of sexuality reveals just how much her singleness challenged normative institutions. Anthony forged an alternative to marriage and procreative sexuality long before economic and political developments opened up opportunities

²⁹ Heather Love, “Gyn/Apology: Sarah Orne Jewett’s Spinster Aesthetics,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 55, nos. 3-4 (2009): 324.

³⁰ Jennifer Manion, “Historic Heteroessentialism and Other Orderings in Early America,” *Signs* 34, no. 4 (Summer 2009): 1000.

³¹ Theodora Jankowski, *Pure Resistance: Queer Virginity in Early Modern English Drama* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000), 10.

for women outside of marriage in the nineteenth century. Focusing on celibacy also enables us to see the ways in which single colonists were able to carve out new modes of intimacy and affiliation in their human relationships as well, bringing to our attention people like Puritan Thomas Parker, whose singleness opened up the possibility for him to cultivate an especially close bond with his male cousin. For both Anthony and Parker, celibacy served not only as a disruption of normative sexuality, but also as a tool that made new types of desire and relationship available. While scholars have often focused on moments of economic and political change as the driving force behind developments in the history of sexuality—the American Revolution, the advent of industrialization, the rise of medical technologies—this study reveals that religion has been an equally generative site, particularly in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

Focusing on celibacy also sheds light on the formation of normative practices of sexuality, marriage, and the family in early America. New England Puritans, for instance, developed their ideas about marriage in deliberate opposition to their anxieties about Pauline singleness. During the Great Awakening, the discourse on celibacy disrupted and redefined the nature of marriage when colonists withdrew from their spouses sexually, physically, and emotionally. And in eighteenth-century Pennsylvania, colonists who found themselves drawn to Pietist cloisters left husbands, wives, and children in order to live communally and forge new spiritual families that were devoid of sexual relations. In all of these cases, celibacy had effects that reverberated far beyond the people who embraced it, speaking back to the key institutions that undergirded colonial American society. Just as celibacy unsettled notions of normativity for seventeenth- and eighteenth-century colonists, it is my hope that this dissertation can help

unsettle our own ideas about how people in the past experienced faith, sex, desire, and relationship.

Chapter 1

“Aberrations from the first good estate”: The Place of Celibacy in Puritan Reform

At the end of the sixteenth century, two leading English theologians summed up their positions on the issue of celibacy. Anglican minister Richard Hooker called the single life “a thing more Angelical and Divine” than the wedded one, while Puritan William Perkins took the opposite tack, asserting that marriage was “in it selfe farre more excellent, then the condition of single life.”¹ Though Hooker and Perkins had much in common—English ministers who had both inherited the Reformation and were both committed to ridding the church of the vestiges of Catholicism—they nonetheless arrived at contrary poles regarding the merits of celibacy and marriage. In the longer history of celibacy in the Christian tradition, it was Hooker’s view that was most familiar. Since the patristic era of the second through fifth centuries, Christians had praised celibacy in similar language, calling it the *vita angelica*—a taste on earth of the angelic life of the world to come, where they “neither marry nor are given in marriage.”² Celibacy as the *vita angelica* proved very enduring, surviving the deep theological rent wrought by the Reformation. Even after England had split from Rome, abolished the monastery, and discredited clerical celibacy, Anglicans like Richard Hooker still found much to admire in the single life.

Puritan ministers like William Perkins, on the other hand, fundamentally reworked Hooker’s centuries-old assessment of singleness. Whereas proponents of the *vita angelica* saw celibacy as a type of spiritual marriage with God, a state in which the purity of sexual abstinence proffered closer intimacy with the divine, Puritans largely stripped celibacy of its spiritual

¹ Title quotation from John Cotton, as quoted in Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1988), 11; Richard Hooker, *The Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity* (London: John Windet, 1597), 5:288; William Perkins, *Christian Oeconomie* (London: Felix Kyngston, 1609), 11.

² On the *vita angelica*, see Sarah Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 252. Quotation is from Luke 20:35, but a similar verse appears in Mark 12:25 and Matthew 22:30.

power. Instead of a life “more Angelical,” it was merely a life more free from the troubles that plagued fallen human beings. To Puritans, celibacy was not about gaining a spiritual marriage but forfeiting an earthly one, a loss that rendered single people especially bereft in a world where God used marriage, not virginity, to draw his saints closer to him. While Puritans left room in their vision of a reformed church for those who did not marry—what mattered most was living a godly life, not marital status in itself—they nonetheless viewed matrimony as far more likely than celibacy to promote godliness. The single life, no matter how well lived, would always amount to less than a pious marriage.

Puritans derived their distinct understanding of singleness from two key sources: first, Reformation-era debates about clerical celibacy and the sacramental nature of marriage, and second, a particular notion of biblicist primitivism that left them dissatisfied with the Church of England.³ From the first source, the Reformation, Puritans inherited the foundation on which they would build their ideas about the wedded and single life. They applauded earlier reformers who had wrestled marital status away from the Pope, affirming along with Anglicans that clerical celibacy and the designation of marriage as a sacrament lacked scriptural basis. In England as elsewhere in Protestant Europe, marriage and celibacy became issues deemed adiaphora—literally, “things indifferent”—features of Christian life that were not essential to salvation and had no clear instruction in the Bible. Where Puritans differed from their contemporaries, however, was in that second source influencing their thinking on celibacy: biblicist primitivism. While both Anglicans and Puritans appealed to an earlier form of Christianity, seeking to shed centuries of Catholic corruption in order to reclaim the apostolic church, they disagreed about what exactly the early church looked like and on what sources of authority it was based.

³ The definitive source on Puritan biblicist primitivism is Bozeman, *To Live Ancient Lives*.

Puritans' and Anglicans' competing perspectives led them to very different conclusions on the issue of celibacy. Puritans replaced the longstanding *vita angelica*, based on patristic precedent, with an interpretation of singleness grounded firmly in the seventh chapter of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians.⁴ Armed with their distinct primitivist framework and exegetical tools, Puritans read in Paul's text both an affirmation that marital status was indifferent—"Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord"—and evidence that marriage, not celibacy, was the greater gift of God.⁵ By shifting celibacy away from the *vita angelica* and locating it instead in a particular interpretation of 1 Corinthians 7, Puritan ministers developed an understanding of singleness that upended the centuries-old hierarchy placing celibacy above marriage. In the Puritan vision of a reformed church, the practice of lifelong singleness retained little place or purpose, a lesser resort far outweighed by the benefits of matrimony.

Celibacy and the Protestant Reformation

Though Martin Luther did not attack celibacy directly when he nailed his Ninety-Five Theses to the church door at Wittenberg, the Reformation's emphasis on "faith alone, grace alone, [and] Scripture alone" soon thrust singleness into the spotlight.⁶ Reformers' various protests against the Catholic Church—from the selling of indulgences to the claim of transubstantiation to the abuses of papal power—all invariably led back to the priesthood, and in turn, to questions about the relationship between marital status and religious authority. When Puritans grappled with the issue of celibacy later in the sixteenth century, they did so within the framework they had inherited from the Reformation, which had fundamentally altered how

⁴ This is not to say that proponents of celibacy before the Puritans did not also employ 1 Corinthians 7. The difference, however, was that among Puritans, 1 Corinthians 7 became the most important source on the single life rather than one source among many—an emphasis that would have significant consequences for Puritan views on celibacy. For a discussion of how 1 Corinthians 7 was used during the Reformation, see Helen L. Parish, *Clerical Marriage and the English Reformation: Precedent, Policy, and Practice* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2000), 56-65.

⁵ 1 Corinthians 7:25.

⁶ Merry Wiesner-Hanks, *Christianity and Sexuality in the Early Modern World: Regulating Desire, Reforming Practice*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2010), 73.

European Christians thought about the single life. Two Reformation developments in particular were critical for Puritans. First, marriage was removed from the list of sacraments, and second, celibacy was dropped as a requirement of the priesthood. Both changes came to be defining features of Protestantism in England and on the Continent, and both circled around the twin issues of sex and power.

In their initial protests against the church, Luther and his fellow reformers adopted very different views about sex from their Catholic counterparts, coming to see celibacy as an unnatural state that was impossible for people to maintain. Sexual temptation had entered the world through original sin and was so strong that most people could not live truly celibate lives. Vows of celibacy, Protestant reformers believed, were futile attempts by human beings to control impulses they could not master. Whether by masturbation or illicit sexual relations, professed celibates were bound to break their vows at some point.⁷ Priests, monks, nuns, and others who adopted celibacy were setting themselves up for a lifetime of sexual sin made even worse by their attempt to hide behind seemingly-virtuous vows. In reformers' logic, religious celibates became the worst kind of sinners: hypocrites who projected a chaste image to the world all the while indulging their sexual desires under the cover of the cloister.

Overturing a longstanding hierarchy, Luther and his followers saw marriage as the solution to the problem of hypocritical and sinful celibacy, elevating the marital bond as the "purest of all loves."⁸ For centuries, church leaders had regarded marriage as a state less holy than celibacy. Viewing sex as unclean, they believed the single life was more pleasing to God because it did not pollute the body. For priests who were administering the sacraments and

⁷ Seeman, "It is Better to Marry Than to Burn," 399.

⁸ Martin Luther, "A Sermon on the Estate of Marriage," in *Luther's Works*, eds. Helmut T. Lehmann and James Atkinson (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1966), 44:9.

handling the host, bodily purity was imperative.⁹ Reformers, however, sought to redeem the marital relationship. They believed that, since one of God's first works was to institute marriage between Adam and Eve, marriage was the foundational human institution. Spousal relationships were intended to be people's primary affiliations, and marriage—not celibacy—the model for all Christians.¹⁰ Furthermore, marriage was the only way Christians could appropriately channel their powerful sexual desires. Accusing Catholic priests of centuries of sexual misconduct, reformers maintained that suppressing sexual urges was impossible, unnatural, and opposed to God's plan for humankind. Their attacks would long stamp Catholic celibacy with the stain of sin, making it very easy for generations of Protestants to associate priestly vows with sexual indulgence and hypocrisy rather than virginity and virtue.¹¹

Reassigning purity from the celibate to the married life, however, required Luther and his colleagues to fundamentally rework the way European Christians had long thought about marital sex. While Catholics and reformers alike condemned sex outside of marriage, they disagreed about the nature of sex inside marriage. To the Catholic Church, even sex between husbands and wives was tainted: married couples were to abstain from sex on certain holy days and for any reason other than procreation.¹² Reformers agreed that sex should not be taken to excess by married couples, but they differed in how they assessed its purpose. Whereas Catholics anchored sex firmly in reproduction, their critics expanded sex's importance, seeing it as beneficial in and

⁹ While scholars debate the exact origins of clerical celibacy, many argue that it has its roots in radical Jewish sects from the pre-Christian era, who believed that sexual intercourse made people unclean and unable to perform the sacraments. Abstaining from sex therefore became a requirement for priests, whose job it was to administer the sacraments on a regular basis. See Karen Cheatham, "Let Anyone Accept This Who Can": Medieval Christian Virginity, Chastity, and Celibacy in the Latin West," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 91-96.

¹⁰ Wiesner-Hanks, 77.

¹¹ Reformers' arguments against clerical celibacy also had a theological basis. With the dismissal of the belief in transubstantiation, clerical celibacy was less important because priests were no longer handling the actual blood and body of Christ, but rather a representation of it. Parish, 169-70.

¹² Wiesner-Hanks, 75-76; M. Darrol Bryant, "Celibacy and the Protestant Traditions: From Celibacy to the Freedom of the Christian," in *Celibacy and Religious Traditions*, ed. Carl Olson (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 116-19.

of itself because it contributed to spousal intimacy, which in turn strengthened the institution of marriage as a whole.¹³ In the hands of reformers, marital sex became not simply a way for fallen human beings to avoid the sin of fornication, but a way to attain the type of closeness that God had intended when he first ordained marriage between Adam and Eve.

In addition to their reworking of sex, reformers' attack on celibacy circled around the issue of power. Believing that the requirement of a chaste priesthood lacked scriptural support, Luther and his followers saw celibacy as a mere invention of the Catholic Church, intended to shore up ecclesiastical authority. As Erik Seeman writes, "Catholic priests used celibacy as a token of their holiness and power," a tool that set them not just apart from the laity, but above it.¹⁴ Priests cited sexual purity as evidence that they were specially positioned to intercede to God and to interpret the scriptures. To reformers, however, the very practice of elevating priests above the larger body of believers was what led them to sin. With close and special access to parishioners, for example, priests could exploit their position by collecting indulgences and filling the church's (and their own) coffers. Celibacy was thus part of an ulterior strategy to authorize the clergy's higher status and justify its separation in the cloister, permitting priests—unseen and unchecked—to abuse their power.¹⁵ The Protestant belief in the "priesthood of all believers" sought to dismantle the clergy's superior position by claiming that celibacy did not confer a higher or preferred relationship with God. Non-celibate laypeople too, they insisted, were equally equipped to read and interpret the Bible and intercede to Christ on their own behalf.

¹³ Belden C. Lane, "Two Schools of Desire: Nature and Marriage in Seventeenth-Century Puritanism," *Church History* 69, no. 2 (Jun. 2000): 380-81; Wiesner-Hanks, 77.

¹⁴ Seeman, "It is Better to Marry Than to Burn," 399.

¹⁵ Bryant, 122.

However, even though reformers lauded marriage and upended clerical celibacy, they still continued to see value in the single life. Luther himself believed that certain people might be called to singleness, making them capable of maintaining sexual continence:

Before Adam fell it was a simple matter to remain virgin and chaste, but now it is hardly possible, and without special grace from God, quite impossible. For this very reason neither Christ nor the apostles sought to make chastity a matter of obligation. It is true that Christ counseled chastity, and he left it up to each one to test himself, so that if he could not be continent he was free to marry, but if by the grace of God he could be continent, then chastity is better.¹⁶

In Luther's reading, chastity was not a state that could be mandated, but was a voluntary practice only for those who had received "special grace from God" to remain continent. For those who had, "chastity [was] better" than marriage. Such divine dispensation, however, was extremely rare. Just because a man felt called to the priesthood in no way meant he was called to a life of sexual abstinence, a flawed assumption that the Catholic Church had codified by requiring clerical vows.

As Luther's explanation shows, even amidst reformers' attacks on clerical celibacy, the single life retained its superior position over marriage. The issue was not celibacy in and of itself, but a particular kind of Catholic celibacy, one that concentrated power in the hands of ecclesiastical officials and that was imposed rather than chosen, restricted by a lifelong vow, and tarnished by hypocrisy. Reformers' various complaints revolved around a set of related problems: lust, self-control, status, wealth, and authority. Because of the concupiscence that entered the world through original sin, chastity was impossible for people to maintain without special dispensation from God. For the church to impose a life of chastity was to usurp God's power as the ultimate giver of gifts. It was also to sentence naturally-concupiscent human beings to a life of hypocrisy and sexual sin. At the same time, however, for those with the gift of

¹⁶ Luther, 44:9.

continence, the ideal of the *vita angelica* persisted. As Luther wrote, “if by the grace of God [a person] could be continent, then chastity is better.”¹⁷ Expunging the church of corruption did not mean expunging the church of celibacy, but rescuing the *vita angelica* from centuries of papal abuse.

Across the Channel, many English clergy grappled with the issue in similar terms, attacking Catholic clerical celibacy while at the same time upholding singleness as the higher calling. In England, however, the Reformation as a whole played out differently, contending both with Luther’s protest and with Henry VIII’s particular complaints against the papacy. From its first stirrings, the Reformation in England transpired in these two registers: one on the level of doctrine (reformers’ theological disagreements with Rome) and one on the level of governance (Henry’s power struggle with the Pope). When Henry finally broke from the Catholic Church in 1534, he did so in order to effect change in the latter register, not the former. What mattered to him was getting out from under the Pope’s thumb, and after splitting from Rome he was happy to keep church doctrine largely intact. Issues that were flashpoints elsewhere in Europe—the office of the priesthood, the accessibility of scripture, the debate of faith versus works—interested Henry only insofar as they affected his authority over the church.¹⁸ Many English ministers, however, were not willing to limit change to the level of ecclesiastical leadership. As a result, the Reformation launched a power struggle between the English Crown and clergy that linked the fate of Anglican reform to the particular proclivities of the reigning monarch. Not until the Elizabethan Settlement in 1563 did Protestantism secure a foothold in England and the Anglican Church adopt the new ideas about marriage and celibacy that had been sweeping across Protestant Europe.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ Eric Josef Carlson, *Marriage and the English Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1994), 37-40.

One of the most significant changes regarding marital status in England was the removal of marriage from the list of sacraments.¹⁹ Like Protestants across the Channel, English reformers believed that marriage could not confer grace. They considered the Catholic designation of marriage as a sacrament to be yet one more example of Roman abuse, of the Pope taking license with God's word by instituting unnecessary church practices.²⁰ As on the Continent, reformers in England insisted that marriage fell under the category of *adiaphora*, a "thing indifferent" that was neither essential to salvation nor mandated in scripture. Maintaining only two sacraments—baptism and the Eucharist—the Church of England limited sacramental status to those acts that the Bible explicitly endorsed as signs of grace. When Anglicans desacralized marriage in 1536, they did so not to diminish its status, but rather to affirm its importance.²¹ Their goal was to reclaim the holiness of matrimony by stealing it away from the Pope's works-based faith.

While a victory for reformers in terms of doctrine, the changing status of marriage raised alarm in terms of practice. Both the clergy and the court worried about how laypeople would respond: perhaps the laity would conclude that marriage had lessened in importance, or even that it had been abolished. Officials feared upheaval in church and society if people disregarded the value of one of England's most fundamental institutions.²² The clergy thus found themselves in a difficult position, removing matrimony's sacramental status in one breath while assuring

¹⁹ Desacralizing marriage was relatively uncontroversial. As Carlson writes, in 1536, "without warning or explanation," the Church "quietly dropped matrimony...from the list of sacraments" (42).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 37-49.

²¹ The same logic applied to how the Church of England thought about the Eucharist after dismissing transubstantiation. English reformers believed they had not diminished the importance of communion by turning the host from the actual body and blood of Christ to a representation of it. On the contrary, they believed that the Catholic Church had overstepped its bounds by assuming that a priest had the power to effect such a miracle. Anglicans saw themselves as rescuing the Eucharist from Catholic corruption, bringing it back to Christ's original intention when he first instructed the apostles on communion. Carlson, 38-40; Parish, 178.

²² Carlson argues that such fears turned out to be unfounded. The desacralization of marriage was a matter of considerable debate, but seemed to make little difference in how the laity viewed marriage in practice. Carlson, 45-46.

parishioners of its importance in the next.²³ Church officials resolved the dilemma by underscoring the significance of marriage in the new Anglican liturgy they produced after the Reformation. Under Archbishop Thomas Cranmer, the Church formulated a view of marriage that would long undergird English conversations about both the wedded and single life. In the *Book of Common Prayer* and other liturgical writings, Cranmer emphasized that matrimony was a sacred institution created by God before the Fall. Though admittedly no longer a sacrament, marriage remained “God’s holy ordinance,” vital in the lives of individual believers and in the institutional life of the church.²⁴

Another key Reformation development in England was the revocation of clerical celibacy. More circuitous and hard fought than the effort to desacralize marriage, the campaign to dislodge clerical celibacy took several decades longer in England than in Protestant areas of the Continent.²⁵ Tentative permission for the clergy to marry was granted under Edward VI in 1549, only to be retracted (with serious consequences for those who had wed) by Mary Tudor, and then later reinstated by Elizabeth. The Elizabethan Settlement finally clarified the issue in 1563, when Article 32 of the Thirty-Nine Articles formally and decisively permitted ministerial marriage.²⁶ As it had across the Channel, the debate about clerical celibacy in England invoked questions of sex and power. The complaint was not against celibacy itself, but against a specific Catholic version of celibacy. In England’s first treatise devoted to the issue, minister Robert Barnes championed marriage as “an especiall, and singular medicine” for those clergymen who

²³ Ibid., 37.

²⁴ *Book of Common Prayer*, “The Forme of Solemnization of Matrimony,” 1549. Reprinted in Church of England, *The Book of Common Prayer: The Texts of 1549, 1559, and 1562*, ed. Brian Cummings (New York: Oxford, 2011), 64.

²⁵ Carlson, 42, 49-51.

²⁶ On the winding trajectory of England’s eventual instatement of clerical marriage, see John K. Yost, “The Reformation Defense of Clerical Marriage in the Reigns of Henry VIII and Edward VI,” *Church History* 50, no. 2 (1981): 152-65.

could not maintain continence.²⁷ The Pope's requirement of a chaste priesthood, he wrote, was grounded in "false reasons," an invention with neither scriptural basis nor ecclesiastical precedent.²⁸ Serving only the Pope's avarice, celibacy was a ruse that helped the Catholic Church amass money and power.

Significant here is that Barnes's promotion of clerical marriage in no way precluded him from practicing celibacy. He remained single his entire life, and even while attacking priestly vows, he continued to see the single life as "good and expedient." Like Luther, however, the catch remained the same: no one could vow celibacy if "he have not the gifte of chastity."²⁹ Barnes saw celibacy as a perfectly viable option for people who had the God-given ability to remain continent, and he himself chose to carry out his ministerial duties as an unmarried man. What Barnes took issue with was not celibacy per se, but rather the Pope's imposition of celibacy on the clergy. The requirement of an unmarried ministry led laypeople to think that celibacy itself was an act of saving gracing, just one more example of a works-based faith in which the priesthood carried special favor with God. According to Barnes, the Pope had erred by failing to see that celibacy, like marriage, was a thing indifferent, having no inherent bearing on salvation.³⁰

For many English reformers, the vow itself came to stand as the key symbol of Catholic corruption. George Joye claimed that the Catholic Church had completely misunderstood the meaning and purpose of religious vows, writing that the only lawful vow was "a free promise of that thing which is in our power to perform it and which thing we are sure also that God

²⁷ Robert Barnes, "That by God's Worde it is Lawfull for Priests that Hath Not the Gifte of Chastitie to Marry Wives," in *The Whole Works of W. Tyndall, John Frith, and Doct. Barnes*, ed. John Daye (London: John Daye, 1573), 2:310.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid., 2:309-26.

accepteth it.”³¹ To Joye, Catholic vows of celibacy hardly measured up. Required in order to enter the priesthood, they were not free. Nor were most men capable of maintaining them, given the overwhelming strength of their lust.³² Furthermore, taking a vow of celibacy at a young age simply did not please God. Scripture offered no support for lifelong vows and even cautioned against them in Paul’s warning to Timothy, which foretold that the end times would be marked by the forbidding of marriage.³³ Going even further than Joye, John Ponet in his 1549 defense of clerical marriage asserted that priests who had taken vows of celibacy had an obligation to break them. Vows ran so counter to divine will that violating them did not anger God, as Catholic apologists insisted, but was in fact demanded by him. The greater sin was to continue burning in lust when God provided the perfect solution in marriage.³⁴

To many Anglican proponents of clerical marriage, it was not just the Pope who was misguided regarding celibacy, but England’s own elite too. Joye accused the English church of maintaining a celibate priesthood for the same reason that Rome did: to grab power. When Henry seized church property after breaking from the Catholic Church, he had redistributed it among a small number of noble patrons who were eager to hang on to it. According to Joye, it was those members of Parliament who had most benefited from the windfall in church lands who most resisted clerical marriage. Allowing the clergy to marry would break up the holdings Henry had gifted, putting land in the hands of priests who would then distribute it along their individual family lines. An isolated and celibate priesthood, whether in Rome or in England,

³¹ George Joye, *The Defence of the Mariage of Preistes* (Antwerp: Jan Troost, 1541), C3.

³² *Ibid.*, A3.

³³ *Ibid.*, C3-D1; 1 Timothy 4:1-3 reads: “Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.”

³⁴ As Ponet wrote, “So we be bound to unvow again that thing whereunto we perceive in our self by lacking the gift that our heavenly father doth not consent.” In John Ponet, *A Defence for Mariage of Priestes by Scripture and Aunciente Wryters* (London: Reynold Wolff, 1549), D8-E4.

was no different than a class of Pharisees, Joye claimed, a group of corrupt leaders eager to monopolize wealth and power by setting themselves apart.³⁵

At the same time that ministers like Joye and Ponet attacked priestly celibacy, however, others remained hesitant, revealing an underlying English ambivalence towards clerical celibacy that Protestants on the Continent did not share. Eric Josef Carlson has found that most Anglican clergymen continued to practice celibacy for several decades after the English church broke from Rome, reaffirming the value of the single life.³⁶ Upon being granted legal permission to marry, few Anglican ministers wed, even among those who had been England's strongest opponents of priestly celibacy. Ministers like Robert Barnes, who had championed clerical marriage as a point of doctrine, opted for celibacy as a point of practice. Furthermore, the arguments that supporters like Barnes offered were based not so much on the idea that marriage was beneficial in and of itself, but rather that "clerical marriage was simply better than clerical fornication."³⁷ For those who could not remain chaste, marriage presented a necessary remedy for sexual sin, but for others, the single life proved more appealing well into the seventeenth century.³⁸

Not just ministers, but members of the laity too expressed ambivalence, questioning the ability of wedded clergy to lead congregations if they were caught up in the same fleshly and worldly concerns as their parishioners. Laypeople drew on the same types of character attacks that reformers had long employed. Married clergy, the rhetoric went, were lust-ridden heretics

³⁵ Joye, B8-C2; Yost, 159-61.

³⁶ Carlson sets out to refute what he calls the standard narrative of clerical marriage in histories of the English Reformation, in which the monarchy played the lead antagonist against reformers' efforts to dislodge priestly celibacy. As the narrative goes, once Henry VIII died and a more amenable Edward VI assumed the throne, reformers were finally (but only temporarily) free to institute the changes they had so long desired. Carlson questions the standard narrative by showing that the lines were not so firmly drawn: many members of the clergy and laity also eyed ministerial marriage warily. Carlson, 49-50.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

³⁸ Jeremy Gregory also finds that a married clergy was not the norm until the late seventeenth century. Gregory, "Gender and the Clerical Profession in England, 1660-1850," in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Rochester, NY: Boydell Press, 1998), 258.

unfit to administer the sacraments, as illustrated in Thomas More's critique of Luther's marriage to the nun, Katherina von Bora: how could parishioners trust a clergyman who believed that "a nun consecrate[d] unto God should run out of religion, and do foul stinking sacrifice to that filthy idol of Priapus?"³⁹ Popular ballads and writings targeted married clergy and their wives with biting satire. The rumor mill was rife with stories of hapless clergy entering highly-suspect unions, whether the elderly Richard Cox's marriage to a woman several decades his junior, Thomas Cooper's failed match with a notorious adulteress, or Thomas Godwin's engagement to a wealthy widow.⁴⁰

England was slow to adopt clerical marriage in part because of these very concerns about ministerial reputation.⁴¹ Even the staunchly Protestant Elizabeth approached the issue of clerical marriage cautiously. As Carlson writes, during the sixteenth century the Church of England "had lurched from one allegiance to another, from one liturgy to another, and from one set of doctrines to another. It was imperative, in the queen's view, that the new church settlement be allowed to establish its credibility with a laity for the most part either hostile to or skeptical of it."⁴² The issue of clerical marriage was, for Elizabeth, directly related to the project of rehabilitating the church's standing. In an attempt to stave off scandal, she issued Injunction 29 of the Royal Visitation of 1559, which stated that:

no manner of priest or deacon shall hereafter take to his wife any manner of woman without the advice and allowance first had upon good examination by the bishop of the same diocese and two justices of the peace...nor without the good will of the parents of

³⁹ Thomas More, *The Confutation of Tyndale's Answer* (London: William Rastell, 1532), 207. For More's attacks on Luther and William Tyndale, see Carlson, 57.

⁴⁰ Carlson, 60-61.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 57-66.

⁴² *Ibid.*, 59. Elizabeth was herself, of course, unmarried. On how her own singleness was perceived, see Philippa Berry, *Of Chastity and Power: Elizabethan Literature and the Unmarried Queen* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 134-65.

the said woman if she have any living, or two of the next of her kinfolks, or...of her master or mistress she serveth.⁴³

By managing ministers' marital choices, Elizabeth hoped to protect clergy from the character assassinations that had long been a weapon of the church's enemies. She also hoped to silence rumors that clerical marriage was simply a front for the church to bring in land and money by pairing ministers with wealthy women. In demanding that unions be approved in advance by both parties, Elizabeth sought to avoid any hint that her approval of clerical marriage was part of a larger strategy to consolidate power, as was alleged against the Pope.

When the Church of England formally legalized clerical marriage in 1563, it did so in a similar tone of compromise. Article 32 of the Articles of Religion situated clerical marriage in the dual framework of anti-Catholicism and adiaphora, affirming that, "Bishops, priests and deacons are not commanded by God's Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage: therefore it is lawful also for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness."⁴⁴ Reacting against the Catholic counsel that forbid clergy to marry, the article made matrimony available to all. And unlike the Catholic mandate of clerical vows, it asserted that celibacy was completely voluntary. Article 32 was neither a wholesale embrace of marriage nor a wholesale attack on celibacy, but rather an admission that both states—now freed from the Pope's grip—could "serve better to godliness." Almost fifty years after Luther and his fellow reformers first broached the issue, the Church of England had concluded that the decision to marry or remain single was entirely a matter of individual "discretion," officially divesting Anglicans from the Catholic

⁴³ *Tudor Royal Proclamations*, ed. Paul L. Hughes and James F. Larkin (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1964-69), 2:460. Carlson writes that this injunction was enforced if not universally, then at least selectively, until Elizabeth's death in 1603. For a discussion, see Carlson, 59.

⁴⁴ As quoted in Carlson, 64.

notion that marital status was subject to ecclesiastical authority and was in any way relevant to salvation.

As Article 32 reveals, however, the larger story of celibacy in England was marked by ambivalence. Though some scholars have modified Carlson's findings, arguing that many English ministers did embrace marriage, the fact remains that both marriage and singleness continued to be viable options for Anglican clergy long after the Reformation.⁴⁵ Ministers like Robert Barnes could champion the cause of clerical marriage while remaining single, just as ministers like Richard Hooker could praise celibacy as a "thing more Angelical and Divine" while himself choosing to wed. The Elizabethan Settlement formally decoupled marital status and ministerial vocation. Placed firmly under the umbrella of adiaphora, the clergy's marital status became an issue beyond the purview of the church.

At the same time, however, the *vita angelica* persisted. Anglicans understood continence as a special gift bestowed by God, not the Pope. For those who received it, celibacy remained the higher calling, but for those who had not, marriage could also "serve...godliness." Ultimately, even though English reformers met clerical marriage with more hesitation than their Continental counterparts, they still moved in the same direction, linking marriage and purity while at the same time reaffirming the *vita angelica*. Reformers believed they were rehabilitating both marriage and celibacy. Neither state could confer grace, and whether Anglicans viewed the wedded or single life with praise, disparagement, or ambivalence, both

⁴⁵ Helen Parish departs from Carlson in his claim that England lacked the same enthusiasm for a married priesthood as the rest of Protestant Europe. She notes that, while many English clergy did remain celibate, many also wed. Taking issue with Carlson's interpretation of his evidence, she argues that just because clergy remained unmarried does not mean they were ambivalent. Reading a wider range of sources and studying the theological underpinnings of English views on marriage and celibacy, Parish finds that English reformers, like those on the Continent, offered vigorous praise of marriage. See Parish, 8-11. Sarah Apetrei and B.W. Young, however, support Carlson's conclusions that English clergy felt more ambivalent towards celibacy than their Continental counterparts. See Apetrei, "The Life of Angels," 251-54; B.W. Young, "The Anglican Origins of Newman's Celibacy," *Church History* 65, no. 1 (1996): 16-19.

states remained viable options in ecclesiastical policy and practice. Puritan detractors of the Church of England, however, would come to disagree.

Celibacy and the Primitive Church

When the critique of Anglican reform emerged after the Elizabethan Settlement, both Anglicans and their Puritan opponents held much common ground in their views on marriage and singleness. As joint inheritors of the Reformation, they shared the beliefs that marital status was a thing indifferent, that marriage was a holy institution ordained by God in paradise, that only those who had the God-given gift of continence could live chaste, and that the church had no authority to mandate celibacy or forbid marriage. Despite their mutual starting point, however, both groups diverged in their positions on celibacy over the course of the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. While Anglicans continued to adhere to the *vita angelica*, seeing the single life as more “Angelical and Divine,” Puritans came to see marriage as a state “farre more excellent, then the condition of single life.”⁴⁶

Puritan and Anglican disagreement over the issue of celibacy resulted from their fundamentally different ideas about how to structure the Church of England after the Reformation. Both groups believed that the church should reorganize itself along primitivist lines, but they parted ways over what that looked like.⁴⁷ Theodore Dwight Bozeman defines Puritan primitivism as “a reversion, undercutting both Catholic and Anglican appeals to a continuity of tradition, to the first, or primitive order of things narrated in the Protestant Scriptures.”⁴⁸ The goal of Puritan reform was not to create the church anew, but to return it to something more original, peeling back the weight of centuries and recovering the church of the apostles.

⁴⁶ See note 1.

⁴⁷ Bozeman contrasts Puritan and Anglican notions of primitivism, 10-11, 57-78.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 11.

The only way to do that, Puritans believed, was to reevaluate longstanding church traditions in light of scripture. Viewing the Pope as the ultimate inventor of corrupt practices, Puritans criticized the Anglican Church for not distancing itself far enough from Rome, for believing that the “continuity of tradition” rather than the Bible alone might offer a way back to apostolic communion. As Puritan John Cotton described it, “No new traditions must be thrust on us...*But that which [we] have had from the beginning. Doct[rine:] True Antiquity...is that which fetches its originall from the beginning...All errors...are aberrations from the first good estate.*”⁴⁹ To Cotton, any modifications—“new traditions”—that departed from scripture were “aberrations” adulterating the church, distancing it from the “first good estate” that was its purest form. Puritans believed that the fundamental source of the early church was the Bible, both the Old and New Testament. In their view, the church began to stray at the close of the apostolic era in the second century, meaning that even the patristic practices of the early church fathers were a deviation from the primitive model. While Puritans conceded that the patristic period, with its closer proximity to the apostolic church, might hold some greater truths than their own time, they nonetheless marked the descent into error at the second century. Patristic clerics were just as capable of corrupting the church through invention as their successors centuries later, making the Bible the only reliable authority on primitive Christianity. Extrascriptural sources might help believers understand certain passages that were less precise, but they could never in and of themselves form the basis of religious insight.

Like Puritans, Anglicans too adopted a primitivist vision of reform as a way to distance themselves from the Catholic Church. The difference between their two approaches, however, was where they drew the line about what constituted the primitive.⁵⁰ For Anglicans, the patristic

⁴⁹ As quoted in Bozeman, 10-11.

⁵⁰ Bozeman, 13-14.

era that Puritans dismissed remained a credible source of apostolic practice. Anglicans' definition of primitive Christianity encompassed both the Bible and patristic tradition, not just scripture alone. They did not discount scripture, but they did believe that the patristic era offered insight that made it a valuable source of authority in its own right; papal corruption had not set in until after the time of the early church fathers.

Anglican and Puritan disagreements about the role of the Bible came to the fore because of the Protestant tenet of *sola scriptura*, a cornerstone of the Reformation that both groups had adopted. *Sola scriptura* captured the twin ideas that scripture alone contained the full sweep of Christian knowledge and that believers did not need a priest to interpret the Bible for them.⁵¹ It emerged as a direct critique of the Catholic Church, which found scripture by itself an insufficient guide to Christian life and church organization. Catholics did not doubt the veracity of the Bible, but they did believe that it had to be supplemented by other sources, including centuries of ecclesiastical precedent and ongoing developments. To the Catholic Church, the apostolic age had not yet come to an end: saints continued to work miracles and add to Christian knowledge, making the Bible but one fount of insight in a continually-unfolding revelation. A specially-trained, elite class of priests was therefore necessary to interpret new developments and adjust church practice. These ideas began to shift during the Reformation, however, when critics—wary of a clerical class acting as the gatekeeper of Christian knowledge—began to locate religious authority elsewhere. They saw the Bible, rather than the intercession of a priest, as the ultimate arbiter of God's word, containing all of the instruction Christians needed to conduct their lives. Prayer, fasting, and ministerial teachings helped reveal different aspects of God's truth, but the Bible as a text was complete and final.⁵²

⁵¹ Parish, 40.

⁵² Ibid., 40-41.

While the Protestant recourse in *sola scriptura* may have diminished the authority of the Pope and an elite priesthood, it in turn opened up a whole host of problems regarding Biblical interpretation.⁵³ Nowhere were such problems more evident than in those issues deemed adiaphora, the point at which Anglicans and Puritans came to a head. Because adiaphora were by definition those aspects of religious life that lacked explicit Biblical instruction, they revealed the limits of *sola scriptura*, forcing both Anglicans and Puritans to figure out what to do in instances where the Bible was unclear. Bringing them uncomfortably close to the Catholic clergy they critiqued, both groups admitted that in adiaphorous issues, human beings had to rely on their own intellectual faculties to interpret scripture. They disagreed, however, on what exactly that looked like. Richard Hooker delineated the Anglican position in his *Lawes of Ecclesiastical Polity*, writing that since the Bible only offered explicit instruction on a very small number of issues, interlocutors were required to take the “raw suggestions” of scripture, combine them with patristic tradition, and then readjust them to fit particular contexts that scripture did not address.⁵⁴ Hooker’s strategy of accommodating the “suggestions” of the Bible to the “diversity of times, places, or conditions” was entirely compatible with the Anglican model of primitivist reform. Anglicans believed that their approach was a far cry from the Pope’s, who seemed more inclined to invent rather than start with “raw” material from scripture.⁵⁵

To Puritan critics, however, Hooker’s position not only aligned too closely with Catholic reliance on extrascriptural authority, but—even more troubling—implied that the Bible itself was historically conditioned. Hooker suggested that the biblical “simplicity” Puritans sought was not an intrinsic feature of the original church, but rather an accommodation to the “rude” times in

⁵³ Ibid., 50-54.

⁵⁴ Bozeman, 29, 61.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 62.

which the Bible was written.⁵⁶ To Hooker, *sola scriptura* meant following not the letter of the Bible, but the spirit, encouraging readers to accommodate Christian teachings to their own times just as the apostles had done in theirs. Human faculties should not be tethered so firmly to scripture that they could not move outside of it; people needed to be able to adapt adiaphorous issues to changing circumstances. Puritans, on the other hand, believed that the intellect needed to be anchored more firmly in scripture, not less so, especially when approaching issues that the Bible ignored or left unclear. They had a far more pessimistic view of human capacity, believing that human faculties had been irrevocably corrupted by the Fall. As a result, people had no ability to glean religious truth except by grounding themselves completely and thoroughly in the Bible. To stray from scripture was to open the door to the very type of folly that had led the Catholic Church astray in the first place. Puritans viewed the intellect in the same way they viewed church reform, glancing backwards rather than forwards. Just as the goal of reform was not to create something new but return to something older, so the purpose of the intellect was not to produce new ideas, but to recover older ones, retrieving knowledge that had always been extant but had long been corrupted.⁵⁷

While for Anglicans *sola scriptura* enabled a degree of accommodation, for Puritans it enabled the practice of deduction. Scripture might not precisely describe every condition of Christian life, but Puritans believed that with careful enough analysis, it could provide guidance for any scenario. Bozeman illustrates how Puritan deduction worked with an example from William Perkins's writings on vocation. Perkins argued that every lawful vocation was covered in scripture, but he admitted that not all were "particularly prescribed."⁵⁸ The difference was

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ As Bozeman writes, for Puritans, the role of the intellect was not to "discern or create the new," but only "to complete and refine a schedule of knowledge already disclosed" (56).

⁵⁸ Perkins as quoted in Bozeman, 70.

between that which was made explicit (“particularly prescribed”) and that which could be deduced. In the latter instance, Bozeman writes, “it was necessary to consider the congruence of a proposed vocation with biblical teaching and law generally, and by this measure traveling players or operators of gaming houses, though not mentioned in scripture, could be judged to have ‘no calling at all.’”⁵⁹ To Perkins, any profession could be measured against the larger Biblical teaching on vocation, even if not mentioned directly. John Cotton made a similar point regarding communion, asserting that women could partake of the Eucharist despite the fact that scripture offered no explicit example of them doing so. Cotton reached his position by comparing “the proportion of the Lord’s supper with the Passover, and deduction from Scriptures as put no difference between male and female, make it to be received as the just will and ordinance of God.”⁶⁰ The Bible was unclear about whether sex was relevant to the Eucharist, so Cotton turned to a comparable scriptural teaching. Because the discussion of Passover made no mention of sexual difference, he concluded that sex was also irrelevant to communion.

In the inferences they made, neither Cotton nor Perkins were departing from *sola scriptura*, but rather demonstrating how *sola scriptura* worked in issues where the Bible was vague. While Anglicans believed that adiaphorous issues could be solved by loosening their grip on scripture—turning instead to patristic tradition for guidance—Puritans believed that indifferent issues demanded an even tighter grasp. As Bozeman writes, the practice of deduction “required a more, not a less, intensive examination of sacred texts,” allowing believers to determine what exactly the Bible taught and where lessons could be culled.⁶¹ For Puritans, such deductions were just “as well the Word of God, as that which is an express commandment or

⁵⁹ Bozeman, 70.

⁶⁰ Cotton as quoted in Bozeman, 70.

⁶¹ Bozeman, 71. Parish also discusses this particular form of exegesis, 56-60.

example,” and they were a far more reliable source on the primitive church than the patristic practices to which Anglicans turned.⁶²

How Anglicans and Puritans understood *sola scriptura* and interpreted adiaphorous issues had important consequences for how they thought about celibacy. Anglicans grounded their support for singleness in practices that were begun by the patristic fathers, who themselves had been influenced by the gospel discussion of the *vita angelica* in Matthew, Mark, and Luke.⁶³ Puritans, on the other hand, because they put little stock in patristic tradition, looked only to the Bible. Significantly, however, they did not turn to the gospel verses that had inspired the patristic fathers. Because the *vita angelica* referred only to the angelic life in heaven, it offered little insight for fallen human beings. Instead, Puritans turned to the section that spoke directly to the question of singleness here on earth: 1 Corinthians 7, which offered the most sustained discussion of celibacy in all of scripture. Endowing Paul’s epistle with greater interpretive weight than their Anglican counterparts, Puritans made 1 Corinthians 7 the key source in their thinking on celibacy. In chapter seven, Paul offered advice on issues related to marriage and divorce, explaining that the relationships believers shared before they were called to Christ were still legitimate: husbands and wives were still married, slaves were still enslaved, and free men and women were still free. Even Christian belief was not enough to warrant spouses separating from each other. If only one spouse had taken up God’s call and the other still wanted the two to live together, then they should remain together.⁶⁴

⁶² As quoted in Bozeman, 70.

⁶³ As Sarah Apetrei explains, Anglicans “adopted the patristic language of the *vita angelica* to speak of the single life, a phrase based on Jesus’s teaching on the absence of marriage in heaven [Mt. 22:30, cf. Lk. 20:34-36] and used by Augustine and Jerome in praise of virginity” (“The Life of Angels,” 252).

⁶⁴ Biblical scholars have offered countless nuanced studies of Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians, disagreeing about what exactly Paul meant in these particular passages. My account here covers primarily the main points on which scholars do agree. For an interpretation that also offers a helpful overview of the scholarship on 1 Corinthians 7, see Will Deming, *Paul on Marriage and Celibacy: The Hellenistic Background of 1 Corinthians 7*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 2004).

Paul's letter had long been invoked and contested in discussions about celibacy in the Christian Church. During the Reformation, the focal point was his discussion about the circumstances under which people entered into marriage.⁶⁵ In the ensuing debates over clerical celibacy, both Protestants and Catholics turned to Paul's letter to support their position. Lines one through nine reveal the elasticity that made his text so useful to both sides:

It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband...But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment. For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that. I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, it is good for them if they abide even as I. But if they cannot contain, let them marry: for it is better to marry than to burn.⁶⁶

Catholic apologists frequently pointed to the beginning of the passage, where Paul affirmed that it was best for men to remain chaste and not "touch a woman." Because most Catholic commentators agreed that Paul was unmarried, they believed that when he advised people to follow in his own footsteps, he meant singleness.⁶⁷ Opponents of clerical celibacy, however, pointed to line nine: "For it is better to marry than to burn." People who did not have the gift of God to maintain self-control required marriage. In denying the remedy of marriage to the clergy, the Catholic Church had blatantly rebelled against scriptural authority.

Early sixteenth-century Protestants also drew on Paul's text for evidence that celibacy in and of itself did not offer the clergy a closer relationship with God, and therefore did not justify their elite status. They reached their conclusion based on two different parts of Paul's letter. First, they referred to verse seven: "But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that." If both the married and the single life were a "proper gift from

⁶⁵ Parish, 62-65.

⁶⁶ 1 Corinthians 7:1-9

⁶⁷ Some Protestant reformers called into question Paul's marital status, which would of course completely change how they understood his text. William Turner and John Jewel, for instance, argued that Paul was a married man and that he was therefore advising marriage to the Corinthians. Catholic apologists, on the other hand, defended Paul's singleness. Parish shows that the disagreement over Paul's marital status stemmed from an ambiguity in the source material, with both sides charging the other of falsifying documents. Parish, 64-65.

God,” then priests’ celibacy in no way made them more pleasing to the divine or better positioned for intercession. Second, to support their argument that marital status was a thing indifferent, reformers turned to line twenty-five: “Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful.” To reformers, here was explicit proof that God offered no express instruction regarding the single life, and as such, that celibacy did not confer special grace. Both lines seven and twenty-five shortened the distance between the priesthood and the laity, supporting reformers’ claim that though marital status was important, it held no intrinsic spiritual value.⁶⁸

While these two verses proved vital to Reformation debates, later Puritans focused on a different section of Paul’s text. Having inherited and accepted from earlier reformers the belief that marital status was indifferent, they shifted their attention to 1 Corinthians 7:26-34:

I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you...I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is a difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

Several critical points emerge from this passage. First, Paul asserted that singleness was preferable during the “present distress,” a phrase that commentators would debate for decades, wondering what constituted “distress” and how far Paul’s advice could be stretched beyond the “present” circumstances of first-century Corinth. Second, Paul made clear that people who married did not sin, offering evidence that the Bible in no way opposed sex when channeled moderately through lawful marriage. Third, Paul registered the concern that married people’s

⁶⁸ Ibid., 62-65.

interests were divided between the affairs of the world and the affairs of the Lord, a sticking point that Puritans would return to again and again in their writings on marriage and singleness.⁶⁹

Given that 1 Corinthians 7 had long informed conversations about celibacy, Puritans were not innovating by turning to Paul's text. They were, however, innovating in terms of the amount of weight they gave it. For Puritans wary of patristic precedent and Catholic invention, Paul's letter to the Corinthians became the ultimate authority on celibacy. Instead of looking to early church fathers or to the gospel praise of the *vita angelica*, Puritans looked primarily to 1 Corinthians 7, making it the litmus test for all other perspectives on the single life. To say that Puritans relied on Paul's epistle, however, is not to say that his letter offered all the answers. Instead, it presented Puritans with evidence that marital status was a thing indifferent, requiring them to draw on their particular exegetical tools to determine the place of celibacy in the church. Like earlier reformers, they turned to the lived example of the Catholic priesthood as one way to make sense of singleness, reading Paul's text in light of the alleged failures of clerical celibacy. Drawing on extant examples like the Catholic Church was another component of Puritans' deduction and meaning-making process—again, not a departure from *sola scriptura*, but a way to apply it in adiaphorous issues that the Bible left unclear. The different ways in which Puritans and Anglicans approached adiaphora exposed their fundamental tensions—tensions that became especially evident in their competing interpretations of the single life.

Developing a Puritan Theology of Celibacy

Analyzed in conjunction with other parts of scripture and with the lessons of the Catholic Church, 1 Corinthians 7 helped Puritans arrive at a notion of the single life that was very different from the patristic tradition of the *vita angelica*. What Paul left ambiguous—the

⁶⁹ While Biblical scholars have long studied—and long disagreed about—the meaning of these particular passages, what is most important for this discussion is how Paul's sixteenth- and seventeenth-century interlocutors interpreted his epistle.

meaning of the “present necessity,” the lack of a “commandment of the Lord,” the value of both marriage and singleness—Puritans sharpened, placing his entire discussion of celibacy within their particular primitivist framework. In doing so, they reversed the centuries-old tradition of the *vita angelica*, determining that marriage, not singleness, led to greater intimacy with the divine. Puritans arrived at their conclusions, however, by building on extant Anglican ideas.

Starting with the official Anglican stance as outlined in the *Book of Common Prayer*, Puritans agreed that while marital status was irrelevant to salvation, it was still important because of its origins in the Garden of Eden. William Perkins, in *Christian Oeconomie*, one of the earliest Puritan statements on the issue, offered five key reasons for why marriage was so critical. First, “it was ordained by God in Paradise, above and before all other states of life, in *Adams* innocencie before the fall.” Second, “it was instituted upon a most serious and solemne consultation among the three persons in the holy Trinitie.” Third, “the manner of conjunction was excellent, for God joyned our first parents *Adam* and *Eve* together immediately.” Fourth, “God gave a large blessing unto the estate of marriage, saying, *Increase and multiplie and fill the earth.*” And fifth, “marriage was made & appointed by God himselfe, to be the fountaine and seminarie of all other sorts & kinds of life, in the Common-wealth and in the Church.”⁷⁰

Marriage might be adiaphorous, but it was critical because it was the foundation from which God intended to grow the world and the church. Ordained in paradise before the Fall by all three members of the Trinity, Adam and Eve’s marriage was to serve as the model relationship for all humankind, setting in motion human history.

⁷⁰ Perkins, 11-12. Though it is unclear when exactly Perkins (1558-1602) wrote this particular piece, scholars believe that it was during the period 1584-1594, when Perkins was a fellow at Christ’s College, Cambridge and wrote the majority of his works. James Turner Johnson, *A Society Ordained by God: English Puritan Marriage Doctrine in the First Half of the Seventeenth Century* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1970), 65.

Also in accordance with the official church's stance, Puritans started with the tenet that marital status had no inherent bearing on salvation. As Perkins wrote, "Mariage of it selfe is a thing indifferent, and the kingdome of God stands no more in it, then in meats and drinks."⁷¹ William Ames responded to the question of whether marriage or singleness was the "more excellent state" in similar terms, explaining, "If they are simply and by themselves considered, there is neither vertue nor vice, nor any worke morally good or bad included in either, because they are naturall formes of living, neither of which is either enjoyned or forbidden, 1 *Cor.* 7.25. Seeing then, that neither state is morally good but indifferent, it cannot bee properly said of either, that it is better then the other."⁷² Both Perkins and Ames set themselves against the Catholic notions that marriage was a sacrament and that celibacy conferred special status on the priesthood. Ames made it clear that his claim was grounded in Paul's text, citing 1 Corinthians 7:25, "Now concerning virgins, I have no commandment of the Lord." Along with staunch supporters of the Anglican Church, Ames and Perkins began with the premise that neither marriage nor singleness had intrinsic spiritual merit.

However, where Puritans diverged from earlier reformers and from the official Church of England was in their understanding of why marriage was nonetheless so important, a departure that led them to conclude that married life was best. Because Puritans read both marriage and celibacy through the lens of primitivism, they were most concerned with determining how marital status, indifferent though it may be, entered the church in its earliest form. Puritan writers frequently emphasized the timeline in which both marriage and celibacy developed in human history. Perkins made his concern with origins clear when, immediately after admitting

⁷¹ Perkins, 11.

⁷² William Ames, *Conscience with the Power and Cases Thereof* (London: J. Dawson, 1639), 197. Ames (1576-1633) was one of Perkins's students at Cambridge. Unwilling to tolerate the halted reform of the Anglican Church, Ames left England in 1610 and spent most of his career in the United Provinces (modern-day Netherlands). Johnson, 32.

that the kingdom of heaven lay no more in marriage than in “meats and drinks,” he clarified, “yet [marriage] is a state in itselfe, farre more excellent, then the condition of single life. For first, it was ordained by God in Paradise, above and before all other states of life, in *Adams* innocencie before the fall.”⁷³ For Perkins, it was not just the fact that marriage was ordained by God that made it important, but the fact that it was the first institution ordained by God, “above and before all other states of life.” Because it was the archetypal, original form, marriage was “farre more excellent” than celibacy.

Ames made a similar move, asserting that though marital status was a thing indifferent in terms of salvation, marriage was nevertheless superior to singleness. After admitting that “it cannot bee properly said of either, that it is better then the other,” he went on to say:

Now because among those things, which are of a middle nature, and neither good or bad, some are greater furtherers of vertue and good works, and some lesse...they are therefore to bee esteemed or neglected according to the power they have that way. And in this sense is the present question of the comparison of Wedlock, and the single life to be understood. Now in this very comparison, if the things bee absolutely considered, the state of Wedlock seemeth more excellent. First, Because in the beginning, it was ordained by God, for the bettering mans condition, *Gen. 2.18.*⁷⁴

At issue for Ames was figuring out how to assess adiaphorous issues. While Hooker had advocated the use of various extrascriptural sources, and even concluded that the treatment of such issues may change over time, Ames argued that the sole standard of judgment regarding things “which are of a middle nature” was how well they advanced “vertue and good works.” In his reasoning, marriage was “more excellent” because it was ordained by God “in the beginning,” designed for man’s improvement. Other Puritan ministers also connected marriage’s value to its prominent early origin in the timeline of creation. Robert Cleaver placed marriage above singleness because it was “the first institution”; Thomas Gataker wrote that, “You may see

⁷³ Perkins, 11.

⁷⁴ Ames, 197.

Gen. 2. that the very first worke that God did, after the very first creation of man and woman, was his marrying of man to woman...”; and Daniel Rogers venerated marriage because it was “an addition of perfection to [man’s] creation, before ever sin entered.”⁷⁵ What made marriage so valuable to Rogers, Gataker, and Cleaver was that it was the archetypal form, the model upon which God sought to arrange the world and build the church.

Anglican writings on marriage, on the other hand, while still asserting that matrimony was an Edenic institution ordained by God, did not emphasize its location in the timeline of creation to the extent that Puritan writings did. Never in his discussion of marriage did Hooker characterize it as the “first institution,” nor did he situate marital status along a primitivist continuum. To be sure, the *Book of Common Prayer* underscored that marriage was created in paradise, but it did so in order to signal God’s approval, in opposition to Catholics who believed that marital sex was polluting. What mattered to Anglicans was that God endorsed matrimony; what mattered to Puritans was that God endorsed matrimony first, directly after the moment of creation.

Consequently, Puritan writings revolved around marriage’s anchoring position in the primitive church, while Anglican writings revolved around marriage’s function. After highlighting God’s endorsement of matrimony, the *Book of Common Prayer* turned to the three-fold “causes for...which matrimonie was ordeined”: first, for the “procreation of children,”

⁷⁵ Robert Cleaver, *A Godly Forme of Houshold Government for the Ordering of Private Families* (1598; reprint, London: n.p., 1621), n.p. Little is known about Cleaver, an older contemporary of Perkins. He was a familiar name in Puritan networks and collaborated with fellow Puritan John Dod in many of his other works. See Johnson, 25.; Thomas Gataker, *A Marriage Feast: A Sermon on the Former Part of the Second Chapter of the Evangelist John* (London: Edward Griffin and Fulke Clifton, 1620), 5-6. Gataker (1574-1654) was a student and teacher at Cambridge. According to Johnson, Gataker was a more liberal Puritan, but his writings still reflect orthodox Puritan thinking. Though he was once accused of antinomianism, neither he nor his contemporaries seemed to take the charge seriously. See Johnson, 94.; Daniel Rogers, *Matrimoniall Honour* (London: Th. Harper, 1642), 49. Rogers was a student of Perkins at Cambridge and a staunch Calvinist. Jason Yiannikkou, “Rogers, Daniel (1573–1652),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition, Oct 2006, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/23970>.

second, to “avoide fornicacion,” and third, for “mutuall societie, helpe, and comfort.”⁷⁶ Puritans valued those same ends, but what mattered most was marriage’s form: matrimony was intended to serve as the pattern for human relationship. The primitive church had cast the mold for all human institutions, marital or otherwise. Using the example of Presbyterian church government, Bozeman shows how Puritans placed greater stock in form than function:

Presbyterian spokesmen might point out that the local selection of pastors or the elders’ disciplinary watch would lead to the more effective cure of souls or would better order a morally torpid population, but they did not intend thereby to ground the pastoral forms, first, in function. For the biblical forms were universal. In their very character as archetypes they came adapted to every exigency of pastoral and disciplinary function, irrespective of time, place, and society.⁷⁷

For Puritans, recovering primitive forms was a critical project because such forms were “universal,” offering guidance regardless of the particular contexts in which they were deployed. To ground issues like Presbyterian organization in their function was to miss the larger point: the Bible equipped Christians for every contingency, disclosing all the instruction believers needed in order to organize the church.

The same could be said about the institution of marriage. It may have offered mutual help, a lawful avenue for procreation, and a remedy for fornication, but its value first and foremost stemmed from the fact that it set the pattern for human relationship, a prototype created by God in Eden to guide subsequent generations. For Puritans who saw marriage as a constitutive element of the original church and as the archetypal relationship, celibacy posed real problems. Whereas Catholic and Anglican frameworks made room for both the wedded and single life, Puritans’ primitivist vision led them to see marriage as the exclusive ideal for all believers. The problem, however, was that though they could dismiss both Catholic and Anglican claims on celibacy by discounting the extrascriptural sources on which they were

⁷⁶ Church of England, *Book of Common Prayer*, 64.

⁷⁷ Bozeman, 73.

based—papal mandate in the first instance and patristic precedent in the next—they still had to grapple with the key Biblical source that offered support for the single life: 1 Corinthians 7.

Read in light of their particular primitivist vision, Puritans found in Paul’s epistle evidence that the single life had no place in God’s original church. William Gouge described celibacy as a mere accommodation to human frailties rather than a deliberate component of the divine plan, writing, “All that can be said for the single estate, is grounded upon accidentall occasions. Saint *Paul*, who of all the pen-men of holy Scripture hath spoken most for it, draweth all his commendations to the head of *Expediency*, and restraineth all unto a *present necessity*.”⁷⁸ Unlike God’s purposeful creation of marriage for man’s comfort and betterment, singleness developed only out of “expediency” and “necessity,” a lesser alternative for sinful people living in a fallen world. Paul endorsed singleness not because it held any inherent value—the *vita angelica*—but only because in some instances it was more convenient. Had humankind remained in Eden, celibacy would have been entirely unnecessary. Perkins made the point especially clear: “If mankind had continued in that uprightness and integritie which it had by creation, the state of single life had been of no price and estimation amongst men, neither should it have had any place in the world, without great contempt of God’s ordinance and blessing.”⁷⁹ In the Puritan understanding of the primitive church, celibacy was a deviation from the ideal form of marriage, deserving “great contempt” from God and from men. Regardless of its adiaphorous nature or its function, marriage would always be superior to singleness because it came first. Celibacy, developing only after the Fall, would always be intertwined with original sin.

⁷⁸ William Gouge, *Of Domesticall Duties* (London: John Haviland, 1622), 211. Gouge (1578-1653) taught at Cambridge. According to Johnson, he was a “staunch Presbyterian and a theological conservative” (105).

⁷⁹ Perkins, 12.

Having located the single life in Paul's "accidental occasions" rather than the *vita angelica*, the next step for ministers was to explain how marriage had become so tarnished as to merit an alternative in singleness. Echoing Luther and earlier reformers, Perkins explained that "after the fall of mankind, [marriage] became a soveraigne meanes to avoid fornication, and consequently to subdue and slake the burning lusts of the flesh, 1 Cor. 7.2. *Neverthelesse for the avoiding of fornication, let every man have his wife, and every woman have her husband.* vers. 9. *But if they cannot abstaine, let them marrie: for it is better to marrie, then to burne.*"⁸⁰ Man's fall introduced "burning lusts of the flesh" into the world, making marriage a remedy that greatly diminished it from what God had intended it to be: "the fountain and seminarie of all other sorts & kinds of life."⁸¹ The outcome might have been the same—to "*Increase and multiplie and fill the earth*"—but the means were markedly different. Before the Fall, Adam and Eve in their "innocencie" had married not out of concupiscence, but because "God loyned" them together, and the "manner of this conjunction was excellent."⁸² After the Fall, humanity's desire to increase and multiply was driven first and foremost by "burning lusts" that only marriage could "subdue and slake." Adam and Eve's expulsion from Eden tainted marriage by introducing worldly ends, making matrimony merely a "soveraigne means to avoid fornication" rather than the "excellent" union God intended.⁸³

Even more troubling, however, was that the Fall did not just enter lust into God's creation, but led to other sins that marriage actually made worse, not better. It was because of those other problems that Paul advised singleness for first-century Corinthians. Perkins outlined

⁸⁰ Ibid., 13.

⁸¹ Ibid., 11.

⁸² Ibid., 14.

⁸³ It was common for Puritans to blame the Fall for tarnishing the ends of marriage. Perkins here is not exceptional, but is illustrative of a larger trend. William Ames, for example, wrote that, "Because since the fall, [marriage] hath that end, and use that it directly makes for the avoiding of sinnes and temptations: 1 Cor. 7.2.5.9" (197).

what would soon become the standard Puritan logic regarding celibacy. Responding to 1 Corinthians 7, he wrote:

Neverthelesse, since the fall, to some men who have the gift of continencie, it is in many respects farre better then [sic] marriage, yet not simplie, but only by accident, in regard of sundrie calamities which came into the world by sin. For, first it freeth a man from many and great cares of household affaires. Againe, it maketh him more fit & disposed to meditate of heavenly things, without distraction of mind. Besides that, when dangers either present, or imminent, in matters belonging to this life, the single person is in this case happie, because he and his are more secure and safe, then others be who are in a married state.⁸⁴

With a two-fold explanation, Perkins spelled out how the Fall gave singleness certain advantages over marriage. First, citing 1 Corinthians 7:28 (*“Therefore I say to the unmarried and widowes, It is good for them if they abide even as I do.”*), he argued that singleness was better because it prevented people from getting too preoccupied with the day-to-day responsibilities of managing households, leaving little time for God. Unlike their married counterparts, single people were at liberty to “meditate of heavenly things,” entering into communion with God while free from “distraction of mind.” Second, citing 1 Corinthians 7:26 (*“I suppose then this to be good for the present necessitie, I meane, that it is good for a man so to be.”*), Perkins argued that it was better to be single during periods of “present, or imminent” danger. In such instances, married people had to deal with burdens that single people did not, tending to spouses and children.

Both of these circumstances in which singleness was preferable, however, arose because of the sin that entered the world when humankind departed from Eden. Singleness gained a foothold only by “accident” (the Fall) and was advisable only amidst “sundrie calamities” (times that were exceptional rather than ordinary). Writing several decades later, Gouge built on

⁸⁴ Perkins, 12-13. Perkins cited the applicable verses immediately after this excerpt: “1 Cor. 7.8. *Therefore I say to the unmarried and widowes, It is good for them if they abide even as I do.* vers. 26. *I suppose then this to be good for the present necessitie, I meane, that it is good for a man so to be,* vers. 28. *But if thou takest a wife thou sinnest not, and if a virgin marrie she sinneth not; neverthelesse such shall have trouble in the flesh,* vers. 32. *And I would have you without care.*”

Perkins's logic to explain Paul's preference for the single life. Similarly grounding singleness in the Fall, he argued that the only instances in which celibacy was valuable were those that were a consequence of sin itself:

All the occasions which move [men and women] to remaine single arise from the weaknesse and wickednesse of men. Their wickednesse who raise troubles against others, their weaknesse who suffer themselves to be disquieted and too much distracted with affaires of the family, care for wife, children, and the like. Were it not for the wickednesse of some, and weaknesse of others, *to please an husband or a wife*, would be no hi[n]derance *to pleasing the Lord*.⁸⁵

Offering the same two-pronged explanation as Perkins, Gouge wrote that it was only because of sin that singleness became a viable option for humankind. The "wickednesse" of men referred to 1 Corinthians 7:26 (the single life was expedient in times of trouble and distress), and the "weaknesse" to 1 Corinthians 7:32-34 (married people were "distracted with affaires of the family"). Whereas marriage grew out of the divine plan for humankind, singleness grew out of people's "wickednesse" and "weaknesse," preventing them from crafting the unions God had intended for them. If celibacy was at all preferable, it was only because of humankind's fallen nature.

Here, however, Puritan ministers offered one critical caveat: singleness was in no way preferable for everyone. When Paul advised celibacy, he was speaking only to a limited group, those people who had received the particular gift of sexual self-control. As Perkins wrote, the single life, "since the fall, to some men who have the gift of continencie, is in many respects farre better than marriage."⁸⁶ Celibacy was only better for those who could maintain it, which to Puritans was an extremely small segment of the population. Because the Fall had introduced lust into the world, the vast majority of people were saddled with an overwhelming concupiscence.

⁸⁵ Gouge, 212. Though Gouge used the term "men" in this particular excerpt, he was speaking generically. In the sentence directly before the quoted passage, he explicitly stated that his discussion of singleness encompassed both "men and women."

⁸⁶ Perkins, 12.

Referring to lust, Gouge wrote, “No sinne is more hereditary...Of all the children of *Adam* that ever were, not one to a million of those that have come to ripenesse of yeares have beene true *Eunuches* all their life time.”⁸⁷ Living in a fallen world, the vast majority of people could not exercise sexual control throughout the entire course of their lives. Those who could were, as Perkins said, only those who had the “gift.” Ministers went to great lengths to elucidate what kind of gift continence was, who might receive it, when it was bestowed, and how it could be maintained. Perkins explained that

the gifts of God are of two sorts, some are Generall, some are Proper. Generall gifts are such as God giveth generally to all, and these may be obtained, if they be asked according to Gods word, lawfully...Proper gifts, are those which are given only to some certaine men: of which sort is the gift of continencie and such like, which though they bee often and earnestly asked, yet they are seldome or never granted unto some men.⁸⁸

If celibacy was an option only for those with the gift of continence, and if continence was a “proper gift” given only by God—a gift that even those who “earnestly asked” for it would likely not receive—then Paul was speaking to a very small number of people indeed when he advised singleness over marriage.

As for earlier reformers, the Catholic clergy came to serve as the ultimate example of people who could not master their lusts, given that so few received the divine dispensation of continence. When the Catholic Church imposed celibacy on the clergy, it was not only usurping God’s authority as the giver of gifts, but also setting the vast majority of priests up for failure.⁸⁹

⁸⁷ Gouge, 210. Gouge’s reference was to Jesus’s teaching on continence in Matthew 19:12: “For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.”

⁸⁸ Perkins, 16. While acknowledging that how exactly God distributes his gifts is a mystery beyond man’s grasp, Perkins did say that there are some clear ways to tell. For example, God gives the gift of continence to people who, because of disease, cannot marry and procreate. Rather than forcing such people to constantly live under the spell of lust, God grants them the gift to contain. See Perkins’s seventh chapter of *Christian Oeconomie*.

⁸⁹ Catholic and Protestant differences regarding the gift of continence hinged on a fundamental disagreement about where self-control ended and God’s help began. Catholic defenders of clerical celibacy drew on a tradition dating back to Augustine, which claimed that anyone could master his or her sexual temptations with enough prayer,

Puritan ministers explained the Catholic error by combining verses from three different Pauline epistles, enabling them to distinguish Catholic celibacy from the type of singleness that Paul approved:

For them which cannot abstaine, [marriage] is, by the expresse commandment of God, necessarie. Hebr. 13.4. *Mariage is honorable amongst all men, and the bed undefiled.* 1 Cor. 7.9. *But if they cannot abstaine, let them marrie.* By which it appeareth to be a cleare case, that the commandment of the Pope of Rome, whereby he forbiddeth marriage of certaine persons, as namely, of Clergie men, is meere diabolicall; for so writeth the Apostle, 1. Tim. 4.1. *The spirit speakeath evidently, that in the latter times some shall depart fro[m] the faith, and shall give heed unto spirits of error, and doctrines of divels [devils], vers. 3. forbidding to marrie.*⁹⁰

This particular combination of Bible verses—1 Corinthians 7, Hebrews 13:4, and 1 Timothy 4:1—became standard fare in Puritan explanations of singleness. Catholic celibacy was not simply unsupported by scripture, it was “diabolicall.” By forbidding certain classes of men to marry, the Pope had proven himself the purveyor of the “doctrines of divels” that scripture foretold, the very heretic whose imposition of celibacy signaled his departure from the faith.⁹¹

While Puritan ministers agreed that Paul’s recommendation of singleness was intended only for those with the gift of continence, they disagreed about what exactly Paul meant by the “present necessitie” (“*I suppose then this [singleness] to be good for the present necessitie...*”) and about how far his advice reached.⁹² Perkins and Gouge understood the “present necessity” to mean only instances of extreme distress, such as moments of religious persecution or when

supplication, and self-discipline. Opponents of this idea, however, believed that lifelong chastity was possible only with a special gift from God. The issue was for individual people to discern for themselves whether or not they had received special dispensation. If they had not, they were not only advised to marry, but commanded to do so.

Without the gift, they simply could not manage to live a lawful single life. Andrew William Barnes, *Post-Closet Masculinities in Early Modern England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 130-33.

⁹⁰ Perkins, 15. Hebrews 13:4 reads in full: “Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.” On 1 Timothy 4:1-3, see note 33.

⁹¹ As Parish has shown, the rhetoric of conflating the Pope with the antichrist because of his support of celibacy grew out of the Reformation on the Continent, and then took root in England. By the seventeenth century, it was widely accepted that 1 Timothy 4 was specifically referring to the Pope. See Parish, 115-37.

⁹² As quoted in Perkins, 12. The verse is 1 Corinthians 7:26.

one's life and limb were at risk. Puritan William Whately, on the other hand, directly refuted their ideas, seeking to extend Paul's endorsement of celibacy rather than narrow it:

You may, perhaps, tell me, that *Paul* meant it of those times of persecutions, and not of all times indifferently, though it be principally true of such times. The present necessitie is not to be restrained to the days of open persecution, but enlarged to the distresses of this present life: for else the argument had been unfitly framed for the state of the Corinthians, seeing at this time they were not assaulted with any such te[m]pestuous weather.⁹³

Whately argued that Paul's words needed to be anchored not more firmly in their Corinthian context, but less so. They should be "enlarged to the distresses of this present life" rather than telescoped to the particular circumstances of the early church. If the "present necessitie" of which Paul spoke in first-century Corinth was in fact not all that exceptional in the first place—because "at this time they were not assaulted with any such te[m]pestuous weather"—then his praise of the single life stretched much further than ministers like Perkins and Gouge allowed. Discussing in great detail the marital troubles outlined in 1 Corinthians 7, Whately assured readers that he was not trying to undermine matrimony, but rather to encourage people to discern very carefully before entering into it. Throughout his book, Whately approached marriage through a very practical lens. A man could determine if God was calling him to marry based on whether or not he could support a family and withstand the trials of household management. Whately strongly encouraged his readers to remain single until they were certain of God's call. Only then could they endure the troubles of the flesh that Paul had warned about.

⁹³ William Whately, *A Care-Cloth: Or a Treatise of the Cumbers and Troubles of Marriage*, facsimile edition (1624; reprint, Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, Inc., 1976), 65. Whately (1583-1639), sometimes spelled Whatley, studied at Cambridge for his B.A. and earned his B.D. at Oxford. He found himself in trouble when, in his 1617 work, *A Bride-Bush*, he suggested that the failure to perform marital duties could be grounds for divorce. In the preface to *A Care-Cloth*, he recanted his views and affirmed that the marital bond was indissoluble for any reason other than adultery and desertion. Johnson concludes that Whately was nonetheless "an irenic figure," and that this episode "seems to have been the only controversy of his life. In spite of his Oxford B.D., Whatley was a Ramist, a fact observable from his sermons" (101). William Whately, *A Bride-Bush, or a Wedding Sermon*, facsimile edition (1617; reprint, Norwood, NJ: Walter J. Johnson, Inc., 1975).

While Whately was in the minority, he nonetheless pointed to a fundamental assumption about singleness with which even his critics could agree: the single life was easier than the wedded one, a claim that undergirded conversations about marital status well into the next century. In 1620, Thomas Gataker wrote that, “married persons are subject to many more crosses and casualties then those that leade a single life, in regard their charge is the greater.”⁹⁴ He reiterated the point in 1623, confirming, “It is true indeed that *Mariage* bringeth many more *Cares*, as more *Charge*, with it, then *the single life* is ordinarily encombred withal.”⁹⁵ The advantages of singleness were two-fold. First, in times of trouble, single people were responsible only for themselves, not for families. Second, in matters of faith, single people could devote themselves fully to religious pursuits without dividing their interests between God and household.

Of course, the anxiety underlying singleness was that unmarried people would not use their time and bodies for religious ends, making the single life a double-edged sword. Unmarried people might be free from the burdens of a family, but their liberty made them especially vulnerable to sin. Gouge wrote that if marriage and singleness are “rightly weyed, we shall finde the single life too light to be compared with honest marriage.”⁹⁶ Lacking a family to support, single people could easily fall into the trap of idleness. Gouge believed that very few single people used their liberty wisely to “meditate of heavenly things.”⁹⁷ Earlier attacks on

⁹⁴ Thomas Gataker, *Marriage Duties briefly couched together out of Colossians*, 3. 18, 19 (London: William Jones, 1620), n.p.

⁹⁵ Thomas Gataker, *A Good Wife God's Gift, and a Wife Indeed, Two Marriage Sermons* (London: John Haviland, 1623), 53.

⁹⁶ Gouge, 211.

⁹⁷ Perkins, 12. This line of reasoning that the lightness of the single life was dangerous had long been a part of attacks on clerical celibacy. Erasmus, whose writings were popular in England, was especially concerned about both the theological and societal dangers of singleness. See Margo Todd, “Humanists, Puritans, and the Spiritualized Household,” *Church History* 49, no. 1 (1980): 18-34. Even Francis Bacon, who penned the memorable line that single men make “best friends, best masters, best servants,” admitted that they did not always make “best

Catholic clerical celibacy had invoked the same fear. Because priests did not have households to manage, they were free to indulge their lust and avarice. Allowing them to marry was the best recourse, given the many temptations that threatened single people.

In their readings of 1 Corinthians 7, Puritan ministers were thus in a difficult position, explaining how singleness could be both a relief from trouble (as Paul assured) and a state that led directly to sin (as alleged against the Catholic priesthood). Whately captured the incongruity most clearly, addressing Paul directly:

*Paul, you dehort us from marrying, not because it is sinne, but because we shall find trouble in it; why, doe you not know, that the single life hath also its thornes and briers? I doe (would Paul answere) but my meaning was, that this estate doth outwardly bring more trouble for else I had used an unenforcible argument, and spoken little to the purpose. You must therefore conceive the Apostles meaning to be, as hath been said, if the state of marriage, and of single life be compared together in such respect, the former is the more troublous.*⁹⁸

Anticipating his readers' objections to Paul's recommendation of singleness, Whately distinguished between "outwardly" and inwardly "trouble." Paul, he explained, only meant a relief from external difficulties when he counted the advantages of singleness, problems such as the hassles of household management. Though Whately did not divulge what constituted the more inward kind of trial, he was presumably referring to the problems of lust that Puritans attributed to the Catholic clergy. Differentiating between internal and external troubles allowed Whately to resolve the dilemma of how singleness could be free of some dangers while rife with others.

Gouge also discussed the problems that could plague marriage, but he went one step further than Whately, moving beyond household concerns and into the realm of the affections. It was not just that married men and women had less time for religious pursuits, but that marriage

subjects." Francis Bacon, *The Essays, or Councils, Civil and Moral, of Sir Francis Bacon, Lord Verulam, Viscount St. Alban* (London: A. Swalle, and T. Childe, 1696), 17.

⁹⁸ Whately, *A Care-Cloth*, 38.

threatened to redirect people's love of God towards love of spouse. For Gouge, the key was in 1 Corinthians 7:33: "But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife." Married people were more apt to let their earthly affairs outweigh their heavenly ones, not just in terms of the amount of time they devoted to household affairs, but in the amount of affection they devoted to household relationships. An Edenic marriage was one in which people were capable of aligning their wills with both God and spouse, slighting neither relationship. As Gouge wrote, in a godly marriage, the pleasing of a husband or a wife would prove "no hi[n]derance to *pleasing the Lord*."⁹⁹ In a fallen world, however, husbands and wives could not properly balance their earthly and heavenly affections, turning marriage into a snare that threatened to distance them from God.

