THE GUISE OF EVERY GRACELESS HEART: HUMAN AUTONOMY IN PURITAN THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE

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Ross House Books
Vallecito, California
1981

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To Polly,
who has been with me from the beginning —
from the summer we courted in Hunter Library
to the summer I graduated:
lover, wife, mother of my children, mentor, friend.
And my favorite Puritan:
". . . a woman of singular virtue, prudence,
modesty, and piety, and specially beloved
and honored of all. . . ."

"I will say nothing of my love to thee,
and of my longing desires towards thee,
thou knowest my heart."

John Winthrop to his wife.
From Boston, November 29, 1630.

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The Christian cannot be satisfied as long as any human activity is either opposed to Christianity or out of all connection with Christianity. Christianity must pervade not merely all nations, but also all of human thought. The Christian, therefore, cannot be indifferent to any branch of earnest endeavor. It must all be brought into *some* relation to the gospel. It must be studied either in order to be demonstrated as false, or else in order to be made useful in advancing the Kingdom of God. The Kingdom must be advanced not merely extensively, but also intensively. The Church must seek to conquer not merely every man for Christ, but also the whole of man.

— J. Gresham Machen

One desire has been the ruling passion of my life. One high motive has acted like a spur upon my mind and soul. And sooner than that I should seek escape from the sacred necessity that is laid upon me, let the breath of life fail me. It is this: that in spite of all worldly opposition, God's holy ordinances shall be established again in the home, in the school and in the State for the good of the people; to carve as it were into the conscience of the nation the ordinances of the Lord, to which Bible and Creation bear witness, until the nation pays homage again to God.

— Abraham Kuyper

Grant me thy gracious assistance, O my God, that in this my undertaking I may be kept from every false way: but that sincerely aiming at thy glory in my undertaking, I may find my labours made acceptable and profitable unto thy churches and serviceable unto the interests of thy gospel; so let my God think upon me for good; and spare me according to the greatness of thy mercy in the blessed Jesus.

— Cotton Mather

We will begin, and we will build, and the God of Heaven, whose servants we are, will enable us to accomplish our aim.

— Nehemiah 2:20.

1

Introduction

Modern historians, in their study of the Puritan mind and world view, have made much of what they call the "Puritan dilemma," that apparent contradiction between ideals and reality, theory and practice, abstinence and excess, flexibility and structure, uniformity and variety, between "loving the world, but with weaned affections." Puritanism, writes Edmund Morgan in his work *The Puritan Dilemma,* did great things for England and America, "but only by creating in the men and women it affected a tension which was at best painful and at worst unbearable."[1]

> Puritanism required that a man devote his life to seeking salvation, but told him he was helpless to do anything but evil. Puritanism required that he rest his whole hope in Christ but taught him that Christ would utterly reject him unless before he was born God had foreordained his salvation. Puritanism required that man refrain from sin but told him he would sin anyhow. Puritanism required that he reform the world in the image of God's holy kingdom but taught him that the evil of the world was incurable and inevitable. Puritanism required that he work to the best of his ability at whatever task was set before him and partake of the good things that God had filled the world with, but told him he must enjoy his work and his pleasures only, as it were, absentmindedly, with his attention fixed on God.[2]

This is a theme that runs through most of the modern treatment of the Puritan. Perry Miller, in his *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* and *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century,* sees the history of Massachusetts Bay as a series of crises brought on by intellectual dilemmas, each of which was resolved by the application of Ramus's logic or Ames's covenant theology. Edmund Morgan traces the life of John Winthrop in much the same terms.

Yet these fundamental dilemmas present a problem to the student of Puritanism. Looking back at the Puritan, the modern historian can see the contradictions and dilemmas, but the Puritans who preached the doctrines and formulated the policies and practices seemed blithely unaware of, or at least unconcerned about, them. Not that the contradictions did not cause them problems. They did, for the history of the first sixty years of the Massachusetts Bay colony contains a variety of efforts and adjustments

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[1]Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma; The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 7.

[2]*Ibid.,* pp. 7f.

designed to deal with these problems. Yet the Puritan leaders did not seem to understand that the problems were caused by the inherent contradictions of the Puritan world and life view. At least in an age and climate that gave careful attention to every problem of life however minute, we find little in the Puritans' writings to indicate that they were aware of the fundamental dilemma which Morgan describes. Why? Did the Puritan have some other view of the problems that we have not yet understood so that when they appeared he was able to fit them into his mental framework rather than being disillusioned by them? What understanding of reality did the Puritan have that enabled him to cope realistically with the problems of life without either denying his theological perspective or separating from the world into isolation and asceticism? Further, why did these problems arise in the first place, and if he was able to cope with them so well, why did the Holy Commonwealth ultimately fail?

It is my purpose in this work to re-examine the Puritan's own understanding of reality and its implications for his social and institutional thought. It will be my thesis that the dilemmas faced by the Puritans can be traced, not to a contradictory position inherent in the Puritan theology and world view, but rather to the adoption of a position that was in contradiction to their Calvinistic philosophy. We shall see that in these particular positions the Puritan in some way asserted the autonomy of human thought, reason, ability, or institutions in place of the revealed authority he claimed to have in the Bible. The dilemmas resulted from that assertion of human autonomy. In the light of this principle, we shall see many things that have been difficult to understand about the Puritan world view and practice fall into place in a satisfactory way. Also many of the questions that historians have persistently raised about Puritanism are clarified or sharpened in the light of this principle, if not answered or eliminated as insignificant.

It is not being critical of the Puritans to observe that they did not achieve perfectly their "due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical." It is enough that they worked their forms out substantially. The substantial successes became the Holy Commonwealth at its best; the imperfections in it are what have come down to us as the Puritan dilemmas. These dilemmas were the weak points that ultimately caused the failure of the Holy Commonwealth. It is my purpose to show that these dilemmas can be traced back in each instance to an assertion of human autonomy and to show the problems that resulted from those assertions in the various areas of Puritan life.

It should be noted that I have taken the liberty of modernizing the text in its spelling and capitalization whenever I have quoted the Puritans directly unless doing so would alter the meaning of the passage. My justification for doing this is based on Alden Vaughan's comment that

> . . . modern readers are entitled to a modern format — not a bowdlerized or expurgated text, but a readable one that preserves the flavor

and sense of the original without the barriers to understanding imposed by erratic orthography and inconsistent punctuation. Today's reader wants, I believe, an insight into the Puritan experience rather than an exercise in typographical gymnastics. . . . The goal of Puritan writing was didactic — to get the message across as widely and as profoundly as possible.[3]

[3]Alden T. Vaughan (ed.), *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. xxvi f.

2

Historiographical Background

The purpose of the Puritans in coming to America, said John Winthrop, was to "seek out a place to live and associate under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical."[1] The end they had in mind, he continued, was

> . . . to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord and to comfort and increase the body of Christ of which we are members, so that ourselves and our posterity may be better preserved from the common corruptions of this evil world in order to serve the Lord and work out our salvation under the power and purity of His holy ordinances.[2]

As a statement of purpose, Winthrop's statement is clear enough, as were the efforts of the Puritans to create a due form of civil and ecclesiastical government. But as they went about their efforts in Massachusetts, the Puritans had to face several different problems, crises, dilemmas, and compromises in order to implement their plans. And in the nearly 350 years since the arrival of the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay, historians of the period have been at pains to explain on one hand the Puritans and their view of the world, and on the other, the problems and successes or failures which they experienced.

The efforts began with the Puritans themselves, whose writings either magnified or criticized the New England orthodoxies. John Winthrop's *Journal* (or *The History of New England*), Edward Johnson's *Wonder Working Providence of Zion's Saviour in New England*, and William Bradford's *Of Plymouth Plantation* were all written by first-generation Puritans about contemporary events, but from a point of view that was generally adulatory. The dominant theme, writes Alden T. Vaughan,

> . . . was not critical but . . . excessively complimentary . . . . From Bradford's humble narrative, Cotton Mather's pretentious but revealing *Magnalia*, and John Winthrop's candid *Journal* — half history, half diary — flowed material enough for any filiopietistic historian to tell the Puritan story as the fathers themselves would have wanted it.[3]

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[1]John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *1493-1754: a New World,* Vol. I of *The Annals of America,* ed. Mortimer J. Adler (18 vols.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), p. 114.

[2]*Ibid.*

[3]Alden T. Vaughan (ed.), *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. xvi.

New England's critics were equally prolific. Dissenters from the orthodoxy of New England wrote and published their criticisms of New England as well as their versions of what happened when the Puritans implemented their Holy Commonwealth. Such works as Roger Williams' *Bloody Tenet of Persecution*, Thomas Morton's *New English Canaan*, Samuel Gorton's *Simplicities Defense Against . . . That Seven-headed Church Government in New England*, George Bishop's *New England Judged*, and John Child's *New England's Jonas Cast Up* not only found willing readers in their day, but also became the basic sources for later historians to use in evaluating and criticizing the Puritans' efforts to establish due forms in church and state.

Following upon these first-generation (contemporary) accounts came the first of the historians of the Massachusetts Bay experience. The early historians were also "excessively complimentary" and filiopietistic, telling the story, as Vaughan put it, as the fathers themselves would have wanted it told. What that way was has been examined by Harry M. Ward in his study of five colonial historians, William Hubbard, Cotton Mather, Thomas Prince, Thomas Hutchinson, and Jeremy Belknap, each of whom represented a succeeding generation from 1670 to 1790.[4] He found that they all agreed that a primary motive of the Puritans had been to secure purity of worship, but they had found it hard, once in America, to maintain the discipline and devotion which their faith demanded, especially in the second generation, which wearied of the cause. Thus, says Ward, Puritan historians even in their own time were concerned about the declension of religious life.[5] He goes on to point out how the early historians of New England handled some of the Puritans' major problems in implementing the Holy Commonwealth. He notes that the earlier historians were more concerned by the issue of religious purity while the later historians were more interested in the desire for religious liberty. Yet Ward observes that although the later historians (Hutchinson and Belknap)

> . . . did not discount as a motivation the quest for purity, the attentiveness of the Massachusetts state to doctrinal purity was justified, in part, because of a real danger of infiltration of corrupting influences from the Church of England.[6]

Of the problem of freedom of conscience and toleration, Ward notes that all the later historians stressed the point that freedom of conscience grew

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[4]Harry M. Ward, "The Search for American Identity: Early Historians of New England," *Perspectives on Early American History: Essays in Honor of Richard B. Morris,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan and George Athan Billias (New York: Harper and Row, 1973), pp. 40-62.

[5]*Ibid.*, p. 47.

[6]*Ibid.*

with the passing of time. But they all believed that "religious freedom had to be balanced with the interests of legitimate authority."[7]

In considering those "men of stature whose names should be etched in the cornerstone of American liberty," Ward notes that Puritan historians "invariably followed one rule: they indiscriminately honored all those in authority in church and state."[8] But dissenters were seen as "troublemakers." Of Roger Williams, the historians reflected mixed opinions. The early historians (Hubbard and Mather) admired his determination but regarded him as an "irresponsible radical" in religion and politics who was "unstable of mind," while Hutchinson and Belknap found Williams to be a "true worker" for religious liberty and freedom of conscience.[9]

On the subject of the source and form of New England's institutions and society, the historians of early New England considered the Americans to be the freest of all men since they had the liberties of freeborn Englishmen and yet had full liberty in creating their government and institutions. The American experiment was unique in that the governments of whatever level were created by civil compact. Mather and Prince, notes Ward, saw this tendency to form a civil compact as an outworking of the congregational way which was practiced in the New England churches, while Hutchinson concluded that they were simply offshoots of English liberty.[10] But all the historians agreed that the founders left "an important legacy": "the idea that men make governments and that authority derives from the body of freemen."[11]

They also agreed that the viability of New England's institutions depended on the character of its people and their leaders. The members of the community were expected to work together for the common good and to exercise magnanimity, courage, confidence, patience, and benevolence.[12] The leaders were to be men of ability and experience and were to rule not for power, but for the common good.[13]

The story as the Puritan fathers themselves would have wanted it told, then, reconciled most of the problems and compromises between theory and practice in favor of the position taken by the orthodox leadership of Massachusetts.

But while the seventeenth and eighteenth-century historians had only begun the "apotheosis" of the Puritan fathers, says Vaughan, "it took the early nineteenth, with its search for national heroes and a national past, to complete the apotheosis. . . ." Vaughan quotes George Bancroft as a

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[7]*Ibid.*, p. 48.
[8]*Ibid.*, p. 54.
[9]*Ibid.*
[10]*Ibid.*, p. 56.
[11]*Ibid.*
[12]*Ibid.*
[13]*Ibid.*, p. 57

typical example: "Puritanism was a life-giving spirit; activity, thrift, intelligence, followed in its train; and, as for courage, a coward and a Puritan never went together."[14]

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, however, the pendulum began to swing back. In 1887 Brooks Adams attacked the "Puritan myth" in his *Emancipation of Massachusetts*. He, and others who shared his views, contended that Puritanism fostered political and religious intolerance and that only with the overthrow of the theocratic rule and the development of secular thought did emancipation come to Massachusetts.

In 1892 Charles Francis Adams described Puritanism in Massachusetts as an ice age, with progress coming in spite of the Puritans rather than because of them:

> Massachusetts had its ice age, . . . sterile, forbidding, unproductive, its history dotted only with boulders and stunted growth. . . . It is barely possible that New England, contrary to all principle and precedent, may have profited by the harshness and bigotry which for a time suppressed all freedom of thought in Massachusetts; but it is far more likely that the slow results afterwards there achieved came notwithstanding that drawback, rather than in consequence of the discipline it afforded.[15]

And by 1921 when James Truslow Adams applied the economic and historical philosophies of Charles Beard to the Puritan period, the progressive, materialist, and economic determinist views were thoroughly established.[16] From the progressive view, the early history of New England was tragic, summarizes Vaughan:

> Conforming to neither the religious nor the political orthodoxy of the mother country, the New England colonies imposed a self-centered, quasi-independent, intolerant regime on all who entered their corner of the New World — a corner to which they had no such rights of absolute rule.[17]

In contrast to Oliver Cromwell in England, who slew his enemies but granted "some leeway in matters of conscience and behavior," this interpretation continues, the New England church and state demanded and enforced conformity to Puritan precepts. Those who challenged the "political and ecclesiastical oligarchies . . . paid a high price for the effrontery." But in the end, "the combined power of the suppressed majority revolted quietly from below, while an antagonized crown, applying imperial pressure from

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[14]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xvii.

[15]*Ibid.*

[16]Edmund S. Morgan (ed.), *The Founding of Massachusetts: Historians and the Sources* (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1964), p.45.

[17]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xv.

across the sea, brought the downfall of the Puritan stronghold in New England."[18] By the end of the seventeenth century New England had been turned from a Puritan community, the Holy Commonwealth, into "Yankee land" as the franchise had been broadened and the Congregational establishment ended. This interpretation was that of the progressive historians and culminated in H. L. Mencken's famous dictum that "Puritanism is the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy."[19]

But in the late 1920's a reaction began to set in against the economic determinism and "present-mindedness" of the progressives.[20] It began with the publication in 1925 of Kenneth Murdock's biography, *Increase Mather: The Foremost American Puritan*, followed in 1930 by Samuel Eliot Morison's *Builders of the Bay Colony*, and by Perry Miller's *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650* in 1933.

Morison set the new tone in his introduction:

> Even by enlarging the scope of biography beyond the conventional lines of piety and politics, it is not easy to describe these people truthfully, yet with meaning to moderns. For the men of learning and women of gentle nurture who led a few thousand plain folk to plant a new England on ungrateful soil were moved by purposes utterly foreign to the present America. Their object was not to establish prosperity or prohibition, liberty or democracy, or indeed anything of currently recognized value. Their ideals were comprehended vaguely in the term puritanism, which nowadays has acquired various secondary and degenerate meanings. These ideals, real and imaginary, of early Massachusetts, were attacked by historians of Massachusetts long before "debunking" became an accepted biographical mode; for it is always easier to condemn an alien way of life than to understand it. My attitude toward seventeenth-century puritanism has passed through scorn and boredom to a warm interest and respect. The ways of the puritans are not my ways, and their faith is not my faith; nevertheless they appear to me a courageous, humane, brave, and significant people.[21]

While these new revisionist historians painted a more favorable picture of the Puritans, they avoided addressing themselves directly to the old argument over the relative benefit of the Puritan experiment. They concentrated instead on understanding Puritanism and its theology, sociology, and philosophy with all their themes and variations. As a result they drew a picture of the Holy Commonwealth that was at once more flattering and more

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[18] *Ibid.*

[19] *Ibid.*, p. xviii.

[20] *Ibid.*

[21] Samuel Eliot Morison, *Builders of the Bay Colony* (2nd. ed.; Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1958), p. vf.

honestly critical. The revisionist historians agreed that the Puritan way, while restrictive, proved flexible, varied, and even somewhat tolerant in practice.[22] The Puritans gave to New England an intellectual theology which in turn, was applied by them to their political, economic, social, and cultural institutions.

The revisionist historians were intellectual in their emphasis. Puritanism, by this emphasis, was best understood intellectually, and all the problems the Puritans faced in implementing the Holy Commonwealth were best explained as the fruit of conflicting ideas rather than economic, social, or environmental factors. Perry Miller in the foreword to his *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650*, addressed the matter directly:

> Upon the verge of publication I am fully conscious that in the work to be offered I have treated in a somewhat cavalier fashion certain of the most cherished conventions of current historiography. I have attempted to tell of a great folk movement with an utter disregard of the economic and social factors. I lay myself open to the charge of being so very naive as to believe that the way men think has some influence upon their actions, of not remembering that these ways of thinking have been officially decided by modern psychologists to be generally just so many rationalizations constructed by the subconscious to disguise the pursuit of more tangible ends.[23]

Miller went on to say that in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries "certain men of decisive importance took religion seriously" and that "they often followed spiritual dictates in comparative disregard of ulterior considerations" and that "those who led the Great Migration to Massachusetts and who founded that colony were predominantly men of this stamp."[24] Morison, likewise, at the end of his famous appendix to the *Builders of the Bay Colony* in which he addressed himself to the social and economic determinism of James Truslow Adams, wrote:

> My own opinion, one arrived at by considerable reading of what the Puritans wrote, is that religion, not economics nor politics, was the center and focus of the Puritan dissatisfaction with England, and the Puritan migration to New England. When you find a Puritan writing about the fine material prospects of the new world, he is usually trying to counteract the arguments that liberty of conscience is not worth the loss of friends, comforts and civilizations.[25]

Morison, Miller, and those who followed them in the period 1930–1960, wrought a historiographical revolution. The precise nature and content of their revolution will be discussed below; it is sufficient at this point to note

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[22]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition*, p.xx.

