EJ 36, no. 1 (2018): 1–17.

A New Definition of Puritanism: A Cross-Disciplinary Approach

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As the United States approaches the 400th anniversary of the arrival of the first Puritans at the Plymouth Colony, investigating the stuff Puritanism was made of should be a fashionable academic and popular concern once again. Puritanism has long been recognized as one of the main shaping influences on American culture and American evangelicalism. To understand America one must understand Puritanism. But therein lies the problem. In 2013 Abram C. Van Engen wrote, "Puritanism is a problem. It had a massive impact on the early modern history of England and New England, and yet no scholar can quite agree on how to define it or exactly what influence it had."[1] Definition is a problem because, as Francis Bremer, in his 2009, *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction*, notes, "Whereas other religious movements of the sixteenth and seventeenth century—Lutheranism, Catholicism, Genevan Calvinism, among others—became institutionalized so that there were official statements of faith and formal membership in churches, puritanism (*sic*) never achieved that type of clear identity"[2] . . . hence the difficulty in defining this movement that contributed so much to defining a nation. In the following essay I make another, perhaps Quixotic tilt at that historical windmill. I believe the theology must be taken seriously for understanding Puritanism. But even more so, Puritanism needs to be seen holistically.

Calvinism came to England through a process that has all the marks of globalization: trade, immigration, and the media, all pervaded with capitalism. English cloth merchants—many of whom were Lollards—were efficient smugglers of forbidden Lutheran and later Calvinist books into England.[3] These books reached Cambridge University where they became grist for the conversational mill at the White Horse Inn. In the second half of the sixteenth century English cloth merchants rode the wave of prosperity created

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[1]Abram C. Van Engen, "Puritanism," *Oxford Bibliographies*, 2013, http://www.oxfordbibliographies.com/view/document/obo-9780199730414/obo-9780199730414-0198.xml. Van Engen is Assistant Professor of English at Washington University in St. Louis, specializing in early American religion, literature, and culture, focusing on Puritanism and the author of *Sympathetic Puritans: Calvinist Fellow Feeling in Early New England* (Oxford: Oxford, 2015).

[2]Francis Bremer, *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford, 2009), 2. Bremer, along with many others, consistently does not capitalize "puritan" or "puritanism," demonstrating amorphous and non-proper noun nature of the movement.

[3]J. F. Davis, "Lollardy and the Reformation," *The Impact of the English Reformation*, *1500-1640* (New York: Arnold, 1997), 45 notes the concentration of Lollards in the textile trade, "which could provide access to the circulation of books and ideas."

by Dutch merchant adventurers. Antwerp served both as the center of the boom and a haven for religious dissenters from England. Although under Spanish dominion at the time, little was done to stop the growth of English Reformed churches. During Elizabeth I's reign (1558–1603), the English merchant chapels were models of Reformed churchmanship, at Antwerp and various other market ports.[4] The steady stream of English merchants fell under their influence and often took Reformed beliefs back with them to England. Flemish immigrants, fleeing the Inquisition, also brought their Calvinist convictions with them to East Anglia making that region a stronghold of Puritanism.[5]

I. Repristination

> In short, the first age [of the Church] was the golden age: to return to that will make a man a Protestant, and, I may add, a Puritan. – Cotton Mather[6]

Puritanism was, as the 2008 *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* describes it, "a distinctive and particularly intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism."[7] It began as a reform movement within Anglicanism, a struggle to mold the Church of England, root and branch, in the image of what they believed to be the biblical ideal. "At the simplest level, puritans were those who sought to reform themselves and their society of the remnants of Roman Catholic teachings and practice then found in post-Reformation England during the mid-sixteenth century, such as using clerical vestments and kneeling to receive the Lord's Supper."[8] That reform was Calvinistic and Calvinism itself had (more or less) inherited Augustine's convictions about sinful human nature. From its Calvinism it inherited a decidedly inner-worldly asceticism, an impulse probably encouraged by the Lollards who had plowed in the Puritans' field over a century earlier. In some ways they preserved the Middle Ages' vision of a holistic, spiritually united church-state, as illustrated by Thomas Aquinas.[9] Puritans in New England strove to build a whole society, not just a narrow church, that was what Pitirim Sorokin described as 'ideational.' Revelation was ultimately all that mattered to the Puritan. Puritanism's

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[4]Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: Brill, 1982), 14–15.

[5]Thomas Jefferson Wertenbaker, *The Puritan Oligarchy: The Founding of American Civilization* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1947), 6–17 "The Flemings who fled the Inquisition brought with them to Suffolk and Essex, not only their looms, their skill and their culture, but an invincible devotion to the doctrines of Calvin which was important in making the east of England the stronghold of Puritanism."

[6]Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America*, (Edinburg: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), 27.

[7]*The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge, 2008); https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Cambridge_Companion_to_Puritanism.html?id=mwItDHAWdgoC.

[8]Bremer, *Puritanism*, 2.

[9]J. I. Packer, "A Kind of Puritan," in *Martyn Lloyd-Jones: Chosen by God*, ed. C. Catherwood, Christian Heritage Classics (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1986), 47 remarks, "[T]he Puritans of history were reformed mediaevals, who inherited the mediaeval sense of the wholeness of life and the involvement of the individual with the group."

yearning for revival and insistence that individuals encounter the divine showed it to be profoundly experiential.

Who were these Puritans? At first, simply an English reform movement—hardly the type of group one would expect to make a global splash. 'Puritanism' was never a formally organized movement. Thus, we must note the fine and fluid boundaries between this religious movement and conventional Anglicanism. But on a much deeper level they were radically committed, Bible-centered, evangelical Christians; ultimately, they were not a parochial movement.