The idea that Paul praised singleness only because of the sins that entered fallen marriages became the cornerstone of Puritan interpretations of 1 Corinthians 7, in stark contrast to the Anglican understanding of celibacy as the *vita angelica*. Paul advised the single life not because it was more "Angelical and Divine," but simply because it helped people avoid the troubles of the flesh. Puritans conceded that, so long as human beings lived in a sinful world, singleness would have a place. Even William Gouge, who criticized celibacy as "too light" compared to "honest marriage," admitted that, "since the fall, Virginitie (where it is given) may be of good use: and therefore the Church doth give due honour both to virginitie and marriage."¹⁰⁰ Regardless, however, of whether virginitie was "of good use" or not, Gouge and his fellow Puritan ministers still saw celibacy as a concession and marriage as the ideal. In their primitivist vision of a reformed church, marriage outranked singleness because it was a constitutive element of the "first good estate." Celibacy, whether the *vita angelica* or otherwise,

⁹⁹ Gouge, 212.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

was a departure, an accommodation for flawed human beings and an “aberration” begun by the patristic church.

Puritans and the “singular *Comforts*” of Marriage

The point at which Puritans most clearly marked their distance from the *vita angelica* was when they advised marriage even to those who had the rare ability to remain chaste. As Perkins wrote, “Marriage is free to al[l] orders, and sorts of men without exception, even to those that have the gift of continencie.”¹⁰¹ While his assertion was a reaction against the Catholic Church, which prohibited matrimony to certain “orders” of men, it was also more than that: if even those with the gift of continence could marry, then marriage offered something that celibacy did not, something more profound than even the praiseworthy life of the angels. Gouge agreed, writing, “There be other occasions, beside avoiding fornication, to move [people] to marie.” Gataker too admitted that, though the married life was “encombred” with care, “but yet are those *Cares* counter [v]ailed with many singular *Comforts* that *the single life* is bereft of.”¹⁰² Gataker’s last phrase laid the case bare: the single life was “bereft” of what the wedded life offered, the “singular *Comforts*” of marriage. All three ministers’ claims overturned the *vita angelica*. While for centuries celibacy had been valued for the very reason that it enabled closer intimacy with the divine—a perspective that Anglicans had reaffirmed—Puritans insisted that it was marriage, not singleness, that brought believers closer to God.

To make their case, Puritans put 1 Corinthians 7 to one last task, reading it not for its teachings on celibacy, but for its insights on how to avoid the marital troubles that Paul warned about and that had made singleness an option in the first place. Reversing Paul’s concerns, Puritans took longstanding exegesis on 1 Corinthians 7 in a new direction. Whereas Paul saw

¹⁰¹ Perkins, 14-15.

¹⁰² Gouge, 212; Gataker, *A Good Wife God’s Gift*, 53.

celibacy as a solution for fallen people, Puritans saw marriage. Though they agreed that matrimony was a snare that could draw people's time and affections away from God, they also believed—crucially—that it did not have to be so. The answer to the problems that entered marital relationships was not to avoid marriage entirely, but to forge better marriages. In Puritan hands, 1 Corinthians 7 became a blueprint for how to build godly unions in a corrupted world, with the hope that by restoring such a fundamental component of the primitive church, they might hasten their return to the “first good estate.”

Paul's letter came to offer Puritans both an account of the pitfalls to avoid in matrimony and the attributes for which to aim. First and foremost, they believed that pious marriages could be achieved if husbands and wives exercised greater vigilance. Because “carnall and fleshly” people were so likely to slip into sin, the married person must “bee so carefull for the things of the world, as that he ought, and may have also a special regard of those things that concern God and his kingdome.”¹⁰³ The “things of the world” that spouses had to guard against were not just Pauline in nature—the distractions of household management and the division of affections—but included the very same snare that threatened single people: lust. Even though Puritans believed that marriage was a remedy for concupiscence, providing people a lawful outlet for their sexual desires, they also believed that without careful restraint, marital sex could be just as dangerous as fornication, drawing believers away from God. In response, they advocated the ideal of “wedded chastity,” where husbands and wives offered their “due benevolence” to one another regularly but moderately.¹⁰⁴ A well-managed marriage was the only way to control concupiscence and live up to matrimony's Edenic form, far better than attempting to deny sexual desires through singleness or indulging them to excess with a spouse.

¹⁰³ Perkins, 16.

¹⁰⁴ Gouge, 216-17. “Due benevolence” was a common term used to describe marital sex, referring to 1 Corinthians 7:13, “Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence: and likewise also the wife unto the husband.”

In addition to exercising greater vigilance and bodily discipline, Puritan ministers advised forming better marriage matches. Thomas Gataker argued that the reason why married people fell into sin was not because of an inherent problem with marriage itself, but because of a problem in the way people entered into it. When making marital decisions without the necessary prayer and careful discernment, believers forged unhappy unions that strayed far from the primitive ideal and made singleness appear the better option. Gataker assured his readers, however, that all “the annoyances, inconveniences, mischiefs and miseries against this estate objected doe for the most part arise; either because the parties matched sort not well together, or want wisdome and discretion to carrie themselves as they ought, either toward other.”¹⁰⁵ Marital problems could be thwarted long before the wedding if people chose mates with whom they “sort[ed]...well” and who exhibited “wisdome and discretion.”¹⁰⁶

Because Puritans believed that marriage matches were “designed in heaven and consummated on earth,” the process of choosing a proper mate was in and of itself a religious exercise.¹⁰⁷ God brought two people together in marriage, but the exact way in which he did so was “shrouded in mystery,” beyond humankind’s understanding.¹⁰⁸ What human beings could do was take greater care to discern God’s will and act accordingly. Those who did not would inevitably choose unsuitable spouses and become consumed with the problems of the world. Those who did, however, would create exemplary marriages that, over time, would render singleness obsolete, an alternative both unnecessary and unappealing.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁵ Gataker, *A Good Wife God’s Gift*, 53.

¹⁰⁶ Many Puritans took Gataker’s advice to heart: marriage guides proliferated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, underscoring the point that marriage, while divinely ordained, could still ensnare people just as much as celibacy if they were not careful. On Puritan marriage manuals, see Heather Dubrow, *A Happier Eden: The Politics of Marriage in the Stuart Epithalamium* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1990), 8-14.

¹⁰⁷ Gouge, 210.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Not only marriages, but friendships as well were “designed” by God in heaven, playing out on earth in ways that were equally beyond human comprehension. Puritans believed that God’s hand was at work in all loving, well-

By advocating greater vigilance and better discernment, Puritan ministers maintained that celibacy was not the only solution to the problem of marriage, believing it possible to replicate on earth the type of matrimony that God instituted in Eden. Creating better unions rather than taking recourse in celibacy was critical to Puritans because of the earlier problem that Gataker had made so clear: unmarried people were bereft of the “singular *Comforts*” of marriage. In investigating what exactly the marital relationship offered that singleness did not, Puritans turned to Genesis 2:18, a verse that, along with 1 Corinthians 7, formed the cornerstone of their thinking on marital status: “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.’” No matter how much Paul advised singleness to the Corinthians or how much Anglicans like Hooker asserted that celibacy was a life more “Angelical and Divine,” Puritans found in Genesis 2:18 evidence that it was marriage, not celibacy, that would help them hew more closely to the divine plan. Pauline celibacy might be an option for fallen people in a fallen world, but it still opposed God’s fundamental statement in scripture, “It is not good that the man should be alone.”

Based on their readings of Genesis, Puritans came to see the “comforts” of marriage as several-fold. Matrimony offered a salve against loneliness, a partner in spiritual growth, a greater understanding of Christ, and a glimpse of the type of union God longed for with his saints.¹¹⁰ Alexander Niccholes began his *Discourse on Marriage and Wiving* by quoting Genesis

ordered, earthly relationships. On Puritan ideas of friendship, see Edmund Leites, “The Duty to Desire: Love, Friendship, and Sexuality in Some Puritan Theories of Marriage,” *Journal of Social History* 15, no. 3 (1982): 383-94.

¹¹⁰ Scholars have long believed that the most important end of Puritan marriage was that of mutual comfort and support. In their seminal article on Puritan marriage, William and Malleville Haller argue that, while all Puritan writers began with the three key ends of matrimony outlined in the early sixteenth century, “namely, the procreation of children, the relief of concupiscence, and the consolation of loneliness...It was when they came to the third object that they confronted the great mystery—why and how and to what end in the divine scheme of things men and women love, marry, and live together.” According to the Hallers, explicating that third end of marriage became the most important project for Puritan ministers, one that their Anglican counterparts did not take up at such length. William and Malleville Haller, “The Puritan Art of Love,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 5, no. 2 (1942): 243. For

2:18, explaining, “For company is comfortable though never so small, and Adam tooke no little joy in this his single companion, being thereby freed from that solitude and silence which his lonenesse would else have been subject unto, had there beene no other end nor use in her more, than this her bare presence and society alone.”¹¹¹ In Niccholes’s account, when God declared that it was not good for man to be alone, he was referring first and foremost to the problem of “lonenesse” and the “solitude and silence” that accompanied it. As he went on to clarify, however, it was not Eve’s mere presence in and of itself that most comforted Adam, but the fact that she was specifically a “helper meete for him.”¹¹² Drawn from Adam’s own side, Eve was the ultimate example of the ideal match that God designated for all of his saints, if only they had the discernment to recognize it. Bringing Adam “no little joy,” Eve offered a comfort that single people could not access, no matter how unencumbered their time or their affections.

Gataker too highlighted the importance of finding a match that was “meet,” or fit. As he wrote, “A bad Wife is no Wife in God’s account...For what is a Wife, but a Woman given to Man to be an Helpe and a Comfort to him?...So is she a Wife in Name, but not in Deed, that affordeth not her Husband that Helpe and Comfort that a Wife ought, and that at first she was intended.”¹¹³ A companionable wife was a “speciall gift of God,” making marriage “one of the greatest outward blessings that in this world man enjoyeth.”¹¹⁴ Marriages deficient in intimacy and companionship were part of the problematic unions that, to Paul, had made celibacy the

arguments that corroborate the Hallers’ thesis, see Johnson; Lane, 372-402; Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritans and Sex,” *The New England Quarterly* 15, no. 4 (1942): 591-607; Kathleen Verduin, “Our Cursed Natures: Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience,” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (1983): 220-37. For opposing arguments, see Todd; Kathleen M. Davies, “The Sacred Condition of Equality: How Original Were Puritan Doctrines of Marriage?” *Social History* 2, no. 5 (1977): 563-80.

¹¹¹ Alexander Niccholes, *A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving* (London: Leonard Becket, 1615), 1. It is unclear who Niccholes was, and the name was likely a pseudonym. Johnson argues that Niccholes’s Puritan leanings are apparent, despite the fact that he wrote for a more popular audience and that his identity is unknown (23). For a similar assessment of Niccholes’s religious leanings, see Lloyd Davis, *Sexuality and Gender in the English Renaissance: An Annotated Edition of Contemporary Documents* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1998), 213.

¹¹² Niccholes, 1.

¹¹³ Gataker, *A Good Wife God’s Gift*, 6.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 12.

better option, even if single people sacrificed any hope of attaining the comforts that marriage might bring.

This issue of being without a helpmeet was especially problematic for Puritans because of the spiritual weight they granted marriage. Adam's "lonenesse" was due not just to lack of companionship, but even more importantly, to lack of a partner in religious improvement. Husbands and wives were meant to assist each other in their faith. According to Gataker, "if Christian men and women are to observe one another, that they may whet each other to godlinesse and good workes: then much more should Christian man and wife so doe: that having lived together for a time as copartners in grace here, they may reign together for ever as co-heires in glory hereafter."¹¹⁵ Spouses were "copartners" in religious pursuits, preparing each other in this life for "glory" in the next. John Wing, in his 1620 marriage treatise, *Crowne Conjugall*, explained in similar terms that marriage was an education preparing believers for heaven, modeling the closeness that Christ sought with his church:

Soe in our naturall matrimony one with another...we may be furthered in the mysticall match between [God] and us; that Husband and Wife, may in such sort manage their marriage, that this Crowne matrimoniall may be (as it were) the harbinger of that which is immortal to the wife; and that to the Husband, the being of the King of a family, may be the fore runner, of being a King (with the King of Kings) in glory; that the union of each to other during naturall life, may be the earnest penny, of the eternall union of both to the Lord of life, for ever and ever.¹¹⁶

To Wing, marriage was far more than a lawful means of procreation, a remedy for fornication, or a balm for loneliness. Husbands and wives readied each other for their "mysticall match" with God, refining the aspects of themselves and of their partners that were "immortal." Marriage was a "harbinger" of what was to come. As an earthly reflection of an "eternall union," it was a training ground for the type of intimacy people would share with God in heaven.

¹¹⁵ Gataker, *Marriage Duties*, 48.

¹¹⁶ John Wing, *The Crowne Conjugall or, The Spouse Royall* (Middleburgh: John Hellenius, 1620), 145.

Not only were husbands and wives crucial copartners in their spiritual efforts, but their marriages also offered them greater understanding of the nature of God. As Gouge wrote:

Hereby man and wife who intirely, as they ought, love one another, have an evident demonstration of Christs love to them. For as parents by that affection which they beare to their children, may better discern the minde, and meaning of God towards them, then such as never had childe, so may married persons better know the disposition of Jesus Christ, who is the spouse of every faithfull soule, then single persons.¹¹⁷

Gouge imbued the spousal bond with spiritual importance by comparing it to the relationship between Christ and his church. Just as parents could understand God's love for his children better than those who were childless, so could married people understand Christ's love for his saints better than those who were unmarried. Christ was the "spouse of every faithfull soule," and the bond between husbands and wives offered a glimpse of his own loving "disposition."

As Gouge suggested, the problem of singleness to Puritans was not just that unmarried people were excluded from the comforts of a loving companion, but that—because of their lack of marriage—they were also excluded from the very avenues by which people gained greater spiritual insight. Belden C. Lane argues that, years before John Locke and other philosophers advocated education through environmental and sensory input, Puritans developed a system of religious knowledge-production grounded in experience.¹¹⁸ It was through their human relationships more than anything else that people learned about the love and submission due to God, whether through the interactions between parents and children, masters and servants, or husbands and wives. While it may have been the case that single people, unencumbered by household affairs, were at greater liberty to meditate on spiritual concerns and were less apt to divide their affections, it was also the case—according to Puritans—that unmarried people's understanding of God was fundamentally limited. Gaining knowledge of Christ's love by

¹¹⁷ Gouge, 211.

¹¹⁸ Lane, 380-84.

meditating in solitude versus gaining knowledge of Christ's love by experiencing human intimacy were two very disparate forms of religious insight. The problem with a life of celibacy, no matter how well lived, was that it denied single people access to a deeper understanding of Christ, robbing them of the vital lessons that physical and emotional closeness with a spouse taught. For that reason, among other "singular *Comforts*," Puritan ministers advised marriage "even to those that have the gift of continencie."¹¹⁹ The *vita angelica* was fit for heavenly beings, but not for earthly ones still straining towards God.

While the Fall had irrevocably tarnished marriage, cheapening it by turning it into a remedy for concupiscence and a snare stealing people's attention and affection from Christ, a marriage done well was still the best tool that human beings had to prepare themselves for grace. Singleness, in contrast, was merely conciliatory. It might help people avoid some of the troubles of a corrupt world, but it came at too great a cost, distancing Puritans from the primitive church they wished to recover. As the foundational institution ordained by God in paradise, matrimony was a constituent element of Christianity in its earliest shape, a way to better understand the nature of God in order to implement his will on earth. Consequently, in the Puritan vision of ecclesiastical reform, marriage played the leading role. Celibacy—no longer the divine *vita angelica*—had lost its place.

With the installment of Archbishop William Laud in the 1630s, the volume of Puritan writings, whether on marriage, celibacy, or otherwise, greatly and suddenly plummeted. Compared to earlier periods, Laud's tenure was notably quiet, the "debate on the essence of marriage...largely ceased" and not reemerging until a decade later.¹²⁰ Laud's crackdown marks a divergence point in the history of Protestant celibacy. As Puritans set out across the Atlantic,

¹¹⁹ Perkins, 14-15.

¹²⁰ Johnson, 121.

they carried their ideas about the single life with them, but their transplantation in New England set celibacy on a different path. For those who stayed in England, celibacy would be transformed by developments in the latter half of the century: the marginalization of Puritanism as the voice of dissent; the rise of Quakers, Baptists, and other sects; the persecution of Catholics; and the revival of asceticism in mid-century holy living movements. While these events would reverberate across the ocean and affect ideas about celibacy in the colonies too, they would take different shape on American shores. To continue to trace the evolution of Puritan thinking after English ministers laid the foundation in 1 Corinthians 7, it is necessary to follow the story across the Atlantic.

Chapter 2

“Sin and iniquity, which ordinarily are the companions...of a solitary life”: Resolving the Problems of Celibacy in Puritan New England

When Puritans began migrating to the colonies in the 1630s, they carried with them ideas about celibacy and marriage that their predecessors had been developing since the Elizabethan Settlement.¹ Like their counterparts who remained in England, they made sense of the wedded and single life by placing both along their primitivist timeline. Though they saw marital status as a thing indifferent, they still ranked marriage above celibacy because of its origins as the first institution created by God in paradise. Celibate people missed out on the religious and companionable benefits of matrimony, living in a state that—because it had developed only in response to the Fall—became closely associated with original sin.

Puritans arrived in New England with these ideas already in place, but the colonial project forced them to approach the issue of marital status differently: in order to build a godly society on American shores, they had to turn theology into practice, translating the writings of ministers like William Perkins and William Gouge into everyday experience. Doing so required New Englanders to address two key problems. First, because singleness had little place in their vision of the church, they had to figure out how to manage the unmarried people in their midst. Second, because Edenic unions were fundamental to the original church they sought to recover, they had to figure out how to craft earthly marriages that lived up to the paradisiacal ideal. Tackling both tasks brought Puritans right back to Paul’s endorsement of celibacy in 1 Corinthians 7. Even though Paul represented the apostolic moment they so fervently wished to recover, New Englanders set out to demonstrate that his counsel did not pertain to them. They

¹ Title quotation is from the 1672 court record of John Littleale, reprinted in *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, Massachusetts, 1672-1674* (Salem, MA: Printed for the Essex Institute by Thos. P. Nichols & Son Co., 1916), 5:104.

insisted that his concerns could be addressed not by remaining single, but by crafting better marriages.

In thinking very concretely about the single and married people in their communities, New Englanders took a century's worth of Protestant discourse in new directions. Since the early sixteenth century, the conversation about celibacy had revolved around the problem of the priesthood. Reformers had extolled a married clergy over a chaste one because they believed that institutionalized celibacy was unscriptural, an invention of clerical elites who used sexual virtue to claim spiritual authority. In New England, however, the problem was no longer confined to the ministry. To Puritans who saw celibacy as an aberration from God's original design, all single people—whether clergy or lay—were problematic. The fundamental issue was singleness itself, and the misdeeds of a chaste priesthood were simply the most prominent example of what happened when people disregarded Genesis 2:18: “And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone.” Because Puritans believed that the same problems that plagued the priesthood—sexual error, self-interest, duplicity—could threaten anyone who lived outside of marriage, they sought to regulate single people by embedding them in households. Their ideas about celibacy, however, did not just affect the ways they thought about singleness, but spoke back to the institutions of marriage and the family as well, challenging the boundaries of normative sexuality, relationship, and affection in seventeenth-century New England.

The Puritan Family and Living Arrangements in New England

In New England, colonization was very much a family enterprise. Unlike the Chesapeake, which attracted large numbers of unmarried male laborers, the Puritan colonies attracted settlers who came primarily in household units. The difference between the two regions was the result of competing visions of colonization: whereas the leaders of Virginia were

first and foremost interested in turning a profit, the leaders of New England were interested in creating permanent settlements that would allow them to practice their faith more freely than they could in England. They traveled to the colonies with spouses and children, and from the first days of settlement created a society that revolved around the family.²

For practical, theological, and social reasons, few New Englanders lived outside of marriage. On a practical level, the family helped settlers survive in a fledgling colonial environment. Those who arrived in the colonies without families of their own were placed in households, pooling labor in order to make the overseas venture viable. Soon after arriving in 1620, settlers in Plymouth colony “took notice how many families there were, willing all single men that had no wives to join with some family, as they thought fit, that so we might build fewer houses.”³ In 1629, the Massachusetts Bay Company sent a small group of servants to the colony, instructing that they live with families “for the better accommodation of business.”⁴ Because New England lacked the large laboring class of both England and the Chesapeake, families relied heavily on the labor of household members, both kin and non-kin. Entering into marriage and having large families thus came to have significant economic payoffs in a hardscrabble colonial setting.⁵

The economic necessity of the family was buoyed by the important theological function it served. Since the first stirrings of the Reformation, Protestants had been shifting the site of religious authority away from the church and into the home. The Protestant notion of the

² On the different aims of colonization in the Chesapeake and New England, as well as the importance of the family to the Puritan enterprise, see Alan Taylor, *American Colonies: The Settling of North America* (New York: Viking, 2001), 139-86.

³ As quoted in David H. Flaherty, *Privacy in Colonial New England* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1967), 176.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Large families became common in seventeenth-century New England. Philip Greven finds that, in the average family in Andover, Massachusetts, between seven and eight children survived to adulthood. Greven, “Family Structure in Seventeenth-Century Andover, Massachusetts,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 23 (April 1966): 234-56.

priesthood of all believers challenged the idea that religion took place only within church walls and only under the guidance of an elite class of clerics. As priestly authority diminished, husbands and fathers took up much of the control that priests lost, responsible for leading family prayer, catechizing children, and overseeing their dependents' religious progress.⁶ The growing power of household heads was also reinforced by the notion of *sola scriptura*. Because Protestants identified scripture as the fundamental source of religious authority, Biblical injunctions like the Ten Commandments came to hold greater weight, with effects that would ultimately spread beyond the household. The Fifth Commandment (“honour thy father and thy mother”), for example, was invoked to describe not just the relationship between parents and children, but between monarch and subjects, illustrating the shifting sites of spiritual and temporal authority after the Reformation.⁷

Puritans helped push these changing ideas about the family even further, making the home not just the site of religious authority, but the wellspring of good governance.⁸ Because familial bonds were grounded in affection and, in turn, voluntary submission to household heads, the family offered an especially salient model for thinking about how to structure the world outside the home.⁹ As Amanda Porterfield writes, the Puritan family was “the building block of society and social reform. They hoped to reorganize English society by instilling internal moral governance in people through family prayer, family bible reading, and family sermon

⁶ For changing ideas about the family in Reformation Europe, see Steven Ozment, *When Fathers Ruled: Family Life in Reformation Europe* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983).

⁷ Holly Brewer, *By Birth or Consent: Children, Law, and the Anglo-American Revolution in Authority* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2005), 19-20.

⁸ Both Margo Todd and Kathleen Davies question how innovative Puritan ideas about the family were. Both find evidence of the same shift towards companionate marriage and the “spiritualized household” in early humanist and Catholic forms. See Todd, 18-34; Davies, 563-80.

⁹ For an introduction to the Puritan family in New England, see Ulrich, *Good Wives*; Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1944); John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970).

discussion.”¹⁰ For Puritans, the first step in ecclesiastical and civil reform was to remake the family and the individuals within it. The “internal moral governance” that people developed would then carry over and allow them to transform the world beyond. Making the link between domestic and civil governance especially clear, English Puritan William Gouge described the family as a “little commonwealth.”¹¹ Both a well-ordered home and a well-ordered society depended on affection and deference, with submission given freely to those in positions of authority. Gouge’s analogy worked both ways: just as the family represented the commonwealth in miniature, so did the commonwealth represent the family writ large.

In the colonies, the Puritan family took on even greater importance.¹² Because the less-developed American setting lacked the established ecclesiastical, governmental, and legal structures that undergirded life in England, the home acted as the primary institution shoring up social order. As Mary Beth Norton writes, “Heads of families were...asked to compensate for the lack of the elaborate administrative superstructure that had surrounded households in England.”¹³ Husbands and fathers who carefully managed the religious, moral, and economic lives of their dependents anchored not only the family, but the entire community and, in turn, the larger colonial enterprise.¹⁴

¹⁰ Amanda Porterfield, *Female Piety in Puritan New England: The Emergence of Religious Humanism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 24.

¹¹ In his 1622 book, *Of Domesticall Duties*, Gouge wrote that, “Besides, a familie is a little Church, and a little commonwealth, at least a lively representation thereof, whereby triall may be made of such as are fit for any place of authoritie, or of subjection in Church or common-wealth. Or rather it is a schoole wherein the first principles and grounds of government and subjection are learned: whereby men are fitted to greater matters in Church or commonwealth” (18).

¹² See Mary Beth Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers: Gendered Power and the Forming of American Society* (New York: Vintage Books, 1996). She writes that, because of “the absence of other well-established, accepted hierarchical relationships in the early colonies, [familial households] became even more important in North America than they had been in the mother country” (39). Erik Seeman also discusses how the family came to take on a much more expansive role in New England than in Old. Seeman, “It is Better to Marry than to Burn,” 403-04.

¹³ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 39.

¹⁴ Not just the family, but the larger community was vital to the Puritan colonial project. In the famous sermon he delivered before arriving in New England, Massachusetts governor John Winthrop explained to his fellow colonists that the success of the entire enterprise rested on their ability to bind themselves together as a community, putting

At the same time that the family became the bedrock of New England society, singleness became a far more rare experience than it was in the world Puritans had left behind. While accurate statistics do not exist for the American side of the Atlantic, demographic historians have determined that seventeenth-century England had an exceptionally high number of never-married people compared to other parts of Protestant Europe, with 15-20% of some English generations never marrying. Erik Seeman argues that the relative rarity of single people in New England contributed to less tolerant attitudes towards them, leading to a self-perpetuating cycle where—because singleness appeared so unconventional—fewer and fewer people were inclined to remain unmarried for long, reinforcing negative attitudes.¹⁵ It was not just that single people appeared especially out of place in a setting where the vast majority of people married, but that they appeared threatening too. By standing outside of marriage, they posed a challenge to the patriarchal household, the key institution undergirding colonial social order.¹⁶

At least one seventeenth-century English visitor, John Dunton, suggests that singleness was an especially fraught enterprise in the Puritan colonies. During a 1686 trip to New England, he wrote that “an old (or Super-annuated) Maid, in Boston, is thought such a curse as nothing

public interests before private ones. By treating one another with love, mercy, and justice, they would follow in Christ’s example and uphold the covenant they had entered into with God, causing their enterprise to flourish. If they did not come together but instead put their own concerns first, they would violate the covenant “and soe cause [God] to withdrawe his present help” from them. See John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity* (1630), in *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 3rd series (Boston: Charles C. Little and James Brown, 1838), 7:47.

¹⁵ Seeman, “It is Better to Marry than to Burn,” 403-04. On English population statistics, see David R. Weir, “Rather Never Than Late: Celibacy and Age at Marriage in English Cohort Fertility, 1541-1871,” *Journal of Family History* 9 (Winter 1984): 346. No conclusive statistics exist on the actual numbers of unmarried people in early America. As McCurdy writes, “When discussing marital status in early America, the most important question is the most difficult to answer: How many single people were there?” (29). Marital status was not included as a category on censuses until the mid-nineteenth century, and in some places much later. Though some scholars have made great strides in quantifying much of the early American population, the numbers we have for unmarried people are estimates at best and are often only possible in smaller locales.

¹⁶ Seeman, “It is Better to Marry than to Burn,” 404.

can exceed it, and look'd on as a Dismal Spectacle..."¹⁷ Dunton's description of the "Superannuated Maid" bears remarkable resemblance to a description that English writer Richard Allestree penned a decade earlier.¹⁸ As Susan S. Lanser points out, Dunton's reliance on Allestree's language shows that the vitriol towards unmarried women was in no way unique to the colonies.¹⁹ However, Dunton's comment that a never-married woman was an even greater "Spectacle" in Boston may in fact not be far from the point, given the great weight that New Englanders placed on the family. Colonial women in particular found their identities wrapped up in the home, the combined result of their perpetual status as dependents, the value of their reproductive and domestic labor, and the limited economic opportunities they had to support themselves outside of marriage.

Underscoring the importance of the family in New England were the laws that authorities passed forbidding people from living alone, part of an effort to control the labor and conduct of colonists. The earliest legislation was enacted in the 1630s, and by the 1660s all of the New England colonies had laws on the books prohibiting solitary living. In 1636, the General Court of Massachusetts legislated "that all townes shall take care to order & dispose of all single p[er]sons & inmates w[i]th[in] their towne to servise, or otherwise."²⁰ That same year, Connecticut issued a statute ordering that "no man that is neither married, nor hath any Servant, nor is a publick Officer shall keep house of himself without consent of the Town where he

¹⁷ John Dunton, *Letters Written from New-England, A.D. 1686*, ed. William H. Whitmore (Boston: T.R. Marvin and Son, 1867), 99.

¹⁸ Richard Allestree, *The Ladies Calling, in Two Parts* (Oxford: n.p., 1673). Allestree (1619-1681), Church of England clergyman and staunch Royalist, was also the author of the bestselling devotional book, *The Whole Duty of Man*, published in 1658. Sarah Apetrei describes *The Ladies Calling* as "the runaway success story of the conduct literature for women produced in late seventeenth-century England." Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 1. Both Allestree books were extremely popular in the American colonies as well. See Richard L. Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993), 58-60. Allestree's writing on old maids will be discussed in greater depth later in the chapter.

¹⁹ Susan S. Lanser, "Singular Politics: The Rise of the British Nation and the Production of the Old Maid," in Bennett and Froide, *Singlewomen in the European Past*, 318.

²⁰ As quoted in McCurdy, 33.

lives.”²¹ Rhode Island and New Haven followed suit with similar laws in the 1650s, and both Massachusetts and Plymouth redoubled their efforts in the 1660s. A 1668 Plymouth law highlighted “the great Inconvenience [that] hath arisen by single persons in this Collonie being for themselves and not betakeing themselves to live in well Governed families.”²² A Massachusetts law of the same year demanded that local community leaders “dispose of all single persons and in-mates within their Towns to service,” chastising young people who did “not serve their parents or masters as children, apprentices, hired servants, or journey men ought to do, and usually did in our native country being subject to their commands and discipline.”²³ In accordance, the Dedham selectmen put together a list of twenty-one young men who needed to be settled “in such families in the Town as is most sutable for their good.”²⁴

Both 1668 laws indicate that single people were either a growing problem in New England or a problem that had begun to garner increasing concern.²⁵ The renewed legislation later in the century registered colonial authorities’ suspicion that unmarried people were taking more license in the colonies than they would have in England, showing how singleness posed an especial threat for Puritans on the American side of the Atlantic. Even if the actual experience of

²¹ As quoted in Flaherty, 178.

²² As quoted in Flaherty, 176.

²³ As quoted in McCurdy, 12 and Flaherty, 177. Many of these laws remained on the books until the nineteenth century, despite the fact that they were seldom enforced after 1700. Studying Massachusetts, Flaherty found a total of sixty-five cases invoking the laws during the seventeenth century, the vast majority of which occurred before 1680. All but three were prosecuted in the years immediately following the passage of the 1668 law. Flaherty suggests that, even though the enforcement of the laws no longer appeared in New England courts after the seventeenth century, single people might still have been dealt with more informally by local authorities. He offers two possible explanations for why the laws were seldom enforced after the turn of the century. First, larger-scale changes regarding the notion of privacy meant that, by 1700, people were more willing to accept the idea of solitary living. Second, the laws were enforced in a de facto manner by colonial Poor Laws, which similarly instructed local officials to place people into service in families or, later, in poor houses. A Massachusetts Poor Law passed in 1703 forbid anyone under the age of twenty-one from living alone “for the better preventing of idleness and loose or disorderly living” (quoted in Flaherty, 177-78). Since people without families were more likely to resort to the town for support, it is possible that the laws against living alone became obsolete because the Poor Laws targeted the same population. Flaherty, 177-79.

²⁴ Flaherty, 177.

²⁵ The renewed effort to manage single people in the 1660s emerged during a particularly tumultuous time in New England. Debates over the Half-Way Covenant were very divisive and tensions with area Indian groups escalated, culminating in the extraordinarily violent King Phillip’s War in the mid-1670s.

singleness was relatively rare, the colonial environment itself—with its easier availability of work and land, its new settlements, and its less-developed institutions of governance—presented opportunities for single people that challenged colonial leaders’ attempts to establish an orderly, hierarchical society.²⁶

While the colonial setting might have exacerbated the situation, laws against living alone were not unique to New England. Their roots lay in sixteenth-century English laws that targeted “masterless men,” those people who had been displaced by England’s agricultural revolution, when laborers’ traditional ties to the land were fractured by the enclosure movement and other large-scale changes to the rural economy.²⁷ England responded to the crisis with the 1549 and 1562 statutes of laborers and artificers, which demanded that young unmarried men and women be put to service in households.²⁸ Marital status in these laws was clearly important, but not because the problem was singleness *per se*. Rather, English authorities saw unmarried people as posing a societal threat. They feared that, without the economic support and supervision of a family, single people were more apt to slip into poverty or resort to crime. To prevent them from disrupting the community by drawing on the town’s poor relief or filling its jails, lawmakers sought to place all unmarried people under family supervision.

²⁶ The fact that the Chesapeake did not draft any legislation against living alone reveals how different the issue of singleness was in that region compared to New England. While colonial leaders in Virginia also feared the problem of too many single men, the nature of their economy and the fact that their society did not circle as tightly around individual family units made single living a difficult and less pressing issue to legislate against. On the lack of legislation against living alone in the Chesapeake, see McCurdy, 42-49. I discuss masterless men and single people in Maryland in chapter 3.

²⁷ Concerns about single men reach back even further. McCurdy shows that the history of concerns against bachelorhood date back to ancient Rome, when rulers demanded military service and taxes from unmarried men whom they saw as doing little to support the empire. McCurdy, 59. Several centuries later, Erasmus blamed single men for civic disruption, accusing them of “lyvyng bothe barren and unnaturall.” Erasmus, *A Right Frutefull Epystle...in Laude and Prayse of Matrimony*, trans. Richard Taverner (London: Robert Redman, 1530), Aiiii-Av. Margo Todd discusses Erasmus’s views on bachelorhood in “The Spiritualized Household,” pp. 19-26.

²⁸ Given that the English laws specifically referred to both men and women, the moniker “masterless men” that we have come to associate with the aftermath of the Agricultural Revolution is misleading.

Like their English precedents, colonial laws against solitary living did not legislate specifically against singleness. They did, however, disproportionately target the unmarried, as single people were the community members most likely to be detached from domestic households.²⁹ They also disproportionately targeted men. Though the language of most colonies' legislation was gender neutral, David Flaherty finds that the vast majority of people prosecuted under the laws were young, unmarried males, though widows were occasionally charged as well.³⁰ The absence of any extant cases against never-married women reflects the larger gender regime undergirding New England society. Throughout their life span, women were classified as dependents in need of supervision, transitioning from the care of a father to the care of a husband. Young, unmarried women were thus far less likely to make claims on living alone than their male counterparts. The few cases prosecuted against widows reveals their more complicated position in the colonial hierarchy. Though they comprised a segment of the female population that was not under explicit male control, widows were still not classed in the same category as male household heads.³¹ Nonetheless, as Flaherty's findings reveal, some widows did make claims on living alone.

While never-married women may have desired to live solitary, they did not make it as far as the widows who were prosecuted under the law. In 1636, for example, the town of Salem denied a parcel of land to single woman Debora Holmes because "it would be a bad president to keep hous alone," giving her four bushels of corn instead.³² Likely, the "bad president" the Salem authorities feared had to do with both her sex and her aim to live alone. Court documents

²⁹ The village of Taunton, Massachusetts presents an exception. To attract settlers after its founding 1638, it granted land to single men and permitted them to live alone. Flaherty, 175

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Norton, *Founding Mothers and Fathers*, 139-180; Norton, "'Either Married or to Bee Married': Women's Legal Inequality in Early America," in *Inequality in Early America*, eds. Carla Gardina Pestana and Sharon V. Salinger (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1999), 25-45.

³² As quoted in Josiah H. Benton, *Warning Out in New England* (Boston: W.B. Clarke, 1911), 32.

classify Holmes as a “maid,” suggesting that she was a never-married woman rather than a widow. Either way, she was thwarted in her attempt to live on her own just like her unmarried male counterparts who were prosecuted under the laws.³³ While the odds were stacked much more firmly against Holmes, both women and men in the seventeenth century were discouraged from living outside of family units.³⁴

The laws against solitary living reveal a key juncture where the exigencies of the colonial project collided with the Puritan discourse on celibacy. Though they were intended primarily to control labor, not singleness, they still very much reflected New Englanders’ spiritual concerns about single people. In the ways they sought to regulate non-familial living arrangements, the laws offer an example of how celibacy in New England had moved far beyond the problem of the priesthood, extending to anyone who lived outside of marriage.

Singleness, Solitude, and the Problem of Being Alone

In 1672, John Littleale was brought before the Haverhill, Massachusetts selectmen for violating the colony’s 1668 law against solitary living. According to the court record, he:

lay in a house by himself contrary to the law of the country, whereby he is subject to much sin and iniquity, which ordinarily are the companions and consequences of a solitary life, it was ordered Oct. 12, 1672, that within six weeks after date he remove and settle himself in some orderly family in the town, and be subject to the orderly rules of family government, unless he remove from the town within that time. If he did not comply with this order, the selectmen were ordered to place him in some family, which if he refused, a warrant was to be issued to place him in the house of correction at Hampton.³⁵

³³ Elaine Forman Crane finds that, in the coastal towns of eighteenth-century New England, unmarried women were able to forge informal networks of support and living arrangements outside of marriage. The maritime economy of the seacoast towns thus presented both more opportunities and challenges for single women. See Crane, *Ebb Tide in New England: Women, Seaports, and Social Change, 1630-1800* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1998), 8-17.

³⁴ As McCurdy argues, this would change for men in the eighteenth-century, but not for women. The concept of “bachelorhood”—a distinct period between when a young man left his parents’ home and when he got married—did not take root in the colonies until the last half of the eighteenth century, helped by the American Revolution. See McCurdy, 160-97.

³⁵ *Records and Files of the Quarterly Courts of Essex County*, 5:104.

The response to Littleale's crime was to place him firmly under the "orderly rules of family government." Otherwise, he threatened such disruption that he would either be forced to leave town or be placed "in the house of correction." While Littleale's particular punishment for the crime at hand was not rare, the fact that his case came before the town selectmen at all was. As Flaherty has shown, for all the laws that New Englanders passed against living alone, very few cases actually entered the courts.³⁶ Instances of prosecutions under the laws largely vanish from the historical record after the mid-1670s, even if the legislation remained on the books longer. As Flaherty explains, because Littleale's case was in this sense "unusual," it "has become well known through frequent citation."³⁷ Scholars looking to demonstrate Puritans' efforts at social regulation or their negative attitudes towards single people have often turned to Littleale's court record as the most vivid example.³⁸

Despite the frequency with which his case appears in our histories, however, we have yet to fully understand one of the critical assumptions underlying it: how it was that Littleale's "sin and iniquity" came to be so obviously the result of his "solitary life." To the selectman chronicling the account, the link was clear and required no explanation at all: "Sin and iniquity," the recorder noted, were simply the expected and "ordinar[y]...companions and consequences" of living alone. Scholars have most often presented Littleale's case as an example of officials' fears of young men's sexual desires or of young men's challenges to the traditional sources of colonial authority, but neither of these perspectives fully explains how the town selectmen so

³⁶ There were, of course, still other examples of the laws being prosecuted. Stephen Hoppin, Junior's case garnered the same response from the Dorchester selectmen in 1672 for violating the same Massachusetts law as Littleale. See McCurdy's discussion of Hoppin, and particularly his juxtaposition of Hoppin with the unmarried Dorchester selectman, William Stoughton, 12-13.

³⁷ Flaherty, 176. On the small number of prosecutions, see note 23.

³⁸ See, for example, Morgan, *Puritan Family*, 145; McCurdy, 34; David Hackett Fischer, *Albion's Seed: Four British Folkways in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 73; Stephanie Grauman Wolf, *As Various as Their Land: The Everyday Lives of Eighteenth-Century Americans* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), 33; Richard Godbeer, *Sexual Revolution in Early America* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 100-01.

easily associated “sin” with “solitary living.” Instead, what does flesh out that connection is the religious logic in which the Haverhill selectmen operated. Even if prosecutions like Littleale’s were rare, his “solitary life” was troubling because of the ways in which New Englanders expanded the Protestant discourse on celibacy, coming to see the singleness of cloistered Catholic celibates as commensurate to the singleness of Puritan laypeople.

By the time Littleale came before the town selectmen, celibacy and single people had become very different sorts of problems for colonial Puritans than they had been for other Protestant groups since the Reformation. When New Englanders worried about the “sin and iniquity” of their coreligionists who lived outside of marriage, they were not talking about people who served the church in an official capacity, but about anyone who was single, clergy and laity alike. Nor were they talking about the problem of people using lifelong sexual renunciation to curry spiritual favor and authority, but about the problems that arose when people did not direct their bodies, affections, time, and labor towards a spouse and children. The underlying issue was lack of marriage, and the consequences that all single people faced, whether Catholic priests or lay Puritans, stemmed from the same error: disregarding God’s counsel in Genesis 2:18 (“And the Lord God said, it is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him”) by crafting lives outside of matrimony and the family.

Though not written until the end of the seventeenth century, a wedding sermon by New Hampshire minister John Cotton offers an especially clear account of how Puritans had come to see priestly celibacy and lay singleness as closely related problems.³⁹ Organized entirely around an analysis of Genesis 2:18, Cotton’s sermon instructed his audience in both the benefits and

³⁹ John Cotton (1658-1710) is not to be confused with his more famous grandfather of the same name. The son of Seaborn Cotton, both John (the grandson) and his father preached in the same church in Hampton, New Hampshire. The younger John Cotton was also Cotton Mather’s cousin. On the elder John Cotton, see Sargent Bush, “Cotton, John,” in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00180.html>.

duties of matrimony. Despite being delivered at a wedding ceremony, however, his address circled back time and again to the issue of singleness, beginning with a foreword to the published text signed only by *Per Auditorem*—literally, “for or by the listener”—who may very well have been Cotton himself. Outlining some of the reasons why people might remain unmarried, *Per Auditorem* wrote:

Marriage is one of the most considerable Changes that befall the Children of men in this World; and though it be so, that some spend a considerable age, and live and dye without tasting the sweets of it; whether frightened by an apprehension of imagined and insuperable sorrows attending it, or from a natural frigidity, or a morose unsociable temper, or on religious grounds or pretences, or perhaps on other reasons not mentioned, must be left to themselves; but the generality of the Children of men do so far answer the Law of their Creation...⁴⁰

In his list of explanations for singleness, *Per Auditorem* painted all unmarried people with the same brush. It made little difference whether they were single because of their “apprehension,” their “natural frigidity,” their “morose...temper,” or their “religious...grounds”: none of those people “answer[ed] the Law of their Creation.”⁴¹ Because *Per Auditorem* circulated in a world that had long dismissed the single life as a meaningful spiritual vocation, it was especially easy for him to place all unmarried people, regardless of their circumstances, on the same level. Considering “religious grounds” for singleness to be mere “pretences,” he invoked the longstanding Protestant critique that Catholic priests used vows of celibacy to mask sexual indulgence and avarice. To him, religious celibates shared the same set of negative traits that described any unmarried person: apprehensive, frigid, morose, unsociable, and duplicitous. He painted a picture of unmarried people as ill-tempered outliers, living examples of the dangers of being alone that Genesis 2:18 had cautioned against.

⁴⁰ John Cotton, *A Meet Help, Or a Wedding Sermon, Preached at New-Castle in New-England, June 19th, 1694. At the Marriage of Mr. John Clark, and Mrs. Elizabeth Woodbridge* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1699), 3-4.

⁴¹ Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 4.

Cotton turned to the same issue in the body of his sermon, investigating the problems that stemmed from singleness. Though his address was very similar to two other wedding sermons published in England around mid-century—sometimes even using the exact same phrasing as them—Cotton’s sermon was different in the amount of attention he devoted to the problem of being alone.⁴² His text thus sheds light on why it was that John Littleale’s solitary living was so alarming to colonial authorities, becoming not just a socioeconomic problem, but a religious one. To extol the benefits of “a meet help” to his audience, Cotton returned repeatedly to the question, “In what respect it is not good that the man should be alone?”⁴³ His response in itself was nothing new, offering a familiar Protestant line on the shortcomings of celibacy: “It doth not answer the end in mans Creation,” meaning it did not remedy people’s natural concupiscence, did not meet their social needs, and did not fulfill their duty to grow the church.⁴⁴ What was new, however, was the degree to which Cotton analyzed the meaning of the word “alone” itself, connecting it—like the Haverhill selectmen—to sin and to the problem of living outside marriage.

In his analysis of Genesis 2:18, Cotton distinguished between two different definitions of the word “alone.” He argued that God did not mean alone in terms of “solitude or solitariness” when he spoke of Adam’s state in the Garden of Eden, “for in some sense it is good for a man to be alone, and at some times, as when he goes to meditate, &c. and at such a time as the

⁴² William Secker, *A Wedding Ring Fit for the Finger: Or, the Salve of Divinity on the Sore of Humanity* (London: Thomas Parkhurst, 1658); Richard Meggot, *The Rib Restored: Or, The Honour of Marriage* (London: Nath. Webb and Wil. Grantham, 1656). Though Secker lived on the English side of the Atlantic, his sermon was published in Boston in 1690 and was reprinted at least eight more times in America, with the last reprint in 1816. I have been unable to find any evidence that Meggot’s sermon was reprinted after its initial run in 1656, either in England or America. In a search of advertisements in early American newspapers, I have also been unable to find any indication that Meggot’s sermon was sold in America, though it may very well have circulated among an American audience via a different medium. All three sermons shared similarities in both content and structure.

⁴³ Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 12.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-14.

Philosopher said, he is never less alone, then when he is alone.”⁴⁵ This first kind of aloneness offered a clear benefit: the chance to commune with God without the distractions of the world. When God spoke of being alone in Genesis, he was clearly referring to a different variety, one that was harmful rather than helpful. As Cotton explained the distinction to his audience, “by *alone*, here we are to understand, without a Compeer, Consort, Companion as other Creatures had, without a woman, without a wife, without a Meet Help.”⁴⁶ The problem that God advised against was specifically the problem of singleness, making any unmarried person—not just a Catholic priest—guilty of dismissing scriptural authority.

Like *Per Auditorem*, Cotton put all forms of singleness in the same box, blurring the lines between priestly and lay celibacy. In discussing “*Nunneries*” and those “who live a *Monkish* life,” he wrote, “God was of another mind, *It is not good*, said God; they are differently minded then it seems from their Maker, the All-wise God; they don’t say after him, who thus practically say, *It is good for man to be alone*. How *Monks* who professedly live alone...will acquit themselves of being of a different Judgment, in this matter, from their Maker, I do not presently see.”⁴⁷ In using Genesis 2:18 to attack Catholic celibacy, Cotton drew a direct line from the problem of being alone to the problem of being unmarried. Monks and nuns flouted God’s counsel, being “differently minded” than their “Maker” by completely reversing his teaching in verse eighteen.

Even if Catholic celibates were well-situated to achieve the type of “solitude or solitariness” that Cotton praised, they took their withdrawal too far. Not only did they violate scripture and operate under the mistaken “Popish conceit” that “Virginitie...[was] more perfect

⁴⁵ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 15-16.

and compleat” than marriage, but they isolated themselves to a dangerous degree.⁴⁸ In “sequestering themselves...from the rest of mankind,” they became susceptible to “blind zeal” and an idle “Contemplative life” that made no practical contribution to church or society.⁴⁹ Their lifelong vows of celibacy also ran counter to humankind’s very nature: “solitariness is very uncomfortable...Man is a sociable Creature, and to such an one a solitary life, though abounding with all other good things, would be tedious and unpleasant.”⁵⁰ No matter the spiritual benefits of “solitariness” that celibacy might offer, prolonged singleness violated scripture and was at odds with humankind’s naturally “sociable” disposition.

To Cotton, the same difficulties that made being alone problematic for religious celibates made it problematic for anyone. Directly after his discussion of monks and nuns, he turned to the problem of secular singleness, writing, “Nor can I from the same principle be an advocate for such who lead a single Life meerly through Moroseness or Aversion to humane Society, or where there is no sufficient lett to a double one, and the Maturity of years call for it. Indeed where there is a sufficient cause, there is nothing to be said against it.”⁵¹ In his telling, both “Moroseness” and “Aversion to humane Society” were as poor of justifications for avoiding marriage as *Per Auditorem*’s “religious grounds.” No matter the motivation, the outcome was the same: defying God’s counsel and becoming unmoored from the community. For those who had reached adulthood, few reasons existed for remaining single. Like isolated celibates living a “Contemplative life,” laypeople who never married had little to offer society: “They do nothing honestly towards the worlds continuance, encreasing God’s Subjects or the Kings; and...they are

⁴⁸ Ibid., 15.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 16.

⁵⁰ Ibid, 13.

⁵¹ Ibid., 16.

unworthy to Live themselves who are not instrumental of giving life to others.”⁵² By casting all unmarried people in the same mold, whether monks or morose “*Batchelours*,” Cotton’s sermon illustrated just how far the issue of celibacy had traveled in New England, no longer a concern specific to the Catholic priesthood, but one that extended to any unmarried person.

One stumbling block remained, however, in Cotton’s dismissal of singleness: Paul’s first epistle to the Corinthians. Like his Puritan forebears, Cotton resolved the discrepancy between Genesis 2:18 and 1 Corinthians 7 by narrowing Paul’s reach. Here too his overall approach was nothing new, but the lengths to which he went to prove his point were. On seven different occasions over the course of his wedding sermon, Cotton circled back to Paul, showing that the apostle’s advice of singleness did not conflict with God’s message in Genesis. In the first instance, Cotton wrote that, “Paul speaks only of that particular time. . . for the *present distress*; and there may be yet other things that may render it convenient to this or the other individual to be alone, or for the present time, but in general, and for mankind it is not good.”⁵³ His point here had become the standard line for New Englanders: Paul’s advice was relevant only for certain individuals facing particular “*distress*,” and even then, was intended to be only temporary (“for the present time”). When Cotton returned to Paul later in the sermon, he took a different tack, shifting the focus away from 1 Corinthians 7 and onto other texts that Paul wrote in praise of marriage: “And that the Apostle *Paul* who was not for the cumbrances that attended a Married Estate in times of Persecution, yet calls *Marriage honourable in all. Heb. 13.4.*”⁵⁴ Combining 1

⁵² Ibid., 17. Cotton here was drawing on a sentiment expressed in Anglican Thomas Fuller’s popular tract, *The Holy State*, which offered a brief discussion of the single life. See Fuller, *The Holy State* (Cambridge, England: R.D., 1642), 34-39, 212-14. Fuller was a minister, historian, and prolific writer of devotional guides. W.B. Patterson, “Fuller, Thomas (1607/8–1661),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, eds. H.C.G. Matthew and Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), online edition, ed. Lawrence Goldman, Jan. 2008, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/10236>.

⁵³ Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 11.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 15.

Corinthians 7 with Paul's letter to the Hebrews, Cotton asserted that even the celibate apostle favored marriage for most people most of the time.⁵⁵

When Cotton looped back again, he shifted his tactic further still, downplaying the spiritual benefits that Paul attributed to singleness. Though the unmarried woman “might have liberty for things of a Spiritual nature, *verse* 34....in other respects and according to the common order appointed by God, she doth well [to marry].”⁵⁶ The “common order,” to Cotton, meant anything but the rare circumstances of “*distress*” that he—quoting Paul—had referenced earlier. He downplayed Paul's praise throughout his sermon by pointing out different caveats that Paul himself had issued: namely, that only those with the gift of continence should attempt celibacy and that those who were already married should not deny sex to their spouses.⁵⁷ The final time Cotton circled back, he reminded his audience that despite Paul's warnings about the problems of marriage in 1 Corinthians 7, in his other writings he still “yet...supposeth them [husbands and wives] likewise *helpers forward of each other in Faith & Love.*”⁵⁸ Unlike single people bereft of companionship, married people could aid each other in spiritual growth. Their union had the potential to entangle them in worldly concerns, but the advantages of marriage still outweighed the costs, helping married believers strengthen their religious lives.

Cotton belabored his explanation of 1 Corinthians 7 more so than his predecessors because of the particular perils he saw with being single. Since Cotton identified the problem of “being alone” from Genesis 2:18 as the problem of being unmarried, his critique of celibacy moved beyond the questions of spiritual authority and sexual purity that had surrounded the

⁵⁵ From the time of the Reformation, combining 1 Corinthians 7 with Hebrews 13:4 was a common strategy for contextualizing and tempering Paul's text. While current Biblical scholars doubt that Paul authored the epistle to the Hebrews, early modern Protestants commonly attributed it to him, as did the original King James Version of the Bible, with which seventeenth-century New Englanders would have been familiar. On the use and authorship of Hebrews, see Parish, 58-60.

⁵⁶ Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 18.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

Catholic priesthood. Celibacy for him became fundamentally an issue of relationship—of living outside of marriage—whether in a cloister or anywhere else in “humane Society.” All other misdeeds of the Catholic clergy stemmed from the underlying error of being single. Those who never experienced the intimacy and companionship of marriage and family life became dangerously isolated, with nowhere to fulfill their sexual and social desires and no way to “answer the end in mans Creation.” Their problems extended beyond their living arrangements and into their very personhood, creating selves that were “morose” and “unsociable.” Even people who harbored an “Aversation to humane Society,” Cotton argued, should enter into marriage, where their ill tempers could be redressed by living in the state that God intended.

When colonial authorities thought about solitary people, they brought these spiritual concerns to the table. Despite their different contexts, the reasons why John Cotton worried about monks and nuns being alone and the reasons why the Haverhill authorities worried about John Littleale being alone all grew out of the same problem: living outside of marriage and the family. By looking at Catholic celibates—the most prominent group of lifelong, unmarried people—New Englanders determined that single and solitary colonists were an issue that needed addressing, lest unmarried Puritans slip into the same errors. The colonial laws against solitary living thus drew not only on English precedent regarding labor regulation, but also on Puritan religious discourse. For example, the 1668 Plymouth law accused people who lived alone as “being for themselves”—entirely self-interested—a concern that carried both social and religious significance.⁵⁹ The law assumed that people who lived solitary served only their own ends, distanced from direct service to family, community, or God. What gave that assumption weight were the ideas that Puritans had inherited from Reformation attacks on the cloister, when solitary priests became the supreme example of people undone by self-interest. Isolated from the larger

⁵⁹ As quoted in Flaherty, 176.

body of believers and lacking their own families to support, priests turned inward, indulging only their individual desires. Lawmakers in 1668 Plymouth mapped those same concerns onto the single people in their own community, fearing that anyone who lived outside of a family became vulnerable to the sin of self-interest. That same type of mapping occurred again in the case of John Littleale, whose “solitary life” so necessarily led to “sin and iniquity.” The court record’s vagueness regarding the types of “sin and iniquity” he could fall into was indicative of the larger problem with his single state. Since he was not under the watchful eye of a master, town leaders had no way of knowing how he was directing his body and affections.⁶⁰ They assumed that, as he was not serving a family, he was not directing himself well.

The types of “sin and iniquity” that led authorities to worry about men like Littleale were both sexual and emotional in nature. Because single men lacked the only legitimate outlet for their lust, colonial leaders feared that unmarried men would fall into the sin of fornication. Like the problem of self-interest invoked in the 1668 Plymouth law, the issue of sexual sin looped back to Reformation attacks on the priesthood. One critique against Catholic celibacy was that, because human beings were so plagued by original concupiscence, most celibates were bound to break their vows of chastity and become religious hypocrites. It was not just that they could not remain chaste, but that the very practice of denying sexual urges for prolonged periods of time only made their lusts more unmanageable.

⁶⁰ Many scholars have studied the importance of supervision in New England, both through the formal oversight of a household head and through more informal modes like gossip, which also played an important role in policing behavior. See for example, Patricia Bonomi, *The Lord Cornbury Scandal: The Politics of Reputation in British America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women Before the Bar: Gender, Law, and Society in Connecticut, 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1995); Edith B. Gelles, “Gossip: An Eighteenth Century Case,” *Journal of Social History* 22 (1989): 667-84. Though men’s participation in gossip has received less scholarly attention, Thomas A. Foster argues that male gossip was critical in enforcing normative notions of masculinity. Foster, *Sex and the Eighteenth-Century Man: Massachusetts and the History of Sexuality in America* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 78-89.

This particular understanding of the dangers of sexual abstinence still held sway in seventeenth-century New England. In 1642, when a spate of sexual disorder overtook Plymouth colony, Governor William Bradford diagnosed the problem as residents trying too hard to restrain their sexual impulses, rather than not trying hard enough. As he wrote, “It may be in this case as it is with waters when their streams are stopped or dammed up. When they get passage they flow with more violence and make more noise and disturbance than when they are suffered to run quietly in their own channels.”⁶¹ Concupiscence was so strong that even the effort to practice godly chastity and abide by Plymouth’s “strict laws” could become a stumbling block for fallen human beings. Despite the governor’s best efforts, he “could not suppress the breaking out of sundry notorious sins... especially drunkenness and uncleanness... Not only incontinency between persons unmarried, for which many both men and women have been punished sharply enough, but some married persons also.”⁶² Lust was so powerful that even married people who had an outlet for their sexual desires were apt to be overwhelmed by them if they exercised too much restraint.

Though Bradford admitted that both married and single people were susceptible to lust during the period of disorder in 1642, he believed that “incontinency between persons unmarried” was the much greater risk. Unlike married people who were able to let their desires “run quietly in their own channels,” single people had no such options. Caught in a double bind, the unmarried had to remain chaste all the while knowing that the longer they did so, the more likely their lust was to exceed its bounds. Beleaguered by his sexual desires, Michael

⁶¹ William Bradford, *Of Plymouth Plantation, 1620-1647* (1856; reprint, with an introduction by Francis Murphy, New York: The Modern Library, 1981), 352.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 351. Edmund Morgan argues that Puritans like Bradford were resigned to such sexual missteps in their community, seeing them as the inevitable consequence of original sin. People’s powerlessness against their sexual urges was simply an anticipated part of fallen human nature. Such “human weaknesses,” Morgan writes, were “all the more likely to appear in a religious community, where the normal course of sin was stopped by human laws.” Edmund S. Morgan, “The Puritans and Sex,” 603. See also Verduin, 220-37.

Wigglesworth recorded in his diary as a young man that “marriage will be necessary for me (as an ordinance of god appointed to maintain purity which my heart loveth) what ever the event may be.”⁶³ In a reversal of Catholic logic and Anglican praise of the *vita angelica*, it was marriage, not celibacy, that enabled Wigglesworth to “maintain purity.” The following year, at the age of twenty-four, he married his cousin, Mary Reyner, the first of three marriages over the course of his life.⁶⁴

Cotton Mather expressed a similar fear that his single status made him especially vulnerable to sin. Reflecting on an older Massachusetts minister who had recently been charged with adultery, Mather commented on how he, as an unmarried man, was even more at risk than his errant elder: “My soul was thereby cast into exceeding Fears, lest I, who am a Young Man, in my single *Estate*, should be left by God unto some Fall whereby His Blessed Name should suffer.”⁶⁵ It was his “single *Estate*” that put him in particular danger of being “left by God,” committing the type of sin (“some Fall”) that would both lead him astray and tarnish the church. Operating under a sexual logic in which prolonged periods of chastity were especially dangerous, both Mather and Wigglesworth worried that their celibacy made them easy prey for sexual sin.

It was not just their singleness, however, that put them in danger, but also their youthfulness. Since the Reformation, the discourse on the single life had been pivoting around the clergy, but in New England, it came to pivot primarily around young people.⁶⁶ This

⁶³ Michael Wigglesworth, *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657: The Conscience of a Puritan*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 81. Entry is from March 1654.

⁶⁴ Reyner died four years later in 1659. Wigglesworth remained single for twenty years, when he married his much younger domestic servant. After her death, he entered his third and final marriage. Raymond A. Craig, “Wigglesworth, Michael,” in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00971.html>.

⁶⁵ Cotton Mather, *The Diary of Cotton Mather*, ed. Worthing C. Ford (1911-12; reprint New York: Frederick Ungar for American Classics Series, 1957), 1:79.

⁶⁶ This is not to say that concerns about youth did not enter conversations about the priesthood during the Reformation. John Ponet had emphasized the problem of the Pope imposing celibacy on young men, arguing that it was especially difficult for young men to be constrained to vows. Ponet aside, however, most conversations about

transformation was the result of two factors. First, young people comprised the segment of the population most likely to be unmarried, given that New England lacked a tradition of vocational celibacy.⁶⁷ Second, ideas about young people were undergoing a broader change of their own during this time. Holly Brewer argues that over the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Anglo-Americans were adopting a new view of youth, seeing them no longer as miniature adults, but as people who were still maturing and developing their sense of reason. Until they became capable of self-government, they were especially vulnerable to the sway of their passions and required careful supervision by parents and elders.⁶⁸ The transformation that Brewer identifies had important consequences for the New England discourse on celibacy, where concerns about being single, being alone, and being young all intertwined. Without a well-developed sense of reason and the ability for self-government, youth were assumed to be particularly susceptible to the problems of singleness, explaining why people like John Littleale—young, unmarried, and living on his own—merited the attention of the town selectmen.

Authorities also worried that solitary men like John Littleale were susceptible to another, larger problem: idleness. Like the laws against living alone, idleness was a notion that traveled easily between social and theological registers. It frequently surfaced in conversations about poor relief, when town leaders on both sides of the English Atlantic set out to determine who was and was not worthy of community financial support. Those deemed unworthy were accused of

celibacy revolved around other issues, such as the problem of the priesthood abusing its power, the idea that chastity was far more pleasing to God than marriage, and the idea that clerical celibacy was mere human invention. Ponet, *A Defence for Marriage of Priestes by Scripture and Aunciente Wryters*, n.p.

⁶⁷ By vocational celibacy, I mean a particular form of celibacy: an intentional, lifelong vow of chastity and singleness that is supported by the church through institutionalized mechanisms, such as the convent or priestly ordination. While Protestants from Martin Luther to Richard Hooker still valued chastity and singleness as the *vita angelica*, both Lutherans and Anglicans dismantled the institutionalized practice of vocational celibacy in the church.

⁶⁸ Brewer, 49-70.

being idle. They had simply chosen not to work, the rhetoric went, or they had squandered their earnings.⁶⁹ Idleness had important spiritual connotations as well, closely associated with sexual sin. Samuel Whiting preached from his Massachusetts pulpit in 1666 that, “*Idleness* was ever the incendiary of *filthiness*, and where there is *abundance* of it, there must needs be a great fire of it kindled, which will burn to destruction: it is as *coals*, and as wood to the first, that kindles the *wildfire of lust* that burns to hell fire.”⁷⁰ To Whiting, idleness was especially problematic because of the ways in which it led to larger issues, namely the “*wildfire of lust*.” In a 1674 sermon, minister Samuel Danforth made the connection between idleness and sexual sin even more explicit:

The standing waters putrifie, and grow corrupt and noisome. The untilled ground is soon overgrown with Stinking Weeds. The beginning of *Davids* fall, was his sloth: He gave himself to carnal ease and rest, rolling himself upon his bed, when he should have been in the Field, fighting battels of the Lord; thereupon Satan assaulted him, and tempted him to uncleanness...No *business, debauchery*. By doing nothing, men learn to do evil.⁷¹

The “standing waters” and the “untilled ground,” like idle and inactive people, were prime targets for Satan’s “assault[s].” Leisure itself led to sexual sin, as people “learn to do evil” because they were “doing nothing.” Whiting’s sermon employed the same logic that sixteenth-century reformers had used against the Catholic clergy: priests fell into sexual sin because they had the time and space to do so. That same line of reasoning, in turn, led the Haverhill selectmen to so easily equate solitary living with “sin and iniquity.” They assumed that, because people like John Littleale were unmarried and living alone—not directing their time and labor to supporting a household—they had more leisure at their disposal, making them easy targets for

⁶⁹ Flaherty, 177, 180; Ruth Wallis Herndon, *Unwelcome Americans: Living on the Margin in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

⁷⁰ Samuel Whiting, *Abraham’s Humble Intercession for Sodom, and the Lord’s gracious Concessions in Answer thereunto* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green, 1666), 46-47.

⁷¹ Samuel Danforth, *The Cry of Sodom Enquired Into: Upon Occasion of the Arraignment and Condemnation of Benjamin Goad, for his Prodigious Villany, Together with A Solemn Exhortation to Tremble at Gods Judgments, and to Abandon Youthful Lusts* (Cambridge, MA: Marmaduke Johnson, 1674), 18-19.

Satan. By leading people down the dangerous path of idleness, living outside of a family became a very short step to falling into sin.⁷²

Even more alarming were the specific types of sexual sins that Whiting and Danforth envisioned as the ultimate end of idleness: not just the sin of fornication, but “unnatural” practices like sodomy and bestiality. Because such sexual acts did not involve opposite-sex relations, they were what Danforth called “*going after strange flesh*.”⁷³ As Richard Godbeer argues, when Danforth and Whiting talked about the issues of sodomy and bestiality, they “focused on the violation of boundaries between sexes” rather than “sodomy’s nonreproductive character.”⁷⁴ For other colonists, however, the “nonreproductive character” of acts like sodomy was exactly what made them dangerous. New Haven’s 1655 sodomy law, for instance, brought under the same umbrella acts like masturbation, anal penetration, and sex with pre-pubescent girls: all “tend[ed] to the destruction of the race of mankind.”⁷⁵

Because all of these acts thwarted procreative sexuality, they were linked in another way to the problem of people who lived outside of marriage. It was not just that men like John Littleale might, in their unsupervised idleness, fall into “unnatural” sexual errors like sodomy or bestiality, but that they might “tend to the destruction of the race of mankind” by withdrawing from sex entirely. In his 1694 sermon, John Cotton mapped onto celibacy the same issues that the New Haven law mapped onto sodomy. Celibacy, Cotton explained, “doth not answer the end

⁷² Thomas W. Laqueur connects the issue of being alone to the sexual sin of masturbation. Fueled by the imagination, performed in secret, and prone to excess, the “solitary vice” emerged as a particular problem in England around the beginning of the eighteenth century, soon after Whiting and Danforth were writing. Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone Books, 2003).

⁷³ Danforth, 3.

⁷⁴ Godbeer, “The Cry of Sodom,” 86.

⁷⁵ *New-Haven’s Settling in New-England, and Some Lawes for Government: Published for the Use of that Colony*, facsimile edition, with an editorial note by John D. Cushing (1656; reprint, Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977), 19. See Godbeer’s discussion of the New Haven law in “The Cry of Sodom,” 87.

in mans Creation” because it did not allow for the “propagation of mankind.”⁷⁶ Reiterating the point in even sharper terms, he wrote, “they are unworthy to Live themselves who are not instrumental of giving life to others.”⁷⁷ Whether people who lived outside of marriage opted to direct their sexual desires towards members of the same sex or—like Cotton’s celibates—directed them nowhere at all, they were all exercising a worrisome form of non-reproductive sexuality.

What set Cotton’s single people apart from New Haven’s sodomites, of course, was the different way in which their non-reproductive sexuality manifested itself. The problem with religious celibates was not that they were affiliating unnaturally, like those who committed sodomy or bestiality (“*going after strange flesh*”), but that they were not affiliating at all. As Cotton’s sermon reveals, this was an issue that extended beyond single people’s bodies and sexual lives, affecting their emotions as well. *Per Auditorem*’s single people suffered from a “natural frigidity” and a “morose unsociable temper,” while Cotton’s “*Batchelours*” had an “Aversion to humane Society.” Both were disturbingly similar to monks and nuns who “sequester[ed] themselves...from the rest of mankind...and from one another,” in direct violation of the “Spirit, which saith, *It is not good that man should be alone.*”⁷⁸ As a result, Cotton’s “*Batchelours*” and New Englanders who lived alone required very different responses than did New Haven’s sodomites: they needed to be integrated into families or directed towards marriages of their own.

The case of another single man shows how the very act of bringing unmarried people inside the family, as per Littleale’s orders, could address the affective problems of being alone, even without entering into marriage. Minister Thomas Parker immigrated to Massachusetts in

⁷⁶ Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 12.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 17.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 16.

1634 at the age of thirty-nine. Never marrying, he spent his eighty-two year life living with the family of his cousin, James Noyes. What is especially notable about Parker's case is not what his singleness caused him to lack—a spouse, children, and household of his own—but what it enabled him to gain. His experience of living with the Noyes family reveals that marriage was by no means the only way that New Englanders experienced fulfilling relationships and emotional closeness. James Noyes's brother, Nicholas, describes the relationship that his brother and Parker shared:

There was the greatest amity, intimacy, unanimity, yea, unity imaginable between Mr. *Parker*, and Mr. *Noyes*. So unshaken was their friendship, nothing but death was able to part them. They taught in *one school*; came over in *one ship*; were pastor and teacher of *one church*; and Mr. *Parker* continuing always in celibacy, they lived in *one house*, till death separated them for a time; but they are both now together in *one Heaven*, as they that best knew them have all possible reason to be perswaded.⁷⁹

Clearly—in this second-hand, memorializing account at least—living with Noyes's family offered Parker a great deal of love and belonging. Being single did not circumscribe him, but rather opened up possibilities for a different kind of intimacy and relationship. It was by “continuing always in celibacy” that Parker was able to live “in *one house*” with Noyes, creating a “unity” between the two that was broken only in death.

A staunch orthodox Puritan, Parker would very likely have been aware of the standard Puritan view that placed marriage over celibacy and linked singleness to original sin. However, what made his celibacy work was the fact that his living arrangements prevented isolation and afforded him a new type of intimacy, one that was in some ways akin to that of a marriage. Despite the fact that Parker lived with Noyes's entire family, including his wife and children, only his relationship with Noyes was highlighted in the accounts. The bond between the two

⁷⁹ Noyes's text was appended to Cotton Mather's account of Parker in *Magnalia Christi Americana, or the Ecclesiastical History of New England* (1702; reprint, Hartford, CT: Silas Andrus, 1820), 438.

men, while lacking the hierarchy of a marriage, included the type of voluntary affection that Puritans valued so highly in the “little commonwealth” of the family.⁸⁰

Parker’s life also demonstrates that, for all the ways in which ministers like Cotton sought to narrow Paul’s reach, New Englanders could still make claims on Pauline celibacy. Later in his account, Noyes shows how Parker’s many “spiritual children” helped compensate for the fact that his celibacy interrupted procreative sexuality:

Mr. *Wilson* once, on occasion of his *celibacy*, said to him, That if there could be anger in Heaven, his father would chide him, when he came there, because he had not, like him, a son to follow him. But he had many spiritual children, that were the *seals* of his ministry: he was also a father to the fatherless; and many scholars were little less beholden to him for their education, than they were to their parents for their generation.⁸¹

Though Wilson chastised Parker for his failure to reproduce, having no “son to follow him” like God did, Noyes directly linked Parker’s service as a minister and teacher to a type of reproduction. More so than their parents, he wrote, the scholars that Parker taught owed him for their “generation.” Just as his celibacy allowed Parker to form an intimate bond with James Noyes, so did his lack of being a father enable him to take on the task of being a “father” to his “many scholars.” In this sense, Parker’s celibacy was very much of a Pauline variety, an example of a person who was able to devote himself entirely to God’s service rather than being distracted by a family. As Noyes wrote, Parker “*lived for the churches sake,*” rather than for his own or for any biological progeny.⁸²

⁸⁰ Though Noyes and Parker were kin, their relationship was also drawing on the discourse of male friendship, a particularly cherished form of affiliation in early America. Puritans drew on Biblical examples of friendship to describe the nature of godly love. John Winthrop, for instance, in *A Modell of Christian Charity*, held up the relationship between Jonathan and David and Ruth and Naomi (see p. 43). His discussion of the former pair is reminiscent of the language with which Mather described Parker and Noyes’s friendship. Richard Godbeer offers a useful framework for thinking about male friendship in early America, though his focus is on the eighteenth century and Early Republican period. See Godbeer, *The Overflowing of Friendship: Love Between Men and the Creation of the American Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

⁸¹ Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 440.

⁸² *Ibid.*, 438.

Significantly, though, while Parker's singleness very much drew on Pauline forms, Paul was nowhere mentioned in the accounts of his life. Both of Parker's chroniclers—Nicholas Noyes and Cotton Mather—explained his celibacy by using the Book of Revelation, not 1 Corinthians 7. Writing about Parker's death, Mather wrote, "and after he had lived all his days a *single man*, but a great part of his days engaged in *apocalyptic studies*, he went unto the *apocalyptic virgins*, who *follows the Lamb whithersoever he goes*." The "*apocalyptic studies*" Mather referred to was Parker's theological writings, which focused on the prophecies of the Book of Revelation as foretold in Daniel.⁸³ The link he saw between Parker's scholarship and his celibacy (the "*apocalyptic virgins*") was a reference to the redemption of the virgins in Revelation 14:3-4: "And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth."

Mather's reference to the virgins in Revelation was more than a rhetorical device connecting Parker's scholarship to his lived experience. According to Noyes, it was Parker's very misgivings about marriage that led him to the Book of Revelation in the first place. To explain Parker's single status, Noyes wrote:

The occasion of his *celibacy* was this: at the time that he meditated *marriage*, he was assaulted with violent temptations to *infidelity*, which made him regardless of every thing, in comparison of confirming his faith, about the truth of the scriptures. This occasioned his falling into the study of the *prophecies*, which proved a means of confirming his faith; but he fell so in love with that study, that he never got out of it, until his death: and the church had doubtless had much benefit by his profound studies in that kind...His whole life, besides what was necessary for the support of it, by food, and sleep, was *prayer, study, preaching, and teaching school*.⁸⁴

⁸³ Parker wrote mostly in Latin and his works were never published, save for one that he wrote in English on the Book of Daniel. *Ibid.*, 435.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 440.

The “*infidelity*” that Noyes mentioned did not refer to Parker’s fears about being unfaithful to a potential wife, but about being unfaithful to God. Parker worried about the very problem that Paul had warned about: the problem of loving an earthly spouse more than a heavenly one. In Noyes’s telling, Parker’s singleness enabled him to lead the very type of devoted life that Paul praised, committing himself wholly to “*prayer, study, preaching, and teaching school.*” He benefited the church not by procreating, but by his “profound studies,” devoting himself entirely to the ministry. And yet, in Noyes’s account as with Mather’s, Paul made no entrance. Parker did not turn to 1 Corinthians 7 in his scriptural searching, but to the Book of Revelation.

The absence of Paul in Mather’s and Noyes’s narratives reveals the ways in which his epistle had become particularly problematic in New England. Given that ministers like John Cotton had worked so hard to convince colonists that Paul’s letter was not a mandate for singleness, it makes sense that Mather and Noyes would have wanted to avoid 1 Corinthians 7 when memorializing Parker. Other ministers too worked to frame Paul’s epistle very carefully. In 1702, two years after Parker’s biography appeared in Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, Samuel Willard preached from his Boston pulpit that, “It is true, that God hath given His Direction to it, as *Prudential* for Persons in Times of peculiar Troubles upon the church, to abide in their *Single State*, if they can do it with a good Conscience.”⁸⁵ Willard’s reference to Paul’s epistle was full of caveats. First, singleness was valuable not because of any inherent merit in its

⁸⁵ Samuel Willard, *A Compleat Body of Divinity* (Boston: B. Green and S. Kneeland, 1726), 674. Delivered in Boston on December 12, 1704, Willard’s sermon was published in 1726 in his massive, *A Compleat Body of Divinity*, a text considered “American Puritanism’s only systematic theology.” The pieces that comprise *A Compleat Body of Divinity* were part of a weekly catechism program that Willard began in 1688. Modeled after similar weekly lectures in Calvinist communities in Scotland, Germany, England, and the Netherlands, Willard’s series was the first of its kind in colonial North America. A staunch defender of orthodox Puritanism, Willard had been galvanized by recent English efforts to tighten control over its colonies, which had deprived Massachusetts of its charter in 1684 and established the Dominion of New England in 1686. He delivered his sermons in the very same church that Dominion governor, Edmund Andros, chose to hold his Anglican services, the Old South in Boston. Willard started his lecture series in an effort to rally Congregationalists in the aftermath of disestablishment, part of New Englanders’ larger efforts to thwart popish and Anglican inroads. Richard P. Gildrie, “Willard, Samuel” in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00974.html>.

own right, but only for “*Prudential*” reasons, when it might somehow prove expedient. Second, singleness was only to be resorted to in “Times of peculiar Troubles”—extraordinary circumstances of danger or duress. And third, people could only practice singleness if they could do so “with a good Conscience,” without falling into sexual sin. To Willard, all three requisites were exceedingly rare, demonstrating to New Englanders that Paul’s counsel to the Corinthians was not a blanket endorsement of celibacy.