[23]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. xi.

[24]*Ibid.*

[25]Morison, *Builders*, p. 386.

that in explaining the problems and dilemmas faced by the Puritans in implementing the Holy Commonwealth, the revisionists neither ignored the problems nor reconciled them in favor of either the orthodox leadership or the dissenters. By their intellectual analysis of ideas and their development, they laid a base for analyzing the Puritan's problems and dilemmas and for understanding the social and political institutions that developed from them. Miller in three major works set the framework for all future analysis of Puritanism. They were his *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630–1650* (1933), in which he traced the roots of Puritan thought back to theological developments in England and showed their application in Massachusetts; *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (1939), which discussed the Puritan view of life and the world in the context of medieval and reformational philosophy; and *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (1953), in which the history of Massachusetts from 1650 to 1730 is viewed against the backdrop of Puritan theology and philosophy and its modification in the new world.

More recent historians, since about 1960, have begun to challenge the conclusions of Morison, Miller, and their successors, accusing Miller, in Vaughan's words, "of seeing too much intellectual system in the Puritan mind, of ascribing to it too much theological uniqueness, and of treating New England Puritanism as a static phenomenon."[26]

> And while most of the revisionism is aimed at Miller — the most imposing target — by implication at least much of it undercuts the work of Miller's contemporaries. Yet on these and other matters there is little consensus . . . ; historians are not infrequently at loggerheads over such fundamental questions as the distinctions between Anglican and Puritan outlooks.[27]

The post-Milleran period has been described as a "dissensus" and as a "disintegration." Michael McGiffert, observing that Miller's work is coming under increasng criticism, comments that "one sign of disintegration is the enthusiasm with which students of Puritanism and New England declare themselves to be 'pluralists' and announce that the early culture of the region was highly 'pluralistic.' "[28]

But, says Vaughan, it would be misleading

> . . . to view the current historiographical trend as essentially an attack on an earlier school, merely another turn of the wheel. For at bottom the new scholars are less concerned with challenging the wisdom of their elders . . . than in asking questions ignored or only tangentially answered by the historians of the 30's, 40's, and 50's . . . In seeking

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[26]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xxi.

[27]*Ibid.,* xxii.

[28]Michael McGiffert, "American Puritan Studies in the 1960's," *William and Mary Quarterly,* 3rd Series, XXVII (1970), 40.

> to answer these questions and others, the new scholars almost invariably stress the diversity, change, and complexity within seventeenth-century New England. And increasingly students of American Puritanism employ concepts and methods borrowed from other disciplines, especially sociology and psychology. The very terminology stressed in recent works hints at new ways of looking at an old subject: "irony," "paradigm," "tension," "paradox."[29]

The new scholars tend to be more institution-centerd than idea-centered. They are concerned with the social and isntitutional history of ealry New England without reference to the intellectual and pietistic aspect of Puritanism set forth by Miller and his successors. After corresponding in 1968 with 46 scholars concerning the present state of Puritan studies, McGiffert wrote that

> It being noted, for example, that the "mind" Miller wrote about was the mind of the articulate, educated few, the question reasonably follows whether the notions of this "speaking aristocracy" were faithfully reflected in the sentiments of the "silent democracy" either in the church or among the far more silent crowd of the unregenerate . . . This question connects with several others in the historical sociology of New England. Bumstead writes, ". . . a whole host of questions remain unanswered: did the writers of the time practice what they preach? What was the common man thinking (and doing)? What relationship exists between socio-economic factors and ideas? Below the ideational level, what did New England really look like and how did it operate?"[30]

On the other hand, Edmund S. Morgan, one of the historians who has tried to explore the relationship between "socio-economic factors" and "ideas," between thought and experience, also wrote to McGiffert that "great danger . . . lurks in the possibility, perhaps the likelihood, that institutional historians will try to operate outside the context of ideas" and that "it will set the study of New England Puritanism backward if students of institutions try to magnify their subject matter to the point where it excludes the intellectual framework in which New England institutions must be properly viewed."[31] John Higham, also writing to McGiffert, expressed his belief that the parting of social and intellectual history would produce a "healthy tension between two different but equally revealing types of historical patterns: the arrangement of people into a functioning society."[32] McGiffert himself comments that "eventually that tension may be resolved in a new synthesis in which the inner and outer worlds of New England, each world more fully and exactly known, will be put together again."[33]

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[29]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* pp. xxii-xxiv.
[30]McGiffert, "American Puritan Studies," p. 59.
[31]*Ibid.*, p. 60.
[32]*Ibid.*, p. 60.
[33]*Ibid.*

Thus Morgan, himself summarizing the present state of Puritan studies, has observed that "the reconsideration of institutions in the light of ideas . . . will surely suggest new insights to every scholar endowed with imagination" and that this reconsideration of institutions will in turn prompt reconsideration of the ideas behind the institutions:

> Doubtless we should continually reassess the relationship between ideas and institutions. Certainly there is a need to study the institutions themselves and not simply extrapolate their history from the ideas that accompanied them. But if we dismiss ideas as a mere projection of institutions, in early New England at least, we will be reduced to antiquarianism, if not eccentricity.[34]

Like the intellectual historians, the institutional historians do not speak directly to the problems and compromises of the Massachusetts Bay experiment as either good or bad, blessing or benefit. They also were only interested in coming to an understanding of what Puritanism was and what it did and how and why it developed the way it did. They were not interested either in attacking the Puritans or in defending them, merely in describing and understanding them. That is why the focus of the debate has changed from criticism or defense of the Puritans (as in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries) to the debate concerning ideas or institutions as the basis for understanding Puritanism.

The modern debate over Puritanism led McGiffert to conclude that "at present Puritan and New England historiography is remarkable more for vitality than for coherence."[35] But Vaughan concluded that the problem may be inherent more in Puritanism than in historiography. Puritanism, he wrote,

> . . . is difficult to pin down: it encompasses divergent, even contradictory, qualities and personalities; it changes over time; it has subtle and far-reaching ramifications. Perhaps its very illusiveness helps to account for the vitality and longevity of the Puritan tradition in America.[36]

This "illusiveness" and complexity is what makes the historian's work difficult. The web of connections between ideas and institutions is so intricate that every new fact discovered may have ramifications of great significance which lead in turn to reassesment of other ideas, facts, institutions, and events. This means that the student of Puritan history must maintain a full awareness of the larger context of his study and must seek out the

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[34]Edmund S. Morgan, "The Historians of Early New England," *The Reinterpretation of Early American History: Essays in Honor of John Edwin Pomfret,* ed. Ray Allen Billington (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1966), pp. 59, 60.

[35]McGiffert, "American Puritan Studies," p. 59.

[36]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xxiv.

connections of his topic with everything else that was going on at the same time. The study of the Puritans is vital and energetic because every new fact can have great impact on the interpretation of the Puritans since every part of Puritan life was so intricately interwoven.[37]

The interwovenness of Puritan life and thought also presents other problems of interpretation, definition, and methodology. In an essay designed to identify these problems, David B. Hall identifies three of them: (1) the problem of determining how Puritanism was "socially functional"; (2) the problem of marking off the "historical and intellectual boundaries" of the Puritan movement, periodizing and inventorying both its distinctive and shared religious ideas, and (3) the problem of constructing a definition of Puritanism that will include the range of "Puritan types," especially accounting for the dynamic, expansive, "restless," nature of Puritanism."

The problems of defining Puritanism and of marking off its historical and intellectual boundaries are not only closely connected, but also foundational for any consideration of how Puritanism was socially functional. The basic question, "How does one define Puritanism?" is one to which the answers given have become increasingly complex as studies of the Puritans have multiplied.[39]

Of modern historians, Perry Miller's definition of Puritanism was probably the least complicated: "Puritanism may perhaps best be described as that point of view, that philosophy of life, that code of values, which was carried to New England by the first settlers in the early seventeenth century."[40] Miller continued to say that Puritanism was "not only a religious creed, it was a philosophy and a metaphysic; it was an organization of man's whole life, emotional and intellectual, to a degree which has not been sustained by any denomination stemming from it."[41] Miller's reconstruction of Puritanism in *The New England Mind* developed and detailed that creed, philosophy, and metaphysic in what he called the reconciliation of piety and intellect, but more recent scholarship has not been satisfied with either Miller's definition or his treatment of it, it being too much centered in the intellectual structure of Puritanism, rather than in the spiritual. Even in his spiritual life, according to Miller, the Puritan intellect remained in control:

> But if the religion of the Puritan was intense, it was not foolhardy. He was ecstatic, but not insane. He employed self-analysis, medita-

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[37]Morgan, "The Historians of Early New England," p. 59.

[38]David B. Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," *The State of American History,* ed. Herbert J. Bass (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), pp. 330-349.

[39]*Ibid.,* p. 330.

[40]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 1.

[41]*Ibid.,* p. 4.

> tion, and incessant soul-searching to drive out sin from one stronghold after another; in every siege he had to be not only valiant, but self-controlled, patient, wary, and crafty. . . . The exhilaration of faith is known to the heart of the believer, but. . . . those inward supports are remote from public view. Appearances, therefore, are deceiving, and the saint must keep his wits about him; he must remain calm in the midst of ardor, he must burn with fervor, but always be detached and analytical, to make sure that his agitation is genuinely of the spirit, not of mere human cupidity, and to guard against suffocating the flame with false assurances and outward conformity.[42]

Alan Simpson sought to correct Miller's narrow conception of Puritanism when he asked, "How does one define Puritanism?" and answered that Puritanism was the whole movement that began in the sixteenth century to exhort men to prepare for a miracle of grace and ended by asserting the presence of the Holy Spirit in every individual.[43] It therefore included every group in England from the Presbyterians at one extreme to the Quakers on the other. They all shared a dissatisfaction with the Church of England, and that dissatisfaction springs from the basic religious experience of conversion called the "new birth":

> However Puritans differ, they all have something in common. . . They separate the world of nature from the world of grace. They insist that the natural man cannot grow in grace; he has to be reborn. They explain the rebirth as a vivid personal experience in which the individual soul encounters the wrath and redemptive love of God. It is an experience for which the church may prepare a man, and after which it may claim to guide him, but which in its essential nature is beyond the church's control.[44]

The new birth results in a new approach to life. The Puritan's life is a search for regeneration, which is achieved in conversion, and then for sanctification — a character which is appropriate to the regenerate. That character is marked by a sense of responsibility to God and to his law and expresses itself in self-examination and self-denial and self-discipline. This combination of motivation and discipline constitutes the basic drive of Puritanism. The same combination caused Milton to observe that Cromwell could conquer the world because he had first conquered himself.[45] Simpson calls it "holy violence under compression."[46]

The institutional historians criticize both Miller and Simpson. Miller's assumption that Puritanism was a philosophy and metaphysic as well as a

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[42]*Ibid.*, pp. 283f.

[43]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 1.

[44]*Ibid.*, p. 5.

[45]*Ibid.*, p. 6. See also note 9, p. 116.

[46]*Ibid.*

religious creed tended to minimize the "restlessness" within Puritanism, says Hall. But the more inclusive definition put forth by Simpson and his emphasis on "experience" and "thrust" are also weak, though valuable:

> . . . though they permit the Quakers to reenter the fold as authentic Puritans, their meaning seems inherently subjective, and they may act to exclude the array of distinction that Miller so successfully identified as woven into the texture of Puritanism.[47]

Other of the institutional historians argue that the intellectual historians have concentrated only on the public writings of the "articulate few" as the "true mirror" of the New England mind and therefore have created their own stereotype of Puritanism, a stereotype which has little to do with New England.[48] What are we to describe as Puritan? asks Darrett Rutman,

> . . . the ideals of the articulate few which, relative to society and authority, were neither unique nor pervasive, or the actuality of the man in the street — more accurately, the man in the village lane — which does not fit the ideals? The very fact that such a question can be asked would seem to imply that the description of New England in terms of Puritanism, or of Puritanism in terms of New England, is erroneous.[49]

What is needed, then, is a definition of Puritanism that will enable us to account for the Puritan types without limiting our study to the articulate few or to the inarticulate many and at the same time enable us to identify the range of Puritan types and experiences from the intellectual to the enthusiast and from the systematic theology of Calvin to the dynamism of the new birth.

As for the historical and intellectual limits of Puritanism, the problem is to locate Puritanism on the time scale between the Reformation and the Enlightenment, between the theology of Calvin and the coming of pietism, which largely gave up the effort to maintain the unity of philosophy and religion.

In between, of course, the intellectual limits of Puritanism are tied up with the definition of Puritanism. We have seen how the expansion of the definition of Puritanism led to an expansion of the intellectual limits by including the Quakers and other left-wing groups in the definition. If the essence of Puritanism is the new birth, then all groups which share the new birth are Puritans. Other historians have not been as inclusive as Simpson and Hall. Perry Miller noted that taking Puritan culture as a whole, about

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[47]Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," p. 332.

[48]Darrett B. Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), p. 149.

[49]*Ibid.*, p. 164.

ninety percent of that culture was not Puritan, but simply English: the intellectual life, scientific knowledge and concepts, morals and manners, customs and prejudices were common to all Englishmen. The other ten percent " . . . made all the difference between the Puritan and his fellow Englishman, made for him so much difference that he pulled up stakes . . . and migrated to a wilderness rather than submit them to apparent defeat."[50] What knit that ten percent together was a certain set of ideas, or presuppositions: they saw a separation between nature and grace, they saw both God and man as active forces in the world, and they shared a common eschatology.[51] Yet among those who were of Puritan stripe in England, the denominational categories are not too useful, tending to obstruct and fix and therefore obscure the more or less flexible relationship which the Puritan groups had with the Reformed tradition during the period. All Puritan groups of whatever stripe held several beliefs in common, regardless of denomination: the "revitalization of the layman's role in the church, the 'purification' of church membership, the emphasis on the autonomy of the local congregation, and the separation of church and state."[52] In short, while the Puritans had a rather limited, but specific, inventory of ideas that separated them from other Englishmen, yet the groups that were formed within Puritanism itself were not so rigidly defined as the denominational categories imply. There was flexibility and development within the groups that made up the movement.[53]

Historically, Puritanism began as a movement for reform within the Church of England in the latter half of the sixteenth century, following the Elizabethan settlement of 1559. The reformers considered themselves members of the Church of England and not as founders of a new church or denomination. It is common to associate Puritanism with certain social class movements and aspirations as well as political developments of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. But it is important to realize that the Puritans never started out to be dissenters and revolutionaries. Puritanism may have had a revolutionary social effect, but, as Alan Simpson has observed,

> Puritanism never offered itself as anything but a doctrine of salvation, and it addressed itself neither directly nor indirectly to social classes, but to man as man . . . [I]ts attractions as a commitment were such that it made converts in all classes — among aristocrats, country gentry, businessmen, intellectuals, freeholders, and small tradesmen.[54]

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[50]Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 7.
[51]Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," p. 340.
[52]*Ibid.*, p. 339.
[53]*Ibid.*
[54]Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England,* p. 11.

Genuine Puritans were never a majority in England, but they found their influence growing as they spoke to the issues of the time and as England headed toward a political crisis in the struggle between the Parliament and the Crown. The constitutional opposition to the Stuart monarchy was not a Puritan movement as such, but in it the Puritan found his "best hope" of achieving a reform in the Church of England.[55] It is this connection with the Church of England that can be used to define and limit Puritanism historically, says Hall.

> From that time [1559] until the accession of William III, most Puritans thought of themselves as members of the Church, not as founders of new churches. It was only when the religious settlement under William denied the legitimacy of this claim that the connections between English Puritans and the Church were finally severed. On this side of the Atlantic, the new charter of 1691 and the events associated with it mark a similar end to the affiliation.[56]

Finally, the problem of determining how Puritanism was socially functional is one of determining how Puritanism was related to the culture and social structure of its time, and how it affected that culture and society. Hall writes that

> Puritanism had social sources and social consequences; were historians to define precisely which groups supported (and dissented from) the Puritan program, as well as the movement's consequences for the broader culture, they would move closer to an understanding of its nature.[57]

There seems to be little debate among the historians as to the purpose or intentions of the Puritans. According to A.S.P. Woodhouse, the active presence of the ideal of the "holy community" is the only satisfactory basis for a working definition of Puritanism in its social and political aspects: "Puritanism means a determined and varied effort to erect the holy community and to meet, with different degrees of compromise and adjustment, the problem of its conflict with the world."[58] That holy community in New England was an experiment in Christian living which sought to reconstruct the church and every other institution and facet of life in the light of that world view inherent in their Calvinistic theology. That theology demanded that they look anew at the form and nature of government, the community, the family, and to have reformed attitudes toward work and leisure. In most cases, writes Vaughan,

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[55]*Ibid.*, p. 31.

[56]Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," p. 339.

[57]*Ibid.*, pp. 330f.

[58]A.S.P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 37.

