

*Marty Center Religion and Culture Web Forum  
February 2004*

**“A place to go to connect with yourself”:  
A Historical Perspective on Journaling**

Catherine A. Brekus  
University of Chicago Divinity School

Historians of early America don't usually spend their time browsing through the self-help section of their local bookstores or studying The Oprah Winfrey Show's website. But several months ago I received a letter from a friend and former student urging me to visit [www.Oprah.com](http://www.Oprah.com). Because I'm writing an essay about devotional diaries in early America (and I'm also writing a book based on an eighteenth-century woman's diaries), she thought I should know that Oprah encourages female viewers to write personal journals. Enclosing a printout of Oprah's instructions on how to begin “journaling” (a word only recently coined), she scrawled in large letters in the margin, “What do you think of this?” This essay, which uses history as a way of illuminating the present, represents my attempt to answer her question.

Oprah Winfrey's website, for those who have never visited it (I'm now a “registered user”), not only contains message boards and cooking and decorating tips, but a space for women to write a wide variety of journals: daily journals for “general daily thoughts”; gratitude journals for recording “five things you love every day”; spa girls' journals for keeping “your exercise routine on track with your fitness goals!”; discovery journals for getting to know yourself by “looking back”; and health journals for recording “your goals, successes and challenges.” There's also the opportunity to “create your own journal” with a unique name. Although women can create a password in order to save

their journals on a secure part of the Oprah website, they are also invited to share entries with others. The “Shared Journals” section includes literally thousands of postings about everything from the death of loved ones to failed diets. “What is a journal?” the website asks. The answer is simple: “Often, it’s a place to go to connect with yourself.”

In this essay, which briefly compares the recent phenomenon of “journaling” to early American devotional writing, I’ll try to answer several questions: Why did so many early American Christians feel compelled to keep diaries, and why has there been such a surge of interest in “journaling” in our own time? How do today’s “spiritual” journals either resemble or differ from early American diaries? In the first part of this essay, I show that early American Protestants kept diaries in order to “crucify” themselves and worship a transcendent God. In the second part, I argue that today, Americans write spiritual journals for a very different set of reasons: to create an authentic sense of selfhood, to come to a deeper appreciation of their own worth, and to find God within them. Since a full discussion of either early American diaries or modern journals could easily stretch to the length of a book, my comments here are not meant to be comprehensive, but only suggestive. Nevertheless, my hope is that by looking at the present through the lens of the past (and vice versa), we might gain a small glimpse of the profound transformations that have reshaped American journaling between 1600 and the present.

**Crucifying the Self:  
Devotional Writing in Early America**

As part of a collaborative project on “The History of Christian Practice in America,” I have spent the last few years thinking about the practice of devotional writing among Puritans and evangelicals in early New England. (The New England Puritans, for those who aren’t familiar with the vocabulary of religious history, were dissenters who had immigrated to America in order to create a more pure church. Evangelicals were their descendants in the eighteenth century. Although they shared the Puritans’ theological convictions, they redefined conversion as a sudden moment of spiritual rebirth rather than as a lifelong transformation, and they tended to be more evangelistic and mission-oriented.) Unfortunately many early American diaries seem to have been lost, but dozens still survive. To name just a few, we can read the journals of Thomas Shepard (1605-1649), a minister in Cambridge, Massachusetts; Sarah Prince Gill (1728?-1771), a “goodwife” in Boston; John Barnard (1654-1732), a Boston carpenter; and Sarah Osborn (1714-96), a schoolteacher in Newport, Rhode Island.