Also like Cotton, Willard turned to the Catholic Church as the quintessential illustration of the problems of singleness. Referring to vows of chastity, Willard asked, “how many are there among them who are *constrained* to it? But what horrendous *Whoredoms*, and bloody *Murders* have been the Events of it, the World is not ignorant of...”⁸⁶ Drawing on a longstanding Protestant critique, Willard asserted that most Catholics who took vows were in no way “*constrained*” by them. The issue was not that people proved incapable of remaining celibate—this did not surprise him—but that the vow itself compounded their troubles because it gave the false appearance of self-control and sexual purity. Equating celibacy with hypocrisy, Willard insisted that “too often, there are none more *Unchast*, than such as boast themselves in *Caelibacy*, who in the mean while nourish in them *Unclean Lusts*.”⁸⁷ Catholic celibates used their vows to “boast” sexual and religious virtue, all the while “nourish[ing]” their sexual desires. The false front of the vow made their offenses even worse, as there were “none more *Unchast*” than those who could hide their “*Unclean Lusts*” behind the veil of holiness.

Lest his audience was still not convinced that Paul’s endorsement of celibacy was intended only as a temporary solution to a very specific set of problems, Willard planted one last seed of doubt, calling into question Paul’s own marital status. After citing apostolic precedent

⁸⁶ Willard, 674. Willard’s discussion was part of a longer series of sermons on the Seventh Commandment (“Thou shalt not commit adultery”).

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

for matrimony, Willard wrote, “The most holy patriarchs and apostles were married, and some thought Paul too; however he asserts his liberty so to be.”⁸⁸ His suggestion that Paul might not actually have been single when he instructed the Corinthians to “remain as I do” threatened to pull the rug entirely out from under those who read his letter as support for celibacy. In questioning Paul’s marital status, Willard revived a more obscure strain of thought that reached back to Reformation attacks on the priesthood.⁸⁹ By reintroducing this critique into the conversation, he cast doubt on the entire Christian debate over marriage and singleness. If Paul was not referring to celibacy when he advised the Corinthians to take after him, then the Bible offered scant support for the single life.

Given how carefully Willard and Cotton worked to nuance Paul’s epistle, Mather and Noyes might have thought it problematic to link Parker’s singleness to 1 Corinthians 7. Even though Parker navigated his celibacy well, enmeshing himself into Noyes’s home rather than “sequestering” himself like Cotton’s celibates, Paul’s text had come to take on a century of associations regarding the problems of being alone and the purported misdeeds of Catholic clergy. Reformation polemic against the celibacy of the priesthood had made it easy for Protestants to associate the single life with Catholic error. Even those Protestants who continued to affirm celibacy as the *vita angelica* had to distinguish themselves very carefully from the Catholic position, saying that they were rescuing celibacy from papal abuse rather than recreating Roman forms.

While Catholicism had long been the repository of English fears about sexual deviance and disorder, it came to take on even sharper edges in the colonies.⁹⁰ The British colonies were

⁸⁸ Ibid., 675.

⁸⁹ Parish, 45-46, 64-65. On Paul’s marital status, see chapter 1, note 67 in this dissertation.

⁹⁰ The Catholic Church had long been associated in the English imagination with sexual deviance, including sins like sodomy. See, for example, George Haggerty, *Queer Gothic* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2006), 64-

hemmed in by Spanish colonization to the south and French colonization to the north, both acting as arms of Catholic expansion. The threat from Canada was especially alarming to New Englanders, who worried about French Catholics converting local Indian tribes and forming alliances against them.⁹¹ As the century wore on, anti-Catholicism only grew in strength, fueled by decades of conflict with France and the escalation of Indian conflict.⁹² Most important were the events surrounding the Glorious Revolution. Up and down the eastern seaboard, the colonies experienced uprisings of their own that were each in some way reactions against the Catholic threat. In New England, colonists interpreted the loss of the original charter and the creation of the Dominion of New England as a “popish plot.”⁹³ Even though the Dominion in no way advanced Catholic aims, residents read the disestablishment of the Congregational Church as a scheme enabling their religious opponents to make inroads. When Massachusetts residents ousted Dominion governor Edmund Andros, they justified their rebellion as a reaction against the encroachment of both the Crown and the Pope.⁹⁴ With the Catholic threat seeming very close-at-hand in the colonial environment, attacks on Catholic celibacy became a persistent feature of the New England discourse on singleness.⁹⁵

83; Cameron McFarlane, *The Sodomite in Fiction and Satire, 1660-1750* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 4-23.

⁹¹ Especially illuminating about the fear of a joint alliance between Indians and French Catholics is Hannah Swanton’s captivity narrative, penned by Cotton Mather. See his narrative and the attached sermon in *Humiliations Follow'd with Deliverances...Whereto is added a narrative of Hannah Swanton, containing a great many wonderful passages, relating to her captivity and deliverance* (Boston: B. Green & J. Allen, 1697).

⁹² Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 128-58.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 144.

⁹⁴ Jacob Leisler’s rebellion in New York and Marylanders’ revolt against the colony’s Catholic elite reveal that Catholicism came under increasing attack not just in New England, but up and down the eastern seaboard. *Ibid.*, 144-158.

⁹⁵ Francis D. Cogliano argues that, while anti-Catholicism increased over the course of the late colonial period, it “lost its currency” after the Revolution. Before the break from Britain, colonists had used the Catholic Church as the ultimate foil, equating “all things ‘popish’ with tyranny and oppression” and all “things Protesant as good.” Amidst Revolution, however, the British came to serve as the ultimate symbol of tyranny, eventually opening up space in the new nation for a more tolerant view of Catholics. Cogliano, *No King, No Popery: Anti-Catholicism in Revolutionary New England* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1995), 154.

Despite the various controversies that came to be bound up in Paul's epistle—including the specter of Catholicism—his text still surfaced as a way to make sense of the single life in New England. Cotton Mather himself, while hesitant to reference Paul in his memorial of Parker, did invoke him in a different discussion of celibacy a decade earlier. In 1692, amidst the backdrop of the Salem Witch Trials, Mather published *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, a conduct guide designed to help women of all ages and stations lead godly lives, whether they were girls, “maids,” wives, or widows.⁹⁶ In his section on “the vertuous maid,” he drew on Paul's text as a model for female singleness, though like Cotton and Willard he also worked to situate Paul carefully. The version of celibacy he imagined was created very much in opposition to the Catholic model, grounded firmly in the community rather than isolated in the cloister and—ideally—only a temporary rather than lifelong pursuit.

Like John Dunton describing the “super-Annuated Maid” he encountered in Boston, Mather too drew heavily on Richard Allestree's image of never-married women, setting out to refute a stereotype that had already taken hold of the cultural imagination.⁹⁷ In his 1673 book, *The Ladies Calling*, Allestree wrote that,

An old maid is now thought such a curse, as no Poetic fury can exceed; lookt on as the most calamitous creature in nature...I doubt not many are frighted only with the vulgar contempt under which that state lies...Yet I am a little apt to believe there may be a prevention in the case. If the superannuated virgins would behave themselves with gravity and reservedness, addict themselves to the strictest vertu and piety, they would give the world some cause to believe, 'twas not their necessity but their choise which kept them unmarried; that they were preengag'd to a better Amour; espoused to the

⁹⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* (Cambridge, MA: S. Green and B. Green, 1692), 72-76. For a helpful discussion of the context in which Mather wrote his conduct guide, see Kathleen L. Doty, “(Un)Becoming Conduct: Cotton Mather's *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* and the Salem Witchcraft Crisis,” in Peikola et al., *Instructional Writing in English: Studies in Honor of Risto Hiltunen* (Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2009), 141-160.

⁹⁷ On the development of the “old maid” as a type, see Susan S. Lanser, 297-323; Amy M. Froide, *Never Married*, 175-81; Elaine M. McGirr, *Eighteenth-Century Characters: A Guide to the Literature of the Age* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 91-104; Marla R. Miller, “‘My Part Alone’: The World of Rebecca Dickinson, 1787-1802,” *The New England Quarterly* 71, no. 3 (Sept. 1998): 351-73.

spiritual Bridegroom: & this would give them among the soberer sort at least the reverence and esteem of Matrons.⁹⁸

As Dunton would echo a decade later, never-married women should use their “gravity” and “strictest vertu” to convince others that their single state was “not their necessity but their choise.” The underlying assumption, of course, was the very opposite, which is what gave the “curse” of the “old maid” so much power: no matter how much “vertu” a never-married woman might conjure up, everyone assumed that her “choise” of singleness was an act. All women, the logic went, would marry if they could.

When Mather turned to his female readers in 1692, he did not address those who might actually have reached the point in life where marriage was no longer likely—the “old maid”—but rather those who feared becoming an old maid. His concern was that young, female New Englanders would be so wary of the “curse” of lifelong singleness that they would jump into the first opportunity of marriage that presented itself, regardless of the suitability of the match or the possibility of forging a godly union. To address the issue, Mather tackled Allestree head on, combining his text with Paul’s epistle:

Such is her *Discretion*, that while 'tis too absurdly counted a *Great Curse* to be an *Old Maid*, she makes her *Single State* a *Blessed One* by improving her *Leisure* from the encumbrances of a family, in *Caring for the Things of the Lord*, that she may be *Holy both in Body and in Spirit*... But yet instead of using any *Hasty Method* to get into the *Married Row*, and instead of taking a *Bad Husband* meerly to avoid the little *Reproach* of having *None*; she do's by her *Gravity* and *Holiness*, convince all the *World*, that her present circumstances are of *Choice* rather than *Force*; and the *Longer* she is in them, the more she do's *Consecrate* herself unto the *Lord*.⁹⁹

Mather’s passage drew directly from Allestree and from 1 Corinthians 7:34 (“The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit”).

Though he held Paul’s single woman up as a pattern for unmarried women to follow, he did not

⁹⁸ Allestree, 145-46. On Allestree, see note 18.

⁹⁹ Mather, *Ornaments*, 75.

contradict the teaching of ministers like Cotton and Willard. Rather he presented Paul's counsel in a way that made it a feasible model for seventeenth-century female New Englanders, similar to how Parker forged a successful version of singleness by embedding himself in Noyes's family.

Mather did so, first, by shifting the emphasis of Paul's text. His ideal unmarried woman came at her singleness in the opposite direction. While Paul's single woman actively sought celibacy as a way to avoid the problems of marriage, Mather's single woman used Paul's advice to make the most of a situation in which she already found herself. She had not chosen celibacy as the higher calling, but instead was single only because a viable suitor—as measured by her careful “discretion”—had not yet presented himself. While waiting for a more appropriate option, she made the best of her circumstances, “mak[ing] her *Single State a Blessed One*” by using it for spiritual improvement. Acknowledging that women had less power in the marriage market than men, Mather's shift in emphasis was important, recognizing that a woman's singleness might not result from the types of problems that *Per Auditorem* had specified (a “frigid” nature or a “morose” and “unsociable” temper), but rather from the vagaries of the market itself. For those young women who found themselves unmarried, Paul's text offered a useful guide: their singleness, free “from the encumbrances of a family,” allowed them to devote themselves fully to God. The recourse was the same that Allestree and Dunton recommended, but the tone was different. Whereas Allestree lamented that Anglican women rushed into bad marriages rather than used their singleness for greater “holiness,” Mather maintained that—with a proper lesson in the virtue of “discretion”—New England women could learn to do otherwise.

At the same time, however, Mather hoped that old maidenhood would remain only an unrealized fear for most of his readers, that their discretion and “holiness” would soon lead them

to a suitable match. He left no room in his conduct book for women who never married, proceeding instead from girls, to maids, to wives, to widows. Concluding his chapter on the “vertuous maid,” he wrote, “But we hope it will not be long before she becomes a WIFE; which will render her a *Mary*, that is, an *exalted* one.”¹⁰⁰ Like Cotton and Willard, Mather turned to Catholicism to demonstrate the errors of lifelong singleness, which included the suspicion that vows of celibacy led women to make claims on a virtue they had not earned. While the single woman could be a “*Blessed woman*,” he wrote, “She does not *Vow* a perpetual Virginitie, lest her *Vow* should happen to Expose her; while there are *Devils* as well as *Angels*, which do not *Marry*, nor are given in *Marriage*.”¹⁰¹ As Willard would do twelve years later, Mather equated celibacy with the hypocrisy of the Catholic church. Not only did he fear that women might not be able to keep their vows, but he worried that the vow itself came to stand in for holiness. The single woman that Mather envisioned instead, who temporarily followed Paul’s counsel for spiritual improvement, neither used her chastity as a symbol of special religious virtue nor hid behind empty claims.

Furthermore, Mather believed that the logic of the vow—that virginity was a higher state than marriage—was simply unfounded. As he explained to his readers,

It was a great abuse which the Ancients who doted upon *Virginitie*, put upon those words of the Apostle, in Rom. 8.8., *Those that are in the Flesh cannot please God*; when they supposed all *Married Persons* to be *Those* intended. A *Vertuous wife* is one that *pleaseth God*, as much as if she were cloistered up in the strictest and closest *Nunnery*; and there *with yea*, there *in* she pleases a *Vertuous Husband* also.¹⁰²

The Catholic Church’s veneration of celibacy was unscriptural, the result of a longstanding error dating back to the patristic church. For Mather, Romans 8:8 (“So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God”) was not a critique of marriage, but of anyone who lived in the world of the

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 76.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² Ibid., 77.

flesh rather than the spirit. A “*Vertuous wife*” glorified God in and through her service to a “*Vertuous Husband*,” not by cloistering herself in celibacy. In assuming that virginity was a higher state and by pledging a lifelong vow of chastity, Catholic female celibates cut themselves off from a higher religious calling. Mather created a model of female singleness defined in opposition to Catholic celibacy. She did not close off the option of marriage in her life, and she did not isolate herself to the extremes of Catholic celibates, but continued circulating on the marriage market and remained firmly rooted in the community.

The type of singleness that Mather’s unmarried woman shared with Thomas Parker looked much different than the solitary singleness of John Littleale. Ideally, Mather’s “*vertuous maid*” would find marriage soon enough, and in the meantime, Paul’s text offered her a guide for how to use her singleness well. While Parker’s celibacy lasted a lifetime, it was made viable by the fact that his position in his cousin’s family prevented him from cultivating the traits that *Per Auditorem* associated with celibate people. For all the “intimacy” and “unity” he experienced with the married James Noyes, his singleness proved much less threatening than that of Littleale’s, whose “solitary life” had come to occupy dangerous ground in seventeenth-century New England.

Marriage as an Alternative to Pauline Celibacy

The Puritan discourse on celibacy did not just shape the way colonists thought about singleness, but the way they thought about marriage too. Puritans defined the ideal marriage in opposition to Paul’s concerns, which he outlined to the Corinthians:

Such [who marry] shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you...I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may

please her husband. And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.¹⁰³

Since marriage was so apt to distract believers from God, Paul advised the Corinthians to remain single. Puritans, however—despite their deep admiration for the apostolic church—insisted that in this instance, Paul’s counsel did not extend to them. The apostle spoke only of rare and extenuating circumstances; in all other cases, singleness lapsed far short of God’s intention for humankind. The best solution to the problems of marriage was not to forego marrying altogether, but to build better unions that redressed Paul’s concerns, making sure that devotion to spouse never infringed upon devotion to God. The marriages that Puritans imagined for themselves would offer spiritual gifts that celibacy could not, enabling them to learn more about the nature of Christ and better carry out God’s will on earth.

Puritans’ personal letters and ministerial writings, however, reveal just how difficult a task it was to properly balance their earthly and heavenly relationships. Paradoxically, it was by imbuing the marital bond with such weighty spiritual responsibility that believers became vulnerable to the troubles Paul had warned about and that they had set out to avoid: the problem of wanting to please a husband or a wife more than the Lord. In their marital relationships, Puritans walked a fine line between trying to love their spouses with all the affection God intended while at the same time not slipping into the problem of loving them too much. Underlying their efforts was the pervasive anxiety that Paul’s counsel of singleness might not just pertain in rare instances of extraordinary duress, but in their own everyday lives as well.

Scholars studying Puritan marriage have often begun with the premise that the transition from a celibate to a married ministry was an easy and straightforward consequence of the English Reformation. As the narrative goes, once celibacy was dislodged as a requirement of the

¹⁰³ 1 Corinthians 7:28-35

clergy in 1563—just before the Puritan movement emerged—ministers welcomed marriage wholeheartedly, eagerly receiving it as “God’s gift to man to rescue him from his primal loneliness.”¹⁰⁴ Unlike their forebears a generation earlier, Puritan ministers were at full liberty to marry, and they envisioned spousal relationships that would not only remedy their solitariness, but strengthen their walk of faith. According to William and Malleville Haller, “It was a nice and subtle happiness these men conceived for themselves when they abandoned celibacy and embraced matrimony...Puritan churchmen in heeding the injunction to marry did not merely lay aside their clerical celibacy. They stretched their souls to love their wives in the spirit of godliness.”¹⁰⁵ In the Hallers’ rendering, Puritans took up the mantle of marriage easily, envisioning relationships that were deeply satisfying both spiritually and emotionally.

While it is certainly true that Puritans praised marriage as the ideal state for clergy and laypeople alike, it is also true that the process by which they “abandoned celibacy and embraced matrimony” was much more fraught than the Hallers and other scholars suggest. Ministers did not simply trade celibacy for marriage, but worried deeply about how to devote themselves to God while also devoting themselves to a spouse. Their concerns were not limited to the clergy, but pertained to any married believer. As a result, Puritan views of marriage—in which believers would “stretc[h] their souls to love their wives in the spirit of godliness”—were always tempered by the fear that their love would go too far, threatening their relationship with Christ.

As it was for the apostle Paul, the danger that loomed for married Puritans was two-pronged: both sexual and emotional. While Puritans valued marital sex, seeing it not just as a cure for their natural concupiscence but as a way to foster spousal intimacy, they also remained wary of it, fearing that their desires would exceed the bounds of self-control and distract them

¹⁰⁴ Johnson, 11. See, for example, Morgan, “The Puritans and Sex,” 592-94; Verduin, 222-24.

¹⁰⁵ Haller and Haller, 250, 254.

from God. Like the Hallers, Kathleen Verduin attributes these conflicting Puritan ideas to the Protestant dismissal of celibate orders during the Reformation. She writes, “Without recourse to the simple absolutes of the monastery, the Puritan was encouraged to marry but obliged even within marriage to treat his sexuality, as well as his emotions, with suspicion and mistrust.”¹⁰⁶ Puritans who no longer had access to celibate vocations had to figure out how to moderate rather than renounce their sexual desires, embracing the emotional and sexual aspects of marriage while simultaneously holding them at bay. Edmund Leites makes a similar point, arguing that the Puritan emphasis on marital companionship put Puritans in an almost impossible bind. Encouraged to love their spouses more than anyone else on earth, they also had to make sure that their devotion in no way infringed upon their commitment to God. Puritan marriage required an intimacy that combined friendship, sexuality, sensuality, and spirituality, at the same time that it placed constraints on all of those fronts.¹⁰⁷ As Verduin and Leites show, the loss of celibate vocations in the Protestant tradition had consequences that extended far beyond the dissolution of the monastery and the approval of clerical marriage. Because of the ways that Puritan ministers remade matrimony in the wake of the Reformation, all Puritans—clergy and laity alike—had to negotiate a very careful balance in their desires and affections, forging earthly relationships that enhanced but never infringed upon their heavenly ones.

The question of how exactly Puritans could do that became the driving force in their teachings on marriage. Ministers frequently offered models of pious matrimony for their congregants to follow. Cotton Mather, in his *Magnalia Christi Americana*, praised John Eliot and his wife by comparing them to Biblical precedents, first the Old Testament couple, Abraham and Sarah, and then a New Testament example. As he wrote of John Eliot, “His whole

¹⁰⁶ Verduin, 224-26.

¹⁰⁷ Leites, 388.

conversation with her had that *sweetness*, and that *gravity* and *modesty* beautifying it, that everyone called them *Zachary* and *Elizabeth*.”¹⁰⁸ The point was not to praise pious marriage in and of itself, but to show that it was possible for seventeenth-century Puritans to achieve Biblical ideals.

However, the most salient model that New Englanders employed was not their fellow community members, but the marriage between Christ and the church. In both their public and personal writings, Puritans turned to Christ’s example for guidance. John Winthrop sent a letter to his wife Margaret in which he explained that he sought to fashion their marriage on the divine precedent, writing, “[T]he grounde & patterne of o[ur] love, is no other but that betweene Christe and his deare spouse.”¹⁰⁹ Preaching to his congregation, minister Thomas Hooker drew the same connection, though moving from the opposite starting point. He invoked believers’ earthly marriages to demonstrate the type of devotion they should offer to Christ, explaining, “The man whose heart is endeared to the woman he loves, he dreams of her in the night, hath her in his eye & apprehension when he awakes, museth on her as he sits at table, walks with her when he travels and parlies with her in each place where he comes...the heart of the lover keeps company with the thing beloved.”¹¹⁰ That same intensity of desire, Hooker asserted, was the very same attention they should lavish on Christ in their religious pursuits.

The written testimony of married couples reveals how Puritans took these messages to heart. As Winthrop told his wife, “My sweet spouse, let us delight in the love of eache other as

¹⁰⁸ Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:495.

¹⁰⁹ John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, 4 April 1618, transcribed in Robert C. Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop: Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Company at their Emigration to New England, 1630* (1869; reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 136.

¹¹⁰ Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption* (London: Peter Cole, 1656), 137-38. Educated at Cambridge, Hooker (1586-1647) emigrated to Boston in 1633 and then went on to help found the colony of Connecticut. Frank Shuffelton, “Hooker, Thomas,” in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00416.html>. According to Lane, “[Hooker’s] *Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline* (1648) helped to define the character of American Congregationalism” (388).

the chiefe of all earthly comforts,” knowing that their “comforts” did not just consist of earthly companionship, but of the hope that their marriage offered a glimpse of greater “delight” to come. At other points, Winthrop described his wife as “the happye and hopeful supplie (next Christ Jesus) of my greatest losses” and as “the chiefest of all comforts under the hope of Salvation, which hope cannot be valued.”¹¹¹ In both cases, he placed his spousal relationship just below his heavenly one, showing how marriage served as a crucial link between this world and the next. John Cotton made the connection even more explicit when he described his wedding day “as a day of double marriage,” in which the relationship he commenced with his bride would serve the dual—and greater—purpose of drawing him closer to Christ.¹¹² Winthrop expressed to his wife a similar hope “that these earthly blessings of mariage, healthe, friendship, etc, may increase our estimation of our better and onely ever [en]duringe happiness in heaven.”¹¹³ A decade later, he wrote that it was the very act of loving others that made fallen human beings most like God, explaining that, “of all the graces, [love] makes us nearer to resemble the virtues of our heavenly father.”¹¹⁴ For both Cotton and Winthrop, cultivating intimacy with their spouses was not an end in itself, but a way to “increase [their] estimation” of Christ and prepare for the type of union awaiting them in heaven.

The problem, however, was that ordering those relationships properly—so that earthly marriages stood just below, rather than competed with, heavenly ones—was often a very difficult task. Because Puritans placed so much weight on the marital relationship, both as a metaphor illustrating the love of Christ and as a practice preparing believers for heaven, the danger of affection running too far was very real. One of the dangers of imbalance was that it threatened to

¹¹¹ John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, 12 July 1620 (p. 161), 4 April 1618 (p. 135), and 23 January 1620 (p. 159).

¹¹² As recounted in Mather’s *Magnalia Christi Americana*, 1:237.

¹¹³ John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, 23 January 1620, p. 159.

¹¹⁴ Winthrop, *Modell of Christian Charity*, 44.

corrupt the very purpose of marriage itself, turning a divine institution into a worldly one. In his *Practical Commentary on the Epistle of John*, John Cotton—grandfather of the John Cotton who delivered the 1694 wedding sermon—wrote that, “It is a lust of the flesh, when they are so transported with affection, that they look at no higher end than marriage it self, to have conjugall affection, 1 Cor. 7.29. the meaning is, let such as have wives look at them not for their own ends, but to be better fitted for Gods service, and bring them nearer to God...”¹¹⁵ Spouses “fit” each other “for Gods service” by offering mutual aid and support. Marriage was a process of spiritual improvement, a way for people to become of better use in carrying out God’s plan on earth. To view marriage as an end in itself was to miss the point. As Cotton explained, a spouse is “as a Talent sent from God; and therefore hee must look to restore it better by twofold at least, that I may say Lord, here is the wife thou gavest mee, and I am the more wise and humble, and gracious.” The purpose of marriage was to help people be of greater service to God than they could have been had they remained single, becoming “more wise and humble” as a result.

Excessive earthly affection did not just threaten the institution of marriage, but threatened to derail a believer’s entire walk with Christ. In the same commentary, Cotton wrote that the reason why “*so many Christians are so troubled*” is because they place too much stock in transitory human relationships.¹¹⁶ Though God had, in part, intended such relationships to offer solace and comfort, people abused matrimony’s blessings when they began to appreciate the gift more than the giver. Their troubles resulted from “the high prizing of earthly contentments, when wee exceedingly delight our selves in Husbands, or Wives, or Children, which much

¹¹⁵ John Cotton (1585–1652), *A Practical Commentary or an Exposition with Observations, Reasons, and Uses upon the First Epistle Generall of John* (London: R.I. and E.C., 1656), 126. 1 Corinthians 7:29 reads, “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none.” Cotton’s commentary was published in 1656, but scholars think the sermons were first preached decades earlier, when Cotton was still in England. Bozeman, 11.

¹¹⁶ Cotton, *A Practical Commentary*, 199.

benumbs and dims the light of the Spirit.”¹¹⁷ Love of spouse was critical in teaching about the love of God, but it needed to be practiced in careful moderation lest its fleetingness lead to pain and disappointment. In such instances, it was not just people’s emotional balance that was endangered, but their sexual self-control too: “Conjugall affection” could easily turn into incontinence when it “exceeds measure.”¹¹⁸ Even spouses who began their marriages with the best of intentions must remain constantly vigilant, as “sometimes a man hath a good affection to Religion, but the love of his wife carries him away.”¹¹⁹ Because marital intimacy became the key site where Puritans learned about Christ’s love and fulfilled their vocations, it became especially fraught with the danger that believers might carry it too far.

Thomas Shepard put the problem in even sharper terms, calling immoderate marital affection a violation of the First Commandment (“Thou shalt have no other gods before me”).¹²⁰ To love a husband or wife too much was to turn a spouse into an idol. As Shepard defined it, “horrible idolatry” meant “doting upon and loving the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed forever.”¹²¹ Recognizing the sin in his own life, he admitted in his autobiography that, “I saw the reason why I did walk no more humbly, holily, was because I did make the creature some thing and did not make God all things, God all, for he that possesseth him possesseth something. So long as the creature is something in my eye, that something will stand between

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 200.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 126.

¹¹⁹ For Cotton, extreme “conjugall affection” was very much a gendered problem. Cotton defined incontinence as “an affection to women, which is ordinate,” making it solely an issue for men. Cotton was unique in this regard, as most of his colleagues, including Perkins, Gouge, and Whately, made it clear that incontinence could ensnare both men and women.

¹²⁰ Exodus 20:3

¹²¹ Thomas Shepard, “The Sincere Convert: Discovering the Small Number of True Believers, and the Great Difficulty of Saving Conversion” (1641) in *The Works of Thomas Shepard, First Pastor of the First Church, Cambridge, Mass., with a Memoir of his Life and Character* (1853; reprint New York: Ams Press, 1967), 1:26.

God and me, that I shall not walk only in his sight.”¹²² By allowing his wife (“the creature”) to become “something in [his] eye,” Shepard had turned her into an idol, a figure that could “stand between” himself and God.

The difficulties Shepard faced in his marriage spoke to the very problems that had led Paul to advise celibacy in the first place. Paul hoped that the Corinthians could be “without carefulness,” unburdened by the extremely difficult task of keeping their earthly affections and concerns in check—a task in which many of them might well not succeed. Like Shepard, Puritans were constantly searching for the right pitch in their marital relationships, hoping to craft both deeply affectionate and properly-balanced relationships that could render Paul’s concerns about marriage obsolete. Edward Taylor described his love for his wife as “a golden ball of pure fire,” saying that the spousal bond “ought to exceed all other.” In the very next breath, however, he qualified that affection, warning that “it must be kept within bounds too. For it must be subordinate to Gods Glory.”¹²³ In a 1674 letter, he told her, “I send you not my heart: for that I hope is sent to heaven long since and (unless it hath utterly deceived me) it hath not taken up its lodgen in any one’s bosom on this side the royal city of the great King.”¹²⁴ Still, what Taylor could offer her he did so unreservedly, saying that the measure of his affection not apportioned to God went solely to her: she held “the most of it [his heart] that is allowed to be laid out upon an creature.” What was not granted to God, he assured her, “doth solely, and singly fall to your share.”¹²⁵

¹²² Thomas Shepard, *Journal*, reprinted in *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge*, ed. Michael McGiffert (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1994), 99.

¹²³ Edward Taylor to Elizabeth Fitch, 8 July 1674, transcribed in Frances Manwaring Caulkins, *History of Norwich, Connecticut* (Hartford, CT: Case, Lockwood, and Brainard, 1874), 154-55.

¹²⁴ Edward Taylor, *Edward Taylor's Minor Poetry*, vol. 3 of *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor*, eds. Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis (Boston: Teayne, 1981), 37.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*

Like Taylor, Winthrop also sought to impose limits on the allotment of affection he and his wife shared, relegating himself to second place compared to her relationship with Christ, who was her “best husbande.”¹²⁶ Cotton Mather searched for a similar balance, recording in his diary, “Heaven does not require me utterly to lay aside my fondness for my lovelie Consort...I must be temperate in my Conversation with her. And I must always purpose a good and an high End in it; something that mai be an Expression or an Evidence of my Obedience to God.”¹²⁷ While God did not demand that he “lay aside” earthly matrimony—as per Paul’s advice of celibacy—he did demand a greater share of Mather’s affections and require that his marriage serve a higher end. The balancing act that men like Mather, Winthrop, and Taylor attempted became a valuable spiritual exercise in its own right, helping them learn to moderate their bodies and their emotions in order to subdue their will to the Lord’s. As Mather’s case illustrates, the pursuit of earthly intimacy taught him to be “temperate in...Conversation” and gave him the chance to show “Evidence of...Obedience to God.”

By successfully navigating the difficulties of marriage—the very ones that Paul had worried about—believers learned some of their most important spiritual lessons. Belden C. Lane argues that it was in fact the challenges of marriage, rather than its intimacy or comfort, that offered believers the greatest opportunity for spiritual growth. Through the prolonged absence or death of a spouse, human relationships in all their fragility and fleetingness helped Puritans learn to calibrate their affections properly and shore up their commitments to God. During a trying

¹²⁶ John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, 4 April 1618, p. 138. Winthrop was not just concerned that people’s love for a spouse would eclipse their love for God, but that it would eclipse their concern for the larger Christian community as well. In a *Modell of Christian Charity*, he warned colonists against serving their own families at the expense of serving the larger body of believers, which he saw as a sign of living in the world rather than living under the covenant. As he wrote, by “seeking greate things for ourselves and our posterity, the Lord will surely breake out in wrathe against us; be revenged of such a [sinful] people and make us knowe the price of the breach of such a covenant. Now the onely way to avoyde this shipwracke, and to provide for our posterity, is to...be knitt together, in this worke, as one man” (46). On Winthrop’s view of the Christian community, see note 14.

¹²⁷ Mather, *Diary*, 2:523.

period of separation and sickness, Margaret Winthrop wrote to her husband, “Thus it pleaseth the Lord to exercise us with one affliction after another in love; lest we should forget our selves and love this world too much, and not set our affections on heaven where all true happiness is for ever.”¹²⁸ Amidst another absence a year later, John confessed to her, “We see how frail and vain all earthly good things are. There is no means to avoid the loss of them in death, nor the bitterness which accompanyeth them in the cares and troubles of this life.”¹²⁹ For both Winthrops, the difficult periods of their marriage instructed them to place their hopes not on each other, but on God. Even amidst trials, however, John maintained that the blessings of matrimony far outweighed the difficulties, “for to love and live beloved is the soule’s paradise both here and in heaven. In the State of wedlock there be many comforts to learne out of the troubles of that Condition; but let such as have tried the most, say if there be any sweetness in that Condition comparable to the exercise of mutuall love.”¹³⁰ Both the Pauline “troubles” and the “sweetness” of marriage offered believers critical spiritual lessons.

After his wife’s illness following childbirth, Thomas Shepard reached a similar conclusion, writing, “as the affliction was very bitter so the Lord did teach me much by it, and I had need for it for I began to grow secretly proud and full of sensuality delighting my soule in my deare wife more then in my god whom I had promised better unto.”¹³¹ Like Margaret Winthrop, Shepard saw his pain as a reminder not to take more joy in his spouse than in God. It was only when facing the possibility of losing his wife that he realized he had “grow[n] secretly proud and full of sensuality” in his marital relationship, and he redoubled his commitment to God, whom he “had promised better unto.” Despite his resolve, however, the difficulty of

¹²⁸ Margaret Winthrop to John Winthrop, 1 May 1628, p. 261.

¹²⁹ John Winthrop to Margaret Winthrop, 28 April 1629, p.290.

¹³⁰ Winthrop, *Modell of Christian Charity*, 44.

¹³¹ Thomas Shepard, *Autobiography*, in McGiffert, 57.

balancing his earthly and heavenly affections continued to plague him. Several years later when his wife died, he wrote that he felt God “withdraw” at the moment of her passing; the loss of the spouse whose role was to pull him closer to God felt like the loss of God himself. Once again, though, Shepard interpreted his pain as a spiritual lesson, reminding him “to delight no more in creatures but in the Lord,” and to turn even more resolutely to God.¹³²

As all of these discussions show, separation became a crucial part of the ideal Puritan marriage. Whether reminding themselves that Christ was their wives’ “best husband” or telling their spouses, “I send you not my heart,” Puritans were working to keep their affections in check. The point was to make sure that they offered God the greatest portion of their love and concern, never falling into the problems that Paul identified in 1 Corinthians 7. The types of marital unions they desired looped back not just to the apostle’s letter, but to the Bible verse frequently juxtaposed with it: Genesis 2:18. For all of the problems that Puritan ministers associated with being alone, when it came to their relationship with God, they concluded that married people needed to act as if they were single. As John Cotton reminded his audience in his 1694 wedding sermon, “Let not them who are not alone, but united in wedlock, be as if they were alone; though in some respects I grant they should be so, and that according to Apostolical precept; *they that have Wives, should be as if they had none.* 1 Cor. 7.27. *i.e.* in respect of their minding Spiritual and Heavenly things: but let them not be as if they were alone in respect of their duty to each other.”¹³³ In their “Spiritual and Heavenly things,” married Puritans needed to take after the unmarried people that worried Cotton so greatly in the rest of his sermon.

¹³² Ibid., 72, 78.

¹³³ Cotton actually meant verse 29, not verse 27. The “duty” to which he referred meant not just sexual intimacy and the responsibilities of household management, but also the duty of social companionship. Cotton wrote that married people’s company with each other should “be better than their being alone,” drawing on the ideas of his grandfather and many others that the purpose of marriage was to offer mutual support on the path to spiritual improvement. Cotton, *A Meet Help*, 19.

To illustrate how believers might integrate singleness and separation into their marriages, Cotton offered the example of a married minister, the very figure who—after the Reformation—had charted his own transformation from celibacy to marriage. The married clergyman served as an especially helpful example because of the ways he navigated between the extremes of both solitude and affection. Cotton wrote that, “A Minister by Vertue of his Calling indeed is to be much alone, if he is so in his Study, he should not be so when he comes out of it too; and he should always find that of his Companion to be *instar Omnium*, in the room of and beyond all other.”¹³⁴ The minister’s easy transition between the solitude of his study and the company of his wife demonstrated how all married believers should strive to switch back and forth between their earthly and heavenly relationships, dedicating themselves wholly to both. When Cotton’s minister left his study, he was not just in company with his wife, but devoted to her. As his closest and most intimate “Companion,” she was his *instar Omnium*, fulfilling in her own person all of his needs for human relationship. Even more so, she was the very reason why his withdrawal worked. Unlike religious celibates, who slipped into isolation because they lacked spouses and household responsibilities to reel them back in, the minister’s wife kept her husband anchored firmly in the home and the community. Cotton’s example illustrated to his audience not just that religious solitude was possible within marriage, but that the benefits of solitude were made most manifest in the family rather than the cloister.

The types of marriages that Cotton hoped his congregants would forge were ones that took their cue from Pauline celibacy. In order to redress Paul’s critique of marriage, Puritans needed to craft better unions that integrated a degree of singleness within them, so that believers were always aware that their primary relationship was with God. When it came to their spiritual affairs, Cotton wrote, “*they that have Wives, should be as if they had none.*” In turn, they “*that*

¹³⁴ Ibid.

had none” needed to move in the opposite direction. John Littleale should embed himself within a family just as Thomas Parker had done. While Mather chose not entertain the possibility that some women might never marry, Parker himself offered a clear example that some men never did. His celibacy allowed him to cultivate deep intimacy with the cousin whose home he shared rather than with a spouse. For unmarried men and women, the goal was to create a type of singleness that clearly marked its distance from Catholic celibacy: ensconced in the family rather than the cloister, bound by a choice (or, for Mather’s women, at least the appearance thereof) rather than a vow, and free of sexual error and self-interest. Whether married or single, believers were tasked with finding a balance between the withdrawal and intimacy that tugged at both their earthly and heavenly relationships.

While these Puritan ideas about celibacy rose to dominance in New England, they were not the only ones to gain currency in British North America. At the same time that ministers like Cotton and Willard were working to narrow Paul’s reach and limit the place of singleness in their communities, other religious groups elsewhere in the colonies were working to open those places back up. In the hands of seventeenth-century Catholics and Quakers, the single life would once again become a valuable spiritual pursuit.

Chapter 3

“I have long thought it an Error among all Sorts, that use not *Monastick Lives*”: Reinventing Celibacy in Catholic and Quaker Colonial America

During the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Catholics and Quakers added their own voices to the colonial conversation about celibacy, offering new perspectives that were first forged amidst political and religious crises in England and later reframed in the colonial context.¹ Though Catholics and Quakers reached very different conclusions about the single life from their Puritan counterparts in New England, all three groups circled around the same set of concerns, working out the place of celibacy in primitive Christianity, the role of unmarried people in the church, the distinction between the clergy and the laity, and the balance between withdrawing from the world and witnessing for God in the thick of it. How Catholics and Quakers responded to these concerns was the result of both their specific theologies and the particular exigencies of the colonial environment.

Catholics who came to Maryland in the seventeenth century participated in a colonial church that looked much different than that of their coreligionists across the Atlantic, lacking the institutions that had for centuries supported celibate vocations and mediated Catholic spirituality to parishioners: the cloister, the seminary, and a class of chaste priests. Instead, Catholic Marylanders found themselves surrounded by a very small number of ordained celibates and a very large number of unmarried men, all of whom operated outside the traditional bounds of the monastery. The fledgling colonial environment thus required Marylanders to grapple anew with centuries-old Catholic ideas, renegotiating their relationship to the unmarried people in their midst and remaking the cloistered space that had long been the preserve of celibate people.

¹ Title quotation from William Penn, *No Cross, No Crown* (1668), vol. 1 of *A Collection of the Works of William Penn*. (London: J. Sowle, 1726), 296.

Quakers too retooled older Christian approaches to celibacy to meet their own needs. Originating on the radical fringes of a Protestant tradition that had already dismantled clerical celibacy and the cloister, Quakers reintroduced aspects of both practices into their spiritual framework, albeit seeking to redress the errors they saw in the Catholic versions. Believing that celibacy could help some Friends better answer the call to preach and that the cloister offered lessons for all who sought a deeper relationship with Christ, Quakers crafted a far more positive view of the single life than their Puritan counterparts. Though both Puritans and Quakers sought a more primitive form of Christianity, Quakers did not see celibacy as a departure from the original church, but rather as a state that in and of itself had little bearing on apostolic communion.

Even though Quakers and Puritans shared common ground as dissenting sects within English Protestantism, it was Catholics and Quakers who most aligned on the issue of celibacy. Despite the theological distance between them, both groups' stance on the single life edged closer together over the course of the seventeenth century. Female Quaker preachers made celibacy critical to their ministerial vocations, while single Catholic men served their faith outside of religious orders, embedded in families and communities. By the end of the century, leading theologians from both groups were championing a more expansive notion of the cloister, making its practices accessible to all believers regardless of their denomination, ordination, or marital status. As for Puritans in New England, celibacy was an issue that spread far beyond the concerns of a small group of vowed ecclesiastics, becoming relevant to any Catholic or Quaker who lived outside of marriage or who wanted to use the methods of the cloister to draw closer to God. With models that looked very different from the institutionalized forms of celibacy

practiced across the Atlantic, Catholics and Quakers crafted new versions of the single life, adapting celibate people and celibate spaces to fit the contours of the colonial environment.

Reinventing Catholic Celibacy in Post-Reformation England

The Catholic population might seem the most obvious place to look for examples of celibacy in England's North American colonies, given that the Catholic Church had reaffirmed its commitment to chaste religious orders at the Council of Trent.² However, despite their support of the religiously-inspired single life, Catholics in the colonies largely lacked the practice of vocational celibacy, mainly because they also lacked the infrastructure necessary to maintain it: cloisters and seminaries.³ Several factors account for why the colonies did not develop these institutional supports, including the nature of the Catholic faith that colonists brought with them, the absence of an established church, and the legal precedents they transplanted from England. Without ecclesiastical mechanisms in place, Catholic colonists were faced with two key tasks: first, redefining the role of single people in their communities, and second, redefining the notion of celibacy in their religious landscape. Their responses to both helped forge a different notion of the Catholic single life, one that replanted the people and the ideals of the celibate cloister firmly within the worldly milieu of colonial Maryland.⁴

The faith that English Catholics brought with them to the colonies already looked very different from the Tridentine Catholicism practiced on the Continent, especially in regard to

² On the Council of Trent's reaffirmation of celibacy, see Todd, 19.

³ Europe did have lay religious orders that men and women could join without taking official vows and cloistering themselves, such as the Beguines, but those groups did not take root in the colonies. On lay Catholic religious orders, see Wiesner-Hanks, 149-50.

⁴ My emphasis in this section will be on Maryland, the center of Catholicism in the British North American colonies. Though Catholics began migrating to Pennsylvania after its founding in 1681, the type of Catholicism that formed among the much smaller Catholic population there took different shape than it did in Maryland. Because Pennsylvania Catholics lived in smaller, more contained communities, they developed a more traditional, parish model of faith, in which the parish remained the center of worship. Accurate population data does not exist for the seventeenth century, but by 1765 Maryland had approximately 20,000 Catholics while Pennsylvania had about 6,000. Both parish and domestic Catholicism will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter. Jay P. Dolan, *The American Catholic Experience: A History from Colonial Times to the Present* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 87.

vocational celibacy. While Henry VIII had not set out to rewrite religious doctrine when he broke from the Pope, the Reformation drastically changed the nature of English Catholic practice, and the development of the Anglican Church over the next century issued a litany of changes for those who chose to maintain their affiliations with Rome. In the immediate aftermath of the Reformation, practicing Catholicism became an act of treason, signifying loyalty to the papacy rather than the Crown. Catholics became a minority sect, persecuted or tolerated to varying degrees depending on the religious persuasions of the reigning monarch. The institutions that had long defined Catholic practice largely vanished: the monasteries were dissolved, Catholic worship spaces were reclaimed as Anglican ones, and Catholic priests and the ritualized performance of the sacraments were pushed underground, inaccessible to many adherents. The long reign of Elizabeth proved especially difficult, with the penal laws cutting Catholics off from both public worship and public life by preventing them from gathering openly for Mass and barring their entrance into the professions.⁵

In response, English Catholics developed strategies that allowed them to maintain their faith in a volatile environment, forging a distinct version of Catholicism—and in turn, a distinct version of Catholic celibacy—that would take root in both England and its North American colonies. The type of Catholicism that English adherents developed is what scholars call “domestic” or “seigneurial” Catholicism, as opposed to the “parish” model that had existed in pre-Reformation England and that remained in place on the Continent.⁶ Emerging as a matter of necessity, domestic Catholicism relocated the longstanding practice of parish-based, public

⁵ On the Elizabethan Penal Laws, see Frances E. Dolan, “Gender and the ‘Lost’ Spaces of Catholicism,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* XXXII:4 (Spring 2002): 662-64; Marion Norman, “John Gother and the English Way of Spirituality,” *Recusant History* 11, no. 6 (October 1972): 310.

⁶ On the difference between the two types of Catholicism and the rise of domestic Catholicism, see John Bossy, *The English Catholic Community, 1570-1850* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976); J. Dolan, 70-71. Domestic Catholicism is alternatively called seigneurial Catholicism, domestic chaplaincy, and private chaplaincy.

ceremony—centered on the priest and the performance of the sacraments—into the private, concealed spaces of the home. Moving from a parish-based to a domestic model of faith had profound consequences for English Catholics, altering the relationship between priests and laypeople and revamping centuries-old devotional styles.

No longer able to gather parishioners in public spaces for worship, priests were forced to change their methods. Two types of priests ministered in England after the Reformation. The secular clergy—those who did not belong to any particular religious order—were largely active in the poorer regions of the north and west, adopting a model of itinerancy. Moving between homes and communities, they said the Mass and offered the sacraments to neighbors who gathered in private households.⁷ The other main group of priests active in England were the Jesuits, practicing mainly in the southeastern part of the country. Instead of itinerating, they developed a model of “domestic chaplaincy,” embedding themselves in particular homes rather than moving from household to household. Such priests served either just the family with whom they lived or the nearby community of local Catholics who came for ministering. Because it required householders with the wealth, space, and privacy necessary to harbor priests, domestic chaplaincy was available only to the upper crust of English Catholics, taking hold in the region with the highest number of landed gentry.⁸ Since it was far easier for those who sheltered priests to maintain their faith, the Jesuits experienced more success than their secular counterparts, and by the end of the sixteenth century, the English Catholic population was disproportionately wealthy.⁹

⁷ Maura Farrelly, *Papist Patriots: The Making of an American Catholic Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 29; F. Dolan, 652.

⁸ Farrelly, 27-32.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 33.

The rise of seigneurial Catholicism issued far more fundamental changes beyond demographic shifts. Because domestic chaplaincy moved priests literally out of the church and into the home, the relationship between priests and parishioners transformed. Whether disguised in plain sight as household servants or hidden away in “priest holes,” priests’ survival depended entirely on the families who sheltered them. As a result, many lay Catholics began to see the clergy in their homes as subject to their own authority, vulnerable dependents who could be told what to preach and what behavior to condone or condemn. Maura Farrelly writes that, through the experience of harboring clergy, “lay Catholics had learned that they had a right and an obligation to tell their priests how to do their jobs.”¹⁰ In the homes of wealthy patrons, priests lost the physical cues that reminded parishioners of their special and elevated status—the ritualized and hidden spaces of the church and the exclusiveness of the cloister—which in turn shortened the distance between the clergy and the laity.¹¹

Another fundamental change occurred on the level of devotional practice. The Jesuits offered a distinct flavor of Catholicism that reshaped traditional worship styles, an especially significant shift given the vital role the Jesuits played in helping English Catholicism survive. Part of the larger mission of the Society of Jesus was to emphasize private prayer and the formation of lay sodalities (small group meetings). Both techniques proved particularly useful in places like England, where Catholic practice was forced underground.¹² With fewer priests available and public worship forbidden, Catholics had to find new ways to express their faith outside the official channels of the church and the ritualized performance of the sacraments.

¹⁰ Farrelly, 93. As exasperated priest, Richard Lascelle, wrote in 1644, “It’s a shame to hear women that can hardly read the petitions of the Jesus Psalter undertaking to teach priests to wipe their chalices, etc.” Lascelle quoted in Bossy, 257.

¹¹ It is worth remembering that lay members who sheltered priests did so at great personal risk. Frances Dolan shows how the responsibility of housing priests fell largely on women, issuing a reversal in the household’s gender hierarchy. As Dolan writes, “Harboring priests was the one offense under the penal laws for which women were executed” (653).

¹² Farrelly, 162.

Because many Catholics did not officially recuse themselves from the Church of England, they required a devotional style they could pursue in private, without detection from their Anglican neighbors.¹³ Once instructed by a Jesuit priest, laypeople could sustain their methods of personal prayer and their sodalities on their own, requiring minimal institutional support. The private, domestic form of Jesuit spirituality had profound consequences for the nature of worship, moving English Catholics away from corporate and external modes of devotion and towards individualized and interior ones. With the help of Jesuit spirituality, English Catholics adopted practices that, ironically, looked increasingly like the tools of Protestantism: individual prayer, Bible-reading, family worship, and lay religious meetings—all features that characterized the Reformation tenet of the priesthood of all believers.¹⁴ Even when priests were present, a rare occurrence for many English Catholics, the center of faith was the family and the home, not the church.¹⁵

With its changes to clerical-lay relationships and to worship styles, the development of seigneurial Catholicism in England spelled important changes for celibacy. While the dissolution of the monasteries had been a decisive blow—eliminating from the religious landscape both the opportunity for and visibility of vocational celibacy—the rise of domestic

¹³ F. Dolan, 642.

¹⁴ Frances Dolan notes other similarities between Protestant practice and domestic Catholicism: “When priests were not available, as was often the case, the devotional spaces in Catholic households might have been as solitary as those associated with Protestantism...what distinguished a quintessentially Protestant...prayer closet from the confessional was the absence of a priest, but the priest was also often absent for Catholics in post-Reformation England” (652).

¹⁵ The move to seigneurial Catholicism also had the paradoxical effect of making Catholics appear simultaneously more and less threatening. On the one hand, to seventeenth-century Anglicans trying to root out popery, the underground nature of the Catholic faith made papists seem both “everywhere and nowhere,” disguised in everyday spaces and among the people with whom Anglicans frequently circulated (F. Dolan, 642). Being driven into hiding made Catholics dangerously unreadable. As Frances Dolan writes, “A floating and adaptive Catholicism was far more tenacious and disturbing than one rooted in property that could be defeated by displacement” (650). On the other hand, however, domestic Catholicism also made it easier for Catholics to attain a degree of toleration under James I and Charles I in the early decades of the seventeenth century. During their reigns, according to Jay Dolan, “only occasionally, when the religious zeal of Catholics outraged public opinion, did the government take action against them” (71).

Catholicism triggered more deep-seated shifts in the way English Catholics thought about the single life. Clerical celibacy was to some extent demystified. Priests who lived shoulder-to-shoulder with their parishioners and depended on them for survival appeared remarkably human, regardless of any divine favor or elite standing their vows of celibacy might garner. As the distance between the clergy and the laity shrank, celibacy was less able to signify elite status. To be sure, priests harbored in individual households had still taken vows of chastity, but without other signs lending mystery to their unique intercessional power—the cloister, the privacy of the confessional box, the hidden offerings of the Mass, the sacred recesses of the church—celibacy became a less potent indicator of favored status.¹⁶ If laypeople by necessity led their own devotional practices and stood in as proxy priests in the absence of ordained ones, then celibacy was no longer as fundamental a prerequisite for intercession.

At the same time that the status of priestly celibacy diminished, celibacy itself became more accessible to laypeople. Without recourse to the cloister, English people who wanted to pursue lives of dedicated religious celibacy could do so, and by default had to do so, outside of the institutional channels of the church. The dissolution of the monasteries thus had the paradoxical effect of opening up the practice of celibacy to those who were interested, albeit in modified fashion. Devout English Catholics could reproduce the forms of the cloister in the home.¹⁷ Sixteenth-century Jesuit John Gerard recommended to Englishwoman Elizabeth Vaux that,

¹⁶ Priests living in private homes also became the target of attacks on the basis of sexuality. Opponents of Catholicism doubted that priests could maintain their vows of chastity while circulating in such close proximity to their female parishioners. Living in private homes, they alleged, created even more opportunities for priests to indulge their sexual desires. See F. Dolan, 653.

¹⁷ While English Catholic convents-in-exile sprang up on the Continent, most notably in Flemish Douai, they remained off-limits to the majority of English Catholics, who could not afford entry or who, for whatever reason, were unable to travel far from their families and communities. See Laurence Lux-Sterritt, *Redefining Female Religious Life: French Ursulines and English Ladies in Seventeenth-Century Catholicism* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2005), 5. Even before the dissolution of the monasteries, joining a cloister was not an option for many Catholics, as

As she could not give God her virginity, she would offer Him a chaste life. She would practice poverty, in the sense that she would put all she possessed or came to possess in the service of God and His servants; and she herself would be a kind of handmaid to them to wait on their wants. Lastly, and before all else, she would be obedient. She would carry out what she was told to do as perfectly as if she had made a vow.¹⁸

Since Vaux could not enter a convent, Gerard recommended that she instill the conventual features of poverty, chastity, and obedience in her own life at her family's house, carrying them out "as if she had made a vow." The type of celibacy Gerard advised was ideal for an environment that lacked the institutions that had long made celibacy work. In the same way that seigneurial Catholicism brought priests from the church to the home, so too did it bring celibacy from the cloister to the household. While severing celibacy from the convent stripped it of its most defining features—church-sanctioned vows, externally-imposed monastic rule, fully enclosed spaces—it also made celibacy more accessible to anyone who might wish to pursue it.¹⁹

Transplanting Catholic Celibacy in Colonial Maryland

English Catholics who migrated across the Atlantic in the seventeenth century brought these new ideas about celibacy and domestic Catholicism with them. In fact, the supple and adaptable nature of domestic Catholicism made their faith more exportable and came to serve Catholic colonists especially well. Maryland, where the majority of Catholics settled until the end of the eighteenth century, lacked to an even greater degree than England the infrastructure that supported the Catholic Church on the Continent, making the seigneurial model all the more important. Though concentrations of Catholics sprang up in places like St. Mary's City, the bulk

it required the payment of a dowry. Practicing celibacy in the home was one way of getting around the expense of joining a religious order. On the dowry required to enter the convent, see Edward F. Terrar, *Social, Economic, and Religious Beliefs Among Maryland Catholic People During the Period of the English War, 1639-1660* (Bethesda, MD: Catholic Scholars Press, 1996), 274.

¹⁸ As quoted in Lux-Sterritt, 161.

¹⁹ Bridget Hill discusses the corresponding rise in English interest in developing a Protestant conventual form. For Protestant women, Hill argues, the motivation to develop convents grew out of a desire to establish religious identities separate from their relationship to men. For Protestant men, the motivation was to create outlets for daughters with limited marriage prospects. See Hill, 107-130.

of believers lived in rural areas, often separated by vast distances from the closest parish, priest, or coreligionist, and seeing itinerating clergy only irregularly. Maintaining their faith demanded the tools of domestic Catholicism: private prayer, family worship, Bible-reading, and lay sodalities.²⁰

The colonial environment also forced Catholics to adapt their faith in new ways, including their notions of celibacy. As for their New England counterparts, the single life for Catholic Marylanders was an issue in which theological and social concerns intertwined. On the one hand, Maryland was home to a large number of men who were single for demographic and financial reasons rather than religious ones, even if some of them might have found opportunities in the priesthood had they lived on the Continent. On the other hand, despite their secular motivations for remaining single, the particular type of singleness that such men carved out for themselves very much depended on their rootedness in the Catholic Church and the faith community it created. Rather than their singleness posing a social and religious threat, unmarried Catholic men were valued as uniquely positioned to contribute to the church and to the colonial venture, creating a viable version of the Catholic single life that thrived even outside of the institutionalized forms of vocational celibacy.

From its first stirrings, the colonial venture in Maryland was tied to the particular circumstances of single men, for reasons that were both religious and social in origin. While Lord Baltimore envisioned a colony that would first and foremost turn a profit, he also wanted to offer a haven for Catholics, presenting opportunities for them to engage in public life and worship openly in ways they could not in England.²¹ His venture drew support from the concerns and energies of two key groups of unmarried men: first, the younger sons of wealthy

²⁰ On the transference of domestic Catholicism to Maryland, see J. Dolan, 74-84 and Farrelly, 68-94.

²¹ On Baltimore's dual concerns regarding faith and profit, see Farrelly, 22.

gentry, and second, Jesuit priests. Baltimore's strongest financial supporters were Catholic gentlemen seeking viable outlets for their younger sons, for whom a combination of factors—primogeniture, the dissolution of the monasteries, the penal laws—had left very few options. Even the longstanding Catholic safety valve of joining the priesthood held little opportunity in England. Thus, while landed elite gentlemen supported Baltimore's venture financially, their younger sons supported it through their persons, migrating to Maryland themselves. These “gentleman adventurers” brought with them yet more single men in the form of servants who, for far different reasons than their masters, also had limited prospects in England.²²

The Jesuits were the other key group championing Baltimore's undertaking. The first Lord Calvert had reached out to the Society of Jesus in hopes of establishing a partnership for the religious component of his colonial venture, and the Jesuits responded enthusiastically to the opportunity for mission work. Not only were they eager to minister to Indians, but they could also serve their vocations without the restrictions of the penal laws, allowing them to preach openly and emerge from under the thumb of wealthy patrons who chipped away at clerical authority.²³ Like the “gentleman adventurers,” Jesuit priests who traveled to Maryland brought an entourage of unmarried male servants.²⁴ Between the younger sons of English gentry, Jesuit priests, and their retinue of servants, Catholic Maryland was a project born out of and brought to fruition by the concerns and labor—both economic and spiritual—of single men.

However, while Catholic Maryland in no way lacked for examples of singleness, it did lack for examples of vocational celibacy. Like England, the religious landscape of Catholic

²² See, for example, the stories of Robert Wintour and Thomas Cornwalleyes in Michael James Graham, “Lord Baltimore's Pious Enterprise: Toleration and Community in Colonial Maryland 1634-1724” (Ph.D. diss., University of Michigan, 1983), 80-94. For examples of other single Catholic men who sought better prospects in Maryland, see Russell R. Menard and Lois Green Carr, “The Lords Baltimore and the Colonization of Maryland,” in *Early Maryland in a Wider World*, ed. David B. Quinn (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1982), 182.

²³ Graham, 76; Bossy, 257.

²⁴ Graham, 82.

Maryland was notably devoid of monasteries, religious orders, and seminaries, key pieces of infrastructure that had long defined the Catholic Church. The first cloister was not established on American soil until the Carmelite sisters founded a branch in Port Tobacco, Maryland in the 1790s.²⁵ Colonial Maryland had only one Catholic school, which operated intermittently, was available only to the colony's elite, and was shut down after the Glorious Revolution.²⁶ The primary examples of lifelong dedicated celibacy were the Jesuits, but despite their eagerness to come to the colony, they too were sorely underrepresented. At any given point in the seventeenth century, Maryland had between only five to seven Jesuits active in the mission field, a number far disproportionate to the population in need of ministering.²⁷ As one historian put it, Jesuits setting sail for Maryland "seemed to be coming only to die."²⁸ Learned priests, accustomed to intellectual rather than manual labor, were among the least prepared segment of European society to withstand the rigors of colonial life, and the disease-ridden Chesapeake environment took a heavy toll.

To make matters worse, the Jesuits who survived were far more interested in serving the Native population than the English. The opportunity to convert Indians was what most appealed to them and had led them to volunteer in the first place. Jesuit Christopher Morris, for example, wrote in his application letter to the provincial superior of his "ardent zeal and earnest desire of concurring to the conversion of those poore Indians of Maryland," while John Cooper expressed his own "desires in helping to reduce such barbarous people to the knowledg of one God and the

²⁵ Margaret McGuinness, *Called to Serve: A History of Nuns in America* (New York: New York University Press, 2013), 6, 23.

²⁶ Farrelly, 181.

²⁷ According to J. Dolan, "of the twenty-one Jesuits who came to Maryland between 1634 and 1672, seventeen died on the mission at relatively young ages" (81).

²⁸ Thomas Hughes, S.J., *History of the Society of Jesus in North America, Colonial and Federal*, vol. 2 (New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1908-17), 77.

true faith of Christ.”²⁹ Only the escalating hostilities between Natives and colonists persuaded Jesuits to redirect their efforts towards English settlers instead.³⁰ Even then, however, priests could not focus solely on the ministry, required to work for their survival like any other colonist. Many priests lamented that, with so much of their energy devoted to farming, trading, and the daily demands of survival in a harsh environment, they had little time left for ministerial work. The competing demands on the Jesuits, combined with the fact that most colonists lived far from the nearest priest and chapel, meant that many Marylanders witnessed only irregularly the examples of vocational celibacy that had for centuries mediated the Catholic faith to parishioners.³¹

Two critical pieces of colonial policy led Marylanders to have little access to traditional forms of Catholic celibacy, both as observers and participants. First, despite the proprietors themselves being Catholic, Maryland never established Catholicism as the state-supported church. While many Catholics came to Maryland for the chance to practice their faith freely and to engage fully in public life, the colony’s formal stance on religious toleration ensured that

²⁹ Christopher Morris to Edward Knott, 27 July 1640; John Cooper to Edward Knott, 17 July 1640. Morris’s application was denied, but Cooper was accepted into the Maryland mission. Both letters are reprinted in *American Jesuit Spirituality: The Maryland Tradition, 1634-1900*, ed. Robert Emmett Curran (New York: Paulist Press, 1988). Morris quotation is from p. 57; Cooper quotation is from p. 59.

³⁰ Even then, however, Jesuits maintained their sights on Indian missions. Father Andrew White wrote in his 1638 annual letter that, “Though the authorities of this colony have not yet allowed us to dwell among the savages, on account both of the prevailing sickness and of the hostile disposition shown by the savages towards the English, to the extent of murdering a man from this colony, who had gone amongst them for the sake of trade, and also of entering into a conspiracy against our whole nation; still we hope that one of us will shortly secure a station among the savages. Meanwhile, we devote ourselves more zealously to the English settlers; and since there are Protestants as well as Catholics in the colony, we have labored for both, and God has blessed our labors.” Letter reprinted under “Annual Letters Concerning the Jesuit Mission in Maryland,” in *American Jesuit Spirituality: The Maryland Tradition, 1634-1900*, ed. Robert Emmett Curran, 62.

³¹ Jesuits and colonial authorities clashed in their competing visions of the place of the Catholic Church in Maryland. Jesuits urged leaders to establish Catholicism as the official church, while authorities wanted the colonial government to maintain a policy of neutrality. The Maryland Assembly won the battle, and an official church was not sponsored in Maryland until 1689, with the establishment of the Church of England. The fact that Jesuits never had the support of an established church had significant consequences for their ministry, “for[ing them]...to become planters and traders as well as Catholic missionaries” (J. Dolan, 77-78). Their non-ministerial labor continued the process of shortening the distance between the clergy and the laity, as priests regularly interacted with parishioners in decidedly non-religious realms. Terrar discusses the problems that resulted when it “became difficult to distinguish clergy from gentleman farmers” (205).

religion would remain a private affair. Without the benefit of an established church, the onus of maintaining the faith, both financially and spiritually, was placed squarely on the shoulders of individual lay members.

Marylanders' heritage of domestic chaplaincy made them especially well prepared for that responsibility, but it also prevented them from funding colonial infrastructure, including the cloisters and seminaries that would have provided local outlets for pursuing the single life. The flip side of Lord Baltimore's vision of religious toleration was that the colonial Catholic Church would be chronically underfunded and underserved:

His Lo[rd] requires his said Governor and Commissioners th[at] in their voyage to Mary Land they be very carefull to preserve unity and peace amongst all the passengers on Shipp-board, and that they suffer no scandall nor offence to be given to any of the Protestants, whereby any just complaint may heereafter be made, by them, in Virginea or in England, and that for that end, they cause all Acts of Romane Catholique Religion to be done as privately as may be, and that they instruct all the Romane Catholiques to be silent upon all occasions of discourse concerning matters of Religion; and that the said Governor and Commissioners treat the Protestants w[ith] as much mildness and favor as Justice will permitt. And this to be observed at Land as well as at Sea.³²

Baltimore's instructions for colonists to practice their religion "privately," to "be silent" about differences of faith, and to "treat the Protestants w[ith]...mildness" reflect his awareness that the colonial enterprise depended on an interfaith cooperation built on Catholic concession, so that no denomination could gain favored status.³³ When religious toleration became law in 1649, it offered a very different vision of church-state relations than existed in Europe and elsewhere in the colonies, proposing that various religions could coexist under the same government and

³² Cecilius Calvert, "Instructions to the Colonists by Lord Baltimore, 1633" in *Narratives of Early Maryland 1633-1684*, ed. Clayton Colman Hall (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1910), 16.

³³ Baltimore's vision of interfaith cooperation was also influenced by the fact that, from the moment they first set foot in Maryland in 1634, Catholic settlers were outnumbered by Protestants—a feature that would become an enduring part of the colony's demography. However, despite the fact that Catholics comprised only 10% of Maryland's population during the seventeenth century, they had an influence beyond their numbers, attaining positions of political, economic, and social power. Equally important was that English Protestants who settled in Maryland "had to deal with many more Catholic neighbors than they had ever encountered in mid-seventeenth-century England..." making the dynamic between Catholics and Protestants in the colony much different than it was in the metropole. Farrelly, 27.

without state support.³⁴ The consequence was a Catholic Church in the British colonies that would continue to lack the institutional machinery defining it in Continental Europe.³⁵

The second colonial policy affecting vocational celibacy was the importation of praemunire from England, which essentially meant that Maryland officials, rather than the Pope, exercised day-to-day authority over the Catholic Church. The First Statute of Praemunire dated back to 1353, “outlaw[ing] legal appeals to Rome and the extension of Roman law into England.”³⁶ The effect was to greatly limit the power of the clergy and canon law. For example, whereas on the Continent the clergy could take recourse in excommunication in order to ensure that local policies were favorable to the church, in England, the clergy had no such authority, leaving decisions in the hands of provincial courts.³⁷ The concept of praemunire traveled to Maryland through its original charter and through subsequent legislation. The 1632 charter stated that churches in Maryland would be “dedicated and consecrated according to the Ecclesiastical Laws of our Kingdom of England,” while the colonial assembly inscribed praemunire in Law No. 34 of its 1638 legal code.³⁸ Though the law’s original language has not survived, Jesuit Thomas Copley indicated its content in a letter asking the proprietor to overturn it, calling it an “*enormous* crime” that “her[e]by even by Catholiques a law is provided to hange any catholique bishop that should cumme hither, and also every preist, if the exercise of his

³⁴ J. Dolan, 77.

³⁵ The official policy of religious toleration also meant that, in Maryland, domestic Catholicism was no longer a concession to persecution like it was in England, but became the backbone of faith even in an environment where Catholics held the highest positions of power and could worship freely. Michael Graham argues that the Catholic Church won converts in Maryland because of the appeal of aligning with the colony’s ruling elite. Though Catholics in Maryland—unlike other minority religious groups in the colonies, like Quakers—frequently married non-Catholics, it was more common for the non-Catholic spouse to convert. It was not just Catholics’ political position that made their faith appealing, but also the sense of community the church fostered. Transplants to a far-flung colonial environment found much to admire and appreciate in the support networks that Catholics forged. Graham, 373-84.

³⁶ Terrar, 197.

³⁷ Ibid.

³⁸ “The Charter of Maryland, June 20, 1632,” in *Documents of American Catholic History, Volume I, 1493-1865*, ed. John Tracy Ellis (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1987), 96. On Law No. 34, see Terrar, 198.

functions be interpreted jurisdiction or authority [of Rome].”³⁹ Copley expressed the disappointment of many of his fellow Jesuits that Maryland—a colony founded and governed by Catholics—did not grant priests any more authority than they had in England.

An important outcome of the Maryland Assembly’s adoption of praeminure was that it prevented the church from establishing convents in the colony, albeit indirectly. Two different acts passed on the heels of Law No. 34 comprise what Edward Terrar calls the colony’s “anti-convent measure.”⁴⁰ First, the Assembly prohibited the clergy from the corporate ownership of property, and second, it placed limits on single women’s inheritance rights. Thomas Copley again reveals the Jesuit outcry, writing that the latter law essentially ensured “that noe woman here vow chastety in the world.”⁴¹ Showing how the legislation worked against female celibates, he explained, “unlesse she marry w[ithi]n seaven yeers after land fall to hir, she must ether dispose away of hir land, or else she shall forfeite it to the nexte of kinne, and if she have but one Mannor, wheras she canne not alienaite it, it is gonne unlesse she git a husband.”⁴² Women who wanted to vow lifelong celibacy could only do so at great financial risk, losing inherited property if they remained unmarried. English Jesuit Henry More expressed similar outrage, describing the law as “repugnant to the Christian faith...that no virgin can inherit unless she marries before 29 years of age.”⁴³

Though these laws hindered the church in Maryland from establishing institutionalized forms of vocational celibacy, they did not stem from anti-Catholicism—as they were supported by Catholic and Protestant Assemblymen alike—but rather from competing views about the

³⁹ Thomas Copley, S.J., “Letter to Lord Baltimore” (3 April 1638), in *The Calvert Papers*, ed. John Wesley Murray Lee (Baltimore: John Murphy & Co., 1889) 1:165. Looking at examples from Ireland and various locations in South America, Terrar argues that Catholic Marylanders’ fears of ceding authority to Rome were well-founded (203-04).

⁴⁰ Terrar, 215.

⁴¹ Copley in *Calvert Papers*, 165.

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ As quoted in Terrar, 214.

church's role in the colony. Terrar offers two explanations. First, lay Marylanders adopted the tradition of praeminure to ensure that they had more control over where Jesuits directed their efforts, desiring that their priests minister to them, not local Indians. By maintaining authority over the clergy instead of ceding jurisdiction to Rome, they sought to discourage priests from establishing outlying missions and encourage them to locate in parishes.⁴⁴ Second, the particular demographic situation in the colony made it even more important for woman—especially women with property—to marry. Not only did men far outnumber women, but Maryland Catholics were much less well-off than their English counterparts. Catholic colonists required the labor of a family in order to survive, and it was in their best interest to discourage women from taking vows of celibacy.⁴⁵ Colonial policies combined with the exigencies of colonial life meant that seventeenth-century Maryland simply developed no dedicated space for those wanting to take vows of chastity or prepare for the priesthood.

The absence of vocational celibacy was felt more acutely in the colonies than in England.⁴⁶ English Catholics who wanted to enter the priesthood or a religious order had easier access to monasteries and universities on the Continent, including the Catholic community and seminary established in Flemish Douai by Catholic exiles during Elizabeth's reign.⁴⁷

Furthermore, even during periods of increased persecution, London offered spaces of refuge among Catholic members of the foreign diplomatic community, with whom English Catholics

⁴⁴ The Assembly also enacted specific legislation placing limits on clergy living with the Indians. See Terrar, 205.

⁴⁵ For Terrar's discussion on both points, see pp.187-215, 274.

⁴⁶ Sarah Apetrei, B.W. Young, and Karin Wulf have all shown how having viable models of religiously-inspired singleness is a critical factor in influencing other people's decisions to remain unmarried. While Apetrei's Mary Astell, Young's John Henry Newman, and Wulf's coterie of Philadelphia Quaker women all arrived at their decisions to remain single from a sense of individual religious conviction, they also all wrote about and admired particular single people. Such mentors played an important role in their own decisions to pursue deliberate lifelong singleness. For Maryland Catholics, examples of dedicated religious celibacy—while a common feature of Continental Europe's religious landscape—were few and far between. Even those small numbers of Catholic colonists who traveled to Europe to join religious orders usually remained across the Atlantic to carry out their vocation. See Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion*, 75-94; B.W. Young, 15-27; Wulf, 45-50, 65-70; J. Dolan, 86.

⁴⁷ J. Dolan, 71.

could worship and build closer ties to people and resources on the Continent.⁴⁸ Perhaps most importantly, England over the course of the seventeenth century had begun to reestablish monasteries, mostly across the Channel but a small few on English soil. One of those was Mary Ward's Institute in Hammersmith, established in 1618. Hoping to develop a female counterpart order to the Jesuits, Ward envisioned an organization that would educate women, offer celibate vows as part of ordination (though they were not required—women could remain lay members), and send them out into the world as teachers. Though she modeled her Institute on conventual forms, the fact that she trained women to serve outside the cloister excited controversy among Anglicans and Catholics alike. Anglican neighbors ransacked the Institute during the Popish Plot in 1678, and the Pope ordered it shut down in 1681, demanding that its adherents relocate to enclosed convents on the Continent.⁴⁹ While the few small convents in England were always vulnerable, they nonetheless offered opportunities for English Catholic women to pursue celibacy as a lifelong religious vocation.⁵⁰

Catholic colonists who wished to attend seminary or enter religious orders could also do so in Europe, but that option was limited to the small few who could afford it. As Jay Dolan writes, “only the sons and daughters of the upper class could aspire to such a life. The cost of the journey to Europe was prohibitive for most families, and in the case of women, the dowries required to enter the convent were so large...that only the well-to-do could afford the high cost of religious life.”⁵¹ That a small number of wealthy Catholics did travel across the Atlantic to pursue religious vocations indicates colonists' commitment to their faith, despite their distance

⁴⁸ F. Dolan, 650, 652.

⁴⁹ Christine E. Burke, *Freedom, Justice, and Sincerity: Reflections on the Life and Spirituality of Mary Ward* (Hindmarsh, Australia: ATF Press, 2009), 1-13, 34-44.

⁵⁰ More successful were English convents developed on the Continent. Working with the French order of Ursulines, English Catholics established twenty-seven convents across the Channel during the seventeenth century. See Apetrei, *Women, Feminism, and Religion*, 84-85.

⁵¹ J. Dolan, 86-87.

from the centers of Catholic power.⁵² The vast majority of Catholic colonists, however, lacked the opportunities for vocational celibacy that England's closer ties and proximity to the Continent afforded.

As in England, however, the obstacles facing the institutionalization of vocational celibacy presented opportunities for Catholics to rework their notions of the single life in ways that best fit their environment. Celibacy in Catholic Maryland came to take on several distinct features. First, it was highly gendered. The combination of colonial policy regarding single women's inheritance laws and the fact that men outnumbered women on an average of six to one until the turn of the century meant that Maryland had a high number of single men and an almost nonexistent number of single women. The few never-married women who have shown up in the historical record have puzzled scholars, leading them to speculate that such women had likely taken some form of celibate vow before leaving Europe. One of early Maryland's most notable women, single or otherwise, reveals the exception that proves the rule. Margaret Brent, most famous for asking the Maryland Assembly for the right to cast a vote in 1648, lived and died as a single woman, as did her sister, Mary.⁵³ As *femes sole*, Margaret and Mary Brent were able to

⁵² During the seventeenth century, only three or four Maryland Catholic men joined the Jesuits. No Maryland women entered a religious order in Europe until the eighteenth century, with Mary Digges becoming the first Maryland-born nun in 1721. During the mid-eighteenth century, the numbers of both male and female Marylanders entering seminaries and convents in Europe increased. Between 1700 and 1773, forty-three Maryland men joined the Jesuits and four joined other religious orders. At least thirty-six women entered convents in the decades immediately prior to the Revolution. Only a small handful of both sexes returned to the American side of the Atlantic to serve their vocations. See J. Dolan, 86; James Hennesey, S.J., "Several Youth Sent from Here: Native-Born Priests and Religious of English America, 1634-1776," in *Studies in Catholic History: In Honor of John Tracy Ellis*, eds. Nelson H. Minnich, Robert B. Eno, S.S., and Robert F. Trisco (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, 1985), 2-5.

⁵³ The Brents were related to the Calvert family, the founders and proprietors of Maryland. Margaret Brent was appointed by Leonard Calvert as his executor before his death in 1646, an act that propelled her into the political life of the colony. Calvert had pledged his estate to support the Maryland soldiers who had fought in Ingle's Rebellion, but his assets were insufficient. In the aftermath of the rebellion, when the soldiers demanded payment, the Maryland Assembly made Margaret Brent the attorney-in-fact for Lord Baltimore. Brent is most well-known for her request to the Maryland Assembly to cast a vote as a landowner. Carr argues, however, that Brent was not an early advocate of female suffrage—as some historians have suggested—but rather that she saw herself as a voting member of the colony because of her status as a landowner and as Lord Baltimore's acting attorney. Brent fell out of favor with Lord Baltimore when she sold his cattle in an effort to make the payments owed to the militia, and the

buy property, and they purchased a parcel of land that they named “Sister’s Freehold.” Lois Carr has suggested that the only way both women were able to remain single despite the incredible pressure on women to marry given the skewed sex ratio was if they had vowed celibacy before leaving England. Carr makes a convincing case that both sisters had taken vows at Mary Ward’s Institute, and that they were motivated to relocate to the colonies to assist the Jesuits in their mission by becoming teachers.⁵⁴ The case of Margaret Neale offers another example of the rarity of female singleness in Maryland. Though the Neale family was predominantly Protestant, Maura Farrelly suggests that Margaret converted to Catholicism and traveled to Europe to join a religious order, which “would explain both her failure to take a husband and her apparent disappearance from the historical record of the colony.”⁵⁵ For both Carr and Farrelly, the single status of the Brent sisters and of Margaret Neale stands out as a peculiarity requiring explanation.

