

Debra Meyers. *Common Whores, Vertuous Women and Loving Wives*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003. ii+210+3 illus. \$39.95. Review by MARTHA OBERLE, FREDERICK COMMUNITY COLLEGE.

In the Introduction to *Common Whores, Vertuous Women and Loving Wives*, Professor Meyers sets out 3 theories: that studying women in colonial America will offer insight into their sisters in England; that the women of Maryland can be separated into two groups, the Predestinarians and the Free Will Christian Women, and that these two groups believed and acted very differently.

In the interactive communities that were early Maryland, the Free Will Christian Women are the Roman Catholics, the Arminian Anglicans and the Quakers. The Predestinarians are the Puritans. According to Meyers, the difference between the groups is predicated on their soteriology, their view of Redemption. The Puritans hold for predestination whereas the Free Will group believes that salvation is earned, that good works matter. The insights into their life styles and the conclusions drawn depend primarily on 3190 wills drawn between 1634 and 1713. Examination indicates that these wills were anything but a standard form with nothing more than names and dates supplied for the particular instance. Other sources include probate and court records, letters, sermons, and genealogical tables.

The first chapter traces the foundation of Maryland. George Calvert sought his patent not only to offer English Roman Catholics a place to worship freely but also to extend the trade and possessions of the mother country. Despite the failure of his first effort in Newfoundland, the loss of his first wife and several of their children, and his own rude reception in Virginia, Calvert persisted, and Charles I granted a patent in June of 1632 to George Calvert's son, Cecil, who, following his father's death, had succeeded to the title of Lord Baltimore. Significantly, the charter granted to the Calverts made their holding a county palatine, which is to say that the Calverts had absolute power in their colony: their authority in their own land was the equivalent of royal prerogative.

One might think that a colony devoted to religious tolerance would be peaceful. Such was not the case. The colonists argued with the non-resident Lord Baltimore and his resident representative over the establishment of laws and practices and then fought among themselves once the laws were established. As with all of England, the brewing civil war in the mother country

had repercussions. The death of Leonard Calvert, governor of the colony, in June of 1649 followed the beheading of Charles II by some six months. The executrix of Leonard Calvert's estate was Margaret Brent on whose skillful management the public safety and quite possibly the survival of the colony depended. In the following decades, despite the political strife, the colony carried out the Calvert policies of religious tolerance and commercial development.

In several quite surprising chapters, Meyers examines the colonists' private lives; their religion in terms of belief, architecture, ritual, and gender role; property transfer and rights, and, finally, the public authority of women.

The family unit is the basis of early Maryland society but, unsurprisingly, not all marital unions were happy or faithful. One colonist referred to his notorious wife as a "common whore" (40); he was not alone in his suffering for land parcels with names such as "Cuckold's Delight" and "Cuckold's Mess" (56) are not in short supply. Several civil points are involved: separation was expensive and time consuming to obtain a man had to support his wife's child, and a wife inherited 1/3 of her husband's estate.

Meyers offers many instances of "loveing wives," women who were acknowledged as such by the very words of their husbands' wills. Free Will Christian Women were bequeathed goods or land or both and they had the right and the responsibility to control, manage, and bequeath what they owned. These women also served as their husbands' executors and might be named guardians of children, both their own and those of others. Again came significant responsibility because offspring, including the unborn from the time of quickening, were considered children (57), and children were capable of inheriting. Meyers does not often find Predestinarian women named as heirs to land or executors of wills.

The "vertuous women" of Meyers study whose acts include building and/or supporting chapels either on their own lands or on church owned plots, instructing children, and among the Quakers, leading the Congregation. Meyers offers the example of Mary Taney who persuaded Charles II and the Archbishop of Canterbury to send money—500 pounds—, supplies, and a priest for the Anglican Arminian community. Henrietta Maria Neale, wealthy by inheritance and marriage as well as her own skillful management and purchase of additional lands, became a sought after councilor in civic and church affairs. Ann Chew and Ann Galloway, respected Quaker members

of the Maryland colony, were known for their charitable deeds as well as for preaching and evangelizing. Meyers finds nothing of the sort for the Calvinist women.

Generally speaking, Meyers work is convincing and her points that this period and similar records deserve further research are well taken. Her footnotes are full, and her bibliography extensive. In particular, this book is a slow and demanding read because each facet of the study is examined from four perspectives.

This reader has two quibbles. In discussing the samplers of Calvinist and Free Will Christian Women, Meyers notes the alphabets and Scriptural quotations of the Puritans and the maps, including longitude lines, of the Free Will group. Longitude becomes a practical concept (Dava Sobel, *Longitude*) a bit later than the scope of this study.

Secondly, in her Conclusion, Meyers notes that by the mid 1800's the inheritance pattern in Maryland had changed: far more men than women inherit land, a shift from the Free Will pattern to that of the Predestinarians. She notes that the male/female ratio has equalized and that Maryland has had an influx of immigrants of various religious beliefs; both factors had to affect society. Yet Meyers finds the Free Will group strong enough to found, in 1799, Georgetown Visitation Convent—still in existence today—as training ground for their girls. Here this reader would have liked to see a few more bits of history added to the mix for by the 1790's Maryland was no longer a colony and freedom of religion had become part of a new Constitution. Despite the Toleration Act of 1688 (96), and with the Calvinists in control in 1689, Catholics in the colony were excluded from civil and military offices (36) and Maryland became a royal colony under William and Mary in 1692 (36). In 1695, St. Peter's manse explodes; in the same year the center of government moves from St. Mary's City to Annapolis (36-7). St. Mary's was abandoned (Dr. Lois Green Carr. St. Mary's City Website). Perhaps the power of the Protestant crown was less tolerant than the vision of George and Cecil Calvert.