As an expression of the Reformation, particularly that branch which eventually, broadly called itself Calvinist, Puritans held to three fundamental principles: (1) *sola scriptura*, (2) *sola fide*, and (3) the church as defined by the right preaching of the gospel, the right administration of the sacraments, and the right application of discipline.[10] The center of Puritan worship was the Bible; even the songs were psalms put to verse. Their whole purpose was to recapture the pristine Christianity of the Bible. As with all Protestants, they insisted that no church tradition could override or obscure the teaching of Scripture.[11]

That reform was Calvinistic and Calvinism itself had reemphasized Augustinian convictions about sinful human nature which Calvinists believed they had learned from the Bible, not Augustine.[12] Salvation, seen through these lenses, was believed to be so absolutely the work of God's grace that the elect could not actively participate in the act of choosing. People lacked, because of their sinfulness, the moral ability to do so. But these theological convictions did not make the Puritans passive about either missions, evangelism, or the demands of radical obedience to God's Word. They crossed an ocean to avoid compromise, one of their first generation ministers, John Eliot, became the "apostle to the Indians" and played a key role in inspiring William Carey (who shared an essentially Puritan theology), and emphasized the need of personal encounter of God's grace.[13] In as much as that it was in New England where the Puritans could, at least for

[10]Ralph Bronkema, *The Essence of Puritanism* (Goes: Oosterbaan & Le Couintre, 1929), 70–204 listed the essential principles of Puritanism as 1) Biblicism, 2) ethicism, and 3) mysticism. Peter Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism* (Swengel, PA: Reiner, 1973), 9–10 lists six defining characteristics of Puritans: 1) a commitment to biblical authority; 2) a commitment to Reformed theology; 3) a desire for a reformed Church of England; 4) belief in the necessity of personal regeneration; 5) belief in the need for national and local reformation through both legislation and religious instruction and prayer; and 6) a strong belief that the last days had dawned or were about to dawn.

[11]Heinrich Bullinger, Zwingli's successor at Zurich, dedicated the first book of his *Compendium christianae religionis* (1556) to emphasizing the concept of *sola scriptura* as the prolegomenon to theology; see further Richard Muller, *Christ and the Decree: Christololgy and Predestination in Reformed Theology from Calvin to Perkins* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985), 39.

[12]Alister McGrath, *Iustitia Dei: A History of the Christian Doctrine of Justification from 1500 to the Present Day* (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1986), 114–16 notes that the dominant Puritan soteriology was that of, first, William Perkins within his Bezan *ordo salutus* and then John Owen. Both of them emphasized that the formal cause of justification was only the imputed righteousness of Christ.

[13]On the contribution of John Eliot to the "Great Century of Missions" see my article "Puritan Missions as Globalization," *Fides et Historia* 31, no. 2 (Fall 1999).

the first generation, express themselves and apply their principles to the whole church and society, it is to New England Puritanism that we turn for pictures of its definition.

It was in New England that we see their covenant theology leading to the application of much of the OT law to the new society. In New England, this would be incarnated in the legal codification of much OT law, especially those regarding capital crimes.[14] This commitment to Biblicism was most obvious in the church. By making church discipline one of the marks of the true church they implied that biblical local churches required a polity that allowed for the efficient application of discipline.[15] Discipline, in particular, and polity, in general, was the most contentious issue with their Anglican neighbors. Archbishop John Whitgift (1430–1604), in a written exchange with the early Puritan Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603), insisted that "the kind of government of the church [which includes whether discipline was practiced or not] was not necessary unto salvation."[16] However, because the Puritans were adamant on the matter of *sola scriptura* and since they saw Scripture unambiguously teaching church discipline (e.g., Matt. 18:15–20; 1 Cor. 5) Whitgift's cavalier attitude toward church discipline would not do. For the Puritans such an explicit teaching of Scripture was an "essential note of the church." While salvation may have been essential to the Puritan's faith, it was not everything. Puritan discipline was key to the visible church's goal of edification: "an ongoing process of spiritual and ethical improvement as the church approximated ever more closely the kingdom of God."[17] Puritanism absorbed this conviction from Genevan Calvinism that was in the 1560s, hardening its attitude on discipline.[18] When they were out of reach of the Anglican establishment in New England, they decided that only those who acceded to Puritan (to them, biblical) doctrine and lived a scrupulous life could be

[14]Although John Cotton drew up a code of laws for Massachusetts based on the Mosaic laws, the Bay colony adopted laws influenced by biblical content but often in English common law form that were published as *The Book of the General Laws and Liberties concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts* in 1648. However, the capital crimes section of this law code (pp. 5–6) lists biblical references after each capital crime, most of which come from the Torah's civil code. Capital crimes in Massachusetts were: 1) worshipping other gods, 2) witchcraft, 3) blasphemy, 4) murder, 5) bestiality, 6) homosexuality, 7) adultery, 8) kidnapping, 9) injurious perjury in a capital case, 10) treason, 11) cursing or assaulting parents by a child sixteen years or older, and 12) rape (at the judge's discretion). These same laws were in place in the 1672 edition of Massachusetts' *General Laws and Liberties*.

[15]David D. Hall, "Narrating Puritanism," in *New Directions in American Religious History* (New York: Oxford, 1997), 56 notes that Puritan discipline was key to the visible church's goal of edification: "an ongoing process of spiritual and ethical improvement as the church approximated ever more closely the kingdom of God."

[16]*Works of Whitgift*, vol. 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge, 1851), 185.

[17]Hall, "Narrating Puritanism," 56.

[18]As Patrick Collinson, "England and International Calvinism, 1558–1640," *International Calvinism, 1541–1715* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1985), 211–12 describes, Geneva objected to Thomas Erastus' doctrine that the Christian magistrate made church discipline unnecessary. From the beginning, while mainstream Puritanism was not technically separatist, it held to the Augustinian conviction that the city of God must not be confused with the city of man. At this time of infant Puritanism, they were particularly influenced by Geneva and continental reformers, like Heinrich Bullinger (1504–75).

members. Antinomianism was met head on and, after John Cotton stopped wavering, was rejected. In his description of New England polity, John Cotton emphasizes that the "Church which Christ in his gospel has instituted . . . is *coetus fidelium*, a communion of saints, a combination of faithful godly men meeting . . . into one congregation."[19]

Being Biblicists, however, did not mean they were mere rationalists. True Puritanism was always "experimental," even revivalistic, even if adverse to revivalism; it sought to bring the experience of God to the masses.[20] In their theology, they held the need for the role of the Spirit. The important early English Puritan, Richard Sibbes, taught, "The Spirit of God works it in the soul together with the word: the Spirit and the word go together."[21] In New England, to be a church member, and thus enjoy the franchise, one had to be able to give a public and convincing account of one's experience of grace. Mere doctrinal fidelity was not sufficient.