These men and women viewed writing as a crucial spiritual discipline that would lead them to greater understanding of their relationship to God. Although there were certainly people who kept diaries in order to record daily events, many identified writing as an explicitly religious pursuit. As Sarah Osborn confessed in her diary, it was a way to “get near” or “wrestle” with God. Influenced by the biblical examples of Moses, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, who had all been commanded to write (“Write thee all the words that I have spoken unto thee in a book,” God ordered Jeremiah), she filled hundreds of pages with her thoughts about herself and God.<sup>1</sup>

Because Puritans and evangelicals were the spiritual heirs of John Calvin, the great theologian who helped lead the Protestant Reformation, they never claimed that the

practice of writing could be salvific in and of itself. They believed that humans could be saved only through divine grace, not works. As John Winthrop (1588-1649), the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony, reminded himself in his diary, “God will have mercie on whom he will have mercie. There was never any holye meditation, prayer, or action that I had a hand in, that received any worthe or furtherance from me or anythinge that was mine.” Nevertheless, Winthrop assumed that devotional writing could be a *means* of salvation. In other words, he believed that if it were God’s will, he might experience a small taste of divine grace while examining himself in the pages of his journal.<sup>2</sup>

These men and women subjected themselves to rigorous self-examination in their diaries. Because of their belief that God had chosen only a small number of the “elect” to be saved, they scrutinized themselves for signs of grace. On page after page of their journals, they asked the same painful questions: Did they truly love God? Did they live according to God’s commandments? Had they committed any sins? Could they find any “evidence” that they numbered among the saved? Although they must have found it extraordinarily difficult to examine their lives with such clinical detachment, they subjected themselves to the same grueling discipline every time they wrote. Instead of celebrating writing as a means of liberation (an idea popularized by the nineteenth-century Romantics), they embraced it as a form of self-regulation.

Because of their belief in the reality of the Fall, Puritans and evangelicals always found the same thing when they looked inward: *sin*. On page after page of their diaries, they lamented their corruption in a self-abasing language that sounds almost shocking to modern ears. (As one historian has remarked, modern Americans use this kind of radical language to criticize institutions, but rarely the self.<sup>3</sup>) In the 1600s, for example, the

Reverend Michael Wigglesworth (1631-1705) filled his diaries with descriptions of his “wretched backsliding heart,” “vileness,” “carnality,” “vanity,” and “whoarish affections,” and even one hundred years later, Susanna Anthony (1726-1791) described her heart as “a sink of sin, more loathsome than the most offensive carrion that swarms with hateful vermin! My understanding dark and ignorant; my will stubborn; my affections carnal, corrupt and disordered; every faculty depraved and vitiated; my whole soul deformed and polluted, filled with pride, enmity, carnality, hypocrisy, self-confidence, and all manner of sins.” Hannah Heaton (1721-1794), a Connecticut farmwife, longed to “fly out of this blind withered naked sore stinking rotten proud selfish self love into the arms of a lovely Jesus.”<sup>4</sup>

All of these writers saw the self as an obstacle to their union with a transcendent God. “Strip me intirely of self,” Sarah Osborn begged God in the pages of her diary. “Wean me wholly from the world and all things therein.” Using more violent language, David Brainerd (1718-1747) a missionary to Native Americans, insisted that he did not only want to be “weaned” from the world, but “crucified to all its allurements.”<sup>5</sup>

Did this intense hostility to the self leave psychological or religious scars? Given the number of writers who claimed to have been tempted by thoughts of suicide, the answer is almost certainly yes. As Susanna Anthony confessed in her diary, “[I] was strongly beset to lay violent hands on myself, verily fearing, if I lived, I should be a most blasphemous wretch.” It is hard to imagine that one could write scores of pages lamenting one’s “filth” and corruption without succumbing to feelings of insignificance or worthlessness.<sup>6</sup>

Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that many Puritans and evangelicals believed that confronting the ugliness of sin helped them gain a greater appreciation of God's "astonishing" grace. Although they always began their diary entries by examining their sinfulness, they often ended by praising God for his perfection. For example, writing in 1641, Thomas Shepard grieved that he was "nothing else but a mass of sin and...very vile," but instead of falling into despair, he expressed awe at God's goodness. "Immediately the Lord revealed himself to me in his fullness of goodness with much sweet affection," he marveled. "The Lord suddenly appeared and let me see there was strength in him to succor me, wisdom to guide, mercy in him to pity, spirit to quicken, Christ to satisfy, and so I saw all my good was there, as all evil was in myself." His self-abasement was not an end in itself, but a means to a deeper appreciation of his utter dependence on a sovereign, majestic, merciful God.<sup>7</sup>