That historians have offered possibilities for why female Marylanders remained single suggests just how different singleness was for men than for women in the colony, as well as how different it was for Catholic women living on opposite sides of the English Atlantic. In England people like John Gerard and Mary Ward retooled celibacy as a viable option for lay women after the Reformation, but that option was largely unavailable to women in Catholic Maryland. With the Brents’ “Sister’s Freehold” as a possible exception, similar practices did not develop in the colony until well into the eighteenth century. The highly uneven sex ratio and the lack of convents meant that the single life in Maryland was a predominantly male experience.

Brents eventually moved to Virginia, where Margaret died in 1671. Lois Green Carr, “Margaret Brent—A Brief History,” Maryland State Archives Online, 7 February 2002, <http://msa.maryland.gov/msa/speccol/sc3500/sc3520/002100/002177/html/mbrent2.html>.

⁵⁴ Though Mary and Margaret traveled to the colony with their brothers, they chose to set up house together rather than with them, which further suggests that they saw themselves as serving religious vocations in Maryland. Ibid.

⁵⁵ Margaret might not have been the only Catholic convert in her family. Born to a Catholic mother and Anglican father, she and her five siblings were raised as Protestants. Four of those five siblings married Protestants, while one sister married a Catholic and, according to Farrelly, very likely converted to Catholicism. As Farrelly writes, “Margaret’s failure to marry was most unusual among women in the Chesapeake region, where the unbalanced ratio between men and women made marriageable women a hot commodity and single women an aberration” (141).

A second distinct feature of the single life in Catholic Maryland was that, despite the high number of unmarried men, singleness was a far less threatening prospect than it was in New England or elsewhere in the Chesapeake. According to Michael Graham, the Maryland Catholic community proved particularly adept at absorbing unmarried males, disrupting the traditional narrative of “masterless men.”⁵⁶ Even though most single Catholic Marylanders were likely single because of demographic or financial concerns rather than religious ones, it was nonetheless their religion that allayed the anxieties traditionally associated with singleness: namely, that unmarried men would fulfill their sexual desires with other men’s wives and daughters and would disrupt the community through their idleness. In contrast to the image of unmoored and disorderly laborers, Graham finds that most single Catholic men were model community members who were “particularly loyal” to the Catholic Church.⁵⁷ While not vowed celibates, they were able to use their faith to carve out viable versions of singleness that garnered respect and ensured belonging within the Catholic community.

Though seventeenth-century Marylanders left few personal writings behind, their wills reveal their close ties to the church. Studying probate records, Graham finds that single Catholic men were consistently among the Church’s most generous supporters. Edward Dermott, for example, informed his executor that, “I desire that after my Just debts be paid that one half of what I have be equally divided amongst the clergy.”⁵⁸ John Thimbleby similarly expressed his allegiance through his bequest: “ffirst I give to him that is the Pastor of the Roman Catholic

⁵⁶ Graham, 85. Another reason why single men might have seemed less threatening to Catholic Marylanders was that Catholicism lacked the suspicion of singleness born out of the Reformation. In contrast to Protestant reformers, singleness had long been and remained an esteemed position among Catholics. See chapter 2 for a discussion of how New Englanders transferred the Protestant suspicion of a celibate Catholic clergy onto all unmarried people in their communities.

⁵⁷ Graham, 85.

⁵⁸ Edward Dermott, reprinted under “Some Quaint Wills of Early Catholic Settlers in Maryland” in *Records of the American Catholic Historical Society of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: American Catholic Historical Society, 1902), 13:33.

Church of the Place where I do dye one thousand pounds of Tobacco Desiring the good prayers of the Roman Catholic Church...I give unto the hands of the same Priest five hundred pounds of Tobacco more...to dispose of it to such poor or pious Workes of Charity for the Catholic Religion as he Shall think fitting.”⁵⁹ Both Dermott and Thimbleby wanted their legacy to reflect their commitment to the Catholic faith, offering support to the clergy and the larger Catholic community through “Workes of Charity.” Their gifts were all the more important for a colonial clergy whose entire support came from the voluntary donations of parishioners.⁶⁰

Probate records reveal another critical way in which the Catholic community proved adept at integrating single men: through spiritual kinship.⁶¹ In addition to leaving their wealth to the Church, unmarried men consistently provided for their godchildren. While for Protestants the tradition of godparenthood had been largely a casualty of the Reformation, for Catholics it remained an essential practice, taking on even greater significance in a colonial environment where premature death frequently disrupted family units.⁶² Being a godparent offered unmarried men in Catholic Maryland the opportunity to enmesh themselves within a particular family, showing how the Church facilitated ties that other colonists gained through marriage. Through the mechanism of spiritual kinship, the Church served in a very real sense as a family for unmarried people. After leaving wealth to the clergy, John Thimbleby “bequeath[ed] unto Mary Brown his God Daughter all his land & houseing that he had or was possessed of within the said Province & not longe after to witt about Seaventeene yeares since the said John Thimbleby dyed

⁵⁹ John Thimbleby, reprinted in *Ibid.*, 23. Also spelled Thimblebee.

⁶⁰ While such liberality might be explained by the fact that they had no heirs or spouses to support, Graham argues that it nonetheless shows how vital a function the Church served for single men. Had they died intestate, their estates would have automatically gone to the colony’s proprietors. The fact that such men specifically chose to bequest their wealth to the Catholic Church suggests its central place in their lives. See Graham, 86-91. On the importance of lay support of the Catholic Church in Maryland, see Hennessey, 2.

⁶¹ Graham, 86-87.

⁶² Guido Alfani and Vincent Gourdon, “Spiritual Kinship and Godparenthood: An Introduction,” in *Spiritual Kinship in Europe, 1500-1900*, eds. Guido Alfani and Vincent Gourdon (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 10-17.

without any Issue of his body Lawfully begotten or any heyres that the Jurors know of.”⁶³

Lacking “any heyres,” Thimbleby distributed his land to Brown just as if she were his own kin, showing his close connection to the Brown family. While New Englanders also sought to attach unmarried people to individual households, they employed legal measures to do so, enacting legislation against solitary living. Unlike the Puritan colonies, Maryland never implemented laws against living alone.⁶⁴ Several factors explain its failure to do so, such as the higher number of single men and the colony’s greater dependence on their labor, but the fact that many unmarried Catholics were already integrated into family units through spiritual kinship may have helped make such legislation seem unnecessary.

Catholic Marylanders’ effectiveness in integrating single men into the community not only offers a corrective to the conventional narrative of masterless men, but also shows how colonists reworked the very notion of what it meant to be an unmarried Catholic. For centuries, the experience of being single was mediated through the formal institutions of the Church, as single people—whether through their own motivations or their families’—joined the priesthood and celibate religious orders. However, aside from the small number of Jesuits, single Catholics in Maryland were lay members circulating outside the institutionalized channels of celibacy. Their distinct version of Catholic singleness had consequences both for them and their wedded counterparts. Married Catholic colonists had to find new ways to relate to the unmarried people around them—people who no longer lived under the rule and communality of religious orders or served as their ministers, but were lay members just like them. They did so by deeply embedding single coreligionists within their families and the local parish.

⁶³ *Proceedings of the Provincial Court, 1675-1677*, Maryland State Archives Online, 66:7, <http://aomol.msa.maryland.gov/megafile/msa/speccol/sc2900/sc2908/000001/000066/html/am66--7.html>.

⁶⁴ McCurdy, 44-45.

Single colonists themselves also had to engage in a process of redefinition. While that process had been underway in England since the Reformation—evident in the efforts of John Gerard and Mary Ward—the colonial project reshaped the Catholic single life further still. Gerard’s Elizabeth Vaux and the women who attended Ward’s Institute sought to recreate a type of cloistered space around themselves, enabling them to circulate in the world but only by very consciously modeling themselves on conventual forms. Colonists like John Thimbleby, however, did not so much reproduce the cloister as reinvent it, imagining a version of male Catholic celibacy that operated further from the monastery walls but was still firmly rooted within the Catholic communion.⁶⁵ Certainly, the competing versions of celibacy imagined by English women and Maryland men were bound up in gender—male and female singleness were always inherently different enterprises—but they were also more than that, revealing the ways in which the colonial environment itself reshaped ideas about the Catholic single life. In Maryland, with its large numbers of single men and few options for dedicated celibacy, Catholic colonists integrated single people into the larger community, developing a positive model of the single life in a region that was deeply suspicious of unattached men.

The Glorious Revolution and the Refuge of the Cloister

The tight-knit faith community that engendered a new understanding of Catholic celibacy faced its most serious challenge towards the end of the seventeenth century, when the conflicts surrounding the Glorious Revolution spilled across the Atlantic. The accession of William and

⁶⁵ It is of course entirely possible that men like Thimbleby were unmarried but not abstinent. The distinction between being single and being chaste is very important when thinking about single men in Maryland, especially given the double sexual standard in the early Chesapeake that—for a variety of reasons—left a historical record much more indicative of women’s sexual indiscretions than men’s. However, the fact that Thimbleby and the other single men in Graham’s study were well-respected community members suggests that, whatever their actual sexual practices, their reputations in no way suffered from evidence of sexual activity outside of marriage. On the Chesapeake’s double standard regarding sex, see Kathleen M. Brown, *Good Wives, Nasty Wenches, and Anxious Patriarchs: Gender, Race, and Power in Colonial Virginia* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 328-334. On the positive reputations of Thimbleby and other single men, see Graham, 84-92.

Mary to the throne spurred a revolt in Maryland that ousted the Calvert family from power, formally established the Church of England, and severely curtailed Catholics' political and religious freedoms. As in previous moments of disruption—the aftermath of the Reformation, the enactment of Elizabethan penal laws, the dislocation of colonial migration—the crisis led Catholics to reassess their faith and their ideas about celibacy, particularly the domain that had long been the reserve of celibate people: the cloister.

With the revocation of its proprietary charter, Maryland entered what scholars call the “penal period” of its history, in which the Crown-appointed governor enacted laws intended to curb Catholic power. Among other things, the penal laws cut Catholics off from political leadership, severely limited the work of the Jesuits, and made it increasingly difficult for Catholics to gather for public worship.⁶⁶ The 1704 “Act to prevent the Growth of Popery within this Province,” for instance, prevented Jesuits from baptizing any child “other than such who have Popish Parents,” forbid Jesuits from opening schools, and made it a crime punishable by fine and imprisonment to “say Mass or exercise the ffunction [sic] of a Popish Bishop or Priest.”⁶⁷ Jay Dolan argues that the penal period strengthened to an even greater degree the domestic nature of colonial Catholicism, as parishioners who wished to maintain their faith were forced to retreat further inward to the private spaces of the home and the self. That Catholics adapted successfully is evident by comparing them to the Maryland Quaker community, which had taken root in the colony in the 1650s. The establishment of the Church of England

⁶⁶ J. Dolan, 84-85.

⁶⁷ “An Act to Prevent the Growth of Popery within this Province” (3 October 1704), reprinted in William Hand Browne, ed., *Archives of Maryland: Proceedings and Acts of the General Assembly of Maryland, September 1704-April, 1706* (Baltimore: Maryland Historical Society, 1906), 26:340-41.

effectively dismantled the colony's Quaker church, but Maryland Catholics remained a vital, if marginalized, group.⁶⁸

As Catholics on both sides of the English Atlantic faced the repercussions of the Glorious Revolution, one English priest proved particularly adept at helping them adjust. Born an Englishman and an Anglican, John Gother published spiritual writings that proved enormously popular in both his natal land and in the colonies. Having converted from the Church of England to Catholicism as a young man, Gother attracted an ecumenical audience, including Anglicans. Fluent in both English and Catholic cultures, he served as a bridge between the two groups at a time when being English came increasingly to mean being Protestant.⁶⁹ Marion Norman attributes Gother's influence to his familiarity with the "'English Way' of devotion," meaning that he shared the same concerns as other English religious writers of the time regardless of their denomination.⁷⁰ Similar in form and content to popular Anglican works, Gother's writings presented a type of spirituality that would have been familiar to English readers whether they were Catholic or Protestant, particularly his emphasis on practical advice and affective piety. Importantly, he was also very sensitive to the tense religious environment in which he wrote, refraining from exacerbating conflicts between Catholics and Anglicans by emphasizing their shared ground (the importance of scripture, prayer, and affective devotion) and de-emphasizing aspects of Catholicism that were often the target of critics (devotion to Mary and the miracles of the saints).⁷¹ Gother's ecumenicalism thus offered a version of piety especially well-suited to the heated environment Catholics faced in the late seventeenth century.⁷²

⁶⁸ J. Dolan, 90.

⁶⁹ Norman, 310-12; J. Dolan, 91-92.

⁷⁰ Norman, 306.

⁷¹ In a piece honoring the Virgin Mary's birthday, for example, Gother praised Mary while shifting the focus of his devotion to her son, making the text appealing to Catholics and palatable to Protestants. *Ibid.*, 310, 317.

⁷² According to Dolan, among eighteenth-century Catholics, Gother was "the favorite spiritual guide in terms of popularity and formative influence..." (91).

Though he never ministered on the American side of the Atlantic, Gother's work was enormously popular there. Intended for Catholics with little institutional support, whether they lived in England or its colonies, his writings reinforced the tenets of domestic Catholicism by emphasizing devotional practices that believers could perform on their own. His *Instructions and Devotions for Hearing Mass*, for example, recommended that if priests were unavailable, then believers should "hear Mass in spirit."⁷³ One of his most popular works, *Instructions for Particular States and Conditions of Life*, first published in 1689, was especially fitting for Catholic colonists still reeling from the Glorious Revolution. As Jay Dolan explains, "Rooted in the personal relationship between the Christian and God, [Gother's *Instructions*] did not demand incessant exercise of external rituals or an exaggerated reliance on the sacraments, but only faith, to enter into personal communion with God."⁷⁴ Intended to help Catholics cultivate the "personal and interior" aspects of their piety, the *Instructions* presented practical guidance at a time when Catholics found it increasingly difficult to practice openly.⁷⁵

Part of Gother's effort involved retooling the one place that for Catholics had long represented a sanctuary from the world: the cloister. His *Instructions* recommended the methods of the monastery as a salve for Catholics facing challenging circumstances. At the end of a chapter providing "Instructions for Parents," Gother contrasted the married and the "recluse"—or cloistered—life. After an exhaustive litany of the many challenges that plagued parents trying to provide for the material and spiritual welfare of their children, Gother determined that, "These are some of the duties of parents, besides many others, which are so very difficult, that to

⁷³ John Gother, *Instructions and Devotions for Hearing Mass* (1699; reprint, London: T. Meighan, 1740), 4.

⁷⁴ J. Dolan, 92.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 91. Gother's text featured chapters intended for Catholics of various stations, including, among other categories, "Instructions for Melancholy and Scrupulous Christians," "Instructions for Christians Subject to Intemperance," "Instructions for Servants," and "Instructions for Masters."

discharge them well, they require the greatest helps of discretion and grace.”⁷⁶ Given the enormous task of childrearing, the only recourse for parents was, ultimately, total reliance on God. His conclusion led him directly into an issue that had occupied England since the Reformation: the question of whether the married or the single life was easier. Gother altered the terms of the debate by identifying the single life as the cloistered one of a devout religious celibate, rather the unruly libertine often invoked by the Catholic Church’s critics. His conclusion, however, was the same: “And who now, that has a knowledge of both states, will tell me, that the difficulties, dangers, and wants of those in the world, are not greater than those of the religious?”⁷⁷ Like most of his English contemporaries, Gother believed that the single life was more free from trouble than the wedded one.

It is at this point, however, that Gother began to depart from his Protestant colleagues, presenting the unwed cloistered life as a model for believers to emulate even while living in the throng of the world. To him, a key advantage of the cloister was its order and discipline. Compared to a monastic vocation, marriage and family life held little reliability or consistency: “What is the obedience and mortifications of a cloister, which have example and regularity to make them easy, in comparison of that compliance necessary in a married life; which not being governed by rule but by the inconstancy of humour, never knows in the morning how low it must bend before night?”⁷⁸ The difficulty with marriage was its unpredictability. “Compliance” was tethered not to “example and regularity,” but to “the inconstancy of humour,” threatening the solace of husbands and wives rather than offering comfort. In Gother’s rendering, the rule of a monastery was liberating, freeing people from the fickle nature of marital relationships. The

⁷⁶ John Gother, *Instructions for Particular States and Conditions of Life* (1689) in *The Spiritual Works of the Rev. John Gother. In sixteen volumes* (London: Keating, Coghlan, and Booker, 1792), 1:322.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 323.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 323.

cloister imposed the safety of discipline, which offered not only a degree of order but fended off temptation, providing a “fence against a great part of those which are unavoidable to such as live in the world.” Because of the monastery’s many benefits, Gother concluded, “if we compare the little business of a recluse, whose concern is scarce extended beyond himself...we shall find the care of a married life to be much greater than that of a religious life.”⁷⁹ Of course, as a Catholic priest himself, Gother likely placed high value on celibacy. His goal was not to belittle the cloister so much as persuade his lay readers that they could bring the benefits of the monastery—its safety, regularity, and ease—into a world that offered no similar comforts.

Gother was encouraging lay Catholics to transfer the values of the cloister outside of the monastery walls and replant them firmly in the milieu of the English Atlantic. The key is in his instruction that, “These [married people] must not therefore think that exactness in religious duties is the province of such as are retired in cloisters, but not of those who by many ties are linked to the world.”⁸⁰ Catholic laypeople had erred by separating too sharply the secular and the sacred, assuming that careful attention to religion was the sole preserve of ecclesiastics. Showing how the cloister could transcend its own bounds and be integrated into the world, Gother sought to shorten the distance between the laity and religious orders. By relying wholly on God with the same “fidelity and diligence” of cloistered celibates, even married laypeople could access the solace of the monastery, being “faithful and exact in all the duties of religion, and zealous in those ways which are most effectual for obliging heaven to their assistance; that by their dependence on a better hand, they may be provided for by all exigencies...nor be overwhelmed by an excess of concern.”⁸¹ Gother’s instructions were particularly germane during Maryland’s penal period. His recommendation was to recreate the cloister not in the

⁷⁹ Ibid., 323-24.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 322-23.

⁸¹ Ibid., 324, 322.

model of an Elizabeth Vaux, who practiced “poverty, chastity, and obedience” in the household, but by inserting monastic ideals into the thick of the world, where being “faithful and exact...and zealous” could help married and single believers withstand “all exigencies,” whether the shifting tempers of a spouse or—on the heels of 1688—a monarch.

In the same ways that seigneurial Catholicism blurred the distinction between the ministry and the laity, so did Gother blur the boundary between the cloister and the world. His *Instructions* integrated the sacred and the secular, locating the essence of the cloister in individual practices rather than physical structures. Like unmarried Maryland men forging new notions of Catholic singleness that could thrive outside of Church-sponsored vows, Gother’s expansion of the monastery into the world contributed a new strand to the early American discourse on the single life. The cloistered celibate became a model for Catholic colonists after the Glorious Revolution, offering an example of “exactness in religious duties,” total reliance on God, a “fence” guarding against the world, and an interior sanctuary sheltering faith even as penal laws impinged. What mattered was not the material structure, the taking of vows, or even the marital status of the believer—all of which were especially complicated for Catholics in the colonies—but rather a particular type and practice of piety. Despite their lack of institutionalized celibacy, colonists who read Gother’s text and integrated lay single people into their parishes and their families developed a new version of the Catholic single life, one that looked very different from monastic celibates in Europe, masterless men elsewhere in the Chesapeake, and idle and solitary outliers in Puritan New England.

Making Quaker Celibacy: Heart Religion, Primitive Christianity, and the Inner Light

Like their Catholic counterparts, Quaker colonists imagined new forms of the religiously-inspired single life that could thrive outside of ecclesiastical structures. Given their starting

point, however, it is surprising that Quakers shared any common ground with Catholics at all on the issue of celibacy. Along with Puritans and Anglicans, Quakers began with the premise that Catholic celibacy was fundamentally flawed, agreeing with the widespread Protestant critique born out of the Reformation that the Pope's mandate of clerical celibacy was the fulfillment of 1 Timothy 4:1-3: "Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils," among which was the "forbidding to marry." In an explication of 1 Timothy 4 that could just as well have been composed by a Puritan or High Church Anglican, Quaker founder George Fox wrote that "the Apostle speaks of them that that are gotten up in the Apostacy which did and have *forbidden to marry*."⁸² To Fox and his fellow English Protestants, the Pope's imposition of celibacy on religious orders marked him as the very heretic Scripture had foretold. Writing seven years after Fox, however, another leading Quaker, William Penn, praised the celibate cloister in ways that sounded very similar to the Catholic John Gother, calling on Friends to recreate certain monastic practices in their own lives. So too would many of Penn's coreligionists come to adopt celibacy as a key feature of their ministerial vocations, viewing marriage as a threat to their work and singleness as the only way to fulfill their calling.

How Quakers could hold both positions—attacking Catholic celibacy as an "Apostacy" while at the same time integrating aspects of it into their own spiritual framework—resulted from the confluence of several factors: their adoption of affective piety, their perspective on primitive Christianity, their critique of the Catholic Church, and their views on the religious identity and labor of female Friends. The collision of all four concerns led Quakers to develop a view of celibacy that looked much different from their fellow English dissenters and, paradoxically, more similar to the Catholics whose "Apostacy" they critiqued. When Friends embraced ministerial

⁸² George Fox, *Concerning Marriage* (London: Thomas Simmons, 1661), 3-4.

celibacy and the cloister, they did so in an effort to improve upon the Catholic models, reclaiming certain practices that they saw as valuable while discarding those that they believed had sent their fellow Christians astray, both Catholic and Protestant alike. What mattered most to Quakers was cultivating the inner light—the workings of the Holy Spirit in every believer—not any external church form, whether the ordination of a minister or the vows of a monastic. Friends pressed conversations about celibate people and celibate spaces entirely into the service of their larger mission, helping believers distinguish between the emptiness of the world without and the substance of the Spirit within.

Quakers first visited the colonies in the 1650s on missionary expeditions to New England. While some settled in Rhode Island and Maryland around midcentury, it was not until the 1681 founding of Pennsylvania that Quakerism took firm root on the American side of the Atlantic.⁸³ Like their Catholic counterparts in Maryland, the theology that Quakers brought with them was first forged in response to events in England earlier in the century. Born in the late 1640s amidst two key events—the rise of the “religion of the heart” and the upheaval of the English civil war—Quakerism was indelibly shaped by the historical moment in which it emerged.⁸⁴

English people who were swayed by the religion of the heart were participating in a larger spiritual trend sweeping throughout Europe at the time. Taking root within a variety of faith traditions—from Catholic mysticism to English Puritanism to Hasidic Judaism—heart religion describes a spiritual framework defined by a set of common concerns. According to Ted

⁸³ On the origins of Quakerism in the colonies, see Thomas D. Hamm, *The Quakers in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 22-29.

⁸⁴ The definitive text on the development of the “religion of the heart,” also called heart religion, is Ted A. Campbell, *The Religion of the Heart: A Study of European Religious Life in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1991).

Campbell, the religion of the heart centers on the belief that human beings can bridge their separation from God through

affective (‘heartfelt’) experience: typically, in experiences of repentance (sorrow over sin) and faith (personal trust in God), but sometimes in more vivid experiences of personal illumination. The key element...was the insistence that the ‘heart’...is the central point of contact between God and humankind...Affective experience became the center of the religious life, so that sacraments, moral discipline, and meditative techniques were relegated to the status of means to a greater end, namely, the personal and affective experience of God.⁸⁵

The key features of heart religion—“affective” piety, the heart as the conduit between humanity and God, the relegation of externalities to secondary importance, the personal experience of Christ—were taken up by High Anglicans, dissenters, and religious radicals alike during England’s tumultuous seventeenth century. Though members of each group adopted its elements in different ways, they were differences of degree rather than kind.⁸⁶

Quakers took heart religion much further than their Anglican and Puritan counterparts. Its features were seared into the very origin moment of their faith, founder George Fox’s 1647 conversion experience. After a fruitless spiritual quest that left him deeply dissatisfied with the state of religion in England, Fox finally found solace not through the support of a particular church or minister, but from the presence of God alone. Describing the moment in his journal, he wrote, “when all my hopes in them [ministers] and in all men were gone, so that I had nothing outwardly to help me, nor could I tell what to do, then, Oh then, I heard a voice which said, ‘There is one, even Christ Jesus, that can speak to thy condition,’ and when I heard it my heart did leap for joy.”⁸⁷ Fox’s moment of conversion encapsulates the tenets that would come to define Quakerism and its radical engagement with the religion of the heart: the failure of “outwardly” help, the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, the expectation of direct communication

⁸⁵ Ibid., 2-3.

⁸⁶ On the various ways in which different English groups adopted elements of heart religion, see Campbell, 42-69.

⁸⁷ George Fox, *Journal of George Fox*, 7th ed., ed. Wilson Armistead (London: W. and F.G. Cash, 1852), 1:55.

from God, and the immediate sense of relief registered through the emotions. Taking up itinerant preaching, Fox crafted a movement that made the personal experience of God the axis of faith. Quaker services did not revolve around the performance of the sacraments or the liturgy of a pastor, but instead around the body of believers themselves, who spoke when the Holy Spirit prodded them.⁸⁸ The goal was for all Friends to discern the voice of God—the light within—as clearly as Fox had at the moment of his conversion. Everything else, Campbell writes, “all external observances, institutions, and forms[,] became strictly secondary,” making way for the all-important interior experience of faith.⁸⁹

Fox’s success at building a following owed much to the larger atmosphere of radicalism that had sprung up during the English civil wars, unleashing a wide array of extreme spiritual and political movements. Though the conflict did not in and of itself lead directly to religious renewal, it did provide a setting that made many people eager for a different kind of religious experience, one that could transcend England’s inter-Christian conflicts and revitalize the faith of those caught in the crossfire. Amidst the upheaval of war and the larger European turn towards heart religion, George Fox’s movement appeared an especially appealing option. Quaker ranks swelled with converts drawn from among High Church Anglicans, Puritans, Baptists, and refugees from more short-lived radical religious groups, all hoping that—with a spiritual framework that zeroed in on the relationship between the believer and God—they had finally cleared away all unnecessary practices and were drilling down to the very core of faith.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ As Fox continued in his journal, “My desires after the Lord grew stronger, and zeal in the pure knowledge of God, and of Christ alone, without the help of any man, book, or writing. For though I read the Scriptures, that spoke of Christ and of God; yet I knew Him not, but by revelation...” (56).

⁸⁹ Campbell, 59.

⁹⁰ Hamm, 13-22. Campbell discusses the affinity between Quaker theology and the radical political and religious groups that emerged around the time of the civil war: “Muggletonians, Salmonists, and Coppinists all claimed a unique inspiration from God, and rejected authorities besides their own inspiration. ‘Levellers’ and ‘Diggers’ (or ‘True Levellers’) claimed a radical equality and, in the case of the Diggers, advocated a form of Christian communism” (58).

The type of affective religious experience that Fox and his followers crafted had profound effects for their views on celibacy, leading Quakers to a far more positive rendering of the single life than their Puritan counterparts. Though both groups incorporated elements of heart religion, they did so to varying degrees. For Quakers, the interior experience of God had become central, relegating all external forms to lesser importance. For Puritans, however, the elements of heart religion were but one part of their larger Calvinist framework. Affective piety played an important role in the Puritan conversion process—as converts moved from a heart “brused in peeces” to one filled with despair, fear, contempt, anguish, hope, and joy—but it did not reorient their faith to the degree it did for Quakers.⁹¹ Puritans still saw external church practices as necessary. Specially-trained ministers were required to help parishioners assess the status of their conversion, while sermons, lectures, scripture, and the sacraments were needed for believers to gain a deeper understanding of Christ. The elements of heart religion that Puritans adopted did not change the overall way they thought about how to restore the primitive church. Pious marriages continued to play a fundamental part in the Puritan vision of reform, and celibacy continued to serve as a stark reminder of humankind’s fall from grace, a token of their enduring separation from God.

While Quakers also cared deeply about adhering to a more primitive form of Christianity, they believed that the twin tasks of cultivating the light within and reclaiming the primitive church were part and parcel of the same project. Like earlier Puritans, Quakers developed their

⁹¹ “Brused in peeces” is from William Perkins’s *A Golden Chaine*, as quoted in Campbell, 48. Just because theologians like Perkins and Ames relied in part on affective measures during the conversion process does not mean that they were opposed to the “scholastic theology” that remained an enduring feature of seventeenth-century Puritanism. The modes of heart religion and scholasticism were not mutually exclusive. Puritans integrated heart religion into Calvinist orthodoxy, seeing it as a complementary measure for explaining how the process of conversion worked within a Calvinist framework. The growing emphasis on recounting conversion narratives in diaries, spiritual autobiographies, and oral testimonies all grew out of the seventeenth-century Puritan incorporation of heart religion, as believers carefully assessed their affective states for indications of God’s election. Campbell, 48-49.

own definition of what constituted primitivism, signaling an important departure from their fellow English Protestants, whether supporters or dissenters from the official church. For Friends, primitive Christianity was not to be found in either the patristic tradition of Anglicans or the scripture of Puritans, but first and foremost in the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in every believer.⁹² Led by the inner light, Quakers maintained that they were in direct, uninterrupted unity with the apostolic church. Unlike Puritans, Anglicans, and other Protestant groups, Friends were not trying to return to, recreate, or replicate the primitive form, but insisted instead that they were already living within it, achieving what William Penn called in 1696, “Primitive Christianity Revived.”⁹³ Because the interior workings of the Holy Spirit bridged the distance between seventeenth-century Quakers and first-century Christians, Quakers believed they had already entered apostolic communion.⁹⁴ As historian J. William Frost explains,

Where the Puritans asserted that there had been a fullness of grace in the first century that was not duplicated in the seventeenth century, Friends said that the light remained the same. The grace that gave Paul the ability to do miracles also gave George Fox the same rights, not because of any intrinsic merit on Fox’s part but because of the power of God’s spirit.⁹⁵

To Quakers, the light that animated Paul was the same light that animated Fox, and by extension, animated all believers so long as they were willing to discern it. Being in direct communication with the Holy Spirit did not require any special “merit,” but only the grace that God offered to all Christians. Importantly, that offer was one God continued to make. The period of revelation had

⁹² T.L. Underwood, *Primitivism, Radicalism, and the Lamb’s War: The Baptist-Quaker Conflict in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press: 1997), 4-12.

⁹³ William Penn, *Primitive Christianity Revived* (1696; reprint, Philadelphia: Joseph Crukshank, 1783).

⁹⁴ Describing the unbroken link between Quakers and the apostolic church, Quaker George Whitehead wrote, “The true Christ was in being from Everlasting, and in time universally shining and manifest in some degree throughout all the Generations of the Righteous, since the World began.” He described the timelessness of the inner light as “a pure, Incorruptible and Unchangeable Principle of Life and Truth; immediately given, and shining from Christ the Eternal Word.” George Whitehead, *The Christian-Quaker* (London: n.p., 1674), 38, 34. On Whitehead’s influence, see Underwood, 45-49. Robert Barclay also discussed Quaker primitivism in *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, 6th ed. (1678; reprint, Newport, RI: James Franklin, 1729), ii, 35, 38.

⁹⁵ J. William Frost, *The Quaker Family in Colonial America: A Portrait of the Society of Friends* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1973), 23.

not ended in a former time, as Puritans believed, but continued into the present moment for those who nurtured the light within.

Creating a new understanding of primitivism necessarily reshaped the way Quakers thought about celibacy. Unlike Anglicans who praised the *vita angelica* as a venerable patristic tradition and Puritans who disparaged celibacy as a departure from the “first good estate,” Quakers took celibacy entirely out of the equation of what comprised primitive Christianity. Both the single and the married life became external forms of little importance in the effort to enter into apostolic communion. Marital status was akin to other practices that were unnecessary to faith, whether the intercession of a priest or the liturgy of a pastor. The only fundamental requisite to living in the primitive church was cultivating the inner light. As a result, celibacy lost the close association with sin that it held for Puritans, placed instead on equal footing with marriage as a state that was inessential to restoring the primitive church. Unlike their fellow Christians on either side of the Reformation divide, Quakers did not rank marriage and celibacy in a hierarchy, but found both states irrelevant to a believer’s internal relation to Christ.

To be sure, Quakers also valued matrimony for many of the same reasons Puritans did. Friends too held up Edenic marriage matches in their communities, especially the union between George Fox and Margaret Fell, which served as the ideal example of godly marriage for Quakers.⁹⁶ The difference, however, was that Quakers believed that such unions were an outcome of living in the primitive church, not an ingredient that could hasten it into being—a crucial shift in emphasis.⁹⁷ Neither sexual renunciation nor godly matrimony could bring

⁹⁶ While subsequent Quakers sought to emulate Fox and Fell’s model, they often found gender equality in marriage much more elusive. Karin Wulf argues that Friends in Pennsylvania—distanced from the founding generation both temporally and geographically—had an especially difficult time transplanting Quaker marriage ideals to the colonial environment. Many Quaker colonists expressed disappointment that their marriages failed to live up to the pattern set by Fox and Fell. Wulf, 58-62.

⁹⁷ As Quaker Thomas Lawrence wrote, “To know marriage as God joyns, is to know it as it was before man fell.” Lawrence, *Concerning Marriage. A Letter Sent to G[eorge] F[ox]* (London: Benjamin Lawrence, 1663), 6.

Friends any closer to the primitive church if they were not first in direct communion with the Holy Spirit. Pious marriages—and by the same token pious singleness—were achievable only as a consequence of living in the apostolic church, not as a prerequisite.

That said, however, there were instances when a Quaker's marital status came to matter a great deal: when being single or being married interfered with a Friend's ability to hear and heed the light within. Because discerning the voice of the Holy Spirit was the cornerstone of Quaker faith, any external factor that impaired it became an issue of serious concern, whether related to marital status or otherwise. In his popular guide to pious living, William Smith demonstrated the ways in which being unmarried might threaten the inner light, offering one of the most in-depth discussions on singleness in seventeenth-century Quakerism. First published in 1663, Smith's guide was similar to other religious manuals of the day, offering believers spiritual advice according to their particular station, whether parents, masters, servants, children, "the aged," or "such as live a single life."⁹⁸ Despite its similar form, however, Smith's book differed because of what it did not include: though he drew on Pauline ideas, his chapter on singleness did not revolve around Paul's text in 1 Corinthians 7, the core source in the debate on celibacy since the Reformation. Because of the way Friends understood the relationship between scripture and direct revelation, Paul's letter was just one feature in the conversation among Quakers, not its epicenter. While Friends did not discount the Bible to the extent that their critics alleged, they did grant it secondary importance. Scripture was meaningful because it was produced by

Because Quakers believed they were living in the apostolic primitive church, they developed a vision of marriage grounded in its prelapsarian ideal, one in which Adam and Eve were true partners and neither spouse exercised superiority. Quakers believed that gender hierarchy only entered marriage as a consequence of the Fall, the point at which husbands began ruling over wives. One sign of living in the primitive church would be the creation of egalitarian marriages resembling the prelapsarian form. Frost, 150. On Quaker views on gender roles in prelapsarian marriage, see the circular letter written by Sarah Fell (daughter of Margaret Fell) to various Quaker women's meetings. Sarah Fell, "A Seventeenth-Century Quaker Women's Declaration," transcribed by Milton D. Speizman and Jane C. Kronick, *Signs* 1, no. 1 (Autumn 1975), 235-45.

⁹⁸ William Smith, *Universal Love*, 2nd ed. (1663; reprint, London: n.p., 1668), n.p.

apostles who were guided by the inner light. However, because the Spirit continued to lead Quakers to revelation, the Bible was not the sole source and final word on Christian knowledge.⁹⁹ The ultimate arbiter on celibacy was no longer Paul, but the Holy Spirit, offering personal guidance to every believer.

From his opening line, Smith reflected Quakers' more positive assessment of remaining single. As he wrote, "Singleness is a good state, and in that state Temptations may be resisted as easily as in any state whatsoever out of the Life..."¹⁰⁰ Drawing on a familiar Pauline argument, Smith asserted that singleness was "good" because single people were more free of "outward care" than those who were "outwardly joyned" in marriage.¹⁰¹ In company with a long line of English ministers, he weighed in on the common question of whether the married or single life was easier and—like his non-Quaker colleagues—came down in favor of singleness. Liberated from the burdens of supporting a family, unmarried people were less apt to become entangled in the world and more free to devote their time to God.

However, Smith was quick to point out that the single life was not entirely devoid of trouble, and it was here that he differentiated himself from his non-Quaker counterparts and moved further away from Pauline thinking. For Smith, the fundamental problem that stemmed from celibacy was neither the oft-repeated Puritan concern of lust or idleness nor the longstanding critique of Catholic priests who exploited celibacy as a sign of spiritual superiority. Rather, Smith worried that single people would be tempted to rely less on God, which threatened their most important relationship and dampened the vibrancy of the light within. Unmarried

⁹⁹ Friends believed that their fellow Protestants had misunderstood the place and purpose of scripture in ways that severely limited God's power, making the Bible itself more important than the Spirit that produced it and that still remained active in the world. On the relationship between the Bible and the inner light, as well as on critics who accused Quakers of abandoning scripture, see Underwood, 26-33.

¹⁰⁰ W. Smith, 35.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

people, Smith wrote, are “well provided for in the outward, and having enough on that hand, and no charge to look after, or to take care for, there may be a sitting down in a secret joy of their own happiness.”¹⁰² Single people who were more outwardly comfortable might be more apt to let down their guard, causing a diminishment in spiritual fervor. Singleness became perilous by leading people to “si[t] down in a secret joy,” risking to separate believers from God by convincing them that they were not wholly dependent on him. In such an “easeful state... God is the soonest forgotten; and in this place people may sit, and not have God in all their thoughts...”¹⁰³ For Smith, that was the moment when the single life—an otherwise irrelevant external form—became a problem: the “easeful state” of single people might make them more apt to push God to the edge of their minds, to “not have God in all their thoughts.”

While both Smith and his Puritan counterparts worried about the ease of singleness, the difference between their concerns was where they were directed. Whereas Puritans feared that single people would fall into idleness and sexual sin, endangering their own souls and disrupting the larger community, Quakers feared that singleness might disrupt a believer’s personal relationship with God, leading them to scale back the closeness they cultivated with the Spirit within. Smith here invoked a problem that frequently worried Quakers: just as the inner light could be nurtured, growing in strength over time, so too could it be extinguished if not properly tended. Frost explains how Quakers used the analogy of a “seed” as another way to describe the light within, a metaphor that emphasized the need for Friends to do their part in preparing the ground for planting, watering the soil, and reaping the harvest. While God had sown the seed in everyone, individuals could choose to accept or reject it, yielding a lifetime of growth or letting

¹⁰² Ibid., 37.

¹⁰³ Ibid.

the fruit whither on the vine.¹⁰⁴ Even though people had no part in gaining God’s grace—the seed was given entirely as a gift, not earned by any human effort—they could still reject the offer of free grace by taking no action, leaving the seed buried in the ground. As Robert Barclay explained in his 1678 book, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity*, “So that the first step is not by man’s working, but by his not contrary working...so it is possible for him to be passive, and not resist it [grace], as it is possible for him to resist it.”¹⁰⁵ The gift of grace did not depend on people’s work, but rather on people not working “contrary” against that which was freely given. To Smith, unmarried people who sat down in an “easeful state” were neglecting the seed God planted by not cultivating the ground. Unburdened by the “carefulness” that “cumbred” married couples, single people were tempted to take comfort “in the fulness of what is possessed outwardly” rather than what God has ignited inwardly.¹⁰⁶ Even though Smith saw singleness was “a good state” in which “Temptations may be resisted as easily as in any state whatsoever,” he also worried that it opened a new door through which temptation could creep.

However, unlike Puritans who distinguished between different types of single people (those who were young and lived alone versus those who were older and embedded in families), Smith drew the line elsewhere, between different types of singleness: internal and external. After expressing his fear that single people might “not have God in all their thoughts,” he went onto say, “and therefore it is not how a single-life stands in relation to it self, but how it stands in relation to God; for it may be single in relation to it self, and yet in that state fall into the greatest snares, and entanglements.”¹⁰⁷ Smith distinguished between two understandings of the single life. The first was the external measure that simply denoted marital status, the very fact of being

¹⁰⁴ Frost, 14-18.

¹⁰⁵ Barclay, 149. According to Frost, Barclay’s book is the fundamental work on early Quaker doctrine, and Barclay was “the standard-bearer” of Quaker theology for the first 150 years of its existence (10-11).

¹⁰⁶ W. Smith, 37.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

unmarried (“how a single-life stands in relation to it self”). The second was the internal measure, not related to marital status but to the status of a single person’s relationship to God. Far more important to Quakers was the second measure—how the single life “stands in relation to God”—the key relationship for all believers whether they were married or single. The problem, however, was that both the internal and external forms of singleness did not always align. People could be single in the “outward” but not in the inward, failing to make their relationship with God their top priority.

Smith’s advice for single Quakers was for them to reframe the way they thought about their single state. What mattered was not their external singleness—their lack of marriage, which could ensnare with its ease—but their internal singleness, how they stood “in relation to God.” In and of itself, marital status was of little importance—whether single or married, Quakers’ “hearts and minds” should “stand single to God”—but when marital status threatened a believer’s ability to cultivate the light within, it mattered a great deal.¹⁰⁸ The single life was a “good state” only if Friends were also single inwardly, with no impediment standing between them and the divine, even if that impediment was simply a matter of “sitting down” in their own comfort. Praising the alignment of internal and external forms of singleness in his chapter’s final line, Smith wrote, “and so a Single life in the outward, and a Single mind to God in the inward, may here clap hands with Joy: and whether Single or Joyned, or how people may stand related to such outward states, that doth not put a different to the inward Joy, and Peace, and Comfort of the Lord...and whether outwardly Joyned, or Single, the Seed of God is felt, in which is the Blessing.”¹⁰⁹ The ultimate lesson for Smith’s readers was that their external marital status only mattered insofar as it affected their internal relationship with God. Regardless of their human

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 39.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 41.

attachments, the Quaker walk of faith was to retain “a Single mind to God in the inward,” whatever unfolded in the world around them.

As Smith’s chapter underscored, the hierarchy that existed for Quakers was not that of marriage versus singleness, but of internal versus external. Quakers made sense of the entire religious landscape by ranking inner and outer modes of spiritual experience. The sacraments, the sermon, the scriptures, and even the training of a minister were all held up as external mechanisms of lesser importance compared to the interior world of the believer, which offered unmediated access to the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁰ Other practices of relating to God were tools that might help believers cultivate the light within, but they were not to be mistaken for the substance of faith.¹¹¹ By relegating external markers to secondary importance, the inner light had a fundamentally leveling effect. The “inward Man,” as Barclay put it, was the state “which is chiefly to be regarded,” as opposed to any outward sign, marital status or otherwise.¹¹² Because every believer was a vessel for the Holy Spirit, all Quakers—whether married or single, clergy or lay, male or female—had the ability to discern the voice of God within.

The Ministry and the Cloister: Celibate People and Celibate Spaces in Quakerism

The idea that all believers were bearers of the inner light had especially important consequences for how Quakers thought about the ministry. Friends took the Reformation tenet

¹¹⁰ Ironically, it was their effort to take the logic of the Reformation to its furthest extreme—reducing the hierarchy between the clergy and the laity, abolishing ritual, dismissing church tradition, trusting in faith alone—that led Quakers’ opponents to attack them as papists. Friends’ de-emphasis on scripture and their reliance on an untrained lay ministry appeared to critics as the Catholic Church’s human invention and errant priesthood in but another guise. John Frederick Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984), 88.

¹¹¹ A revealing incident occurred in the early 1660s. John Nicholson, a Quaker visiting from England, suspected that a small handful of Quakers in Salem, Massachusetts had opted for celibacy not because they believed it offered any intrinsic spiritual virtue, but because they were convinced that the millennium was nigh. Nicholson expressed his disapproval of them in a letter to Margaret Fell, with the issue being that the Salem Quakers were putting too much stock in an external state (sexual renunciation). Mabel Richmond Brailsford, *Quaker Women, 1650-1690* (London: Duckworth & Co., 1915), 146-47; Carla Gardina Pestana, *Quakers and Baptists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37.

¹¹² Barclay, 517.

of the “priesthood of all believers” much further than most of their fellow Protestants. What made a minister was hearing the call to preach and receiving the endorsement of the larger Quaker meeting. Chastity, marital status, education, sex, training, and ordination all became irrelevant to carrying out a ministerial vocation; Friends flung the doors of the priesthood wide.¹¹³

Quakerism’s opening up of the ministry had paradoxical effects for the fate of clerical celibacy. On the one hand, as it had for other Protestant groups after the Reformation, celibacy lost its power to confer the clergy with any kind of special status or intimacy with the divine. To Quakers, clerical celibacy was just one more example of an external form that distracted Christians from the essentials of faith. On the other hand, however, at the very same moment that Quakers and other Protestants rejected a chaste priesthood, celibacy became especially important to a particular group of Quaker ministers: women. Building a cadre of female preachers led Quakers to redefine the longstanding notion of clerical celibacy and to shift the terms of the debate that had surrounded it since the Reformation. Designing their own version of vocational celibacy in deliberate opposition to the Catholic one—stripping it of intrinsic spiritual privilege and eliminating the bonds of a lifelong vow—Quaker women inserted a wedge into Protestantism, allowing the single life to once again gain a foothold by reintroducing ideas that most Protestants had dismissed for over a century.

Quakers were able to revise and reincorporate vocational celibacy because of a larger shift in the way they viewed female religious identity. Whether they were called to preach or not, Quaker women inhabited a different spiritual role from women in other Protestant traditions. For the majority of Protestant groups, the line between women’s domestic and spiritual labor was

¹¹³ On the process for entering the Quaker ministry, see Rebecca Larson, *Daughters of Light: Quaker Women Preaching and Prophesying in the Colonies and Abroad, 1700-1775* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1999), 45-47.

blurred. The same Reformation discourse that had elevated the family as the ideal site of Christian devotion had also reinforced the notion that women's religious service took place in the home. The idealized image of Protestant female piety became a wife and a mother rather than a nun in a cloister, a transformation that was both conceptual and material, given that the dissolution of the monasteries had left women with scant alternative.¹¹⁴ More so than many of their fellow Protestants, however, Quaker women were able to carve out religious identities that were not triangulated through husbands and ministers or grounded in pious wifeness and motherhood. Instead, Quaker women—like Quaker men—were first and foremost bearers of the inner light. Because the Holy Spirit offered all believers a direct channel to God, all Quakers shared in the same fundamental religious identity, regardless of their sex.¹¹⁵

Some Quakers also pursued a more specialized role, called to be “God’s chosen instruments” by serving as ministers.¹¹⁶ Though both men and women could be equally called, the experiences of women reveal the ways in which fulfilling a ministerial vocation remained a deeply gendered enterprise, requiring many women to circle back to the very practice that Protestants had worked so hard to dislodge from the ministry: celibacy.¹¹⁷ While certainly not all female Quaker ministers remained celibate, a good proportion either delayed marriage or abstained from it altogether. In her study of Quaker women whose preaching circuits spanned the Atlantic, Rebecca Larson finds that, “A clear pattern emerged across regions... Whether in

¹¹⁴ Wiesner-Hanks, 78-80.

¹¹⁵ Larson, 16-23; Wulf, 56-60.

¹¹⁶ Larson, 43. Quakers were not the only faith community in England to enlist female preachers, but they were the most visible and enduring group to do so. See Phyllis Mack, *Visionary Women: Ecstatic Prophecy in Seventeenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 236-61. On the American side of the Atlantic, Quaker women were certainly the most common female preachers that colonists encountered.

¹¹⁷ The issue of female ministers was also part of the debate about women's public voice in the church, centering on Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 14:34: “Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience as also saith the law.” See Larson, 19-20. The growing presence of what Mack calls “visionary women” in seventeenth-century English Christianity made these questions about women's public speech especially pressing. Prophesying women radically subverted gender roles by claiming a public voice, “enjoy[ing] virtually the only taste of public authority they would ever know” (*Visionary Women*, 5).

the British Isles or the American colonies, a majority of the transatlantic travelers who had begun to preach as young adults deferred marriage, marrying often ten years later than average for Quaker women.”¹¹⁸ Despite the fact that Quakers and other Protestants had severed the link between sexual abstinence and the office of the priesthood, many female Quaker ministers still found it in their best interest to make celibacy a defining feature of their vocations.¹¹⁹

For Quaker women, celibacy was a tool that served both pragmatic and theological functions. On a practical level, celibacy freed women’s time and bodies for the ministry. Even though Quakerism had separated women’s religious identities from the household, it had not separated their labor. Throughout the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century English Atlantic, women’s work was still tied firmly to the home and the family. In ways their male counterparts did not, many female ministers found their domestic duties and their call to preach mutually exclusive, making celibacy the only way they could tend to their ministerial vocations. As Abigail Craven, an Irish Quaker minister who preached extensively in the colonies, wrote, “I had several offers of marriage, some appeared likely, but I did not see it my way for some years, & thought one great concern was enough to bear.”¹²⁰ Though she eventually married at the age of thirty-five after over a decade of preaching, Craven knew that marriage would not serve her well while she was still so wholly committed to her ministry, a full-time undertaking. Remaining single was the only way for her to remove herself from household labor and fulfill her vocation.

¹¹⁸ Accurate statistics on marital status do not exist for all female Quaker ministers. Larson has studied the group of colonial and English women who traversed the Atlantic as preachers, finding that, out of fifty-seven female transatlantic travelers, twenty-four were single during their preaching tour. Larson, 135, 148.

¹¹⁹ Quakerism in fact opened several avenues for women to redefine their religious identities in terms other than wifehood and motherhood, not just the ministry. For example, women’s meetings that operated separately from men’s ones offered women leadership positions. Though studying a later time period (the last half of the eighteenth century), Karin Wulf argues that such roles were especially important for women who never married. Pennsylvania single women like Susannah Wright and Elizabeth Norris, while never taking on the mantle of ministers, were active and respected leaders in their local meetings. Quakerism thus offered women several different options from which to carve out identities as single women. Wulf, 53-75; Larson, 30-34.

¹²⁰ As quoted in Larson, 135.

Female Quaker ministers did not opt for celibacy solely for practical reasons, however. Even though Quakers stripped celibacy of any intrinsic theological merit, they still saw it as offering a critical spiritual benefit: abstinence could help Friends respond best to the light within, rendering themselves more submissive to God. Irish Quaker minister Mary Peisley Neale, who like Craven spent several years preaching in the colonies, refrained from marrying until age thirty-nine, reserving her love and her body for the Lord: “My own affections and the affections of others would long since have stolen me out of His hands, who has an absolute right to dispose of my body and spirit, which are His.”¹²¹ Practicing celibacy allowed Neale to offer God the whole of her physical and emotional self, lending her entirely to the ministry. It was not that she saw sexual renunciation as an inherent spiritual virtue, but that she saw celibacy as enabling her to serve God wholeheartedly, without any human relationships stealing her “out of His hands.” For Neale, celibacy remained an external form that she did not mistake as elemental to faith. It was not valuable in its own right, but for its ability to help her respond to God’s call, allowing her—in William Smith’s terms—to “stand Single to God.”¹²² In all aspects of her life, not just her decision about marital status, Neale guarded her ministerial vocation carefully, so as “not to bury that talent that he has given me in the earth, nor to quit the occupying of it for any outward occupation.”¹²³ Marriage was the very kind of “outward occupation” that might threaten her “talent” and prevent her from following the Spirit’s leadings. Celibacy offered her the best way to respond to the light within, letting flourish the ministerial gift God had given her.

¹²¹ Mary Neale, *Some Account of the Life and Religious Exercises of Mary Neale, Formerly Peisley* (Dublin: John Gough, 1795), 73. Neale (1717-1757) became a minister at the age of twenty-seven and married a fellow Quaker minister twelve years later. She spent most of her life single, however, dying only three days after her wedding. Larson, 313-14.

¹²² W. Smith, 39.

¹²³ Neale, 13. The reference to burying a talent in the earth comes from the story in Matthew 25:14-30, in which Jesus reprimands his listeners for wasting the gifts that God has given them, like burying coins in a field rather than using them.

Recognizing the different consequences of marriage for men and women, male Quakers too saw female ministerial vocations as demanding special vigilance. Just as Neale was determined not to bury her talent in the earth, so minister John Alderson advised women “not to think of marriage till their errand was finished, lest they mar their service.”¹²⁴ At least one female preacher seems to have “mar[red]” her service in the very way Alderson feared. Mary Fyfield heard the call to preach and received the endorsement of her local meeting, but opted to make marriage her first concern instead. Fellow Quaker James Jenkins described Fyfield’s decision as the result of misplaced priorities, noting, “If it was her duty so to marry, that act seemed to supersede a duty of another kind which was judged by her friends to be of still greater importance—she therefore sunk in the esteem of those who thought they saw in an abatement of fervour a dimunition of her gift in the ministry.”¹²⁵ The Friends at Fyfield’s meeting counted her call to the ministry as a “duty” of “still greater importance” than marriage, but Fyfield—by their accounting—confused the relative weight of the two. Her wedding “prevented the accomplishment” of her vocation.¹²⁶ By choosing to marry rather than directly enter the preaching circuit after receiving her meeting’s blessing, Fyfield seemed to her peers to lose a degree of “fervour,” indicating a “dimunition” of the gift God had given her. It was her marriage, not her singleness, to which they attributed her dampened zeal, causing her to lose their “esteem” and revealing the degree to which celibacy had become a recognizable and important feature of Quaker women’s ministry.

In order for singleness to remain a vital and praiseworthy part of their vocations, female preachers had to guard against the same error that Quakers and other Protestants believed had

¹²⁴ As quoted in Larson, 136.

¹²⁵ James Jenkins, *The Records and Recollections of James Jenkins*, ed. J. William Frost (New York: E. Mellen Press, 1984), 467.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

corrupted the Catholic priesthood: turning celibacy into an idol of its own, a false sign of elite status and divine favor. For Quakers, the value of ministerial celibacy was the very fact that—unlike Catholic celibacy—it was entirely extra-ecclesiastical, a tool voluntarily taken up to better cultivate the inner experience of God rather than a requirement imposed by church authorities. The memoir of Sarah Morris, a never-married Pennsylvania minister, illustrates how Quaker vocational celibacy looked very different from the Catholic model. Though Morris lived to age seventy-two without ever marrying, her memoir makes no specific mention of her marital status, and it is that omission which is significant: Morris’ celibacy was not the defining feature of her ministry, but merely the result of her heeding the light within.¹²⁷ To her as to Neale, celibacy offered no inherent spiritual benefit, but was rather the best avenue by which she could pursue her vocation, allowing her to “stand Single to God” in both inwardly and outwardly.

As her memoir makes clear, Morris’s singleness enabled her to devote herself wholeheartedly to the ministry. Though she did not begin preaching until age forty-three, she recounted her entire life up to that point as a period of preparation, where she learned to subdue her own will so that she could discern the Spirit’s prompting and take up God’s call.¹²⁸ As she wrote, “It had pleased God thus to incline me to seek a more full enjoyment of that inward life and virtue, which is conveyed to the soul through the illumination of the Holy Spirit.”¹²⁹ Seeking the inward life, however, was not in itself sufficient, as Morris continued to grapple with the “emptiness and vanity of the world” against the “greater mortification” that would “qualify

¹²⁷ Morris’s father was also a transatlantic Quaker preacher. For a brief biographical sketch of Sarah Morris, see Larson, 66, 313.

¹²⁸ Sarah Morris, “Memoir of Sarah Morris,” in *The Friends’ Library: Comprising Journals, Doctrinal Treatises, and Other Writings of Members of the Religious Society of Friends*, eds. William Evans and Thomas Evans (Philadelphia: Joseph Rakestraw, 1842), 6:479. Morris began her ministry well past the average age of marriage for Quaker women in the colonies, which was 22.8 years. Larson, 135.

¹²⁹ Morris, 478.

[her] for his service” as a preacher.¹³⁰ Part of her “mortification” meant becoming entirely dependent on God, being careful not to sit down in the outward ease Smith had warned against. Her utter reliance on heavenly rather than worldly support is reflected by the fact that other people made only minimal entrance into her memoir, appearing only as witnesses to her piety rather than as earthly attachments.¹³¹ Morris drew comfort from God alone: “O Lord, knowest that nothing else can ease and comfort me; thy living presence is all I want.”¹³² Like the Irish Quaker Neale, her singleness gave her the ability to devote her body and her time fully to her preaching, while devoting her affections fully to God. The celibate life remained a means to an end and never an end in itself, an external form that mattered only insofar as it enabled Morris to cultivate the inner essence of faith.¹³³

At the same time that Quaker women like Sarah Morris created a new version of clerical celibacy, they also created a new version of the female religious celibate, innovating upon the longstanding Christian model of a cloistered nun.¹³⁴ Redressing aspects of Catholic celibacy that

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Despite little mention of other people in her memoir, Morris was esteemed by her Philadelphia community. Her obituary in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* (1 November 1775) described her as “an ornament to society, and the delight of her friends and acquaintance [sic], whose affliction for their loss could only be alleviated by an assurance, that it is her great gain.” Obituary reprinted in Larson, 85.

¹³² Ibid, 479. Morris was following the particular conventions of spiritual autobiography when she discussed her journey through “mortification” to total reliance on God, but her account nonetheless reveals the ways in which her singleness was important to her ministry. An account written by Elizabeth Webb, who entered the Quaker ministry as a widow, offers a comparable example of Quaker spiritual writings. See Webb, “A Letter from Elizabeth Webb to Anthony William Boehm,” in *Autobiographical Writings by Early Quaker Women*, ed. David Booy, (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004), 183-188. See Booy, 14-25, for a helpful introduction to Quaker women’s writings.

¹³³ Morris’s obituary called her an “eminent Minister,” writing that “her life and conversation were uniformly consistent with her Christian profession.” Her legacy extended far beyond her, with both her singleness and her ministry influencing other women. Having never married, she left most of her estate to her brother, but stipulated that upon his death it should go to an unmarried niece who had traveled with her during her transatlantic preaching voyage. Her will also gave money to eight female ministers. See Larson, 131. Philadelphia Quaker single woman Hannah Griffitts wrote a memorial in honor of Morris, which continued to have influence when female students at a Quaker school were instructed to copy it in their copybooks. According to Wulf, Griffitts presented Morris as “a model of the single life” (46-47).

¹³⁴ It is worth remembering, however, that there were different models of nuns even within the Catholic tradition. English Catholic Mary Ward, for instance, founded a female religious community in which women—while still bound by a vow—did not always live in the enclosure of the cloister. The fate of Ward’s community, however, reveals that living unenclosed was very much the exception rather than the rule. The Pope dissolved her Institute

had long made Protestants uneasy, celibate Quaker women pursued their religious vocations without being isolated in the convent or, like English Catholic Elizabeth Vaux, in the home. They also eschewed lifelong vows, as demonstrated by Craven's and Neale's decisions to marry later in life. Devout unmarried Quakers operated beyond the ecclesiastical mechanisms that had for centuries defined life for most female religious: traveling widely, preaching to audiences of both men and women, and reserving the possibility that God might yet call them to marry.

In doing so, Quaker ministers pushed the bounds for single women in the same way that their married compatriots pushed the bounds for wives. As Rebecca Larson writes:

A spiritually 'gifted' woman in the Society of Friends could pursue her ministerial 'calling' without renouncing marriage or motherhood. In contrast to a Catholic nun, the Quaker woman who dedicated herself to obeying God's will was not expected to withdraw from the world and remain celibate... Since Quaker female preachers were accepted as both biological creatures and spiritual vessels, their activities as divinely chosen 'instruments' brought about redefinitions of familial roles.¹³⁵

In Larson's telling, the significance of Quaker women pursuing religious callings was that, unlike nuns, they did not have to "renounc[e] marriage or motherhood" or "withdraw from the world." Married female ministers moved further outside the home while their husbands moved further inside, tending to children and domestic tasks when their wives were away preaching. While certainly such gender reversals redefined conventional roles in the family, the freedom that Quaker women had to combine household and ministerial pursuits cut both ways. Quaker women could just as soon choose not to combine household and ministerial work, devoting themselves fulltime to religious service instead. Those preachers who remained single looked just as different from Catholic nuns as their married counterparts did, not isolated in the cloister but operating fully in the world. Their singleness also looked different from devout, unmarried

and ordered its adherents to join enclosed orders instead. Burke, 84. A small number of non-residential options existed for female religious in Catholic continental Europe, but they were lay movements that did not require a vow. See note 3.

¹³⁵ Larson, 134.

women in other Protestant denominations. Ministerial careers opened up the possibility for Quaker women to loop back to the very place where Larson began. They could voluntarily “renounc[e] marriage or motherhood” in ways inaccessible to most Protestant women, pursuing fulltime religious vocations that earned them the esteem of their communities. As their married compatriots forged a new model of the Christian wife, so too did unmarried ministers forge a very different version of the female religious celibate.

The fact that Quakers saw celibacy as advantageous to the ministry not only opened up the possibility for vocational celibacy in the colonies, but also made single people themselves seem less of a threat to the larger community, even among those whose single status was especially alarming to Puritans: young people. In his 1663 pamphlet, *Concerning Marriage: A Letter Sent to G.F.* [George Fox], Quaker Thomas Lawrence offered “admonitions” to readers based on their marital status. He instructed single people to “shut out all motions to marriage that are not of God,” which to Quakers meant the frequent refrain to not marry “as the world does,” but with pious intentions, with partners chosen from within the community, and with a courtship that proceeded through the proper channels of the Quaker meeting.¹³⁶ Especially revealing of Quaker attitudes towards single people was Lawrence’s instructions “to them that would have married, and have had many offers, but failed to consider when they have not been ignorant or negligent of God’s stirrings, and have followed carnal desires, and self-ends, the usual provocations to the Worlds marriages.”¹³⁷ Lawrence invoked the young unmarried people that English people on both sides of the Atlantic feared most: those who chose to remain single because of their own wishes rather than God’s, being “ignorant or negligent of God’s stirrings” while indulging “carnal desires” and “self-ends.”

¹³⁶ Lawrence, 13.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

His Quaker framework, however, led Lawrence to find a silver lining. Since Friends believed that over time they could become more adept at discerning the inner light, young single people were specially positioned for reform. Lawrence assured his readers that, “to some that God will shew his loving kindness and favour, there are two ends of such long delays in mercy.” The first end was “to break down and utterly destroy the body of sin and death, from whence carnal lusts and self-ends arise,” and the second was “to qualifie them to receive his blessing, to be married in the Lord, to know Gods call, Gods stirrings, and Gods will concerning marriage, by an absolute and infallible knowledge and assurance, and so come out of the defilement, and come to enjoy the honourable marriage.”¹³⁸ The period of being single was a time for people to prepare themselves to live more godly lives, learning to “destroy...self-ends” and “know Gods call” instead. For Lawrence, singleness came to take on an especially important office. Even with its potential for “carnal lusts” and “self-ends,” it was not the looming threat that Puritans feared, but rather a time of which God made special use, preparing young people “to be married in the Lord.” Until they were sure of their marital choices, they needed to continue to wait in their singleness: “All friends, every particular, until...they be perswaded of Gods will certain and infallible concerning their marriage, were better forbear, and wait on God, in his Light to receive his counsel; how else do Friends differ from the World?”¹³⁹

In Quaker hands, even the singleness of those who were not pursuing religious vocations could be turned to a larger mission, helping Friends distinguish themselves from the world. As Sarah Morris discussed in her memoir, being young and unmarried offered her the opportunity for “greater mortification,” serving as a time in her life when she learned to align her will with God’s. In similar fashion, young single people could “come out of the defilement,” gaining

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 12.

“absolute and infallible knowledge” of the workings of the inner light. Quakerism’s more positive rendering of the single life was thus not limited to women who devoted themselves to ministerial vocations, but could be extended to any unmarried Friend. Even those who were not exercising the chastity their singleness demanded of them could become bearers of the inner light being readied by God for service.

Just as Quakers reconsidered the single people in their midst, whether the Friends who waited on marriage until they were absolutely “perswaded of God’s will” or the female ministers who employed celibacy to fulfill their vocations, they also reconsidered the space that single people had traditionally occupied: the cloister. In the last half of the seventeenth century, both the Catholic John Gother and the Quaker William Penn used the cloister to think through pressing concerns facing their own communities. For Gother, the issue was how to adapt the ideals of the cloister for those who could not access the cloister itself, whether because they lived in religious environments where it could not take root or because they were married laypeople whose burdens mired them in the world. For Penn, the issue was how to create a type of cloister that navigated more successfully the critical Quaker distinction between internal and external forms. Like his female coreligionists revising Catholic vocational celibacy, Penn sought to remake the Catholic cloister, clearing it of Catholic error. To be sure, Puritans too had circled around a similar issue. John Cotton, for example, wanted to reclaim what he saw as the more positive aspects of monastic solitude (dedicating oneself fully to God) from its downsides (retreating too far from social circulation and responsibility), but he advocated replacing the cloister with godly marriages that offered opportunities for solitude. Penn, however, found the answer in the cloister itself, advocating for an improved version where external displays of piety became properly interiorized experiences.

Penn began his 1668 tract, *No Cross, No Crown*, with a familiar litany of Protestant complaints against the Catholic cloister, but for him—unlike his non-Quaker colleagues—all of the problems looped back to one fundamental mistake: over the centuries, the monastery had become a purely external form. His key objections to cloistered celibates were, first, that they relied on others for their support, practicing “a lazy, rusty, unprofitable *Self-Denial*, burdensome to others to feed their Idleness.”¹⁴⁰ Second, Penn claimed that the cloistered life limited the power of God and the testimony of believers. Resisting temptation while holed up in a monastery was but little victory: “No thanks if they commit not, what they are not tempted to commit.”¹⁴¹ Third, and most importantly, the monastery presented the same confusion between inner and outer states that William Smith had identified in his discussion of singleness. Like Smith’s unmarried people who, outwardly comfortable, assumed their inner states were also secure, cloistered celibates assumed that their outer display of piety signified a healthy inner relationship to God. Penn reversed that logic, asking, “Does not the Body follow the Soul, and not the Soul the Body? Do not such consider, that no outward Cell can shut up the Soul from Lust, the Mind from an Infinity of unrighteous Imaginations?...How then can an *External Application* remove an Internal Cause; or a Restraint upon the Body, work a Confinement of the Mind?”¹⁴²

Penn believed that the critical error of Catholic celibates was their assumption that the internal world would follow the external—the soul would follow the body—rather than the other way around. His image of a religious recluse embodied the larger Quaker complaint about external church forms, whether the monastery, the sacraments, or otherwise: they distracted believers from their all-important internal states, giving them a false sense of piety. The cloister

¹⁴⁰ Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 295.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 296.

offered Catholics an excuse, a place where young people could “cover Idleness,” where the lazy could avoid the “Pain of Punishment,” and where the aged could assuage a “long Life of Guilt.”¹⁴³ Such people joined monasteries in hopes that their outward display of religion would absolve them of sin—a fruitless quest according to Penn, who proclaimed that “taking up the *Cross of Jesus is a more interior Exercise.*”¹⁴⁴

The underlying issue for Penn was that the cloister, in its confusion of internal and external practices, prevented Christians from fulfilling their larger mission, which was to redeem the world by serving as an example to it, not by retreating from it. Because Quakers saw themselves in unity with the primitive church, they believed it their responsibility to expand apostolic communion by leading others into the fold.¹⁴⁵ The Catholic monastery precluded that very type of witnessing. It was a “Selfish Invention...[that] runs away by it self, and leaves the World behind to be lost.”¹⁴⁶ In contrast, Penn wrote, “true Godliness don’t turn Men out of the World but enables them to live better in it, and excites their Endeavours to mend it.”¹⁴⁷ Cloistering oneself was in no way a display of “true Godliness,” which should inspire people to enter fully into the world and “mend” it rather than withdraw from it. As the living example of the apostolic church, Quakers had an obligation to “keep the Helm, and guide the Vessel to its Port; not meanly steal out at the Stern of the World, and leave those that are in it without a Pilot...”¹⁴⁸ The Catholic Church had faltered in its duties by isolating the devout instead of releasing them into the world as guides for others.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ Underwood, 10-11.

¹⁴⁶ Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 296.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid.

¹⁴⁸ Ibid.

Entering fully into the throng of the world, however, presented Quakers with a different problem: how to serve as an example to the world without getting caught up in it themselves. As a solution, Penn offered—ironically—the very institution he had been criticizing in the first place, the Catholic cloister. Penn assured Quakers that they could live and witness in the world without unmooring themselves from God so long as they built the cloister within. Redressing the problems he saw with Catholic approaches, Penn turned the cloister from an external to an internal form. The goal was to help Quakers collapse the stark distinction between heavenly and earthly affairs, anchoring themselves in the light of God no matter where they went in the world or what they were doing.¹⁴⁹ In contrast to the physical isolation of cloistered Catholics, for Quakers, “the Christian Convert and Monastery are within, where the Soul is encloistered from Sin. And this Religious House the True Followers of Christ carry about with them, who exempt not themselves from the Conversation of the World, though they keep themselves from the Evil of the World in their Conversation.”¹⁵⁰ By carrying the monastery within, turning it from an outer structure to an inner practice, Quakers could experience safety and solace without having to retreat. They did not “exempt...themselves from the...World,” but they did “keep themselves from [its] Evil,” giving higher testimony to the power of God than cloistered Catholics ever could. Friends “truly overcom[e] the World,” Penn wrote, by leading “a Life of Purity in the Face of its Allurements,” not by stealing themselves away and hiding from its temptations.¹⁵¹

Robert Barclay made a similar point in his 1678 *Apology*, asserting that Quakers had made the physical space of the cloister—along with all other external marks of religion—unnecessary. In his proposition that “*all superfluous Titles of Honour, Profuseness and Prodigality in Meat and Apparel, excess of Gaming, Sporting and Playing [be] laid aside and*

¹⁴⁹ On Quakers’ concern with eliminating the distinction between the spiritual and the temporal, see Frost, 14-26.

¹⁵⁰ Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 295.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

forborn,” he used the example of the monastery to show that Quakers did not require any exterior signs of status to distinguish themselves, whether displayed through title, apparel, ordination, or otherwise. Among Quakers, Barclay wrote, God “hath produced effectually in many that Mortification and Abstraction from the *Love and Cares of this World*, who daily are Conversing in the World (but inwardly Redeemed out of it) both in Wedlock, and in their lawful Employments, which was judged could only be obtained by such as were shut up in Cloysters and Monasteries.”¹⁵² Quakers had achieved in the world what people had thought for centuries could only be achieved in “Cloysters and Monasteries.” They married, worked, and lived in the throng while being “inwardly Redeemed” from it. Because the Holy Spirit lived within every believer, it created an internal sanctuary that served as a superior type of cloister, enabling Quakers to tether themselves firmly to God even while witnessing in the world.

Importantly, however, while the cloister was not necessary in order for Quakers to gain “Mortification,” it did still offer spiritual benefits. Just because Penn advised Quakers to first build the cloister within did not mean they had to dismantle the cloister without: “Nay, I have long thought it an Error among all Sorts, that use not Monastick Lives, that they have no Retreat for the Afflicted, the Tempted, the Solitary, and the Devout.”¹⁵³ Though he criticized the way Catholic celibates used the cloister, he still found “Monastick Lives” valuable, offering solitude and the opportunity to “undisturbedly wait up on God.”¹⁵⁴ The problems he had identified earlier were not endemic to the cloister itself, but stemmed from the motivations that Catholics brought to the cloister, turning it into an external pretence of faith rather than a tool that could help cultivate genuine inward devotion.

¹⁵² Barclay, 518.

¹⁵³ Penn, *No Cross, No Crown*, 296.

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

Distinguishing between the Catholic monastery and the practice of “True Retirement,” Penn wrote, “I do not only acknowledge, but admire *Solitude*. Christ himself was an example of it: He lov’d and chose to frequent *Mountains, Gardens, Sea-sides*. They are requisite to the growth of *Piety*; and I reverence the Virtue that seeks and uses it; wishing there were more of it in the World.”¹⁵⁵ Retreat in and of itself was not the issue. Indeed, “Retirement” was “requisite to...*Piety*,” and Penn counted the loss of monastic options in the Protestant tradition as “Error.” The issue instead was that Catholics had departed from the “True” form of retirement for which the cloister was originally intended, the type of retirement that “Christ himself” sought when he escaped alone into nature. Lamenting the lack of opportunities for religious retreat, Penn wrote in his 1682 book, *Some Fruits of Solitude*, that solitude is “a School few care to learn in, though none instructs us better.”¹⁵⁶ The cloister and the withdrawal it offered were critical to Christians—practiced even by Jesus—but only if people began with the proper motivations and returned again to the world, renewed and prepared to stand as witnesses for God. Too many Catholic celibates, Penn regretted, fled to the cloister to live out their days in hopes that changing their external state would change their internal one. By understanding that it worked the other way around—that transformation first had to begin internally, in the heart—Quakers could redeem the cloister, restoring it to the sacred devotional practice it had once been in the earliest days of Christianity. Ultimately, Penn’s ideas aligned more closely with Gother’s than with his fellow Protestant dissenters. Despite their theological distance from one another, both men sought to reintegrate the sacred space of the cloister into religious landscapes that lacked it, making its practices accessible to the larger body of believers.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid.

¹⁵⁶ William Penn, *Some Fruits of Solitude, in Reflections and Maxims Relating to the Conduct of Human Life*, 2nd ed. (1682; reprint, London: Thomas Northcutt, 1693), A3.

Without the institutionalized infrastructure that had for centuries supported Christian celibacy, both Quakers and Catholics created new forms of the single life that transcended the church walls. They expanded celibacy beyond the cloister at the same moment that they expanded the cloister beyond celibacy, offering its tools to the world. In contrast to their Puritan counterparts, both groups carved out conceptual and physical space in the colonies for the religiously-inspired single life, albeit in different ways and often to paradoxical effect. Catholic Marylanders, for instance, experienced a closing down of traditional celibate vocations, but it was that very absence of institutionalized celibacy that allowed them to create a more capacious definition of devout, male singleness. Such opportunities, however, did not exist for Catholic women until well into the eighteenth century, given Maryland's skewed sex ratio and the importance of the family in the colonial environment. At the same time, while opportunities for female celibacy decreased among Catholics, they increased for Quakers, who reintroduced into Protestantism practices that the Reformation had long silenced. The gendered nature of pursuing a ministerial calling made celibacy especially important for women, just as the primitivist nature of Quaker spirituality made the cloister especially important for all Friends, regardless of their sex or status, allowing them to practice Christ-like solitude.

The effect of both Quakers' and Catholics' ideas, in turn, rippled beyond the church and into the community. Whether as female ministers, young single Friends, or unmarried Catholic men, single people were not imagined as the solitary and dangerous outliers feared by Puritan New Englanders, who so tightly linked singleness and sin. Instead, in communities with faith traditions that reserved special esteem for the single life, unmarried people came to look far less alarming and were once again imagined as contributing members of colonial society.

While Catholics and Quakers were bringing celibate people and celibate spaces beyond the cloister and into the world, other religious groups in the colonies were seeking to reinstitute monastic structures and bring greater discipline to the single life. Religious renewal across the Atlantic had led to a revived interest in sexual asceticism, which traveled to the colonies through the efforts of Anglican missionaries and Pietist immigrants. In the last years of the seventeenth century and the first decades of the eighteenth, the colonies would become a place for European transplants to experiment with yet more new ideas about the purpose of celibacy and the place of those who practiced it.

Chapter 4

“O blessed life of loneliness when all creation silence keeps”: European Experiments in the American Colonies

If Catholics and Quakers first carved out space in the colonies for more positive renderings of celibacy and of single people, then a host of new influences from Europe would soon fling the doors wide open.¹ In the last half of the seventeenth century, European Protestants on both sides of the English Channel experienced a renewed interest in sexual renunciation, culminating in a “quasi-monastic revival.”² While colonists did not participate in the revival directly, they were certainly affected by its consequences, which reached British North America in two main ways. First, missionaries from the Church of England transported books and pamphlets to the colonies that praised the single life, as well as texts that affirmed the official Anglican position of neutrality. Those materials were then used to catechize colonial parishioners and to stock Anglican libraries up and down the eastern seaboard. The missionaries also introduced a new element to the colonial discourse through their very persons. The majority of clergy sent to the colonies were single men, propelling back into the spotlight conversations about how unmarried clerics should manage themselves. That question took on new concerns and greater urgency in the colonial environment, where missionary clergy worked in tight competition for converts who had plenty of other religious options.

