

Responding to god's
will: individualism (or
its absence) in mary
rowlandson's cap...



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People distinguish themselves through their individuality, their uniqueness, the ways in which they are their own self and no one else. However, a remarkable woman of the late 1600s did not herself fit the typical construct of an individual; in *A Narrative of the Captivity, Sufferings, and Removes of Mrs. Mary Rowlandson*, author Mary Rowlandson reveals how she found herself combined with God, rather than on her own. This paper will prove that Rowlandson did not view herself as an individual that also happened to worship God, but rather as the inferior half of one entity made up of herself and the Divine: she subsisted as a physical counterpart to God's incorporeal presence, the duo entangled throughout the unpredictable progressions of her mortal life.

Rather than finding her own path in life, as the common individual would, Rowlandson found herself continuously guided by the compass of God's will. In her narrative, she recognizes that this indication of direction pointed her towards fulfilling a personal covenant with God when she writes "The Lord hereby would make us the more to acknowledge his hand, and to see that our help is always in him" (6). She understood that God was looking to protect her, should she persist in abiding by His values and wishes. By quoting Micah 6: 8; she reveals just what she believed her agreement with God entailed: "...to do justly, and love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God" (74). Thus, her actions were motivated by her need to always do the right thing, provide compassion and forgiveness, and keep Him by her side. This idea of forever acting in terms of God's will proves she believed that she survived only by reason of Him, and therefore must act only to fulfill their

pact. In this way, Rowlandson and God are essentially one being; He exists within her, she serves Him, He aids her.

In this work, Rowlandson identifies herself as a vessel of God in that there is no way to distinguish between her secular and spiritual actions: everything she did, she either did for Him or attributed to Him. In numerous instances in the text, Rowlandson contributes many of her own abilities and actions to “the Providence of God.” For example, when she used oak leaves to heal a wound, she wrote “... with the blessing of God, it cured me...” (18), thus attributing the healing to Him rather than to her own handiwork. She considered the way in which every action was going to be viewed by God, thus He was not dictating the way she conducted herself, but more simply His values were hers as well, melded into Rowlandson's character. In this way, she did not see herself as a distinctive servant of God, but rather understood that he was a fundamental part of her.

Furthermore, there is never a moment in time that Rowlandson believed that God was not with her. This lack of “aloneness” demonstrates that she did not believe in Him as just a concept, but instead believed that He was worked into her. During her time in captivity, she wrote about how she needed to find a occasion to be by herself so that she could “pour [her] heart out unto the Lord” (60). For Rowlandson, to be alone was to be closer God, as she could better focus on the bodiless spirit within herself when less chaos besieged her. In contrast, when surrounded by more people and disorder, her connection with God became more clouded. There was a point early during her captivity, immediately after her youngest child had died and she was surrounded by unfamiliar Indians, in which she could not bear to live

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any longer. After reaching solitude, she reflected on “ the wonderful goodness of God to [her], in preserving [her] so in the use of [her] reason and senses, in that distressed time, that [she] did not use wicket and violent means to end [her] own miserable life” (20). Once Rowlandson rediscovered that “ aloneness,” she was able to realign herself with His plan for her and identify the appropriate course of action. Succinctly put, once Rowlandson reached solitude, she was more intimate than ever with the Lord, because they were one entity, the tangible body and the sacred metaphysical being, not two separate pieces that fit together, but one piece comprised of the two essences.

Despite the fact that Rowlandson and God made up this single unit, the prisoner did acknowledge that she was the subordinate of the pair. When good things happened to her, she credited Him for the occurrence. For example, when ashes were thrown in her eyes and she was blinded, but woke up again with her sight regained, she wrote, “... have pity upon me, O ye my friends, for the hand of the LORD has touched me” (59). This idea of God's metaphorical touch having the power to fully restore her, but only when and if he chose to do so, demonstrates His superiority over her. Even when she supposed that He was being overly harsh towards her, Rowlandson believed that it was due a higher reason that she could not know because, for what whatever intention, He did not need for her to know. In one of her darker moments during captivity, she wrote, “...God did not leave me to have any impatient work towards himself, as if his ways were unrighteous; but I knew that he laid upon me less than I deserve” (60). Ultimately, this shows that Rowlandson recognizes that God had complete power over her,

as well as that she accepted that He would initiate things that she could not necessarily comprehend or want. Although inferior, she still made up a critical component of the relationship as she was the one that was physically able to carry out God's wishes.

Even when writing her personal narrative, Rowlandson centered it around Bible verses, as if telling her life story would be incomplete without holy references; this is true, because scripture and Rowlandson's relationship with God make up more than a significant portion of her existence. She spends so much of her time in the text just trying to make sense of God's will, as well as relaying allegories to better augment and reinforce her adventure.

Rowlandson wrote, " O the wonderful power of God that I have seen, and the experiences that I have had" (108), which wonderfully exhibits the magnitude of the Lord's role in her life in just a few words. This exemplifies the great extent to which Rowlandson centers her life around God and his sacred works, just as she centers her own story around His.

In summation, Mary Rowlandson cannot not identify as an individual, but as the concrete manifestation of God's will. She consisted of two presences intertwined within the physical body, one divine and one mortal. Instead of finding her own way in life, she was guided by the desires of her Lord and lived to fulfill her personal covenant with Him, to do good and carry out his wishes as the inferior but nevertheless integral half of the duo. Additionally, it is impossible to distinguish between Rowlandson's secular and sacred work because everything she did was in God's name, always acting for Him and never individualistically. Rowlandson found that she could best connect with the spirit within her when she could find solitude, for He was worked into her, <https://assignbuster.com/responding-to-gods-will-individualism-or-its-absence-in-mary-rowlandsons-captivity-narrative/>

not watching from the outside, but residing within, able to explore her deepest thoughts and most intrinsic desires.