Besides using their diaries to examine themselves and to heighten their love of God, these men and women also hoped to overcome their temptations to "worldliness." By forcing themselves to write about their lives every morning or evening, they hoped to discipline themselves to fix their minds on God instead of worldly pleasures, whether money, sex, or fame. Borrowing an image from Psalm 131 ("Surely I have behaved and quieted myself, as a child that is weaned of his mother: my soul is even as a weaned child"), many longed to be "weaned" from their "carnal" desires. Writing in 1711, the Reverend Cotton Mather (1663-1728) resolved to renounce the "FLESH," the "WORLD," and the "DIVER." "I rebuke, I restrain, I deny the *Flesh* in its Irregular Inclinations," he vowed. "I dream not of Happiness in the great Things of this *World*; I see nothing here will make me happy."<sup>8</sup> But the vehemence of his language betrayed him.

As he knew, he was too human (he would have said “sinful”) to ever completely conquer his desires.

Based on what these men and women wrote in their diaries, their most painful struggles involved “weaning” themselves from their attachment to loved ones. Early American ministers often warned their congregations not to elevate fallen humanity above God. Although Christians could love “friends” and “relations,” they could never forget that their ultimate allegiance was to God alone. In the words of one minister, “To love them with a particular love, as things distinct from God, to delight in them merely as creatures; and to follow them as if some good, or happiness, or pleasure were to be found in them distinctly from what is in God: this is a branch of spiritual Adultery, I had almost said Idolatry.” In anguished diary entries, both ministers and lay people expressed fears of loving their spouses, children or friends more than God. They did not want to be guilty of worshipping “false idols.” When Cotton Mather’s wife lay dying from the measles, he subjected himself to the strict discipline of writing in order to control his emotions. In a poignant entry, he wrote, “Those Words of my Saviour do much run in my mind; The Cup which my Father gives me, shall not I drink it? I would endeavor all possible Imitation of such a patient Submission unto the Will of God. . . .”<sup>9</sup> By writing in his diary, he tried to focus on his love of God rather than his “particular love” for his wife.

As these examples reveal, Puritans and evangelicals in early America assumed that writing always involved an anguished confrontation with the corrupt self. This has sometimes been difficult for modern scholars to understand. Indeed, many have suggested that these men and women viewed writing as a kind of freedom—as an opportunity to construct new identities. For example, one historian has argued that John

Barnard, a Boston carpenter, “actively constructed a personal piety” in his diary.<sup>10</sup> While this interpretation certainly holds a grain of truth, it distorts the more complicated story that early American Protestants told about themselves in their diaries. These men and women repeatedly insisted that they were helpless to “construct” themselves—only God could give them a contrite heart—and they embraced the rigors of writing because it offered them the possibility of transcendence, not self-determination. Suffering, in their opinion, could be redemptive. As Thomas Shepard noted in his diary, some Christians wanted “to have joy and peace alway[s],” but in his opinion, “temptations, fears, and wrestlings” were also “good.” In a single, forceful sentence that summed up his worldview, he wrote, “the greatest part of a Christian’s grace lies in mourning for the want of it.”<sup>11</sup>

Devotional writing always involved “mourning,” but in the eyes of Puritans and evangelicals, it was also a powerful means of grace.

### **Finding and Loving the Self: Spiritual Journaling in Modern America**

The practice of “journaling,” as it is now called, has changed so much over the past two hundred years that it is almost dizzying to compare early American diaries to the “shared journals” on Oprah.com or to the popular guidebooks on personal writing. But juxtaposing the present to the past can help us gain a clearer understanding of the historical forces that have transformed America’s religious landscape. What exactly has changed? And why?