While this first route of transmission was relatively indirect—occurring through printed texts and discussions of clerical conduct—the second route was both more explicit and more radical. In the 1680s, Pietists from the Continent began to migrate to the colonies for the express

¹ Title quotation is the name of a hymn written by Pennsylvania celibate, Johann Conrad Beissel. Lamech and Agrippa, *Chronicon Ephratense: A History of the Community of Seventh Day Baptists at Ephrata*, trans. J. Max Hark (Lancaster, PA: S.H. Zahm & Co., 1889), 65. The authors were two members of the Ephrata Cloister who originally published *Chronicon Ephratense* in German in 1786.

² Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 251.

purpose of building monastic communities. Not only did they create physical, cloistered space—offering colonists for the first time the opportunity to pursue celibate vocations—but they also presented vastly different ideas about the nature of celibacy. Whereas Quakers and Anglicans had praised the single life because it allowed believers to serve God without distraction, radical Pietists insisted that celibacy held intrinsic merit in its own right, the same type of inherent spiritual virtue that Protestants had tried to expunge during the Reformation. Unlike Catholics, however, who grounded their arguments for sexual purity in priests' need to handle the Host and intercede to God on behalf of their parishioners, Pietists advocated celibacy for all believers, not just the clerical elite or the unmarried. They also emphasized the corporeal dimensions of celibacy. Sexual purity did not merely preserve the body from pollution and symbolize commitment to a spiritual bridegroom: it was the only way to prepare the body to consummate union with Christ in heaven.

These European contributions marked an important moment in the colonial discourse on celibacy. They forged networks of intellectual exchange across the Atlantic, in which the colonies did not simply receive imported ideas, but reframed them, providing an environment for Europeans to push their ideas further than they could have at home. Because the ability to experiment with alternative modes of religious experience had closed down in Europe after the Thirty Years' War, the colonies became especially significant as a site for testing out new models of celibate practices and living arrangements. The spread of Europe's quasi-monastic revival also added a much more radical strain to the colonial discourse, reintroducing into Protestantism the older Christian notion that total commitment to God demanded sexual renunciation. Though these European ideas traveled in admittedly small circles when they first

arrived on American shores, their contributions ultimately spread much further, laying the groundwork for colonists' own revival of celibacy during the Great Awakening.³

Reviving Celibacy in Anglican England

Compared to Puritans, Catholics, and Quakers, it is far more difficult to talk about a cohesive Anglican perspective on the single life. Supporters of the official Church of England had long held a variety of competing views.⁴ On the one hand, though Anglicans stripped celibacy of its intrinsic spiritual virtue during the Reformation, the Church of England continued to have leaders who preferred the single life. Influential bishops like William Laud and Lancelot Andrewes, for example, both opted to remain single despite entering office long after the approval of clerical marriage.⁵ Even among ministers who were married, celibacy continued to hold special pride of place as a religious vocation. The twice-married Jeremy Taylor praised celibacy as “a life of the Angels, the enamel of the soul, the huge advantage of religion.”⁶ Thomas Culpeper lauded celibacy as that “Angelical Estate [which] seems to share in honour with Martyrdom,” despite himself being a married man.⁷ On the other hand, circulating side-by-side with encomiums of celibacy was a discourse that extolled the married minister. A married clergyman was to present a model of the ideal Christian husband to all the men in his parish, performing a crucial service that celibate clergy could not offer.⁸ In turn, the pastor's wife

³ Many scholars have discussed the critical role of Pietism in ushering in the Great Awakening. See, for example, Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 186-216; Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*, 24-39; Samuel C. Smith, *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 11-30; Noll, 60-65.

⁴ See the discussion in chapter 1. The ambivalence that Eric Josef Carlson has identified in English attitudes towards clerical marriage during the Reformation persisted throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Young, 16-21.

⁵ Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 252.

⁶ Jeremy Taylor, *Holy Living*, vol. 1 of *Holy Living and Holy Dying*, ed. P.G. Stanwood (1650; reprint, New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 74.

⁷ As quoted in Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 252.

⁸ One consequence of having a married clergy, according to Jeremy Gregory, was that a minister's ability to lead his parish was assessed by his ability to lead his family. Gregory, “Gender and the Clerical Profession in England, 1660-1850,” in *Gender and Christian Religion*, ed. R.N. Swanson (Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, 1998), 260-

became a critical part of her husband's vocation. Not only was she also to serve as a model Christian spouse, but she could help her husband minister to his female parishioners and gain a better sense of the parish's broader religious climate.⁹

Anglicanism's ability to hold these competing ideas about clerical marriage and celibacy together at once was woven into the very fabric of the Church. The Thirty-Nine Articles that detailed Anglican doctrine were intended as a *via media* accommodating heterodox views, even if their spirit of compromise alienated England's most radical reformers. Article 32, which formally permitted the clergy to marry, encapsulated the type of middle ground the Elizabethan church sought. According to Gilbert Burnet's 1683 *History of the Reformation*, that middle ground was especially important when it came to the debate over clerical marriage, given that no other issue stirred up "more contradiction and censure."¹⁰ Leaving marital decisions entirely in the hands of individual clergy members, the Article stipulated that, "Bishops, Priests, and Deacons, are not commanded by God's Law, either to vow the estate of single life, or to abstain from marriage: therefore it is lawful also for them, as for all other Christian men, to marry at their own discretion, as they shall judge the same to serve better to godliness."¹¹ In deliberate opposition to the Pope, whom they believed had usurped God's power by imposing the rule of celibacy, Church officials declared that they had no authority to legislate on the clergy's marital status.

Article 32 was intended to close the book on clerical marriage once and for all, but it had the opposite effect. By refusing to rule one way or the other, the Church ensured that celibacy

61. In a 1697 sermon, George Stanhope illustrated the connection, preaching that, "the Care and Abilities of such a Person to instruct and oversee the House of God as a Spiritual father, would best be measured by the condition of his own Family at Home." Stanhope, *A Sermon Preached Before the Sons of the Clergy* (London: H. Bonwick, 1697), 3.

⁹ Gregory, 260-65; Leonard I. Sweet, *The Minister's Wife: Her Role in Nineteenth-Century American Evangelicalism* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983), 12-17.

¹⁰ Gilbert Burnet, *The History of the Reformation of the Church of England*, Part 2 (London: T.H., 1683), 1:89.

¹¹ As quoted in Young, 16.

would long be a point of contention in England. Springing up in the Article's wake was an enduring—and at times explosive—debate about whether the married or single life could “serve better to godliness.” Clerical marriage proved so controversial because it was an issue that extended far beyond celibacy itself, striking at the very heart of the English church. As B.W. Young and Sarah Apetrei both argue, celibacy invoked a larger problem that Anglicans had been grappling with since the Reformation: where exactly the Church of England should draw its *via media* between Catholicism and Protestantism.¹² The question of a chaste priesthood brought the issue into especially sharp focus. According to Young, “In preferring to underscore that a priest might desire, on religious grounds, *not* to marry, conformist advocates of clerical celibacy were guardedly questioning a central tenet of the Reformation and upholding a feature of Roman Catholicism which Protestants rejected on scriptural, historical, and ‘rational’ grounds.”¹³ Anglican ministers who opted for celibacy, their opponents feared, might walk back the very achievements of the Reformation, leaving open the unsettling possibility that the Pope was correct on the issue of sexual renunciation.

Because the issue of celibacy revealed “the inherent tensions between the Catholic and Protestant dimensions of Anglicanism,” it became a flashpoint during moments of particular religious and political crisis.¹⁴ The quasi-monastic revival took hold during those very moments, first originating during the mid-century civil wars and then erupting during the Glorious Revolution.¹⁵ As the number of people talking and writing about celibacy increased, the Anglican conversation about celibacy boiled over from accommodation to conflict.

¹² Apetrei, “The Life of the Angels,” 251-52; Young, 15-16.

¹³ Young, 16.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁵ Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 260. John Rogers also locates a “brief but striking Protestant opposition” to the ideal of marriage, specifically between 1640 and 1660. Rogers, “The Enclosure of Virginity: The Poetics of Sexual Abstinence in the English Revolution,” in *Enclosure Acts: Sexuality, Property, and Culture in Early Modern England*, eds. Richard Burt and John Michael Archer (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 234; Bridget Hill

The roots of the quasi-monastic revival grew out of the mid-century “holy living” movement spearheaded by Jeremy Taylor, the twice-married Anglican minister who had lauded celibacy as “the huge advantage of religion.”¹⁶ Writing in the 1650s, amidst the aftermath of war and in a climate of growing religious dissent, Taylor hoped to revitalize an Anglican faith that “had grown tired...of rigidly prescriptive preachments and ranting prophets.”¹⁷ Deeply affected by the larger turn towards heart religion sweeping through seventeenth-century Europe, he sought to cultivate a style of Anglican piety that was grounded in the personal experience of God. Taylor’s particular version of heart religion, however, was one that was registered not just through the emotions, but through the methods of what he called “holy living”—practices such as temperance, prayer, fasting, and Bible-reading.¹⁸ Unlike Quakers, who believed that external modes of faith distracted people from cultivating heartfelt intimacy with Christ, Taylor believed that disciplined external practices were the best way to cultivate such intimacy. A deeply personal and affective relationship with Christ began first on the body and then moved to the heart, not the other way around.

On his list of “holy living” practices, which otherwise contained familiar prescriptions for piety, Taylor proposed a less common addition: sexual asceticism. He believed that celibacy offered Anglicans the ability to free up their time and bodies for higher pursuits. “Natural virginity,” he wrote, provided a “separation from worldly incombrances” and “containeth a

identifies a rise of interest in female celibacy in the last half of the seventeenth century, 108-11. See as well Judith Spicksley, “A Dynamic Model of Social Relations: Celibacy, Credit and the Identity of the ‘Spinster’ in Seventeenth-Century England,” in *Identity and Agency in England, 1500-1800*, eds. Henry French and Jonathan Barry (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 124-29. Spicksley sees a revival in female celibacy during the Restoration because of increased economic opportunities for women, especially among middling and upper class women who were able to make careers as writers—the first generation of women to be able to forge literary professions.

¹⁶ The movement was named after Taylor’s seminal text, which had initiated the campaign. On Taylor, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 103-08.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁸ On the influence of heart religion on Taylor, see Campbell, 100, 115.

victory over lusts...and [led to] self-denial...and a greater mortification.”¹⁹ Celibacy helped believers come closer to God by emptying them of self, offering them a form of “self-denial” that made God’s will—not their own—their highest priority.

Drawing on two different Biblical discussions of celibacy, Taylor combined Paul’s counsel in 1 Corinthians 7 with the gospels’ *vita angelica*. While Puritans dismissed the latter as pertaining only to life in heaven rather than on earth, Taylor found both discussions to be one and the same: being less distracted by temporal concerns and by the problems of the flesh—as per Paul—was exactly what constituted the life of the angels, making the angelic life possible in this world. As Taylor explained, “*Virginitie*...being unmingled with the World, it is apt to converse with God: and by not feeling the warmth of a too forward and indulgent nature, flames out with holy fires, till it be burning like the Cherubim and the most extasied order of holy and unpolluted Spirits.”²⁰ Because it liberated people from the fleshly and earthly troubles that Paul warned about (their “worldly incombrances” and “indulgent nature”), celibacy allowed them to be most “like the Cherubim,” free to “converse with God” while “unmingled with the World.” Taylor expanded upon the centuries-old patristic model, turning it into a valuable practice for all believers, not just for those who served the church or even for those who were unmarried. All Christians could benefit by exercising the “self-denial” that sexual restraint required.

At the same time that Taylor praised celibacy, he was careful to distance himself from the Catholic Church, cautioning that sexual renunciation “of it self is not a state more acceptable to God.” It did not offer intrinsic merit in its own right, but was only as valuable as the ways in which believers made use of it. Lest they fall into the same sins as an errant Catholic priesthood, “Virgins must remember that the virginitie of the bodie is onely excellent in order to the puritie

¹⁹ J. Taylor, 74.

²⁰ Ibid.

of the soul.”²¹ Celibacy could in no way curry favor with God or signal elite ecclesiastical status. If used with the correct motivation, however, it could be a valuable spiritual practice, using the body to cultivate a more immediate and heartfelt relationship with Christ.

With his remove from the Catholic Church clearly marked, Taylor amassed followers around a “holy living” movement that introduced sexual renunciation into mid-century Anglican reform. Amidst the crises of civil war, he advanced his prescription for spiritual renewal as a salve for England’s religious divisiveness. In the same way that Quakers saw their interiorized approach as cutting down to the very core of Christian faith, Taylor saw his methods of holy living as presenting fundamental Christian practices that could bridge England’s theological differences.²² Though both Taylor and his Quaker counterparts were participating in the larger, ecumenical phenomenon of heart religion, Taylor did so while being firmly anchored in an Anglican framework.

What gave his movement weight was the fact that he wanted to reform the Church of England so that it lived up to the way it already saw itself: as the leading example of the primitive apostolic church. Bishop William Beveridge preached from his Restoration pulpit that, in “the constitution of our church, as it is now reformed...there is nothing defective so neither is there anything superfluous in it, but that it exactly answers the pattern of the Primitive and Apostolical Church itself, as near as it is possible for a national church to do.”²³ While other Anglican ministers agreed that their church was the closest extant relative of apostolic communion, they were less confident than Beveridge that Anglicans were actually living up to the honor. Much to the disappointment of clergy like Jeremy Taylor, English people did not

²¹ Ibid., 79.

²² On the ecumenical impulses behind the “holy living” movement, see Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 252-59.

²³ As quoted in Eamon Duffy, “Primitive Christianity Revived: Religious Renewal in Augustan England,” in *Renaissance and Renewal in Christian History*, ed. Derek Baker (Oxford, UK: Basil Blackwell, 1977), 287.

appear worthy representatives of a “national church” that mostly closely adhered to the Edenic form. Their complaint gathered more and more steam as the century wore one, with growing numbers of Anglicans issuing calls for a more primitive style of piety. William Cave offered the campaign’s signal text with his 1673 *Primitive Christianity: or, the Religion of the Ancient Christians in the First Ages of the Gospel*. Seeking to unearth not the “abstruse and intricate speculations of Theology” but rather the “divine and holy Precepts of the Christian Religion drawn down into action...breathing in the hearts and lives of these good old Christians,” Cave’s primitivism was infused with the spirit of his times. He was less concerned with doctrine than with everyday practice, determining “Precepts” for practical “action” and recovering the experience “breathing in the hearts” of early Christians.²⁴ Devout Anglicans reeling from the seventeenth century’s political and religious turmoil found much to admire in Cave’s appeal to a heartfelt, primitivist faith. As Eamon Duffy writes, “The nation, after so many years of anarchy and disruption, had to be trained in the religious norms of the church.”²⁵

Training the nation, however, required starting at the level of individuals. Works like Jeremy Taylor’s and William Cave’s gained popularity because they offered specific and practical guidance to individual believers eager to infuse their daily lives with greater holiness, hoping that bodily restraint and careful conduct could lead them to a more intimate experience of God. As Apetrei argues, “The primitive faith did not merely represent ecclesiological precedent, but for the majority of ordinary church members it offered an ideal standard of Christian living. It was to be experienced personally in the present, revived as practical holiness, the secret to genuine happiness and serenity.”²⁶ In contrast to previous primitivist movements among

²⁴ William Cave, *Primitive Christianity: Or, the Religion of the Ancient Christians in the First Ages of the Gospel* (London: R. Chiswell, 1673), preface [n.p].

²⁵ Duffy, 289.

²⁶ Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 259.

Anglicans and Puritans, primitivism's late-century iteration placed greater emphasis on experience—on the “ideal standard of Christian living”—as opposed to ideal ecclesiastical forms. Whereas earlier Puritans had been most concerned with replicating Biblical structures of church organization, later Anglicans were most concerned with recovering primitivist behaviors and habits, the daily mechanisms of living in apostolic communion that guided everything from diet to apparel to sexual practice. As Cave made clear, the type of primitivism he craved was experiential, that which “breath[ed] in the hearts and lives of these good old Christians.” To revive primitive Christianity in the last decades of the seventeenth century meant revamping both the external and internal behavior of individuals, using the daily habits of the body as a way to restore the soul.²⁷

With its emphasis on behavioral reform, the campaign for primitive Christianity aligned with another movement already underway in the latter half of seventeenth-century England: the reformation of manners. Both movements shared the same anxieties about the moral laxity of Restoration society. Concerned Britons feared that theaters, taverns, brothels, and other forms of urban entertainment had caused a steep decline in sexual morals. Especially alarming was that sexual looseness was not limited to the laity, but had overtaken the Anglican clergy as well.²⁸ In a Church that had long defined itself against the sexual transgressions of Catholic priests, the misconduct of Anglican clergy presented a particularly disconcerting problem. From the time of the Reformation, Protestants had seen Catholic clerical celibacy as a direct route to sexual sin: humankind's natural concupiscence was simply too strong for priests to resist, and trying to resist only made their lusts more unwieldy. The problem with the sexual lapses of Restoration Anglican clergy—men who could and did marry—was their intimation that celibacy might not

²⁷ On the importance of William Cave to the movement, see Duffy, 288-89.

²⁸ Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 261-63; Duffy, 287-88

be the root of the Catholic priesthood's errors after all. Though freed from the mandates of the Pope, Anglican ministers still exhibited the same sexual misdeeds and lack of self-control that English critics had long associated with Catholicism.

Making matters worse, Restoration reformers feared that the Church's strongest political supporters were equally guilty, with leaders of a staunchly Anglican parliament embroiled in rumors of sexual scandal. As Eamon Duffy writes, "There was at the heart of the restored church an uncomfortable sense of contradiction. The parliament which was so uncompromisingly Anglican...harbored men whose lives were anything but an ornament to the church they championed. Restoration society was not godly."²⁹ The perceived depravity of seventeenth-century England made calls for primitive Christianity very potent, explaining why the primitivism that reformers promoted was less geared towards remaking ecclesiastical structures than with remaking Anglicans themselves, whether members of the clergy, laity, or Parliament.

Sexual asceticism became an important part of the project to revitalize Anglican faith and morals. Reformers presented celibacy as a practice of the early church fathers whom they so greatly admired and on whom they sought to model their lives.³⁰ As the century wore on, more and more Anglicans found celibacy appealing, building on the movement that Jeremy Taylor had begun. The conversation reached a high point around the time of the Glorious Revolution. When the divide between England's Catholic and Protestant elements came to a head, the debate about sexual asceticism burgeoned.³¹ Two of the quasi-monastic revival's most influential

²⁹ Duffy, 288.

³⁰ As Apetrei shows, however, while primitive Christianity often entailed praise of sexual asceticism, it did not always do so. Writing in the 1680s, high Anglican Henry Wharton viewed the celibacy of the early church fathers as a corruption of the primitive church rather than a component of it. Puritans, of course, would have shared his sentiments. Apetrei, "The Life of Angels," 255-56.

³¹ While the Glorious Revolution was the high point of the conversation, it was certainly not its end. William Law would become celibacy's most famous English advocate after the turn of the century, influencing key figures like

leaders, Anthony Horneck (1641-1697) and Edward Stephens (d. 1706), illustrate the various directions in which the campaign for celibacy could be pulled. Both Horneck and Stephens were married men who reserved a special place for sexual asceticism within the Church of England, but their efforts led to very different outcomes.³²

Horneck, a Palatinate-born Anglican clergyman, proposed celibacy as a way to redress England's crisis in sexual morals and reclaim the primitive church. In his 1681 book, *The Happy Ascetick*, he praised the discipline of the patristic fathers, writing, "To suppress such satisfactions of the Flesh, they were so watchful, so courageous, so magnanimous, that they seemed Angels more than Men, and were actually nearer to God, to whom they lived, than to the World, in which they lived. In their lives, Chaste and Modest."³³ Similar to Taylor, Horneck saw celibacy as a way for fallen human beings to emulate the life of the angels, emptying themselves of worldly concerns by denying the self and offering complete devotion to God. While Horneck believed that remaining single was the best way to "suppress...satisfactions of the Flesh," he insisted that those who were already married could also practice the discipline of sexual restraint. In contrast to the Protestant stance that marital sex—in moderation—was valuable because it fostered spousal intimacy and mirrored the affection between Christ and his church, Horneck invoked a pre-Reformation notion of marital sex, in which its sole contribution was procreation. Other than for reproductive purposes, married Christians should practice abstinence: "For what,"

John Wesley. Wesley would go on to reprint many of the key works on seventeenth-century sexual asceticism in his *Christian Library*, including Horneck's *Happy Ascetick* and Cave's *Primitive Christianity*. On Wesley's *Christian Library*, see F. Ernest Stoeffler, "Pietism, the Wesleys, and Methodist Beginnings in America," in *Continental Pietism and Early Christianity*, ed. F. Ernest Stoeffler (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 203-05. English radicalism would also continue to gain fresh influences from its links to Continental Pietism, as will be discussed later in the chapter.

³² Apetrei, "The Life of Angels," 263-64.

³³ Anthony Horneck, *The Happy Ascetick: Or, The Best Exercise, Together with Prayers Suitable to Each Exercise. To which is Added a Letter to a Person of Quality, Concerning the Holy Lives of the Primitive Christians* (1681), 6th ed. (London: Samuel Chapman and Richard Ware, 1724), 501.

Horneck asked, quoting Ambrose of Milan, “is abstinence but a Picture of Heaven?”³⁴ Whether married or single, Christians who practiced celibacy and other forms of bodily discipline could become “equal to Angels.”³⁵

Non-juror Edward Stephens represented the more radical edge of England’s quasi-monastic revival.³⁶ Like Horneck, he began by aligning himself with the sexual asceticism of the early church fathers, championing celibacy because it had “always been esteemed very Honourable in the Christian Church, and believ’d to be a Matter of great Reward hereafter.”³⁷ Stephens departed from Horneck, however, by taking his primitivist views one step further, organizing a monastic-style Anglican community in the heart of London. In 1692, he founded a religious group whose members met daily to perform the Eucharist and reaffirm their commitment to godly living, which included sexual renunciation. He soon expanded his movement, calling for the creation of an Anglican cloister where celibate believers could devote themselves fully to a pious and ascetic lifestyle. Starting with his female followers, whom he believed had the most to gain from cloistered living, he proposed a “Religious Society for Single Women,” intended for “some Devout Women, with such mean, but convenient Habitation, Work, Wages and Relief, that they may have Time and Strength for the Worship of God, both in Publick and Private, and Freedom of Mind for Meditation, and Religious Exercises.”³⁸ He imposed a strict regimen built on his own understanding of the apostolic example and intended to

³⁴ Ibid., 395.

³⁵ Ibid., 8.

³⁶ Stephens was trained as a lawyer and ordained as a minister, but he never received a ministerial post. Geoff Kemp, “Stephens, Edward (d. 1706),” in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, online ed., ed. Lawrence Goldman, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/26380>. B.W. Young suggests that non-jurors would have been most likely to take up the cause of celibacy, as they were “the strongest proponents of a patristic, deeply catholic spirituality.” A leading non-juror and staunch advocate of clerical celibacy was Thomas Ken, who “every morning made a vow that he would not marry *that day*.” Ken as quoted in Young, 19.

³⁷ Edward Stephens, *A Letter to a Lady: Concerning the due improvement of her advantages of celibacie, portion, and maturity of age and judgment, which may serve indifferently for men under the same circumstances*. (London: Printed for the Religious Society of Single Women, 1695), 3-4.

³⁸ Edward Stephens, *The More Excellent Way; or, A Proposal of a Compleat Work of Charity*. (London: n.p., 1696), 1.

help believers separate wholly from the world. By practicing asceticism and celibacy, he believed his adherents could come as close to the “Angelick State, that our Mortality can bear.”³⁹ Ultimately, however, Stephens’s radicalism ended up alienating his more moderate followers and stoking the fires of his critics. Disappointed by his attempts in London, he eventually left his wife, children, and the Church of England to pursue a monastic life in the Eastern Orthodox tradition.

Stephens’s more extreme approach to sexual asceticism illustrates the underlying tension of the quasi-monastic revival, as well as the tension that Young argues had always inhered within the Anglican discourse on celibacy. Because the issue of sexual asceticism did not follow denominational lines, it could attach to a variety of competing movements, becoming simultaneously lauded and feared. In late seventeenth-century England, advocates and opponents of celibacy came from Catholic and Protestant, high and low Anglican, and conforming and non-juror backgrounds. When celibacy was pursued firmly within the Anglican tradition, in the style of Jeremy Taylor or Anthony Horneck, it was praised as helping the established church live up to its vaunted place in primitivist Christianity. When pursued on the edges of the established church, however, as in the case of Edward Stephens, it was feared as a sign of dissent, likely to veer into extremism or Catholicism.⁴⁰ In the Anglican *via media*, celibacy always had wrapped within it the potential for controversy. Because it could represent a wide variety of religious and political perspectives, it became an especially loaded issue during key moments, whether periods of crisis or reform. After the Glorious Revolution, when the zeal

³⁹ Stephens, *Letter to a Lady*, 5. Stephens solidified his place as one of England’s foremost apologists for celibacy in 1695, with the publication of, *Asceticks. Or, the Heroick Piety and Virtue of the Ancient Christian Anchorets and Coenobites*, a lengthy history about the role of asceticism in the Christian tradition.

⁴⁰ Apetrei discusses English people’s fears that celibacy would lead to “enthusiasm and popery” in “The Life of Angels,” 270.

that had led to quasi-monasticism spread across the Atlantic, it brought with it that same tension and potential for conflict.

Transporting Anglican Ideas to the Colonies: Radical Texts and Single Missionaries

The quasi-monastic revival itself was an event that played out among Anglicans in England rather than in the colonies. With its minimal infrastructure, the colonial Anglican Church was very diffuse and lacked the cohesiveness it had in England, as well as lacked a comparable concentration of Anglican reformers that developed in places like London. All of these factors made it difficult for the colonies to support their own branch of quasi-monastic revival.⁴¹ While a parallel movement to reform manners did emerge in the colonies at the end of the seventeenth century, most notably in New England, sexual asceticism played a much different role. Ministers and moral reformers preached chastity for young people who had not yet married, but they in no way encouraged sexual renunciation as a lifelong pursuit.⁴² Instead, during the period of upheaval prior to the Glorious Revolution, New Englanders' reaffirmed their commitment to godly marriages and family units rather than took recourse in celibacy.

⁴¹ On the diffuse nature of the Anglican Church in the colonies, see Woolverton, 27; James B. Bell, *The Imperial Origins of the King's Church in Early America, 1607-1783* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 10-25; Nancy L. Rhoden, *Revolutionary Anglicanism: The Colonial Church of England Clergy During the American Revolution* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1999), 12-19.

⁴² On the movement to reform manners in New England during the late seventeenth century, see Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly: The Reformation of Manners in Orthodox New England, 1679-1749* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 22-59. Cotton Mather illustrated the transatlantic links of the movement, writing, "Some admirable Designs about the Reformation of Manners have lately been on foot in the English Nation in pursuance of the most excellent Admonitions which have been given for it by the Letters of their Majesties...there has been started a Proposal for the well-affected people in every Parish to enter into orderly *Societies*, whereof ever member shall bind himself not only to *avoid* Prophaneness in himself, but also according unto their place in first *Reproving*; and, if it must be so, then *Exposing*, and so *Punishing*, as the law directs, for others that shall be guilty." Mather, *The Wonders of The Invisible World. Being an Account of The Tryals of Several Witches Lately Executed in New-England* (1693, reprint, London: John Russell Smith, 1862), 94. His father, Increase Mather, echoed his son's enthusiasm for English efforts, writing, "I thank the Lord in that there are at this day in London, several *Religious Societies* of the *Communion of the Church of England*, whose design is to promote Religion in the Power of it. Now these Societies require of such as joyn to them, that they give the Society a Solemn account of their sence of Spiritual things." Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1700), 36.

However, even though colonists did not fuel their own quasi-monastic revival, they were still very much affected by its consequences. The same impulse that had led Anglicans in England to champion the twin causes of primitive Christianity and sexual asceticism had also led them to set their sights further afield, seeking to revive and expand Anglicanism in the colonies. Reinforcing their vision was a different project that emerged around the same time, as the Crown sought to maximize profits and consolidate control of its overseas holdings after the Glorious Revolution. Albeit for very different reasons, these religious and economic undertakings shared complementary goals. Bringing the colonies more firmly into the fold of empire meant bringing them more firmly into the fold of Anglicanism, and vice versa. In 1701, to serve England's intertwined imperial and spiritual aims, enterprising Anglicans created the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), a lay movement that formed the key missionary arm of the Church of England.⁴³ One Anglican clergyman in particular, Thomas Bray, was critical to the Society's founding, designing a combined program of ministering to the colonies through religious literature, missionary clergy, secular officials, and lay financial support.⁴⁴

The impetus behind the SPG was closely linked to the same spirit of reform that had animated quasi-monastic revival. Restoration England had spawned a multitude of lay organizations intent on improving faith and manners, whether through small group religious meetings or volunteer societies, and both the revival of celibacy and the concern for mission work benefited from these new forms of lay association. It was the culture of late seventeenth-century voluntarism that made missionary outreach to the colonies seem both necessary and

⁴³ The SPG was in fact the second part of a two-pronged approach to mission work in the colonies. The first phase implemented by Bray was the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (SPCK), established in 1698 shortly before the SPG. The main difference between the two organizations was that the SPCK sent only reading material abroad, while the SPG sent both missionaries and religious literature. Woolverton, 31, 85-86.

⁴⁴ For background on Bray, see Woolverton, 84-86.

viable.⁴⁵ The impetus behind the SPG was also linked to the problem of the clergy that had mobilized earlier reform efforts, albeit in a very different way. If in England a key issue facing the Anglican Church was ministers' moral and sexual laxity, in the colonies, the key issue was the lack of any ministers at all. Colonial outposts simply had too few ordained Church of England pastors to serve the burgeoning population.⁴⁶

The shortage of clergy was more than just an issue of expanding empire, but was a problem sewn within Anglicanism itself. To lead Anglican services, ministers needed ordination from the bishopric, and because the colonies lacked a bishop, all ordinations had to take place in England. The investment in time and money, as well as the possible danger of a transoceanic voyage, kept the number of ordained Anglican ministers in the colonies low.⁴⁷ By contrast, the proportion of ministers among dissenting groups was much higher, largely because of the ways that such groups had reshaped clerical offices when they distanced themselves from the Church of England. Puritans had a ready supply of pastors because they developed their own institutions within the colonies to train clergy, believing that their ministers did not require ordination from an Anglican bishop. Quakerism, meanwhile, could function with minimal institutional framing. Becoming a minister was about heeding the call to preach, not about university training or ordination, and Quaker meetings did not revolve around a pastor reading a liturgy or performing the sacraments. Even Catholic colonists, though they also faced the same clerical shortage as Anglicans, had other strategies in place to compensate. The missionary efforts of Jesuit priests and the practices of seigneurial Catholicism had given them tools to maintain their faith in the absence of strong ecclesiastical support. By comparison, Anglicanism proved relatively ill-

⁴⁵ On the rise of Anglican voluntary societies and their link to the SPG, see Brunner, 15-28.

⁴⁶ A 1676 letter from John Yeo, Anglican cleric in Maryland, brought the problem to the attention of Archbishop Gilbert Sheldon in especially sharp terms, estimating that there were only three Anglican ministers in a colony with a population of 20,000. See Woolverton, 82-83.

⁴⁷ On the problems caused by the lack of a colonial episcopate, see Woolverton, 74-75; Rhoden, 13, 24-26.

equipped for the colonial environment, with services that centered around the liturgy of a minister who required ordination in England.

By sending clergy to the colonies to redress the shortage, the SPG became the key conduit transferring English ideas about celibacy across the Atlantic. One of the most important routes of transmission was the printed literature that missionaries brought with them to stock colonial libraries.⁴⁸ Many of those texts were the same ones that had fueled quasi-monastic revival, advocating sexual renunciation and praising the single life. SPG book lists included Anthony Horneck's *The Happy Ascetick*, a collection of Horneck's sermons, William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, George Herbert's *The Country Parson*, and Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*—all of which venerated celibacy above marriage.⁴⁹ Other reading materials, while not offering explicit praise of sexual asceticism, still linked bodily discipline to inner piety, such as Richard Allestree's *Whole Duty of Man*, a staple missionary text.⁵⁰ The remaining books that addressed celibacy offered the standard Anglican position as outlined in Article 32, presenting singleness and marriage as equally viable options. Bishop Beveridge's catechism, another regular on book lists, placed marriage and singleness solidly on equal footing.⁵¹ Gilbert Burnet's *History of the Reformation and Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles* reaffirmed the official Anglican stance that the clergy's marital status was a matter of individual discretion. Even

⁴⁸ Accurate circulation data for SPG libraries does not exist, making it very difficult to determine how colonial readers responded to these books, or even if many people read them. Both Charles T. Laughler and John Calam have argued that the SPG saw the libraries as a critical component of its larger enterprise. Laughler, *Thomas Bray's Grand Design: Libraries of the Church of England in America, 1695-1785* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1973), 18-54; Calam, *Parsons and Pedagogues: The S.P.G. Adventure in American Education* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1971), 93-102. The account of the so-called "Yale apostasy" suggests that such reading material did indeed have powerful effects. In 1722, a number of Yale professors and students converted to Anglicanism after studying books in an SPG shipment donated by Jeremiah Dummer. On the "Yale Apostasy," see Woolverton, 128.

⁴⁹ For a representative book list, see United Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, "A Catalogue of the Missionaries Library, &c.," in *A Collection of Papers, Printed by Order of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* (London: Joseph Downing, 1706), 41-45. See as well the examples in Laughler, 87-101.

⁵⁰ Calam, 97-98; Apetrei, "The Life of Angels," 253.

⁵¹ William Beveridge, "The Catechism Explained," in *The Theological Works of William Beveridge* (Oxford: John Henry Parker, 1844), 107-110; Calam, 95.

though Burnet found no scriptural or patristic mandate for clerical celibacy, he nonetheless concluded his discussion of Article 32 with Paul's words: "*He that marries does well, but he that marries not does better*"—underscoring the notion that celibacy, though in no way required, was still the superior state for believers who had the God-given gift of continence.⁵²

SPG missionaries also brought Anglican ideas about singleness through the materials they used as teaching tools in the colonies, the most common of which was *Catechetical Lectures* by SPG founder, Thomas Bray.⁵³ In his sixteenth lecture, Bray turned to "the pomps and vanity of this wicked World, and all the sinful lusts of the flesh."⁵⁴ Like Burnet's histories, Bray's text presented colonists with the standard Anglican position. When talking about "*the State of Celibacy, or the single Life,*" in which "*the greatest part of Mankind in this world are found,*" Bray reminded his audience of Paul's praise of singleness, quoting 1 Corinthians 7:8: "*It is good for them if they abide so.*"⁵⁵ Celibacy was valuable because it gave people more time to meditate on the things of God and was more manageable in times of trouble. The catch, of course, was that celibacy was only advisable if people had a gift from God to maintain it, lest the single life become another worldly snare: "*Even the State of Celibacy it self must be Renounc'd*

⁵² Gilbert Burnet, *An Exposition of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England* (London: R. Roberts, 1699), 362.

⁵³ On the importance of Bray's *Catechetical Lectures* to the missionaries' work, see Woolverton, 99 and Laughter, 9. Divided into separate lessons intended to offer practical, rather than deeply theological, teachings, the texts were concise and clear enough to be easily digested. They were also highly portable, designed as self-contained lessons from which even those colonists who attended missionary services only irregularly could still benefit. As one pleased minister described Bray's lectures, "as they are short I can read one each [Sunday] evening...and so conclude with the post Communion Prayers, general Thanksgiving, and singing a Psalm." As quoted in Woolverton, 99. It was Bray's own singleness (though he did marry) that helped bring the *Catechetical Lectures* into being. Having finished his schooling in 1678, Bray—a *puer pauper* at Oxford—had to wait three more years until he was old enough for ordination. As such, Woolverton writes, "Bray had to bide his time: he could not marry until he had obtained a living that paid enough to support a family. Preferment came slowly to lower class clergy, if at all." Because he was both "bid[ing] his time" and in need of financial support, the young single Bray channeled his energies into writing a catechism. He had the good fortune of presenting it to the archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Tenison, soon after Tenison had called for greater attention to the catechizing of youth. Bray's text was immediately put to service, earning him fame and an income. The attention he gained from his catechism garnered him a position as commissary of Maryland, from which he hatched his ideas for the SPG. Woolverton, 85.

⁵⁴ Thomas Bray, *Catechetical Lectures*, 3rd ed. (London: J. Brudenell, 1703), 173.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 190.

and Forsaken, by those who cannot contain... For alas! when Persons Morals are once Corrupted in this Kind, it is very rare that either Man, or Woman, returns to that just Abomination and Abhorrence, which all Christians ought to have of the very Thoughts and Expressions of Uncleaness...⁵⁶ In true evenhanded Anglican fashion, Bray's subsequent discussion of marriage issued the same warning, saying that the married life could also ensnare believers in the ways of the world, as "there is Danger in this, as well as in other States."⁵⁷ While Bray thus reaffirmed the longstanding Anglican compromise regarding marriage and celibacy, he—like Burnet—still presented colonists with the idea that singleness was an explicit gift from God. For those who had been given it, celibacy was the superior blessing, a glimpse of the life of the angels.

At the same time that missionaries were transporting the Anglican discourse on celibacy through their books and catechisms, they were also reshaping that discourse. The process of turning the Church of England into a missionary church had inadvertently reframed the conversation. If in England, religious reformers were advocating celibacy as a way to redress Anglicans' moral and sexual lapses, in the colonies, they were figuring out how to manage unmarried missionaries whose celibacy was not always the blessing that men like Taylor and Horneck imagined it to be. The missionary enterprise put to the test the more recent praise of celibacy that had erupted during the quasi-monastic revival, as well as reintroduced into the spotlight longstanding questions about unmarried clergy's ability to govern themselves.

Because so much of the impetus behind reform in England grew out of concerns for clerical conduct, the character of the missionary became especially important to the SPG enterprise. Anglican clergymen in England were coming under fire at the exact moment that the

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

Society was calling upon them to expand the Church and represent it to the world, making the conversation about the ministry even more urgent. As a result, the SPG had to think in very concrete terms about the attributes and behavior of the ideal pastor. George Keith, the controversial Quaker-turned-Anglican and key information-gatherer for the SPG, outlined the model candidate:

Such as go over into those parts for the propagation of the Gospel, should be men of solidity and good experience, as well as otherwise qualified with good learning and good natural parts, and especially exemplary in piety, and of a discreet zeal, humble and meek, able to endure the toil and fatigue they must expect to go through, both in mind and body, not raw young men, nor yet very old, whose godly zeal to propagate true Christianity in life and practice should be their great motive; for people generally of those parts are very sharp and observant, to notice both what is good or bad in those who converse among them.⁵⁸

Keith's missionary possessed not only the ideal qualities of any Anglican cleric, but also those of special import in a colonial setting: he was experienced, "exemplary in piety," fit to endure "toil and fatigue," and capable of living up to the particularly high standards of a "sharp and observant" colonial population with many denominational choices.⁵⁹

Beyond spelling out the qualities of the model missionary, Keith's passage spoke to another, underlying concern about the Anglican ministry, one that looped back to the questions of celibacy and authority that had been circling since the Reformation. If Church of England clergy were not celibate like Catholic priests, then on what grounds did they base their authority? If Anglican ministers were allowed to marry just like laypeople, then what set them apart from their parishioners? As Burnet, the seventeenth-century church historian, wrote, members of the

⁵⁸ George Keith, "A Letter from Mr. George Keith to the Secretary about the State of Quakerism in North America" (19 September 1701), reprinted in *The British Magazine, and Monthly Register, or Religious and Ecclesiastical Information, Parochial History, and Documents Reflecting the State of the Poor, Progress of Education, &c* (London: T. Clerc Smith, 1844), 25:121-24. For background on Keith and his role as information-gatherer for the SPG, see Woolverton, 91-92.

⁵⁹ These questions about clerical conduct and the nature of the ideal SPG minister emerged at the same moment that the Anglican Church was transitioning from an unmarried clergy to a married one. Though ministers had been permitted to marry since 1563, the transition took time. Jeremy Gregory argues that it was not until the late seventeenth century that married ministers became the norm in the Church of England (258).

Elizabethan church worried that marriage “made the Clergy look too like the rest of the World, and involved them in the common Pleasures, Concerns, and Passions of Human Life.”⁶⁰ For Anglicans who saw the Church of England as the crowning achievement of the Reformation and the standard-bearer of primitive Christianity, the stakes were especially high. Those clergy who failed to distinguish themselves from the laity through their exemplary conduct “lay themselves open to many Censures; and they bring a Scandal on the Reformation for allowing them this Liberty, if they abuse it.”⁶¹ Missteps of the English clergy tarnished not only the Church of England, but the entire cause of Protestantism, which had wrestled the “Liberty” of clerical marriage away from the tyranny of the Pope.⁶² By their superior conduct, married Anglican ministers showed that the victories of the Reformation were not wrought in vain.

The SPG adopted the same logic for their own ends: the key way in which Anglican missionary clergy would distinguish themselves was through their display of exemplary behavior. Anglican clergy needed to set themselves apart from their ministerial competition in the colonies. At a time when both Catholics and Quakers were reducing the centrality of the

⁶⁰ Burnet, *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 356. This text (and other works by Burnet) was included on SPG book lists. See “A Catalogue of the Missionaries Library, &c.,” 41-42.

⁶¹ Burnet, *Thirty-Nine Articles*, 361. George Stanhope registered a similar fear in his 1697 sermon: “Let our Adversaries of *Rome* answer, if they can, the Tyranny they usurp over Consciences, in forbidding that to Some Orders of Men, which Christ hath left free to All. The Consequences of that imposed Celibacy have been too filthy to be mention'd, and too notorious to be deny'd. But let not Us furnish them with a more popular Argument than any they have yet produc'd in this Point, by ministering just ground of Reproach upon our marry'd Clergy, from the scandalous Lives of their Posterity. I do not deny, but there may be considerable Advantage in the single Life of Priests...” The caveat, however, was that, “It ought to be left free, a matter of Choice and Convenience, and not made a matter of Duty and Necessity.” Stanhope, 15-16. Both Burnet and Stanhope saw Anglican ministers as carrying the legacy of the Reformation on their shoulders, able to live godly lives and perform their vocations well whether married or single. Unlike Burnet, however, Stanhope would ultimately come down on the side of married clergy, saying that married ministers were preferable because they served as a better model for their parishioners. Gregory, 261-62.

⁶² It was not just that married ministers were more likely to become ensnared in the world that worried Anglicans. They also feared that supporting clergy wives and families would be a financial drain on the parish. Perhaps even more disconcerting was that ministers' wives might not conduct themselves with the comportment required as representatives of the Church of England. Samuel Pepys, for instance, wrote in his diary that clergy wives only “lay up their estates, and do no good nor relieve any poor.” *The Diary of Samuel Pepys*, vol. 8, eds. Robert Latham and William Matthews (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970-83), 67. On other concerns about clergy wives, see Gregory, 257-59.

pastorate to their worship—emphasizing practices that laypeople could perform on their own—Anglicans were moving in the opposite direction. Instead of loosening clerical distinctions in the colonies, they were tightening them, emphasizing qualifications such as ordination, training, and superior conduct. Anglican officials, for example, saw Quakers as both dangerous and illegitimate because they relied on untrained, itinerating laypeople instead of a designated clerical class. Thomas Bray wrote that being a Quaker was the same as having no faith all, hoping to win back to the Church of England those colonists who “have been in a manner abandoned to *Atheism*; or, which is much as one, to *Quakerism*, for want of a Clergy settled among them.”⁶³ His *Catechetical Lectures* devoted several pages to the problem of untrained laypeople assuming the authority of a minister, a critique against any dissenting group whose pastors were not ordained by an Anglican bishop.⁶⁴ According to Bray, what made the Church of England superior to other religious options in the colonies was its clergy. As a result, it was imperative that the SPG obtain an exemplary class of ministers.

Winning converts required not just training, ordination, and an arsenal of superior Anglican doctrine, but more intangible components: a minister’s likeableness, his ability to engage and appeal to diverse groups of people, and his everyday lived example.⁶⁵ Such a minister would have embraced England’s late-century zeal for religious renewal, striving for the “ideal standard of Christian living” by exhibiting in his daily life the workings of “practical holiness.”⁶⁶ The problem, however, was that the ideal missionary Keith outlined was not often

⁶³ Thomas Bray, *A Memorial Representing the Present State of Religion on the Continent of North America* (London: John Brudenell, 1701), 9.

⁶⁴ Bray, *Catechetical Lectures*, 183-86.

⁶⁵ John Kendall Nelson, “Anglican Missions in America, 1701-1725: A Study of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts” (Ph.D. diss., Northwestern University, 1962), 446.

⁶⁶ Apetrei, “The Life of Angels,” 259. Because the missionaries were so critical to the SPG’s larger goals, the Society was assiduous in spelling out the type of exemplary conduct it required from its ministers. On the requirements and application process, see Alfred W. Newcombe, “The Appointment and Instruction of S.P.G. Missionaries,” *Church History* 5, no. 4 (Dec. 1936): 340-58.

the type of clergyman who applied for the job. The men who best illustrated Keith's traits—"exemplary in piety," properly motivated "to propagate true Christianity," neither "raw [and] young" nor too old to withstand harsh conditions—were those men who were already well-positioned in the Anglican Church in England. With parishes, wives, and families, they were far less willing to trade everything in for a gamble with the missionary project. Instead, the type of people willing to leave England to minister in a more challenging environment were those who had the least to lose.⁶⁷ Such men already found themselves on the fringes of the Anglican Church. Financially, they were lower-class clergy who had little chance of preferment. Ethnically, they were "a motley collection of outlanders: Scots, Irishmen, Welshmen, Cumberlanders, and Yorkshiremen."⁶⁸ And demographically, even though Keith requested men of experience, they were often "raw [and] young."

Their youth and lower-class status, combined with the fact that such men had everything to gain by leaving England, all pointed to another key feature of the typical missionary: he was single. While the ideal characteristics that Keith spelled out would have controlled for more married men, given the age and experience level he desired, in actuality, most SPG missionaries were unmarried.⁶⁹ As commissary Jacob Henderson wrote about the Anglican ministry in Maryland, "The Clergy generally come single into the Province."⁷⁰ While it is possible that such men deliberately opted for singleness, swayed by the campaigns of the quasi-monastic revival, it

⁶⁷ The SPG did require that missionary applicants be ordained, which implied a certain standard of education and training. Newcombe, 344.

⁶⁸ Woolverton, 27.

⁶⁹ Application materials required that a minister reveal his "condition in life"—whether he was married or single—but none of the literature explicitly spelled out a desired marital status. Newcombe, 342. The sole exception were those missionaries who would minister to Native Americans. They were required to be single men of middle age. See Record 210, dated 28 April 1710, in Cecil Headlam, ed., *Calendar of State Papers, Colonial Series, America and West Indies, 1710-1711* (London: His Majesty's Stationery Office, 1924), 84.

⁷⁰ Henderson himself had arrived from England unmarried, but had since wed. Jacob Henderson, *The Rev. Mr. Jacob Henderson's Fifth Letter to Daniel Dulany, Esq.; in Relation to the Case and Petition of the Clergy of Maryland* (Philadelphia: n.p., 1732), 24. On Dulany, see Carol Lee van Voorst, "The Anglican Clergy in Maryland, 1692-1776" (Ph.D. diss., Princeton University, 1978), 267.

is likely that socioeconomic factors played the biggest role. Carol van Voorst argues that singleness was the norm for Anglican clergy in Maryland because of their “youth and modest financial circumstances,” writing that they were “typically young men in their twenties who had been ordained only a short period before they set sail for America.”⁷¹ Older missionaries too, however, were more likely to be single. As van Voorst continues, a “remarkable proportion” of ministers who came at a more advanced age had also never married or were widowed. Regardless of their age, unmarried men found the SPG an especially attractive prospect.⁷²

To redress the disconnect between the ideal candidates they envisioned and the actual men who volunteered for the work, SPG officials issued instructional literature intended to regulate clerical conduct. The set of guidelines they developed in 1706 made clear that they had single, rather than married, missionaries in mind.⁷³ Like the New England laws against solitary living, SPG instructions sought to govern single men’s time and bodies by placing them under the watchful protection of elders, both in the form of SPG officials and local household heads. Missionaries were forbidden from living alone or from boarding with people who might prove unsavory influences, such as tavern owners. Instead, they were expected to lodge with a family—the longstanding English answer to the problem of unattached men.⁷⁴ In the SPG iteration, however, the boarder was not to be the chief beneficiary of the arrangement. Through his pious habits, the missionary was to serve as a religious guide for the family hosting him.

⁷¹ Van Voorst, 267. Married missionaries were required to bring their wives with them so as to avoid any hint of scandal, whether involving them leaving a troubled marriage in England or engaging in adulterous relations abroad. See, for example, the story of Thomas Crawford, who left his wife in England and acquired a new one in the colonies. Nelson, 47.

⁷² Van Voorst, 267.

⁷³ “Instructions for the Clergy employed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts,” in C.F. Pascoe, *Two Hundred Years of the S.P.G.: An Historical Account of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, 1701-1900* (London: Published at the Society’s Office, 1901), 836-40.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 837-38.

Beyond regulating where they would live, SPG instructions were intended to guide clergy in every aspect of their lives, from the moment they were accepted as missionaries in England to their time on ship to their activities while abroad. Both their public and private lives were carefully ordered. Missionaries were instructed to use their solitude (a pervasive feature of more isolated SPG posts) productively, meditating on Anglican doctrine and the state of their souls. Even more important than missionaries' interior religious states, however, was how they crafted their public image. In all situations, they were to serve as "remarkable Examples of Piety and Virtue."⁷⁵ On the American-bound ship, they were to "set up an orderly system of prayer and catechism."⁷⁶ In the households where they lived, they were to "persuade [residents] to join with them in daily Prayer Morning and Evening."⁷⁷

Of utmost concern to SPG officials was that missionaries did not just possess exemplary character traits, but that they actively created opportunities to put them on display. Every public act was intended as one from which the missionary "may gain...Reputation and Authority."⁷⁸ Their spending habits, for example, were to "be frugal, in Opposition to Luxury, so they avoid all Appearances of Covetousness, and recommend themselves, according to their Abilities, by the prudent Exercise of Liberality and Charity."⁷⁹ To SPG officials, what mattered most about the practice of frugality was the chance it offered to cultivate a charitable reputation, allowing the missionary to "avoid all Appearances" of greed. Thrift in this instance was valued less as a virtue than a deliberate behavior that observers could witness, helping missionaries "recommend themselves" to their constituents. In their every move, missionaries needed to demonstrate that they were superior to dissenting clergy and to that other class of single male missionaries in the

⁷⁵ Ibid., 837.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 838.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 837.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 838.

colonies, “Romish Preists and Jesuits.”⁸⁰ Underscoring that the success of the SPG project hinged on the behavior of the clergy, Thomas Bray wrote, “Indeed, it is my opinion that the least mercy is due to scandalous Clergymen of all other Criminals.”⁸¹ Worse than “Criminals,” “scandalous Clergymen” besmirched not just their own reputations, but the entire institution of the Church of England.

Despite the SPG’s attempts to regulate the clergy, missionaries’ youth and singleness still proved problematic at times.⁸² The case of Henry Nichols in Pennsylvania reveals how single men were especially vulnerable to the same sexual scandals that had threatened the Anglican Church in England. Nichols had:

lived in good reputation, and had the esteem of all that heard him (saving an arrogant and haughty humour, which upon many occasions would show itself in him), but as that sin is often punished by a degredation, so it happened in him, a young woman in the house accused him of too much familiarity with a gentleman's wife, who had introduced him to his house and with whom he boarded and lodged...⁸³

According to its chronicler, the incident caused Nichols to lose parishioners, showing that the very measures intended to protect single missionaries (lodging them with families) had backfired. As Annette Laing concludes, because he was “forc[ed]...to live in close contact with others,” Nichols was made “especially vulnerable to charges of misconduct.”⁸⁴ An Anglican missionary in New York offered a similar cautionary tale. Rumors that James Honyman had taken up with a prostitute forced him to leave his post and be reassigned to another colony. The

⁸⁰ From “Charter of the Society, June 16, 1701.” Reprinted in full in Pascoe, 932-35. Quotation from p. 932.

⁸¹ As quoted in Graham, 269.

⁸² Despite the negative portrayal of SPG missionaries in colonial sources, most SPG missionaries served without incident. Carson I.A. Ritchie argues that the scandals and negative portrayal of missionaries in colonial sources does not reflect clerical misconduct, but rather the biases of colonial writers who feared SPG inroads in the colonies. Ritchie, *Frontier Parish: An Account of the Society of the Propagation of the Gospel and the Anglican Church in America, drawn from the Records of the Bishop of London* (Cranbury, NJ: Associated University Presses, Inc., 1976), 144-82.

⁸³ Nichols’s story comes from Annette Susan Laing, “‘All Things to All Men’: Popular Religious Culture and the Anglican Mission in Colonial America, 1701-1750” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside), 165-66. Quotation from p. 165.

⁸⁴ Laing, 166.

local vestry reporting the incident to the SPG requested that they send no more young, single men, but only those of “years and experience,” as “This is a country in which a very nice conduct is necessary”—lending credence to Keith’s claim that colonists were especially “sharp and observant” of their clergymen.⁸⁵ As the words of the New York vestry made clear, missionaries should expect to be subject to colonists’ close scrutiny.

The cases of Nichols and Honyman reveal that, no matter how much Anglicans like Horneck and Stephens encouraged celibacy, the single life still brought with it certain problems, especially for clergy. Single ministers like Nichols, who lacked their own family units and were embedded in other ones, could be “accused...of too much familiarity” with the women with whom they lived. Likewise, unmarried missionaries like Honyman could be considered less desirable candidates by the parishioners they served, more apt to fall prey to their sexual passions. As both cases make clear, the key problem was how single pastors who did not have legitimate outlets for their affections and sexual desires could interact with the women around them and minister to their female parishioners. This issue was not unique to the missionary endeavor, but was rather the latest iteration of a problem that had reached an especially high pitch during the Reformation, when critics of the Catholic Church used the same concerns to discredit the institution of a chaste priesthood.⁸⁶

Aside from calling for superior “Piety and Virtue,” the 1706 instructions issued by the SPG offered little advice for how single missionaries ought to allay the concerns surrounding unmarried men.⁸⁷ However, one text that was prescribed reading for SPG clergy did propose a solution: George Herbert’s *The Country Parson*. Though written for a different historical

⁸⁵ Honyman’s story is told in Laing, 166-67. On Keith, see note 58.

⁸⁶ Complaints against the sexual misconduct of the clergy date back to the very beginnings of institutionalized celibacy in the Catholic Church during the eleventh century. See Cheatham, 91-96.

⁸⁷ “Instructions for the Clergy,” in Pascoe, 837.

moment in the middle of the seventeenth century, Herbert's clerical manual was a staple in the book collection that the SPG sent to the colonies with every missionary.⁸⁸ Compared to comparable manuals of the day, Herbert's book was unique in that it was not intended to guide clergy in doctrinal or theological issues, but rather instructed them in how to comport themselves.⁸⁹ In particular, Herbert was attuned to the particular challenges facing unmarried clergymen, making his book especially valuable to the SPG several decades after it was written.

Like many of his Anglican colleagues, Herbert was a married man who praised celibacy as the higher calling. He recognized, though, that being single presented ministers with certain hazards. The opening lines of his chapter, "The Parson's state of life," captured the problem succinctly: "The Country Parson considering that virginity is a higher state than Matrimony, and that the Ministry requires the best and highest things, is rather unmarried, than married. But yet as the temper of his body may be, or as the temper of his Parish may be, where he may have occasion to converse with women, and that among suspicious men, and other like circumstances considered, he is rather married then unmarried."⁹⁰ On one level, Herbert was referring to the conventional Pauline caveat regarding the single life, saying that though celibacy was preferable, a minister who could not remain continent—because of the "temper of his body"—needed to marry. On another level however, Herbert was adding a second concern that might still make marriage advisable: "the temper of his Parish." The latter issue stemmed from the unmarried minister's fundamentally problematic relationship to his female parishioners. At the same time that the minister needed to work closely with his charges to guide them on their spiritual walk, he

⁸⁸ Herbert's manual was written in the early 1630s but not published until 1652. On Herbert's book in SPG shipments, see Laughler, 65, 96 and "Catalogue," 42.

⁸⁹ Andrew William Barnes, *Post-Closet Masculinities in Early Modern England* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 2009), 142-49; Kristine A. Wolberg, *"All Possible Art": George Herbert's The Country Parson* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2008), 19-23.

⁹⁰ George Herbert, "The Country Parson," in *Herbert's Remains: Or, Sundry Pieces of that Sweet Singer of the Temple* (London: Timothy Garthwait, 1652), 32.

also needed to keep a clearly-marked distance from his female congregants, lest the men in his church—particularly their husbands—grow suspicious. Single ministers walked a fine line. Their celibacy was, as Herbert wrote, among the “best and highest Things,” but it was also the more dangerous state. Because of this double-bind, Herbert devoted the bulk of his chapter to advising unmarried clergy.

The solution he proposed was for single ministers to submerge themselves in all-male worlds. The unmarried cleric should not even risk employing female domestic labor, but should rely on “men-servants at home, and have his linen washed abroad.” Not just his private space, but his public space as well should have very little cross-over with women: “If he be unmarried, and sojourne, he never talkes with any woman alone, but in the audience of others, and that seldom, and then also in a serious manner, never jestingly or sportfully.”⁹¹ Talking with women only infrequently, only on spiritual topics, and never one-on-one, the single clergyman should triangulate all of his female interactions through other people. Writing out of a Protestant English context that had long trafficked in the shortcomings of the Catholic priesthood—including the accusation that priests exploited their close access to female parishioners while hiding behind vows of chastity—Herbert wanted single Anglican ministers to avoid any hint of sexual scandal, marking their distance from women very clearly.

The role models Herbert offered to unmarried ministers were the religious celibates of the early Church. He advised single clergymen to “often readeth the Lives of the Primitive Monks, Hermits, and virgins,” paying special attention to “their daily temperance, abstinence, watchings, and constant prayers, and mortifications...”⁹² In particular, they should note how the early celibates avoided the key snares of celibacy, snares which were two-fold: first, “spirituall pride”

⁹¹ Ibid., 33.

⁹² Ibid., 34.

(the type of spiritual superiority that Catholic priests claimed from their celibacy), and second, “carnall impurity” (especially dangerous given the overwhelming strength of “original concupiscence”).⁹³ Like their primitive forebears, seventeenth-century Anglicans should be on guard against these two pitfalls, practicing a type of celibacy that emulated the early church and avoided Catholic errors.

Remaining resolute in their singleness required both internal and external regimens. Inwardly, the single minister subdued his own desires in order to serve God’s: “If he stand steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart, that he will keep himself a virgin, he...blesseth God for the gift of continency.”⁹⁴ Outwardly, he managed all interactions carefully and practiced self-discipline: he “is very circumspect in all companies, both of his behaviour, speech, and very looks, knowing himself to be both suspected, and envied.... he spends his dayes in fasting and prayer.”⁹⁵ In his external practice, the unmarried minister had to go the extra mile, not just devoting himself “to observe the fasting dayes of the Church, and the dayly prayers enjoyned him by aucturity...but he adds to them, out of choice and devotion, some other dayes for fasting and prayer.”⁹⁶ Knowing full well that part of what made celibacy the higher calling was its very difficulty, the single clergyman appealed to God often for help, requiring more frequent “dayes for fasting and prayer” than his married counterparts.

For unmarried SPG ministers reading *The Country Parson* as part of their missionary library, Herbert’s instructions would have been especially germane. Providing guidance for how to manage their interactions with women while surrounded by a “sharp and observant”

⁹³ Ibid., 35-36.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 33.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 33-34.

population, Herbert's manual highlighted the particular perils facing single men. In doing so, it offered a counterbalance to other texts that missionaries brought with them which either extolled the single life or placed it in the same neutral category as marriage. To be sure, Herbert praised celibacy as the superior state, but he also grappled head-on with the problems that had accrued to celibacy since the Reformation: namely, the notion even those who devoutly pursued singleness did so in a context where the motives of unmarried clerics were suspect and where many observers doubted it was possible to maintain chastity. These concerns remained vital decades after Herbert wrote. They were shared not only by colonists like the New York vestry members who complained of the young, unmarried Honyman, but also by SPG officials who worried that the single men representing the Church of England were not chaste. More specifically, they worried that it was those men's very singleness that called their chastity into question. Lacking wives of their own, single missionaries circulated in close proximity to the female colonists with whom they boarded and ministered—not the ideal, all-male world that Herbert advised.

While quasi-monastic revivalists faced the task of opening up greater space within Anglicanism for singleness and sexual asceticism, SPG officials faced the task of making singleness viable not just in Anglican theology, but in practice, especially for missionaries who operated beyond the usual checks of an established parish and a supervising bishop. By turning the Church of England into a missionary church, the SPG became the key conduit bringing Anglican ideas about celibacy across the Atlantic. It also, however, became the key institution reshaping those ideas. On the heels of quasi-monastic revival, SPG officials renewed older concerns about how to manage an unmarried clerical class. Seeking to mark their distance from the Catholic priesthood, they endeavored to create a chaste clergy that—while not bound by a vow or regulated in a monastery—practiced a type of voluntary celibacy that was entirely

recognizable by the spotless behavior and rigorous self-discipline of the clergyman himself.

Other Europeans migrating across the Atlantic would bring more radical approaches, replicating the cloistered forms of celibacy that the Anglican Church—as Edward Stephens had learned—eschewed in both England and the colonies.

Reviving Celibacy in Continental Pietism

Anglicans were not the only Europeans experiencing a renewed interest in celibacy in the last half of the seventeenth century. On the Continent as well, a quasi-monastic revival emerged among Pietists who were eager for spiritual renewal. Originating in the “cultural mixing pot” of the late sixteenth-century United Provinces (modern-day Netherlands), Pietism was a very diverse movement that drew inspiration from medieval mysticism, primitive Christianity, heart religion, and spiritual practices that spanned both sides of the Reformation divide.⁹⁷ Though its roots reached back further, Pietism catapulted into the spotlight amidst the devastation of the Thirty Years’ War (1618-1648). Like the civil wars in England, the Thirty Years’ War proved a divisive inter-Christian conflict that unleashed a flurry of radicalism as well as calls for a faith

⁹⁷ Pietism is a notoriously fuzzy concept in academic circles, and scholars disagree on both its definition and origins. Part of the issue is that it has been used as a catch-all term, describing an impulse in any denomination that signals a more affective, experiential, personal, and often evangelical expression of faith. Some scholars, however, use the term only to describe a very particular strain of German spirituality, and academics continue to disagree over the precision of the definition. Pietism’s origins have been debated equally vigorously. Some see its roots in English Puritanism, transplanted to the United Provinces through English exiles like William Ames. Others argue that Ames was the one influenced by the turn towards affective piety in the Dutch Reformed churches. While scholars disagree on the more immediate origins of Pietism, they do agree on its more distant roots in medieval mysticism. Jonathan Strom, “Introduction: Pietism in Two Worlds,” in *Pietism in Germany and North America, 1680-1820*, eds. Jonathan Strom, Hartmut Lehmann, and James Van Horn Melton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2009), 2-7; Campbell, 71. On the mystical elements of Pietism, see S. Smith, 11-30.

that could cut across Europe's hardening denominational lines.⁹⁸ In its wake, Pietism offered a way for war-weary Europeans to reinvigorate their spiritual lives.⁹⁹

For several reasons, Pietist campaigns to revitalize Continental spirituality had the effect of reviving interest in celibacy as well. First, reform efforts often entailed the call to a more primitive form of Christianity, including a desire to emulate the ascetic practices of the early fathers. Second, Pietist reform closely linked bodily practices to inward piety, making asceticism an important method for strengthening faith. Third, Pietists drew on a mystic tradition that emphasized both spiritual and physical union with Christ, which had profound consequences for their sexual practices. And fourth, Pietists focused on cultivating intense, personal relationships with Christ that took precedence over all earthly affiliations and concerns. As a result of all of these factors, celibacy became an especially important pursuit for Pietists in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Sexual renunciation was not simply a tool that could help believers serve God without distraction, but a practice that, for many Pietists, became absolutely essential to faith.

Though scholars debate Pietism's exact origins, most agree that the publication of Philipp Jakob Spener's *Pia Desideria* in 1675 was a decisive moment when its various elements coalesced into a recognizable movement.¹⁰⁰ Originally penned as an introduction to a collection

⁹⁸ The Westphalia settlements at the end of the Thirty Years' War hardened the religious boundaries of Europe by reaffirming the 1555 Peace of Augsburg, which stipulated that local princes had the right to determine the religion of their territories. While residents who found themselves of a different religion were granted certain rights of worship, more radical groups still faced persecution and found the strictures too oppressive for the type of faith they wanted to practice. W. Ward, 18-27.

⁹⁹ Stoeffler identified four key characteristics of Pietism, though groups differed in the degrees to which they held each characteristic: first, an emphasis on a deeply personal relationship with God; second, "religious idealism," or wholehearted and complete commitment; third, a strong Biblical emphasis; and fourth, an "oppositional element," or an orthodoxy against which Pietists reacted. Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 13-23, 29.

¹⁰⁰ Campbell sees Pietism emerging as a distinct feature of the Dutch Reformed Church by the middle of the seventeenth century, though others mark 1675 as the formal birth of the movement. Theologians who played critical roles in its development include William Ames, Willem Teellinck, Jodocus van Lodensteyn, Jan Teellinck, Theodore à Brakel, and Willem à Brakel. While all were critical in developing and heightening Dutch Pietism, Lodensteyn made an especially crucial contribution through his widespread use of conventicles (small group meetings),

of sermons by Lutheran minister Johann Arndt, *Pia Desideria* became exceedingly popular in its own right, presenting laypeople with practical steps for improving their faith. Like many of his contemporaries, Spener had been influenced by the rise of heart religion, concerned less about doctrine and theological nuances than about cultivating the personal and affective experience of Christ. He hoped to make religion a vital part of European Christians' everyday lives, not a separate entity confined to church services or reserved for specially-trained clergy. As Spener concluded in *Pia Desideria*, "It is not enough that we hear the Word with our outward ear, but we must let it penetrate to our heart...Nor, again, is it enough to worship God in an external temple, but the inner man worships God best in his own temple, whether or not he is in an external temple at the time."¹⁰¹ Like Quakers who relegated all external church forms to secondary importance, Spener insisted that faith emerged first and foremost from within, registered in the heart and on the body of individual believers. Outlining a clear spiritual regimen, he called for the organization of small group religious meetings (the "ancient and apostolic kind of church meetings"), regular Bible-reading as a guide for daily living, and careful moral and bodily discipline to help laypeople avoid sin and dedicate themselves fully to God.¹⁰²

Especially significant about Spener's proposals was that they could be integrated into any of Europe's extant Protestant traditions. Pietism emerged from within the established churches as a method to reform them, and its practices were malleable enough to accommodate a variety of spiritual frameworks. It did, however, always have the potential to spawn separatist movements, as reformers who sought more extreme change found that they could not accomplish their spiritual goals from within the established church. Those who formally removed

implementing them not just for ecclesiastics and students, but for all members of the congregation as a means to develop more personal and affective relationships with God. Campbell, 73-74, 78.

¹⁰¹ Philipp Jakob Spener (1635-1705), *Pia Desideria* (1675), in *Pietists: Selected Writings*, ed. Peter C. Erb (New York: Paulist Press, 1983), 48.

¹⁰² See Erb's introduction to *Pietists: Selected Writings*, 5; Spener quotation from *Pia Desideria*, in Erb, 32.

themselves to found or join fringe sects represent what scholars call “radical Pietism,” as opposed to the “church Pietism” of those who stayed within their denominations.¹⁰³ It is important to note, however, that the category of radical Pietism contains an incredible degree of diversity, consisting of a variety of small groups that did not necessarily see themselves as being in spiritual alignment with one another, despite their shared Pietist umbrella.

After the publication of *Pia Desideria*, Pietist networks grew increasingly complex, expanding across northern and western Europe. Around the turn of the century, Pietism took root in England thanks in large part to the efforts of German Lutheran pastor A.W. Boehm, whom Prince George (husband of Queen Anne and a Lutheran himself) designated as his court preacher in 1705.¹⁰⁴ Boehm had trained for the Lutheran ministry at Halle in Saxony, which had become Europe’s Pietist center. Upon arriving in England, he began translating and distributing seminal Pietist texts, most notably Johann Arndt’s *True Christianity*, which along with Spener’s *Pia Desideria* formed the cornerstone of the movement.¹⁰⁵

Boehm also became active in Anglican reform circles, especially those supporting the Church of England’s colonial mission. Though he was not the first Pietist to express interest in the SPG—in 1699, August Hermann Francke, Boehme’s teacher and mentor at Halle, became the Society’s first non-English member—he took Pietist involvement much further.¹⁰⁶ Boehm made sure that Pietist writings, including his translated version of Arndt, were featured in every shipment of books that the SPG sent to the colonies, explaining that the SPG “should have as its

¹⁰³ Church Pietism is also sometimes called Reformed or Continental Pietism. Peter Vogt, “Different Ideas about the Church: The Theological Dimension in the Transfer and Adaptation of German Religious Groups to the Pennsylvania Environment, 1683-1740,” in *Halle Pietism, Colonial North America, and the Young United States*, ed. Hans-Jurgen Grabbe (Stuttgart, Ger.: Franz Steiner, 2008), 23-29; Campbell, 74.

¹⁰⁴ S. Smith, 23.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 23-24.

¹⁰⁶ Francke played a central role in turning the University of Halle into a Pietist center and had begun his own missionary outreach. On Francke, see Roeber, 87-88, 154-55.

purpose not the Propagation of sects but true Christianity.”¹⁰⁷ His comment underscores the ecumenical impulses that made Pietism so easily exportable. Becoming an important element in eighteenth-century English spirituality, Pietism would spread across the Atlantic as well, reshaping the religious landscape of British North America.

Transporting Pietist Ideas to the Colonies: Monastic Communities and Androgynous Bodies

While Boehm helped transport Pietist ideas to the colonies through the books he sent with the SPG, the most important route of transmission was through Pietists themselves, especially those from the movement’s more extreme edge. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, radical Pietists migrated to the colonies to experiment with new forms of monastic living, making important contributions to the colonial discourse on celibacy. Heavily influenced by mysticism, millennialism, and German theology, Pietists strongly reflected their Continental roots, presenting more radical ideas than those that had emerged during England’s own quasi-monastic revival.¹⁰⁸ Three main groups of Pietists formed monastic-style communities in the colonies, taking their religious experiments further than they were able to in Europe: the followers of Jean de Labadie, of Johannes Kelpius, and of Johann Conrad Beissel.¹⁰⁹ While all

¹⁰⁷ As quoted in S. Smith, 23.

¹⁰⁸ To be sure, England too had been influenced by these radical continental thinkers. The Philadelphians, for example, were committed to preserving the ideas of Jacob Boehme. French Camisards and Huguenots brought radical ideas from the Continent to England. While their thinking contributed to the larger atmosphere of radicalism that enveloped England in the aftermath of the civil war, their effects on the religious life of the colonies were minimal. Continental European radicalism largely spread to the colonies directly from the Continent rather than being triangulated through England. On English radicalism, see Hillel Schwartz, *The French Prophets: The History of a Millenarian Group in Eighteenth-Century England* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 11-36.

¹⁰⁹ Even before these three men planted celibate communities in the colonies, an earlier communal society had been founded by Dutchman Pieter Cornelius Plockhoy in what is present-day Lewes, Delaware. Though a devout, ecumenically-minded Mennonite, Plockhoy was less concerned about realizing a spiritual agenda (and therefore did not advocate celibacy) than about redressing social and economic disparities. He arrived in New Netherlands in 1663 and founded the community, “Valley of the Swans.” His experiment, however, was short-lived. The settlement crumbled a year later when England took over Dutch holdings in North America. Plockhoy and his wife then relocated to Germantown, Pennsylvania. Donald F. Durnbaugh, “Communitarian Societies in Colonial America,” in *America’s Communal Utopias*, ed. Donald E. Pitzer (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 15-17. On the ways in which European ideas came to fruition in the colonies, see Lucinda Martin,

three communities remained on the outskirts of American religion, they influenced groups and ideas that would come to take on central importance during the Great Awakening.

The earliest community was founded in Maryland in the 1680s by the followers of Jean de Labadie. It was distinct in that celibacy was not mandated, but nonetheless became a significant part of the group's religious life.¹¹⁰ Labadists turned to celibacy as a result of their particular theological framework and of the ways in which they organized their community, factors that grew out of Labadie's own spiritual experiences in Europe. Born in southwestern France to Huguenot parents who had conformed to Roman Catholicism under Henry IV, Labadie grew up an environment that contained both Catholic and Calvinist influences.¹¹¹ He joined the Society of Jesus as a young man, but soon found the Jesuits too tepid for the type of spiritual rigor he sought. After leaving the Society and becoming ordained as a secular priest instead, Labadie moved towards increasingly radical and affective strains of Catholic piety.¹¹² Worshiping with Jansenists and Oratorians at a time when authorities viewed radical groups with growing suspicion, he was forced into hiding and took shelter with a Huguenot family who revived his interest in Calvinism.¹¹³ In 1650, after studying Calvin's *Institutes*, he converted to

"Jacob Boehme and the Anthropology of German Pietism," in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, eds. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014), 134.

¹¹⁰ The Labadist community in Maryland was also unique in that it was part of a larger European sect, rather than a distinct experiment on American shores. Delburn Carpenter, *The Radical Pietists: Celibate Communal Societies Established in the United States Before 1820* (New York: AMS Press, 1975), 19.

¹¹¹ Campbell, 75. The definitive work on Labadie (1610-74) is Trevor J. Saxby, *The Quest for the New Jerusalem: Jean de Labadie and the Labadists, 1610-1744* (Dordrecht, Neth.: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1987). Though Saxby is mainly concerned with studying Labadism in Europe, he discusses the Maryland community in his final chapter.

¹¹² Carpenter, 20-21.

¹¹³ The turn towards a more affective form of piety in seventeenth-century Europe was certainly not limited to Protestants. Catholic groups like the Jansenists and Oratorians both reflected efforts to revitalize faith by emphasizing a more heartfelt, personal relationship with Christ. Jansenism was an especially critical influence on Labadie's thinking. Believing that the natural desires of the body were sinful, Jansenists followed an ascetic regime intended to bring greater intimacy with God. They aimed to separate themselves from the larger body of believers by forming separate communities marked by sexual renunciation, prayer, fasting, and strict discipline. On the rise of Jansenism and its importance in seventeenth-century Europe, see Campbell, 18-29. On the ways in which Jansenism shaped Labadie's thinking, see Stoeffler, *Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 163.

the Reformed Church, became a minister, and began a well-received preaching career. He eventually made his way to the United Provinces, where he joined the early Pietist circles of the Dutch Reformed community.

Labadie's embrace of Pietist ideas further radicalized him, and he was grieved by what he saw as the watered-down faith of most Dutch Christians. Diagnosing the root of the problem as a lackluster clergy, he proposed a seminary that would train only those youth who felt a special call to preach, steeping them in a highly-disciplined environment where their time, bodies, and behavior were carefully ordered. He advocated greater discipline for laypeople too. In his Dutch parish, he organized strict conventicles that governed congregants' spiritual and bodily concerns, intended to help them distance themselves from the world and experience Christ more intimately.¹¹⁴ Labadie's reform efforts, however, proved too extreme for most of his parishioners. He was dismissed from his post, but took a group of followers with him. Formally separating from the Dutch Reformed Church, they constituted themselves as a communal society and lived together in Amsterdam.¹¹⁵ Soon forced to flee by Dutch authorities, they resettled in northern Germany and later Denmark, where Labadie died in 1674.

His followers carried the banner forward and dreamed of a more permanent settlement where they could practice their faith freely. One branch of Labadists set their sights across the Atlantic. In 1679, after a failed attempt to start a community in the Dutch colony of Suriname, they sent Peter Sluyter and Jasper Danckaerts to investigate sites in North America. Labadists' interest in the colonies was both financial and spiritual. Financially, as a communal society in which members held property in common, they required a location with enough resources to

¹¹⁴ On Labadie's winding ministerial career and plans for reform, see Campbell, 75-78.

