

# MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

High School Lesson Plan by Joanne Sassi-Willcox

## Themes:

1. Religious Persecution
2. Development of separation of church and state
3. Rise of Religious Fundamentalism
4. Present Day controversies on the role of Religion and Government

## Activities:

1. Have students list all of the different religions they can think of on the board and discuss their opinions on them.
2. Have students contrast the First Great Awakening with ideas of the Enlightenment
3. Compare/contrast the First and Second Great Awakenings
4. Compare/contrast Fundamentalism of the 1920's with that of today
5. Debate: Matilda Joslyn Gage vs. a Fundamentalist from today
  - a. Issues:
    1. Same Sex Marriage
    2. Abortion
    3. Prayer in public schools
    4. God in the Pledge of Allegiance
    5. The Ten Commandments in a courthouse
    6. God in the Constitution
    7. Republican presidential candidates and focus on religion (e.g., Rick Perry)

## Background:

- A. Start with a discussion of Anglican Persecution of Puritans, Pilgrims, Quakers, and Catholics
- B. Puritans:
  1. Calling from God - mission to save the world. God chose them to save the world from the Antichrist. If they succeeded they would create a "citty (sic) on a hill" - beacon in the wilderness to light the world (a perfect society). If they failed, wrath of God would descend upon mankind. Believed in predestination: the elect chosen by God. No one knew if he were saved but if he acted saintly probably was! To succeed - could not allow any dissent - totally intolerant of any ideas that went against their mission. Individual thought/liberty discouraged
    - a. Anne Hutchinson challenged this thought. She believed that:
      1. Outward behavior was no sign of salvation. If one is saved - one doesn't have to obey outward laws of God. If a person were saved, he/she could tell. Believed that one could experience God directly (Puritans said God only spoke thru the Bible). True saint needed no church. If a minister was not one of the elect - disregard. Held weekly meetings/discussions.
      2. Two strikes against her: questioned orthodox Puritan beliefs and was a woman who thought independently and spoke out publicly.
      3. Tried for heresy and banished. Went to Rhode Island - then to New Netherlands. Killed by Indians: Puritans said it was a sign from God showing they were right/she was wrong
    - b. Roger Williams also challenged the Puritans. He believed that:
      1. The land was given by the King but he didn't own it - the Indians did. How could he give it away? Should pay the Indians for the land. Said the state had no right to enforce religion on people's thoughts/attitudes. When the state interferes with the soul, it's anti-Christian.

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2. No particular group is the chosen people of God - so whites might not be superior.
  3. Said Indians are people, too, and that they committed less killing than Christians. Killing to enforce religion is contrary to the meaning of Christ.
  4. Religion is a private matter that no government has the right to interfere with.
  5. Church and state should never be united
  5. He was banished from Mass. Bay - founded Rhode Island - total separation of church and state
- C. Religious Toleration in Colonial America
1. Pennsylvania
  2. Maryland
- D. The Ideas of the Enlightenment
- E. The First Great Awakening
- F. Post-Revolutionary War:
1. Virginia Bill of Rights - first to call for total separation of church and state
    - a. other states followed
  2. The Constitution: no religious qualifications to hold office
- G. The Bill of Rights - 1st Amendment
- H. The Second Great Awakening - The Burned Over District - led to reform movements
- I. Matilda Joslyn Gage on Church and State and the Split between her, Frances Willard, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony
1. See Gage quotes at the end for her views on Church and State
  2. helped found the NWSA in 1869 and held various offices in the organization, including president from 1875-1876
    - a. AWSA vs. the NWSA: AWSA: favored only obtaining the vote and focused on a state by state approach to gaining the franchise. NWSA: lobbied for the vote, plus equal education, equal pay. Worked on a national campaign and an amendment to the Constitution
      1. the two merged in 1890 which led Matilda to break away and form the Woman's National Liberal Union (WNLU)
        - a. Platform: "equal rights and equal physical, mental, and spiritual liberty of action, through and of faith for women and for men." (Sally Roesch Wagner, The Dangers of the Hour, p. ii.)
        - b. Gage was upset that the NWSA had merged with the AWSA which contained many conservative religious women
        - c. In the latter 19th c., religious groups had banded together to promote a Christian party to have an amendment added to the Constitution "to declare the nation's allegiance to Jesus Christ and its acceptance of the moral laws of the Christian religion, and so indicate that this is a Christian nation, and place all the Christian laws, institutions, and usages of our government on an undeniably legal basis in the fundamental law of the land." (Wagner, iv)
        - d. Gage vs. Frances Willard: According to Willard her group has "one vital organic thought.... It is that Christ shall be this world's King - ...of its courts... its customs and its constitutions." (Wagner v)
          1. According to Gage, Frances Willard was "the most dangerous woman in America." (Wagner, v)