Puritans are often pictured as dour, stern folk whose religion was a cold denial of human sentiment and whose theology bordered on scholasticism. Hence they seem entirely unrelated to the revivalistic religion of much of the American nineteenth century. But Puritan scholar Lori Ferrell describes William Perkins' Puritanism as an 'experimental predestinarianism' that linked Calvinist doctrine with pietist experience thus grabbing the attention and conviction of English laypeople.[22] J. I. Packer describes the essence of original Puritan worship in a way that could be confused with any old-fashioned 'revival' meeting:

> stress on 'heart-work,' spontaneity, the singing of hymns and psalms, free Spirit-prompted prayer marked by 'familiarity,' 'fullness' and 'affection,' and the 'plain, pressing, downright preaching of sin and grace which would 'rip up' the conscience and then pour in the gospel balm . . . Puritanism was, at its heart, a movement of spiritual revival.[23]

Hence, the Puritan stereotype is mistaken. That preaching for conversion was a treasured part of the Puritan heritage is shown in Samuel Torrey's election sermon of 1674. In it Torrey laments that 'it is a matter of very sad consideration unto us that the

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[19]John Cotton, *The Way of the Churches of Christ in New England* (London: Matthew Simmons, 1645), 1.

[20]According to J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1990), 215 "Puritanism was essentially an experimental faith, a religion of 'heart-work'" (215); "Puritanism was, at its heart, a movement of spiritual revival" (37). Recall that McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 112 defined Puritanism as an expression of Reformed theology that emphasized "the experimental basis of faith." Even the modern Anglican critic of Puritanism John R. H. Moorman, *The Anglican Spiritual Tradition* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1983), 116 believes that "Puritanism, in spite of its rigorous attitude, did much to strengthen people's faith and give them a sure sense of God."

[21]Richard Sibbes, 'Faith Triumphant,' *Works of Richard Sibbes*, vol. 7 (Carlisle, PA: Banner of Truth, 1982), 434.

[22]Lori Ferrell, "Accommodation and Attraction: William Perkins and the Creation of Calvinist Culture," unpublished paper delivered for the American Society of Church History, January 7, 2000.

[23]Packer, *Quest for Godliness*, 48, 37.

work of conversion does fail and is failing more and more in many—if not in most—congregations.'[24] Iain Murray chronicles the preachers of Puritanism's genesis and their effects. Timothy Edwards, he notes, defended the Great Awakening by reminding critics that the preaching of early Puritan "Roaring" John Rogers (*c*. 1570–1636) had similar outward signs to those being decried over a century later during the Great Awakening by the likes of Charles Chauncy as 'enthusiasm.'[25] Local revivals had occasionally broken out in New England earlier also, particularly under the ministry of Solomon Stoddard. Bushman observes, "The style of the itinerants in the Great Awakening, far from being an innovation in New England, was merely the continuation of the tradition Stoddard represented."[26] No less a keen observer and participant than Jonathan Edwards insisted that the Awakening was the same in kind as the revivals Stoddard oversaw: it is "apparent to all to be the same work."[27] The kinds of people who joined New Light churches and planted new ones show that the Awakening was a popular reaffirmation of the Puritan heritage—not a break from it.[28] Even George Whitefield was a "self-confessed spiritual heir of New England's Puritan progenitors."[29]

The revival of the Great Awakening had an earlier, Puritan, precedent that was key to shaping the polity of Massachusetts Puritans. Soon after John Cotton's arrival, in the early 1630s, a revival ensued among the new colonists and public testimonies were common. So the Puritans soon required these revivalistic public testimonies for admission to church membership. 'For the first time in Christendom,' claims Sydney Ahlstrom, 'a state church with vigorous conceptions of enforced uniformity in belief and practice was requiring an internal, experiential test of church membership.'[30] This practice preserved two Puritan traits that would be portentous for later American evangelicals: a commitment to a church

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[24]Samuel Torrey, *An Exhortation unto Reformation* (Cambridge, MA: Johnson, 1674), 11.

[25]Iain Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: Banner of Truth, 1971), 13. On the other hand, Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against,* 3 believed the 'enthusiasm' of the Awakening was nothing other than "a bad temperament of the blood and spirits; tis properly a disease, a sort of madness."

[26]Bushman, *Great Awakening*, 4.

[27]Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1834), 125. So, too, did Thomas Prince, publisher of the periodical *The Christian History* (1743) compile accounts of revival throughout New England and conclude that the Great Awakening was 'essentially the same' as those lead by previous Puritans; Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spirit of the Old Writers: The Great Awakening and the Persistence of Puritan Piety," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith.* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 277.

[28]Gerald Moran, "Christian Revivalism and Culture in Early America: Puritan New England as a Case Study," in *Modern Christian Revivals* (Chicago: Illinois, 1993), 44.

[29]Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism*, Library of Religious Biography (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 276. Whitefield identified himself and was identified by some New Englanders, like Thomas Prince, with the founding Puritans; Frank Lambert," *Pedlar in Divinity": George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals* (Princeton: Princeton, 1994), 133.

[30]Sydney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale, 1972), 146.

of visible saints and to the experiential reality of God's regenerative work.[31] Hence, the Puritan repristination movement was about recapturing the dynamic spirituality of the early church as well as its practices and doctrines.