The most striking difference between past and present is that modern journaling is a thriving part of the consumer economy. Unlike early Americans, who constructed their

own diaries out of pages of foolscap tied together with string, today's consumers can buy books in a stunning variety of styles, sizes, and colors (not to mention prices) that are all specifically designed for "journaling." One can purchase luxurious leather-bound books, inexpensive spiral notebooks, books that can be tied shut with a ribbon, books with lined or unlined pages, and books with cover pictures of butterflies, polka dots, pens, stars, cats, angels, and most popular of all, trees or flowers. While many of these books are blank inside, "guided" journals include quotations or exercises that are designed to stimulate writing. For example, Believe in Yourself: A Key to Life Guided Journal encourages people to write in response to sentences such as, "Only with understanding can you truly celebrate your life."<sup>12</sup>

Besides these blank and guided journals, one can also buy dozens of books that explain how and why to begin writing. As the subtitles of these books suggest, almost all of them fall into the genre of "self-help": for example, you can buy A Workbook to Help You Regain Control of Your Life, A Journaling Tool for Tying Up the Incomplete Details of Your Life and Heart, or Tools for the Healing of Mind, Body and Spirit. As one author excitedly explains, keeping a personal journal will help you "work through problems, heal relationships, access your subconscious, interpret dreams, discover your subpersonalities, recover from grief, overcome childhood wounds...and more."<sup>13</sup> (All this for only \$13.95!) Although it is not clear who is buying these books, it seems likely that they are the same people who are buying other kinds of personal growth literature.

Although a few of these guidebooks are explicitly Christian in focus, the most popular never mention particular denominations or creeds. Instead, they promise "spiritual growth," a phrase which is designed to appeal to Americans who see

themselves as “spiritual, but not religious.” For example, the Complete Idiot’s Guide to Journaling includes a chapter on how to use journaling as “a means to improve your relationship to the divine,” but never specifies the exact identity of that “divine.” As sociologist Wade Clark Roof has argued, “baby boomers” have rejected organized religion in favor of a “quest culture” that encourages individual religious seeking.<sup>14</sup>

After reading the tortured words of early American Protestants, who reviled themselves for their corruption, the cheerfulness of these books is almost startling. Gone are the anguished prayers to be “weaned” from the world and the crushing sense of personal sin. Nor do most of these books ever suggest that journaling might be painful, but only “uncomfortable.” Most important, they promise that any feelings of “discomfort” will eventually give way to “the peace that passes all understanding,” or as another author promises, “a more blissful experience.”<sup>15</sup>

Journaling is fulfilling and “blissful,” according to many of these guidebooks, because it leads to the discovery of the self—a self which is imagined as essentially good. Indeed, the most striking feature of these books is their extraordinarily positive view of the self. Rather than urging us to confront our sinfulness, they promise that self-examination will lead us to a greater appreciation of our inner wisdom and beauty. Believe in Yourself, a guided journal, recommends that people write in response to the quotation, “If you measure your value by who you are, there is no end to your reserves.”<sup>16</sup> Another guided journal, entitled The Simplify Journal: A Workbook to Help You Regain Control of Your Life, includes a section on “Soul” that advises people to “Practice Acceptance.” For example, you should “List at least 5 of your best qualities and attributes,” and “Recall positive comments about your compliments from others and note

them here.”<sup>17</sup> While these self-help books don’t portray the self as perfect, they urge us not to be too hard on ourselves. “May you find parts of yourself you weren’t familiar with, and greet them with warm forgiveness,” one book advises.<sup>18</sup>

Although it is impossible to know how people actually use these guidebooks, the “Shared Journals” on Oprah’s website suggest that large numbers of Americans take this advice seriously. The writers who share their personal journals on Oprah.com, most of whom are women, portray writing as a way to deepen their love of themselves. “I love myself more and more everyday,” one woman writes. Scores of others echo her words: “I love myself more and more each day. I am a worthy and deserving person”; “I have accepted my failures and vow to understand myself better, to love myself better, and above all else, to remain true to my spirit”; “I love myself and will not compromise [sic] my happiness for anything.” In contrast to early Americans, who worried that they loved themselves too much, we in the twenty-first century seem fear that we don’t love ourselves *enough*.