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2. Gage published Woman, Church and State - 1893

3. She collaborated with Elizabeth Cady Stanton on The Woman's Bible

J. Religious Fundamentalism - 1920's

1. part of the urban vs. rural conflict

2. religion became a debatable point, attributed to:

a. moral let down after World War I

b. prosperity; people caught up in materialism

c. scientific theories gaining more acceptance (Freud and Darwin)

d. belief that science could accomplish anything

3. Modernists v. Fundamentalists: Modern. trying to reconcile science with religion/interpreted the Bible. Fundamentalists (small town and rural Americans, southerners, farmers) believe in literal interpretation of the Bible/The Second Coming was imminent/anti-science

a. Fundamentalists controlled the state legislatures, which led to anti-evolution laws

1. Scopes Trial

2. anti-women (working, equality, clothing restrictions in various states)

K. *Engel vs. Vitale* ruling

L. 1970's - Today

1. Rise of the Moral Majority/Christian Right. Discuss people involved in the movements

a. anti-abortion

1. Discuss *Roe v. Wade*

b. anti-family planning/contraceptives

c. anti-evolution/pro creationism, intelligent design

d. pro prayer in public schools

e. anti-secular humanism

f. pro censorship

g. literal interpretation of the Bible and ideas on women's "place"

h. opposed passage of the Equal Rights Amendment

2. Goals:

a. have students research and debate the ideas above

## MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE ON RELIGION AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

"True religion sets people free."

"The most religious people...I know are bitter in opposition to the churches of today - made up, as they largely are, of sham, pretence, and a hypocritical resemblance to the real, the true and the good. The moment has come for separating the chaff from the wheat and presenting true religion to the world - a religion which works for the good of humanity - a religion which recognizes and protects the rights of all."

"With regard to Eve and the authority for her being bound to consult her husband in the relation established by the creation of the first pair, some persons might think the order of creation would imply just the contrary; for as we trace the progress of creation step by step, we perceive that the inferior were first made and each successive thing created, exceeded in rank the preceding one."

## MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE AND SEPARATION OF CHURCH AND STATE

“Every woman suffragist from the commencement has been bombarded with Paul, knocked on the head by somebody else's interpretation of the Scriptures, and branded as heretical. We are tired of this. We know our rights, and knowing them, we shall dare maintain them. What is still more, we know the facts of history, and we know the present degraded condition of woman today is due to that interpretation of Scripture, which holds - always has held - that she had no right to live for herself, and to think for herself.”

“In the old anti-slavery times men did not hesitate to call the American Church the bulwark of American slavery. In like manner to-day we shall proclaim the Church--American, English, Greek, Protestant, Catholic--to be the bulwark of woman's slavery. Man trained by the church from infancy that woman is secondary and inferior to him, made for him, to be obedient to him...it is no subject of astonishment... that woman's political enfranchisement is so long delayed. “

“It is the church which stamps with religious authority the political and domestic degradation of woman. It is the church which has placed itself in opposition to all efforts looking towards her enfranchisement and it has done this under professed divine authority, and wherever we find laws of the state bearing with greater hardship upon woman than upon man, we shall ever find them due to the teachings of the church.

... The Protestant pulpit is only less dangerous than the Catholic to the liberties of the people in that its organized strength is less. “<sup>1</sup>

“The Church has opposed every demand of woman for higher opportunities, on the ground of feminine inferiority and secondary creation.”

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

“The church has ever obstructed the progress of humanity, delaying civilization and condemning the world to a moral barbarism from which there is no escape except through repudiation of its teachings.”

WCS, 69.

“Civilization means a recognition of the rights of others at every point of contact. The church doctrine of woman's created inferiority to man caused the darkness of an age which has not yet realized this.”

WCS, 201

“The Christian Church is based upon...the theory that woman brought sin and death into the world, and that therefore she was punished by being placed in a condition of inferiority to man - a condition of subjection, of subordination. This is the foundation today of the Christian Church.”

“I am as much as ever, a believer in the invisible church - but not in this rotten thing known to the world as ‘the Christian Church’”

“It is not religion that has opposed woman suffrage, because true religion believes in un-doing the heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free. But from the church and from theology this reform has met opposition at every step.”

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<sup>1</sup> Speech of Matilda Joslyn Gage at the Woman's National Liberal Convention, "Dangers of the Hour", February 24th, 1890.

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“If religion has a lesson to teach mankind, it is...the absolute equality of each human being with every other human being.”

WCS, 111.

“The great underlying creative principle is solely and distinctively feminine.”

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

“In all ancient nations we find goddesses seated everywhere with gods, in many instances regarded as superior to them, and of greater influence in the affairs of the universe.”