> Puritanism did not cause its adherents to hold views radically different from their countrymen's but rather to see things in a subtly different light, sometimes dissimilar in kind . . . , sometimes in intensity . . But put all the subtle differences together and the man stands out as a Puritan . . . For the Puritan was not quite like other people. Probing endlessly the implications of Christian doctrine to himself and to his society, he tried to force both to act accordingly.[59]

Of course, Vaughan concludes, "both self and society often resisted, which accounts not only for the psychic tensions so characteristic of the Puritan mind, but also for the turbulent quality of society whenever Puritans gained the upper hand."[60]

But it is one thing to have such a vision of a holy community or commonwealth; it was another one to put it into effect. Only when the founders came to grips with the problems of embodying the vision in institutions, writes Simpson, did the "specialty" of the New England way emerge with its attendant implications: (1) that no diversity of opinion in fundamentals would be permitted, (2) that a "due form" of civil and ecclesiastical government would be set up, and (3) that the clergy would have to be men well-instructed and yet with "saving knowledge."[61] All these implications were necessary if the holy community were to be established and to remain.

Yet, argues Rutman, ". . . modern historians have drawn a picture of a highly cohesive and ordered social structure in which authority was omnipresent — the authority of the father in the family, of the minister in the church, of the magistrate in town and commonwealth."[62] But the record shows that all was not so unified or cohesive in the holy commonwealth, nor was the ideal ever a reality in New England. It is this point that Rutman uses to call for a modification of Puritan ideas in light of Puritan institutions and their development.[63]

Thus Puritanism, as it functioned socially, developed the institutions which became the New England Way and also gave rise to the "psychic tensions" and "turbulent quality" of life which led the historians to remark on the existence of a Puritan dilemma. Whether it affected the society in the way described by the intellectual historians, who studied the public writings, or in the way described by the institutional historians, who read the voting records, land deeds, and population charts, is an open question. On it rests much of the argument concerning the declension of New England. Was New England orthodox and authoritarian in the first generation, suffering a

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[59]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xiii.
[60]*Ibid.*
[61]Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England,* pp. 26-29.
[62]Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," p. 150.
[63]*Ibid.,* p. 163.

declension in later generations, as Cotton Mather and Perry Miller have it, or was it heterogeneous from the very beginning? If Rutman's argument stands, based on the records reflecting the "man in the village lane," then ". . . the concept of a Puritan golden age, followed by decline, disappears." The declension was, in large part, "nothing more than the insistence by the generality upon a relationship between the individual and society rather different from that held to by the leaders."[64] Rutman concludes:

> The historian must, of course, address himself to the problem of New England's intellectuals. Isolated from reality as they were, they clung for almost half a century to ideals which grew more outdated with the passing of each day, and then gradually and subtly accommodated their ideas to the realities of the situation facing them. But their accommodations and the forces in society that caused them to make changes represent a much more important aspect of history than the mere description of "Puritanism." And the historian must dispense with the easy generalization that such leaders "shaped" New England's culture regardless of what "the rank and file may have wanted." He must seek instead to understand the rank and file, their motivations, aspirations, and achievements. For in the last analysis which is more vital, an ideological "Puritanism" divorced from reality which has received so much attention over the years, or the reality which has received so little attention but which was in essence laying down the basis for two-and-a-half centuries of American history ahead?[65]

These, then, are some of the problems that face anyone who sets out to study the Puritans. We have noted the problems and some of the major answers that have been given. These are the problems that must be addressed and the answers that must be considered. An adequate definition of Puritanism, concludes Hall, must take them all into consideration. It

> . . . must seek to unite the experiential dimension with the formal structure of the Puritan intellect. It must locate the movement within a particular time period, and with reference to the Reformed tradition and Pietism. It must identify the bond between the social sources of the movement and its history, between its rhetoric and its social consequences.[66]

In the face of these problems, it is the concept of the Puritan dilemma, more than anything else, that serves as a device around which to organize and frame such a definition. Let us now consider that device.

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[64]*Ibid.*, p. 164.

[65]*Ibid.*

[66]Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," p. 332.

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The Puritan Dilemma

When Rutman claimed that the accommodation of the New England intellectuals to the reality of the situations facing them and the forces in society that caused them to make changes represented a much more important aspect of history than the mere description of Puritanism, he may have had in mind the history of what is commonly called the "Puritan dilemma." The concept of a fundamental conflict at the heart of Puritanism which explains several of the problems faced by the Puritans in implementing their holy commonwealth is a common one among modern historians of whatever school or persuasion. Perry Miller argued in *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* that the tension in the Puritan's theory of reason was the key to all the other dilemmas. The Puritans, he said, believed that they could safely apply human reason to Scripture according to the rules of "dialectic" because the "Word of God and not the creatures" was the source of their theology: ". . . in the Puritan mind confidence in the certainty of God's Word was matched by an equal confidence in the infallibility of logic."[1] After going on to discuss the roots of this Puritan trust in reason and logic, Miller concludes that

> the latent conflict in their theory of reason engendered conflicts in other realms as well, in their theory of human psychology and in ecclesiastical practice, and was perhaps the one glaring weakness in their otherwise perfect system, the single but fatal inconsistency in an otherwise monumental consistency.[2]

The fruit of that one fatal flaw in that monumental consistency was what the Puritan experience was all about and what Miller traced in *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century.* Edmund Morgan has best described Miller's work:

> In immense detail and with no quarter given to the simple-minded, Miller discussed the patristic and scholastic origins of Puritan ideas, the Puritan's cosmology, logic, psychology, and rhetoric, their ideas about the nature of man and God, and the concepts of human relationship that underlay their political, social, and ecclesiastical institutions. At every point he suggested the implications, paradoxes, and tensions, and the way conflicting or diverging ideas were held together in a system that constituted "one of the major expressions of

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[1]Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 190.

[2]*Ibid.*, p. 191

> the Western intellect . . . an organized synthesis of concepts which are fundamental to our culture.[3]

In the second volume of *The New England Mind,* sub-titled *From Colony to Province,* Miller showed how the inner tensions of Puritanism increased as it responded to the various challenges that came to the holy commonwealth until paradoxes turned into irreconcilable conflicts and sapped the strength and confidence of New England.[4]

Miller's study was both genetic and definitive, setting the terms of the discussion for all further consideration. In 1958, Edmund S. Morgan published a biography of John Winthrop in which he discussed Winthrop's life from the standpoint of *The Puritan Dilemma,* a tension, he said, which was "at best painful and at worst unbearable."[5] The Puritan dilemma was defined as the problem of "how to apply a rigorous ethic to the existential situation without endangering the structure of the community."[6]

David B. Hall used the dilemma concept in his call for a new definition of Puritanism. He saw the Puritan as caught in the dilemma caused by the "dynamic relationship" between this world and the next. The Puritan knew himself to be "a mid-point between these worlds, and his striving for self-discipline, his endless self-scrutiny, was directed toward the end of winning freedom from this world and entrance to the kingdom . . . "[7] Another dilemma facing the Puritans, according to Hall, was the one between schism and reform. They were resentful of the corruption in the church, yet also believed that schism and separation was a sin. This dilemma was responsible for much of the Puritanism's restlessness and for its fragmentation into miscellaneous sects.[8]

A.S.P. Woodhouse saw the Puritan dilemma as one of liberty versus reform. He notes that the Puritan concern for liberty is not a "constant feature" of the Puritan mind since it runs counter to the "universal trait" of Puritanism: " . . . the passionate zeal for positive reform, with the will, if necessary, to dragoon men into righteousness — or the semblance of righteousness."[9]

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[3]Edmund S. Morgan, "The Historians of Early New England," *The Reinterpretation of Early American History: Essays in honor of John Edwin Pomfret,* ed. Ray Allen Billington (San Marino, California: The Huntington Library, 1966), p. 53.

[4]*Ibid.*

[5]Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma; The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p.7.

[6]Emil Oberholzer, Jr., Review of Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma; The Story of John Winthrop* in the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review,* XLV (June 1958), 119.

[7]David B. Hall, "Understanding the Puritans," *The State of American History,* ed. Herbert J. Bass (Chicago: Quadrangle, 1970), p. 340.

[8]*Ibid.*

[9]A.S.P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 53.

> . . . The motives are equally authentic: the passionate concern for liberty and the passionate zeal for reform in the interests of righteousness. Capable of co-operation up to a certain point, they finally remain, somewhere near the heart of Puritanism, in a state of potential and unresolved conflict.[10]

Finally, Richard Reinitz, in his *Tensions in American Puritanism,* saw that the lasting effects of Puritanism both in England and America were products of its "inner tensions":

> A religious movement based on a profound insight into the human condition, Puritanism was able to draw on new sources of energy and to apply them to a wide range of secular activities. The religious enthusiasm it tapped has been basic to many movements, but Puritanism was uniquely able to maintain that enthusiasm and to institutionalize it. Rooted in a heightened sense of the individual's confrontation with God, Puritanism was nonetheless deeply concerned with the idea and the actuality of community. Ostensibly aimed at the past, at the reassertion of ancient values, ironically it contributed greatly to the breakdown of established social patterns.[11]

It is obvious from the preceding brief survey that there are several different aspects to the concept of the Puritan dilemma, some more serious than others. Several words have been used to describe this dilemma, among them "dilemma," "paradox," "tension," "balance," and "irony." Regardless of which of these terms is used, it is possible that any of three different things can be intended. There is, first, a paradoxical, or ironical, sense in which the alternatives mentioned are paradoxical, but not necessarily contradictory to each other. The historian who remarked that the Puritans came to America to do good and ended up doing well has called our attention to an ironic fact about the Puritan experience, but not to a necessary contradiction.

There are many examples that could be cited to illustrate this aspect of the Puritan dilemma. What has been called the Puritan work ethic is an example of the unintended consequences of the Puritan doctrine of the "calling," wherein each man was seen as being called by God to a particular occupation or profession. Reinitz has observed that

> The overt function of the doctrine of the calling was to support the hierarchical conception of society, but the actual consequences of the energetic pursuit of a calling could be quite different. . . . The Puritans as Puritans had no desire to further the development of capitalism, yet the energies released by the sanctification of work contributed greatly to the increased productivity of modern economic life. Puritan merchants in dutifully pursuing their calling contributed to

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[10] *Ibid.*

[11] Richard Reinitz (ed.), *Tensions in American Puritanism* (New York: John Wiley, 1970), p.9.

> the growth of a market-regulated economy and modern economic individualism.[12]

That the Puritans reaped consequences they did not intend was also shown by Samuel Eliot Morison in his consideration of *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England,* first published in 1936. Morison pointed out that in contrast to the other English colonies of the time, the faith of the Puritan stimulated him to a high degree of intellectual activity. Within ten years of its founding, Massachusetts Bay had a college, a school system, a printing press, and a native literature made up of sermons, poetry, and history. In Puritanism, writes Morison,

> . . . New England had a great emotional stimulus to certain forms of intellectual life. . . . The intellectual alternatives . . . were not Puritanism *or* humanism, but Puritanism *or* overwhelming materialism. . . . Again we have a paradox. Puritanism in New England preserved far more of the humanist tradition than did non-puritanism in the other English colonies.[13]

Another example of unintended consequences was given by Perry Miller in his essay "Errand into the Wilderness," in which he observed that the Puritans went forth as on an errand as agents of universal reformation, the chosen nation representing the world, but when the rest of the world moved off in another direction, the nature of their errand changed and they were left to do their own business for themselves. They began as a movement on behalf of mankind and ended as a chosen elite at odds with the rest of the world.[14]

Finally, the Puritan demand that men live actively in the world had consequences that the Puritans did not intend. The Puritan idea of a static and organic society was displaced by the Puritan demand that men take an active part in reforming the society. When men were allowed an active part in political activity, the results were quite different from the static order they were seeking.[15]

A second aspect of the concept of the Puritan dilemma can be seen in the use of the words "tension" and "dilemma" to refer to the matter of keeping a balance between two opposed, but equally necessary, focal points, such as law and liberty, form and freedom, unity and diversity, or piety and intellect. These were the kind of dilemmas with which John Winthrop struggled, according to Morgan:

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[12]*Ibid.,* p. 13.

[13]Samuel Eliot Morison, *The Intellectual Life of Colonial New England* (New York: New York University Press, 1956), pp. 15-17.

[14]Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), pp. 1-15.

[15]Reinitz, *Tensions,* p. 12.

> . . . Winthrop gradually reduced the extent of his oscillation between abstinence and excess. It took time, time to cool the blood, time to grow in the spiritual strength that alone could hold him to a steady course of godliness in a world of temptations. But in the end, before he was forty, he was successful in containing the tension.[16]

Puritanism abounded in such tensions of balance, and the Puritan thinkers struggled to maintain the balances, contain the tensions, and to re-explain, re-reconcile, and reinforce them continually. They did this, as we shall see, by their doctrine of the covenant and their view of society as made up of a multiplicity of covenants which interacted with and counter-balanced one another.

One of the major examples of this kind of tension was, in fact, inherent in the whole struggle of Puritanism against the Church of England. While the Puritans were still in England, the tension between uniformity and Puritan reform had been obvious. "The medieval principle of uniformity could not be reconciled with the inveterate tendency of the Reformation to produce constant variety," writes Miller, "unless one party could secure an absolute control over every corner of the realm; and England was too complex a society to give such an opportunity to any one faction."[17] Miller records that the Puritans regarded their position not as a matter of their own judgment, but as a repetition of the "highest judgment ever recorded," ". . . and why the King would not listen to it was more than they ever could comprehend."[18]

The reasoning behind their emigration, therefore, was clear: "In order that they might continue to behold in magistrates the ordinance of God, they had to escape from those who refused to live up to the part and to choose for themselves some that would."[19] In short, they had to gain that absolute control over every corner of the realm so that they could both maintain authority and allow the development of a variety limited to the bounds of Scripture.

The balance of divine sovereignty and human responsibility is another example. The Puritanism which came to America was a balance of objectivity and subjectivity, of head and heart, of faith and action. The Puritans believed that everything was dependent upon and determined by God, yet they lived lives full of activity, planning, and direction. They held that God's revelation was objective yet applied it subjectively to their personal experience. Perry Miller saw the doctrine of the covenant of grace as a means of enabling the Puritan to contain the relationship between the vision

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[16]Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma,* pp.11f.
[17]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 52.
[18]*Ibid.*, p. 51.
[19]*Ibid.*, p. 101n.

of a sovereign God and the human intellect. The spectacle of the Puritan theologians,

> . . . struggling in the coils of their doctrine, desperately striving on the one hand to maintain the subordination of humanity to God without unduly abasing human values, and on the other hand to vaunt the powers of the human intellect without losing the sense of divine transcendence, vividly recreates what might be called the central problem of the seventeenth century as it was confronted by the Puritan mind.[20]

A final paradox that had to be continually reconciled was the one between reason and grace in the approach to the Scriptures. Puritanism taught that reason without grace was helpless, but that the Scriptures were to be applied to the regenerate life in accord with reason and learning. Harvard College had been founded in order that Massachusetts might have a learned clergy. Could reason be used to ensure the truth and orthodoxy of the discipline? The whole history of Puritanism, writes Simpson,

> . . . is a commentary on its failure to satisfy the cravings which its preaching aroused. It was forever producing rebellions against its own teachers: rebellions within the learned camp and rebellions from outside that camp against the assertion that learned reason had anything to teach the illuminated spirit.[21]

A third aspect of the concept of the Puritan dilemma comes in the use of the words "tension" or "dilemma" to mean those dilemmas that involved manifest contradictions either in thought or in action. These tensions involved inherent contradictions rather than apparent paradoxes or problems of maintaining balance. As a result of these inherent contradictions, the Puritans were forced to make compromises that ultimately led them to frustration and declension. Probably the major example of such a dilemma and the compromise that was forced on the Puritan theory by the existential situation in New England society was that involved in the Halfway Covenant, which will be discussed at a later point in this study. But there were others as well. Of them, Simpson has observed that the Puritans

> . . . had dreamed of themselves as a united army forming the vanguard of history, but the army splinters into columns, battalions, and platoons, while history seems to be marching on. They had thought that conversion could become an institution, but they find themselves with church members where they had hoped for saints. They had devised one of the most formidable disciplines ever seen for keeping sin within bounds, but there seemed to be as much of it inside the covenant as outside. They had demanded an impossible tension from the

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[20]Miller, *Errand,* p. 74.

[21]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 27f.

> elect and an impossible submission from the mass. Everywhere the taut springs relax, the mass rebels and compromises eat away at a distinction on which the whole system was based.[22]

That distinction and those compromises involved the New England Way in church and state, which suffered from several dilemmas. The consequent compromises, which were made to resolve them, make up a good part of the significant history of the Puritan dilemma, as we shall see.

The first two aspects of the Puritan dilemma, however, are interesting but of no great significance in a study of human autonomy in Puritan thought and experience. It should be noted that the tensions of balance are not specifically Puritan problems, but rather human problems, and that where the Puritans addressed themselves to these problems of balance, they did so with substantial success, balancing form and freedom, piety and intellect, law and liberty.

But what we are primarily interested in in a discussion of human autonomy in Puritan thought and experience are those places where Puritan thought led to positions that were manifestly contradictory or out of balance: those that involved inherent contradictions, not just problems of maintaining balance. Of these, there were three in the areas of church membership, church establishment, and church government. We will consider them in a later part of this study.

John Cotton did not believe in an inherent Puritan dilemma. In 1636, as word filtered back to England about New England's new "Way" of doing things in church and state, Lord Say and Seal, a Puritan nobleman who was considering emigration to New England, wrote to John Cotton, one of Massachusetts' leading apologists for the "Way" of restricting the franchise to the restricted church membership of "visible saints." How can you justify such a policy, Say apparently asked. Will this not make the church the main influence in human affairs, drawing all things "under the determination of the church (as Cotton summarized it)?" What happens when the magistrates and the church differ? Will this not ultimately throw the commonwealth into distractions and "popular confusions?"

Cotton's reply to Say's letter set forth, in summary fashion, all the essentials of the Puritan view of political structure and philosophy: the division of power between church and state, the limitation of the franchise to church members, the necessity of theocracy in both church and state, and his classical putdown of "democracy": "If the people be governors, who shall be governed?"[23]

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[22]*Ibid.*, p. 32.

[23]John Cotton, "Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the Year 1636," *The Puritans,* eds. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1936), I, 209-212.