The distance that Americans have traveled from the seventeenth century, when spiritual journaling meant exploring the sinfulness of the self, to today, when it means exploring the beauties of the self, is so vast that it demands historical reflection. How can we explain this dramatic transformation in attitudes toward the self and God? Although a complete answer to that question is impossible in this brief, schematic overview, a few of the structural transformations that have reshaped American life since the late 1700s are worth noting here. First, the American Revolution and the creation of the new republic in the late eighteenth century inevitably led to a more positive view of the self. Although the Founding Fathers were not naive about human nature, they argued that as long as there

was a system of checks and balances to prevent the rise of despotism, ordinary people could be trusted to make political decisions. By the mid-1800s, politicians such as Andrew Jackson increasingly celebrated the decency and innocence of the “common man.”

Second, the rise of capitalism in the nineteenth century put intense pressure on older understandings of sin as selfishness. In order to sell their products, merchants and entrepreneurs had to convince people that they did not need to practice an ascetic faith of self-denial. If the self was essentially good, then it did not need to be painfully “weaned from the world,” but indulged and gratified. Although conservative Christians continued to decry “worldliness,” they were increasingly marginalized in a consumer culture that perceived self-gratification as a positive good.

Finally, the rise of religious liberalism in the nineteenth century reinforced the growing faith in human goodness. Influenced by Enlightenment philosophers such as the third earl of Shaftesbury and Frances Hutcheson, many Protestant clergymen argued that humans were not inherently selfish, but compassionate. The most liberal clergymen, especially the Unitarians and Transcendentalists (such as Ralph Waldo Emerson), took this language to an extreme by rejecting the traditional doctrine of original sin. Insisting that humans had been created in the image of God, they argued that the evangelical emphasis on the Fall had been oppressive and even cruel. What was needed, they claimed, was the liberation of the human spirit.

By the 1880s and 1890s, many Protestant liberals had replaced the traditional conception of a transcendent God with a revolutionary new faith in divine immanence. Of course, this theology was not completely new. The Quakers, who had emerged in

England during the 1640s, had always argued that every person has an “inner light,” but they had been condemned as dangerously radical. But as political, economic, and religious changes converged to create a more positive understanding of human nature, many Americans not only began to assume that the self was good, but that it was the location of the divine.

Modern “journaling” is deeply indebted to the liberal emphasis on an immanent God. As many journaling guides explain, it is especially important to love ourselves because God is not only located above us, but inside of us. As one popular author explains, “journaling helps us to find within ourselves the spark of divinity that illuminates the dark places and transforms the mundane world into a place of beauty, growth, compassion and healing.” Similarly, one of the most popular guided journals, Soul Catcher: A Journal to Help You Become Who You Really Are, which has been featured on The Oprah Winfrey Show (and which is still prominently advertised on Oprah.com), promises to “assist you to hear the wisdom of your inner voice.” In contrast to early Americans, who imagined God as high above them in the clouds, many Americans today assume that God is located within, and they write personal journals in order to “get in touch” with their “inner voice.”<sup>19</sup>

Of course, not all the guidebooks to journaling sound so newfangled. A more traditional image of both self and God can be found in the books written from an explicitly Christian perspective, whether Catholic or Protestant. While most of these books don’t seem to be as popular as the more vaguely “spiritual” titles (with a few notable exceptions), they hark back to the same themes of divine transcendence and human weakness that early Americans explored in their religious diaries. For example, in

Rick Warren's bestseller, The Purpose Driven Life Journal: Reflections on What on Earth am I Here For, writers are asked to consider the question, "How can I remind myself today that life is really about living for God, not myself?" (Warren is a Southern Baptist and the pastor of Saddleback Church in California, one of the largest churches in America.) Given our contemporary preoccupation with self-esteem, it isn't surprising that these journaling guides have abandoned an older language of corruption, but they still retain the belief in original sin. A guide meant for adolescents tells them to practice self-forgiveness, but not before making "a list of no more than five things you have said or done in the last twenty-four hours that have hurt you or others."<sup>20</sup> (This book was written by two Catholic authors.)