“Before it became thus possible to ignore the feminine in creation, God had been robbed of their feminine principle recognized everywhere in Pagandom.”

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

“The Church, having robbed the creative power of its feminine principle, next declared it created in its own image only males.”

“The Church, Science, and Woman,” 1886.

“As Miss Grew has truly said, it is not religion that has opposed woman suffrage, because true religion believes in undoing the heavy burdens and letting the oppressed go free. But from the church and from theology this reform has met opposition at every step.”<sup>2</sup>

“The world is in the midst of a tremendous religious revolution...Man has lost his power over woman, against whose moral and material rights the interpretations of the Bible and the whole force of the church have been directed for nearly 2,000 years.”

“During the ages, no rebellion has been of like importance with that of Woman against the tyranny of Church and State; none has had its far reaching effects. We note its beginning; its progress will overthrow every existing form of these institutions; its end will be a regenerated world.”<sup>3</sup>

A brighter day is to come for the world, a day when the intuitions of woman's soul shall be accepted as part of humanity's spiritual wealth; when force shall step backward, and love, in reality, rule the teachings of religion.”

“Creation:

So God, Father-Mother, created man, male and female created He-She.”

“No one has fuller belief in the Great Infinite--or in the invisible church. It is only the hideous deceptive irreligious form that I attack--based as it is--on the belief in woman fall, woman first transgression--woman original sin, which rendered the sacrifice of a Savior necessary. I most fully believe in a good life--,& that is what many Christians do not--and in the law of compensation. I do not believe in a blind belief, or faith without sight. My reason was given me to decide with--I was created a revelation to myself more authoritative to me than any book revelation which must be accepted on faith and upon whose authenticity... there are doubts.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Report of the International Council of Women, assembled by the National Woman Suffrage Association, Washington, D.C., March 25 to April 1, 1888.* Washington, D. C.: National Woman Suffrage Association, 1888, p. 347.

<sup>3</sup> WCS, 245-246.

<sup>4</sup> MJG to Harriet Robinson, Robinson Collection, Schlesinger Library, 14 March 1890

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“And who is the God they desire to recognize? Not the united masculine and feminine principle, which at the beginning said, “let us make man in our image, after our likeness.” So, in “the image of God created he him, male and female created he them, and called their name Adam.” The National Reform Association wishes to introduce an unknown God into the Constitution, a mere masculine figment of masculine brains,—a divided God, such as men long have worshipped and preached. For ourselves, we believe in the feminine principle in humanity and the feminine principle in the God-head; and that the truest recognition of God, is to do justice to every creature. The great creative, vivifying principle of the God-head, that subtle, most venerated portion of the Trinity, through whose life-giving power Christ was generated,—the Holy Spirit,—is feminine, and the great, unforgiven sin of the ages, is the non-recognition of this feminine principle in the God-head.”

“God in the Constitution” Oct. 1881

### MATILDA JOSLYN GAGE ON REPRODUCTIVE RIGHTS

“My blood always boils at advice from a man in regard to a family. That, at least, should be the province of woman alone. To say when and how often she chooses to go down into the valley of the shadow of death, to give the world another child, should be hers alone to say.”<sup>5</sup>

The law of motherhood should be entirely under woman’s control, but in order to be that, woman must first of all be held as having a right to herself.

NCBB, Nov. 1878

[The subject] which lies deeper down into woman’s wrongs than any other. This is the denial of the right to herself...down through the Christian centuries to this nineteenth, nowhere has the marital union of the sexes been one in which the women has had control over her own body. Enforced motherhood is a crime against the body of the mother and the soul of the child.

The law of motherhood should be entirely under woman’s control, but in order to be that, woman must first of all be held as having a right to herself. When society, and especially the church, becomes permeated with the belief that woman was created for herself, and not for man, that she and not man should be the law of the family, when the old Pauline doctrine that neither husband nor wife has control of their own bodies, is done away, when his most diabolical doctrine that woman was made for man, is utterly overthrown, as it must and will be; when each girl born into the world is taught from birth that she, and no other, has a right to her own body; when each boy from birth is taught self-control, self-restraint, and that man has no right to enforce maternity, then “science” will not be asked to step into the domain of justice and inherent right, to settle questions of this nature. Each woman will be a law unto herself and the world. There is no more pernicious doctrine—none more degrading to womanhood, than that now permeating society, as to the necessities of man’s nature, “necessities” which call for the sacrifice of woman. We do not believe it—beginning nor end. We do believe—most fully—in the right of woman to herself, and in her right to the control of all such questions.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> “Persons and Things” by Matilda Joslyn Gage  
*The National Citizen and Ballot Box*, January 1881, p. 2

<sup>6</sup> “Our Book Table.” by Matilda Joslyn Gage  
*The National Citizen and Ballot Box*, November, 1878, p. 2

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