II. Inner-Worldlyism

Along with the fading of the echo of Puritanism in American evangelicalism is a lessening of an understanding of the role of the church in American life. Note the popularity of Rod Dreher's 2017 book *The Benedict Option*, with a companion article in *Christianity Today*, called "evangelicalism's flagship magazine," as if "The Benedict Option" were an option for American evangelicals.[32] Dreher's prescription for American Christians is a strategic withdrawal from the wider society into insular communities of like-minded Christians raising their children separate from the culture, thereby resisting assimilation and sustaining a Christian manner of life, akin to the medieval monastic orders.[33] Dreher himself is Eastern Orthodox. What is remarkable about this is that the flagship evangelical magazine giving voice to an other-worldly spirituality is so contrary to the founding principles of Puritanism.[34]

Puritan inner-wordlyism means that their faith had everything to do not only with the church but with every sphere of life, including their famous work ethic. For example, as documented by Mark Valeri in his 2010 book, the Puritan ethic and church structure shaped Robert Keayne, a London immigrant punished by his church for aggressive business practices and Hugh Hall, one of New England's first slave traders. Puritan pastors in Boston, first intent on building a "model of Christian charity," also saw a providential hand in England's commercial dominance. For the New England Puritan, commercial activity was not a mere secular pursuit, either separate from their faith or one to be necessarily abandoned because of their faith. For the Puritan, to be godly guided not

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[31]By 1700 Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel*, 19 was still defending the practice of examining applicants to church membership. "It has been proved that church members ought to be believers, saints, regenerate persons. And therefore the Church should put the persons who desire admission into their holy communion to declare and show whether it be thus with them, whether they have truly repented of their sins, and whether they truly believe on Christ . . . Yea, it were better (as Mr. Cotton observes) to admit diverse hypocrites than to keep one sincere child of God from coming to the Church."

[32]Jacob Lupfer, "Why a 'Yes' To Gays Is Often a 'No' To Evangelicalism," (Washington Post, June 10, 2015); https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/religion/why-a-yes-to-gays-is-often-a-no-to-evangelicalism-commentary/2015/06/10/d8657e06-0fa6-11e5-a0fedccfea4653ee_story.html?utm_term=.60d1d816ea05.

[33]Rod Dreher, "The Benedict Option's Vision for a Christian Village," *Christianity Today* (February 17, 2017); https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/march/benedict-options-vision for-christian-village.html.

[34]*Christianity Today* also published a brief response to "The Benedict Option," that echoed Puritan principles, "The church must be a way of life, seven days a week, that engages the world with the gospel"; David Fitch, "The Benedict Option's False Dichotomy," *Christianity Today* (March 2, 2017); https://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2017/february-web-only/benedict-options-false-dichotomy.html.

only their worship on the Sabbath but their business practices, filling their private notebooks and letters with meditations on Scripture as well as their business activities.[35]

In New England, "doctrine literally preceded practice."[36] Alister McGrath concurs and draws the inescapable conclusion:

> The legacy of Puritanism is to be chiefly sought in America, where its influence upon the piety and culture of a new nation, with no indigenous theology or culture to oppose it, was incalculable. Just as no student of European history can neglect the Reformation, [so] no student of American history can neglect the Puritans, who shaped a nation in the image of their God.[37]

Of immediate impact on the New England Puritans were the ministries of William Ames and John Cotton (1584–1652). Both men faithfully passed the baton handed to them by the early death of William Perkins (1602). Ames was one of the most read Puritan theologians by the New Englanders and Cotton became one of the founding fathers of the City upon a Hill. They sought to extend the Reformation impulse to every area of life. "Dress, adornment, and hair styles for both sexes, the upbringing of children, the conduct of business, there was nothing that was not reformed."[38] Cotton described the all-encompassing vision of Puritanism on which New England was founded:

> I am very apt to believe, what Mr. Perkins has, in one of his prefatory pages to his golden chain, that the word and scriptures of God do contain a short *upoluposis*, or platform, not only of theology, but also of other sacred sciences (as he called them) attendants and handmaids, thereunto, which he makes ethics, economics, politics, church-government, prophecy, academy. It is very suitable to God's all-sufficient wisdom and to the fullness and perfection of the Holy Scriptures, not only to prescribe perfect rules for the right ordering of a private man's soul to everlasting blessedness with himself, but also for the right ordering of a man's family, yea of the commonwealth too, so far as both of them are subordinate to spiritual ends, and yet avoid both the church's usurpations upon the civil jurisdictions, in *ordine ad spiritualia*, and the commonwealth's invasion upon ecclesiastical administrations, in *ordine* to civil peace, and conformity to the civil state.[39]

The dedication of the bulk of Puritanism to inner-worldlyism is demonstrated further by insistence that they were not separating from the Anglican Church. But when the non-separatist Puritans of the Massachusetts Bay Colony washed ashore in 1630, with the words of John Winthrop's "A Model of Christian Charity" still ringing in their ears, they met their separatists brethren in Plymouth, the "pilgrims." Out of the encounter between

[35]Mark Valeri, *Heavenly Merchandize: How Religion Shaped Commerce in Puritan America* (Princeton: Princeton, 2010).

[36]Bernard Bailyn, *The New England Merchants of the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard, 1955), 23.

[37]McGrath, *Iustitia Dei,* 112.

[38]Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639–1723* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan, 1988), 14.

[39]John Cotton, To Lord Say and Seal (1636), *The History of the Colony and Province of Massachusetts Bay*, One (Cambridge: Harvard, 1936), 41

the Winthrop's Puritans and the pilgrims arose Massachusetts Congregationalism, which became formative for later American republicanism.[40]

The Massachusetts Puritans insisted that by adopting congregationalism they were not following the separatists at Plymouth. They seem to have adopted the separatists' polity without imbibing the separatist spirit.[41] Debating separatism seems, at first glance, to be irrelevant—both groups were separated from what they believed was a contaminated Anglican Church by an ocean. But their continued claim of relation to the Church of England incarnated a quality of Puritanism that made that movement—and its nineteenth century evangelical descendants—culturally potent: engagement. Puritans were about remaining pure but not about being insulated and separate.

Puritan spokesman John White, in his 1630 defense of the Massachusetts colonists, called 'separation' 'evil in itself.'[42] The Great Migration to New England was not an abandonment of their English neighbors but rather a strategic, missionary move. Over sixty years later, in 1691, New England Puritans were still claiming, "There are none in the world that do more fully concur with the doctrine of the Church of England contained in the 39 Articles than do the churches in New England."[43] The 'New Plymouth men,' on the other hand, felt little responsibility for those outside; Robinson himself had taught that the pastor's role was only in feeding his flock, not evangelism.[44] This, the great body of Puritanism could not imitate—with dramatic consequences for later evangelicalism. These Puritans had crossed an ocean so they could both continue faithful to their convictions and not separate from—i.e., cease to be related to and engaged with—the Anglican Church and the rest of the world. They committed themselves to a pure but engaged, conversionist church.