¹¹⁵ In Amsterdam, Labadie and his ideas garnered respect from others on the radical religious fringe, including Quaker Robert Barclay and Moravian Jan Amos Comenius, illustrating Pietism's early ecumenical links. Campbell, 77-78.

support themselves. Spiritually, they desired a place without an entrenched, established church or strict denominational boundaries, so that they could worship openly. The colonies offered both possibilities, as well as the attractive prospect of growing their ranks with converts from the local Indian population.¹¹⁶

Purchasing a parcel of land in Maryland's Cecil County, Sluyter and Danckaerts established the Labadist community of Bohemia Manor in 1683.¹¹⁷ Sluyter served as the group's leader until his death in 1722, while his wife acted as head of the Manor's female residents. At its largest, the community had around 125 men, women, and children, a small handful of whom were from the colonies but most of whom had migrated from Europe for the express purpose of joining the group.¹¹⁸ Given that there were other Labadist settlements in Europe, it was the colonial environment itself that drew them to Bohemia Manor. Residents carved out a spot in the local economy and were able to practice their faith unmolested, even after the Church of England was established in Maryland in 1689.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁶ Carpenter, 23-24.

¹¹⁷ "Bohemia" was the name given to the area by the owner who sold them the land, Augustine Hermann, an immigrant from central Europe. Ibid., 19.

¹¹⁸ The community had dissolved by 1727. Carpenter argues that a lifespan of roughly 44 years and a membership of around 125 people make Bohemia Manor one of the more successful communal societies to have developed in the early modern period. Labadism did not last much longer in Europe. Most Labadist communities had ceased to exist by the middle of the eighteenth century. Carpenter, 20, 34; Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism*, 168. As Saxby writes, however, Bohemia Manor's "spiritual legacy" lived on even after the community's demise, particularly through the person of Sluyter's stepdaughter, Susanna Bayard. Her piety (which Saxby described as "Labadist born and bred") was esteemed, and even the great revivalist George Whitefield called her a "true mother in Israel." He stayed at her home when he was in the area, in one letter referring to it as his "headquarters." Whitefield quotations are from Saxby, 309-10. On the few colonial converts, see Bartlett B. James, *The Labadist Colony in Maryland* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1899), 38. Despite their plans, the Maryland Labadists never seem to have proselytized among the Indian population.

¹¹⁹ As the members of Bohemia Manor were Calvinist, they seem to have benefitted from the establishment of the Church of England in Maryland, despite their distance from Anglicanism. According to J. Franklin Jameson's introductory note to Danckaert's journal, in 1692 Lord Nottingham, then Secretary of State, wrote to Governor Copley of Maryland that, "the King being informed that Mr. Vorsman, Moll, Danckers, De la Grange, Bayert, and some others...do live peaceably and religiously together upon a plantation on Bohemia River, and the said persons being in some Respect strangers may at one time or other stand in need of your particular protection and favour." In 1693 and 1695, Maryland governors Copley and Nicholson gave "Peter Sluyter *alias* Vorsman" license to marry persons, as he "hath made it appear to me that he is an Orthodox Protestant Minister, ordained according to the Maxims of the Reformed Churches in Holland." As quoted by Jameson in his introduction to Jasper Danckaerts,

Sexual asceticism became an important feature of their community, extending from the covenants that anchored their faith. Labadists distinguished between two covenants: the law delivered through Adam and Moses and the law delivered through Christ. Fulfilling the first covenant required strict adherence to a set of rules, but fulfilling the second was a matter of heeding the internal workings of the Holy Spirit.¹²⁰ According to their catechism, the first covenant was “typical, ceremonial, literal and entirely external, hence only designed as temporary in order to set forth the grace and truth of Christ by symbols.”¹²¹ The second covenant supplanted the first, as the mere “symbols” of religion became obsolete once believers could experience Christ directly.

Labadists’ focus on the covenants and their emphasis on a Spirit-filled faith was not unique, but what made their approach different was how they understood the implications of living under the new law.¹²² Embracing Christ’s governance had both spiritual and bodily effects. As Labadie described it, rebirth offered “evangelical self-knowledge, conversion, hatred and denial of the world, self-denial, the mortification of all lust, complete surrender to God, mystical fellowship with God, life in the presence of God, the Spirit filled life, lowliness, [and] childlikeness...”¹²³ His list was a mix of both internal and external consequences, whereby believers demonstrated their internal transformation through external changes, such as highly-disciplined behavior and ascetic practices. For Labadists, increased external control was the clearest indicator that believers had relinquished the old law. Outward rigor, whether

Journal of Jasper Danckaerts, 1679-1680, eds. Bartlett Burleigh James and J. Franklin Jameson, trans. Henry C. Murphy (1867; reprint, New York: Barnes and Noble, 1957), xxx-xxxii.

¹²⁰ Carpenter, 25-26.

¹²¹ P. du Lignon, *Catechism*, as quoted in James, *Labadist Colony*, 11.

¹²² Labadists and Quakers shared much common ground. Both dismissed the sacraments and other external forms of religious practice, and both separated from their respective established churches. Both groups even attempted to formally align themselves after Labadie’s community fled to Germany, but negotiations between Labadie and William Penn eventually failed. Campbell, 77-78.

¹²³ P. du Lignon, *Catechism*, as quoted in James, *Labadist Colony*, 11.

demonstrated through fasting, long hours of prayer, or the ability to withstand harsh living conditions, was possible only with the help of the Holy Spirit, a sure sign of having accepted the new covenant.¹²⁴

Another implication of living under the new covenant was that it required complete separation from the world. Labadists sought to forge monastic-style communities comprising only those who had embraced Christ's new law. Such separation was just as critical in rural Maryland as it was in cosmopolitan Amsterdam. As Danckaerts wrote during his North American scouting mission, "The lives of the planters in Maryland and Virginia are very godless and profane. They listen neither to God nor his commandments, and have neither church nor cloister."¹²⁵ The colonies might have offered religious toleration and economic opportunity, but the spiritual landscape was every bit as disappointing as the one Labadists had left in Europe. Their goal was to bring together in monastic community those few who had embraced the second covenant. What united them was not the performance of the sacraments or a Quaker-style vision of apostolic communion, but rather the shared experience of asceticism, discipline, and renunciation of the world.

Out of this particular theological framework emerged Labadists' ideas about celibacy. As a former Catholic priest, Labadie never renounced his celibate vows after converting to Calvinism, but he did not demand vows of celibacy from his followers. His failure to do so stemmed in part from his dismissal of all forms of external ceremony—including vows—which he saw as symptoms of upholding the law rather than the Spirit.¹²⁶ It was also the result of a more fundamental belief: Labadie saw sexual asceticism as an important feature of any

¹²⁴ One Labadist wrote how Sluyter commanded them not to burn fires even in the cold of Maryland winters, "in order to harden them and to mortify and subdue the sins of the body, while there was so much wood there that they were obliged to burn it in the fields to get it out of the way..." As quoted in James, *Labadist Colony*, 18.

¹²⁵ Danckaerts, 134.

¹²⁶ Carpenter, 30.

Christians' spiritual walk—whether clergy or lay, married or single—and therefore one that did not need to be designated by a special vow. Celibacy was not an isolated spiritual practice stipulated for the rare few, but was an aspect of rebirth, in which “self-denial” and the “mortification of all lust” were constitutive parts. No matter their ecclesiastical or marital status, believers should make use of sexual asceticism to demonstrate their commitment to the new covenant.

The arrangement of the community itself fostered the celibacy and bodily discipline that Labadists so valued. Both married and single residents lived in sex-segregated quarters and operated in largely distinct worlds, separated from each other even at meal time.¹²⁷ While Labadists were allowed to marry, they could only do so within the fold, in accordance to their catechism: “Both persons must be pardoned and regenerated because otherwise the marriage cannot be considered holy; and a believer may not assume the yoke with an unbeliever.”¹²⁸ Those who were already married upon conversion either had to join with their spouse or—if only one spouse experienced rebirth—sever their marital bond.¹²⁹ Husbands and wives who entered the Manor together did not have to disavow sexual relations entirely, but they did have to exercise restraint, which was enforced by the community's living arrangements. Because of their segregated living quarters, as one former member wrote, “what they thought of at night had

¹²⁷ Quaker Samuel Bownas visited the Manor and offers one of the best accounts we have of Labadists' daily practices in Maryland. He describes how men and women ate alone, as well as their views of common property ownership, writing, “I likewise queried, *if they had no Women amongst them?* He told me they had, but the Women ate by themselves and the Men by themselves, having all Things in common, respecting their household Affairs, so that none could claim any more Right than another to any Part of their Stock, whether in Trade or Husbandry...” Samuel Bownas, *An Account of the Life, Travel, and Christian Experiences in the Work of the Ministry of Samuel Bownas* (London: Luke Hinde, 1756), 59. Despite Bownas's account, scholars believe that communal property ownership was abandoned as a large-scale practice at Bohemia Manor in 1698, but that members still maintained the practice in smaller groups. Many Labadist communities in Europe continued to practice communal ownership until the middle of the eighteenth century. Carpenter, 28-29; Durnbaugh, “Communitarian Societies,” 19.

¹²⁸ du Lignon, *Catechism*, as quoted in James, *Labadist Colony*, 13.

¹²⁹ Both Petrus Bayard of New York and Ephraim Hermann of Maryland seem to have left their wives to join the community. After several years, however, both left the Manor and returned to their spouses. James, *Labadist Colony*, 38.

to be done somehow during the day...”¹³⁰ To demonstrate the bodily mortification that signified their rebirth, married members had to manage their sexual relations very carefully. All members, though to varying degrees depending on their marital status, had to check their sexual desires.

Their monastic living arrangements not only helped them in the process of “self-denial,” but also helped them reorient their affective bonds, achieving that “hatred and denial of the world” that was part of living under the new law. Labadists made the ties of faith rather than the ties of family paramount. Sex-segregated living arrangements and the communal ownership of property served to replace the ties of human affiliation with spiritual ones, helping residents of the Manor forge a new type of spiritual family in their mutual isolation from the world. Petrus Dittlebach remembered how, “My friend’s wife had five small children whom she brought with her to this new cloister discipline. When she kissed them she was rebuked for showing so naturally her fleshly cleavings.”¹³¹ By singling out her own children for her devotion, she was holding onto the arrangements of the world rather than widening her attachments to encompass the entire community. When that same woman complained about being separated from her husband, Sluyter and his wife responded by “arguing that *hell was full of ordinary marriages.*”¹³² The goal of the monastic community was to reorient believers’ away from their “fleshly” and “ordinary” relations and towards new spiritual ones. To be sure, Dittlebach’s words should be read remembering that he chose to leave the Manor, but his account still aligns with the logic of the Labadist cloister, which was intended to help believers distance themselves from the world and center their lives around their faith.¹³³

¹³⁰ Petrus Dittlebach (also spelled Peter Dittleback), translated and quoted in James, 18.

¹³¹ This woman eventually persuaded her husband to leave the cloister, and the family returned to the United Provinces. As quoted in James, 18.

¹³² As quoted in James, 19.

¹³³ On Dittlebach, see James, 15 and Saxby, 313-16.

While Bohemia Manor remained a small, short-lived community on the radical fringe of the colonial religious landscape, its influence spread beyond its borders. For one, it attracted the curious from the colonies and Europe alike. Quaker Samuel Bownas and Reformed pastor Rudolphus Varick both recorded their visits, saying they were “civilly entertained” and seated at the head of the table, suggesting that residents were used to receiving guests.¹³⁴ The community was also mentioned in the account of French explorer and diplomat, Antoine de Lamothe Cadillac, and in an anxious letter that New York pastor Henricus Selyns wrote to the classis of Amsterdam, warning him of Labadist inroads in the colonies.¹³⁵ Perhaps the most important visitor was Johann Conrad Beissel, a Pietist transplant from Europe who would go on to found the most enduring celibate cloister in the colonies.¹³⁶

More significant than the fact that Bohemia Manor attracted visitors, however, was the fact that such visitors witnessed a version of celibacy and a type of religious community that were new to American shores. Even though the Manor did not attract many residents from the colonies, it did become a destination for radical Pietists from across the Atlantic, helping to forge networks that linked the colonies to Europe and turned North America into an important site for religious experimentation. In ways that looked different from centuries-old Catholic practice, Labadists in Maryland made sexual asceticism and alternative marriage and family arrangements fundamental components of their faith. The residents of Bohemia Manor did not attach celibacy to a clerical class or codify it with a vow, but rather saw it as an outgrowth of conversion for all who accepted the new covenant. Whether they were married or single, all members of the community exercised sexual restraint as a critical part of their spiritual regimen. Their perspective on celibacy looked far different from extant ideas in the colonies as well. Unlike

¹³⁴ Bownas, 58. Varick as quoted in Saxby, 304.

¹³⁵ Saxby, 299, 304.

¹³⁶ Carpenter, 33. Beissel will be discussed later in the chapter.

Puritans, who viewed marriage as an edifying spiritual experience for believers, Labadists' remained wary of earthly relationships, fearing they would interfere with their ability to commune fully with God. And unlike Quakers, with whom they shared many ideas about direct revelation and the inner workings of the Holy Spirit, Labadists were far more suspicious of the world. While for Quakers the task was to overcome the world while serving as an example in the thick of it, for Labadists, the task was to overcome the world by removing from it, building a monastic society in which bodily asceticism demonstrated the closeness of a believer's relationship with God. While not explicitly mandated, celibacy became a critical part of their mission, helping believers separate from the world by resisting human attachments, overcoming the lusts of the flesh, and entering fully into the new covenant.

Unlike Bohemia Manor, the other monastic communities that developed in the colonies did make celibacy a specific point of doctrine, adding yet another new layer to colonial discourse. In 1694, seventy miles away from the Maryland Labadists, a group of European Pietists under the direction of twenty-year-old Johannes Kelpius established the Society of the Woman in the Wilderness near Germantown, Pennsylvania.¹³⁷ The group had originally formed on the Continent under Johann Jacob Zimmermann, a Wurttemberg pastor and mathematician who, like Labadie, had called for further reform of the church and was driven out of various pastorates for his views. Though a Lutheran minister, Zimmerman had been deeply influenced by both mysticism and Pietism, and in the mid-1680s he combined his spiritual and mathematical observations to predict that the millennium would begin in 1694. Amassing a group of

¹³⁷ Though the two groups lived in close proximity and were founded eleven years apart, no examples of direct correspondence between them has surfaced. Carpenter, 55. The official name of Kelpius's community was "The Contented of the God-Loving Soul." The moniker, "Society of the Woman in the Wilderness," was given to the community by its neighbors, though that is how Kelpius and his followers have come to be known. The reference is from Revelation 12:5-6, which will be discussed later in the chapter. As Carpenter points out, the name "Woman in the Wilderness" is ironic, given that the community did not permit female members. Carpenter, 37.

followers—forty men, all fellow scholars and theologians—Zimmerman made plans to migrate with his flock to the colonies and prepare for Christ’s imminent return.¹³⁸ In a letter appealing for financial support from a wealthy Quaker in the United Provinces, Zimmerman explained that his plan was inspired by direct revelation. His group, he wrote, was “to depart from these Babilonish Coasts, to those American Plantations, being led thereunto by the guidance of the Divine Spirit.”¹³⁹ Zimmerman, however, died shortly before the company could make the trek, and Johannes Kelpius became the new leader of the overseas venture.

Upon arriving in Pennsylvania in June 1694, Kelpius and his followers created a monastic-style community on the banks of Wissahickon Creek. They lived together, shared property in common, and worshiped in a large meeting hall. For all its communality, however, the group also followed in the hermetic tradition, with members escaping in solitude for long periods of time to commune with God.¹⁴⁰ That latter practice led neighbors to refer to them as hermits—which is how they became commonly known in the region—though the Society as a whole aimed to serve the larger community, opening up a school and offering religious services to a German population that lacked access to Lutheran ministers.¹⁴¹

¹³⁸ That their “Chapter of Perfection,” as Zimmerman called it, had specifically forty people likely had both mystical and Biblical significance. In mystic thought, the number “4” was considered the “equal perfect number,” and in the Bible the number “40” had special resonance: the Flood resulted from forty days and nights of rain, the ancient Israelites roamed the desert for forty years, Jesus fasted for forty days and remained on earth for forty days after his resurrection. Scholars debate the extent to which mysticism influenced the Society. For a wider analysis on the role of mysticism in the community, see Elizabeth W. Fisher, “‘Prophesies and Revelations’: German Cabbalists in Early Pennsylvania,” *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 109, no. 3 (July, 1985): 299-333. Fisher argues that cabbalistic and mystical traditions were important to many colonists, despite the marginalization of such practices by historians who focus on institutional church histories. For an alternative account that puts less stock in the role of mysticism in Kelpius’s group, see Durnbaugh, “Communal Societies,” 19-22.

¹³⁹ Letter from Zimmerman excerpted in Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Pietists of Provincial Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen, 1895), 46. Carpenter and Fisher both believe that the benefactor was Benjamin Furly, a close associate of William Penn. See Carpenter, 42 and Fisher, 299.

¹⁴⁰ On the endurance of the hermetic tradition in Christian practice, see Fisher, 300-02.

¹⁴¹ The Society strived to be nonsectarian, serving local residents regardless of their particular denomination. Because the majority of their neighbors came from German Lutheran backgrounds, they held religious services that followed the Lutheran tradition. Carpenter, 46-47.

One particularly important feature of the Society's mission was its emphasis on celibacy. Unlike the Labadists in Maryland, the Society in Pennsylvania saw celibacy as intrinsic to its theology, rather than an outgrowth of living under the new covenant. The Wissahickon hermits developed different views because of two main factors: first, their concern with the approaching millennium, and second, their adoption of the ideas of German thinker Jacob Boehme. Millennialism shaped their ideas about celibacy because of the particular ways in which Christ's second coming was described in the Book of Revelation, a text that framed the group's entire colonial enterprise. Their mission to leave Europe for the wilderness of North America was based on the foretelling of the millennium in Revelation 12:5-6: "And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne. And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days." To Zimmerman who first crafted the venture and to his followers who carried it out, the wilderness of Pennsylvania was the very wilderness mentioned in scripture, where they had "a place prepared of God" that was unattainable on the "Babilonish Coasts" of Europe.¹⁴² Johann Seelig, one of the leaders of the Wissahickon community, wrote from Pennsylvania that, "Here, then, there is a gate for a great harvest, which the Lord opens for us wider and wider...Ye European Churchwomen, consider, unless you put off your soiled garments of religion, you cannot enter into the Philadelphia which the Lord Awakens anew...rather outside of your European Babylon than within it..."¹⁴³ God would mobilize the next phase of human history in the American

¹⁴² While the idea of integrating the Americas into European Christian eschatology was not unique, Fisher argues that the ways in which the Wissahickon society did so in conjunction with mystical elements was new. See her discussion on pp. 322-23.

¹⁴³ [Johann Seelig] "Copy of a Report from the New World, 7 August 1694," in "The Hermits of the Wissahickon," ed. Oswald Seidensticker, *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 11, no. 4 (Jan. 1888), 440. The "Philadelphia" to which Seelig referred was the church addressed in Revelation 3:7 and 4:7-13. Seelig is also spelled "Selig."

wilderness. Their location along the Wissahickon was intended to situate them for redemption, allowing them to enter—in Kelpius’s words—the “Wilderness of the Elect of God.”¹⁴⁴

Because the Book of Revelation was so critical to their thinking, members paid especially close attention to its discussion of celibacy. The fourteenth chapter describes the redemption from the earth of the 144,000 virgins:

And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: And they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders: and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth. These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. And in their mouth was found no guile: for they are without fault before the throne of God.¹⁴⁵

The Society’s emphasis on millennial concerns made Revelation 14 the fulcrum of the conversation on celibacy, rather than Paul’s epistle or the gospels’ *vita angelica*. Virginité became a crucial part of the Kelpians’ eschatology, as only those who “were not defiled with women” could be “redeemed from among men.” Such chaste men were “without fault” before God, the only ones capable of learning the new song of praise. In a letter to Steven Momford, a Sabbatarian minister in New York, Kelpius expressed his own desire to be “among the Virgin waiters... wherein the King of Glory and Father of the coming Eternity is to enter.”¹⁴⁶ Sexual purity would open up his body and soul so that the “King of Glory” could “enter.” In a community that believed the millennium was imminent and that it would unfold specifically in

¹⁴⁴ Johannes Kelpius to Hester Palmer of Flushing, Long Island, 25 May 1706. Reprinted in Sachse, *German Pietists*, 180-191. Quotation from p. 184.

¹⁴⁵ Revelation 14:2-5

¹⁴⁶ Johannes Kelpius to Steven Momford, 11 December 1699. Letter reprinted in full in Sachse, *German Pietists*, 129-136. Quotation from p. 129. Momford was the founder of the colonies’ first Sabbararian church. It is unclear if the community at Wissahickon celebrated the Sabbath on the seventh day, though Carpenter says that Kelpius maintained a “warm relationship” with several Sabbatarians in New York and Connecticut, some of whom visited the community. Carpenter, 52.

the Pennsylvania wilderness, celibacy became especially urgent, a means of preparing for imminent union with the divine.

The notion that sexual purity would allow the “King of Glory...to enter” was the point at which the Society’s millennialism collided with Jacob Boehme’s theology. Though scholars disagree about how to categorize Boehme, they do not dispute that he was extremely influential, especially for those drawn to the more radical edges of the Pietist movement.¹⁴⁷ Boehme’s ideas added a different element to colonial discourse because of the particular ways in which he viewed the Fall of humankind and the subsequent measures necessary for redemption. In Behmenist theology, both God and the original man were androgynous. With the divine Virgin Sophia—the goddess of wisdom—living inside of him, Adam possessed both male and female attributes. However, after the Fall, the divine Sophia left Adam and humankind’s male and female features were separated into two different sexes, with the female aspects becoming the earthly Eve. The curse of original sin was for human beings to long suffer from the loss of their original androgyny, yearning to be reunited with the Virgin Sophia. To Boehme, redemption meant the process whereby human beings would recover their prelapsarian androgyny.¹⁴⁸

While Boehme’s views did not in and of themselves demand celibacy—and Boehme was himself a married man—they did allow for a reading that championed the single life, which is exactly how many of his most ardent admirers interpreted and applied his ideas.¹⁴⁹ Johann Gichtel and Gottfried Arnold did the most to link Boehme’s theology to sexual renunciation,

¹⁴⁷ Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) remains a figure of much debate among scholars, who disagree about whether to characterize him as a spiritualist, mystic, and/or radical Pietist—all with varying degrees of separation from the Lutheran tradition. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei, “Introduction: Boehme’s Legacy in Perspective,” in *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*, eds. Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (New York: Routledge, 2014), 1-12; L. Martin, 121.

¹⁴⁸ John Joseph Stouder, *Sunrise to Eternity: A Study in Jacob Boehme’s Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1957), 195-298.

¹⁴⁹ On Boehme’s marital status, see Willard M. Martin, “Johannes Kelpius and Johann Gottfried Seelig: Mystics and Hymnists on the Wissahickon” (Ph.D. diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1973), 74.

believing that the only way to reconnect with the divine Sophia was to abstain from earthly marriage.¹⁵⁰ By marrying, people reinforced the separation of the sexes and gave in to their human lusts, preventing them from recovering their original androgyny and uniting with their most important match, Sophia. Arnold described reunion with Sophia as a type of marriage, but one that was far superior to an earthly one:

In truth, all the desire of youth and all the supposed fulfillment of physical marriage are less than nothing when reckoned against this heavenly joy. It is an actual power of paradise when the most beautiful bride meets a spirit...Whoever this dove takes into her lap she gives the oblation of an untroubled peace and of the certain hope of all certainty in the kiss of her mouth. She lets him experience all her freedom and supplies as much of her life-giving balm as he will have. One can then lay consoled on her breast and drink to satisfaction, and all her pure powers are open to draw one into a paradisiacal love-play in her...Nevermore can an earthly bride be more lovely, adorned, and purer to a man than this greatly praised virgin. Indeed, there is not the least comparison between the two...¹⁵¹

For Arnold, who read Boehme's work as a mandate for celibacy, those who remained chaste and refrained from "physical marriage" preserved themselves in order to consummate greater union with Sophia. Reuniting with her was an experience that demanded preparation of the body just as much the soul. Celibacy was a way for fallen people to recover their original, gender-less natures, binding them with the divine as new beings where male and female attributes could again coexist.

¹⁵⁰ Johann Georg Gichtel (1638-1710), whose criticism of the German church forced him to flee to Amsterdam, took it upon himself and his small band of followers to preserve and distribute all of Boehme's writings. Gottfried Arnold (1666-1714), an admirer and correspondent of Gichtel, brought Boehme's Sophiology to a wider European audience with his 1700 treatise, *The Secret of the Divine Sophia* (alternatively translated as *The Mystery of the Divine Sophia*). L. Martin, 122-23, 130. Unlike Gichtel, however, Arnold eventually married, with many of his colleagues criticizing him for abandoning his principles. Wolfgang Breul argues that Arnold did not so much abandon his admiration for celibacy as rework it. Arnold still believed that celibacy was the higher calling, but later in life he came to believe that abstinence was not accessible to everyone, and that those who did not receive the gift of continence needed to marry. He also shifted his understanding of celibacy from being an external state to an internal one. Since even sexually chaste people could stray from their faith, true celibacy meant complete devotion to God in the heart rather than on the body. Wolfgang Breul, "Marriage and Marriage-Criticism in Pietism: Philipp Jakob Spener, Gottfried Arnold, and Nikolaus Ludwig Von Zinzendorf," in *Pietism and Community in Europe and North America, 1650-1850*, ed. Jonathan Strom (Leiden, Neth.: E.J. Brill, 2010), 42-51.

¹⁵¹ Gottfried Arnold, *The Mystery of the Divine Sophia* (1700), in Erb, 226.

Kelpius and his followers embraced Gichtel's and Arnold's particular reading of Behmenism, and members of the Society vowed celibacy.¹⁵² Their interest in Boehme initially came from their founder, Zimmerman, who had been swayed by Behmenist thinking in the 1680s. Like Boehme, however, Zimmerman was a married man, suggesting that Kelpius and his followers came by their mandate of celibacy via a different source. Most likely, that source was the Philadelphian Society in London, with whom Kelpius's group spent six months just after Zimmerman's death and directly before sailing to the colonies.¹⁵³ Led by John Pordage and Jane Ward Leade, England's Philadelphian Society (named after the church in Revelation) was committed to translating, safeguarding, and applying Boehme's work.¹⁵⁴ Armed with Behmenist ideas and their own prophecies that the millennium was imminent, Pordage and Leade founded a Society that sought to emulate the biblical "Philadelphia," a community of believers who came together across denominational lines.¹⁵⁵ Kelpius's company was deeply impressed by the Philadelphians during their six months of worship and study together, and after leaving for Pennsylvania they continued to see themselves as participating in a shared mission. In one of his frequent letters to the London Philadelphians, Kelpius wrote, "We behold the harmony of divine discipline by virtue of a sympathetic agreement of your centre with ours, and although the radiant roads from and to the latter, cross each other in so endless manner, yet with all this diversity, the aspect of the upper huts of our mother, manifold wisdom, becomes more dear and

¹⁵² The exact nature of their vows is unclear, in terms of the specific wording they used and whether or not the vows were sworn on the Bible. Carpenter, 52.

¹⁵³ On Zimmerman's marriage, see W. Martin, 74. Kelpius, who died at the age of 41, never married.

¹⁵⁴ Durnbaugh, "Communal Societies," 19-20.

¹⁵⁵ Pordage (1607-1681) and Leade (1623-1704, sometimes spelled "Lead") did not create the concept of a nonsectarian Philadelphia community. The idea was first espoused among Boehme's German-speaking admirers on the Continent, but it was only in England that the notion was put into practice. L. Martin, 126. For more on Leade's prophesying, and a reading of the role of gender within it, see Sarah Apetrei's epilogue to Ariel Hessayon's chapter, "Jacob Boehme's Writings During the English Revolution and Afterwards: Their Publication, Dissemination, and Influence," 92-94, in Hessayon and Apetrei, eds., *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*; Mack, *Visionary Women*, 409-10.

joyous.”¹⁵⁶ Regardless of their differences, both groups preached the millennium and the “manifold wisdom” of Sophia as part of a nonsectarian message.

Importantly, the Philadelphian Society to which Kelpius felt so closely aligned had also been greatly influenced by Gichtel’s and Arnold’s version of Behmenism, believing that—through celibacy—people could reunite with the divine Sophia and return to their original androgyny.¹⁵⁷ Kelpius and his followers adopted the same stance, making sexual renunciation a core tenet of their Society. Their Behmenist foundation was reinforced by the more familiar words of the Apostle Paul, which took on special meaning in their chiliastic framework. In the report he compiled to send back to Europe, Seelig wrote that, “We mean to remain free according to the better advice of St. Paul at this time.”¹⁵⁸ Invoking Paul had a different significance than it did for most of his Protestant contemporaries. Seelig and his coreligionists believed they were living in the very circumstances that Paul had described when he advised the Corinthians to “remain free”: “I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man [to be unmarried]...this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none; And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not...for the fashion of this world passeth away.”¹⁵⁹ Paul—like Seelig—wrote with all the expectation of Christ’s imminent return. The Kelpians’ celibacy would help them focus their time and their bodies on the task at hand, which was to prepare for the coming millennium.

¹⁵⁶ Johannes Kelpius to Heinrich Johann Deichmann, 24 February 1697. Letter translated and reproduced in full in *The Diarium of Magister Johannes Kelpius*, ed. Julius F. Sachse (Lancaster, PA: New Era Printing Company, 1917), 29-31. Quotation from p. 29.

¹⁵⁷ L. Martin, 125-31.

¹⁵⁸ Seelig, 440-41.

¹⁵⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:26-31

To Seelig's disappointment, however, his compatriots did not prove as devoted to the cause as he was. Almost as soon as they arrived in the colonies, some members traded in celibacy for marriage. The first was Ludwig C. Biedermann, who married none other than founder Johann Zimmerman's daughter.¹⁶⁰ A decisive blow, of course, came when the millennium failed to materialize. In the years following, more and more brothers broke their vows. Soon after Kelpius's death in 1708, the community largely disbanded. Though some new members had joined—mainly Pietists from Europe, but a few converts from the colonies as well—the Society still dwindled. A small handful of brothers continued to pursue a hermetic practice, living alone in the woods, but the communal aspect of the monastic society had vanished with the passing of the founding generation.¹⁶¹

While the failed millennium prophecy was a key factor in the group's demise, the retreat from celibacy played a critical role in and of itself. According to chroniclers from the later Ephrata Cloister, who preserved much of the Wissahickon Society's story, the marriage of a few members eventually pulled almost all of them back into the world, disrupting the separation they sought through their monasticism and long periods of solitary prayer. As the Ephratan chroniclers wrote, "Those who had been most zealous against marrying now betook themselves to women again, which brought such shame on the solitary state that the few who still held to it dared not open their mouths for shame."¹⁶² Not only had celibacy lost currency among the Society's own members, but those who retreated from their vows cast "shame" even on those who still continued to uphold them. As more members interacted with the world and traded

¹⁶⁰ Carpenter, 50. Though as a woman she was not permitted to join the Society, she had nonetheless made the transoceanic trek with them.

¹⁶¹ Those few who continued to carry the Society's banner—of which Seelig was one—did so until the early 1740s, living isolated instead of in community. On the disintegration of the group, see Durnbaugh, "Communal Societies," 21-22; Carpenter, 38, 58-59; Fisher, 300.

¹⁶² Lamech and Agrippa, 14-15.

spiritual for earthly intimacy, the more celibacy lost its appeal and credibility for those who remained.

Despite its small size and limited lifespan, the Wissahickon community is especially important in the colonial American history of celibacy, having forged links with radical Pietists in Europe, introduced new ideas and models of the single life, and influenced the development of other celibate groups in the region.¹⁶³ Donald F. Durnbaugh argues that the Wissahickon society was one of the key conduits bringing Pietist ideas across the Atlantic, which in turn helped create valuable communication networks between Pietists in North America and in Europe.¹⁶⁴ Even more important than laying those tracks, however, were the particular types of Pietist ideas that Kelpians brought. It was not just that they introduced Behmenism to the colonies, but that they introduced a particular kind of Behmenism, one mediated by those who argued that union with the divine demanded sexual renunciation and monastic withdrawal. Kelpius and his followers had transported to the colonies several sets of Boehme's collected works, compiled and edited in a ten-volume series by Johann Gichtel.¹⁶⁵ Upon arriving in Pennsylvania, they exchanged manuscripts and letters with Gottfried Arnold, who called them "Witnesses of Truth."¹⁶⁶ Both Gichtel and Arnold were, of course, among the leading Pietists reviving interest in celibacy in continental Europe.

The Behmenist version of celibacy that Kelpius's company transplanted in Pennsylvania—and modified, according to their chiliasm—in turn contributed new ideas and practices of the single life to the colonial milieu. The Society's ideas about celibacy came from a

¹⁶³ Scholars disagree about what to make of the Society, with some categorizing its members as separatists and others placing them within the Lutheran tradition. Fisher, 300-01.

¹⁶⁴ Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Communication Networks as One Aspect of Pietist Definition: The Example of Radical Pietist Connections between Colonial North America and Europe," in *Pietism in Germany and North America, 1680-1820*, eds. Jonathan Strom, Hartmut Lehmann, and James Van Horn Melton (Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishing Company, 2009), 36-39.

¹⁶⁵ Sachse, *German Pietists*, 48.

¹⁶⁶ As quoted in Durnbaugh, "Communication Networks," 38.

radically different perspective than those held by Puritans, Quakers, Catholics, or Anglicans, and differed as well from the Labadists at Bohemia Manor. Not only did Kelpians carve out room for celibacy in North America—unlike their Puritan neighbors—but they imagined a type of celibacy that had intrinsic theological merit. Whereas female Quaker ministers valued celibacy largely because of its practical benefits, freeing them from household labor, and Labadists valued celibacy as a sign of living in the new covenant, the Wissahickon group saw celibacy as essential to salvation itself. Only those who were among the “Virgin waiters” enabled Christ to enter into their bodies and their souls. Unlike Anglican ministers who praised celibacy while still being married, Pietists who adopted Gichtel’s and Arnold’s reading of Boehme demanded sexual renunciation. Finally, their notion of celibacy differed from the Catholic version as well. For Catholics, abstinence rendered priests more pure and pleasing to the divine and made them more apt conduits for intercession. For Behmenists, celibacy was relevant not just to members of the priesthood and not just to questions about bodily pollution, but served as the sole path to redemption for all believers, the only way to prepare for union with the divine.¹⁶⁷

In addition to adding a new strand to colonial discourse, Kelpius’s group was important for the way it influenced other colonists, both in Pennsylvania and further afield. Kelpius corresponded with a wide range of people, and the Society drew visits from colonists and Europeans alike who were interested in the spiritual alternatives it offered.¹⁶⁸ As with Bohemia Manor, arguably the most important visitor to the Wissahickon Society was Johann Conrad Beissel, who would become the most influential celibate in the colonies. Though he visited in 1721, long after the Society’s most flourishing years, the Kelpian community still served as a critical influence during his long spiritual quest. Beissel had originally migrated to the colonies

¹⁶⁷ L. Martin, 123-31.

¹⁶⁸ Durnbaugh, “Communication Networks,” 37-39. See as well the vast amount of correspondence written by Kelpius in Sachse, *German Pietists*, espec. 219-50.

in 1720 to join Kelpius, but upon his arrival found the community dwindling. The monastic community he would go on to found was unique compared to the societies at Bohemia Manor and along the Wissahickon in that it originated entirely in the colonies rather than as an idea first developed in Europe. The Ephrata Cloister would also prove to be the most influential of all three societies, actively recruiting during the later Great Awakening.¹⁶⁹

Beissel's ideas about celibacy had begun to take shape long before he visited the Wissahickon Society. In Europe, he had worshipped or studied with at least a dozen different religious groups, many of whom occupied the radical fringe, including: Reformed Pietists, Lutheran Pietists, Catholic Quietists, German Baptists, Sabbatarians, Philadelphians, Inspirationists, Mennonites, Labadists, and Quakers.¹⁷⁰ Within those groups, he had been particularly drawn to thinkers who promoted asceticism and withdrawal as tools for greater spiritual experience, whatever their particular faith tradition. He admired Pietist Heinrich Horch, mystic Ernst Christian Hochmann, hermit Charles de Marsay, and Catholic Quietist Madame Guyon, all of whom in one way or another praised celibacy, asceticism, and religious withdrawal. Through his interactions with these various radical thinkers, Beissel came to appreciate the work of Jacob Boehme, whose ideas had been mediated to him in their Gichtelian strain. Horch, Hochmann, and Marsay were all supporters of the Philadelphian movement, and so—like Kelpius—Beissel's Behmenism was very much of the variety that saw celibacy as critical to salvation.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Carpenter, 61-63. Beissel's experiences before coming to Pennsylvania are well-documented in Carpenter and in E. Gordon Alderfer, *The Ephrata Commune: An Early American Counterculture* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1985), 14-26.

¹⁷⁰ Carpenter, 61.

¹⁷¹ Carpenter, 66-67. Hochmann was also influential in the development of the German Baptist Brethren, commonly known as the Dunkards, who were founded in Schwarzenau in 1708 by Alexander Mack. For the first seven years, the Dunkards lived communally and many of them practiced celibacy. However, shortly before Beissel came in contact with them in 1715, they had abandoned both practices. Though Beissel did not join the Dunkards in Schwarzenau, he did later join them in Pennsylvania after he and many members of the Schwarzenau sect had

From his interactions with the Philadelphian Society, Beissel first learned about Kelpius's community in Pennsylvania, and in 1720 he made the decision to emigrate and join them. After seeing the community's thinning ranks and declining morale, however, he opted to continue on to Germantown instead. As he had in Europe, Beissel soon became an active figure in the region's religious landscape, forging ties with a variety of different groups. He worshiped with Mennonites and Quakers and traveled to various parts of the colony to meet with Sabbatarians who had migrated from England and Wales. Though he did not join the Wissahickon Society, he interacted and corresponded with the remaining celibates who lived there, especially Conrad Matthai and Johann Seelig. He also sought out the Labadist community in Maryland, visiting Bohemia Manor and developing a rapport with Peter Sluyter, who offered him reading material on Labadist theology. In Germantown, Beissel connected with the Pennsylvania branch of a group he had known in Europe, the German Baptist Brethren (or Dunkards), led by minister Peter Becker.¹⁷²

By and large, however, Beissel was just as disappointed with his religious quest in the Conestoga Valley as he was in Europe, finding the same spiritual dryness plaguing Christians on both sides of the Atlantic. His response was to develop his own community, implementing eremitic and ascetic practices in the Pennsylvania wilderness. With three likeminded men, Beissel moved to a secluded area outside of Germantown and built a small monastery. There, they held property in common and pursued a disciplined regimen that included celibacy, fasting, prayer, and a minimum of physical comfort. Like the hermits along the Wissahickon, they were

migrated to the colonies. For Hochmann's view on marriage, see Jobie Riley, "An Analysis of the Debate between Johann Conrad Beissel and Various Eighteenth-Century Contemporaries Concerning the Importance of Celibacy" (Ph.D. diss., Temple University, 1974), 192-93. On the importance of Guyon's Quietism on both sides of the Atlantic, see Patricia A. Ward, *Experimental Theology in America: Madame Guyon, Fenelon, and their Readers* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2009), 59-90.

¹⁷² Walter C. Klein, *Johann Conrad Beissel: Mystic and Martinet, 1690-1768* (Philadelphia: Porcupine Press, Inc., 1972), 21-35. On his connections with the Labadists, see Saxby, 308.

not completely isolated, opening a school for area children and preaching religious renewal in the surrounding German-speaking countryside. Beissel's first attempt at monasticism, however, did not last long. His austerity proved too severe for his companions, and two of them left the community after a year. Beissel and his most devoted follower, Michael Wohlfahrt—who would long remain a loyal adherent—retreated still further into the wilderness.¹⁷³

Around the same time, Peter Becker, pastor of the Germantown Dunkards, had begun itinerating throughout the region, sparking a small-scale revival. In 1724, seeing Becker's success, Beissel came forward to be baptized in a Pennsylvania creek along with other converts, officially joining the Brethren. Though he soon became the leader of a new Dunkard congregation in the Conestoga Valley, his ideas did not always align with Baptist doctrine. While serving his parish he grew increasingly radical, preaching without a text and claiming direct revelation. According to some of his contemporaries, "He conducted all meetings... with astonishing strength of spirit, and used so little reflection over it, that even in the beginning he was not suffered to use a Bible; so that the testimony in its delivery might not be weakened by written knowledge."¹⁷⁴ Not everyone, however, was as impressed. The more Beissel clamored for greater zeal and discipline—which included urging his congregants to adopt celibacy—the more his relationship with the Dunkards soured.¹⁷⁵ In 1728, he formally left his post and split from the German Baptist church. He baptized himself backwards in the same creek to

¹⁷³ Klein, 30-49; Carpenter, 69-70.

¹⁷⁴ Lamech and Agrippa, 31.

¹⁷⁵ Though some of the Brethren had originally advocated celibacy in Europe (see note 171), they were by this time opposed to it as a widespread practice, citing the conventional Protestant argument that God had ordained matrimony in paradise. They still, however, made exceptions for those who were able to remain chaste. Referencing Paul's message in 1 Corinthians 7, Brethren founder Alexander Mack wrote, "For if the single state be conducted in purity of the spirit and of the flesh, in the true faith in Jesus, and kept in true humility, it may be deemed better and higher, and more in accordance with the pattern of the Lord Jesus. But if a single person marries he commits no sin, provided it be done in the fear of the Lord." Mack, *A Short and Plain View of the Outward Yet Sacred Rites and Ordinances of the House of God* (Philadelphia: John Binns, 1810), 84. For a discussion of the Pennsylvania Brethren's argument in favor of marriage, see Riley, 109-110, 202-05.

demonstrate his separation, and then had himself re-baptized by a small group of his own followers. With them, he again retreated into the wilderness and experimented with various modes of monastic living, attracting more and more devotees until, by 1732, he had created his own sect, the Ephrata Cloister.¹⁷⁶

Though Ephrata was not the first monastic community in the colonies, it was the largest and the most enduring. Most significant is the fact that the majority of people drawn to it were colonists themselves, rather than migrants from Europe who came for the purpose of joining a particular monastic group. Beissel had thus made the practices of celibacy and of monastic living appeal to the colonial population in ways that the Labadists and Kelpians had not, even though his cloister drew on many of the same elements. Like Bohemia Manor, Ephrata separated living arrangements by sex, creating fellowships of men (“Solitary Brethren”) and women (“Solitary Sisters”) who committed themselves to celibacy. As more and more married couples were attracted to the cloister, he added specific living arrangements for them, establishing a separate group of “Householders” in which couples lived together but withdrew from sexual relations.¹⁷⁷ Like the Wissahickon Society, Beissel also preserved opportunities for hermitic withdrawal, though believers were always tethered to the larger community at Ephrata.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ The name “Ephrata” comes from the Old Testament, used both to describe the Ephrathites and as an ancient word for Bethlehem. The location of the Pennsylvania community moved during the first years of settlement, eventually establishing its more permanent home along the Cocalico Creek, about eight miles from Beissel’s first camp in the Conestoga Valley. For a much fuller picture of Beissel’s background and his spiritual journey specifically within Pennsylvania, see Jeffrey Bach, *Voices of the Turtledoves: The Sacred World of Ephrata* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003), 8-24.

¹⁷⁷ To his married converts, Beissel issued “ceremonial letters of divorce” which were, as Carpenter writes, “completely illegal,” but nonetheless served to initiate the Householders into the cloister’s celibate community. Carpenter, 82.

¹⁷⁸ Carpenter, 70-71. Unlike Kelpius’s society, Beissel’s followers were not required to make vows of celibacy. While Beissel saw celibacy as the ideal in his community, he did not mandate vows because of his larger disagreement with swearing oaths of any kind. Durnbaugh, “Communal Societies,” 24; Riley, 53.

Beissel's ideas about monasticism and celibacy grew out of the wide set of influences—both in Europe and the colonies—that he had encountered before establishing the cloister. Reflecting European Protestantism's concerns with primitive Christianity, Beissel and his celibate followers saw themselves as upholding the church of the apostles. As one cloister member explained to a visitor, "We can prove ourselves to have both the *spirit* and the *state of the primitive Church*. We keep our vows of chastity, we have all things in common among us, we observe the washing of feet, and other things."¹⁷⁹ Their "vows of chastity" were, in their understanding, in line with the "*spirit*" and "*state*" of early Christianity, following the advice of the apostle Paul. Beissel had also been influenced by the same chiliastic impulses that had animated the Philadelphians and Kelpians. Like members of both groups, the Ephratans—albeit to a less urgent degree—put their hope in being among "the 144,000 virgins, which were sealed and elected" at Christ's second coming.¹⁸⁰

The most important source for Beissel's thinking about celibacy was Jacob Boehme and those who read his theology as a call for sexual renunciation. Beissel detailed his Behmenist ideas most clearly in his *Dissertation on Man's Fall*, in which he struggled over both the origins and consequences of sexual difference. Like Boehme, he believed in the original androgyny of both God and Adam. The female attributes of the divine Virgin Sophia had dwelled in Adam until "the union was broken" in the Fall, "and by this division the multiplicity introduced."¹⁸¹ In Beissel's telling, it was lust itself that first initiated Adam's demise and led Sophia to leave him. Watching the animals, who were already divided into male and female pairs, Adam desired his

¹⁷⁹ Israel Acrelius, "A History of New Sweden, or the Settlements on the Delaware River," in *Ephrata as Seen by Contemporaries*, eds. Felix Reichmann and Eugene E. Doll (Allentown, PA: Schlechter's, 1953), 56.

¹⁸⁰ Johann Conrad Beissel, *A Dissertation on Man's Fall*, trans. Peter Miller (Ephrata: Printed for the Cloister, 1765), 16. This text was originally written by Beissel around 1745, but the ideas it outlined had been present in his thinking much earlier. Carpenter, 85. Miller's was the first English translation and, according to the cover, was available for purchase in Philadelphia.

¹⁸¹ Beissel, *Dissertation*, 2.

own partner. In “his lust, excited in him by gazing on the animals, was the cause, that he early fell into adultery... forsaking the wife of his youth [Sophia], then the God-heavenly femalety was undone.”¹⁸² Though Sophia’s female attributes were channeled into Eve, they were no longer divine, but riddled in sin because of Adam’s undoing: Eve had been “weakened by Adam’s will, and this mole of lust she received from his body.”¹⁸³ Their progeny would forever inherit the problem of Adam’s lust and self-will, distancing the sexes from one another and from God.

Only Christ’s sacrifice could bridge their separation, because Jesus was born of a virgin whose “will...was not to know a man.”¹⁸⁴ Mary’s virginity not only made “all virginity among mankind...sanctified,” but also protected Jesus from being born out of humankind’s carnality, allowing him to retain his God-given, androgynous nature.¹⁸⁵ According to Beissel, Jesus possessed the “exact ballance” of maleness and femaleness: “This man Jesus performed his office in the figure of a man; but he himself was not male, but female in his constitution, for he liveth in subjection and obedience even to the death of the cross.”¹⁸⁶ Jesus was an example on earth of humanity’s original androgyny, blending both great power and great “subjection” in his frame—a combination of male and female principles. The “sinking down will of Christ,” born of the virginal “will” of Mary, overcame Adam’s own self-will and “reinstated...the Holy unity.”¹⁸⁷

However, in order to receive Christ’s gift, every person had to subdue his or her own will likewise. Most importantly, they had to subdue the carnal lusts that had led Adam astray in the

¹⁸² Ibid., 5, 9.

¹⁸³ Ibid., 11.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 25.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid., 23, 18.

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 26.

first place, for the divine Sophia could only unite with “a virgin in body and spirit.” She “can not ingrafft her watery femalety to fructification into an spirit, except his fire be revenged by the fire of revenge, and this is the Mistery of the cross of Jesus.”¹⁸⁸ People who wished to “ingrafft” Sophia’s female principles first had to overcome, like Jesus, their own will and desires. The “Mistery” of atonement required all people to take up the cross individually. As Beissel concluded, “If I want to be united with virgin Sophia to a heavenly fructification, I needs must on that body, wherein I am dressed, suffer with Jesus before the city-gate, where the reproach of Christ is my honourable garb, and his death my life.”¹⁸⁹ Accepting Christ’s sacrifice was very much a bodily endeavor; just as the Fall had been launched by Adam’s unwieldy desires, so would redemption be reserved for those who could subdue their lusts.

As Beissel’s *Dissertation* makes clear, controlling concupiscence and renouncing sex were critical to his eschatology. Because of the desire that led to the Fall and the gender difference that resulted from it, sex and marriage were associated with sin, signs of living in a fallen world. In a reversal of the way that earlier Puritans had linked celibacy with sin and the Fall, Beissel linked marriage. As he wrote in a different text, “if any body will be Partaker of the true Rest and Peace with God...the same must truly repent, and withdraw with all his Heart and whole Mind from all Vanity, and Love of Creatures, and from all Worldly and carnal or fleshly desire whatsoever, and turn with his whole Heart and Mind to God...”¹⁹⁰ Marriage and sex prevented believers from cleaving to the divine Sophia. Union with her required them to distance themselves from the “Love of Creatures” and from all “carnal or fleshly desire.” In an earlier piece on marriage, his 1730 *Ehebuchlein* (“Book on Matrimony”), Beissel linked

¹⁸⁸ Ibid., 19, 26.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid., 27.

¹⁹⁰ Beissel, *Mysterion Anomias: The Mystery of Lawlessness* (Philadelphia, 1729), preface. The first translated version of the text appeared in 1729, but it is unclear when Beissel composed the German original.

marriage and sin even more explicitly, “declar[ing] matrimony to be the penitentiary of carnal man, and fully expos[ing] the abominations committed therein under the appearance of right.” Marriage was a “penitentiary” for fallen people because it reinforced their sexual difference and hindered them from binding with Sophia, keeping them tethered to their earthly desires.¹⁹¹

While Beissel believed celibacy was necessary whether his followers were married or single, he did not believe it was easy—which was, in part, the point. Like Labadists at Bohemia Manor, he viewed sexual renunciation and other ascetic practices as demonstrative of a believer’s ability to commit to God and deny the self. He instructed his followers to “carefully avoid the ardent raising of fire, lest you prostitute your sex, and as often as you feel within you the burning, hasten to the water of life, there you will obtain a competent share.”¹⁹² Beissel used “fire” throughout his dissertation as a description of the overheated male qualities, which could only be slaked by the “watery” female principle of Sophia, the “water of life.” Describing his own efforts, Beissel wrote, “I have now been for many years immersed in those Godly waters of heavenly virginity, and have soaked therein my male property, which was salted with fire...”¹⁹³ He spoke here both about his own virginity as a devout celibate and about the “heavenly virginity” of Sophia, who, similar to how Gottfried Arnold described her, offered believers complete respite.

Avoiding sex and marriage also aided members of the cloister in their larger effort to separate themselves from the world, helping them, as Beissel wrote, to “withdraw with all [their] Heart and whole Mind” from temporal concerns. In Beissel’s rendering, commitment to God

¹⁹¹ Lamech and Agrippa, 5. *Ehebuchlein* was printed on Benjamin Franklin’s printing press in Philadelphia. No surviving copies of the book have been found, and the quotation here—from *Chronicon Ephratense*—is the only description we have of its contents. Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The German Sectarians of Pennsylvania, 1708-1742: A Critical and Legendary History of the Ephrata Cloister and the Dunkers* (Philadelphia: P.C. Stockhausen, 1899), 1:167.

¹⁹² Beissel, *Dissertation*, 13.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 26.

demanded complete withdrawal and the recalibration of every part of believers' lives. As he explained in his foreword to one of the cloister's hymnals, "So far as consolation is sought in the amusements of the visible world, so far we lose communion with the Church."¹⁹⁴ Like Bohemia Manor, all aspects of life at Ephrata Cloister were designed to help believers realign their earthly and heavenly concerns. Their clothing, diet, living quarters, and daily schedules were all carefully planned not only to enable the self-denial required to take up the cross of Jesus, but to help believers remove themselves from the worldly patterns that had organized their lives outside the cloister.¹⁹⁵ Whether the method was renouncing sex or wearing distinctive robes, the goal was for Ephratans to signal their separation, reorienting their bodies and their affections in the service of God and the larger cloistered community. As a manual written by the leaders of the Solitary Sisters explained, "Our life and conduct cannot agree or conform to the world, whether it be in eating and drinking, sleeping or waking, in clothing or other requisite things pertaining to the natural life."¹⁹⁶ Any alignment with the world threatened believers' walk of faith, indicating that they were still attached to the flesh rather than the spirit.

The Ephratans' style of celibacy and monasticism appealed to residents in the Conestoga Valley at the same time that it stirred up controversy. While their most vocal critics were members of the Dunkard sect that Beissel had left, their practices also raised alarm among other Pennsylvanians.¹⁹⁷ The idea of single women living alone—and of Beissel's access to them as their unmarried spiritual leader—aroused particular suspicion. Neighbors were skeptical that Ephratans could maintain a commitment to celibacy when single women and single men lived

¹⁹⁴ Johann Conrad Beissel, *Turtel Taube*, reprinted in Julius Friedrich Sachse, *The Music of the Ephrata Cloister* (New York: reprinted by AMS Press, 1970), 55-56.

¹⁹⁵ On Beissel's strict rules regarding his followers' schedules and attire, see Riley, 203-07, 228-30.

¹⁹⁶ From the *Schwester Chronicon*, reprinted in Sachse, *German Sectarians*, 2:193.

¹⁹⁷ Carpenter, 83.

in close proximity in the woods, no matter their separate sleeping quarters.¹⁹⁸ Even more disconcerting to area residents were Beissel's attacks on marriage, which were potent enough to encourage at least some women to leave their husbands and children to join his growing community. Shortly after *Ehebuchlein* was published, two married women departed from their spouses and asked to be baptized into the single sisterhood, one of whom was the wife of prominent Germantown printer, Christopher Sauer.¹⁹⁹ Sauer himself was a Pietist transplant to the region, and soon after arriving in the colonies with his wife and young son, he described Pennsylvania in a letter back to Europe, writing, "The hermits have the best opportunity...It is also especially a gathering place for many hundreds of restless and eccentric people...Whoever wants to be very secluded can remain hidden here his entire life."²⁰⁰ At the time, of course, he had no way of knowing that his wife would be among those "secluded" souls. While she would not remain hidden for quite so long, she would spend fourteen years of her life as a celibate woman at Ephrata before returning to her husband and son.²⁰¹

The controversies that the cloister ignited were a tribute to its success. Unlike the Labadist and Kelpian communities, Ephrata continued to grow and attract colonists who were drawn to its ascetic and monastic practices. Though membership reached its peak in the 1750s, Ephrata remained in existence for the rest of the century and spawned a number of sister cloisters elsewhere.²⁰² Beissel thus did not just expand the ways that colonists thought about celibacy, but

¹⁹⁸ The matter was only made worse when one of the sisters claimed to be carrying Beissel's child. Beissel was brought to court but the case was dismissed after authorities found that it was grounded in gossip and misunderstanding. Sachse, *German Sectarrians*, 1:174-75; James E. Ernst, *Ephrata: A History* (Allentown, PA: Schlechter's, 1963), 79.

¹⁹⁹ Sachse, *German Sectarrians*, 1:175. The growing number of married couples who felt similarly persuaded to join in the 1730s prompted Beissel to create a new branch of the cloister specifically for Householders. Ernst, 82-83.

²⁰⁰ Christopher Sauer, 1 August 1725. Letter reprinted in full in Donald F. Durnbaugh, "Two Early Letters from Germantown," *The Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 84, no. 2 (Apr. 1960), 230-31.

²⁰¹ Alderfer, 96-99.

²⁰² Sister settlements were founded at Antietam, Bermudian Creek, Stony Creek, and Snow Hill in Virginia, the Carolinas, and elsewhere in Pennsylvania. Durnbaugh, "Communal Societies," 26.

expanded their opportunities to practice it. Even more so than his Pietist counterparts on the banks of the Wissahickon and in Maryland, Beissle offered colonists the chance to revitalize their faith by employing practices that had long been lost in the Protestant tradition.

The version of celibacy that European Pietists brought to the colonies changed the face of the American discourse on the single life. For Labadists, Kelpians, and Ephratans, complete commitment to God demanded the rejection of intimate human relationships—both affective and sexual—and required physical separation from the world. Whereas previous American conversations had revolved mainly around Paul’s epistle and had offered celibacy as an equally viable (if not more desirable) option as marriage, Pietists made celibacy absolutely essential. They not only created space within Protestantism for the single life, but they reinstated the very forms of institutionalized celibacy that the Reformation had rejected: monasteries, vows, a chaste priesthood, and a class of religious celibates. Unlike Quakers, Catholics, and Anglicans who were in the process of removing celibate practices from institutionalized forms, Pietists were seeking to relocate them within the church where they had been for centuries, imposing formal structure and further discipline on the Protestant single life.

The effects of the quasi-monastic revival, both its Anglican and Pietist strains, would not come to their fullest fruition in the colonies until the middle third of the eighteenth century, during the Great Awakening. Nonetheless, it was this earlier moment of transfer that laid critical groundwork for revivalism, when SPG missionaries and Pietist immigrants brought new ideas to American shores and forged networks of theological exchange between the colonies and Europe. The same concerns that had animated Europe’s quasi-monasticism would be clearly visible in the religious discourse that erupted around the Awakening, opening yet wider space within the

colonies and within Protestantism itself for celibate vocations and monastic-style living arrangements.

Chapter 5

“They lay with the Bible between them”: The Revival of Celibacy During the Great Awakening

In the 1720s, the discourse surrounding celibacy that colonists had been participating in for over a century began to undergo a marked shift.¹ No longer a theological debate limited to religious leaders or practiced only by a small few on the radical fringe, celibacy became an issue of growing concern among a wide variety of colonists, regardless of their ethnic and denominational affiliations and whether they found themselves married or single, clergy or lay. The widening circle into which the discourse expanded was in large part a result of the fervid revivalism of the First Great Awakening, though it was not wholly coincident with it. Among Pietists in Pennsylvania, for instance, celibacy was already an important issue that helped usher in revivalism, rather than being its offshoot. In New England, radical separatists who made commitments to celibacy during the Awakening continued them long after revivalism had cooled. And for early Methodists, the fruit of John Wesley’s wrestling with celibacy did not culminate on the American side of the Atlantic until the last decades of the eighteenth century, even if the seeds were first sown during Wesley’s experiences in colonial Georgia in the 1730s.

While all of these iterations of celibacy had different timelines and origins, they were linked together by the intense period of religious revival that swept up and down the eastern seaboard in the middle third of the eighteenth century. To tell the history of celibacy during the Great Awakening thus requires expanding the Awakening’s chronological and geographical bounds, extending revivalism beyond its peak in the early 1740s and beyond the borders of the

¹ Title quotation from Isaac Backus, *A History of New England, with Particular Reference to the Denomination of Christians Called Baptists* (1777-1796), 2nd ed. (Newton, MA: Backus Historical Society, 1871), 2:89.

colonies themselves.² It also requires repositioning the Great Awakening as but the latest iteration—albeit an important one—in a much longer conversation about Christianity and sexuality that had been brewing since at least the Reformation and had more recently been renewed among Europeans in the late seventeenth century.³ While aspects of Europe’s “quasi-monastic revival” had been transported across the Atlantic via SPG missionary texts and radical Pietists, it was not until those ideas met with Great Awakening revivalism that they piqued widespread interest in the colonies. Whether in seventeenth-century Europe or eighteenth-century America, periods of religious revitalization lent special importance to celibacy, long seen as a tool of devout Christians seeking single-minded dedication to God.⁴

However, despite the colonies’ debt to recent renditions of a much older conversation, the Great Awakening also took ideas about celibacy in different directions, opening a new chapter in the larger history of Christian sexual renunciation and of the colonists’ participation within it. What made celibacy distinct in this particular time and place was the ways in which it was invoked in the broader issues surrounding revivalism—issues related to ministerial authority, confessional boundaries, the nature of conversion, the role of the body in religious experience, and the management of believers’ earthly and heavenly affections. Such issues had long

² In the past few decades scholars have expanded the study of the Great Awakening both temporally and geographically. See, for example, Ward; Noll; Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*; Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*; John B. Frantz, “The Awakening of Religion among the German Settlers in the Middle Colonies,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 2 (Apr., 1976): 266-88; Susan O’Brien, “A Transatlantic Community of Saints: The Great Awakening and the First Evangelical Network, 1735-1755,” *American Historical Review* 91, no. 4 (October, 1986): 811-32. Kidd adopts the term “the long Great Awakening,” which “started before Jonathan Edwards’s 1734-35 Northampton revival and lasted roughly through the end of the American Revolution” (xix). Seeman, though he is only looking at New England, similarly focuses on “the continuity of revivalism,” which he argues lasted from the late 1720s to the mid 1760s, peaking during the 1740s Great Awakening (147-79).

³ Of course, the Reformation was in no way the starting point for these debates. On the origins of sexual renunciation in the Christian tradition, see Peter Brown’s *The Body and Society*.

⁴ As discussed in chapter 4, it was during periods of religious revitalization—amidst the perceived moral decline of Restoration England and in the aftermath of the Thirty Years’ War on the Continent—that celibacy was especially likely to come to the fore. Its advocates saw it as a way of life that imitated the ideals of the primitive apostolic church and that, as such, could unite believers caught in inter-Christian conflicts.

informed debates about sexual asceticism, but the Great Awakening intensified them. In the urgency of revivalism, converts' desire to cultivate deep intimacy with Christ complicated their human intimacies, leading an increasing number to opt for lives of celibacy or renegotiate their closest relationships, making their devotion to God central.

Ideas about celibacy during the Great Awakening were thus a mix of old and new influences—built on an extant discourse but spun in new directions—that came to the fore as colonists reworked their relationships to the traditional sources of ecclesiastical, civil, and familial authority. From the 1720s to the 1750s, a growing number of colonists grappled with the spiritual implications of their marital and sexual choices, whether they found themselves drawn to the discipline of early Methodists, the cloistered life at Ephrata, or the radical proselytizing of New England separatists. What this widespread colonial engagement with celibacy added up to was a mixed and paradoxical legacy, one that came to associate any type of sexual nonconformity—whether as abstinence or excess—with the dangers of zealotry, at the same time that it carved out viable and enduring models of singleness in a world where the vast majority of people married. That legacy would, ultimately, come to constrict as much as it liberated those who imagined lives beyond the normative bounds of marriage, family, and procreative sexuality.

“Come to the Marriage”: Great Awakening Piety

Celibacy and religious awakening went hand-in-hand in the colonies because of the nature of revivalism itself.⁵ At the center of the Great Awakening was the experience of conversion, whereby colonists traded in the “dead Formality” of religion for an intensely

⁵ Section title quotation is from George Whitefield's sermon, *The Marriage of Cana*, 32.

personal relationship with Christ.⁶ Whether in churches, fields, barns, or homes, revivalist preachers—both trained ministers and lay exhorters—urged listeners to commit themselves unreservedly to God, searching their hearts for signs of the conviction of sin and the joy of God’s grace. While the message of conversion was nothing new in the colonies, the medium of the message, its sense of immediacy, and the response it demanded were.⁷ With a call to action, the famous itinerant George Whitefield beseeched his listeners, “Come then, my Brethren, come to the Marriage.—Do not play the Harlot any longer.—Let this be the Day of your Espousals with *Jesus Christ*,—he only is your lawful Husband,—he is willing to receive you, tho’ other Lords have had Dominion over you, Come to the Marriage.”⁸ Whitefield’s message was clear: the day of conversion was akin to a wedding day between the believer and Christ, demanding immediate action, a particular type of intimacy, and single-minded devotion. And like the beginning of a loving marriage, the wedding did not just commence a “lawful” union, but a relationship that would play itself out in the heart and on the body.⁹

Whitefield’s equation of marriage and conversion captures both the promise and the fear that accompanied the Great Awakening. Supporters and critics of revivalism came to blows over what exactly was necessary to cultivate an intimate espousal with Christ, how it was manifested,

⁶ Samuel Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative, of the Late Remarkable Revival of Religion in the Congregation of New-Londonderry, and other Parts of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1744), 8.

⁷ On the ways in which the Great Awakening introduced new modes of marketing and advertising, see Frank Lambert’s works: *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999) and *“Pedlar in Divinity”*: *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). Harry S. Stout shows how Whitefield relied on a combination of personal charisma and marketing skills to gain a massive following in *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans, 1991). Timothy D. Hall looks specifically at the novelty and problems of itinerancy in *Contested boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1994).

⁸ Whitefield, *Marriage of Cana*, 32.

⁹ This rhetoric of believers becoming espoused to Christ and of comparing conversion to a wedding day was nothing new. Earlier Puritans, such as Thomas Shepard and Thomas Hooker, used similar language (see chapter 2). What set Whitefield and his fellow revivalists apart, however, were the ways in which they saw that espousal playing out: through the immediate and emotional experience of conversion, outside of traditional church forms, without the guidance of ordained parish clergy, and often accompanied by bodily effects.

what it demanded of new converts, and what its implications were for the extant spiritual and social order of the colonies. Those who embraced revivalism did so in opposition to a type of piety that seemed only to go through the motions, led by clergy who had not experienced the new birth themselves and who believed conversion was a plodding process wrought by careful study and close attention to forms and doctrine. Such ministers and their staid strategies, revivalists claimed, harvested complacency and spiritual dryness. As Whitefield warned, “A dead Ministry will always make a dead People.”¹⁰ The type of religious experience New Lights craved was one navigated instead by the emotions, accompanied by direct communication with God in prayer, and inspired by the powerful exhorting of preachers who had personally felt the hand of God in their lives.¹¹ It was through the alternating emotions of guilt, despair, relief, and joy that believers assessed their spiritual progress.

Conversion also wrought powerful physical effects on many believers. Nathan Cole was so stricken by conviction of sin that he found himself “weeping, Sobing and Sighing, as if [his] heart wou’d break.”¹² He lost all interest in “eating, drinking, Sleeping, or working,” slipping into inaction: “I went into my parlour and lay there for three days and three nights and never set my foot out of the Room.”¹³ Sarah Pierpont Edwards, wife of minister Jonathan Edwards, was similarly overcome by bodily responses to prayer, preaching, and hymn-singing. Such practices, she wrote, “moved me so exceedingly, and drew me so strongly heavenward, that it seemed as if

¹⁰ George Whitefield penned this line as part of the verbal sparring that ensued after he accused Harvard faculty and students of lacking real faith. Whitefield, “The Following Letter from the Reverend Mr. Whitefield, to the Students of Harvard College in Cambridge,” *Boston Gazette*, 16 March 1742, p. 2.

¹¹ Though the terms “New Lights” and “Old Lights” admittedly lack precision, scholars still use them to speak generally of the supporters and opponents of the revivals, respectively. It should be remembered that there were differences of degree within both groups. Thomas Kidd moves away from the Old Light/New Light dichotomy by creating three main groups: moderate evangelicals (who supported the Awakening but feared its tendency to excess), antirevivalists (who opposed the revivals on all fronts), and radical evangelicals (who pushed the Awakening to its most extreme edge). Kidd, *The Great Awakening: A Brief History with Documents* (New York: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2008), 2.

¹² Nathan Cole, “The Spiritual Travels of Nathan Cole,” 97. Pagination refers to the version printed in Michael J. Crawford, “The Spiritual Travels of Nathan Cole,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (Jan. 1976), 89-126.

¹³ Cole, 99.

were to draw my body upwards, and I felt as if I must necessarily ascend thither. At length my strength failed me, and I sunk down; when they took me up and laid me on the bed, where I lay for a considerable time, faint with joy, while contemplating the glories of the heavenly world.”¹⁴ It was neither her first nor last fainting spell during a remarkable “season of grace” in 1742.¹⁵

With its bodily and emotional effects, conversion rendered a complete reorientation of believers’ heavenly and earthly priorities. Jonathan Edwards identified such reorientation as a key indicator of conversion, writing in his foundational account of revivalism that, “The Minds of People were wonderfully taken off from the *World*, it was treated amongst us as a thing of very little Consequence...there then was the Reverse of what commonly is: *Religion* was with all sorts the great concern, and the *World* was a thing only by the Bye...There was scarcely a single Person in the Town, either old or young, that was left unconcerned about the great Things of the eternal World.”¹⁶ Revivalism made the distinction between the things of the “*World*” and the things of “*Religion*” especially stark. To Edwards’s delight, his parishioners were finally calibrating their concerns properly, putting their spiritual lives first. It was the nature of revivalism itself that made the choice between sacred and secular affairs seem exceptionally pressing and, for many listeners, mutually exclusive. Whitefield’s plea to “come to the Marriage” demanded immediate action and wholehearted commitment. The second Nathan Cole heard the news that Whitefield was preaching in a town twelve miles away, he “dropt my tool that I had in my hand and ran home to my wife telling her to make ready quickly to go...and run

¹⁴ Sarah Pierpont Edwards’s spiritual narrative was first published by her great-grandson, Sereno Edwards Dwight, in his *Life of President Edwards* (New York: G. & C. & H. Carvill, 1830). Quotation is from p. 177. Edwards described a similar experience at another point in the narrative, writing, “my strength was immediately taken away, and I sunk down on the spot. Those who were near raised me, and placed me in a chair...” (177).

¹⁵ “Season of grace” was the term Edwards’s husband, Jonathan Edwards, used to describe her spiritual experience. Jonathan Edwards, “On Sarah Pierpont,” in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, eds. Perry Miller, John E. Smith, and Harry S. Stout (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1957), 4:331.

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (London: John Oswald, 1737), 12-14.

to my pasture for my horse with all my might; fearing that I should be too late...”¹⁷ Cole’s work in the fields was instantly trumped by his spiritual interests. After a frantic trek, he took Whitefield up on his invitation, commencing a union with Christ that would become the defining relationship of his life for the next forty years.

The all-consuming intimacy with Christ that converts like Cole longed for alarmed the Great Awakening’s critics. To them, Whitefield’s wedding was called too hastily, officiated without proper authority, and based on fleeting and overwrought emotions. As leading anti-revivalist Charles Chauncy assessed Whitefield’s itinerancy in 1742, “And now it was, that Mr. Whitefield’s Doctrine of *inward Feelings* began to discover itself in Multitudes, whose *sensible Perceptions* arose to such a Height, as that they *cried out, fell down, swooned away*, and, to all Appearances, were like Persons in *Fits*.”¹⁸ What Chauncy, tongue firmly in his cheek, called Whitefield’s “Doctrine” was in his view really no doctrine at all, grounded solely on “*inward Feelings*” that lacked a basis in rational, studied theology and could not stand up to external tests of scripture and church practice. Conversion was neither instantaneous nor built on something so flimsy as the emotions, and the dramatic responses to Whitefield’s preaching—cries, swoons, and fits—were the marks of fleeting passion rather than solid faith.

At the root of the disagreement between Chauncy and Whitefield was a host of issues related to authority. On what authority was conversion based? Who had the authority to preach? If, as revivalists proclaimed, the essence of piety was close intimacy with Christ, then were not converted lay people every bit as qualified as church leaders to interpret the will of God? Invoking longstanding fears of antinomianism, questions of ministerial authority often revolved around whether or not God still spoke directly to humanity through immediate revelation.

¹⁷ Cole, 92.

¹⁸ Charles Chauncy to George Wishart, 4 August 1742, in *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening*, ed. David S. Lovejoy (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), 75.

Accused of claiming “Communications directly from the Spirit of God,” Whitefield defended not only his own claims to divine revelation, but the practice in general, asking, “is it a Crime for a Believer, much more a Minister of Jesus, to speak of his having Communications directly from the Spirit of God?...How are Believers sealed; or how is the divine Life begun and carried on, if there be no such Thing as having divine Communications directly from the Spirit of God?”¹⁹ His opponents, however, dismissed such claims as sheer “enthusiasm,” a rebuke David Lovejoy describes as the “ultimate reproach hurled” against religious people or movements during the eighteenth century.²⁰ The “Communications” that converts perceived as coming directly from God were in fact nothing more than the fancies of their own imaginations, riled up by revivalist preachers who were skilled at making the passions run high.²¹

Questions of authority during the Great Awakening spread far beyond religion, raising questions about civil and familial authority as well. Should people who separated from their local parish still be taxed or should they, like a group of Connecticut separatists, declare that financially supporting ministers who “den[ie]d the power of godliness” was “against their Consciences”?²² Did civil officials have authority over matters related to converts’ closest relationships, as in the case of a Rhode Island woman who found that “she had not got the right husband” and united instead with the one God had “made for her”?²³ Were converts who committed themselves to Christ still subject to the authority of their unconverted family

¹⁹ George Whitefield, *A Letter to the Rev. the President, And Professors, Tutors, and Hebrew Instructor of Harvard-College in Cambridge; in Answer to a Testimony Publish’d by Them Against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and His Conduct* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1745), 7.

²⁰ Lovejoy, 2.

²¹ According to one group of Massachusetts ministers, converts who mistook their own imaginations for God’s leading committed dangerous “*Errors in Doctrine... without due Regard to the written Word, the Rule of their Conduct.*” From *The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay in New-England...Against Several Errors in Doctrine, and Disorders in Practice...*(1743), in Bushman, *The Great Awakening*, 127.

²² “The Reasons which the Separates Gave Before the Church of their Separation” (1745), in Bushman, *The Great Awakening*, 102, 105.

²³ From the testimony of Joseph and Rebeckah Fisher. Reprinted in Appendix 1 of McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 120. This case will be discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.

members, like the New York woman who defied her parents by “leaving the church in which I had been raised” to obey instead the “dear Saviour [who] made everything bearable”²⁴

All of these questions, whether they related to direct revelation, taxation, or parental power, emerged as colonists responded to the calls of revivalists like Whitefield to “come to the Marriage,” forcing many to rethink their extant human relationships and earthly obligations. Wedding Christ as their “only...lawful Husband” opened up a whole host of complications for converts who grappled with what their spiritual espousal demanded of them. To be sure, balancing earthly and heavenly affections had long been a concern for colonists, but the Great Awakening amplified the problem, presenting it to larger numbers of people, juxtaposing the sacred and the secular in particularly stark terms, foregrounding experience over theology, fostering emotional and bodily responses, and demanding immediate and wholesale commitment. In return, some converts found that complete dedication to Christ precluded dedication to a spouse, and they refrained from marriage entirely. Others created space within their marriages to allow for greater intimacy with God, either opting for sexual abstinence or realigning their affections so that Christ came first, always over and above concern for a spouse.

Continuities: Paul, Pietism, and Primitivism

Though the Great Awakening was but the latest rendition of centuries-old questions about singleness, sex, and marriage, the precise ways in which colonists wrestled with them were the result of more recent developments. On the eve of the Great Awakening, American ideas about celibacy circled around issues that had taken root in the colonies in the seventeenth century but were pushing more forcefully to the surface in the 1720s. Pauline justifications for singleness, Pietist debates about marriage and sex, and the ascetic practices of primitive Christianity all set

²⁴ Catharine Brownfield (1716-1798) memoir, in *Moravian Women's Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820*, trans. Katherine M. Faull (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 80.

the stage for revival and informed how colonists would respond when Whitefield called them to espousal with Christ.

By the 1720s, the colonies had come to harbor a remarkably diverse array of perspectives on celibacy, reflecting their growing religious diversity. As examples like female Quaker preachers, Wissahickon hermits, and male Catholic Marylanders all show, the colonies had long offered opportunities for single people to carve out meaningful lives, whether because of the theological value that certain groups placed on singleness or because of the ways that particular faith communities embraced unmarried people. When revivalists led more and more colonists to consider celibacy in the middle third of the eighteenth century, they were building on ideas and practices already in circulation. Awakening-era colonists who accepted celibacy or who otherwise grappled with its logic did so in part because they were prepared to do so, having been steeped in a Christian tradition where sex and marriage always carried competing meanings no matter how hard religious leaders tried to pin them down.

The story of Jerusha Ompan offers a case in point. Ompan was one of the Indians living near the Mayhew family's mission in Massachusetts.²⁵ In 1727, minister Experience Mayhew published a brief chronicle of her life in *Indian Converts; or, Some Account of the Lives and Dying Speeches of a Considerable Number of the Christianized Indians of Martha's Vineyard, in New England*, a book designed to showcase the success of New England's Congregational church in converting Natives.²⁶ Mayhew was persuaded to write and publish *Indian Converts* by his fellow New England ministers, who were alarmed by the activities of Jesuit and SPG missionaries among Indians in the region. Part of the justification that SPG officials gave for

²⁵ Background on Ompan and the Mayhew family comes from Laura Arnold Leibman's introduction to *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts: A Cultural Edition*, ed. Laura Arnold Leibman (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2008), 1-76.