And having said all that, Cotton turned his attention to the charge that the New England Way would lead to distractions and popular confusion, answering that

> . . . these three things do not undermine, but do mutually and strongly maintain one another (even those three which we principally aim at) authority in magistrates, liberty in people, purity in the church. Purity, preserved in the church, will preserve well-ordered liberty in the people, and both of them together establish well-balanced authority in the magistrates. God is the author of all these three, and neither is himself the God of confusion, nor are his ways the ways of confusion, but of peace.[24]

In this passage Cotton not only names the three principal aims of the holy commonwealth, but also argues their relative importance and interconnectedness. They were all of a piece; they stood or fell together. There could be no well-ordered liberty in the people or well-balanced authority in the magistrate apart from the purity of the church. Cotton's concept is a key to the Puritan worldview, namely, the dependence in Puritan thought on what Herman Dooeyweerd has called the "religious root" of all human thought.[25] Cornelius Van Til, a contemporary orthodox theologian, has expressed the problem as one of an "ultimate personal point of reference":

> In the last analysis, every theology or philosophy is personalistic. Everything "impersonal" must be brought into relationship with an ultimate personal point of reference. Orthodoxy takes the self-contained ontological trinity to be this point of reference. The only alternative is to make man himself the final point of reference.[26]

Thus the significance of what Cotton was saying is that if well-ordered liberty and well-balanced authority depend on the nature of one's spiritual condition and theological viewpoint, then it becomes very important to know what an individual believes and what his society as a whole accepts as "public belief" (the expression of truths publicly taken for granted). This means that whenever there is a change of content or appropriation in the system of belief, we ought to expect certain changes in such tangible areas as the spheres of liberty in the people and authority in the magistrate. Conversely, whenever we see a change taking place in these areas we ought to be

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[24]*Ibid.*, p. 212.

[25]Hermann Dooyeweerd, *In the Twilight of Western Thought: Studies in the Pretended Autonomy of Philosophical Thought* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press. 1968); see also Hermann Dooyeweerd, *The Necessary Presuppositions of Philosophy,* trans. David H. Freeman and William S. Young, Vol. I of *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought* (4 vols.; Nutley, N.J.: The Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1969), p. 4.

[26]Cornelius Van Til, introduction to Benjamin Breckinridge Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible,* ed. Samuel G. Craig (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1948), p. 18, cited by Rousas John Rushdoony, *The One and the Many: Studies in the Philosophy of Order and Ultimacy* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1971), p. 354.

able to trace it back to a change in the belief-system. Consequently, the key to social and political welfare in a society is the content of the "religious root," that is, the seat of faith and belief, which content is the meaning of "purity in the church."

But Cotton seemed to be saying even more than that: "God," he said, "is the author of all these three. . . ." With this statement, Cotton asserted the "non-autonomy" of human thought and temporal reality (though neither he, nor any of the other Puritans, ever called it that), the concept that no part of the creation, including man or any part of man, can claim autonomy, or self-sufficiency, in any way. That is, in Van Til's words, man's "ultimate personal point of reference" is not in human thought or any part of the temporal reality. Cotton did just what Van Til says that orthodoxy does: he made the self-contained ontological trinity, i.e., God, to be the source and ultimate personal frame of reference.

And more: Cotton further asserted that God is not the author of confusion and His ways are not the ways of confusion, but of peace. Cotton probably would have been surprised, therefore, to hear the modern historian discuss the "Puritan dilemma" since there seems to be a fundamental difference between Cotton's assertion that God's ways are the ways of peace and not of confusion and Morgan's assertion that Puritanism created a dilemma which was "at best painful and at worst unbearable."[27]

The Puritans themselves did not seem to suffer from the dilemmas that have been attributed to them. It is true that they strove to maintain balance and to reconcile tensions and that their disappointment in the course of declension was keen, but even then, there is a certain guilelessness and honesty that shows a certain central unity of being that argues a lack of that psychic tension or mental conflict attributed to them by the device of the Puritan dilemma.

The Puritan prided himself on being able to see things "as they be" with the aid of divine grace. Thus he was not misled by appearances except by sin. John Cotton taught that men should labor in their callings but should not expect too much from them: labor, but labor in faith because this world will soon pass, being only the world of appearances. Reality and permanence belong to eternity, not to temporality. Once a man grasped that, says Perry Miller, he "would be able to live amid disappointments without being disappointed, amid deceptions without being deceived, amid temptations without yielding to them, amid cruelties without becoming cruel."[28]

It should be noted as well that as the first generation leaders looked back at their achievements in Massachusetts Bay, they did not seem in any way to

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[27]Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma,* p. 7.

[28]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 288.

regret the way things had developed there. Perry Miller records that what they considered the "major issues" were not guided by "domestic considerations" but by their sense of New England's part in the overall strategy of Protestantism and the Holy War. Miller lists the following major issues, all of which are vital to a consideration of the Puritan dilemma: (1) the suppression of Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomians, (2) the banishment of Roger Williams, (3) tricky diplomacy with the King, Parliament, the Presbyterians, and Oliver Cromwell, (4) the remonstrance of Dr. Child, and (5) the formulation of the Cambridge Platform.[29] And when Richard Mather preached his farewell sermon in 1657, he exhorted New England to keep its four unique features: (1) the balance of economic life with spiritual life, (2) the preservation of the New England Way, both civil and ecclesiastical . . . with its peculiarities of restricted membership and intolerance, (3) the transmission of the basic conversion experience of the founders, and (4) the perpetuation of the church order through a succession of converted children.[30]

That New England did not keep these things is not the point. What is significant is that Mather was unapologetic even in 1657 about defending them and maintaining their benefit for the Bay Colony.

A final instance of the fundamental sense of unity (rather than dilemma) felt by the Puritans comes in their reactions to the contemporary charge that they were, and that their way of life produced, "hypocrites." Larzer Ziff records that the Puritans recognized this, but did not comprehend it. One of them complained, writes Ziff, quoting, "The most ordinary badge of Puritans is the more religious and conscionable conversation, than that which is seen in other mens: and why this should make them odious or suspected of hypocrisy amongst honest and charitable men I could never yet learn."[31] In a similar vein, John Cotton replied to Richard Saltonstall's charge that forcing men to attend church produced hypocrites because they "conform their outward man for fear of punishment," that, "if it did so, yet better to be hypocrites than profane persons. Hypocrites give God part of his due, the outward man, but the profane person giveth God neither outward nor inward man."[32] Such bold expressions of confidence do not come from men who are halting between two opinions or fundamentally double-minded and unstable, or in whom there is a tension that is "at best painful and at worst unbearable."

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[29]Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), p. 6.

[30]*Ibid.*, p. 14.

[31]John Ley, quoted in Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 25.

[32]John Cotton, "Letter to Richard Saltonstall," *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 203.

That the Puritans did not seem to suffer from an inherent Puritan dilemma should not mislead us, however, into thinking that somehow the problems did not exist. The problems did exist, and a list of them (as above) would make up a summary of all the important events in the history of Massachusetts Bay. The point that needs to be made clear is that while the problems existed and plagued the Puritans as they tried to implement the Holy Commonwealth, yet no Puritan ever held or admitted that the problems were the result of inherent contradictions within the Puritan philosophy. In this light it is not hard to see why the Puritan always seemed to think that his problems were caused by his critics' misunderstandings or his opponents' departures from truth, but never by his own inconsistencies. Every criticism was heard and considered and inevitably turned back upon the critic. (Cotton and Winthrop were especially good at applying this tactic.) In the following discussion we shall be looking at some of the major problems encountered by the Puritans, seeking to find out what concepts and institutions they intended to implement in the holy commonwealth and how they understood the conflicts they faced. It is the thesis of this work that these problems were caused in each instance by an assertion in some way of human autonomy in either concept or practice. It is the Puritan understanding of the concepts of authority, sin, sovereignty, and law that does the most to define the concept of autonomy and to illustrate its presence in Puritan thought and practice. After we have described these Puritan doctrines and shown their application in the holy commonwealth, we will survey the dilemmas and human autonomy in Puritan practice. We will afterward consider the impact and implications of this thesis on the problems of Puritan historiography outlined above.

4

The Concept of Autonomy in Puritan Theology

The concept of human autonomy is not mentioned as such in the writings of the Puritans. It is not defined in Puritan theology. Nor is it mentioned by any of the historians of Puritanism that the author has read. It is rather a concept implied by several other doctrines and more or less taken for granted, as a tacit premise. Autonomy was for the Puritan a negative concept, closely tied to the doctrine of sin, as we shall see in what follows. The positive side of that concept we shall call "non-autonomy," meaning that for the Puritan no part of the creation, nor man or any part of man, could claim an autonomy, or self-sufficiency, apart from God in any way. The concept of non-autonomy can be seen in every area of Puritan life and thought, but the idea was spelled out most clearly in his concepts of authority and sin. In the first, he bowed his will and conscience to an ultimate source of authority outside himself; in the second, he defined what it meant to turn away from that authority toward autonomy.

It was the Puritan's view of authority that did most to make him a "Puritan." Puritanism, whatever else it might have been or whatever other effects it may have had in the social and political life of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, was more a matter of theology than anything else. Puritanism was a theological interpretation of life: not only a religious creed, but a philosophy, metaphysic, and re-organization of the whole of life — material, emotional, and intellectual — from the standpoint of the Scriptures. What brought the Puritans into clash with the civil and ecclesiastical settlement of England was its radical insistence on judging civil and ecclesiastical issues on the sole basis of the Bible, which they took to be the Word of God.[1] Miller has pointed out, however, that there was a "vast substratum" of agreement which actually existed between the Puritans and their Anglican opponents and that much of what is today mistaken for Puritanism was actually the standard intellectual climate (the truths taken for granted) of that day:

> The vast substratum of agreement which actually underlay the disagreement between Puritans and Anglicans is explained by the fact that they were both the heirs of the Middle Ages. They still believed

[1]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 4-10 *passim.*

> that all knowledge was one, that life was unified, that science, economics, political theory, aesthetic standards, rhetoric and art, all were organized in a hierarchical scale of values that tended upward to the end-all and be-all of creation, the glory of God.[2]

The rest, Miller says, the "relatively small number" of disputed ideas, "made all the difference between the Puritan and his fellow-Englishmen," so much that he was willing to leave England and migrate to the wilderness "rather than submit them to apparent defeat."[3] This should indicate for us how seriously the Puritan took the matter of Biblical truth and "discipline out of the word." "It is to the movement for 'discipline out of the Word,'" writes Miller, "that we must look for the source of that energy which, after beating itself in vain for sixty years against the state church, inundated the shores of another continent."[4]

To understand how this came about, it is necessary to go back to the history of the Reformation in England. During the 1530's King Henry VIII had repudiated the Roman Catholic Church for personal reasons and established the Church of England. When his ten-year-old son Edward inherited the throne in 1547, a group of English reformers gained an important influence in his court and were able to take some first steps toward reforming the Church in Protestant directions. But when Mary came to the throne in 1553 she returned the Church to the Roman fold, and the English reformers were executed or exiled. Then in 1558 the Virgin Queen Elizabeth came to the throne. The exiles returned and began again to agitate for reform in the Church of England. In 1559 what was called the Elizabethan Settlement was enacted containing two major acts, the Act of Supremacy which made Elizabeth the supreme governor of the Church of England, and the Act of Uniformity which authorized a "slightly moderated version" of the prayer book which had been developed in Edward's day.[5] In 1563 the doctrinal standard of the Thirty-Nine Articles and the set forms of worship and common prayer were adopted.

It was during this period of time that what is called Puritanism began to develop. The term itself was originally used as a kind of slur, implying that those who believed, as the Puritans did, in purifying the Church were Donatists, or perfectionists, an ancient heresy which Augustine had fought against in the fifth century. But, slur or not, the reformers picked up the term and used it in their campaign to complete all the implications of the Reformation and of Protestant doctrine in church and state. The American Puritans left England in the culmination of a long dispute between those

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 10

[3]*Ibid.*, I, 7

[4]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 23.

[5]Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 89.

who favored this Elizabethan settlement of 1559 and those who opposed it. Thus the Puritan found himself confronted, writes Simpson, "by that Anglican piety which had developed side by side and in conflict with his own, within the framework of the Establishment erected by Queen Elizabeth". The complexion of that settlement was "thoroughly frustrating" to the Puritan.[6] Simpson's summary of the Puritan's doctrinal problems with the settlement is instructive:

> He believed in the total depravity of nature; he was told that men were not so fallen as he thought they were. He believed that the natural man had to be virtually reborn; he was told that he could grow in grace. He believed that the sermon was the only means of bringing saving knowledge and that the preacher should speak as a dying man to dying men. He was told that there were many means of salvation, that sermons by dying men to dying men were often prolix, irrational, socially disturbing, and that what they had to say that was worth saying had usually been better said in some set form that could be read aloud. He demanded freedom for the saints to exercise their gifts of prayer and prophecy, only to be told that the needs of the community were better met by the forms of common prayer. He felt instinctively that the church was where Christ dwelt in the hearts of the regenerate. He was warned that such feelings threatened the prudent distinction between the invisible church of the saved and the visible church of the realm. He insisted that the church of the realm should be judged by Scripture, confident that Scripture upheld him, and prepared to assert that nothing which was not expressly commanded in Scripture ought to be tolerated in the church. He was told that God had left much to the discretion of human reason; that this reason was exercised by public authority, which in England was the same for both church and state; and that whatever authority enjoined, in its large area of discretion, ought to be loyally obeyed.[7]

The Thirty-Nine Articles also caused another problem for the Puritan dissenter in England in that in requiring submission to these Articles and the set forms of worship which embodied them, the Church of England was violating the Puritan's liberty of conscience, which conscience, the Puritan claimed, was to be subject only to the authority of God. Thus, the difference between the Anglican and the Puritan was not only or not so much a theological struggle as it was a difference in what Clifford Shipton called "the locus of authority."[8]

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[6]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), pp. 8f.

[7]*Ibid.*, p. 9.

[8]Clifford K. Shipton, "The Locus of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), p. 147.

And to the Puritan the locus of authority was in the Bible, the Word of God. As Puritans in England began to seek for "discipline out of the Word," they began to work for a purification of the Church of England and for a completion of the Reformation in England. They organized, "using every available means for the infiltration of English life and conversion of authority to their point of view" — in the Universities, the Inns of Court, the commercial companies, municipalities, and even Parliament.[9]

They also began to search the Scriptures for the very forms and models they should use in reforming England, especially the church and its relation to the state, as well as the government of the church itself. Throughout the controversies with the leaders of the establishment, on one hand, and the separatists on the other, the Puritan non-conformists continued to insist upon two things, each of which contained an apparent paradox: (1) church and state must be separated from each other in their functions but the magistrate must continue to be the "ordinance of God," maintaining a civil orthodoxy in doctrine and behavior; and (2) the churches must be independent congregations of like-minded believers and yet in the aggregate were to constitute a national and uniform church. These principles they claimed to derive from their study of the Bible.

It was in the Word they looked for the solution to these dilemmas, and it was to Massachusetts they went to work them out in the real world. They went with the goal of reconciling the "spiritual and political discord . . . reform the magistrate, and the church, and enforce complete obedience to it."[10] The occasion of their going was the dissolution of the Parliament in 1629. With that, their hopes for reforming the Church in England were dashed. Bishop William Laud was given the responsibility of enforcing uniformity in the church, and the Puritans were faced with the sad alternative of choosing between their religious beliefs and their political loyalty, between their belief in the King's supremacy and their obedience to God, or as they put it, between surrendering their heads to the block and obedience to their consciences under the discipline of the Word.[11]

Yet, writes Miller,

> . . . precisely at the moment when this dismal solution seemed to be the only one which would ever come out of England, a new enterprise was born, a way conceived of resolving the conflicting allegiances that had not yet been thought of, and they promised, with a greater degree of hardship, a greater possibility of success.[12]

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[9]Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England,* p. 10
[10]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 100.
[11]*Ibid.,* p. 52
[12]*Ibid.*

And not only was a door of liberty thrown open to those who were able to walk through it, but "through a remarkable concatenation of events," the door had been opened "by the unwitting hand, ironically enough, of no less a person than King Charles himself."[13]

And so it was that Winthrop could tell his audience on board the *Arbella* in 1630 that

> . . . for the work we have in hand, it is by a mutual consent through a special overruling providence, and a more than ordinary approbation of the churches of Christ to seek out a place of cohabitation and consortship under a due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical.[14]

It is clear that the Puritan believed that the Bible was the Word of God and that the Word of God was true — that is, true in the sense that its opposite was not true. Miller writes,

> That Protestantism appealed to the authority of the Bible against the authority of the Pope is a platitude of history. That the Calvinists were vehement asserters of its finality is also common knowledge. What is frequently forgotten is that without a Bible, this piety would have confronted chaos. It could not have found guidance in reason, because divine reason is above and beyond the human; not in the church, because God is not committed to preserving the orthodoxy or purity of any institution; not in immediate inspiration, because inward promptings are as apt to come from the Devil as from God; not from experimental science, because providence is arbitrary and unpredictable; not from philosophy, because philosophy arises from the senses, which are deceptive, or from innate ideas, which are corrupted, or from definitions of the attributes, which are mental creations. Unless the formless transcendence consents, at some moment in time, to assume the form of man and to speak "after an humane manner," men will have nothing to go upon.[15]

Thus it was that in Jesus Christ the transcendent God took on the "form of man" and in the Bible He spoke "after an humane manner." Scripture, said Calvin, obtains "full authority among believers only when men regard [it] as having sprung from heaven, as if there the living words of God were heard."[16] And Walter Travers, whom Miller called the official spokesman for the Puritan party in England, wrote in 1617 that ". . . Christ hath left us so perfect a rule and discipline . . . which is common and general to all

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[13] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

[14] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *The Puritans,* ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963) I, 197.

[15] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), pp. 19f.