The church was both exclusive (in the sense of confining membership to 'visible saints') and established. John Eliot described their model as an inclusive parish church around a core covenanted group. The true church was the gathered 'company of visible saints' but it had a sense of mission for the whole community.[45] New England's churches

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[40]Michael P. Winship, *Godly Republicanism: Puritans, Pilgrims, and a City on a Hill* (Cambridge: Harvard, 2012).

[41]Thomas Shepard, "A Defense of the Answer," in *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings*, eds. P. Miller and T. H. Johnson (Mineola, NY: Dover, 2001, orig. pub. 1963), 119 asks rhetorically, "should we forsake the public assemblies and join together in private separated churches?" He considers this option "unsufferable" and "a great offense." One of the reasons for going to New England was to be able to "enjoy God's ordinances" while not having to disavow the Church of England. This is contested by Winship, *Godly Republicanism,* 135, who argues that Plymouth Colony, "far from being pathetically unimportant, was the exemplar and catalyst for Massachusetts's congregationalism." Whether Miller is right about the near irrelevancy of the Plymouth Colony or Winship is right about the important contribution of Plymouth to Puritan congregationalism, that the mainstream of Puritanism did not embrace other-worldly withdrawal from society still seems unassailable.

[42]John White, *The Planters Plea* (London: William Jones, 1630), 409.

[43]Edward Rawson (1615–93), *The Revolution in New England Justified* (Boston: Joseph Brunning, 1691), iii.

[44]David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century*, (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 1972), 39.

[45]John Eliot, *Communion of Churches* (Cambridge, MA.: Marmaduke Johnson, 1665), 1.

could not have been identifiably 'Puritan' if they did not exclude, in some way, someone. A thoroughly inclusive culture was unthinkable.[46] Nevertheless, as engaged evangelicals, the Puritans heard the call of the church in the parish is to be a 'universal home-missionary enterprise.' Through New England's Puritan century, every resident was required to be under the church's ministry. By being exclusive, they helped preserve their particulars; by being national—i.e., requiring, at first, everyone to attend one of the established churches, they guaranteed that those particulars would be presented to non-adherents—people who did not necessarily share their culture.[47] Though the Puritans sought to retain Christendom's idea of a national church, their essential commitment to a thoroughly Reformation conviction that the true church is the invisible church was dominant. When the political environment changed, the descendants of these Puritans easily adapted the covenanted core to be a free church in a pluralistic society. Their theocratic tendencies would become untenable as a distant king and the demands of increased diversity made their effects felt. But they were never exclusively nor primarily a state-church, a religious tool of the establishment. They were a genuinely evangelical people who could thrive, through the Great Awakening and the Baptists in particular, over the next two centuries.

III. The Puritan Character

Along with theological differences between Puritans and mainstream Anglicans were certain elements of character, so difficult to define accurately, that can be impressionistically drawn in three sets of carefully balanced traits.[48] The Puritans were simultaneously tough-minded and passionate, pious and active, intellectual and practical. For the Puritans, these characteristics were the fruit of their doctrine: the great God of the Bible must be obeyed and worshipped with all of their being.

Their character, and the complementary theology, could turn *adiaphora* into tests of faith. As tough-minded folk, they could not overlook the adiaphora; as passionate believers they could not be indifferent even to 'things indifferent.' Rather than conform to what seem minor things such as dress, they would hazard their lives to cross an ocean and

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[46]Mark A. Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford, CA: Stanford, 1997), 173. This ideal of an established but separate church often failed in practice because the townspeople, even if non-members, often insisted on a voice in the hiring and firing of ministers, whose salary they paid. Paul R. Lucas chronicles several accounts of this in Connecticut in *Valley of Discord: Church and Society along the Connecticut River, 1636–1735* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), ch. 4.

[47]According to Darrett Rutman, *Winthrop's Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630–1649* (New York: Norton, 1965), 261, in 1646 "a whole series of ecclesiastical laws was passed by the General Court, including a law against blasphemy and one requiring church attendance 'seeing that the word [of God] is of general and common [benefit] to all sorts of people, as being the ordinary means of to subdue the hearts of hearers not only to the faith, and obedience to the Lord Jesus, but also to civil obedience, an allegiance unto magistracy, and to just and honest conversation toward all men'" (Colony Records, II, 176–79).

[48]Bremer, *Puritanism*, 2.

settle a hard land. Increase Mather pointed to a differing approach to the adiaphora as the key distinguishing feature between Puritans and mainstream Anglicans.

> The first planters of New England could not indeed comply with several things imposed by the Church of England for that they thought them unwarrantable and compliance . . . unto them . . . sinful. The imposers, though they confessed the things indifferent, yet (so rigid were they, as to) set themselves even to destroy the non-compliers.[49]

It would have been so much easier for them to have left well enough alone. They were, after all, rid of the Pope and transubstantiation. The Puritans, though, believed that these truths were commands of an almighty Creator before whom they will one day have to give account. There could be no compromise with the expedient.[50] We see here a toughness of mind that issues naturally from active ideationalists. In William James' categories of the tough-minded versus tender-minded, the Puritans' rank as "one of the toughest the world has ever had to deal with."[51] But if one expects the tough-minded to be dispassionate, the Puritans certainly do not fit the mold. They took all of life as of the greatest importance and they felt the intensity of that conviction.[52]

Puritanism is, in Peter Lake's definition, "a style of piety, an emotional and ideological style, producing distinctive structures of meaning whereby both the world and the self could be construed, interpreted, and acted upon."[53] Hence, at the heart of Puritanism was a marriage of piety and activism. Religion was certainly no opiate for them. Scripture, again, stood at the crux of the way the world and the self are approached. Both 'Puritans' and 'Anglicans' were struggling for the identity of the Church of England in the late sixteenth century. The key to distinguishing them, however, is the interpretation and application of *sola scriptura*. For the Puritans, 'the Lord's order' (Cartwright's term) was kept when Scripture was obeyed. For John Whitgift, "'The Lord's order is kept' when due obedience is given to the civil magistrate, and others that be placed under him, to govern the church of God."[54] Hence true Puritanism, from its inception, was not content to stop at the church doors. Puritans may claim submissively to 'render unto Caesar' but they assumed that it is God who decides what legitimately belongs to Caesar, not vice versa, and God has spoken in an open book. Puritans would never compartmentalize religion as modern Christians have done; they would never subordinate "religious rationality to the rationality of other institutional spheres."[55] So, when we see descendants of Puritans cate-

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[49]Increase Mather, *A Vindication of New England* (Boston, 1688), 1.