²⁶ My analysis of Mayhew's text is based on the version edited by Leibman in *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts: A Cultural Edition*. Pagination of quotations is based on Leibman's numbering.

extending their work into New England was the need to minister to Natives, claiming they were underserved by local clergy.²⁷ *Indian Converts* was intended to be a tool in the growing contest between Anglicans and Congregationalists, showing that New England's mission work was alive and well. However, it also had the unintended consequence of presenting to the reading public the example of one Indian woman who found in scripture a clear mandate for celibacy.

Mayhew's book featured biographical sketches highlighting the piety of his most exemplary converts, including Ompan, who died in 1721. In the middle of his account of her life, he wrote: "She was about 29 Years old before she dy'd; and tho she had had some Offers of Marriage made to her, yet she would accept of none of them, alledging to her Friends as the reason of her Refusal, that of the Apostle in the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, Chap. vii. *The unmarried Woman careth for the Things of the Lord, &c.*"²⁸ This brief statement was the only mention Mayhew made of Ompan's marital status, leading scholars to wonder what he thought of her response to "the Apostle[']s]" words. Erik Seeman concludes that Mayhew was criticizing her decision.²⁹ Indeed, Mayhew's use of the word "allegedly"—she "allegd[ed] to her Friends" the reason for her singleness was 1 Corinthians 7—may indicate that he suspected her of having ulterior motives. Given Mayhew's position as a Congregationalist missionary, it is likely he viewed celibacy with the same suspicion as his Puritan forebears. Grandson of Thomas Mayhew, a founder of Martha's Vineyard, Experience grew up in the Congregationalist Church. Though he never attended college or received ordination, he spent his life in the service of his faith. His mission work was funded by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England, and he led the Martha's Vineyard mission during the period considered its "golden

²⁷ On the impetus for publishing *Indian Converts*, see Thomas S. Kidd, *The Protestant Interest: New England after Puritanism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 42-45. For more information on the Martha's Vineyard mission and the literary contributions of Mayhew's text, see Leibman's introduction, 1-76.

²⁸ Mayhew, 267.

²⁹ Seeman, "It is Better to Marry than to Burn," 404.

age.”³⁰ Contemporaries applauded Mayhew not only for his success in converting Indians, but in leading them to English ways of life. Given the importance of the patriarchal household in New England and the fact that Mayhew was commended for instilling English values, it makes sense that he would have been wary of singleness.

However, the rest of Mayhew’s account suggests that he was in no way critical of Ompan or her marital status. The very fact that she entered his book in the first place indicates that he saw hers as a Christian life well-lived; her story features in the chapter, “*Containing an Account of several Indian WOMEN that have been justly esteemed Religious.*”³¹ Two paragraphs before he mentioned her singleness, Mayhew showered her with praise: “She was, I think, by all that knew her, both *English* and *Indians*, esteemed a Person of a very blameless Conversation: some of her *English* Neighbours that us’d to employ her do bear Witness, that she was a Person of great Integrity, true to her Word, just and honest in her Dealings, and of a most obliging Carriage and Temper.”³² Directly after mentioning Ompan’s marital status, Mayhew paid her the highest compliments, detailing how her faith strengthened her to the very end: “She dy’d of a lingering Distemper; and as her outward Man gradually decay’d, so it appeared that her inner Man was renewed Day by Day. Her Discourses were during that time very pious and edifying.”³³ While it is not clear exactly what Mayhew thought of Ompan’s singleness, it is clear that he held her up as a model of Christian piety.

The significance of her story, however, lies less in Mayhew’s own opinion of her marital status than in the fact that his account of a single woman’s praiseworthy life circulated at all.

³⁰ Though he rejected their offer, Mayhew was nonetheless granted an honorary degree from Harvard in 1723. Biographical information and quotation from Allen C. Guelzo, “Mayhew, Experience,” in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/01/01-00589.html>.

³¹ Mayhew, 227.

³² *Ibid.*, 266.

³³ *Ibid.*, 267.

Ompan's story ran against the current of New England orthodoxy, offering an alternative reading of 1 Corinthians 7 to that which had long been promoted by Puritan ministers. To be sure, Mayhew wrote in an era that had already seen the eclipse of classical Puritanism, but those ideas still remained in circulation. Samuel Willard's *Compleat Body of Divinity*, considered "American Puritanism's only systematic theology," was not published until 1726, one year before Mayhew's *Indian Converts*.³⁴ It contained his 1704 sermon on marriage and celibacy, which underscored that Paul advised singleness only as a temporary response during periods of extreme duress. The 1704 delivery date of Willard's sermon likely places it within a decade of when Ompan herself declared a commitment to celibacy, having died in 1721 at the age of twenty-nine. Even though she operated in a far different world from the Bostonians who would have heard Willard preach, the fact that she and Willard's competing ideas circulated at the same time suggests that—despite ministers' efforts to persuade otherwise—New Englanders still read Paul's epistle as applicable to their own time and place.

Pauline justifications for celibacy endured even as ministers eyed singleness warily because of the Protestant practice of *sola scriptura*, which pastors like Experience Mayhew affirmed whenever they translated the Bible or taught converts that studying scripture was essential to their spiritual practice. While the Mayhews no doubt encouraged particular interpretations of scripture, they could not always control how their listeners understood or applied Biblical texts. Ompan's own response to Paul's words was paradoxically double-edged. It spoke both to Mayhew's extraordinary success in gaining committed Christian converts, as she wanted to make her relationship with God her highest priority—"The unmarried Woman careth

³⁴ Gildrie, "Willard, Samuel," n.p. On Willard's sermon, see chapter 2.

for the Things of the Lord”—but it also spoke to the fact that Paul’s words were always up for grabs no matter the teachings of ministers.³⁵

While we do not know how readers responded to the detail of Ompan’s marital status, we do know that New Englanders had access to her story, which circulated in the same market as Willard’s recently-published sermons.³⁶ The addition of Ompan’s voice to the conversation about singleness shows that, even in New England, with its strong theological opposition to celibacy, the single life remained appealing—perhaps, by 1727, even admirable, given Mayhew’s praise of Ompan as a devout Christian. These changing ideas about the single life in New England may not have been entirely religious in origin. Ompan’s account was printed at a time when, even if laws against living alone were still on the books, they were seldom enforced.³⁷ Her story also took place when there were quite simply more unmarried people, a result of the region’s maturing economy. Both the fishing villages along the coast and the frontier settlements along the western frontier had growing numbers of unmarried men and women, making single people a more common feature of New England communities than they were the century before.³⁸ Though Ompan’s commitment to singleness was decidedly religious

³⁵ Ompan was not the only Indian on Martha’s Vineyard who invoked Pauline justifications for singleness. Mayhew’s account also includes the story of Assannooshque, a widow who refused to remarry after her husband’s death because of the difficulty the wedded life could bring. Though her account makes no mention of Paul’s text or specifies exactly what kind of difficulty she feared, her view that marriage was more troublesome than singleness was one aspect of Paul’s advocacy of celibacy to the Corinthians. Mayhew, 234.

³⁶ Admittedly, *Indian Converts* was not a wild success in the book trade. Leibman, 25-26. Regardless of how many colonists read Mayhew’s book, however, Ompan’s (and Assannooshque’s) appearance within it remains significant, shedding light on women’s view of singleness in the 1720s.

³⁷ David H. Flaherty suggests that one reason why such laws were no longer enforced was because of colonists’ changing ideas about privacy, in which privacy gradually became a more desirable and acceptable state by the end of the seventeenth century. He notes, however, that even if the laws were ignored, living alone still “remained uncommon for practical reasons.” Flaherty, 177-79. See the discussion on laws against solitary living in chapter 2.

³⁸ Certainly, the vast majority of New Englanders still married at some point during their lives, but increasing numbers spent longer periods of their lives without spouses. McCurdy argues that the experience of being a single man became much more common in the eighteenth century, when sons moved further out to the frontier to find land and opportunities. He marks the change as beginning around 1750. McCurdy, 120-33. Elaine Forman Crane finds a large population of women living without husbands in New England’s coastal towns. Because the majority of men worked in the shipping industry, they were often absent at sea for long periods of time or fell prey to the dangers of

in nature, her story nonetheless may have been one that New Englanders by the 1720s were especially ready to hear. Whether for religious or socioeconomic reasons, on the eve of the Great Awakening, New Englanders were beginning to think of celibacy and single people differently than their seventeenth-century forebears.

Ompan was a transitional figure linking earlier conversations about celibacy to those that circulated during the revivals. Though she relied on longstanding Pauline justifications for celibacy, the way in which she did so looked ahead to the specific developments of eighteenth-century revivalism. It was not just that she employed the Protestant mechanism of *sola scriptura*, but that she relied entirely on her own authority to do so, “alleging to her Friends as the reason of her Refusal, that of the Apostle in the first Epistle to the *Corinthians*, Chap. vii.”³⁹ A key issue that would arise during the Great Awakening was about just that type of authority: On what sources of authority did laypeople base their religious decisions? Who had the authority to preach? What was the relationship between civil and spiritual governance? Ompan also presaged the Great Awakening by the very fact that she voiced her opinion on celibacy at all, offering a glimpse of the ways the discourse was beginning to expand and would expand even further during the revivals. Whereas prior debates were largely limited to ministers and often came down to the splitting of theological hairs, during the Great Awakening, more and more laypeople from a variety of ethnic and religious backgrounds were concerned about the spiritual implications of their relationships.

While Ompan’s story reveals the endurance of Pauline celibacy, Awakening-era interest in the single life was fueled from another source as well: the transfer of European Pietist debates

their occupations. Many women were either widowed at young ages, never married, or spent the bulk of their married days on their own. See Crane, 11-12, 109-35.

³⁹ Mayhew, 267.

to American shores.⁴⁰ Pietist ideas had been circulating in the colonies since the seventeenth century, but the number and influence of Pietists themselves increased in the first decades of the eighteenth century, leading to a clash among different groups over the nature of celibacy.⁴¹ Pietism had sown within it the seeds of conflict regarding the meaning of marriage and sex. Spener, its foremost spokesperson, had emphasized in *Pia Desideria* the notion that Christ was a “spiritual bridegroom” to believers, underscoring the link between union with God in heaven and union between spouses on earth.⁴² Whether they were Lutheran, Reformed, or radical, Pietists of various persuasions agreed that the goal of a Christian’s walk was intimacy with Christ, like husbands and wives who became one after marriage: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”⁴³

Where Pietists disagreed, however, was over the implications of what their metaphorical marriage to Christ meant for their human marriages, especially what it meant for husband and wife to become “one flesh.” Some Pietist groups believed that the concept of a “spiritual bridegroom” lent special sacredness to earthly marriage, as an imitation of the relationship between Christ and the church. Other Pietists, however, believed that taking Christ as a spiritual bridegroom precluded taking an earthly one. Marriage and marital sex not only adulterated the relationship with Christ, but threatened the very prospect of salvation, as sexual abstinence was necessary to prepare the body and soul for union with God in heaven. This struggle over the meaning of marriage and sex had long beleaguered Christians, but Spener’s emphasis on the all-

⁴⁰ Many scholars have recognized the important role that Pietism played in fueling the Great Awakening in the colonies. See, for example, Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening*, 241-65; Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 60-75; Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 187-98; Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America*, 24-39.

⁴¹ The influx of Pietists was mainly the result of the expanding German-speaking population in Pennsylvania, which burgeoned in the early eighteenth century. Frantz, 267-74.

⁴² Roeber, 54; Breul, 38-42. Spener himself was a married man.

⁴³ Ephesians 5:31. Roeber discusses the importance of Ephesians 5 to Pietist ideas about marriage, showing how different interpretations of the epistle set various Pietist groups at odds. Roeber, 49-64, 220-23.

important closeness between believers and Christ rehashed the issue in especially stark terms. The degree of ambivalence tolerated by Anglicans like Jeremy Taylor and George Herbert—married men who praised celibacy as a higher calling—was no longer an option for staunch Pietists, leading to a “‘crisis’ over the concept of marriage” in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.⁴⁴

Pietists who migrated to the colonies from Continental Europe transferred this crisis across the Atlantic, where it came to a head in revival-era Pennsylvania. John B. Frantz argues that the confluence of Pietist ideas and the sense of dislocation experienced by recent German arrivals made Pennsylvania fertile ground for the Great Awakening. In the early 1720s, German Baptist—or Dunkard—ministers began itinerating in the area around Germantown, leading small-scale revivals that owed their success to the limited institutional presence of the German Lutheran Church. Prior to his founding of the celibate Ephrata Cloister, Johann Conrad Beissel was “the foremost German Baptist evangelist in America,” exciting the spirit of revivalism even before George Whitefield set foot in Pennsylvania in 1739.⁴⁵ Beissel’s success in attracting converts alarmed other Pietist groups who were either interested in converting the same souls or feared the splintering of the German-speaking Pietist population into numerous rival sects.

One of the most important groups to respond to Beissel’s evangelism was the Moravians, a Pietist denomination from Europe that had established a settlement in the new colony of Georgia during the 1730s. Though they date back to the fifteenth century, the Moravians experienced a renewal in the early eighteenth century that was very much related to the concomitant rise in Pietism. Faced with increasing persecution after the Thirty Years’ War,

⁴⁴ Peter Vogt, “‘Ehereligion’: The Moravian Theory and Practice of Marriage as Point of Contention in the Conflict between Ephrata and Bethlehem,” *Communal Societies* 21 (2001), 38.

⁴⁵ Frantz argues that Beissel and other Baptist ministers itinerating in German-speaking Pennsylvania were critical in laying the groundwork for Whitefield’s visit to the colony. In 1739, six thousand colonists turned up to hear Whitefield preach in Germantown, despite the language barrier. Frantz, 275, 277, 283.

when confessional lines in Europe hardened, the Moravians took refuge on the Saxony estate of Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, a devout Lutheran Pietist who had been trained at Halle.⁴⁶ Though he always considered himself a Lutheran, Zinzendorf was committed to the protection of the Moravian community—known as Herrnhut—that developed on his property. He helped usher in a period of Moravian revitalization, wedding longstanding Moravian beliefs with the Christ-centered impulses of Pietism.

At the core of Moravian belief was the importance of Christ's sacrifice, which had created a mode of communication between God and humanity and offered the possibility of redemption. Because Jesus bridged the chasm between people and God, Moravian theology was built around Christ's suffering on the cross, and their hymns and liturgy were replete with imagery praising Jesus's wounds as the site of rest, peace, and comfort.⁴⁷ To Moravians, Christ's sacrifice was so powerful that it could touch all people who recognized their profound debt and who offered gratitude, a departure from Calvinist theology which limited salvation to the predestined elect. The Moravian tenet that salvation was available to all made evangelization imperative, and they founded missions in Asia, the West Indies, Africa, and North America.⁴⁸

In response to the revivalism already stirring German-speakers in Pennsylvania, the Moravians expanded their North American operations and moved their headquarters from Georgia to Bethlehem, Pennsylvania in 1741. The heated environment forced the various Pietist groups in the colony to articulate more clearly than they had to in Europe both their shared ground and their differences. After the Moravian leader in the colonies, August F. Spangenberg,

⁴⁶ On the development of Halle as the center of Pietist thought, see Ward, 61-63; Stoeffler, *German Pietism During the Eighteenth Century*, 39-57. Stoeffler also offers a helpful introduction to Zinzendorf, a very well-documented figure (131-67).

⁴⁷ The most notable example is Zinzendorf's *Litany of the Wounds of the Husband*, which became one of the most important components of Moravian worship. For a discussion of the Moravian emphasis on the wounds of Christ, see Craig D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2004), 204-21.

⁴⁸ Roeber, xvii-xxii.

requested that more missionaries be sent over from Europe, Zinzendorf himself came to Pennsylvania, armed with a vision to unite German-speaking Pietists who were dispersed among a variety of sects. As his joint Lutheran and Moravian loyalties reveal, Zinzendorf was very ecumenically-minded, holding as his “principal aim, that they should not dwell upon non-essentials, but only on such points as conduce to the real benefit of the souls.”⁴⁹ To iron out what those essential points were, Zinzendorf hosted a series of synods in 1742, inviting representatives of Pennsylvania’s various religious groups. It quickly became apparent, however, that uniting under a shared Pietist umbrella would be no easy task. By the end of the first synod, the main sticking point was clear: competing ideas about celibacy, especially among the two leading Pietist groups, Moravians and Ephratans. During the third synod, negotiations broke down entirely. The Ephratans walked away from the table and even the latitudinarian Zinzendorf became convinced that their differences were irreconcilable.⁵⁰

What the two groups disagreed on was the fundamental tension in Pietism itself about the nature of spiritual marriage to Christ. Both groups found themselves on opposite ends of the Pietist spectrum. Beissel had adopted the Sophiological ideas of Jacob Boehme, Gottfried Arnold, and Johann Gichtel, which demanded celibacy as a way to prepare the believer for union with the divine Sophia and for the body’s return to its original androgyny.⁵¹ At Ephrata Cloister, commitment to Christ as spiritual bridegroom precluded human marriage and sexual relations. Moravians took the opposite position, insisting not only that earthly marriage was sacred because

⁴⁹ A.G. Spangenberg, *The Life of Nicolas Lewis, Count of Zinzendorf and Pottendorf (1773)*, in *Early Evangelicalism: A Reader*, ed. Jonathan M. Yeager (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 16.

⁵⁰ Ultimately, the synods had the opposite effect of what Zinzendorf intended, with both Ephratans and Moravians feeling more secure in their own positions and more convinced that their opponents’ views were flawed. On the ensuing pamphlet war between the two groups, see Vogt, “*Ehereligion*” 35-46 and Jeffrey Bach, “Ephrata and Moravian Relations: The View from Ephrata,” *Communal Societies* 21 (2001): 47-58.

⁵¹ On Beissel’s ideas about celibacy, see chapter 4.

it mirrored Christ's union with the church, but the radical idea that marital sex was sacred too, a practice that could draw believers closer to Christ.

Their sacral notion of sex was not a longstanding tenet of Moravianism, but had developed under Zinzendorf's influence and was codified in the Count's 1740 treatise, "Seventeen Points on Matrimony." In his first ten points, Zinzendorf reiterated familiar Protestant ideas about marriage: that the union between husband and wife reflected the union between Christ and the church, that spouses owed mutual love and obligation to one another, and that the wife voluntarily submitted to her husband, who acted as the loving head of the marriage. Many of these ideas were outlined in the discussion of marriage in Ephesians 5.⁵² Where Zinzendorf innovated was in his remaining tenets, which proved too extreme for many of his Lutheran Pietist colleagues. In the eleventh and twelfth points, Zinzendorf described the moment of coitus as an "anointing" that united earthly spouses just as Christ united the church through the offering of his body. He described the sexual union as a "Sacrament": the husband's semen entering his wife was "a Balm and an anointing oil of the holy marriage covenant."⁵³ Unlike most Catholics and Protestants, who approached sex even within marriage with caution, Zinzendorf made marital sex a sacred component of Moravian spirituality.

Moravians and Ephratans might have clashed over the issues of marriage, sex and celibacy at the 1742 Synods, but their failed alliance belied the fact that both groups actually had

⁵² This part of Zinzendorf's praise of marriage was along more conventional lines: marriage provided helpmeets to people in both their spiritual and practical pursuits and allowed them to fulfill God's command in Genesis 1:28 to increase and multiply. As his ninth point detailed, "Marriage according to the Intention of our Saviour is a fellowship and continual conversation of a man and a woman, join'd together by the Lord to bear/draw equally all Burdens of a double labour, and to perform all things, which required of a compleat Body, but can not be done by a single Person." Zinzendorf, "Seventeen Points of Matrimony" (1740), in Peter Vogt, "Zinzendorf's 'Seventeen Points of Matrimony': A Fundamental Document on the Moravian Understanding of Marriage and Sexuality," *Journal of Moravian History* 10 (2011): 47. See Vogt's commentary on this section of the treatise, 57.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 48-49. Roeber discusses the sacramental quality of Zinzendorf's views on sex, 148-51. See as well Breul, 51-52. Zinzendorf's reworking of Moravian marriage coincided with his larger expansion of Moravians' Christ-centered theology, which is made most clear in his *Litany of the Wounds of the Husband* (see note 47).

much in common, including a special reverence for the single life.⁵⁴ Even Zinzendorf, who rejected the idea that celibacy was a higher state than marriage, still maintained that some people were called to singleness. He opened his “Seventeen Points” with a caveat, writing that, “Matrimony is a divine Ordinance which regardeth all Mankind, Unless the Lord makes an Exception.”⁵⁵ The ways in which both Moravians and Ephratans valued those “Exception[s]” linked the two groups together and set them apart from non-Pietist Protestants in the colonies.⁵⁶ Regardless of their different assessments of marriage, both groups reserved space for the single life and presented alternatives to conventional family arrangements—alternatives that would become especially appealing to colonists during the Great Awakening.

Like Ephratans, Moravians imagined a vastly different style of organizing familial and religious relationships than did members of most Protestant traditions. The center of Moravian life was not the family, but the larger faith community. At Herrnhut and in Bethlehem, Moravians lived in communal groups called “choirs” that were based on age, sex, and marital status, rather than living with nuclear families. Separate choirs existed for young children, adolescents, single men and women, married people, and widowed people—all divided by sex. The purpose behind the arrangement was to allow each individual greater opportunity for religious growth, as Moravians believed that people profited most from living with those who were at similar points in their spiritual journey. The choir arrangement also served the community as a whole. Private ownership did not exist in Bethlehem until the 1760s, and each

⁵⁴ As Vogt argues, it was because of their similarities that Moravians and Ephratans clashed over the issue of sex and marriage—a disagreement that seemed all the more striking and important given their shared participation in Pietism and their competition for the same German-speaking converts in Pennsylvania. Vogt, “*Ehereligion*,” 35-36.

⁵⁵ Zinzendorf, “Seventeen Points,” 46.

⁵⁶ Bach, “Ephrata and Moravian Relations,” 55.

choir performed vital tasks—sewing, farming, childrearing, preaching—that ensured the survival of the entire community and the larger missionary enterprise.⁵⁷

Freeing women from the task of childrearing was especially important given the Moravian commitment to mission work. Just as Moravians believed that people garnered the greatest religious benefit from living with those like themselves, so did they believe that people attained the greatest benefit from being ministered to by members of their own sex. Missionaries were sent out in husband-wife teams, so that women could minister to other women while their husbands tended to men.⁵⁸ The choir system allowed married Moravians to focus on mission work by transferring the responsibility of childrearing to the larger community. Infants were cared for by their parents, but moved into the young children’s choirs at the age of eighteen months, where they were raised by unmarried members of their own sex. In contrast to mainstream Protestant practices, childrearing for the Moravians was the preserve of single people and was distributed evenly between the sexes.⁵⁹

Beyond the choir system’s pragmatic functions, the arrangement helped Moravians prioritize their earthly and heavenly affections. Just as children did not live with their parents and opposite-sex siblings, neither did married couples live together, instead residing communally with other married people of the same sex. Separating spouses from the nuclear family unit helped Moravians keep their faith central. What mattered most was their relationship with God

⁵⁷ On Moravian living arrangements and their communal economic enterprise, see Beverly Prior Smaby, *The Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem: From Communal Mission to Family Economy* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1988), 9-26.

⁵⁸ By the time Bethlehem was founded in the 1740s, married missionaries were the norm for Moravians, but that had not always been the case among Pietists. Lutheran Pietist August Hermann Francke and his son, Gotthilf August Francke—both very influential theologians at Halle and founders of the Francke Foundations—believed that missionaries should remain single while in the field so that they could focus entirely on their ministerial work, per the advice of Paul. Roeber, 156, 198.

⁵⁹ This is not to say that single people were given only the task of childrearing. They performed other critical functions in the community, including sewing, baking, farming, overseeing choirs, and other tasks. See Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 183-85.

and their contribution to the larger community, not their local loyalties to spouses, parents, siblings, and children. Living out their entire daily routine surrounded by members of their particular choir—eating, sleeping, working, and worshipping together—Moravians supported each other in their shared goal to gain intimacy with Christ.⁶⁰

While the Moravians' separation of husbands and wives might seem at cross-purposes with their praise of marriage and marital sex, the opposite was in fact the case. Because they valued matrimony so highly, they sought to put marriage entirely in the service of God. Marital decisions were not made by individuals themselves, but by community leaders and by a drawing of the lot, a common decision-making method Moravians used to help determine God's will. The marriage was not final, however, until single men and women who had been identified as potential partners offered their agreement.⁶¹ The personal writings of Moravians reveal the ways in which they saw their marital decisions as revolving entirely around obedience to God. One woman who experienced conversion during the Great Awakening and joined the Moravians described how "dear mother Spangenberg spoke and proposed my marriage to my dear husband. I immediately gave myself up to the will of the dear Saviour."⁶² Submitting to God's will, however, was not always so easily done. Another woman, Anna Seidel, who migrated from Herrnut to Bethlehem recorded that, "I was happy to go to America, but to enter into marriage! That cost me dear and there was much bitter pain until I was able to give up my will to the

⁶⁰ Scholars have written at length about how these communal, same-sex arrangements created new forms of relation and affection outside of the nuclear family. See Smaby, *Transformations*, 10-12; Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 183-90; Aaron Spencer Fogleman, *Jesus Is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press), 86-95; Derrick R. Miller, "Moravian Familiarities: Queer Community in the Moravian Church in Europe and North America in the Mid-Eighteenth Century," *Journal of Moravian History* 13, no. 1 (2013): 54-75.

⁶¹ On Moravian marriage practices, see Smaby, "Forming the Single Sisters' Choir in Bethlehem," *Transactions of the Moravian Historical Society* 28 (1994): 11-12.

⁶² Martha Buninger (1723-1773) memoir, in Faull, 31.

intention of the Saviour.”⁶³ Despite her struggle, Seidel agreed to marriage as an exercise in subduing her will to God.

Seidel’s case demonstrates how attractive the single life was to Moravians. In some instances, even the expressed desire of Moravian leaders was not enough to convince people to marry. In a letter to Zinzendorf, Bethlehem leader Spangenberg confessed,

when I left you, you gave me [the instruction] that we should go through [the list of] our Single Brethren and Sisters once every year and ask whether they should be considered for marriage. Now, that was a commission which wouldn’t have been any easier for me than if you had directed me to carry away a mountain. I’ve had great trouble convincing Brother Gottlieb, even though he is otherwise a most dear soul, and it hasn’t gone any easier with Anne Rosel, who is our joy in every other way... That’s how it has gone with [several others], where either the Brother or the Sister didn’t want the other.⁶⁴

Much to Spangenberg’s frustration, the single life held particular appeal for Moravians. Beverly Prior Smaby argues that it was in fact female colonists’ great interest in joining the Single Sisters that led the Moravians to completely rethink their North American mission, as the post’s leaders had originally made no plans to accommodate single women. The arrangement developed by Zinzendorf and Spangenberg stipulated that, “In Bethlehem there should never be a Single Sister’s house, however [there should be] a Single Brethren’s house as well as Boys’ and Girls’ Choir[s]. The Single Brethren and [Single] Sisters would not be able to do well in America without marriage; without it they wouldn’t be as useful either. And it would not be the intent of the *Heiland* [the Savior] to keep the people there single for so long.”⁶⁵ Because Bethlehem was originally intended as a missionary headquarters rather than a permanent community like Herrnhut, Zinzendorf and Spangenberg saw little need to plan for unmarried women. Mission work required husband-wife teams, and it was assumed that single male missionaries would

⁶³ Anna Seidel (1726-1788) memoir, in Faull, 126. Seidel married at age thirty-four.

⁶⁴ As translated and quoted by Smaby, “Single Sister’s Choir,” 12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 1.

marry soon after their arrival in the colonies. As such, Bethlehem required quarters for single men, married people, and their children, but not for single women.

Women in the colonies, however, had other plans. During the Great Awakening in the first half of the 1740s, unmarried women found the Moravian lifestyle so appealing that they forced its leaders to readjust their strategy. By 1745, it became clear that a Single Sisters' choir was necessary, and accommodations were built in nearby Nazareth. By the end of 1746, the women had outgrown their new space, and Moravian leaders decided to move the Single Sisters into the larger Single Brothers' quarters in Bethlehem, building a new home for the men. When construction was completed in November 1748, the single women moved into their larger living space, fully integrated into the Bethlehem community.⁶⁶ Most significant about the burgeoning Single Sisters' Choir is that its members came largely from the colonies themselves. Unlike earlier communities of celibates—like Labadie and Kelpius's followers, who were mostly German transplants coming from Europe for the express purpose of joining the group—the Moravians attracted women born on American soil and from a variety of ethnic, religious, and racial backgrounds. The Single Sisters' Choir was, in Smaby's words, a “melting pot,” attracting “women of German, British, Native American, Dutch, French, Scandinavian, and African ancestry.”⁶⁷

During the height of the Great Awakening, as Moravian missionaries fanned out around the colonies, unmarried American women were drawn to their message, especially in New York and Pennsylvania.⁶⁸ Some women sought out the Moravians after being converted by a

⁶⁶ Ibid., 2-3.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁶⁸ See, for example, the stories of Martha Buninger, Marie Elizabeth Kunz, and Catharine Brownfield in Faull's collection. Brownfield's account is especially compelling. Though she could not understand a word of the worship she witnessed at Bethlehem, she was still deeply drawn to the community: “In 1744, I came on a visit to Bethlehem, and although I did not understand the German language, in all the meetings that I attended I nevertheless felt the

revivalist preacher of another faith.⁶⁹ Margaretha Edmonds wrote that she was “awakened by Mr. Whitefield’s sermons, and on a pleasure trip to Albany on which my mother’s sister had taken me to visit a few relatives, the dear Saviour led me to understand that the amusements that occurred there were nothing but vain things that brought the heart no true pleasure.”⁷⁰ In characteristic Whitefieldian fashion, Edmonds saw a stark division between the religious life and the “pleasure” of the world, coming to understand that she would have to choose between the two. After deciding to commit herself wholeheartedly to God, she learned about the Moravians. While listening to Moravian missionaries preach in New York, she was “pierced...to such an extent that I cried many tears for grace.”⁷¹ Though Edmonds would marry two years after converting to Moravianism, she still participated in a faith that upended mainstream approaches to marriage and the family, opting for a denomination that allowed her to prioritize religion above all else and to offer her body and soul to God.

Though many of the single women who converted to Moravianism in the 1740s would go on to marry, many others would remain single their entire lives or spend several years with the Single Sisters first, forcing mission leaders to revamp their plans and build living quarters for them. Smaby offers several explanations for Bethlehem’s appeal to unmarried women, including the influence of single female role models, the opportunity for women to serve in leadership positions, the draw of companionship with peers, and the alternative that Bethlehem offered to

sweet peace of God in Christ Jesus my Lord” (80). She joined the community in 1745 and spent two years with the Single Sisters before marrying.

⁶⁹ The success of Moravian proselytizing during the Great Awakening is registered by the complaint of anti-revivalist Charles Chauncy, who noted that even renowned itinerant Gilbert Tennent was upset by Moravians encroaching on his flock: “[Tennent] seems indeed to have quite turned about: The Reason whereof may be this; the *Moravians* who came to *Philadelphia* with Count *Zinzendorf*, have been among his People, and managed with them as he did elsewhere, and brought the like Confusion among them; and now he cries out of Danger, and expresses himself much as those did, whom before he had sent to the Devil by wholesale.” Chauncy, “A Letter from a Gentleman in Boston,” in Lovejoy, 78.

⁷⁰ Margaretha Edmonds (1723-1773) memoir, in Faull, 33.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 34.

household labor.⁷² Smaby does not, however, take into account the fact that interest in singleness itself was growing during the Great Awakening, as people heard the message of itinerants like Whitefield and found the celibate life the best way to espouse themselves to Christ. Though Smaby focuses on single women, single men too were drawn to Bethlehem in increasing numbers. During the community's first two decades, nearly half of the adult population between the ages of 20-59 was unmarried.⁷³ Even those who married did so at a later age on average than the rest of the colonial population.⁷⁴ The proportion of single people would continue to grow until the end of the eighteenth century, when the number of married adults finally eclipsed the number of single ones. In a trend that began during the Great Awakening, the common mode of life at Bethlehem for the first fifty years was singleness.⁷⁵

Ephrata also drew an increasing number of people to celibacy during the Great Awakening. Like the Moravians, though with a smaller geographic reach, Ephratan missionaries hit the road to preach revival. Their ability to attract attention is evident in the fact that several were arrested as Jesuit spies on a 1744 preaching tour in New England.⁷⁶ Arrests notwithstanding, their proselytizing paid off: membership in the Ephrata Cloister reached its highest point during the 1740s and early 1750s, attracting a record number of people who committed themselves to celibacy whether they were single or married.⁷⁷ Though even at its

⁷² Smaby, "Single Sisters' Choir," 6-11.

⁷³ Smaby, *Transformation of Moravian Bethlehem*, 55, 73.

⁷⁴ As Smaby writes, "the average age at first marriage for men and women was 33 and 28 respectively—six to eight years higher than was usual during the colonial period." *Ibid.*, 73.

⁷⁵ Between 1750-1790, "staying single was the dominant way of life. Less than two-fifths of the adult population were married, whereas half the adults were single." *Ibid.*, 55.

⁷⁶ Alderfer, 101. The issue of Ephratans being mistaken for—and arrested as—Jesuits or members of other Catholic orders occurred on several different occasions. See Durnbaugh, "Communitarian Societies," 24; Klein, 81.

⁷⁷ Membership grew over the course of the 1740s and reached its peak in 1750, with about fifty single men, fifty single women, and 100 married couples. Ernst, 347; Carpenter, 62. Conrad Weiser, who served as a critical liaison between the local Indian groups and the colonial government, was among Ephrata's most famous converts. Weiser was married at the time he joined the cloister, and with Beissel's help, he convinced his wife to join too. Their celibacy and absence from their children, however, eventually led both to leave, rendering ill will between Weiser and the rest of the Ephrata community. Alderfer, 96-99.

peak the Cloister numbered little more than 300 members, it played a crucial role in pushing the issue of celibacy into the spotlight during the Great Awakening, presenting an alternative for colonists who were touched by the revival message of wholesale spiritual commitment.

Ephratans and Moravians were vital in bringing European Pietist ideas about celibacy to the colonies, but they were not the only groups to do so. In the last half of the seventeenth century, reform-minded Anglicans also embraced Continental Pietism, enlisting both Pietism and primitive Christianity in their efforts to revitalize the Church of England. SPG missionaries, in turn, transported these ideas to the colonies, mainly through the reading material they brought with them. However, beginning in the 1730s, two SPG missionaries in particular—John Wesley and George Whitefield—grappled far more directly with Pietist ideas, introducing them to a much wider swath of the colonial population. Both men were critical in fueling American revivalism, and both were deeply concerned about the same issues that animated men like Conrad Beissel and Count Zinzendorf, wondering about the role of celibacy, sex, and marriage in cultivating deep and committed relationships with Christ.

John Wesley's ideas about the single life were indebted to both Pietism and primitive Christianity. He came by his interest in the former, initially, by reading Pietist and mystical works such as August Hermann Francke's *Pietas Hallensis* and Thomas á Kempis's *The Imitation of Christ*, and later, through his interactions with Moravians in the colonies.⁷⁸ Both sources would lead him to seek a more heartfelt, Christ-centered faith. His interest in primitive Christianity was also shaped by his experiences in both England and the colonies. Geordan Hammond argues that Wesley first developed his primitivist ideals from three key influences: his parents' High Church Anglicanism, the non-juror cause, and the patristic strain that had long

⁷⁸ On Wesley's Pietist and mystical influences, see Ward, 310-14; Smith, *A Cautious Enthusiasm*, 24-25, 37-43; Robert G. Tuttle, Jr., *Mysticism in the Wesleyan Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Francis Asbury Press, 1989), 21-91.

been prevalent in the Church of England.⁷⁹ These various fields of influence led Wesley to the same works that had informed England's quasi-monastic revival, including Anthony Horneck's *The Happy Ascetick*, Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*, William Cave's *Primitive Christianity*, and the treatises of William Law.⁸⁰ Like many of his contemporaries, Wesley saw the ascetic practices of the apostolic church as a model for his own time. The "Holy Club" that he, his brother, and other Oxford students formed was an attempt to implement a more disciplined mode of faith and living, guided by the same logic that had led the "holy living" practices of Jeremy Taylor, in which bodily restraint served as a vessel that could open the soul to greater religious experience.⁸¹

It was Wesley's commitment to primitive Christianity, and the role of asceticism therein, that inspired him to travel to the American colonies as a missionary for the SPG. According to Hammond, Wesley saw colonial Georgia as a "laboratory" where he could implement primitivist tenets, trying out many of the practices that would become crucial to later Methodism.⁸² Wesley had originally been drawn to Georgia for the chance to work with local Indians, whom he believed could implement apostolic practices with far more success than English colonists. The benefits, ideally, would flow both ways. Wesley hoped the challenging conditions of colonial Georgia would further his own religious progress and implant the practices of primitive Christianity more firmly into his own life.

⁷⁹ Geordan Hammond, "High Church Anglican Influences on John Wesley's Conception of Primitive Christianity, 1732-1735," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 78, no. 2 (June 2009): 174-76.

⁸⁰ While Wesley would abridge the works of Taylor, Horneck, and Cave in his *Christian Library*, he would eventually split from William Law, whose turn towards mysticism and extreme views on celibacy alienated not only Wesley, but many of Law's other followers. John Brazier Green, *John Wesley and William Law* (London: Epworth Press, 1945), 32-65.

⁸¹ The pejorative name of "Methodist" was originally given to Wesley and his peers by critics satirizing their commitment to discipline and asceticism. Campbell, 115-17; Lawrence, *One Family Under God*, 19.

⁸² Geordan Hammond, "Restoring Primitive Christianity: John Wesley and Georgia, 1735-1737" (Ph.D. diss., University of Manchester, 2008), 15.

In particular, he hoped his work in Georgia would help him resist the temptations of the flesh, and he began the manuscript version of his journal with the expectation that he would “have no intimacy with any woman in America.”⁸³ In a letter penned to fellow Anglican clergyman John Burton days before sailing for Georgia, Wesley spelled out his hopes for leading an ascetic Christian life across the Atlantic. In the colonies,

most of those temptations are removed which here so easily beset me. Toward mortifying the desire of the flesh, the desire of sensual pleasures, it will be no small thing to be able, without fear of giving offense, to live on water and the fruits of the earth. This simplicity of food will, I trust, be a blessed means, both of preventing my seeking that happiness in meats and drinks which God designed should be found only in faith and love and joy in the Holy Ghost; and will assist me—especially where I see no woman but those which are almost of a different species from me—to attain such a purity of thought as suits a candidate for that state wherein they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven.⁸⁴

Along with a simple diet, Wesley hoped that ministering among the Indians would limit “the desire of sensual pleasures,” as Native women were “almost of a different species” from him. His goal was to attain the *vita angelica*, the “life of the angels” celebrated in patristic tradition and valued by Anglicans as a marker of the primitive church and a way to worship God without distraction.⁸⁵

Wesley clearly went to Georgia with certain ideas about celibacy already in place, but the colonial environment both affirmed and challenged his views. On the one hand, Wesley’s ideas about the single life were supported by the Moravians he met on the ocean voyage and with

⁸³ As quoted in Geordan Hammond, *John Wesley in America: Restoring Primitive Christianity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 173. This line was omitted from the journals that Wesley published. Hammond suggests that the omission was due to “the controversial nature of celibacy within Anglicanism” (173). However, his point is complicated by the fact that, only three years after publishing his journals, Wesley printed his pamphlet praising the single life. It is possible that Wesley feared his statement would revive the controversy surrounding the Sophia Hopkey affair, which he had hoped to leave behind him upon returning to England.

⁸⁴ John Wesley to John Burton, 10 October 1735. Burton was an Anglican minister, a trustee of the colony of Georgia, and a friend of Georgia’s first governor, James Oglethorpe. He was the one who first introduced Wesley to Oglethorpe. John Telford, ed., *The Letters of John Wesley* (London: Epworth Press, 1931), 1:189.

⁸⁵ In his emphasis on the *vita angelica*, Wesley very much reflected his High Church Anglicanism, in which discussions of celibacy revolved more around the patristic tradition than 1 Corinthians 7, the central text in earlier Puritan conversations.

whom he became close during his time in Georgia.⁸⁶ The Moravians confirmed for Wesley the overall value of celibacy even if both parties disagreed on some of the details. Shortly after they met in 1736, Moravian leader Spangenberg invited Wesley to submit questions regarding matters of faith, to which Wesley offered thirty-one inquires. Reflecting his own concerns, question number sixteen asked, “Is celibacy a state more advantageous for holiness than marriage?”⁸⁷ Spangenberg responded, “Yes, to them who are able to receive it,” relying on a reading from Matthew 19:11-12 that suggested that some people were specifically called to the single life.⁸⁸ Spangenberg in turn reported Wesley’s position in a letter to his coreligionists in Europe, writing, “Above all, [Wesley] believes that all scripture of doubtful interpretation must be decided not by reason but from the writings of the first three centuries, e.g. infant baptism, footwashing, fast days, celibacy, and many others.”⁸⁹ Spangenberg’s summation of Wesley’s thinking reveals that, while the two agreed on the value of celibacy, they did so for different

⁸⁶ Though Wesley had been influenced by Pietist ideas before leaving England, his experience aboard the *Simmonds* were his first sustained interactions with Moravians, whose piety deeply impressed him. On the critical role of the Moravians in shaping Wesley’s ideas as well as the subsequent development of Wesleyan Methodism, see Lawrence, 23-30; Noll, 82-86; Theodore H. Runyon, “German Pietism, Wesley, and English and American Protestantism,” in Grabbe, *Halle Pietism*, 135-45; Henry D. Rack, *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), 120-45.

⁸⁷ As quoted in Geordan Hammond, “Versions of Primitive Christianity: John Wesley’s Relations with the Moravians in Georgia,” *Journal of Moravian History* 6 (2009): 57.

⁸⁸ Spangenberg’s letter is transcribed in full in Douglas L. Rights, “A Moravian’s Report on John Wesley—1737,” *South Atlantic Quarterly* 43 (1944), 408-09. Matthew 19:11-12 reads, “All men cannot receive this saying, save they to whom it is given. For there are some eunuchs, which were so born from their mother’s womb: and there are some eunuchs, which were made eunuchs of men: and there be eunuchs, which have made themselves eunuchs for the kingdom of heaven’s sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it.” It is worth noting that Spangenberg was writing at a time when Moravian ideas about marriage and sex were changing. Zinzendorf would not write his “17 Points of Matrimony” until four years after Wesley and Spangenberg’s exchange, and his ideas would not permeate American Moravianism until after the establishment of Bethlehem in 1741. Spangenberg’s own thinking on celibacy was in fact more complex than he let on with Wesley. Like Beissel, Spangenberg as a young man was attracted to Johann Gichtel’s writings on celibacy, which were grounded in the mystic tradition and in Behmenist Sophiology. Spangenberg, however, later distanced himself from mysticism and revised his ideas about singleness. In 1740, four years after conversing with Wesley, he married his first wife, who died in 1751. He remarried in 1754, and she died in 1759. Though Spangenberg lived until 1792, he never married again. Both of his marriages were childless, leading Atwood to suggest that Spangenberg continued his commitment to celibacy even while married. Atwood, “Spangenberg: A Radical Pietist in Colonial America,” *Journal of Moravian History*, No. 4 (Spring 2008): 12.

⁸⁹ Spangenberg, “Moravian’s Report,” in Rights, 409.

reasons. Whereas Spangenberg relied on the gospel of Matthew, Wesley turned to patristic tradition, believing that scripture was unclear—of “doubtful interpretation”—on the issue.

While Spangenberg affirmed Wesley’s overall idea about the value of celibacy, other experiences in the colonies tested his beliefs. During his time in Georgia, he read widely on the primitive church, which ultimately led him to challenge the tenets he valued most. In particular, his reading of William Beveridge’s works caused him to question the authority of some of the apostolic canons, including the twenty-seventh one forbidding clergy to marry.⁹⁰ Wesley’s doubts about whether or not unmarried ministers should remain celibate troubled him throughout his time in Georgia, in both theological and practical terms. In a 1736 letter to his brother, Wesley confessed, “I stand in jeopardy every hour. Two or three are women, younger, refined, God-fearing. Pray that I know none of them after the flesh.”⁹¹ Though Wesley’s pre-departure letter to Burton made it clear that he had already struggled with “the desire of sensual pleasures” before leaving England, his experiences in the colonies drove home just how difficult celibacy was to maintain, especially his experience with Sophia Hopkey.⁹² Her tutor in French and divinity, Wesley was drawn to Hopkey because she shared his commitment to the ascetic ideals of primitive Christianity.⁹³ The fact that Wesley was at the same time doubting the authenticity

⁹⁰ Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 154-57, 171-72.

⁹¹ John Wesley to Charles Wesley, 22 March 1736, in *Letters*, 1:199. The original text was written in Greek. According to Bufford W. Coe, “the fact that Wesley wrote these sentences in Greek rather than English is indicative of the confidential nature of this confession.” Coe, *John Wesley and Marriage* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1996), 155, n.96.

⁹² Part of the difficulty for Wesley was that he did not end up ministering to Indians in Georgia, but to the English population, clearly throwing a wrench in his plan to minister to women who were “almost of a different species” than him (see note 84).

⁹³ Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 171. According to Wesley’s journal, Hopkey was also interested in pursuing celibacy. An entry from October 25, 1736 suggests that, while Wesley was reconsidering his commitment to the single life, Hopkey was not. Writing about traveling to Frederica (south of Savannah) with her, Wesley worried about his ability to resist temptation: “I saw the danger to myself, but yet had a good hope I should be delivered out of it, (1) because it was not my choice which brought me into it; (2) because I still felt in myself the same desire and design to live a single life; and (3) because I was persuaded should my desire and design be changed, yet her resolution to live single would continue.” *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley: Enlarged from original MSS., with notes from unpublished diaries, annotations, maps, and illustrations*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock (London: Robert

of the twenty-seventh apostolic canon led him to reconsider his own pledge of celibacy, confiding in his journal, “My desire and design still was to live single; but how long it would continue I knew not.”⁹⁴ Ultimately, Wesley chose celibacy over Hopkey and redoubled his commitment to singleness, but not without an extraordinary effort and a great deal of questioning first.⁹⁵

Wesley’s time in Georgia was critical in sowing the seeds of doubt about the apostolic precedent for celibacy and about his own ability to remain chaste, but it also affirmed his belief that single people were better able than their married counterparts to devote themselves fully to God, regardless of any patristic mandate.⁹⁶ Upon returning to England in 1737, he embarked on a ministerial career that would prove far more successful than his tenure in Georgia, becoming an active member of England’s growing evangelical movement. It was England’s own stirrings of revivalism that led Wesley to share his views on celibacy more widely with an audience eager to

Culley, 1909-1916), 1:287. Though Hopkey championed primitive Christianity, her interest in celibacy was perhaps not entirely religious in origin. She had been courted by Thomas Mellichamp, who at the time was in a Charleston jail on charges of forgery. According to Wesley, Hopkey declared, “I have promised either to marry him or to marry none at all...I am every way unhappy. I won’t have Tommy; for he is a bad man. And I can have none else.” Wesley, *Journal*, 1:290. Her interest in remaining single might have stemmed from the fact that she had been matched with a man she found undesirable. For a more detailed analysis of Wesley’s relationship with Hopkey, see Coe, 72-79.

⁹⁴ Wesley, *Journal*, 1:294.

⁹⁵ Hopkey helped make Wesley’s decision easier. One month after Wesley told her that he would not consider marriage until he had spent time ministering to the Indians, Hopkey became engaged to William Williamson. They married three days later. Her marriage indirectly set off a chain of events that would tarnish Wesley’s reputation in Savannah, eventually forcing him to leave or face a lawsuit for defaming Hopkey’s character by denying her communion. Hammond, *John Wesley in America*, 172.

⁹⁶ His belief in the value of singleness might have been further buoyed by a 1738 trip to the Moravian center at Herrnhut, on Zinzendorf’s estate, where he witnessed the distinct living arrangements of the Moravians on a scale far larger than he would have seen in Georgia. On display for him would have been the ways in which the Moravians emphasized ecclesiastical and communal bonds over familial ones. For information on Wesley’s trip to Herrnhut and the continued influence of Moravians on him after his return to England, see Ward, 312-13. Though Wesley did not advocate that his followers set up similar monastic living arrangements, he did encourage them to make their relationships with God their first priority, even above their relationships with family members, and he emphasized non-kin relationships in Methodist bands and small group meetings. At least one group of English Methodist men did, however, form a monastic-style community. See Abelove, “Sexual Politics,” 90. Wesley eventually parted ways with the Moravians, believing that they focused too much on contemplation and quietism rather than on an active faith manifested through godly works and behavior. See Albert C. Outler’s explanation in *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 353-54.

hear them, and in 1743 he summarized his ideas in the pamphlet, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*.⁹⁷

While Wesley's text very much reflects the influences of Pietism and High Church Anglicanism, it also shows him moving in new directions.⁹⁸ His opening line suggests that celibacy was a growing topic of interest to early Methodists drawn to his style of Christ-centered piety, as he had "been frequently asked, Which is to be prefer'd, A Married State, or a Single Life?"⁹⁹ Because he was so "frequently asked," Wesley took to writing a pamphlet in accessible language that would specifically discuss the treatment of marriage and singleness in scripture.¹⁰⁰ He devoted the first half to clearing up misconceptions about his ideas on marriage, complaining that his critics had "shamefully misrepresented what I have spoken on This, as indeed on all other Subjects."¹⁰¹ His first order of business was to distance himself from the Catholic Church, making clear that he in no way prohibited marriage like the Pope who both "forbid[s] and

⁹⁷ The first pamphlet made it to America soon after it was published in England. The cover of the 1743 second edition says copies were sold by A. Bradford in Philadelphia, referring to Andrew Bradford, son of Pennsylvania's first printer, William Bradford. See Raymond A. Craig, "Bradford, Andrew," in *American National Biography Online*, Feb. 2000, <http://www.anb.org/articles/16/16-02550.html>. Wesley expanded and revised the pamphlet in 1765, altering the title to *Thoughts on a Single Life*.

⁹⁸ As Abelow has shown, it was not just in his writings that Wesley displayed his preference for the single life. The way he organized his followers into small group bands and larger societies also reflect his idea that marriage should not be believers' most important relationship. Abelow, "Sexual Politics," 88-91.

⁹⁹ John Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 2nd ed. Bristol: Felix Farley, 1743.

¹⁰⁰ Considering that, according to Spangenberg's letter, Wesley found scripture unclear about celibacy and therefore relied on patristic tradition, it is interesting that Wesley's pamphlet makes no mention of early church practice. For reasons that are unclear, Wesley drew wholly on scripture to make his case. Perhaps he did so because of the Hopkey incident, which occurred after Spangenberg wrote but before the publication of this pamphlet, leading Wesley to find more definitive scriptural support for his decision to remain single. Wesley might also have made the decision with his audience and medium in mind. He specifically stated on the first page that he wanted to write a text "at the same time Short and so Plain that every Reader of a common Capacity might understand it," which might have led him to leave out a winding explanation of patristic tradition (2). Or, the decision might have resulted from the context in which Wesley wrote. By 1743, revivalism was in full swing in both England and the colonies. Revival-style preaching was Bible-based, rather than grounded in close theological arguments and scholarly debate. As such, Wesley may have wanted to foreground scripture over patristic precedent.

¹⁰¹ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 3. Wesley's disclaimer here makes it clear that his ideas about sexual asceticism were already well-known and were the target of critics, perhaps going back to his days at Oxford or from the 1740 publication of his Georgia journals.

“despise[s]” it.¹⁰² Importantly, Wesley also distanced himself from the most radical Pietist groups. For all the ways in which he had been influenced by Pietist devotion and an Anglican “holy living” movement that celebrated sexual renunciation, he made clear that his support of celibacy did not stem from Behmenist and Sophiological ideas. He found the notion of original androgyny—from which followed the claim that sexual difference and marriage were created only after the Fall—“absolutely groundless,” the result not of careful study of scripture or church tradition, but a mere “Madman’s *Dream*.”¹⁰³ He believed that such claims could be easily refuted in Hebrews 13:4 (marriage was “honorable” and marital sex “undefiled”) and 1 Corinthians 7:5, in which Paul told husbands and wives not to deny sex to each other (“*Defraud you not one the other, except it be with Consent, for a time.*”). Like many of his Protestant colleagues, and in contrast to the Behmenism of groups like the Ephrata Cloister, Wesley found scriptural mandate for marital sex so long as it was not carried to excess.¹⁰⁴

The issue for Wesley, however, was not so much the radical Pietist denial of marital sex, but the authority on which their denial was based. Original androgyny was “groundless” because it was insupportable by scripture and patristic tradition: “Beware therefore, that under Pretence of greater Purity, or of Inward, Particular Revelations, supposed to be of GOD, Thou disobey not an Undeniable Command of GOD, given in the Revelation of Jesus Christ.”¹⁰⁵ Behmenist thinking was the result of “Inward, Particular Revelations” that did not hold up when measured

¹⁰² Ibid. Wesley was quoting the oft-cited Protestant source criticizing Catholic clerical celibacy, 1 Timothy 4:1-3.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 3-4. The “madman” was likely Jacob Boehme, whom Wesley had openly criticized before, at one point calling him an “ingenious madman.” See Hessayon and Apetrei, 4, *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*. It is important to remember, though, that Boehme’s ideas did not necessarily advocate celibacy, and that Boehme himself was married. However, because followers like Gottfried Arnold and Johann Gichtel used Boehme’s ideas to craft theologies of celibacy, Boehme himself became associated with singleness. For a discussion on Behmenist celibacy, see chapter 4.

¹⁰⁴ Though Wesley admired the Moravians, he certainly did not go to the same length as Zinzendorf in seeing marital sex as sacramental. Wesley’s views were in line with the more mainstream Protestant viewpoint that developed after the Reformation, which saw marital sex as a critical component of marriage so long as it was not indulged too much. For Protestant views on marital sex, see Wiesner-Hanks, 77-95.

¹⁰⁵ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 5.

against the Bible or other external forms of authority. People who absented themselves from their marriages or denied sex to their spouses directly refuted the scriptural teaching that no “Man *put asunder* whom GOD hath joined, on any Pretence whatsoever.”¹⁰⁶

After making it clear to his readers that he did not disavow marriage on either Catholic or Behmenist terms, Wesley spent the rest of his pamphlet championing the cause of celibacy. He began with the same scriptural support that Spangenberg had offered in response to his inquiries, though here too Wesley moved in a new direction. Quoting the same verse from Matthew, he offered his own clarification parenthetically: “*For there are some Eunuchs which were so born, from their Mother’s Womb; and there are some which were made Eunuchs of Men: And there be Eunuchs which made themselves Eunuchs* (have abstain’d from Marriage all their Lives, have remain’d Single ‘till Death) *for the Kingdom of Heaven’s Sake. He that is able to receive it, let him receive it, Matt. xix. 10, &c.*”¹⁰⁷ Especially significant is his clarification of the term, “eunuch,” which for Wesley had nothing to do with castration, but signaled only marital status. Eunuchs were those who “abstain’d from Marriage” their entire lives.

Though castration did not enter Wesley’s definition, the method by which people became eunuchs was still critical. The Catholic notion of having only clerics and members of religious orders practice celibacy was, Wesley believed, an error resulting from the distinction that Rome made between “Evangelical Counsels” and “Divine Commands.”¹⁰⁸ The latter were binding for all believers and consisted of key scriptural injunctions like those in the Decalogue. “Evangelical Counsels,” by contrast, pertained only to a small few, including the mandate for celibacy that applied only to the clergy and religious orders. For Wesley, the problem with this distinction was that it inevitably led to “a still worse Doctrine, That of Works of

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 7.

Supererogation,” which to Protestants was synonymous with works-based salvation. Evangelical Counsels had turned celibacy into a deed that the elite few performed in an attempt to curry favor with God, akin to the sale of indulgences.¹⁰⁹

Wesley took a completely different view regarding who was bound to Jesus’s teachings on celibacy in Matthew. He dismantled the Catholic distinction between “counsels” and “commands” and turned celibacy from an issue pertaining only to the few into one pertaining to the many. His critique of Catholic celibacy was therefore different than many of his fellow Protestants, who saw the Pope as usurping the authority that was vested only in God to bestow the gift of continence. For Wesley, the crux of the problem was instead the fact that the Pope had made celibacy relevant only to a small number of Catholics, preventing the bulk of the church from grappling seriously with the critical precept in Matthew 9:10: “He that is able to receive it [the gift of celibacy], let him receive it.” Matthew’s words were a command for all believers, not a counsel. As Wesley wrote, “The Word is Peremptory...*Let him receive it.* (Not, He *may* receive it, if he *will*.) How could a Command be more clearly exprest?”¹¹⁰

However, just because the verse in Matthew featured a universal rule did not mean that everyone was capable of following it. Distinguishing between general and particular gifts of God, Wesley—along with most of his Protestant colleagues—wrote that the gift of celibacy was not a general one, but a particular one, pertaining only to a “*Particular Class* of Men...who *are able to receive it: Those to whom it is given; those who have received this Gift of God.*” As Matthew 19:11 cautioned, “*All men cannot receive this Saying.*” Those who could not, Wesley wrote, should marry, per Paul’s advice to the Corinthians, “*But if they cannot contain, let them*

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. On counsels versus commands, see Coe, 59.

¹¹⁰ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 7.

marry.”¹¹¹ The question remained, then, of who was actually able to carry out Jesus’s pronouncement.

It was in answering this question that Wesley offered his most distinct addition to the current discourse on celibacy. Unlike earlier Puritans and his Anglican contemporaries, Wesley insisted that all people were able to receive the gift of continence: “‘But who are able to keep themselves thus pure?’ I answer, Every Believer in Christ: Every one who hath living Faith *in the Name of the only begotten Son of GOD.*”¹¹² Continence was gifted to all believers at the moment of conversion, when “Lust then vanishes away.”¹¹³ The catch, however, was that just because all converts received the gift, not all were able to maintain it, and in that sense the gift was “particular.” As Wesley cautioned, “if the Believer *keep not himself*, if he do not *watch unto Prayer*, if he do not *look unto Jesus Day and Night*, he will soon be weak again, and like another Man. He hath cast away the Gift of God. Then, *to avoid Fornication, let him marry* (unless he have Confidence that he shall soon recover it) for *it is better to marry than to burn.*”¹¹⁴

In Wesley’s framework, celibacy became an important part of the conversion process itself. Continence was a sign of conversion, setting apart those who had received the new birth by giving them the ability to resist their sexual appetites (“[Satan] may tempt; but he cannot prevail.”).¹¹⁵ Lust, on the other hand, was a sign of backsliding, an indication that a believer was in danger of becoming just “like another Man,” indistinguishable from the unconverted by living for the world rather than for God. However, as his experiences with Sophia Hopkey had affirmed for him, Wesley knew that maintaining the gift was no easy task, and as such “*he that*

¹¹¹ Ibid., 7-8.

¹¹² Ibid., 9.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 9-10.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 9.

marrieth...doth well,” even if “he that *marrieth not, doth better.*”¹¹⁶ In line with his views on asceticism, Wesley equated celibacy with “hardship.” Most people could not endure a lifetime of sexual renunciation and should marry to avoid the sin of fornication.¹¹⁷ Though he was far more convinced of the possibility of Christian perfection than many of his colleagues, his theology still left room for human shortcomings.¹¹⁸

While Wesley’s understanding of the place of celibacy in the conversion process was distinct, his reasons for praising celibacy were not. He offered the traditional Pauline justification: celibacy enabled believers to be free from worldly distractions. Singleness helped converts prioritize God above all else, leaving them with “only one Thing to care for” instead of dividing their affections, time, and interests.¹¹⁹ Those who were already married at the moment of conversion should rely on God’s help to order their earthly and heavenly commitments properly. “Fear not, GOD will assist thee therein,” he assured his married readers.¹²⁰ The underlying point remained, however, that those who were not married should treasure their status: “Be exceeding glad,” Wesley told single people, and “cast not away...the Privilege, which GOD hath given Thee.”¹²¹ After instructing husbands and wives to remain espoused after

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 10.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 11.

¹¹⁸ Wesley’s views on celibacy were influenced by his views on Christian perfection, the belief that human beings could overcome sin in this lifetime, before redemption. During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, perfectionism was an important and divisive issue among Pietists and evangelicals. On the role of Christian perfection in Wesleyan thought, see Hammond, “Restoring Primitive Christianity,” 102-22 and Abelow, *Evangelist of Desire*, 55-56, 79-83, 90-93.

¹¹⁹ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 11. Wesley reiterated the point in even stronger terms in his revised 1765 pamphlet, telling single people, “Above all, you are at liberty from the greatest of all Intanglements, the loving *One Creature above all others*. It is *possible*, to do this without sin, without any impeachment of our Love to God. But how inconceivably *difficult*? To give God our *whole Heart*, while a Creature has *so large* a share of it?” *Thoughts on a Single Life* (London: Foundery, 1765), 5.

¹²⁰ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 11. His assurance was based on a Pauline injunction, when the apostle instructed the Corinthians to remain in the same states they were in at the moment they were called to Christ: “Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called. Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God” (1 Corinthians 7:20-24).

¹²¹ Wesley, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life*, 12.

conversion, he closed his pamphlet with a verse that encapsulated both the hopes for heavenly intimacy and the fears of familial strife that emerged during the Great Awakening: “Verily, verily I say unto You, there is no Man who hath left Father or Mother, or Wife or Children,—for my Name’s Sake, but he shall receive an Hundred Fold, now in this present Time, and in the World to come, Eternal Life.”¹²² Though he attempted to manage the meaning of the verse—which appeared in the gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke—by assuring wedded people of God’s assistance, his message to readers was clear: singleness was preferable to marriage. When his pamphlet reached an American audience in 1743, it became part of the discourse that the Great Awakening had created, wherein believers began to question those very types of familial bonds and affections.

Wesleyan Methodism did not take firm hold on the American side of the Atlantic until the 1760s, but colonists had access to Wesley’s pamphlet and journals by the early 1740s. They also participated in the early stages of the Methodist movement via his successor in America, George Whitefield, who made much greater waves in the colonies than Wesley did. Friends, coreligionists, and colleagues who met at Oxford, Whitefield and Wesley were both deeply influenced by Continental Pietism.¹²³ Though the Methodist movement they founded would soon split along Wesleyan Arminian and Whitefieldian Calvinist lines, Whitefield brought to the colonies an inchoate version of Methodism that minimized doctrinal differences and centered instead on the conversion process, calling all colonists to make wholehearted commitments to Christ regardless of their denominational affiliations.¹²⁴

¹²² Ibid. Wesley was paraphrasing Matthew 19:29, Mark 10:29-30, and Luke 18:29-30.

¹²³ It was in fact Wesley who first introduced Whitefield to the writings of Continental Pietists. Wesley was also vital in persuading Whitefield to go to the colonies, hoping he would take over his missionary work in Georgia. Hammond, “Restoring Primitive Christianity,” 215-16.

¹²⁴ In the early 1740s, the movement they cofounded—as well as their friendship—split, with Wesley ascribing to an Arminian view that salvation was available to all and Whitefield holding to a Calvinist model of a predestined elect. Though the two men would eventually reconcile their friendship, the theological divide in Methodism remained.

Reflecting their mutual interest in cultivating close relationships with God, Whitefield shared Wesley's concerns about how marriage would affect his ministry and his faith. While Wesley's ideas about celibacy would become far more well-known—because, among other things, of his published writings and notoriously failed marriage—Whitefield's own reservations about matrimony show that Wesley's views were not as “highly unusual” as scholars have thought.¹²⁵ Wesley might have taken his ideas about singleness further than his Anglican colleagues, but the difference was one of degree rather than kind. When placed within the longer history of Continental Pietism and the more immediate context of the Great Awakening, Wesley appears a logical offshoot of a much larger conversation.

Amidst the height of his career in the colonies in the late 1730s and early 1740s, Whitefield revealed that he too worried about his human relationships impinging upon his spiritual ones. In 1740, three years before Wesley wrote his pamphlet on singleness, Whitefield confessed in a letter to Elizabeth Delamotte, the woman he was courting, that “there is nothing I dread more than having my heart drawn away by earthly objects.—When that time comes, it will be over with me indeed; I must then bid adieu to zeal and fervency of spirit, and in effect bid the Lord Jesus to depart from me. For alas, what room can there be for God, when a rival hath taken possession of the heart?”¹²⁶ Whitefield's comment struck to the core of the difficulty of balancing earthly and heavenly relationships. Because of the close intimacy of the marital union,

That division, however, was far less important on the American side of the Atlantic than it was on the English side. It was not until after Methodism was firmly established in the new nation at the end of the eighteenth century that the inter-denomination split had significant implications for American followers. Lawrence, *One Family Under God*, 33-43.

¹²⁵ Ablove, “Sexual Politics,” 87. Though Lawrence argues that Methodists were far more amenable to Wesley's ideas than Ablove thought, she too views Methodist notions of celibacy as largely distinct, rather than seeing their similarities in a wider Christian discourse. See her chapter on celibacy in *One Family Under God*, 133-57.

¹²⁶ Whitefield to Elizabeth Delamotte, 1 February 1740, in George Whitefield, *The Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771-1772), 1:148. The relationship did not work out and Delamotte married another man. On his relationship with Delamotte, see Arnold A. Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1970), 1:467-76, 1:597-98. On Whitefield's eventual marriage to a different woman, see Stuart C. Henry, *George Whitefield: Wayfaring Witness* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1957), 72-77.

a spouse appeared a “rival” to God, an “earthly objec[t]” by which his “heart [could be] drawn away.” Wesley expressed a similar sentiment when he praised singleness because it gave people “only one Thing to care for,” their relationship with God. For both Wesley and Whitefield, dividing time and affection between a spouse and God without doing injury to the latter seemed nearly impossible, leading to a loss of “zeal and fervency of spirit” that was akin to bidding “the Lord Jesus to depart.”¹²⁷

Despite his concerns, however, Whitefield admitted that he still felt a calling to marriage, not celibacy. The key was making sure that he married only after he had fully cemented his loyalties to God, so that a spouse would not rival his affections. As he explained, “I often have great inward trials...I believe it to be God’s will that I should marry...However, I pray God, that I may not have a wife, till I can live as though I had none.”¹²⁸ The last line is critical, echoing Paul’s own advice to the Corinthians in which, after encouraging them to remain single, Paul instructed those who were already married: “But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none...for the fashion of this world passeth away.”¹²⁹ Anticipating Jesus’s return, Paul implored his audience not to let their marriages interfere with their salvation. By invoking Paul’s advice to the Corinthians, Whitefield revealed that he too worried about a spouse interfering with his piety and his ministerial career. He did not want to wed until he was capable of relegating his marriage to secondary importance.

To achieve the kind of marital relationship that would not detract from his faith, Whitefield needed not only to rely on his own discipline, but to find a wife who was similarly

¹²⁷ This view, of course, was not wholly coincident with Pietism. In line with many other Protestant groups, Moravians, as discussed earlier, saw marriage as a critical component of faith.

¹²⁸ Whitefield to Benjamin Ingham, 28 March 1740, in Whitefield, *Works*, 1:158.

¹²⁹ 1 Corinthians 7:29-31

pious. He sought “a *gracious woman* that is dead to every thing but Jesus... Such a one would help, but not retard me in my dear Lord’s work.”¹³⁰ Just as he did not want a spouse to eclipse his own love for God, he did not expect to overshadow his wife’s spiritual commitment. He continued in the same letter, “I wait upon the Lord every moment: I hang upon my Jesus: and he is so infinitely condescending, that he daily grants me fresh tokens of his love, and assures me that he will not permit me to fall by the hands of a woman.”¹³¹ Whitefield, like Wesley, feared that a woman might derail his faith. Summarizing his view that marriage was an especial snare to the devout, he told a friend, “O let no one take away your crown. If you marry, let it be in the Lord, and for the Lord, and then the Lord will give it his blessing. Only remember this, marry when or whom you will, expect trouble in the flesh.”¹³² He reiterated the message in a published sermon, declaring (while himself a married man) that, “Some people think it clever to have wives and children, but they want a thousand times more grace than they had when they were single.”¹³³ Marriage brought comfort and help, but spouses needed to remain ever vigilant lest the distractions of the world lead them away from Christ. Soon after Whitefield married Elizabeth James, a widow ten years older than him, he assured fellow revivalist Gilbert Tennent that a wife would in no way hinder his work: “In that respect, I am just the same as before marriage.”¹³⁴ That Whitefield made explicit his continued commitment to the ministry reveals

¹³⁰ In his desire for a wife who would “help” his work, Whitefield was also quite direct in admitting that he needed to marry so that his wife could run his Georgia orphanage, desiring a woman “qualified to govern children, and direct persons of her own sex.” Whitefield to William Seward, 26 June 1740, in George Whitefield, *Works*, 1:194.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

¹³² Whitefield to Mr. S—., 20 November 1750, in *ibid.*, 2:387.

¹³³ George Whitefield, “A Faithful Minister’s Parting Blessing,” in *Eighteen Sermons Preached by the Late Rev. George Whitefield* (London: Joseph Gurney, 1771), 18.

¹³⁴ Whitefield to Gilbert Tennent, 2 February 1742, in *Works*, 1:363. Whitefield married in 1741, at the age of twenty-six. He was unmarried during his first preaching tour in the colonies. Philip Greven, *The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1977), 137. On Whitefield’s ideas about the significance of his marriage to his ministry, see Henry, 74.

just how seriously he took his marital decision, and indicates that Wesley was certainly not alone in weighing the drawbacks of marriage and the benefits of singleness.

In 1751, a decade after Whitefield wed, the forty-eight-year-old Wesley married widow Molly Vazeille. His decision to marry after his long commitment to singleness was the result of both shifting theological ideas and practical concerns. By the late 1740s, Wesley had come to terms with his doubts over the twenty-seventh apostolic canon, concluding that celibacy was not a requirement of the clergy. He looked back on his error in a journal entry written in 1749, explaining that he had earlier been “persuaded, ‘It was unlawful for a Priest to marry,’ grounding that Persuasion on the (supposed) Sense of the Primitive Church.”¹³⁵ His “persuasion,” however, “vanished away when I read with my own Eyes Bishop Beverege’s *Codex Conciliorum*. I then found the very Council of Nice had determined just the contrary to what I had supposed.”¹³⁶

In addition to his doubts about apostolic precedent, Wesley had also become less persuaded by the mystical writings of radical Pietists.¹³⁷ Though he had long dismissed Behmenist Sophiology, he still shared some of the mystics’ concerns about sex, recording in the same diary entry that, “by reading some of the Mystic Writers, I was brought to think ‘Marriage was the less Perfect state,’ and that there was some degree (at least) of ‘Taint upon the Mind, necessarily attending the Marriage-Bed.’” Wesley was convinced otherwise, however, by a closer reading of scripture: “St. Paul slowly and gradually awakened me out of my Mystic Dream; and convinced me, ‘The bed is undefiled, and no necessary Hindrance to the Highest

¹³⁵ John Wesley, *Diary of John Wesley*, in *Wesley’s Last Love*, ed. Augustin Leger (London: J.M. Dent and Sons, Ltd, 1910), 67. Wesley wrote this journal entry while considering marriage to a different woman, Grace Murray, his housekeeper. His brother and colleagues prevented the union by whisking Murray off to wed another man. On the Grace Murray incident, see Abelove, *Evangelist of Desire*, 19-23; Lawrence, *One Family Under God*, 141-44.

¹³⁶ Wesley, *Diary*, 68.

¹³⁷ On Wesley’s rejection of mysticism, see Tuttle, 91-142. Though Wesley abandoned his most radical ideas from the mystic tradition, Tuttle argues that mystic strands still remained in Methodism. See pp. 143-66.

Perfection.”¹³⁸ Equally important to his change of heart was the persuasion of his Methodist colleagues. Wesley admitted that he did not fully “shake off” his suspicion of marriage and sex “till our last Conference in London,” referring to the annual Methodist conference in 1748.¹³⁹ Reasons that were less theological in nature might also have accounted for Wesley’s decision to wed. He had hoped that his marriage would “break down the prejudice about the world and him,” referring to rumors that his ministry was simply an excuse to gain intimate access to female followers.¹⁴⁰ Committing himself to one particular woman through marriage, he hoped, would convince his critics that his interactions with Methodist women did not extend beyond pastoral counseling.

Though Wesley had a change of heart regarding marriage, he remained committed to the idea that no human relationship should impose on his ministry or on his relationship to God. In terms similar to Whitefield, Wesley wrote after his wedding, “I cannot understand how a Methodist preacher can answer it to God to preach one sermon or travel one day less in a married than in a single state. In this respect surely ‘it remaineth that they who have wives be as though

¹³⁸ Wesley, *Diary*, 68-69. Other writings that chart Wesley’s changing ideas about ministerial celibacy include his pamphlet, “Popery Calmly Considered,” and his analysis of Hebrews in *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*. To discredit the mandate of clerical celibacy in the Catholic Church, Wesley relied upon the familiar verses of 1 Timothy 4 (in which forbidding marriage was the “doctrine of devils”) and Hebrews 13:4 (which declared that “marriage is honorable in all”). See Wesley, “Popery Calmly Considered,” in *The Works of the Rev. John Wesley* (New York: J. & J. Harper, 1827), 10:50-64; and Wesley, *Explanatory Notes Upon the New Testament*, 3rd ed. (Bristol: William Pine, 1762), 3:89-137. On Wesley’s larger reckoning with marriage, see Coe, 66.

¹³⁹ Wesley, *Diary*, 69.

¹⁴⁰ Wesley, *Journal*, 3:515. Wesley’s marriage was far from harmonious. Vazeille had left him by 1758, publicly voicing accusations of adultery. Coe, 71. The rumors that surrounded Wesley followed other single male evangelical preachers as well. English minister John Valton wed after accusations that he was too close to a certain married woman. Lawrence, “I thought I felt a sinful desire,” 188. New Jersey revivalist Theodorus Frelinghuysen was beset by a scandal regarding his intimacy with fellow male preacher, Jacobus Schuurman. Frelinghuysen married Eva Terjun soon after, while Schuurman married one of her sisters. Randall Herbert Balmer, *A Perfect Babel of Confusion: Dutch Religion and English Culture in the Middle Colonies* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 110-22. Popular pieces about lascivious evangelical preachers helped feed the rumor mill, such as the poem, *The Methodists, an Humorous Burlesque Poem: Address’d to the Rev. Mr. Whitefield and His Followers* (London: John Brett, 1739) and John Collet’s 1776 drawing, *Continence of a Methodist Parson, or Divinity in Danger* (London: R. Sayer and J. Bennett, 1776). On the sexual nature of anti-Methodist critiques, see Henry D. Rack, “‘But, Lord, let it be Betsy!’ Love and marriage in early Methodism,” *Proceedings of the Wesley Historical Society* 53 (1): 3-4; Lawrence, “I thought I felt a sinful desire,” 179-81.

they had none.”¹⁴¹ Wesley also made his sentiments clear to Vazeille, assuring her before they married that his heavenly priorities would always outweigh his earthly ones: “If I thought it would be otherwise, much as I love you, I would see your face no more.”¹⁴² Whether married or single, he aimed to put his faith and ministerial duties first.¹⁴³

Wesley’s and Whitefield’s concerns about marriage made sense not only in the context of a much older Christian discourse, but also in the more recent turn towards quasi-monastic revival, primitive Christianity, and Pietism. Their ideas circulated as well amidst longstanding Pauline justifications for celibacy, forwarded by believers like Jerusha Ompan who found in scripture a mandate for the single life. In many ways, the Great Awakening was an expansion of earlier conversations, already in place before the revivals began but amplified as the message of ministers like Wesley, Whitefield, and Beissel reached larger audiences. Whether they joined the growing number of celibates at Ephrata and Bethlehem, read Wesley’s pamphlet praising singleness, or took to heart Whitefield’s sermons about the snares of earthly marriages and the joy of heavenly ones, colonists engaged more deeply with questions that had long concerned devout Christians seeking wholehearted devotion to God. At the same time, however, the Great Awakening spun the conversation in new directions and took hold in places long accustomed to viewing the single life with suspicion. Converts responded to the fervor of revivalism by carving out new models of singleness and sexual renunciation that would leave an enduring mark on American ideas about celibacy.

¹⁴¹ Wesley *Journal*, 3:517. Wesley voiced similar thoughts to ministers who asked for guidance regarding their own marital decisions. See, for example, his 1782 advice to Zachariah Yewdall in *Letters*, 5:62-63. Lawrence discusses Wesley’s marital advice to Methodist circuit riders in the late eighteenth century in *One Family Under God*, 150-55 and “I thought I felt a sinful desire,” 184-86.