[16] John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* ed. John T. McNeil (2 vols.; Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960), I, 74.

the church, and perpetual for all times, and so necessary, that without it this whole society, and company, and Christian commonwealth cannot well be kept under their prince and king Jesus Christ."[17]

The authority of Scripture in the Puritan view was also transcendent and not immanent. It was given by the condescension of the "formless transcendence" and was not subject in any way to human modification. William Ames argued in his *Medulla* that Scripture was "not a partial, but a perfect rule of Faith and manners," and that human traditions had no part in the church.[18] And the Cambridge Platform stated that ". . . it is not left in the power of men, officers, churches, or any state in the world, to add, diminish, or alter anything in the least measure therein."[19] Miller records that Cotton said that it was not within the church's power to perform any act "of their own head, but to receive all as from the hand of Christ, and to dispense all according to the will of Christ revealed in his Word."[20] Even the form of church government was not determined by human considerations, wrote Richard Mather, but "by rules from the Word of Christ, whose will, (and not the will either of the major, or minor, part of men) is the only rule and law for churches."[21] And in the legal code of 1648 the Massachusetts Bay colony provided that "no human power [is] Lord over the Faith and Consciences of men, and therefore may not constrain them to believe or profess against their consciences."[22] New Haven passed a similar provision in 1656. The implication is that the only power which could bind men's consciences was the transcendent power of the Word of God. This meant in practice a certain human freedom of conscience but necessarily premised on a non-autonomous submission to transcendent authority. Or, as William Ames had put it, in defining conscience as "a man's judgment of himself, according to the judgment of God in him."[23] But unless that judgment of God is found in the Bible, the conscience will remain natural and unenlightened.

Even as he asserted that the Bible was true and its authority transcendent, however, the Puritan always made a distinction between the absolute truth of the Word of God and his apprehension of it. The truth of the Word of God did not come from man, but had been revealed from God through holy men who spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. This concept had two consequent implications: first, whatever the Bible said was absolutely

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[17]quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 23.

[18]quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 159.

[19]"The Cambridge Platform," I, 3, *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C. : University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p.99.

[20]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 169.

[21]*Ibid.*

[22]Shipton, "The Locus of Authority," p. 142.

[23]William Ames, quoted in Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 14.

true and not conditioned by time and place, conditions or circumstances. It might not tell him everything there was to know or everything he wanted to know, but whatever it did tell him was absolutely true. One of the main conflicts with the Anglicans in England centered around this point. In the effort to harmonize reason and the Scripture, the Anglican was content to reduce the content and meaning of Scripture wherever it seemed to defy reason; the Puritan, in contrast, extended Scripture to the whole of life and existence and then tried to prove that the content and meaning of Scripture was essentially reasonable. This point is so important, said Miller, that only with it in mind can we properly understand Puritan theology.[24]

Not only that, but the Puritans also assumed that the meaning of Scripture was self-evident. There was no need of light or help from other sources, and varying interpretations were not optional. "The infallible rule of interpretation of Scripture is the Scripture itself," proclaimed the Westminster Confession, "and therefore, when there is a question about the true and full sense of any Scripture (which is not manifold, but one), it must be searched and known by other places that speak more clearly."[25]

God has not revealed Himself exhaustively in the Scriptures, however, noted Miller:

> He has not therein uttered the naked truth about Himself, He has not revealed His essence; His secret will remains secret still, as we witness daily in the capricious orderings of providence. The Bible contains His revealed will, tells men what is expected, but does not explain why, for even if it were explained men could never understand their relation to the whole drama of creation.[26]

Miller goes on to point out that this distinction between the revealed and the unrevealed was one of the "fissures" in the "impregnable wall of systematic theology" which left the Puritan open to intellectual development.[27]

The second implication of the Puritan's distinction between absolute truth and finite apprehension was the distinction between the fact of truth and the appropriation of truth. The Bible, therefore, was to be studied by men and progressively appropriated. The Bible is a complete and unalterable revelation, but comprehension and interpretation could be increased by free discussion, which in turn would minister to discovery and agreement in the truth. The Massachusetts Code of 1648 begins by stating that

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[24]Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 57.

[25]The Westminster Confession of Faith, "I, 9,*The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Groups,* ed. G. I. Williamson (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 18.

[26]Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century,* p. 20

[27]*Ibid.,* p. 21.

> so soon as God had set up political government among his people, Israel, he gave them a body of laws for judgment both in civil and criminal causes. These were brief and fundamental principles, yet withal so full and comprehensive as out of them clear deductions were to be drawn to all particular cases in future times.[28]

This drawing of "clear deductions" from the basic laws of Scripture illustrates the place of both intellectual development and progressive apprehension of truth in approach to the Scriptures.

But there is no apprehension of truth apart from the Bible. The Puritans agreed that God converses with men only through the Bible; there is no new revelation given in any way to man. Shipton records that the Puritans "thought of themselves as in a current sweeping toward a better knowledge of God, a knowledge to be reached by learning and study, not by unpredictable personal revelations."[29] Consequently, one of the results of sin is that a man will never come to a knowledge of reality, to things "as they be," because in sin man turns from God and His truth.[30]

In these three ways, then, the Puritans took a non-autonomous view of authority: the truth and authority of the Bible was transcendent, not immanent; true, but not exhaustive; and objectively there, but only more or less appropriated. According to the Puritan,

> we must not be wise 'above what is written'; if we inquire further in to the mystery of the Godhead than what is revealed, we will attain not knowledge but blindness. The visible church is not founded upon the secret intention, "but only his revealed will signified in the Scriptures."[31]

This may have been the source of Puritanism's secret strength. We have previously cited Miller's comment that the Puritan's insight of the will of God by divine grace fortified him against disappointments, deceptions, temptations, and cruelties. Similarly, A.S.P. Woodhouse, noting the Puritans' sources of authority, observed that

> the sense of special insight into, and cooperation with, the purposes of God, is a distinguishing mark of the Puritan, and it sets him at a distance from other men. It is both a strength and a weakness. At its worst it issues in self-righteousness. . . . But it nerved the arm and brought an access of courage, which on any other premise would have been reckless.[32]

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[28]"The Book of the Laws and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts," *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 163.

[29]Shipton, "The Locus of Authority," p. 144.

[30]Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 288

[31]Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century,* p. 21.

[32]A.S.P. Woodhouse (ed.), *Puritanism and Liberty: Being the Army Debates (1647-9) from the Clarke Manuscripts with Supplementary Documents* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), p. 42.

It follows, then, that if the source of authority is a transcendent truth in the Word of God and the strength of the Puritan comes in his non-autonomous submission to it, the nature of sin must in some way be related to the issue of transcendence and non-autonomy, that is, the turning away from that transcendence and non-autonomy.

The Puritan's concept of sin may be summarized briefly by recounting the main points from Thomas Hooker's sermon, "A True Sight of Sin," which Perry Miller described as an "exhaustive analysis."[33] Hooker begins by pointing out that if we would gain a true sight of sin, we must see sin "1. clearly, 2. convictingly, what it is in itself, and what it is to us, not in the appearance and paint of it, but in the power of it. . . ."[34]

We must do this, he says, because "it is one thing to say sin is thus and thus, another thing to see it to be such; we must look wisely and steadily upon our distempers, look sin in the face, and discern it to the full; the want whereof is the cause of mistaking our estates, and not redressing of our hearts and ways. . . ."[35] Sin, in other words, is a fact, not a theory; experience, not an idea just to be discussed; and reality, not imagination. As there is a difference between the traveler who has actually visited the extremities of the earth and him who has merely read about them, so there is a difference between him who has understood the true nature of sin in himself and him who has merely heard the doctrine preached:

> The one sees the History of sin, the other the nature of it; the one knows the relation of sin as it is mapped out, and recorded; the other the poison, as by experience he both found and proved it. It's one thing to see a disease in the book or in a man's body, another thing to find and feel it in a man's self. There is the report of it, here the malignity and venom of it.[36]

What, then, is the malignity and venom of sin? Hooker examines the nature of sin in its "naked hue" in two particulars: as it respects God and as it concerns man. The first has to do with what makes sin sin (the "vileness of the nature of sin") and the second with what the result of sin is.

The vileness of the nature of sin, according to Hooker, lies precisely in the issues of human autonomy. Sin would dispossess God of His absolute supremacy: "Now herein lies the unconceivable heinousness of the hellish nature of sin, it would justle the Almighty out of the throne of His glorious sovereignty, and indeed be above Him." Man's will was the chiefest of all God's workmanship and was made to attend upon God — to choose Him. God did

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[33]Thomas Hooker, "A true Sight of Sin," *The Puritans*, ed., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols; ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 292-301.

[34]*Ibid.*, p. 293.

[35]*Ibid.*

[36]*Ibid.*

> . . . in an especial way intend to meet with man, and to communicate Himself to man in His righteous law, as the rule of His Holy and righteous will, by which the will of Adam should have been ruled and guided to Him, and made happy in Him; and all creatures should have served God in man, and been happy by or through him, serving of God being happy in Him; but when the will went from under the government of His rule, by sin, *it would be above God, and be happy without Him. . . .*"[37]

The non-autonomous Puritan, in other words, would be ruled by God's law in submission to God's Word and find his happiness on God's terms; the autonomous man would be above God and his happiness on his own terms. But how does autonomous man do this?

> Now by sin we justle the law out of its place, and the Lord out of His glorious sovereignty, pluck the crown from his head, and the scepter out of his hand, and we say and profess by our practice, there is not authority and power there to govern, nor wisdom to guide, nor good to content me, but I will be swayed by mine own will and led by mine own deluded reason and satisfied with my own lusts. This is the guise of every graceless heart in the commission of sin. . . .[38]

Hooker concludes with a passage that describes the dilemma of those who choose the way of autonomy and reject the laws of God:

> It's a grievous thing to the loose person he cannot have his pleasures but he must have his guilt and gall with them; It's grievous to the worldling that he cannot lay hold on the world by unjust means, but conscience lays hold upon him as breaking the law. Thou that knowest and keepest thy pride and stubbornness and thy distempers, know assuredly thou dost justle God out of the throne of his glorious sovereignty and thou dost profess, not God's will, but thine own (which is above his) shall rule thee, thy carnal reason and the folly of thy mind, is above the wisdom of the Lord and that shall guide thee; to please thine own stubborn crooked perverse spirit, is a greater good than to please God and enjoy happiness, for this more contents thee.[39]

It is a wonder, Hooker added, that "the great and terrible God doth not pash [sic] such a poor insolent worm to powder and send thee packing to the pit every moment."[40]

The essence of sin, then, as it respects God, is that man tries to replace God with himself, or, better, to be like God, knowing good and evil and living by his own standards and laws, and not by God's laws. Calvin wrote that the prohibition given to Adam was given so that Adam might prove his

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[37]*Ibid.*, p. 294.
[38]*Ibid.*
[39]*Ibid.*, p. 295.
[40]*Ibid.*

willing submission to God's command. Adam was to be contented with his lot and not "arrogantly to aspire beyond it." Adam, however, turned aside to the lies of Satan, despised the truth, and revolted against the authority of God. Assuredly, said Calvin, "when the Word of God is despised, all reverence for Him is gone . . . Hence infidelity was at the root of the revolt." From infidelity followed ambition and pride and ingratitude. Adam, by "seeking more than was granted him," exhibited contempt for God's great liberality. "It was surely monstrous impiety that a son of earth should deem it little to have been made in the likeness, unless he were also made the equal of God." In fine, concludes Calvin,

> infidelity opened the door to ambition, and ambition was the parent of rebellion, man casting off the fear of God, and giving free vent to his lust. . . . Man, therefore, when carried away by the blasphemies of Satan, did his very utmost to annihilate the whole glory of God.[41]

In another passage Calvin notes that man ". . . cannot arrogate to himself one particle beyond his due, without losing himself in vain confidence, and, by transferring divine honour to himself, becoming guilty of the greatest impiety."[42] The essence of sin, then, is autonomy. And autonomy is "the guise of every graceless heart."

Hooker next turned his attention to the second particular, sin as it concerns man. Sin, he said, affects man in four ways:

(1) It makes a separation between God and man and thereby deprives man of a "universal good" which does not include all the evil in the world. The only universal known to sinful man is a universal that contains all the good and all the evil and therefore cannot be truly good: ". . . sin takes away my God, and with him all good goes. . . . A natural man [i.e. man without God] hath no God in any thing, and therefore hath no good."[43]

(2) It brings an incapability and an impossibility to receive grace from God when man remains impenitent. The man who continues obstinately in his sin is like one who spills the medicine that would cure him or the meat that would nourish him, and thus he must die. "It's thy life, thy labor, the desire of thy heart, and thy daily practice to depart away from the God of all grace and peace, and turn the tomb-stone of everlasting destruction upon thine own soul."[44]

(3) It is the cause which brings all evil of punishment into the world, for without sin the troubles of this world would not be evil: "The sting of a trouble, the poison and malignity of a punishment and affliction, the evil of

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[41]John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* trans. Henry Beveridge (2 vols.; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1966) I, 212.

[42]*Ibid.,* 231.

[43]Thomas Hooker, "A True Sight of Sin," p. 297.

[44]*Ibid.,* p. 298.

the evil of any judgment, it is sin that brings it, or attends it. . . . So Paul . . . plays with death itself, sports with the grave. 'Oh, Death, where is thy sting? Oh, Grave, where is thy victory? the sting of death is sin.' "[45] Hooker concludes by reasoning that if sin brings all evils and makes them evil to us, then it is worse than all the evils themselves.

(4) It makes even all the good and glorious things of life evil to us. " 'To the pure all things are pure,' he said, quoting the Bible, 'but to the unbelieving there is nothing pure, but their very consciences are defiled.' It is a desperate malignity in the temper of the stomach, that should turn our meat and diet into diseases, the best cordials and preservatives into poisons, so that what in reason is appointed to nourish a man should kill him."[46]

Such are the effects of sin on man. Hooker concluded his sermon by considering the holiness of God in contrast to the evil of sin: "But that which I will mainly press is, sin is only opposite to God, and cross as much as can be to that infinite goodness and holiness which is in His blessed majesty; it's not the miseries or distresses that men undergo, that the Lord distastes them for, or estrangeth Himself from them . . . but He is not able to bear the presence of sin."[47] Therefore, said Hooker, ". . . it's certain it's better to suffer all plagues without any one sin, than to commit the least sin, and to be freed from all plagues . . . Thou dost not think so now, but thou wilt find it so one day."[48]

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[45]*Ibid.*
[46]*Ibid.*, p. 299.
[47]*Ibid.*
[48]*Ibid.*, p. 301.

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The Lack of Human Autonomy In Puritan Institutions

The concept of autonomy which is implied in the doctrines of authority and sin is the key to the Puritan dilemma. We may study its effects in two ways — in the lack of human autonomy in Puritan institutions and in the presence of human autonomy in the development of Puritan thought and experience. We take up the lack of human autonomy in Puritan institutions in this chapter, the presence of human autonomy in the next.

The Puritans, coming to form a "due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical," designed forms in which power was divided, both authority and liberty were limited, and sovereignty and universals were transcendental only. These three aspects influenced the specific features of Puritan institutions in the holy commonwealth. We will look at each in turn, surveying at the same time the development of the institutions of church and state in Massachusetts.

The non-autonomy of man meant the absoluteness and sovereignty of God. It followed that there was not only to be no sovereign power on earth, but that whatever power did exist should be so divided and diffused that no one man or group of men could gain or claim absolute or sovereign power. Sovereignty had been "shunted off to heaven" by Calvin, wrote J. Figgis, and therefore the foundation for individual liberty had been laid.[1] The result on earth was that power and authority were both divided and limited. The concept of divided power thus gave rise to the concept of the covenant law basis of society. Drawing on the heritage of feudalism with its variety of laws touching each area or order of life, the Puritans developed the concept of the sphere law, each sphere of life being based on a particular covenant or compact that lay at its base. Each sphere of life was independent of the others in that one did not rule the other, but the spheres were also interdependent in that each was seen as only a single part of reality. Each sphere had its own laws and principles, powers and restraints on power. And each checked and balanced each of the other spheres. The Puritan state was ordained by God, wrote William Perkins, the Puritan theologian:

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[1]J. Figgis, cited by Edward S. Corwin, *The "Higher Law" Background of American Constitutional Law* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1955), p. 62n.

> God in his Word hath ordained the society of man with man, partly in the commonwealth, partly in the church, and partly in the family; and it is not the will of God that man should live and converse alone by himself.[2]

Each of these spheres of life is based on a compact, wrote Thomas Hooker:

> From mutual acts of consenting and engaging each of other, there is an impression of engagement results, as a relative bond, betwixt the contractors and confederators, wherein the . . . specific nature of the covenant lieth, in all the former instances especially that of corporations. So that however it is true, the rule binds such to the duties of their places and relations, yet it is certain, it requires that they should first freely engage themselves in such covenants, and then be careful to fulfill such duties.[3]

In the Puritan theory, then, men first personally appropriated by faith the covenant of grace which had been made with Abraham. That made them regenerate men. Regenerate men then drew together to form churches and states, promising all due submission to the law and to the authorities set over them. Thus, "when men have entered these covenants, first with God, then with each other in the church and again in the state, they have thrice committed themselves to the rule of law and the control of authority," notes Miller.[4] Thus Massachusetts was a covenanted society. John Davenport described the system of covenants as "National, Conjugal, Social."[5] And Cotton wrote that

> it is evident by the light of nature that all civil relations are founded in covenant . . . there is no other way whereby a people . . . can be united or combined together into one visible husband and wife in the family, magistrates and subjects in the commonwealth, fellow-citizens in the same cities.[6]

The spheres thus developed — church, state, family, school, calling (vocation), ministry, magistracy, etc. — were to be co-ordinate but unconfounded; independent but interdependent. Thus John Cotton wrote to Lord Say and Seal that

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[2]William Perkins, "A Treatise of the Vocations, or Callings of Men, With the Sorts and Kinds of Them and the Right Use Thereof," *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 135.

[3]Thomas Hooker, "A Survey of the Sum of Church Discipline," *The Puritans,* ed., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 188.