[50]For Toon, *Puritans and Calvinism*, 9–10, "The common element was the desire to have the whole life of the Church, ministry, worship, liturgy, polity, and doctrine guided by the Word of God."

[51]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, *The Puritans* (New York: American Book, 1938), 60.

[52]Interview with Harry S. Stout, *Christian History*, Issue 41.

[53]Peter Lake, 'Defining Puritanism—Again?' *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on the Seventeenth Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 4.

[54]Whitgift, *The Works of John Whitgift*, 3.275.

[55]Peter Beyer, *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage, 1994), 116. In the Puritan mind there was always a unity of function and performance; there were no 'non-religious problems.'

gorizing some problems as 'non-religious,' we may be sure that among them Puritanism has died with the parents.

Though a movement that honored the intellect, Puritanism was extraordinarily practical. Puritan intellectual preferences showed a peculiar combination of traditional, almost scholastic discipline for classical learning and a bottom-line oriented biblically defined pragmatism. Peter Ramus' legacy had given form to this tough-minded cognitive style.[56] Peter Ramus (1515–72), a French reformed philosopher developed a logical system with a practical focus and pedagogical method that deeply impacted Puritanism. Cotton Mather called Ramus 'great.'[57] Ramus' experience as a student at the University of Paris influenced and typifies the Puritan cognitive style: "When I came to Paris, I fell into subtleties of the sophists, and they taught me the liberal arts through questions and disputes, without ever showing me a single thing of profit or service."[58] In contrast, the seminal Puritan theologian William Perkins defined theology as "the science of living blessedly forever."[59] For Puritans proper doctrine is vital but must be lived vitally too.

IV. Ideationalism

> The church wherein the service of God is performed is much more precious than the world, which was indeed created for the sake and use of the Church.—Cotton Mather[60]

The belief that all that the world held was subservient to an all-absorbing spiritual reality epitomized the era now derisively called "medieval." Pitirim Sorokin exalts the medieval era as the height of Western civilization—the pinnacle of Christianity's achievement of an ideational culture from the debris of late Roman sensate debauchery. Christianity, according to Sorokin, created a new super-system that made many Western civilizational achievements possible. Puritanism, as we shall see, inherited that early Christian yearning for the ideational, preserving, for a time, the medieval quest for a godly society. But as the West changed, it incorporated more and more anthropocentric elements. The new "synthetic" super-system was the cultural background against which Puritanism arose and, in many ways, the spiritual drift against which the Puritans were protesting. Globalization, the process, tends to spread whatever super-system is dominant. Hence, for much of its history, Puritanism, while actively engaged with the world, was resisting a powerful supersystem increasingly at odds with Puritan principles. Puritanism cannot be understood without understanding ideationalism.

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[56]Cotton Mather, *The Life and Death of Mr. John Eliot* (London: John Dutton, 1694), 67.

[57]Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America*, 27.

[58]Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (New York: Macmillan, 1939), 123, who with Johnson, *Puritans*, 32–33 believe that Ramus' logic (essentially Platonic in its use of dichotomy) set them apart from Calvin, who used Aristotle and thus was scholastic in form.

[59]Donald K. McKim, "The Functions of Ramism in William Perkins' Theology," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, 16, no. 1 (1985): 508.

[60]Mather, *Great Works of Christ in America*, 28.

The ideational culture, according to Sorokin, was based on the premises that (1) reality is ultimately nonsensate, (2) the needs and ends of human beings are mainly spiritual, (3) and the method of achieving those ends is self "minimization."[61] He defined ideational culture as "A unified system of culture based upon the principle of a super-sensory and super-rational God as the only true reality and value."[62] Like Weber's inner-worldly ascetics, ideational societies do not give economic utility final authority. Instead, they create a whole culture in which the demands of revelation override merely "practical" concerns if they happen to conflict. This could be a fine definition of the Puritan worldview, although, in the Puritan view, God invests the sensory with reality by the fact that he created it. The empirical becomes, in a sense, "supersensory" because God is the ultimate source of empirical knowledge. Hence the Puritan fascination with the "natural," from Increase Mather's book on comets to Jonathan Edwards' musings on spiders. Puritanism applied this same empiricism to spiritual matters. Whether Thomas Shepard or John Eliot or Cotton Mather or Jonathan Edwards, Puritans studied the soul with the same empiricism that scientists took to nature. And why not, since the same Creator was responsible for both? Thus, as Sarah Rivett shows, they considered the testimonies of angst-filled teenage girls at the Salem witch trials, the needs of Massachusett converts, and conversion of "the Person"—who turned out to be the young Mrs. Sarah Edwards. So they bridged the material and the spiritual in a way bewildering to the modern (or sensate) mind.[63] Theirs was an ideationalism quite unlike the despairing of Hamlet: "How weary, stale, flat, and unprofitable seem to me all the uses of this world!"[64]

Human nature being what it is, Sorokin believes that the ideational culture breaks down to a secondary stage that Sorokin calls "idealistic" or "synthetic." The idealistic stage is a synthetic one, still essentially built on the original ideational principles but trying to incorporate more humanistic elements. This synthetic stage soon collapses into the "sensate" culture "based upon and integrated around this new principle: that true reality and value is sensory."[65] In Sorokin's view, the ideational is the pinnacle of civilization because it is reaching for aspirations beyond the mere satisfaction of individual human desires. These aspirations are usually rooted in some religious ideal. The sensate culture, on the other hand, is baser, seeking only physical peace and human happiness. There may be religion in the sensate culture, but its chief end is to glorify humanity and help humans enjoy themselves for as long as they can.