¹⁴² As quoted in William Henry Meredith, *The Real John Wesley* (Cincinnati: Jennings and Py, 1903), 341.

¹⁴³ Even after his marriage, Wesley continued to declare that singleness was preferable. Revising his 1743 pamphlet on the single life in 1765—after his marriage with Vazeille had already crumbled—Wesley walked back his more radical claim that continence was gifted to all believers at the moment of conversion, but he nonetheless maintained that celibacy was the higher calling.

Departures: Great Awakening Innovations in American Celibacy

While the examples of singleness proposed by believers like Ompan, Wesley, and Beissel were relatively familiar to colonists, the Great Awakening introduced two important elements to the colonial discourse that were less so. First, revivalism extended concerns about celibacy to people who were already married, forcing them to recalibrate their relationships both via their emotions and their bodies. Second, revivalism enabled single people to create alternatives to marriage that could thrive outside of the monastic-style communities supporting celibacy in other faith traditions, whether Pietism or Catholicism. Both of these elements contained conservative and radical strains, and like the Great Awakening itself, attracted both praise and wariness.

Married people who responded to Whitefield's call to espousal with Christ faced a different set of challenges from those who were single. Compared to earlier ideas that emerged after the Reformation saying that matrimony was spiritually edifying, Great Awakening converts often found their marriages a hindrance. The experience of conversion, in which believers pursued a more intimate relationship with Christ, often necessitated a trade-off, requiring a degree of withdrawal from their human relationships. Many converts responded by inserting both physical and emotional space into their earthly marriages. Sarah Pierpont Edwards, despite being married to one of New England's most prominent revivalists, Jonathan Edwards, and participating in frequent group worship services, had her most profound spiritual moments in solitude. It was, in fact, the experience of being alone that gave those moments such power. In one instance, Edwards was deeply affected while hearing a sermon on Romans 8:34, but it was only afterwards, on her own, that the message truly struck her: "But when I was alone, the words came to my mind with far greater power and sweetness... They appeared to me with undoubted certainty as the words of God, and as words which God did pronounce concerning me. I had no

more doubt of it, than I had of my being.”¹⁴⁴ To be sure, the need to distance oneself from earthly distractions so as to commune with God was nothing new in Congregationalist Massachusetts, but revivalism made Edwards’s need for solitude especially urgent; it was a time not for theological study or spiritual reflection, but for Christ to come closest to her. When she was alone, she wrote, “The presence of God was so near, and so real, that I seemed scarcely conscious of any thing else.”¹⁴⁵

Much of Edwards’s account revolves around moments of separation from her human relationships in order to gain intimacy with God. She noted that, even before the revivals began, she had fully submitted herself to Christ, save for two worldly concerns: “1st. My own good name and fair reputation among men, and especially the esteem and just treatment of the people of this town; 2dly. And more especially, the esteem, and love and kind treatment of my husband.”¹⁴⁶ That second concern was particularly pressing. Shortly before she recorded this entry, her husband had upbraided her for “fail[ing] in some measure in point of prudence, in some conversation I had with Mr. Williams of Hadley, the day before.”¹⁴⁷ The event served to “bereave me of the quietness and calm of my mind, in any respect not to have the good opinion of my husband.”¹⁴⁸ To Edwards, the incident with her husband represented far more than a marital squabble; it was a barometer gauging her submission to God and her distance from worldly concerns. Being unnerved by her husband’s censure disappointed her: “This, I much disliked in myself, as arguing a want of a sufficient rest in God, and felt a disposition to fight against it, and look to God for his help, that I might have a more full and entire rest in him,

¹⁴⁴ Sarah Pierpont Edwards, in Dwight, 173.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid., 172.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid. For a fuller explanation of the incident with Williams, see Sue Lane McCulley and Dorothy Z. Baker, eds., *The Silent and Soft Communion: The Spiritual Narratives of Sarah Pierpont Edwards and Sarah Prince Gill* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 2005), xxxi-xxxiii.

¹⁴⁸ Sarah Pierpont Edwards, in Dwight, 172.

independent of all other things.”¹⁴⁹ Edwards measured her spiritual progress by how much weight she put in worldly opinions of her, especially the opinion of her husband.

It was in the height of Northampton’s revival season, January 1742, that Edwards finally became “independent” of such fears, committing herself to “rest in God” at the price of greater emotional distance from her spouse. Her intimacy with God was so heightened—“My God was my all, my only portion”—that even the opinion of her husband no longer concerned her:

After some time, the two evils mentioned above, as those which I should have been least able to bear, came to my mind...but now I was carried exceedingly above even such things as these, and I could feel that, if I were exposed to them both, they would seem comparatively nothing. There was then a deep snow on the ground, and I could think of being driven from my home into the cold and snow, of being chased from the town with the utmost contempt and malice, and of being left to perish with the cold, as cast out by all the world, with perfect calmness and serenity...My mind seemed as much above all such things, as the sun is above the earth.¹⁵⁰

At the same time that Edwards moved closer to Christ, she also moved—emotionally—away from her husband and from the stock she placed in her marital relationship. She could be “driven from [her] home” and “cast out by all the world” so long as she rested in God. Characteristic of many Great Awakening narratives, Edwards’s renegotiation of her heavenly relationship necessarily led to a renegotiation of her earthly ones. Though she remained a devoted and supportive spouse, she created space within her marriage so that her attention to God outweighed her attention to her husband.

Edwards’s story is influenced by the fact that both she and her husband were touched by the message of revivalism. For converts whose spouses did not share their spiritual concerns, espousal with Christ was yet more fraught. While Edwards welcomed the degree of separation that entered her marriage, others lamented the distance that emerged in their human relationships. Conversion could bring respite as well as a disarming sense of loneliness for those

¹⁴⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰ Ibid., 174.

whose spouses were either uninterested in revival or were unable to obtain the same degree of intimacy with Christ. Connecticut farmwoman Hannah Heaton, who experienced conversion after hearing Whitefield preach, struggled with a marriage in which “the yoke is unequal,” a reference to 2 Corinthians 6:14: “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?”¹⁵¹ For Heaton and others during the Awakening, this verse was of particular concern. Its message was clear: those who had experienced the new birth should not marry those who had not. Itinerant revivalist preachers had warned Heaton to be careful of that very snare: “One night after meeting mr davenport come to me and warned me not to marry an unconverted man and told me them schriptures that speakes against it.”¹⁵² Heaton, however, admitted that she did not heed Davenport’s advice, a lapse that she credited to her susceptibility to the devil. Reflecting back, Heaton wrote, “Oh poor me here i rebelled as i shall shew by and by (now i began to see more and more that the world flesh and devil was against me).”¹⁵³ She believed that her alignment with Christ had made her more vulnerable to Satan, who sought to win her back by leading her to dismiss scriptural commands and ignore the teachings of revivalist preachers.

Like many converts, Heaton alternated between moments of extreme joy and extreme despair during and after her conversion, often going long periods of time when she “felt an

¹⁵¹ Hannah Heaton, *The World of Hannah Heaton: The Diary of an Eighteenth-Century New England Farm Woman*, ed. Barbara E. Lacey (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 22. Pagination is Lacey’s. Wesley referred to the same verse in his 1743 pamphlet, *Thoughts on Marriage and a Single Life* (pp. 5-6). Hannah Heaton (1721-1794) grew up in Long Island and experienced conversion in 1741, after hearing George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent preach in New Haven, Connecticut. She married Theophilus Heaton, Jr. in 1743 and moved to North Haven, Connecticut, where they operated a farm and raised two sons. Heaton kept a diary that focused mostly on her spiritual journey. It spans four hundred pages and covers a forty-year period. For biographical information on Heaton and an analysis of her writings, see Lacey’s introduction to her diary, xi-xxxii.

¹⁵² Heaton, 13. Davenport, one of the more controversial itinerants of the Awakening, spent the summer of 1741 preaching in Connecticut. See Lacey’s note in Heaton, 321.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 13.

absent God.”¹⁵⁴ It was during one of those more difficult periods in 1743, at the age of twenty-two, that she married Theophilus Heaton. As she explained it, “God withdrew from me and in this dark frame of mind i married to an unconverted man conterary i believe to the mind and will of god.”¹⁵⁵ Though Theophilus attended Congregationalist services, he never participated in the revivals, nor did he follow his wife when she broke from their parish to join local separatists.¹⁵⁶ She saw her marriage to a man of nominal faith as an act of divine rebellion, one that would long haunt her. As her case demonstrates, marital decisions came to take on especially charged significance in the fervor of revivalism, reaping both earthly and spiritual consequences.¹⁵⁷

Because the Great Awakening had sharpened the problem of being “unequally yoked,” Heaton and her husband’s spiritual differences plagued their fifty-year marriage. She insisted that the issue was not lack of affection, writing, “I can truly say i love my husband nor would i if it were lawful change him for the best man on earth. But alas the yoak is unequal.”¹⁵⁸ Ultimately, it mattered little if Theophilus attended Congregational services, if Hannah loved him, or if he was a moral man. In the logic of Great Awakening revivalism, Paul’s injunction in 2 Corinthians 6:14 was her sole standard of assessing her marriage. She longed for Theophilus’s own conversion and desired to make her “house a house of god and every soul in it a tent for the holy ghost to dwell in,” but it was not to be. Neither Theophilus nor her sons shared in Hannah’s

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 26.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid., 20.

¹⁵⁶ Heaton’s neighbors were also concerned about her failure to attend the local Congregationalist church, and in 1758 she was charged with breaking the Sabbath. The case went to trial, but her husband—much to his wife’s protest—paid the fine to release the charges against her. See Lacey’s introduction to Heaton, xx.

¹⁵⁷ According to Lacey, Heaton believed that all “her subsequent afflictions were a punishment for disobeying God’s word” on the issue of marriage. Yeager makes a similar point. See Lacey introduction to Heaton, xxii and Yeager, 68. In one instance, for example, Heaton wrote, “I seemd as if i was cast out of gods sight and he in anger had shut out my cries” (23).

¹⁵⁸ Heaton, 22.

piety, making her feel isolated in her own home and in her closest earthly relationships.¹⁵⁹ Soon after her wedding, she remembered feeling “alone on the earth now. I had no husband that could know what ailed my soul.”¹⁶⁰ Though her natal family had also experienced conversion, she lived far away from them and from the Long Island separatists with whom she had worshipped before her marriage. Heaton’s conversion may have increased her intimacy with God, but it also greatly complicated her earthly entanglements, making more acute her feelings of isolation.¹⁶¹

She returned to the problem of her lonely spiritual journey again and again, lamenting that, “Ah now I had no husband nor friend to help my mind.”¹⁶² Like other troubles she faced during her life, Heaton believed that her sorrow was her due punishment for marrying an unconverted man:

Lord grant that my marrying may be a warning to all gods children. Remember what peter got by going to the high priests hall without warrent or call. God commanded the children of israel not to make marriages with other nations lest it was a snare to them god forbid. . . . Again god says be not unequally yoked with unbelievers for what communion hath light with darknes or what concord hath christ with belie. And how can twoo walk together except they are agreed and agreed they cannot be while one loves christ and the other hates him and his.¹⁶³

In contrast to the examples of happy Biblical unions, Heaton saw her own marriage as a cautionary tale. She had denied God’s command to “be not unequally yoked with unbelievers” and now stood as a warning for others. “O be like him you that are godly parents,” she advised.

¹⁵⁹ Late in Heaton’s life, one of her sons (Jonathan) became more interested in religion, much to his mother’s relief. For most of her life, however, her husband and sons maintained Old Light loyalties. Lacey introduction to Heaton, xxiii-xxv.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶¹ See, for example, an incident between Heaton and Theophilus’s family, with whom they lived during the first year of their marriage: “Now there was wicked practices in the family & i did reprove them and the family was soon set against me and we was turned out and no portion given us as the rest of the children had. We had not so much as a house to put our heads in. One of the neighbours toock us in and i a stranger away from all my freinds and o the false stories that was told about me i pray god to forgive them.” Ibid., 21.

¹⁶² Ibid., 24.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 21.

“Be faithful and prayerful and i doubt not you might know as weel as abraham and neomy who your children should marry.”¹⁶⁴

Because her conversion made her human relationships so fraught, Heaton took especial pains to create moments of solitude. It was when alone that she found the most relief for her sufferings: “The next sabbath i was low and at night i went away alone and poured out my complaint to god. But ah he heard me then when i could hardly believe he heard at all.”¹⁶⁵ When she had neither the space nor opportunity for solitude, she carved out time to herself wherever she could. During a period of spiritual darkness, while so caught up “in many outward troubles” that she became “sensible [of the] withdrawings of the lord,” she searched for moments of solitude after the busyness of the day was done: “I use to sit up a nights after my family was abed & go away and on my knees on the ground pleading for mercy and sometimes i have lain on the ground wrastling & crying for help.”¹⁶⁶ With her family asleep, Heaton hoped to trade at least temporarily her troubled earthly relationships for closeness with God. She stole such moments whenever possible, whether retreating to the quietness of the barn with Bible in hand or relishing a solitary evening walk home after meeting.¹⁶⁷

Like Heaton, Nathan Cole—who had abandoned his tools in the field to hear Whitefield preach—also grappled with how his relationship with God affected his relationships with those closest to him, especially his spouse. Though his wife also sought religious rebirth, she was never able to obtain the intimacy with Christ that her husband did, a problem that would resurface throughout their marriage.¹⁶⁸ What put the most distance between them, however, was

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid., 18.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 23.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 15, 17-18.

¹⁶⁸ On his wife’s less radical experience of conversion and her stance on separatism, see Michael J. Crawford’s introduction to Cole’s spiritual journal, 90. The fact that Cole became a full-fledged separatist while his wife did not strained their relationship.

not so much their different degrees of spiritual progress, but the fact that Cole's conversion experience often led him to isolate himself, both physically and emotionally. When Cole retreated to the parlor for three days on end, feeling both the anguish of conviction and the relief of God's grace, he relegated all of his earthly relationships and commitments to secondary importance: "presently my Wife came into the room and asked me what I cried for; I gave her little or no answer, she stood a while and went out again; for I was swallowed up in God."¹⁶⁹ For Cole, being "swallowed up in God" prevented him from leaving even one foot in the world. Like other converts, he drew an especially sharp distinction between his sacred and secular affairs, making any sort of shared ground or compromise nearly impossible. Espousal to Christ demanded wholehearted commitment, precluding—albeit temporarily—engagement even with his wife, the person he described as "very near and dear to me."¹⁷⁰

In some instances, Cole barely registered his human interactions at all. During the same period of isolation, he recalled that "there came somebody and opened the Door and spake to me, but I made no answer nor turned to see who it was: but I remember I knew the voice but soon forgot who it was."¹⁷¹ Being with God was all-consuming, making not just Cole's spousal relationship of little concern, but also any earthly distraction. As with Heaton and Edwards, Cole's growing intimacy with Christ necessarily distanced him from his human relationships. Amidst the urgency of revivalism, he found it exceedingly difficult to hold both his heavenly and earthly concerns at once. For Cole and others, the experience of conversion had led to a new

¹⁶⁹ Cole, 97. It was common for converts to describe themselves as being "swallowed up in God." See, for example, Isaac Backus's conversion narrative, in Lovejoy, 45; Jonathan Edwards's account, in Dwight, 61; Sarah Pierpont Edwards's account, in Dwight, 178, 180. Susan Juster discusses this phenomenon in *Disorderly Women: Sexual Politics and Evangelicalism in Revolutionary New England* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1994), 59-66.

¹⁷⁰ Cole, 104.

¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 97.

reckoning of their marital relationships, shifting the balance of their affections away from their spouses and towards God.

For other married people, however, the Awakening had much more radical implications, leading them to forego sexual relations with their spouses or absent themselves from their marriages altogether. Drawing on a very different set of concerns, these more radical separatists entered head-on into larger Great Awakening debates about authority—both ministerial and civil—and about the effects of conversion on the body. A group of separatist Baptists in Cumberland, Rhode Island offers a clear example. In 1749, Joseph Bennett petitioned the colonial government for a divorce from his wife, Molly, daughter of Ebenezer Ward.¹⁷² Bennett was seeking divorce on the grounds of adultery, alleging that while he was away at sea, his wife had moved in with Solomon Finney and had become pregnant with Finney's child.¹⁷³

According to the draft of divorce, the couple's problems stemmed from the radical influences of revivalism itself. The issue began in February of 1747,

when the said Ebenezer Ward, having imbibed and cherished certain wicked and strange tenets and principles destructive to government and against the matrimonial laws and rights of the English Nation, did then suggest unto the said Molly, his daughter, being then the said Joseph's wife, that he, the said Joseph, was in an unconverted State and Condition, and that it was sinful for her to cohabit with him as her lawful husband, and the said Molly, attending to the wicked and evil council and advice of the said Ebenezer, he the said Ebenezer, together with one Solomon Finney, a person of like pernicious and evil principles, did conspire to seduce the said Molly, the said Joseph's wife, to leave him and...to deliver herself up to the said Solomon to Bed and Company and hath ever since cohabited with him in an adulterous manner...¹⁷⁴

¹⁷² Ebenezer Ward's case is more complex than is presented here. Even apart from his role in his daughter's divorce, he was a problematic figure in Cumberland because he had taken it upon himself as an untrained layperson to baptize converts. For more details on Ward's threat to ministerial authority and on the Bennett affair, see McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 100-23.

¹⁷³ Court testimony offered in defense of Molly suggests that Joseph Bennet may have played a more active role than he let on, perhaps intending to desert his wife by going to sea. See the testimony of Joseph and Rebeckah Fisher, transcribed in Appendix 1 of McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 119-20.

¹⁷⁴ "Rough draft of the Act of divorce," transcribed in Appendix 4 of McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 122-23.

At its root, the case revolved around the same concern that had had plagued Hannah Heaton and had become especially problematic during the Great Awakening: the problem of being married to an unconverted spouse. Where the Bennett situation differed, however, was in the response it provoked. Heaton upheld her marriage and searched for intimacy with Christ within it, while Molly believed she was obligated to obey the injunction in 2 Corinthians 6:14 by removing herself from her “unequally yoked” union and entering into a more fitting one. According to the testimony of two of Ward’s neighbors, such ideas made sense in the context of the Awakening: “about this time there was a considerable discourse about marrying in the new covenant, and this Bennet’s [sic] wife was of the opinion she had not got the right husband and that one [Solomon] Finney was made for her.”¹⁷⁵ The idea that “Finney was made for her” necessitated Molly’s exit from her marriage so that she could align herself with scriptural commands.

At stake for the Wards and Finney, on the one hand, and for Bennett and the colony of Rhode Island, on the other, was the issue of authority. To Molly, Solomon, and Ebenezer, spiritual obligations always trumped civil laws and officials. The extant legal union between Molly and Joseph made little difference in what Molly saw as God’s will for her life. Her marriage was entirely a spiritual concern, beyond the reach of colonial law. The opposite was true for the Rhode Island legislators who viewed Ebenezer Ward’s “strange tenets and principles [as] destructive to government and against the matrimonial laws and rights of the English nation.”¹⁷⁶ They placed little stock in the spiritual authority to which Molly deferred. Regardless of the veracity of her claim that God had led her to unite with Finney, they believed she was ultimately bound to civil authorities in issues related to marriage and divorce.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁷⁶ Ibid., 122.

Molly's case did not just revolve around her absenting herself from her marriage, but absenting herself from sexual relations as well. Part of her defense for moving in with Finney was that the two would have a chaste spiritual union. As Samuel Bartlet explained in his testimony, "I hear Molley say that Solomon Finney and she was man and wife Enternally but not Externally and further this Deponent Saith that a few days after, Molley was at my House and I asked Her what she meant by telling Squier Lapom that finney and she was man and wife, and she said that they was man and wife in the sight of the Lord and it was made known to them that it was so."¹⁷⁷ The issue was once again about authority—Molly and Solomon were married "in the sight of the Lord"—but it was also about what kind of marriage they shared. Molly claimed to be married to Solomon "Enternally" (internally), but not "Externally," describing their union as a celibate spiritual marriage rather than a sexual one. Unlike celibate married couples who joined the Moravians and Ephratans, and unlike converts who renounced marriage in order to enter a spiritual union with Christ, Molly left a sexual union for a chaste one with another man.

In a blow to the coreligionists who rallied around her, however, she admitted to having sexual relations with her "spiritual" husband, and Joseph Bennett was granted a divorce on the grounds of adultery. The news of Molly's pregnancy "took all heart" from her father, lay preacher Ebenezer Ward, who had "believed Phinney and his daughter meant no harm lodging together for they lay with the Bible between them."¹⁷⁸ By most of its chroniclers, the episode in Cumberland came to be remembered as the story of a father-cum-exhorter duped by the spiritual charades of his own daughter, a victory for Great Awakening opponents who trafficked in

¹⁷⁷ "Testimony of Samuel Bartlet of Cumberland," transcribed in Appendix 2 of McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 122.

¹⁷⁸ Molly and Solomon were legally married in 1750 in the town of Norton, Massachusetts, where they raised their children. See McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 119. Quotations are from Isaac Backus, in Appendix 1 of McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 121.

revivalism's excess.¹⁷⁹ Duped or not, radical separatists like Ward posed very real threats to colonial officials concerned about upholding civil authority and social order. In the same month that Rhode Island legislators granted Joseph Bennett his divorce, they passed, "An Act Against Adultery, Polygamy, and Unlawfully Marrying Persons; and for the Relief of Such Persons as are Injured by the Breach of Marriage Covenants." Reminding Rhode Islanders of the colonial government's jurisdiction over marriage and divorce, the act punished by fines and public whipping those who committed adultery or who remarried while their spouses were still alive.¹⁸⁰

Despite the fact that Molly's claim to celibacy fell apart when she admitted her pregnancy—the timing of which made it clear that the child was Finney's, not Bennett's—what is significant is that her and Finney's spiritual union made sense to her fellow Cumberland separatists in the first place. Molly and her coreligionists were part of a larger strain of radical revivalists in New England who ascribed to perfectionist beliefs, "declar[ing] that as a result of their religious conversion they were so perfect that they were no longer capable of sin."¹⁸¹ Perfectionist ideas, while certainly not new to the Christian tradition, appeared among radical New England separatists who took the Great Awakening's emphasis on conversion to its furthest extreme. When explaining their break from the local Congregationalist church, a group of Norton, Massachusetts separatists illustrated the short step between conversion and perfection, stating "that the life of religion consists [in] the knowledge of God and a conformity to him in

¹⁷⁹ On the ways in which the Ward-Bennet affair came to be remembered, see *ibid.*, 102-03. Isaac Backus wrote that, "the affair of Solomon Finney's taking Bennet's wife and having of it countenanced by a pretence of new covenant marriage" was "well known" in New England as early as 1751. As quoted in *ibid.*, 115.

¹⁸⁰ Rhode Island Colony, *Acts and Resolves, 1749* (Newport, RI: James Franklin, 1749), 53-54. McLoughlin argues that the case between Molly Ward Bennett and Solomon Finney played an important role in leading the Rhode Island legislature to draft the law. The act was approved during the same session in which Joseph Bennett's divorce was granted (*Soul Liberty*, 103).

¹⁸¹ McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 104.

the inner man; which necessarily produced an external conformity to his laws.”¹⁸² Critical is their close linking of internal and external conformity: conversion wrought the complete alignment of the “inner man” with God’s external laws. The ability to rise above sin “necessarily” followed on the heels of such profound internal change.¹⁸³ Drawing on the scriptural authority of Matthew 5:48—“Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect”—many radical separatists believed it incumbent upon them to fulfill Christ’s pronouncement not just in the world to come, but here on earth.¹⁸⁴

Accompanying their perfectionist impulse was an extraordinary sense of assurance. In stark contrast to questioning and backsliding converts like Hannah Heaton and Nathan Cole, the Norton separatists insisted “that all doubting in a believer is sinful, being contrary to the commands of God, hurtful to the soul, and a hindrance to the performance of duty.”¹⁸⁵ To speculate whether or not one was truly converted was to deny the perfectionist claim that converts gained freedom from sin. In this logic, it is no wonder that Molly and her coreligionists in Cumberland were so confident that “Finney was made for her,” and it is no wonder that they supported her profession to a spiritual, rather than sexual, union. Perfectionism, liberating them from all sin, had freed them from the temptations of the flesh. Continence was completely attainable, and sexual relations need have no place in a marital union.¹⁸⁶

¹⁸² “The Articles of Faith and Covenant Drawn Up and Agreed Upon by the Church of Christ in Norton,” transcribed by George Faber Clark in *History of the Town of Norton, Bristol County, Massachusetts* (Boston: Crosby, Nichols, and Company, 1859), 446.

¹⁸³ The links between Wesley’s perfectionist ideas and those of New England separatists are clear. Though Wesley would modify his thinking during the 1760s, he believed that all converts were liberated from lust at the moment of conversion. The Norton separatists, however, took Wesley’s perfectionist logic one step further, claiming that converts could be free of all manner of sin. On Wesley’s views on perfectionism, see note 118.

¹⁸⁴ McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 108.

¹⁸⁵ “The Articles of Faith and Covenant,” in Clark, 446.

¹⁸⁶ In this instance too, separatists took Wesley’s perfectionist thinking one step further. To Wesley, the gift of continence granted to all believers at conversion was extraordinarily difficult to maintain. Most would lose the gift by letting their guard down and falling prey to worldly temptations. To Cumberland and Norton separatists, however, converts were completely capable of holding on to their purity, freed from committing sin.

Also accompanying perfectionist ideas were claims on immortality. In his *Church History of New-England*, Isaac Backus described members of a Baptist church in Easton, Massachusetts who “had run into the most delusive notions that could be conceived of; even so as to forsake their lawful wives and husbands and take others, and they go so far as to declare themselves to be perfect and immortal, or that the resurrection was past already, as some did in the Apostolic Age, II Tim. ii, 18.”¹⁸⁷ Like their claims to perfection, the Easton Baptists’ declaration of immortality was grounded in a particular reading of scripture, John 11:25-26: “Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live: And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.” While “most learned theologians said [John 11:25-26] applied only to the *souls* of the elect,” radical separatists interpreted Jesus’s words to apply to their bodies as well.¹⁸⁸

By the late 1740s, these ideas had spread to several separatist groups throughout southern New England.¹⁸⁹ Backus mentioned another Immortalist group in Taunton, Massachusetts whose members “hold that the union between two Persons when rightly married together is A Spiritual Union whereas God Says they Twain shall be one flesh:—they deny The Civil Authoritys Power in Marriage:—and they hold that they are Getting into a state of Perfection in this World so as to be free from all Sinckings And trouble, and so that they Shall Never Die, and many other corrupt things.”¹⁹⁰ Like radicals in Cumberland and Norton, the Easton and Taunton separatists took Great Awakening ideas to a further extreme. Instead of renegotiating their

¹⁸⁷ Isaac Backus, *A Church History of New-England. Extending from 1783 to 1796* (Boston: Manning and Loring, 1796), 3:160.

¹⁸⁸ McLoughlin, *Soul Liberty*, 110.

¹⁸⁹ In addition to the various places Backus mentioned, “Immortalist” groups sprang up in Hopkinton, Grafton, and Cambridge, Massachusetts as well as in Windham County, Connecticut. See C.G. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1962), 200-03.

¹⁹⁰ Isaac Backus, *Diary of Isaac Backus*, ed. William McLoughlin (Providence: Brown University Press, 1979), 1:141. Entry is from 24 June 1751. On Backus’s interaction with perfectionist groups throughout Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, see William McLoughlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1967), 34, 97-98.

marital relationships, as Edwards, Heaton, and Cole had done, they opted “to forsake their lawful wives and husbands and take others.” In doing so, they circumvented colonial officials, “deny[ing] The Civil Authoritys Power in Marriage” by recognizing God as the sole arbiter of their spousal relationships. The new marriages they created were not consummated in sexual union, when the “Twain shall be one flesh,” but instead in chaste “Spiritual Union.”¹⁹¹

Radical separatist claims to sexual renunciation departed from extant ideas about celibacy circulating during the Great Awakening. Whereas Ephratans practiced sexual abstinence as part of a longer tradition of mystical Sophiology, and whereas Wesley saw continence as a gift available to all believers at the moment of conversion, New England radical separatists renounced sex on the basis of direct revelation. Immortalist Sarah Prentice of Grafton, Massachusetts said that God himself had directed her to celibacy, telling minister Ebenezer Parkman “of the wonderful Change in her Body, her Sanctification, that God had shewn to her His mind & Will, she was taught henceforth to know no man after the Flesh, that she had not for above 20 years, not so much as shook Hands with any Man, &c.”¹⁹² Prentice was led to celibacy via those same “Communications directly from the Spirit of God” that Whitefield had earlier defended.¹⁹³ God had spoken to her individually, directly communicating “to her His mind & Will” that she should abstain from sexual relations.

¹⁹¹ On the designation of a “spiritual union” as a chaste one, see Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 141.

¹⁹² As quoted in Seeman, “Sarah Prentice and the Immortalists,” 121. Sarah Prentice, wife of New Light minister Solomon Prentice, first experienced conversion at the height of the Awakening in 1742. She gradually became more and more radical, ascribing to the ideas of both perfectionism and immortality. It was not until 1753, however, at the age of 36, that she adopted the practice of celibacy, having already given birth to several children. Minister Ebenezer Parkman was greatly alarmed by the following she amassed as a lay exhorter. See his discussion of her in *The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman, 1703-1782*, ed. Francis G. Walett (Worcester, MA: Printed for the American Antiquarian Society by Davis Press, Inc., 1974), 2:157-58, 3:279, 3:290. Though Solomon Prentice was radical in his own right, his wife developed far more extreme views. For more information on Sarah and Solomon Prentice, see Ross W. Beales, Jr., “The Ecstasy of Sarah Prentice: Death, Re-Birth, and the Great Awakening in Grafton, Massachusetts,” *Historical Journal of Massachusetts* 26, no. 2 (Summer 1997): 101-23.

¹⁹³ On Whitefield’s “Communications directly from the Spirit of God,” see note 19.

She explained to Isaac Backus how God's message had been revealed to her both spiritually and bodily, saying that "this night 2 months ago She passed thro' a change in her Body equivalent to Death, so that She had ben intirely free from any disorder in her Body or Corruption in her soul ever Since; and expected she ever should be So: and that her Body would never see Corruption, but would Live here 'till Christs personal coming."¹⁹⁴ The meaning of God's message was made clear to her on her physical person, which "passed thro' a change" that made her immune to "any disorder in her Body," including lusts of the flesh. Thirty-six years old and the mother of several children at the time of her revelation, Prentice chose to remain with her husband, Solomon, but to withdraw from sexual relations with him.

Her marriage to Solomon shifted in other ways as well—not just sexually, but affectively. Parkman noted that Prentice "speaks of her Husband under the name of Brother Solomon," indicating an important change in relational status. On one level, the use of "brother" signals the diminished role of sex in their relationship, but on another level, it signals the accompanying diminishment of an emotional bond. Prentice referred to all men as her brother: "Then came in Mr Benjamin Leland & Mr Samuel Cooper whom she call'd Brother Benjamin & Brother Samuel, &c."¹⁹⁵ By addressing Solomon like any other man, Prentice showed that the relationship they shared as husband and wife had lost some of its exclusivity. Like Sarah Edwards, Nathan Cole, and others, Prentice reconfigured the balance of attention she gave her spousal relationship. After conversion, her marital bond diminished in magnitude while her spiritual bonds grew. What mattered most to Prentice was not her familial identity, but her place in the larger fellowship of believers, all of whom became her "brothers." By the same token, her extension of the word "brother" to non-kin reveals that her faith community had become a new,

¹⁹⁴ Backus, *Diary*, 1:294. Entry is from 27 June 1753.

¹⁹⁵ As quoted in Seeman, "Sarah Prentice and the Immortalists," 121.

more expansive type of family to her. Like the Moravians whose choir system minimized believers' local, blood-tie loyalties in favor of broader, community-oriented ones, Prentice moved from the particular to the universal, reconfiguring the meaning and weight of her familial and spiritual relationships.¹⁹⁶

Several issues collided in Prentice's case for celibacy: the medium by which it came (direct revelation), the way it manifested itself (on the body), and the effect it had on her human relationships ("Brother Solomon"). All three elements alarmed critics of revivalism. In their *Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches*, a group of Massachusetts ministers railed against the very type of authority Prentice claimed, censuring zealous converts who mistook the "secret Impulses upon their Minds" for the "special Presence of GOD."¹⁹⁷ Though Isaac Backus was a staunch supporter of the Awakening, having himself experienced conversion at the hands of revivalist preachers, he too assessed Immortalist claims on celibacy as "awful errors," recounting in his diary numerous instances of "being sent for...to deal with Sundry persons" who had fallen prey to radical ideas and who threatened to tarnish the separatist cause.¹⁹⁸ Not only did critics dismiss Prentice's claims of direct revelation, but they also doubted her ability to

¹⁹⁶ Another Immortalist who opted for sexual renunciation, Shadrach Ireland, also traded local bonds for larger ones. Ireland and his followers lived communally in Harvard, Massachusetts where, according to Isaac Backus, "Ireland forbade them to marry, or lodge with each other, if they were married." Backus, *A History of New England*, 2:462. Ireland's understanding of celibacy was slightly different than Prentice's, however. Once people attained perfection, he believed they were free to resume sexual relations. An account by Ezra Stiles shows that Ireland was only somewhat successful at recruiting members into his ranks, whether they joined him at Harvard or adopted the tenets of celibacy and immortality on their own. Upon the death of one Immortalist in 1793, Stiles wrote that, "he was one of Old Ireland's Men & of the Company of a dozen or 15 wild Enthusiasts who about 50 years ago lived in & about Medford, Sutton, Uxbridge, & declared themselves *Immortals*." Ezra Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries and Other Miscellanies of Ezra Stiles, D.D., LL.D. 1755-1794*, ed. Franklin Bowditch Dexter (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1916), 418.

¹⁹⁷ *The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay in New-England...Occasion'd by the Late Happy Revival of Religion...*, in Bushman, *The Great Awakening*, 127. Skeptics who doubted divine revelation had plenty of fodder to work with during the Great Awakening. See Backus's account of a Canterbury, Connecticut man who claimed that God had told him his wife and children would die and that he would remarry. Several months later, his family was found poisoned and he had wed the very woman God foretold. The case was taken to court, but the man was acquitted. He was, however, excommunicated from his church. Backus, *A History of New England*, 2:89.

¹⁹⁸ Backus, *Diary*, 1:140-41. Entry is from 24 June 1751.

remain sexually continent. Invoking an attack that Protestants had long leveled against Catholic priests, they accused her of professing abstinence as a ruse to disguise sexual excess. Rumors swirled that she had taken up with another celibate Immortalist, Shadrach Ireland.¹⁹⁹

The cause of Prentice and Ireland was of course not helped by stories of fellow radical separatists like Molly Ward Bennet, who admitted to false claims of celibacy. To many of the Great Awakening's critics, sexual and familial disorder along was endemic to revivalism itself. For every defense of the Awakening as a legitimate "effusion of [the] Holy Spirit" emerged an attack warning of revivalism's strife and excess.²⁰⁰ The same Massachusetts pastors who railed against converts' mistaken "*secret Impulses upon the Mind*" also condemned the accompanying physical effects: "*disorderly Tumults*" and "*indecent Behaviors*."²⁰¹ Revivals, with their late-night meetings, mixed-sex audiences, and emotional preaching, served only to excite people's passions. Anglican clergyman Timothy Cutler drew a direct line between sexual disorder and the tenets of revivalism after Whitefield's tour in Boston, writing that, "Our presses are for ever teeming with books, and our women with bastards, though regeneration and conversion is the whole cry."²⁰² Like those who accused Prentice and Ireland of sexual relations, Cutler believed that converts were projecting a false piety, declaring "regeneration" while capitalizing on the circus of revival to indulge their passions.

In such a heated atmosphere, the possibility of sexual continence seemed all the more unlikely. Even though unmarried people were the one segment of colonial society expected—

¹⁹⁹ Looking back on the event, Ezra Stiles wrote in 1793 that Sarah Prentice "used to lie with Ireland as her spiritual husband" (418). Seaman argues, however, that "Stiles's report of Ireland and Prentice lying together was based more on rumor than anything else..." ("Sarah Prentice and the Immortalists," 120).

²⁰⁰ *The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly of Pastors of Churches in New-England...Occasion'd by the Late Happy Revival of Religion...*(1743), in Bushman, *The Great Awakening*, 129.

²⁰¹ *The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches in the Province of Massachusetts-Bay in New-England...Against Several Errors in Doctrine, and Disorders in Practice...*, in Bushman, *The Great Awakening*, 127.

²⁰² Timothy Cutler to Zachary Grey, 24 September 1743, in *Illustrations of the Literary History of the Eighteenth Century: Consisting of Authentic Memoirs and Original Letters of Eminent Persons*, ed. John Nichols (London: Nichols, Son, and Bentley, 1822), 4:303.

proscriptively at least—to be abstinent, they were also especially at risk, lacking the only outlet that legitimated sex in eighteenth-century America. In a different letter, Cutler recounted the story of an “old whimsical maid, crazed with Love for a young man” whom she wished would press suit. Her distress when he proved uninterested pushed her into a spiritual crisis, leading her to “turn towards...imaginary Religion, and set her to crying for she knew not what...”²⁰³

Though to her dismay she was unable to act on her sexual desire, she nevertheless fell prey to the passionate climate that, according to its critics, revivalism fueled. If an “old whimsical maid” could barely temper her sexual fervor, then how could a married woman like Sarah Prentice maintain her celibacy, living with her husband and worshipping in a radical sect with a man like Shadrach Ireland? In Pietist Pennsylvania too, critics doubted the motivations and claims of religious celibates. Neighbors whispered that members of the Ephrata Cloister were practicing “free love” instead of sexual renunciation.²⁰⁴ Several Brethren and even Beissel himself were severely beaten during the 1730s and 1740s by area residents who feared that Ephratan proselytizing was a ploy to entrap their wives and daughters.²⁰⁵

The difficulty that colonists had in conceiving that converts might not only choose abstinence but actually be able to maintain it made it especially easy for them to link celibacy with enthusiasm. In 1742, newspapers in Pennsylvania, Massachusetts, and South Carolina printed a story about the self-castration of a man named John Leek. The article in full reads: “About two Weeks ago, one *John Leek* of *Cohansie* in *West-New-Jersey*, after twelve Months Deliberation, made himself an Eunuch (as it is said) for the Kingdom of Heaven's Sake, having

²⁰³ Timothy Cutler to Edmund Gibson, 28 May 1739, transcribed by Douglas C. Stenerson in “An Anglican Critique of the Early Phase of the Great Awakening in New England: A Letter by Timothy Cutler,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 30, no. 3 (July 1973): 485.

²⁰⁴ In *Chronicon Ephratense*, Lamech and Agrippa recorded that the growth of Beissel’s community “created a terrible stir in the land, especially among the neighbors, who were partly degenerate Mennonites and partly spoiled church-people...” (91).

²⁰⁵ Alderfer, 48, 53; Klein, 70.

made such a Construction upon *Mat. xix. 12.* He is now under *Dr. Johnson's* Hands, and in a fair way of doing well.”²⁰⁶ The verse from Matthew 19:12 was of course the same one that both August Spangenberg and John Wesley had used to justify their own support of celibacy, though neither in any way advocated castration, and Wesley even removed castration from his definition of eunuch. Once again, the Great Awakening had enabled converts like Leek to push extant ideas about celibacy further. That his story was picked up by printers in three different colonies suggests that it held particular interest, offering readers an example of the enthusiasm that revivalism could foster.²⁰⁷ Though scholars disagree on the authenticity of the account—with one arguing that it sprang entirely from the imagination of Benjamin Franklin—the article nonetheless remains significant.²⁰⁸ Circulating at the height of the Awakening in 1742, Leek’s story resonated because it very well could have been true. His particular response to revivalism

²⁰⁶ Leek’s story appeared in the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 28 October 1742; *Boston Post-Boy*, 8 November 1742; *Boston Evening Post*, 8 November 1742; *Boston News-Letter*, 12 November 1742; *South Carolina Gazette*, 13 December 1742. The wording was the same in all five accounts.

²⁰⁷ Interest in Leek’s story might also have been helped by the recent appearance in the colonies of *Eunuchism Display'd*, written by French Huguenot Charles Ancillon (also spelled Ollincan). The book was first published in French in 1707 and translated into English in 1718, printed in London. Charles Ancillon, *Eunuchism Display'd: Describing All the Different Sorts of Eunuchs* (London: E. Curll, 1718). Copies were available in the colonies by 1734, if not sooner. See Thomas Cox, *A Catalogue of Books, In All Arts and Sciences* (Boston: T. Cox, 1734), 7. For a brief introduction and an excerpt of Ancillon’s text, see Ian McCormick, ed., *Secret Sexualities: A Sourcebook of Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Writing* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 21-34.

²⁰⁸ Jerry Weinberger believes Leek’s story was a fictional account invented by Benjamin Franklin, printer of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, where the article seems to have originated. Weinberger, “Benjamin Franklin Unmasked,” in *Benjamin Franklin’s Intellectual World*, eds. Paul E. Kerry and Matthew Scott Holland (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012), 17-18. Cynthia Lyerly, on the other hand, presents the account as genuine, though she mentions it only briefly in the footnote of an article concerned about a different instance of self-castration in the 1780s. Lyerly, “A Tale of Two Patriarchs; or, How a Eunuch and a Wife Created a Family in the Church,” *Journal of Family History* 28, no. 4 (2003): 505. Because Leek’s story is not their main focus, neither Weinberger nor Lyerly offer an explanation of how they reached their conclusions. The identity of the “Dr. Johnson” in the article is unclear, though it is likely Samuel Johnson of Connecticut, an Anglican minister whose opposition to the revivals was well-known and who became a close colleague of Franklin’s in the 1750s—a fact that supports Weinberger’s conclusion. Franklin too was wary of the Awakening’s tendency to foster enthusiasm. Leek’s story took place in the Raritan Valley, a region that was particularly swept up in revival fervor under the influence of Theodorus Frelinghuysen, whose own sexual tendencies sparked rumors (see note 140). A family by the name of Leek (also spelled Leake) resided in Cohansie, New Jersey in the 1730s-1740s, and a man named John Leek obtained a marriage license to Phebe Devinney from the colony of New Jersey in 1735. My research, however, yielded no evidence linking that Leek family to John Leek’s castration. On the Leeks of Cohansie, see Richard A. Harrison, *Princetonians, 1769-1775: A Biographical Dictionary* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 394. For Leek’s marriage license, see US GenWeb Archives, State of New Jersey, <http://files.usgwarchives.net/nj/statewide/vitals/marriages/marrindx31.txt>.

was plausible to colonists, and in turn profitable to newspaper publishers, whether they saw it as a satire of religious enthusiasm or as an authentic example of revival's radical edge.²⁰⁹

Colonists also would have found the internal logic of Leek's act plausible. Drastic though it was, it aligned with their assumptions that continence was ultimately impossible to maintain: if Leek wanted to preserve his celibacy, castration was likely the only recourse. His act was an extreme response to what was nonetheless conventional Protestant logic, which followed that most people were powerless against the strength of their lust. The heated atmosphere of 1742 lent an even greater resonance to Leek's story. Relying on the same verse in Matthew, Wesley's pamphlet on the single life was available just a few months after the article circulated. Though Wesley used the term eunuch loosely when he praised those "which have made themselves eunuchs...for the kingdom of heaven's sake"—meaning only lack of marriage—it was not a far leap to a more strict and literal interpretation. During the Great Awakening, more and more people turned to literal readings of scripture, like the Immortalists who insisted that John 11:25-26 ("And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die") pertained to the body as well as the soul, offering a promise of corporeal incorruptibility.

At the same time, however, Leek complicated the suspicions of his contemporaries who believed that the professed celibacy of people like Sarah Prentice and Conrad Beissel was simply a false front hiding sexual indulgence. Leek's celibacy was less ambiguous; he had fully and irrevocably committed himself to a life of sexual renunciation. He also disrupted prevailing suspicions by the way in which he arrived at his decision of celibacy. Not presented as the result of divine revelation or a hasty call made in the heat of a revival meeting, his self-castration stemmed from "twelve Months Deliberation." Perhaps even more jarring to readers, Leek did

²⁰⁹ Regardless of whether it was true or not, Leek's story was presented as news, nestled between articles about political developments, shipping updates, and items for sale.

not offer a clear-cut cautionary tale. Under the care of “Dr. Johnson,” he was “in a fair way of doing well.” Even the most enthusiastic converts might make a full recovery.

While John Leek’s story upset certain assumptions about celibacy, its publication still reinforced the link between sexual renunciation and religious enthusiasm, circulating amidst other accounts that also tied the two together. One such story featured Massachusetts lay exhorter Richard Woodbury, who gained renown not only for the small group of followers he amassed, but for his “mad enthusias[m]” and “disordered brain.”²¹⁰ Among “a thousand other such mad and ridiculous frolics,” Woodbury “pretend[ed] to inspiration, uttered several blasphemous and absurd speeches, asserting that he was the same to-day, yesterday, and forever, saying he had it in his power to save or damn whom he pleased, falling down upon the ground, licking the dust, and condemning all to hell who would not do the like, drinking healths to King Jesus...”²¹¹ In addition to his claims of divine revelation and immortality, Woodbury also preached singleness. Unwed himself, he challenged a married Congregationalist minister’s commitment to God: “Consider, as you have marry’d and are Settled in the world, whether you are indeed espoused to Christ as your Head and Husband.”²¹² Woodbury took to heart Whitefield’s instructions not to “play the Harlot any longer” and to become espoused to Jesus, but he pushed the message to its literal end. To Woodbury, having an earthly spouse was a form of harlotry, a snare that stole a believer’s time, body, and affections away from God. Just as itinerants like Gilbert Tennent doubted the ability of “unconverted” ministers to preach conversion, so did Woodbury doubt the ability of married ministers to foreground their relationship with Christ above all others. Earthly matrimony divided people’s loyalties and left

²¹⁰ *Boston Gazette*, 24 July 1744; Reprinted in *Boston Evening Post*, 30 July 1744.

²¹¹ Alexander Hamilton, *Hamilton's Itinerarium: Being a Narrative of a Journey from Annapolis, Maryland, through Delaware, Pennsylvania, New York, New Jersey, Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts and New Hampshire, from May to September, 1744*, ed. Albert Bushnell Hart (St. Louis: W.K. Bixby, 1907), 146.

²¹² As quoted in Seeman, *Pious Persuasions*, 134. See Seeman’s analysis of Woodbury’s ministry, 133-138.

them firmly “Settled in the world.” That Woodbury’s fanaticism and his insistence on singleness went hand-in-hand might not have surprised many of his contemporaries, given the stories circulating during the Great Awakening.

The degree to which it had become especially easy to link celibacy and religious extremism during the revivals is evident in the personal writings of Susanna Anthony (1726-91), who worked hard to distance herself from any charge of enthusiasm. Like Richard Woodbury and John Leek, Anthony embraced unequivocally Whitefield’s invitation to espousal with Christ. Unlike them, however, she developed a form of piety that garnered widespread admiration both during and after her lifetime, in addition to a form of singleness that would serve as a model for women well into the nineteenth century. After her death, her pastor, Samuel Hopkins, extracted and published parts of the spiritual diary she had kept for decades, noting in his introduction that, “She appeared wholly, and in a distinguished degree, devoted to the cause of Christ and pure religion...”²¹³ Anthony left a far different legacy than many of her fellow converts whose piety precluded earthly marriage and sexual relations, successful in guarding herself and the “cause of Christ” from the sting of critics.²¹⁴

Raised a Quaker in Newport, Rhode Island, Anthony shocked her family when she converted to Congregationalism during the Great Awakening in 1741. She remained single throughout her 65-year life, and though she never described her celibacy as a specific, intentional choice, she did describe her conversion and subsequent commitment to God as a type of marriage—requiring “solemn vows” and sealed with an “I DO”—that not only took precedence

²¹³ Susanna Anthony, *The Life and Character of Miss Susanna Anthony* (1796), ed. Samuel Hopkins (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1799), 4.

²¹⁴ See, for example, the review of Anthony’s journal in *The Theological Magazine, or, Synopsis of Modern Religious Sentiment*, March/April, 1797. The reviewer described Anthony’s text as “useful to all who are exercised in spiritual trials, or who are pleased with a striking example of unfeigned and exalted piety” (304).

over all earthly relationships, but saw any form of human intimacy as a rival to her affections.²¹⁵ After her conversion, she declared, “And now I am no more my own. I am the Lord's by all the bonds and obligations of a rational, redeemed, devoted creature.” Her sentiment was strikingly similar to the marriage teachings in Ephesians 5, around which Pietists circled so closely: “For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.”²¹⁶ Just as husband and wife became “one flesh” after marriage, so was Anthony “no more [her] own” upon resigning herself to God, bound by “bonds and obligations” to her spiritual bridegroom as matrimony binds earthly spouses. It is significant that her conversion occurred at the age of sixteen and was renewed at the ages of eighteen and twenty. During the very same period of life when young women typically embarked on the world of courtship and marriage, Anthony commenced an intimate and lifelong relationship with Christ. As she saw it, that relationship required nothing short of complete disavowal of the world’s allurements, especially its fashions, diversions, and company—the very mechanisms that facilitated eighteenth-century courtship.

Like many converts, Anthony saw heavenly and earthly affairs as mutually exclusive: “What a wide difference is here, between the strictly religious and the sensual worldling!”²¹⁷ However, she marked the boundary even more firmly, opting not just for partial withdrawal from close relationships like Edwards, Cole, and Prentice had done, but a life that precluded marriage altogether. The stark border between the “strictly religious” and the “sensual worldling” allowed little compromise, and in the very next line she came to a decisive fork in the road: “Come, then, my soul, and view them both as far as death; and now make a solemn and deliberate choice,

²¹⁵ Anthony, 47.

²¹⁶ Ibid., 43; Ephesians 5:31.

²¹⁷ Anthony, 46.

either religion, or carnal pleasure. Come, my soul, and choose for Eternity.”²¹⁸ The distinction was clear—“either religion, or carnal pleasure”—and she chose God with her “whole soul and all [her] powers.”²¹⁹ Significantly, her choice did not just require retreat from the fleeting pleasures of the world, but from the people of the world as well. Religion was a “solitary dress” that could make her a “despised outcast among men,” garnering “reproach, disdain and contempt...as not fit for common society, or scarce to live.”²²⁰ Though Anthony in fact came to be deeply respected by her faith community and enmeshed in a network of pious female friends, she nonetheless saw her initial commitment to God as a trade-off between divine and earthly intimacy.

Anthony went on to craft a life that revolved entirely around her faith as well as a spiritual regimen that depended entirely on her singleness. Taking Christ as her only husband yielded both religious and practical effects. It was not just that she longed for an intimacy with Christ that an earthly spouse would endanger, but that she longed for a life filled with religious study and prayer—a life that the unending daily tasks of household management would have made impossible. Anthony’s days were attuned not to the rhythm of home and family duties, but to the ministerial tasks of a pastoral counselor: spending hours studying the Bible and dense theological texts, offering prayer and consolation at the deathbeds of coreligionists, and answering requests for spiritual guidance. She simply had no use for the mundane tasks or diversions of the world, admitting, “I know the natural bent of my mind is for study...I am conscious to myself, that I neither allow nor love an idle, lazy life. My natural temper does not

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Ibid., 47.

²²⁰ Ibid., 45, 46.

incline to it; but when indulged or employed in study and in the exercises of the mind, is most diligent and laborious.”²²¹

The life that Anthony cultivated of “study,” counsel, and prayer was viable because of her single status.²²² Though she worked hard to support herself by her needle, her decisions regarding how to schedule her time were largely her own, not determined by the needs of a husband or children. To be sure, like any eighteenth-century unmarried woman, she was at the mercy of her extended family, but unlike many of her single peers, she claimed a relatively high degree of control over both her living arrangements and her time—two factors that had defining consequences for her faith.²²³ Anthony resented tasks that impinged on her devotional practices by robbing her of either time or privacy. Her diary records numerous instances of unsatisfying and imposing social interactions: “This day I have been in company with some of great note, persons of quality, who were very agreeable, as to civil, social, affable behavior. But I would not give one hour's familiar, Christian conference with a dear saint; or, what is more, one moment's communion with God, for a year's converse with these. O when shall the ties of mere civility and common friendship be no more...!”²²⁴ Anthony was not just registering a distinction between those who were merely moral (“agreeable, as to civil, social, affable behavior”) and those who were truly pious (“a dear saint”), but also her regret that any sort of perfunctory social exchange (the “ties of mere civility and common friendship”) might interrupt her attention to Christ and his followers.

²²¹ Ibid., 108.

²²² Anthony did not record a specific moment in time when she chose singleness in rejection of marriage. It is very possible that her single status was less a deliberate decision determined in a particular instance than the result of a series of small choices and of circumstances beyond her power. Studying single women in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century England, Amy M. Froide finds that most women did not deliberately set out to remain single. Rather, their singleness stemmed from a variety of factors both in and out of their control, as well as out of more minor decisions that they made about their lives. See Froide's discussion in *Never Married*, 182-94.

²²³ On the ways in which single women were often circumscribed by their families, see Froide, *Never Married*, 44-86; Chambers-Schiller, 107-26, 157-73; Karin Wulf, 85-117.

²²⁴ Anthony, 89.

Such “ties...of common friendship” wearied Anthony, and she maintained them not because they offered comfort, but because she felt a sense of Christian obligation, afraid she might appear the religious hermit and give the impression that “strict religion” required monastic-style isolation. She recorded another instance in which she

Again paid a visit long due. I went with some reluctance; but went because I would prevent or remove all prejudice against strict religion, and leave no room for any to think religion made me stiff and unsociable, disregarding of relatives. But, O, when shall I dwell forever where I love, with Jesus, and his dear children, to converse of him only...O come sweet hour of my release! All below this, is but sordid drudgery, only as far as it is done in obedience, under a sense of duty.²²⁵

Anthony sought to distance herself from the taint of enthusiasm surrounding the Great Awakening, which had not only fostered “prejudice against strict religion,” but had made it all too easy to cast suspicion on converts who opted for the single life. Her religion was “strict,” but she wanted to make clear that it had not led her to a life of isolation (“stiff and unsociable” like a cloistered celibate) or led her to cast aside familial ties (“disregarding of relatives,” like a radical separatist slipping out of one marriage and entering into the next). The latter assurance was especially important given that Anthony’s conversion had in fact resulted in her rejecting her family’s Quaker faith; the former was necessary because, despite her efforts to appear otherwise, Anthony did in fact find her visit the stuff of “sordid drudgery,” and she engaged only so far as “obedience” and “duty” required. Her “visit long due” was ultimately an essential part of her ministry—one that required great sacrifice on her part—offering testimony that her conversion had not led her to forsake family or social responsibilities.

Despite Anthony’s deliberate efforts to engage, however, nothing put her more ill at ease than lacking access to the solitude and space necessary for religious devotion. Throughout her diary she reiterated her need for “secret retirement,” which she numbered among her “dearest

²²⁵ Ibid., 89-90.

enjoyments.”²²⁶ What was essential to Anthony was not just the mere practice of sitting with God in “retirement,” but the context: “If I cannot unbosom my soul to God in secret, farewell comfort...How can I keep up lively communion with God, in the constant hurry and converse of the world? I never yet could.”²²⁷ It was the “in secret” part that was critical to her spiritual practice. Without it, she simply could not “unbosom” herself or find any level of “comfort.” When Anthony spoke of being “in secret” and of retreating from the “world,” she was not speaking metaphorically, referring to a figurative withdrawal from the world of the flesh to that of the spirit; she meant actual material bodies and physical space. Anthony required a luxury that few colonists were afforded: privacy.²²⁸ Hannah Heaton had improvised when her family was asleep, Sarah Edwards had experienced spiritual breakthrough while her husband was out of town, and Nathan Cole had simply tuned people out when they entered the room. Anthony, a single woman whose sewing offered a degree of self-sufficiency, had more consistent access to privacy than any of them, but hers too was contingent on forces beyond her control.²²⁹ As she explained in one entry, “God is now denying me all opportunity for secret retirement in my father's house, another family having moved into it...” She only found relief after going “abroad” at some friends’ urgings, where she could finally “enjoy religious privileges, both private and secret.”²³⁰

²²⁶ Ibid., 94.

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ On the lack of privacy in eighteenth-century American living spaces, see Flaherty, 33-46.

²²⁹ While it is certainly not the case that unmarried people in general had more access to privacy than married ones, for Anthony, singleness did seem to help. Anthony spent most of her life living in her parents’ home, where she was generally able to have her own physical space. She was the second youngest in a family of seven daughters, and her siblings had married and moved elsewhere. As a result, her parents’ house often—though not always—offered a modicum of privacy. Most never-married women, however, spent the bulk of their lives at the mercy of their families, usually attached to the households of their siblings or extended family members, in whose homes they provided crucial labor and support. On Anthony’s living arrangements and background, see Hopkins’s introduction to her journal, pp. 3-4.

²³⁰ Ibid., 94. Froide argues that English single women were villainized as old maids during the early modern period because England lacked both conceptual and physical space for unmarried women after the dissolution of the monasteries. Froide, *Never Married*, 154-81. Anthony’s writings demonstrate how important physical space was to

Because Anthony knew exactly what she was missing, she felt the loss of her privacy acutely. In another instance, she wrote:

I am melted in grief and sorrow, because deprived of secret retirement. I have had no opportunity for this the last week...for I have not the privilege of a closet or a garret for retirement. This takes away almost all the relish of life...I am ready to burst into a flood of tears, when I look on the dear children of God, my christian friends, and think how they can pour out their souls in secret...I was almost ready to go to some christian friend, and vent my grief, and beg a place of retirement. But I feared it might offend them, as pharisaical, and Satan take the advantage to distract me about it; though my soul did even break with the longing I had for my God...O when, when, shall I come and pour out my soul before thee in secret! When, O when shall I enjoy thee, as I have enjoyed thee, in secret duties! Let me never forget the pain I now endure in being deprived of retirement...²³¹

Anthony's "secret retirement" was so critical to her faith that she was undone by its absence, feeling not only more distant from God ("O when, when, shall I come and pour out my soul before thee..!"), but losing even her general "relish of life." Though she longed to go to a "christian friend...and beg a place of retirement," she resisted out of the same set of fears that pushed her into the "sordid drudgery" of social visits: that she would be perceived as too rigid and extreme in her religious devotion, verging on "pharisaical." Once again, Anthony sought to distance herself from the taint of enthusiasm that could all too easily attach to "strict religion" during the Great Awakening, especially for the unmarried. Checking the impulse to turn to a "christian friend," however, demanded extraordinary effort on her part, and it was squelched only by the fear that Satan might capitalize on her weakness and injure the larger cause of Christ-centered piety.

Clearly, Anthony achieved an intimacy with God when she was alone that she could not duplicate in the presence of others. It was not so much their "hurry" and "converse" that got in the way, but the very fact that other people were witnessing private moments between her and

single women's ability to craft devout lives. See as well Susan S. Lanser's discussion of the rise of the old maid during the early modern period, pp. 297-323.

²³¹ Anthony, 100.

her spiritual bridegroom. When alone with God, she felt an “unspeakable satisfaction” and “long[ed] to continue the sacred exercise, where no mortal eye can see, or ear hear; but the omniscient God alone witnesses the devout ardor, the intense fervour of my love.”²³² God only was to be the “witness” of her passion, and to have others intrude on such a personal and fervid communion was to cheapen the entire experience. With breathless language (“When, O when shall I enjoy thee, as I have enjoyed thee, in secret duties!”), Anthony yearned for God like a devoted newlywed yearned for her husband. After finally stealing a moment with him, she expressed her relief simply but palpably: “This dear day I loved...”²³³

The version of singleness that Anthony cultivated offered a new contribution to the American discourse on celibacy, one that would prove particularly enduring. What made her model different was that she pursued the single life within her Congregationalist Church, her parents’ home, and her larger community, never seeking out the monastic-style living arrangements of Pennsylvania Pietists or the radical separatism of celibate Immortalists. Nor was hers a type of singleness along the lines cultivated by her Quaker contemporaries, who circulated within a tight-knit community of unmarried women whether they were at home in the Delaware Valley or preaching abroad.²³⁴ Anthony was part of no such community, and in fact had left a Quaker faith that offered ministerial opportunities and leadership roles for single women.²³⁵ Instead, she carved out a successful form of singleness within a Protestant tradition that centered faith firmly in the family, praised the spiritual edification of marriage, and had long dismissed the practice of celibacy as a valuable religious vocation.

²³² Ibid., 101.

²³³ Ibid.

²³⁴ On the networks that developed between single Quaker women in Pennsylvania, see Wulf, 53-75. On the networks between transatlantic female Quaker preachers, see Larson, 118-32.

²³⁵ Anthony did, however, seem to be ensconced in a tight circle of pious female friends, based on her journal and her obituary. See as well the letters she exchanged with Sarah Osborn in *Familiar Letters, Written by Mrs. Sarah Osborn and Miss Susanna Anthony* (Newport, RI: Printed at the office of the Newport Mercury, 1807).

Certainly, Anthony was not the first New England Congregationalist to pursue the single life, but the Great Awakening presented opportunities for celibacy that were new. Her motivations went further than the Pauline justifications of a Jerusha Ompan, who saw marriage as a distraction from the Lord. Anthony did not so much reject an earthly marriage as gain a heavenly one, accepting Whitefield's wedding invitation by deliberately taking Christ with a "solemn vow" and an "I do." Hers was also not the conciliatory singleness offered by New England forebears like Cotton Mather, who in his *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion* encouraged unmarried women to employ "Gravity and Holiness" as a way to "convince all the World, that [their] present circumstances are of *Choice* rather than *Force*."²³⁶ Such women should make good use of their "*Leisure* from the Encumbrances of a Family" by using the time for religious improvement, all the while remaining watchful for a husband. Anthony reversed Mather's priorities. It was her faith that led to her singleness, offering the only way for her to avoid the "Encumbrances of a Family" and to create a life that revolved entirely around religious study, prayer, and pastoral counseling. Anthony took full advantage of the type of piety the Great Awakening emphasized, in which conversion demanded wholesale commitment to Christ and was experienced both bodily and affectively.²³⁷

However, at the same time that the Great Awakening offered new opportunities for celibacy, it also posed challenges that ultimately circumscribed unmarried people's options. Anthony's singleness might have rendered her a piety worthy of praise, but only because she

²³⁶ Cotton Mather, *Ornaments for the Daughters of Zion*, 75.

²³⁷ Anthony's life spans an important transformation in the history of female singleness, when scholars have identified a change in how unmarried women were perceived. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, a woman's singleness was deemed acceptable only if she could persuade people that it was of her own choosing. By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the circumstances had reversed: a single woman deserved contempt if she had chosen her singleness, and she deserved pity if her state was the result of forces beyond her control (e.g. a heartless suitor, illness, disability, poverty, or family circumstances). On this transition, see Dror Wahrman, *The Making of the Modern Self: Identity and Culture in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004), 14-15; Froide *Never Married*, 182-94. On Froide's position on the issue of "choice" and female singleness, see note 222.

crafted her presentation of the single life very carefully, deliberately distancing her espousal with Christ from any hint of Great Awakening enthusiasm. She forced herself into dreaded “visit[s] long due” so as not to appear “stiff and unsociable,” even though she found them “sordid drudgery.” She demonstrated that her close relationship with Christ had not made her “disregardful of relatives,” even if she regretted the interruption to her spiritual regimen. And she resisted asking a friend for a desperately-sought place of solitude lest her “strict religion” appear “pharisaical,” even if the lack of private intimacy with God unraveled her. Though Anthony’s singleness enabled her to devote more time and space to Christ than she would have been able to as a married woman, it was her singleness that made her especially vulnerable. Circulating in the same world as Molly Ward Bennett and her false claims to chaste “spiritual union,” as John Leek and his drastic assurance of sexual renunciation, as Richard Woodbury and his toasts to “King Jesus,” and as Sarah Prentice and her celibate marriage to “Brother Solomon,” Anthony had to be ever on her guard, giving no cause for anyone to suspect that her own intimacy with Christ verged on the extreme.

Celibacy and the Legacy of the Great Awakening

Because the Great Awakening offered both opportunities and hazards, it was a defining moment in the history of early American celibacy, presenting a mixed and enduring legacy. The equation of celibacy with extremism would stick, but so too would the idea that piety offered an alternative for those who sought lives outside of normative family arrangements and procreative sexuality. On the one hand, in the years after revivalism cooled, celibacy became less a topic of pressing urgency and widespread interest, slipping further to the radical edge. John Wesley would revise his 1743 pamphlet on the single life in 1765, tempering his most extreme claims. Moravians would abandon their experiment in communal economy in 1762, reorienting

Bethlehem around the household. Ephratans would number only half as many devotees in 1770 as they did in 1750.²³⁸ And even Cumberland perfectionist Ebenezer Ward would walk back his most unorthodox tenets, ultimately earning praise from his former critic, Isaac Backus, who recorded in the 1770s that Ward “now appears to be a solid, steady man.”²³⁹

Sarah Prentice offers a more curious case. In 1782, Ebenezer Parkman mentioned that “Madam Prentice of Grafton has been with the *Shakers*,” but it is unclear if Prentice simply visited the Shakers, who shared her commitment to celibacy, or if she had joined the new movement.²⁴⁰ A direct line links her circle of Immortalists to the followers of Shaker founder Ann Lee: when Lee migrated across the Atlantic from England in the 1780s, she specifically sought out the former home of Shadrach Ireland’s celibate group in Harvard, Massachusetts as the launching point for her American ministry, perhaps feeling an affinity for earlier celibates who, forged in the fires of revivalism, believed that faith in Christ demanded complete offering of body and soul. That Lee and her followers were met with such opposition by their neighbors in the 1780s and 1790s—to the point of brutal physical violence—suggests that a faith that put celibacy at its core had become especially threatening in the decades after the Great Awakening, with sexual renunciation becoming thoroughly linked to religious radicalism.²⁴¹

Alongside that easy tendency to lump celibacy and enthusiasm, however, endured the model of celibacy that Susanna Anthony crafted, creating a viable and even praiseworthy alternative to marriage, especially for women. One nineteenth-century woman, Sylvia Drake, who never married but devoted her life both to her faith and to another deeply pious woman with whom she lived for forty-four years, pored over Anthony’s journal, perhaps feeling the same tug

²³⁸ Carpenter, 109.

²³⁹ Backus, *Diary*, 2:921. Entry is from 27 October 1774.

²⁴⁰ As quoted in Beales, 101.

²⁴¹ On the opposition the Shakers met in New England, see Seeman, “It is Better to Marry than to Burn,” 410-13.

that Ann Lee felt to Shadrach Ireland's former home in Harvard.²⁴² Other unmarried women participated in the "cult of single blessedness" that emerged at the turn of the nineteenth century—the same time that Anthony's journal was published—in which women resisted marriage because suitors failed to meet their high standards of religion and morality. Here too, though, as Anthony's own life revealed, were limits.²⁴³ The reputations of women like Sylvia Drake and those who claimed "single blessedness" depended on a particular type of singleness, one grounded in a piety that was thoroughly devoted but stayed within the firm bounds of church, family, and community.

Despite its limits, it was the Great Awakening that first made Anthony's model of celibacy work. She had answered Whitefield's call to espousal with Christ with total commitment. Reviving the longstanding Christian notion that the depth of a person's faith might preclude marriage, the Awakening fundamentally altered the way Americans had been thinking about celibacy since the seventeenth century, and shaped the way they would continue thinking about it for a century to come.

²⁴² Rachel Hope Cleves, *Charity and Sylvia: A Same-Sex Marriage in Early America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 157.

²⁴³ Chambers-Schiller, 10-28.

Conclusion

Bookended by two critical moments—the Reformation and the Great Awakening—this dissertation has shown how a predominantly Protestant population in the American colonies continued to grapple with celibacy long after Protestantism had divested itself of a chaste priesthood and the monastery. Over the course of the first 150 years of settlement, colonists gradually opened up within their own religious frameworks the very spaces of singleness that the Reformation had sought to close down, reintroducing celibacy and the cloister as meaningful spiritual practices. In doing so, colonists made celibacy into a very different issue by the time of the Great Awakening than it had been at the start of the colonial project. No longer a critique of Catholic clerics who used sexual renunciation to claim spiritual favor and authority, it was a critique of Protestant laypeople who might do likewise: using celibacy to profess spiritual virtue, to gain greater access to God, to separate from the larger body of believers, and to relocate ecclesiastical power in their own hands. To their opponents, colonists who took up celibacy during the revivals threatened to bring into the Protestant tradition the very problems that had beset the Catholic Church, problems that they had long sought to define themselves against.

This transformation in the nature of colonial American celibacy occurred over roughly four phases. In the first, the colonies were imagined as a space entirely devoid of lifelong celibacy. Puritans who migrated across the Atlantic saw New England as a place to build a primitive church and a godly society where celibacy was no longer necessary and where single people, embedded in family units, approached their singleness as a temporary stop en route to marriage. However, even in their vision of a society grounded in marriage and the family, cracks began to show. Unmarried men who had mastered their passions could become respected community patriarchs, if not household ones, and unmarried women could turn their single state

into an opportunity for religious improvement, serving God without the distractions of a family. The cloister continued to hold valuable lessons as well, reminding Puritans of the importance of distancing themselves from the world and communing with God in solitude. While ministers sought to manage these positive aspects of celibate practices and cloistered spaces very carefully, the underlying message that believers should prioritize their relationship with God above all others reserved the possibility that a certain kind of singleness was redeemable, creating a very small aperture that lay New Englanders would pry wide open during the eighteenth-century revivals.

In the much broader second phase, colonists began to carve out spaces where singleness could thrive. Catholics, Quakers, Anglicans, and Pietists all planted celibate vocations and monastic communities firmly in American soil, albeit in very different ways. Of all the religious groups studied in this dissertation, Catholics are unique in the sense that they came from a longstanding tradition of esteeming celibacy. However, the Catholic Church in the colonies faced particular challenges that made celibacy impossible to sustain as it had for centuries, including the lack of state funding, the absence of seminaries and cloisters, and—for women—the enactment of legal strictures that actively discouraged lifelong singleness. In many ways, Catholic colonists faced the same challenges as their Protestant counterparts, working to introduce celibacy into a religious landscape that lacked institutional support for it. In other ways, however, the challenges at hand had very different stakes. For Catholics, the task was to revamp centuries of practice and create forms of singleness that could function outside of church walls and without official sanction. This was a drastically different way of thinking about celibacy, to be sure, but it still aligned with Catholics' overarching belief that the single life held

especial religious value. For Protestants, however, the task was to create conceptual space for celibacy in a religious framework where it did not already exist.

Their success in doing so had the paradoxical effect of making celibacy in the colonies a primarily Protestant rather than Catholic experience. Quakers were the first Protestants in the colonies to create special room for the single life. They made celibacy a viable vocation for female ministers and issued a call for Friends to reclaim the cloister, drawing attention to what Protestants had lost with the dissolution of the monasteries. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, the colonies also witnessed an infusion of European ideas. Quasi-monastic revivalists had sought to make celibacy a critical feature of Christian practice regardless of believers' particular denomination, and Anglican missionaries brought these radical ideas to the colonies, along with the Church of England's official position that celibacy, just as well as marriage, could lead to godliness. Pietists who came from the Continent went even further, introducing a very different element to colonial discourse. Unlike Quakers and Anglicans, they did not just open up spaces for celibacy, but made its practice absolutely essential, believing that sexual renunciation was the only way to prepare their souls and bodies for eternal union with Christ. It was Pietists, rather than their Catholic neighbors, who built the first monasteries in British North America, offering colonists an alternative to traditional marriage and family life.

The third phase occurred during the Great Awakening—the high-water mark of colonial interest in celibacy—when these ideas came to their fullest fruition. What made the Great Awakening discourse different was the way in which it expanded. Amidst renewed interest in conversion, celibacy became relevant to a much wider swath of the population, not just for ministers pursuing their vocations, for Pietists on the radical fringe, or even for those who were single. Lay colonists from a variety of faith backgrounds looked to celibacy and religious

withdrawal as tools to cultivate wholehearted devotion to Christ. In both large and small ways, they recalibrated their relationships and their bodies to fit themselves entirely for God's service. Invoking older Christian ideals, they made sexual renunciation and solitude, not marital union and familial affection, the primary modes of religious knowledge and experience. Of course, as this dissertation argues, these older ideas had persisted in Protestantism even after the Reformation, but with revivalism they came to occupy a more prominent spot in religious discourse. They also began to take different shape. Colonists innovated on longstanding practices to meet their own needs by detaching celibacy even further from the cloister and from its institutionalized forms, by reclaiming abstinence as a tool of lay rather than clerical spirituality, by reaffirming celibacy as a deliberate and voluntary pursuit, and by infusing even their most intimate unions with emotional and sexual withdrawal.

In the fourth phase, which this dissertation only begins to address, colonists faced the legacy the Awakening left behind. The revivals had two important effects for the fate of celibacy in the colonies. On the one hand, the backlash against religious enthusiasm left an enduring mistrust of all those who opted for sexual renunciation as part of a spiritual regimen. Celibacy moved to the religious margins, less a practice integrated within mainstream denominations than one reserved even more resolutely for the extreme fringe. On the other hand, a new and more viable model of singleness presented itself, one that was carefully crafted to avoid the charges of enthusiasm and Catholicism. The praiseworthy celibacy that Susanna Anthony cultivated became a prototype that single women would continue to draw on throughout the nineteenth century, albeit layering within it a new set of concerns: namely, the idea that the single woman was not—like Anthony—a pastoral counselor assuming a ministerial role, but a

pious mother whose children were members of the church community and the poor and downtrodden of antebellum society.¹

Even before they took up Anthony's model, however, it was women who stood to gain the most from the introduction of celibacy to the colonies—and to lose the most when it was unavailable, as for female Catholics in Maryland. The cloister had long presented one of the few alternatives available to women. Despite the fact that critiques against celibacy were initially lodged against a male priesthood, the lack of celibate vocations had a much more significant effect on women than men, given the nature of early modern gender roles, women's limited economic options, and the fact that Protestantism so thoroughly blurred women's domestic and spiritual labor. When colonists like Quaker Sarah Morris, Immortalist Sarah Prentice, and Congregationalist Susanna Anthony reintroduced celibacy and detached it from the cloister, they completely reframed women's status both inside and outside the church.

Because of the ways that colonists expanded the conversation, British North America offers a helpful test case regarding the larger question about the fate of celibacy after the Reformation. As this dissertation shows, the sixteenth-century abandonment of a chaste priesthood and the monastery in no way settled the issue of celibacy for Protestants. The colonial experience reveals how various Protestant denominations continued to work out the place of sexual renunciation and singleness in the church, bringing to light two of the Reformation's paradoxes. First, the Reformation had the effect of expanding the conversation about the very institution it sought to limit, making celibacy an issue that Protestants would return to again and again, especially during moments of political crisis and religious renewal. Second, and even more significantly, the Reformation had the effect of expanding not just the

¹ Chambers-Schiller discusses the ways in which unmarried women's roles in the nineteenth century were circumscribed within the family, and how even women who ventured beyond the home did so in ways that aligned with notions of women's "proper sphere," such as teaching young children and nursing the sick (105).

discourse, but the very practice of celibacy itself. This growth was not in terms of numbers, but in terms of the increasing variety of people who found celibacy relevant and the burgeoning number of ways in which they adapted it to fit their specific spiritual concerns. Though in many ways the history of celibacy after the Reformation is a history of loss—with Protestants losing institutionalized celibate vocations and, more profoundly in some cases, losing the very notion that single people were valuable members of the religious community—in other ways it was a story of gain. The very process of stripping the church of celibate vocations had the unintended consequence of democratizing them, making them more accessible to a wider swath of people. No longer reserved for an elite clergy, for those who had access to special training and ordination, or for those who could afford the dowry required to enter a convent, celibacy was open to anyone who felt called and able to pursue it. Instead of eliminating celibacy, then, the Reformation set off a sequence of events that allowed Protestants to reinvent it, opening it up in new ways by extending it beyond longstanding Catholic modes.

This transformation becomes especially evident when studying the colonial milieu, where religious diversity, opportunities for spiritual experimentation, and rich networks linking the colonies to radical ideas in Europe all presented a wide array of celibate practices and styles of cloistered withdrawal. Though opportunities to pursue celibacy would expand and then contract with the Great Awakening, the triumph of Genesis 2:18 over 1 Corinthians 7 that Cotton Mather had celebrated in 1719 was still incomplete. For many colonists, the apostle's concerns continued to ring resoundingly true. They would foreground Paul's message and resolve the contradiction in Genesis—"It is not good that the man should be alone"—not by cultivating intimacy with an earthly spouse, but by cleaving closer to a heavenly one.

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