Yet even these Christian guides to journaling, like the vaguely "spiritual" ones, seem almost obsessively concerted with "discovering" the self. While early Americans were distressed by their inherent sinfulness, people today seem to be haunted by a different demon: a deep fear of the loss of authentic "selfhood." "We have lost touch with the reality of our inner life," laments Francis Dorff, a Catholic monastic and the author of Simply SoulStirring: Writing as a Meditative Practice. "We live as though our life were limited to what we see, get, and have on the surface."<sup>21</sup> Another author complains, "Your inner voice tells you what it wants and needs, but too often you can't hear it. External voices and commotion drown out the song of your spirit."<sup>22</sup> Again and again, journaling guides promise that writing will help us to "come to greater awareness of the Self," "find your true self," "explore your true self," and "reconnect" with "the lost self."<sup>23</sup> According to Oprah's website, "Writing consistently in a journal can give you a deeper connection with your own inner self."

Since this language sounds both superficial and narcissistic, it would be easy to make fun of it. What exactly does it mean to “reconnect” with yourself? But journaling deserves to be taken seriously as a response to a genuine sense of crisis. As many historians (and ethicists) have argued, a multitude of forces in the modern world have put intense pressure on the integrity and dignity of the self. For example, technological and scientific advances have enabled people to exert greater control over the human body than ever before, but these advances have also raised profound questions about the nature of “selfhood.” Living in an age when we can reconstruct our appearances with plastic surgery, adjust our brain chemistry to make ourselves happier, and contemplate the possibility of gene therapy, it is not surprising that many of us seem confused about what it means to be a “self.” What is immutable about the self, if anything? To give another example, the rise of a global economy has expanded people’s access to material goods, but also standardized everyday experience. Ironically, corporations spend billions of dollars on advertising in order to convince us that buying particular products will somehow make us distinctive, but in reality, they make us more alike. In a consumer culture that treats the self as yet another object to be manipulated, people seem increasingly confused about what it means to be a unique individual. The result, according to historian T.J. Jackson Lears, is that ever since the late nineteenth century, Americans have been plagued by a sense of “weightlessness” and an insatiable hunger for “authenticity.”<sup>24</sup>

Journaling, then, can be understood as a protest against the dehumanizing forces of the modern world, especially the objectification and commodification of the self. Even the most superficial guides to journaling (and unfortunately, there are many) make a

strong affirmation of human dignity and worth. According to these guides, every person is distinctive, and every person has an important story to tell about what it means to be human.

Yet in a sad irony, many of these guides inadvertently contribute to the crisis that they are trying to resolve. The problem isn't simply that journaling has become commercialized, although this is certainly true. Indeed, beginning writers are urged to buy the right notebooks, pens, and writing manuals to inspire their creativity, and advertising techniques can sometimes be crass. (One author begins her guided journal by recording her "prayer" that consumers will buy the companion volume to her book.)<sup>25</sup> The more difficult problem is that these guides help to cultivate a kind of selfhood that is perfectly matched to the requirements of a capitalist economy. By insisting that self-love is an unqualified good, they contribute to a consumer ethic of self-gratification. The result is a vicious circle: these guides implicitly protest against the commodification of the self, but by urging people not to be guilty about self-indulgence, they unwittingly help to fuel the engine of consumerism. "I'm really glad you are taking time for yourself," writes one woman on [www.Oprah.com](http://www.Oprah.com) to another. "You deserve to."

To be sure, not all the news about contemporary journaling is so bleak. A few countercultural voices, most of them motivated by religious concerns, insist that the ultimate goal of journaling is not simply self-awareness, but "self-forgetfulness." Although they reject the intense language of sin that characterized early American journals, they continue to portray the self as flawed and weak, and they urge people to look beyond themselves for meaning, whether to the human community or to God. As one author explains, "By sharing our stories and listening to another's, we transcend the

boundaries of self and move toward understanding the timelessness of God's life in all human beings."<sup>26</sup> For some Americans today (how many is impossible to tell), journaling remains not only a way to find the self, but to transcend it.