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[61]Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamics: A Study of Change in Major Systems of Art, Truth, Ethics, Law, and Social Relationships*, rev. ed. (New York: Routledge, 2017), 27.

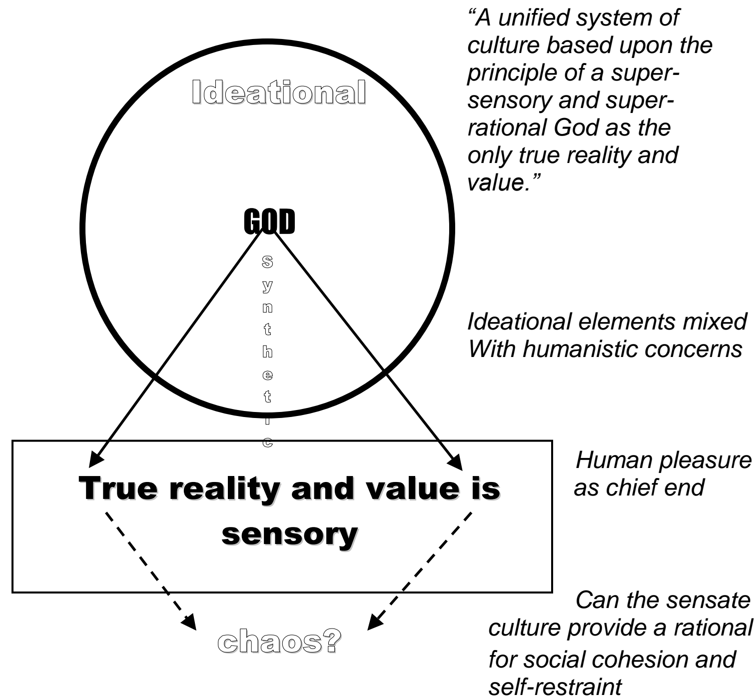
[62]Pitirim A. Sorokin, *Crisis of Our Age* (New York: Dutton, 1941), 18.

[63]Sarah Rivett, *The Science of the Soul in Colonial New England* (Chapel Hill: North Carolina, 2011).

[64]William Shakespeare, "Hamlet," act I, scene 2.

[65]Sorokin, *Crisis of Our Age*, 19.

Sorokin's Super-System



Sorokin, seeing history through his wide-angle lens, believed that the ideational phase of Western history had passed before the Puritans came on stage. Puritanism, however, though with hints of modernization, was essentially a throwback to the medieval period precisely in its ideational character. It was an ideational system resisting an idealistic super-system. Unlike some of their conformist neighbors, the ideational Puritans could not accept a church dominated by the needs of the state. In its first generation, this ideational character was probably more decisive in separating Puritans from conformist Anglicans than any theological differences.

Among other tendencies, the Puritans' ideationalism encouraged asceticism—self-denial under God. Hence, we turn from Sorokin's ideationalism to Max Weber's well known inner-worldly asceticism. Although Sorokin was a sharp critic of Max Weber, for the purposes of globalization historiography their sociologies are complementary.[66]

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[66]Robert K. Merton, "The Sorokin-Merton Correspondence on 'Puritanism, Pietism, and Science,' 1933–34," in *Sorokin and Civilization: A Centennial Assessment*, ed. J. B. Ford *et al*.

Weber categorized pieties, religious styles. Sorokin categorized cultural super-systems, cultures. The two are not unrelated or incompatible. Inner-worldly ascetics strive to apply their faith to all of life—be enmeshed in the culture and transform it; they seek to create a whole civilization based on their principles. The inner-worldly ascetics, of whom Weber writes, strive to create essentially the ideational systems of which Sorokin writes.

The approach a religious movement takes to life outside the church is vital to its ability to shape the wider cultural ethic—its *Wirtschaftsethik*—and contribute to globalization.[67] In particular, Max Weber sketched four types of religious social structures: other-worldly mysticism, inner-worldly mysticism, other-worldly asceticism, and inner-worldly asceticism.[68] Other-worldly mysticism, represented by the Montanists (second and third century Christian enthusiasts) and mystics like Meister Eckhardt (1260–1327), does not directly address political and economic life and has not yet shown particular potency as a long-term social force. Weber wrote that such movements, "relatively indifferent to the world," usually accept whatever secular social structure they find themselves in.[69] In Richard Niebuhr's terms, these movements embody a "Christ above culture" approach.[70] Inner-worldly mysticism seeks to escape the world by fleeing to a spiritual dimension while continuing to live in it. Weber's examples of inner-worldly mysticism are Johann Tauler (*c*. 1300–1361) and Lutheranism.[71] This is similar to Niebuhr's "Christ and Culture in Paradox" form of spirituality; Niebuhr put the dissidents from Puritanism Anne Hutchison and Roger Williams in this category. Other-worldly asceticism, represented by monasticism, views the true Church as the "City of God" in distinction to the corrupt and decaying "city of man." Niebuhr called such movements "Christ against culture." Opposite to "Christ against culture," according to Niebuhr, is "the Christ of culture," which Niebuhr claimed makes an idol out of the reigning culture. Although it is arguably inner-worldly, because it is usually neither mystical nor ascetic, it does not easily fall within any Weberian category; it is arguably not truly religious at all but an expression of secularism.[72] Finally, inner-worldly asceticism, which we will

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(New York: Routledge, 2017) reproduces correspondence between the chairman of his dissertation committee, Pitirim Sorokin, and himself, in which Sorokin wrote that though Weber's theory (*The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*) was formerly fashionable, "at the present time . . . hardly any serious historian or scholar . . . subscribes [to] it" (24–25).

[67]S. N. Eisenstadt defines *Wirtschaftsethik* as, "in a sense, a 'code,' a general 'formal' orientation, a 'deep structure' which programs or regulates the actual concrete social organization," according to Adam B. Seligman, in the Introduction of R. H. Tawney, *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1998), xxii.