[4]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 190.

[5]Cited in Rousas John Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1964), p. 42.

[6]John Cotton, quoted in Andrew C. McLaughlin, *Foundations of American Constitutionalism* (New York: Fawcett, 1961), p. 69.

> it is very suitable to God's all sufficient wisdom, and to the fulness and perfection of Holy Scriptures . . . to prescribe perfect rules for the right ordering . . . of a man's family, yea, of the commonwealth too . . . God's institutions . . . may be close and compact, and coordinate one to another, and yet not confounded.[7]

Each sphere had a check or potential check on the other spheres, either through the law, the negative, or even the right to leave the colony. In 1634 when the citizens of Newtown petitioned the General Court for permission to move to Connecticut, there was a difference of opinion between the deputies and magistrates of Massachusetts Bay, most of the deputies favoring the move and most of the magistrates opposing it. Furthermore, the magistrates maintained that they had the power of veto on the action. When John Cotton was invited to preach at a day of humiliation "to seek the Lord," he spoke from Haggai 2:4 and, recorded Winthrop in his journal,

> . . . laid down the nature or strength . . . of the magistracy, ministry, and people, viz., — the strength of the magistracy to be their authority; of the people, their liberty; and of the ministry, their purity; and showed how all of these had a negative voice, etc., and yet the ultimate resolution . . . ought to be in the whole body of the people . . . [8]

Winthrop went on to relate that

> . . . although all were not satisfied about the negative voice to be left to the magistrates, yet no man moved aught about it, and the congregation of Newtown came and accepted of such enlargement as had formerly been offered them by Boston and Watertown, and so the fear of their removal to Connecticut was removed.[9]

Two years later, in 1636, Hooker and his congregation removed to Connecticut in spite of the magistrates, and in 1641, the Massachusetts Body of Liberties guaranteed that

> every man of or within this jursidiction shall have free liberty, notwithstanding any civil power, to remove both himself and his family at their pleasure out of the same, provided there be no legal impediment to the contrary.[10]

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[7]John Cotton, "Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the Year 1636," *The Puritans,* ed., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 209.

[8]John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England 1630-1649,* ed. James Kendall Hosmer (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), I,134.

[9]*Ibid.*

[10]"Massachusetts Body of Liberties," 1493-1754: *Discovering a New World,* Vol. I of *The Annals of America,* ed. Mortimer J. Adler (18 vols.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), p. 165.

In his letter to Lord Say and Seal, Cotton went on to say that the government of church as set forth in Scriptures was compatible with any form of civil government (because of the separation and non-confounding of the respective powers of the spheres), but that if a commonwealth should have the liberty to form its own frame of civil government, the Scriptures were also adequate for that: "I conceive that the Scripture hath given full direction for the right ordering of the same, and that, in such sort as may best maintain the vigor of the church."[11]

Thus the Puritan, coming to form a church government, developed congregationalism, a form which so divided authority and power in the church that there was no center of authority anywhere. In the congregational form of government there was no final authority externally or even internally except the sovereignty of God working by the Holy Spirit through the hearts and minds of the collective individuals who made up the congregation. Thus, too, consociations and synods could not impose their decisions on the individual church or coerce them in any way. The Cambridge Platform of 1648 provided that

> although churches be distinct, and therefore may not be confounded one with another, and equal, and therefore have not dominion one over another . . ., yet all the churches ought to preserve church communion one with another, because they are all united unto Christ, not only as a mystical, but as a political head, whence is derived a communion suitable thereunto."[12]

Although there was to be communion among the churches and union in Christ, yet the directions and determinations of synods were without coercive force. Their decisions would be received with submission and reverence if consonant with the Word of God and by the fact that they reflected the agreement of several bodies, which made then an "ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His word."[13] But there was no organizational way that such determinations could be enforced or conformity coerced. Power was divided in the church and indeed in the whole society, and united only in the Triune God who was transcendental and sovereign.

The corollary to the idea of divided power is the idea of limited authority. John Cotton was one of the most vocal of the Puritans in articulating the idea of limitation on power, "that all power that is on earth be limited."[14] He had led the movement to limit the power of the magistrates, which movement led to the adoption of the Massachusetts Body of Liberties in 1641. Indeed his own work "Moses His Judicials" was an early attempt to codify the laws and practices of Massachusetts by an application of Old

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[11]John Cotton, "Letter to Lord Say and Seal," p. 207.

[12]"The Cambridge Platform," IV, 1, *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 111.

[13]*Ibid.,* XVI, 5, p. 113.

[14]John Cotton, "Letter to Lord Say and Seal," p. 213.

Testament law. Man, Cotton held, is a creature of God and a fallen one at that, and thus man is subject to limitations, including limited power and liberty. But sinful men would attempt to destroy the limits. In his series of sermons on the Thirteenth chapter of the Revelation, Cotton warned:

> Let all the world learn to give mortal men no greater power than they are content they shall use, for use it they will . . . This is one of the strains of nature, it affects boundless liberty, and to run to the utmost extent: Whatever power he hath received, he hath a corrupt nature that will improve it in one thing or another . . . It is therefore most wholesome for magistrates and officers in church and commonwealth, never to affect more liberty and authority than will do them good, and the people good; for whatever transcendent power is given, will certainly over-run those that give it, and those that receive it.[15]

The converse of man's exceeding the limits of his power is to be deprived of part of his rightful power, an error of equal import, said Cotton:

> It is therefore fit for every man to be studious of the bounds which the Lord hath set: and for the people, in whom fundamentally all power lies, to give as much power as God in His word gives to men. And it is meet that magistrates in the Commonwealth, and officers in the churches should desire to know the utmost bounds of their own power, and it's safe for both: All intrenchment upon the bounds which God hath not given, they are not enlargements, but burdens and snares; they will certainly lead the spirit of a man out of his way sooner or later.[16]

If the boundaries are properly drawn, Cotton continued, giving neither too much power nor too little, the boundaries need not be imposing: if they are but banks of sand, they will contain the sea as long as they be in the right place. On the other hand, "If you pinch the sea of its liberty, though it be walls of stone or brass, it will beat them down."[17]

Cotton applied this concept not only to the bounds of the church and the state, but also to marriage and family relations as well:

> So let there be due bounds set, and I may apply it to families; it is good for the wife to acknowledge all power and authority to the husband, and for the husband to acknowledge honour to the wife, but still give them that which God hath given them, and no more nor less: Give them the full latitude that God hath given, else you will find you dig pits, and lay snares, and cumber their spirits, if you give them less: there is never peace where full liberty is not given, nor never stable peace where more than full liberty is granted . . .[18]

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[15] *Ibid.*, 212f.
[16] *Ibid.*
[17] *Ibid.*
[18] *Ibid.*, p. 214.

The same principle applied to children and servants and "any others you are to deal with": ". . . Give them the liberty and authority you would have them use, and beyond that stretch not the tether, it will not tend to their good or yours."

Cotton concluded his sermon and told his hearers to go home with this meditation: "That certainly here is this distemper in our natures, that we cannot tell how to use liberty, but we shall very readily corrupt ourselves: Oh the bottomless depth of sandy earth! of a corrupt spirit, that breaks over all bounds, and loves inordinate vastness; that is it we ought to be careful of."[19] Loving "inordinate vastness" is a good description of what it means to assert human autonomy.

This concept of limited spheres of authority and power and the need to find a precise boundary of power for each sphere may serve as a key to an understanding of the Puritans' efforts to develop a due form of government in the Bay colony. As the colony changed itself from a trading company into an elected magistracy and a representative government, there were several conflicts and disputes over rights, powers, interpretations of laws, and the application of justice. Some of these disputes were over the "bounds" of the respective spheres of authority (both of the extent and the degree of power); others were caused by various violations of the boundaries that were set. A brief recounting of what is called the "deputy dispute" should illustrate both points.

The charter for the Massachusetts Bay Company, issued by the King in 1629, had granted to the company and its officials authority

> . . . to make, ordain, and establish all manner of wholesome and reasonable orders, laws, statutes, and ordinances, directions, and instructions, not contrary to the laws of this our realm of England, as well for settling of the forms and ceremonies of government and magistracy fit and necessary for the said plantation and the inhabitants there, and for naming and stiling all sorts of officers, both supeior and inferior, which they shall find needful for that government and plantation, and the distinguishing and setting forth of the several duties, powers, and limits of every such office and place.[20]

The charter did not say where the company was to meet nor did it place any particular restrictions on the company's officers, except that whatever laws they should make should not be contrary to those of England. The charter did set the form of government of the company, however. The body of shareholders in the company were called "freemen." These freemen were to meet four times a year to make laws for the company and the colony and to elect, for one-year terms, the management officials — a governor, a deputy governor, and eighteen assistants — who were to run the company

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[19] *Ibid.*

[20] Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1958), p. 84.

and the colony between meetings of the general court of freemen. The management officials (the executive council of governors and assistants) were to meet once a month to take care of necessary business. It is important to note that in the first years of the colony the freemen and the assistants (as the executive council was called) were virtually identical since freemen had to be shareholders and there had to be twenty men on the executive council. The rest of the shareholders were still in England. So the shareholders in America met, elected themselves assistants, and then ruled the colony. Edmund Morgan records that "all but one of the members who are known to have migrated the first year were assistants."[21] But it did not remain that way for long. After all, Winthrop and his company came with the intention of setting up a "due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical" to the end of improving their lives and to bring into "familiar and constant practice" that "which most in their churches maintain as a truth in profession only."[22]

The first step in setting up a due form of civil government was, therefore, to expand the base of the government. The first meeting of the assistants was held on August 23, 1630, but only some rather routine business involved in organizing the colony was transacted. The assistants also met on September 7 and 28 to transact routine business. Then on October 19, the General Court meeting was held. At that meeting it was decided to have the freemen choose the assistants, who in turn would elect the governor and deputy governor, and together they and the assistants would make and enforce all laws for the colony. The significance of this was the "expansion" of the "freeman" from a shareholder in the company to a citizen of the commonwealth, and, accordingly, at the next meeting of the General Court 116 men were admitted as freemen. Likewise the assistants had become the legislative body, a privilege taken away from the freemen when the position was opened to the general populace. The freemen had the privilege of electing the leaders, but not to make the law. It was also decided to restrict the privilege of freemanship in the future to those who were the members of some church within the colony — a move which at once (1) restricted political activity to those who were under the discipline of the church morally and spiritually and (2) invited all church members to participate in the political activity of the commonwealth.

The second step came in 1632 when the General Court ordered that two men be chosen from each town to sit as a body and confer with the governor and assistants on matters of taxation. It was also decided at that meeting to have the freemen rather than the assistants elect the governor and deputy governor. These moves were in response to criticisms of the people that they

[21] *Ibid.*, p. 86.

[22] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *The Puritans,* eds., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 198.

were not being adequately represented in the government since the representation of the assistants elected by the freemen was neither direct nor locally oriented.

A third step came in 1634 when the representatives of the freemen (the two appointed from each town) demanded to see the charter and discovered that the original charter had granted the freemen legislative power. The cause of the dispute went back for several years to a kind of running debate between John Winthrop and Thomas Dudley over what we might call "substantive justice." Winthrop believed that in its early years a plantation should be ruled with leniency and liberality. Justice should be done, but governors should be more informal and discretionary, concentrating on the substantial issues, rather than formal and inflexible, as Dudley insisted. Also, it was obvious that the form of government in the colony had changed over the years, so when Dudley asked for the source of Winthrop's authority, Winthrop faced a dilemma. If he answered that his authority (and the frame of government then erected) stemmed from the agreement of the people that had been made in 1630 (when the freemanship had been expanded but legislative power taken away), Massachusetts would be in trouble from England for violating the charter and setting up an independent state. On the other hand, if he claimed the charter, he would have to face up to the fact that freemanship included legislative power. It did not matter that Massachusetts had reinterpreted freemanship. He could not sustain the argument as long as he ignored the 1630 agreement of the people. Winthrop chose to stand for the charter in his 1631 debate with Dudley and now in 1634 the freemen's representatives wanted to see the charter to check his power and to check their own privileges against it. And they were inclined to claim their privileges because they feared Winthrop's concept of discretionary power, not because he misused it, but because it could be misused, as their experience in England had shown.

Winthrop explained the situation to the freemen's representatives and offered to make them into an advisory body to the assistants, to revise laws, but not to make new ones.[23] But the freemen wanted more: a full body of legislation drawn up by themselves as a protection against a discretionary government which might become arbitrary.[24] The result was a change in the frame of government in which the freemen would elect deputies to represent them in a legislative body to serve along with the governor and the assistants, who also served as judges in the government. The next step was to give the magistrates a veto over the deputies as a check and balance to democratical tendencies. Thus it was that the search for the proper bounds of authority developed, and continued, for it was not yet finished. The Body of Liberties was not completed until 1641, and there were other conflicts and violations, as we shall see, but the proper bounds of power,

[23]Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma,* p. 112.
[24]*Ibid.,* p. 113.

neither more nor less, were being discovered, and the wall of sand between them being laid down, giving to the people, in the words of Nathaniel Ward, who drew up the Body of Liberties, "their proper and lawful liberties."[25]

One of the major disputes over the problem of power and the limits of authority in the colony came in 1645 and brings us to the third aspect or implication of the principle of non-autonomy, which we shall call non-neutrality or non-universality. (Non-universality is not the best word to describe the concept and yet better than any of the others that come to mind.) Non-universality is the idea that nothing except God is to be interpreted in terms of itself. Everything on earth, in the view of non-autonomy, is always interpreted in terms of something else. There is no neutral standard behind God, as it were, whereby we may judge both God and the creation. Instead we see the creation either in terms of God's standard or in terms of some other standard. Thus in Puritan thought there was a great debate over the nature of good: is a thing good because willed by God or does God will something because it is good? Perry Miller records Samuel Willard's intimation that by the end of the century congregations were growing weary of the endless dispute. Willard, he says, "endeavored to silence the debate by awarding judgment to both contentions at once. Since all the attributes are one, he said, 'then God both wills the things because they are good . . . and also they are good because he wills them; his active will put the actual goodness into them.' "[26] Miller calls this a disposition to "compromise" indicating a retreat away from the position of the earlier Puritans, who "unhesitatingly founded the goodness upon the fact of their having been willed."[27] According to William Perkins, the authoritative Puritan theologian, "a thing is not first of all reasonable and just, and then afterward willed by God: but it is first of all willed by God, and thereupon becomes reasonable and just."[28] John Preston related the concept to the issue of man's non-autonomy and non-universality:

> In our judging of the ways of God, we should take heed of framing a model of our own, as to think because such a thing is just, therefore the Lord wills it; the reason of this conceit is, because we think that God must go by our rule; we forget this, that everything is just because he wills it; it is not that God wills it, because it is good or just . . . What God wills is just, because He is the rule itself. . . .[29]

To deny this is to make man and man's rule autonomous and universal rather than non-autonomous and non-universal. There is no universal rule

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[25] *Ibid.*, p. 170.

[26] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1954), p. 18.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] *Ibid.*

[29] *Ibid.*

that man can place behind God; He is the rule and the universal, ruling according to His character and perfection, and therefore all on earth must be judged on His terms and by His standard.

The significance of this doctrine as it relates to the Puritan view of nonautonomy may be seen in John Winthrop's "little speech" on liberty at the close of the Hingham affair in 1645. The trouble began when a disputed election in the town of Hingham came up before the magistrates for settlement. Winthrop, then deputy governor but acting as a magistrate and judge, ordered the faction led by the Reverend Peter Hobart to appear at court, and when they refused, committed them for contempt. The Hobart faction then petitioned the deputies for a consideration of Winthrop's charges against them and of their charge that the magistrates had acted without authority in imprisoning them. The deputies, not knowing how to handle the case, asked advice of the magistrates, who agreed to hear the case if the petitioners would make a specific charge against a specific officer. The petitioners named Winthrop and charged him "for illegal imprisoning of some of them and forcing the first with others to give bond with sureties to appear and answer at the next quarter court."[30]

The details of the case and decision are not our concern here. Winthrop was acquitted of the charges against him. After the case was settled and the sentences read, Winthrop asked permission to address the court. His "little speech," as he called it, is, according to Perry Miller, the "classic expression of Puritan political theory." It is also the clearest example of the Puritan rejection of human autonomy.

Winthrop began by saying that he was satisfied with the decision of the court and glad that the "troublesome business" was done, but yet humbled before God because to be charged at court (even though acquitted) is a matter of humiliation before God, "who hath seen so much amiss in my dispensations as calls me to be humble."[31]

He continued with a dissertation on the authority of the magistrates and the liberty of the people, the "great questions that have troubled the country." Of authority, he said, "It is yourselves who have called us to this office, and being called by you, we have our authority from God, in way of an ordinance, such as hath the image of God eminently stamped upon it, the contempt and violation whereof both have been vindicated with examples of divine vengeance." The authority of the magistrate is from God even though it is the people who decide who the authorities shall be. Therefore the contempt or violation of that authority is a very serious matter both for the rulers and for the ruled. The ruled are to remember always that the magistrates are "men subject to like passions as you are" and therefore, "when you see infirmities in us, you should reflect upon your own, and that

[30]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Masachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 289.
[31]Winthrop, *Journal,* II, 237.

would make you bear the more with us, and not be severe censurers of the failings of your magistrates, when you have continual experience of the like infirmities in yourselves and others." The rulers are responsible to be faithful and not to break the covenant with the people. As long as the magistrate is faithful and of a good, not an evil, will, the people are to bear with him even in his error.