Comparing early American devotional writing to modern journaling reveals the profound transformations that have taken place in American religious life over the past three centuries. If we could magically transport a few of the most popular journaling guides back in time, early American Protestants would be shocked by the modern faith in the goodness of the self and the immanence of God. Given their propensity to see history as a story of decline rather than progress, they would almost certainly tell the story of American religion from 1600 to the present as a fall from grace.

Yet while it would be easy to turn this essay into a jeremiad, my own attitude is far more ambivalent. Indeed, I find it difficult to give a simple answer to the question my friend posed to me: What do I think of modern journaling? On one hand, I have no desire to return to the intense self-loathing that characterized early American journaling. Nor do I want to recapture the kind of self-denying piety that made Cotton Mather wonder whether it was sinful to mourn for his dying wife. But on the other hand, I don't view the contemporary practice of journaling, with its emphasis on self-gratification, as a sign of cultural progress. Instead, I'll hope that the leaders of journaling workshops, the authors of self-help books, and last but not least, Oprah Winfrey, will search for ways to build on the insights of the past without repeating its mistakes. Our journals should not only help us to discover our true selves, but our finitude.

---

 Notes

I am grateful to all the members of the History of Christian Practice Project for sharing their thoughts about journaling with me. Those interested in the project can visit the website: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/practice/finalConference.html>. I am especially grateful to Kathryn Lofton for asking me to think about Oprah Winfrey and contemporary journaling.

<sup>1</sup> See Exodus 17:14; Jeremiah 30:2; Habakkuk 2:1-2.

<sup>2</sup> John Winthrop, "Experience," in Life and Letters of John Winthrop, ed. Robert C. Winthrop (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), 79-80. Charles Hambrick-Stowe explains, "in Puritan spirituality God did not come because someone engaged in a certain exercise; but if God was going to come, He would do so through the means of that exercise." Charles Hambrick-Stowe, The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 45. Other good overviews of early spiritual memoirs are David Sanford Shields, "A History of Personal Diary Writing in New England 1620-1745," Diss. (University of Chicago, 1982); Jon Alexander, American Personal Religious Accounts, 1600-1980: Toward and Inner History of America's Faiths (New York: Edwin Millen Press, 1983); and Daniel B. Shea, Jr., Spiritual Autobiography in Early America (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).

<sup>3</sup> Shields, "History of Personal Diary Writing," 72-73.

<sup>4</sup> Edmund Morgan, ed., The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth 1653-1657: The Conscience of a Puritan (New York: Harper and Row, 1946), 13, 20, 21, 25; Samuel Hopkins, The Life and Character of Miss Susanna Anthony (Worcester, Mass.: Leonard Worcester, 1796); Barbara E. Lacey, ed., The World of Hannah Heaton: The Diary of an Eighteenth-Century New England Farm Woman (Dekalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2003), 56.

<sup>5</sup> Sarah Osborn, Diary #20 (1 January 1757 – 7 May 1757), entry for 16 January 1757, p. 24, Newport Historical Society, Newport, Rhode Island. Jonathan Edwards, The Life of David Brainerd, ed. Norman Pettit, The Works of Jonathan Edwards, Volume 7 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 173.

<sup>6</sup> See Philip Greven, The Protestant Temperament: Patterns of Child-Rearing, Religious Experience, and the Self in Early America (New York: Knopf, 1977). Hopkins, The Life and Character of Miss Susanna Anthony, 19-20.

<sup>7</sup> Michael McGiffert, ed., God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety Being the Autobiography and Journal of Thomas Shepard (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), entry for 8 February 1641.

<sup>8</sup> Cotton Mather, Diary of Cotton Mather (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing, 1957), 119.

<sup>9</sup> Samuel Shaw, The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness (1665; rpt., Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1746), 147. Cotton Mather, Diary, Vol. 2, 253.

<sup>10</sup> Erik Seeman, Pious Persuasions: Laity and Clergy in Eighteenth-Century New England (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 1999), 15. Tom Webster views "the phenomenon of diary

---

writing as a ‘technology of the self,’ as a means by which the godly self was maintained, indeed constructed, through the action of writing.” “Writing to Redundancy,” 40. See also Margo Todd, “Puritan Self-Fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward,” The Journal of British Studies 31, no. 3 (July 1992): 236-264.