[68]Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1956, orig. pub. in 1922), 166 calls other-worldly asceticism, "world-rejecting asceticism (*weltablehnende Askese*)."

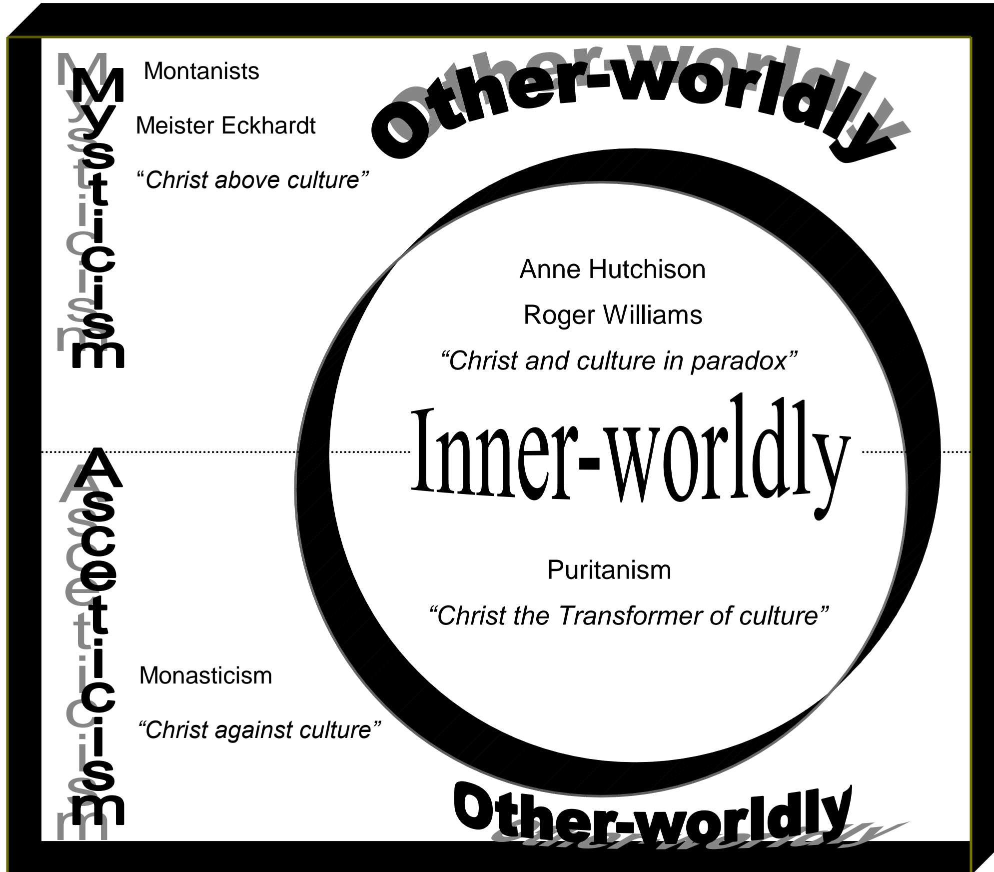
[69]Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 176–77.

[70]H. Richard Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951), 116.

[71]Christine Walker Bynum, *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone Books, 1991), 67.

[72]On "the Christ of Culture," see Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture*, 83–115, who contends that advocates of Christ against culture often show similar traits to those of this conviction, esp. a tendency to emphasize law and a suspicion of theology. He cites Albrecht Ritschl as the prime example of a "Christ of culture" approach to Christianity, concluding that one cannot confess merely that Jesus is the "Christ of culture" and be a true Christian.

establish was the Puritan approach, harnesses the rigor of the monasteries for life in the market place. Niebuhr called it "Christ the Transformer of Culture" and esteemed it the most potent approach of the Church to fulfill its cultural mandate. Sorokin developed a similar category that he called "active ideationalism." Weber wrote that to the contemplative mystic, the inner-worldly ascetic's religious life "appears to be a perpetual externalization of the divine in the direction of some peripheral function."[73] In Sorokin's similar category, believers do not "flee the world of illusion" but labor to bring it nearer to God.[74] The Puritans developed a respect for nature as "emanations of the divine" as Jonathan Edwards put it.[75] Hence, life on earth deserved concentration. It is just those religious movements that relate "religious function" to "religious performance"—"peripheral function" to Weber—that have the most impact on the wider culture.



[73]Weber, *Sociology of Religion*, 171.

[74]Sorokin, *Social and Cultural Dynamic*, 27.

[75]Edwards, Miscellanies, no. 108, according to Norman Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards's Moral Thought and Its British Context*, Jonathan Edwards Classic Study Series (Eugene, OR: Wipf and

However, where Puritanism does not quite fit into this Niebuhrian category is in the degree in which it believed human institutions could be transformed. “At the heart of puritanism was the attempt to transform society by first using grace to make God’s will one’s own.”[77] They were, as we have seen, what Max Weber describes as “inner-worldly ascetics” and Sorokin calls “active ideationalists.” Stephen Mott claims that the Puritans were the first group in history to believe that “one could intentionally and organizationally make changes in one’s community.”[78] Though rooted in a culture more like its past than the modern era, Puritanism was the first of a long series of attempts to recreate human society. It was arguably the most successful.

Hence, Puritanism can be defined as an inner-worldly ascetic evangelical movement, with its roots in the post-Reformation Calvinistic Anglican reform, aimed at holistic social transformation according to the ideational pattern of Scripture and beginning with the personally experienced regeneration of sinful human beings.[79] Its heritage is with us still and all, I submit, for our good. Its enormous treasures of teaching and example, largely forgotten by all but specialists, lies waiting to enrich a needy church once more.

Stock, 1981), 85 writes, “The beauties of nature are really emanations, or shadows, of the excellencies of the Son of God.”

[77]Bremer, *Puritanism*, 3.

[78]C. Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford, 1982), 194.

[79]McGrath, *Iustitia Dei*, 112 defines Puritanism as ‘the English manifestation, especially during the period 1564–1640, of Reformed theology which laid particular emphasis upon both the experimental basis of faith and the divine sovereignty in election.’ He confines the term to the non-separatists; I follow Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism*.