On the matter of liberty, Winthrop observed "a great mistake in the country" on the nature of liberty. There are, he said, two kinds of liberty, natural and civil or federal. Natural liberty is an autonomous kind of liberty: it is liberty in man's terms and on man's terms, liberty relative to man: "By this, man, as he stands in relation to man simply, hath liberty to do what he lists; it is a liberty to evil as well as to good." The other kind of liberty is civil, or federal, or moral, liberty: liberty in and on God's terms, relative to God and to His appointed authorities, "a liberty to that only which is good, just, and honest." The first liberty is incompatible and inconsistent with authority; the second is the proper end and object of authority, and is "maintained and exercised in a way of subjection to authority."[32]

Rousas J. Rushdoony's explanation of the Puritan view is pertinent:

> The Puritan conception of law and liberty differed markedly from the modern view. Since Christ is both life and liberty, *the beginning of liberty is the discipline of Christ.* His Word, Scripture, is the means to freedom in every area of life, in that *liberty is under law,* and is not, as in the modern view, *liberty from law.* The freedom from law bestowed by Christ is not antinomian; it is freedom from damnation by the law into power to live by a new nature in *the law as liberty.* The Christian view *requires* discipline and discipleship; the second *requires* freedom from discipline and restraints. The Puritans recognized that true discipline is self-discipline, and is therefore an inner rather than an outer compulsion. The outer compulsion should do no more than establish conditions for the development of inner compulsion.[33]

Rushdoony goes on to note that in the Puritan view law and power were transcendental. The separation of law and power in the sphere of government was made in order to prevent an "immanent collection" of transcendental attributes.[34] Such an "immanent collection" of transcendental attributes is the essence of human autonomy usurping the powers that belong to God alone.

The Puritan concept of authority and liberty, then, as described by Winthrop, was non-autonomous. The Puritans were not interested in liberty or power as such, but only in liberty and power for such; that is, liberty and

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[32] *Ibid.*, p. 239.

[33] Rousas John Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, N.J.; The Craig Press, 1964), pp. 100f.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 101.

authority were limited concepts to be used in certain limited ways and for certain limited purposes, but never ends in themselves. Winthrop makes this clear when he told the deputies that man must choose between these two views of liberty and authority. They will either see the issue in man's terms or in God's terms and that will make all the difference in public life:

> Even so, brethren, it will be between you and your magistrates. If you stand for your natural corrupt liberties, and will do what is good in your own eyes, you will not endure the least weight of authority, but will murmur, and oppose, and be always striving to shake off that yoke; but if you will be satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties, such as Christ allows you, then you will quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority which is set over you, in all the administrations of it, for your good.[35]

If the answer to the problem of authority in the colony was not an autonomous and arbitrary power in the magistrate (as the deputies had argued against Winthrop), neither was the answer in an autonomous view of liberty (as Winthrop cautioned the deputies). Autonomy belonged only to the sovereign and transcendent God. The freedom of all on earth could be preserved by preserving the non-autonomous status of human institutions. Thus the Puritans divided and limited the spheres of authority on earth and balanced them one against the other. The aspect of non-universality was necessary to keep men thinking in those terms. Let man gain a human or temporal or immanent universe, and the limited and divided spheres would soon be united under it, as autonomous liberty struggles to cast off "the least restraint of the most just authority."

[35]Winthrop, *Journal,* II, 239.

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Dilemma and Human Autonomy in Puritan Practice — I

If it is true that the application of the principle of non-autonomy played such a large part in the shaping of Puritan institutions, it is also true that there were a few features of Puritan society which denied the principle of non-autonomy, and it is these areas of violations that have led historians to remark the existence of a Puritan dilemma. It was at these points that the Puritans departed from their views of non-autonomy and asserted in some way the autonomy of human thought or temporal reality, reaping as a consequence the various dilemmas we have mentioned above. The toll taken by these dilemmas was great and in many cases vital in the long-run efforts to establish a holy commonwealth.

Following Cotton's thought on the bounds of power, we can observe two kinds of violations: those tending toward an autonomy in human thought or temporal reality, that is, violations in which there is an attempt to fix an immanent and final authority, and those tending toward disorder, that is, in which there was a lack of due order or arrangement.

The dilemmas described above may be discussed under three major heads, each of which can be summed up in a question which indicates the nature of the dilemma. An examination of these three dilemmas will enable us to review the major problems that confronted the Puritans in Massachusetts Bay in the first generation (1630-1662). An examination of their effects will enable us to understand the compromises that were necessary and the declension that came as a result of either the dilemmas or of the compromises that were worked out. The three major problems were in the areas of

(1) Church membership — If membership in a particular church is to be restricted to visible saints, how can it be determined who is a visible saint? And how can there be a comprehensive, national church?

(2) Church establishment — If there is to be a religious uniformity in the state by establishment, how can church and state be kept separate? And if orthodoxy of doctrine is to be imposed, how can liberty of conscience exist?

(3) Church government — If independent congregations are the essence of church government, how can uniformity among the congregations be maintained?

It will be helpful first, however, to lay the ground for some important distinctions. Several of the dilemmas to be discussed involve matters of church government, civil government, and of the relationship between the church and the state, matters which were closely intertwined in the Puritan period. It is necessary, therefore, in order to separate some of the overlapping areas, to distinguish between the matter of the forms of church government and the matter of the establishment of a state church. Also it will help us to understand the positions taken by the various Puritan groups on these particular issues. To do this we need to go back to the situation in England which gave rise to the Puritan emigration. In England in the hundred years between 1560 and 1660 there were four major groups involved in the struggle between church and state — the Anglicans, the Presbyterians, the Congregationalists (non-separating), and the Separatists. (There were splinter groups further to the left of the Separatists. Their position on these issues was similar to that of the Separatists.) There were also four main issues that separated them, phrased here as questions to focus on the conflicts:

(1) Supremacy — Who is the Head of the church?
(2) Church government — How should the church be ruled?
(3) Uniformity — What kind of church should the state have?
(4) Membership — Who should be a member of the church?

The various positions of the groups may be charted as follows:

Group	*Supremacy*	*Church Government*	*Uniformity*	*Membership*
Anglicans	King as supreme	Bishops and Hierarchy	Establishment	Comprehensive
Presbyterians	King under Law	Synods and Councils	Established	Comprehensive by profession
Congregationalists	Christ	Congregations and Consociations	National Church discipline	Restricted by profession, (visibility)
Separatists	Christ	Congregations alone	Independent Church in a neutral State	Restricted by profession and discipline

On the issue of supremacy or the ultimate authority in the church, the Anglican position was that of the Elizabethan settlement: the king is supreme in both church and state. The Puritan position (whether Presbyterian, Congregationalist, or Separatist, all of whom were considered Puritans in England) was that the king's supremacy was not absolute (or autonomous). The Presbyterians saw the king under law, the non-separating and separating Congregationalists saw even less connection with

the church than that. Christ alone was to rule in the congregational church and that directly by the Holy Spirit, as we have seen. The difference between the Presbyterians and the Independents (Congregationalists) on this point will come to the fore in the period of the English civil wars and Cromwell's Protectorate in the late 1640's and 1650's.

In the matter of church government, the Anglicans favored a hierarchical form of government ranging from the local parish to the king, all deriving their authority from the king in a bureaucratic chain of command in which the Bishops would rule over groups of local churches. The Presbyterians wanted a system of representative councils ranging from the local church to the general assembly of the entire national church, preserving both the independence of the local church and an involvement in a system of wider courts of appeal. The Congregationalists stood only for the existence and autonomy of the local congregation; their church would begin and end with the local congregations, as would that of the Separatists. The difference between the Congregationalist and the Separatist on this issue came in the New England Congregationalists' willingness to engage in what they called "consociations" or non-coercive synods. Recognizing the need occasionally for a wider court of appeal or fellowship, the Congregational churches would come together for that purpose, but it was always on a voluntary and non-coercive basis.

In the matter of uniformity or of the state church, both the Anglicans and the Presbyterians were agreed on an established church, that is, one supported by the state and ruled by the state. They simply differed on the organization of that church. The Congregationalists wanted a "national" church as opposed to an "established" church, that is, the congregational church would be the only uniform, tolerated, church within the national boundaries and would be supported by the state, but it would not be ruled by the state. The difference between the Presbyterians and the Congregational groups on this issue spelled the ultimate difference between those Puritans who ruled and fell with Cromwell in the 1650's (the Independents) and those who joined the Anglicans in restoring Charles II in 1660 only to be expelled from the Church in 1662. The Separatists wanted a complete separation of church and state — an independent church in a religiously neutral state.

The fruit of the Reformation was the recognition that the church and the state were eventually to be separated. The significance of the Puritan movement was that it came at the precise moment that this separation was being worked out. It was the particular fate of the non-separating Congregationalists that they stood for the separation of church and state institutionally or functionally, while opposing the separation of church and state spiritually. It is not hard for us to see the consistency of the Anglican idea that the church and the state are joined under a supreme king. Neither is it difficult for us to see Roger Williams's idea that the state is a temporal

kingdom and the church is a spiritual kingdom, and the two should be separated. But the Puritan (non-separating Congregationalist) idea is opposed to both of these. It is that the church and the state are to be separated functionally and institutionally but to be joined spiritually under Jesus Christ who is supreme Lord and King. Puritan thought often seems to be confusing the two spheres, but it was attempting to keep hold of the state as a spiritual entity, recognizing that the magistracy is a religious work even if the magistrate himself is not religious. In this view the movement toward a neutral state is thus a move with significant religious overtones. We will consider the differences between the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians on this issue below.

On the matter of membership, the Anglican church was to be comprehensive, embracing all the people of the nation.[1] The Presbyterian idea, following the idea of the established church, was that the Presbyterian church would be comprehensive, embracing all the nation, but communing membership in the church would require a specific profession of faith and submission to the discipline of the church. The Congregational and Separatist churches shared a view of church membership as restricted to only those who professed faith in Jesus Christ and submitted to the discipline of the church. The New England Congregationalists added a new wrinkle when they added the idea of visibility to the profession and discipline, as we shall see below.

It is obvious that these positions and issues overlap in places, yet from them we may plot the problems that came when the Puritans sought autonomy in the areas of church membership, church-state relations, and church government.

The dilemma involved in the area of church membership was that of trying to identify in the visible church (the particular church in a particular place at a particular time) those individuals who were truly members of the invisible church (the elect known only to God). Puritans of all kinds had believed in a limitation of some kind on membership within the visible church (even the Presbyterians required a specific profession of faith in order to be a communing member of a visible church), but up until the mid-1630's both in England and America, the limitation was thought of as being a profession of faith in Jesus Christ and a submission to the moral and spiritual discipline of the church. Faith was what made the invisible church, but it was profession that made the visible church. The making of a profession did not make faith, however; the true invisible church is known only to God.

Although the New England Congregationalists were often accused of being Separatists or of borrowing their forms of church polity from the

[1]Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), pp. 24-25.

Separatists, John Cotton was adamant in his denial of the charge, though he admitted that the Separatists may have come to the same conclusions from different premises. Of the problem of membership in the visible church, Cotton wrote that

> the particular visible church of a congregation to be the first subject of the power of the keys, we received by the light of the word from Mr. Parker, Mr. Baynes, and Dr. Ames: from whom also . . . we received light out of the word, for the matter of the visible church to be visible saints; and for the form of it, to be a mutual covenant, whether an explicit or implicit profession of faith, and subjection to the Gospel of Christ in the society of the church, or presbytery thereof.[2]

The matter of the visible church was to be the visible saint, and the particular congregation was to be made up of visible saints joined together in mutual covenant. In Congregational theory the church was to be formed out of saints who were voluntarily joined in the covenant, not born into it or forced or persuaded to join. Even though the church was supported by taxes and attendance at church was required, yet actual membership in the church covenant was voluntary and given only to those who indicated an express desire to join.

Congregational theory had no answer for the unregenerate of the society. They were expected to live quietly in the community, pay taxes for the support of the church, and attend meetings. Beyond that the commonwealth made no apology for the situation nor any attempt to provide for them. There could be no church without a covenant, and no covenant without a profession of faith. And if there were only a few church members in the community, said one, "That is the fault of people, not of the rule, nor of the way; if the saints be thin sown, who can help it?"[3] In 1648 the Cambridge Platform would express the same concept:

> We conceive the receiving of them into our churches would rather loose and corrupt our churches, than gain and heal them. A little leaven laid in a lump of dough, will sooner leaven the whole lump, than the whole lump will sweeten it. We therefore find it safer, to square rough and unhewn stones, before they be laid into the building, rather than to hammer and hew them, when they lie unevenly in the building.[4]

In short, the personal covenant of grace was basic to life in the covenanted holy commonwealth, both in the church covenant and in the

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[2]John Cotton, "The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared," *John Cotton on the Churches of New England,* ed. Larzer Ziff (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 189.

[3]Quoted in Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 209.

[4]Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism,* p. 200, cited by Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 210.

civil covenant. It was by the personal covenant of grace that the individual was saved and made a covenant-keeper rather than a covenant-breaker, and therefore there could be no participation in the covenant of church or state without evidence that the individual man had a part in the personal covenant of grace. It followed that the visible church was to consist only of those "visible saints" who had "owned the covenant," i.e., had acknowledged and submitted to the covenant, along with their children.

But since in New England, certain privileges attached to church membership (such as voting and office-holding), it was always possible that unregenerate men might try to imitate faith and the profession in order to gain the privilege attached to church membership. To prevent this, the New England churches specified that church membership should belong only to those who could make a "knowledgeable" profession of faith and could demonstrate a consistently holy life. This was the test of visibility.[5]

The attraction of Congregationalism had been from the beginning its promise of making a closer identity between the visible and invisible churches. But in New England, in the 1630's, the churches began to demand not only the profession of faith and submission to discipline, but also proofs of "visibility" — a recounting of one's personal experience of salvation before the church, after which he could be questioned and then accepted or rejected by a vote of the congregation. This development was best described by Cotton Mather:

> . . . the first Churches of New England began only with a Profession of Assent and Consent unto the Confession of Faith and the Covenant of Communion. Afterwards, they that sought for the Communion, were but privately examined about a work of grace in their souls, by the Elders, and then publicly propounded unto the congregation, only that so, if there were any scandal in the lives, it might be objected and considered. But in the year 1634, one of the brethren having leave to hear the examinations of the Elders, magnified so much the advantage of being present at such an exercise, that many others desired and obtained the like leave to be present at it; until, at length, to gratify this useful curiosity, the whole church always expected the liberty of being thus particularly acquainted with the religious dispositions of those with whom they were afterwards to sit at the Table of the Lord; and that Church which began this way was quickly imitated by most of the rest . . ."[6]

The procedure followed in joining a church was outlined by Thomas Lechford in his *Plain Dealing; or News from New England,* in which he noted that ". . . sometimes there is a space of divers months between a par-

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[5]Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 145.

[6]Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London 1702), Book V, p. 43, cited in Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 94.

ty's first propounding and receiving; and some are so bashful, as that they choose rather to go without the communion, than undergo such public confessions and trials, but that is held their fault.[7] Lechford comments marginally that

> whether Popish auricular confession, and these public confessions be not extremes, and whether some private pastoral or presbyterial collation, left at liberty, upon cause, and in case of trouble of conscience, as in the Church of England is approved, be not better than these extremes, I leave to the wise and learned to judge.[8]

The assertion of autonomy involved in this has been pointed out by Alan Simpson, who observed that ". . . this New England church is going to be built out of the conversion experience, and it is assumed that a subjective experience can be detected by objective tests."[9] Seen in full perspective, writes Sidney Ahlstrom, "this was a radical demand."

> For the first time in Christendom, a state church with vigorous conceptions of enforced uniformity in belief and practice was requiring an internal, experiential test of church membership. Many future problems of the New England churches stemmed from this decision.[10]

The consequences came almost at once. At one extreme stood men like Roger Williams who, always seeking a purer church, carried the test to the extreme of making it the only requirement for membership. And at another extreme stood Anne Hutchinson who insisted that the Holy Spirit could reveal to men with absolute certainty whether a man was truly saved or not. No test of visibility would be necesary where the Holy Spirit speaks directly. (We shall consider below in more detail the specific problems raised by Williams and Hutchinson.) At an opposite extreme, of course, was either some kind of return to a non-autonomous position or some kind of adjustment to reality to which the Puritans were eventually forced. The return to a non-autonomous position came in the form of a return to profession and discipline, as expressed by Thomas Shepherd:

> The meaning is not as if we allowed none to be of the church, but real saints, and such as give demonstrative evidence of being members of the invisible church; for we profess . . . that it is not real, but visible faith, not the inward being, but the outward profession of faith . . . that constitutes a visible church.[11]

And when John Cotton came to defend the New England Way in 1648, he wrote that in the trial of new members, ". . . we do not exact eminent

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[7]Thomas Lechford, *Plain Dealing: or News from New England,* ed. J. Hammond Trumbell (New York: Garrett Press, 1970), p. 21.

[8]*Ibid.*

[9]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 25.

[10]Ahlstrom, *A Religious History,* p. 146.

[11]Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 198.

measure, either of knowledge, or holiness, . . . for we had rather ninety-nine hypocrites should perish through presumption, than one humble soul belonging to Christ should sink under discouragement and despair."[12] And the Cambridge Platform of that same year specified that members ought to be "examined and tried first" in such a way as to satisfy "rational charity" that they are sincere, but "the weakest measure of faith is to be accepted in those that desire to be admitted into the church . . . , if sincere. . . . Severity of examination is to be avoided."[13]

It was in the making of this return to the non-autonomy of the profession and discipline that Perry Miller saw one of the Puritan's contradictions. "The clergy of New England did not lack courage when called upon to reconcile many facts with their preconceived ideas," he wrote,

> . . . but none of them quite had the effrontery to plead for this situation purely upon the basis of any correspondence to spiritual realities. They who formerly scorned the social and ethical arguments of the Anglican Church were reduced to defending Congregationalism on those very grounds; the erstwhile rebels against formalism came finally to rest upon a formality. The important thing, they were bound to admit, was the profession; they knew it was desirable for examiners to test the sincerity of a profession, but the externality of the act was after all its essential aspect.[14]

Miller is mistaken. It is true that the rebels against formalism came to rest upon a formality and that the externality of the act was its essential aspect, but the contradiction was caused by the assertion of autonomy in the test of visibility, not in the return to profession. When the Puritans returned to profession of faith and submission to discipline as the criterion of church membership, they were resolving the dilemma of autonomy, not creating a contradiction in their theory and practice. Thomas Hooker spoke to the point in his *Survey of Church Discipline* (iii, 6) when he laid down the rule that "if a person live not in the commission of any known sin, nor in the neglect of any known duty, and can give a reason of his hope toward God," he is to be accepted into the fellowship of the church. "This rule being received and agreed upon," he said,

> . . . it would marvelously facilitate the work of admission, without any trouble, and prevent such curious inquisitions and niceties, which the pride and wantonness of men's spirits hath brought into the Church, to disturb the peace thereof, and to prejudice the progress of God's ordinances.[15]

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[12]John Cotton, "The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared," cited in Lechford, *Plain Dealing,* ed. J. Hammond Trumball, p. 21, n. 12.