<sup>11</sup> Michael McGiffert, ed., God’s Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety Being the Autobiography and Journal of Thomas Shepard (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972), 123.

<sup>12</sup> Believe in Yourself: A Key to Life Guided Journal (White Plains, New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1998). The text in this journal is taken from Sophia Bedford-Pierce, The Key to Life (New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1995), and Beth Mende Conny, Believe in Yourself: A Woman’s Journey (New York: Peter Pauper Press, 1994).

<sup>13</sup> Kathleen Adams, Journal to the Self: Twenty-Two Paths to Spiritual Growth (New York: Warner Books, 1990).

<sup>14</sup> See Joan R. Neubauer, Complete Idiot’s Guide to Journaling (Alpha Books, 2000). Wade Clark Roof, Spiritual Marketplace: Baby Boomers and the Remaking of American Religion (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001). See also Robert C. Fuller, Spiritual But Not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), and Robert Wuthnow, After Heaven: Spirituality in America since the 1950s (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Paula Farrell Sullivan, The Mystery of My Story: Autobiographical Development for Personal and Spiritual Development (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1991), 3; Eldonna Bouton, Journaling From the Heart (Whole Heart Publications, 2000).

<sup>16</sup> Believe in Yourself: A Key to Life Guided Journal.

<sup>17</sup> Janet Terban Morris, The Simplify Journal: A Workbook to Help You Regain Control of Your Life (New York: Peter Pauper Press, n.d.).

<sup>18</sup> Evelyn McFarlane and James Saywell, If...Questions for the Soul (New York: Villard, 1998).

<sup>19</sup> Neil F. Neimark, The Handbook of Journaling: Tools for the Healing of Mind, Body, and Spirit, Second Edition (R.E.P. Technologies, 2000); Christina Baldwin, Life’s Companion: Journal Writing as a Spiritual Quest (Bantam, 1990), Kathy and Amy Eldon, Soul Catcher: A Journal to Help You Become Who You Really Are, 1. The emphasis is in the original.

<sup>20</sup> Harry J. Cargas and Roger J. Radley, Keeping a Spiritual Journal (Nazareth Books, 1981), 74.

<sup>21</sup> Francis Dorff, Simply SoulStirring: Writing as a Meditative Practice (Paulist Press, 1998), 1.

<sup>22</sup> Janet Terban Morris, The Simplify Journal: A Workbook to Help You Regain Control of Your Life (New York: Peter Pauper Press, n.d.), 135.

<sup>23</sup> Sullivan, Mystery of My Story, 6; Patricia D. Brown, From the Heart Journal: A Personal Prayer Journal for Women (Nashville: Dimensions for Living, 1999), 11; Linda H. Hollies, Sister to Sister: A Companion Journal for African American Women (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1999), back cover; and Bouton, Journaling From the Heart. Bouton’s book includes three “workshops” that are designed to help people begin writing personal journals. Her first workshop is entitled, “Introduction to Journaling:

---

Reconnecting with The Lost Self.” Besides writing books, Bouton leads journaling workshops.

<sup>24</sup> T. J. Jackson Lears, No Place of Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture 1880-1920 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994).

<sup>25</sup> In Sister to Sister: A Companion Journal for African American Women, Linda Hollies writes: “My prayer is that you will purchase Sister to Sister, Volume 2: Devotions for and from African American Women.” But she also assures people that her journal can be used “all by itself as an aid to your inner healing and wholeness” (vi). According to the biography on her book, Hollies is the director of outreach for the West Michigan Conference of the United Methodist Church.

<sup>26</sup> Sullivan, Mystery of My Story, 83. It is interesting to note that the authors of Christian journaling guides have a strong sense of their countercultural identities. In the Introduction to her book, From the Heart Journal, Patricia D. Brown explains, “this guided journal is different from many you’ll find on the bookstore shelves because it reminds you that you are not alone. Its pages awaken you to the knowledge that you travel with God—your companion and guide, center and strength, wisdom and compassion” (11).