[13]"The Cambridge Platform," XII, 3, *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 107.

[14]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 198.

[15]Thomas Hooker, *Survey of Church Discipline,* iii, 6, cited in Lechford, *Plain Dealing,* ed. J. Hammond Trumball, p. 22, n. 12.

But even though there was a return to non-autonomy in the formalization of the tests of visibility, the congregational goal of identifying the visible and invisible churches remained. A profession of faith was required, an examination as to Christian maturity was made, and church discipline was exercised. There was a two-fold limitation on church membership, writes Rushdoony;

> . . . church and state were fearful of immature Christians being given full membership, and individuals were hesitant about assuming mature responsibility, regarded by them as awesome, without much soul-searching. At times men had to be urged to assume responsibilities for which religious and civil authorities deemed them ready.[16]

Some historians have seen this reluctance to join the church as an evidence of declension, others as a sign of sensitive consciences or overscrupulousness among the elect who did not feel that they could live up to the requirements of membership in the church covenant. Whatever the reasons, it is a fact that in the second generation of Puritan Massachusetts there were a sizable number of people who had not owned the covenant and joined the church. It is known that many were unregenerate. It is also known that many of them were regenerate and attended services regularly but chose for one reason or another not to own the covenant. Even though the tests of visibility had been formalized and severity of examination was avoided, yet the church covenant and church discipline was not to be taken lightly, and some chose not to take it at all. It was the fact of this "unregenerate" and "unchurched" second generation coupled with the Puritans' doctrine of infant baptism that revealed again the dilemma caused by the assertion of autonomy involved in trying to identify the invisible church. But this time the dilemma was not resolved by a return to a non-autonomous position, such as only requiring the profession of faith and submission to the discipline of the church.

The practice of the Puritan church was to baptize the infant children of believers. It was always understood that the baptism of infants could not by itself make the recipient of baptism a recipient of saving grace. Instead, when the baptized children reached their maturity, it was expected that they would experience conversion, make their profession, and own the covenant as a visible saint, and be admitted to the second sacrament of the church, the Lord's Supper or Communion. Yet among the children of the first generation such an experience either was lacking or they were not able to fulfill the requirements for church membership sufficiently even though they were otherwise moral and reputable people. As the colony grew, the problem became more and more obvious and urgent, and as it did, the pressures mounted for some sort of solution.

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[16]Rousas John Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1964), p. 43.

The solution was proposed in 1662 by the Synod assembled at Boston, which had been called by the General Court specifically to consider "Who are the subjects of Baptism?" The Synod answered that "confederate visible members" of the particular churches and their children were proper subjects of baptism. Also, said the Synod, the infant-seed of confederate visible members are under the "watch, discipline, and government" of the church but are not to be admitted to full communion until they fulfill "further qualifications" set by the Word of God (i.e., examination, profession of faith, and submission to discipline; in short, visible sainthood). Church members who had been admitted in infancy but had never become confederate visible members could also have their children baptized, as long as the parents understood the doctrine of faith and assented to it, were not scandalous in life, and owned the covenant before the church, submitting themselves and their children to the Lord and to the government of the church. In short, a distinction was drawn between the purity of full membership and the halfway status of the unconverted second generation who had been baptized in the church and now wished to have their children (the third generation) baptized.[17]

It is common to blame the need for the Halfway Covenant, as it was called, on the doctrine of infant baptism. It was rather a problem caused by the concept of visible sainthood, as Edmund Morgan has observed: "The halfway covenant, while wholly insufficient as a recognition of the church's relationship to the world, was probably the most satisfactory way of reconciling the Puritan's conflicting commitments to infant baptism and to a church composed exclusively of saints."[18] It should be noted that the concept of visible sainthood involves an assertion of autonomy on the part of the church; the doctrine of infant baptism does not, but rather the opposite, symbolizing, as it did to the Puritan, both his and the child's dependence on God for grace and salvation.

It is also common to see the Halfway Covenant as a downward step toward declension and a compromise with worldliness by the Puritans. It was in fact neither. That it did not result in declension has been noted by Alden Vaughan who records that "as late as 1675 less than half of the congregations in Massachusetts subscribed to the new doctrine, and even in the last quarter of the century when most churches at last gave formal assent to the half-way solution, few New Englanders took advantage of its provisions."[19] And that it was not a compromise with worldliness was noted by

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[17]"The Answer of the Elders and Other Messengers of the Churches, Assembled at Boston in the Year 1662 to the Questions Propounded to Them by Order of the Honored General Court," *The Puritan Tradition in America* 1620-1730, ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 116-120.

[18]Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), p. 133.

[19]Alden T. Vaughan (ed.), *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 116.

Perry Miller who saw that in the restriction of halfway members from communion and from voting, the "principle of exclusion" was not violated. If the Halfway Covenant had not existed, churches would have been tempted to admit unconverted members to full membership without testing and thus in time the church would have come to be governed by these unconverted or unqualified members.[20]

Miller does remark that with the Halfway Covenant, however, the basis of the church covenant was changed from a personal and internal one to a formal and external one, and notes that, with that, the Congregational church had come full circle — from criticizing the formality of the Church of England to accepting the formality of the Halfway Covenant![21] Again Miller misses the point of it: the Halfway Covenant was an adjustment made to cope with the problems raised by the test of visible sainthood. It was not an abandonment of visible sainthood, nor was it an acceptance of formality. And, it is important to note, it was also justified by the Synod on the basis of non-autonomy. The Synod explained that

> the denial of baptism to the children in question hath a dangerous tendency to irreligion and apostasy because it denies them, and so the children of the church successively, to have any part in the Lord, which is the way to make them cease from fearing the Lord. . . . The owning of the children of those that successively continue in covenant to be a part of the church is so far from being destructive to the purity and prosperity of the church . . . that this imputation belongs to the contrary tenet. To seek to be more pure than the rule will ever end in impurity in the issue.[22]

"To seek to be more pure than the rule" is a good way to sum up the doctrine of visible sainthood, and the Halfway Covenant was thus a readjustment to reality and non-autonomy in face of the problems it caused in the Massachusetts churches.

The Synod went on to say that

> God hath so framed His covenant, and consequently the constitution of His church thereby, as to design a continuation and propagation of His kingdom therein, from one generation to another. Hence the covenant runs to us and to our seed after us in their generations. To keep in the line and under the influence and efficacy of this covenant of God is the true way to the church's glory. To cut it off and disavow it cuts off the posterity of Zion and hinders it from being (as in the most glorious times it shall be) an eternal excellency, and the joy of many generations. . . .[23]

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[20]Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1967), pp. 97f.

[21]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 195.

[22]"The Answer of the Elders . . . Assembled at Boston in the Year 1662 . . . ," p. 120.

[23]*Ibid.*

Thus by means of the Halfway Covenant, Massachusetts could retain what was good about visible sainthood (the church in the control of the visible, or mature, saints) and yet have a national and comprehensive church which would include under its "watch, discipline, and government" everyone in the colony who desired association with the church, regardless of whether they met the test of visible sainthood. And the kingdom of God and His covenant could be continued and propagated from one generation to another.

The doctrine of visible sainthood was also responsible in part for the problem the Puritans had with Anne Hutchinson and the Antinomians. But while the case opened on a controversy over visible sainthood, it was soon revealed that deeper, more serious problems were involved. The immediate cause of the Hutchinson case was a dispute over the theology of salvation, specifically whether sanctification was any evidence of justification. This was an important argument because it had political overtones. If membership in the church was based on one's visibility as a saint (evident sanctification), and the franchise is limited to church members, then the means of determining both what and who is a visible saint becomes a matter of political as well as theological interest. It is too easy, argues Herbert Schneider, to appraise this case (and that of Roger Williams as well) from the standpoint of later issues, such as toleration and liberty of conscience.

> . . . Looking back, it is obvious to us, that from the point of view of later developments, this aspect of the case is most significant; but from the point of view of the problems of the founding of New England, they represent rather a struggle between fanatical religion and moral religion, between socially effective churches, between visible and invisible Christianity.[24]

Thus the issues at the time of the Hutchinson affair were both theological and social. Ziff observes that

> . . . during 1636 tempers ran higher and higher, and the oral clashes that followed sermons were becoming slanderous. In view of the undeniable Christianity of the Hutchinson group, the heat generated and sense of danger acutely felt by those who opposed them indicated that the doctrinal battle was touching the deepest assumptions of the culture. Since, however, the growing outrage sprang from the unarticulated structure of the society's sense of reality rather than from a mere disagreement on theological interpretations, it was intensified by the majority's frustration in being unable to find a correlative in the disputed opinions for their intense feeling of being threatened.[25]

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[24]Herbert Wallace Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 64.

[25]Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), p. 65.

According to the Hutchinsonians, visible sainthood was a "covenant of works," which meant that practical sanctification could not be used as a standard by which to judge whether a given candidate for church membership was actually a member of the invisible church. Anne Hutchinson's position was that it is the actual possession of the covenant of grace that made one a member of the invisible church and that this possession was evidenced by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit within the believer, not in his outward profession and evident works.

In between these two positions stood John Cotton. Anne Hutchinson professed to follow Cotton in her doctrine, but Cotton professed to be in orthodox agreement with the rest of the ministers of Massachusetts Bay, whom Mrs. Hutchinson described as being under the covenant of works, rather than grace. It is Cotton's position that we must follow in order to think clearly about the antinomian issue and visible sainthood. It is true that Cotton opposed the tendency of ministers and elders to hold an "instrumental view" of faith, i.e., that faith is a cause of salvation rather than a term for the state of salvation. The Antinomian crisis, writes James Jones, revolved around Cotton's view of three issues: (1) whether salvation was instant or reached through stages of preparation, (2) whether sanctification or good works were any evidence of being truly saved, and (3) whether faith is an active or passive state.[26] Cotton rejected the concept of preparation, seeing a great gulf fixed between faith and unfaith. Cotton's concern, writes Jones,

> . . . was to safeguard the primacy of God's action and the centrality of Christ. He was afraid that if there were anything antecedent to conversion, it would encourage men to look to themselves to see if they were on the right track rather than waiting for God to work in them the overwhelming miracle of the new birth. The new creation was creation out of nothing not only because it was instantaneous but also because there was nothing in man, no stages of preparation, nothing he could do or say, that would influence this event. It was wholly of God and not of man. The true Christian looked only toward the divine and not to any preparatory steps or stages.[27]

Cotton was also concerned that people might come to rely on their attendance at church or even membership in it for their salvation. While the people should enjoy the purity of the church in New England, they should not trust in it, nor stand upon it, nor think that they are blessed because of it. To do so would be to trust in the letter rather than the spirit, and the letter is "loss, and dross, and dung."[28]

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[26] James W. Jones, *The Shattered Synthesis: New England Puritanism before the Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), p. 6.

[27] *Ibid.*

[28] Ziff, *Puritanism in America,* p. 61.

It was this emphasis in Cotton that Anne Hutchinson found so attractive. Nothing that man could do was any help in achieving salvation and therefore nothing that man did was any evidence of salvation or lack of it. It was the position of the Elders, however, that a tree was to be judged by its fruit, and that faith was to be judged by works. Consequently most of the New England churches judged visible sainthood and the covenant of grace by the outward profession of faith and a life lived in conformity to it.[29]

As the issues were clarified in debate, however, Cotton eventually disassociated himself from the Antinomian position of Mrs. Hutchinson and her brother, John Wheelwright. At the Synod of 1637, called to study and consider the questions that had been raised, Cotton and the other ministers came to agreement on the issues:

> . . .that in the testimony of the Holy Spirit, which is the evidence of our good estate before God, the qualifications of inherent graces and the fruits thereof, proving the sincerity of our faith must ever be co-existent, concurrent, co-apparent, or else the conceived testimony of the Spirit is either a delusion or doubtful.[30]

Both Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright were undaunted. Their position was that those who were truly saved were possessed by the Holy Spirit which dwelt in them even to the point of making a "personal union" between the Holy Spirit and the believer so that "a believer must be more than a person."[31] The saved therefore were to be governed by grace and not by laws — either moral laws or the laws of men. And since such deliverance from the law would be dangerous in hypocrites, a rigorous examination into the elect must be made. Sanctification, or godly behavior, was not sufficient; the search must be internal: of the actual possession of grace rather than the appearance of grace. Thus, writes Larzer Ziff,

> . . . Psychology took precedence over ethics as the science of the salvation experience. If one objected that a tree is known by its fruits, the obvious answer was that the tree does not know itself by its fruits but by its roots. Not the outer form but the inner flux marked the saint. His every energy should be bent to insuring access to that flux and opposing the imposition of forms and formulas that arrested it.[32]

Massachusetts considered these ideas so dangerous that they had the Antinomians disarmed, and then tried Hutchinson and Wheelwright for sedition when they continued to "nourish contentions." First Wheelwright was disenfranchised and was banished, and soon thereafter Mrs. Hutchinson

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[29]Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic,* p. 103.

[30]Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (London, 1702), Book VII, Ch. III, Sec. 5, cited in Herbert W. Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 66, n. 26.

[31]John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England 1630-1649,* ed. James Kendall Hosmer (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), I, pp. 198, 201.

[32]Ziff, *Puritanism in America,* p. 60.

was also. Winthrop recorded that the Court ". . . charged her with divers matters . . . , which were clearly proved against her, though she sought to shift it off."

> And, after many speeches to and fro, at last she was so full as she could not contain, but vented her revelations; amongst which this was one, that she had it revealed to her, that she should come into New England, and should here be persecuted, and that God would ruin us and our posterity, and the whole state, for the same.[33]

And so the court proceeded, concluded Winthrop, and banished her for asserting that she had had an "immediate revelation" from the Holy Spirit, apart from the Word of God — a manifest heresy in Puritan theology.

In concluding his study of the Antinomian problem, Larzer Ziff asked the most relevant question concerning the affair: "What was there in the Puritan community that was so deeply offended by Anne Hutchinson's group that her opponents moved swiftly and massively to suppress them . . . ?"[34] Ziff goes on to quote Winthrop's comment that in claiming an immediate revelation, Anne Hutchinson

> . . . hath manifested that her opinion and practice have been the cause of all our disturbances, and that she walked by such a rule as cannot stand with the peace of any state; for such bottomless revelations, as either came without any word, or without the sense of the word (which was framed to human capacity) if they be allowed in one thing, must be admitted as a rule in all things; for they being above reason and Scripture, they are not subject to control.[35]

The position of the Hutchinsonians was that the individual was more important than the state, that the individual enlightened conscience was more important than the social norms and behavior code of Massachusetts' visible saints. "Like transcendental thinkers who were to follow her in New England," writes Ziff, "she saw no conflict between the freedom of the enlightened individual and the well-being of the community, but, like them also, she insisted on the priority of conscience."[36]

Ziff is correct. The Antinomian spirit sees the individual as more important than society and the individual conscience as autonomous. But there were other assertions of autonomy as well. In her claim of immediate revelation and her claim to be in bodily communion with the Holy Spirit, Mrs. Hutchinson was clearly heretic. The heresy was not in her claim to be moved by the Holy Spirit, but rather in her claim to be moved to an immediate revelation. And in her call for a subjective, internal test of salvation rather than the outward visible test, she was making herself (or the church)

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[33]Winthrop, *Journal,* I, p. 240.
[34]Ziff, *Puritanism in America,* p. 66.
[35]*Ibid.*
[36]*Ibid.*

the judge of the grace of God within the believer, a knowledge impossible to men, being rather a part of God's omniscience.

But Mrs. Hutchinson was apparently not convinced. Winthrop wrote that after her excommunication, God apparently gave her up ". . . to that hardness of heart, as she is not affected with any remorse, but glories in it, and fears not the vengeance of God, which she lies under, as if God did work contrary to his own word, and loosed from heaven, while his Church had bound upon earth."[37] If Winthrop is correct, Mrs. Hutchinson simply continued to assert her autonomy.

[37]Winthrop, *Journal,* I, 255.

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Dilemma and Human Autonomy in Puritan Practice — II

The dilemma involved in the area of church-state relations and establishment was that of trying to maintain a franchise restricted to church members and a religious uniformity within the colony and yet to keep the church and the state separate and unconfused. The Puritans also desired the magistrate to maintain an orthodoxy of faith and practice within the colony yet professed to believe in the liberty of the individual conscience. In Puritan theory, church and state were to be cooperating but unconfounded spheres within the society. The churches were responsible for man in his spiritual relationship to God, and the state was responsible for man in his social relationships with other men. The Antinomian crisis had challenged this arrangement by insisting that he who had a satisfactory spiritual relationship to God through the first table of the law (containing man's relationship to God) was thereby delivered by the Spirit from any obligation to the second table (man's relationship to man). This did not necessarily mean that he would violate them but that they would be fulfilled in spirit rather than in letter. The colony in its reaction to this sundering of the law reunited it by maintaining that both the church and the state were equally responsible for both tables of the law. For the Puritan there could be no segregation of spiritual life and social life. The two were all of a piece; life was inescapably religious.

When he came therefore to consider the relationship between Christianity and civil government and began to work out the separation of church and state, he considered that the state should not have governing power in the churches and that the church should not rule in civil matters as a church. Thus Cotton wrote to Lord Say and Seal that

> . . . it is very suitable to God's all-sufficient wisdom, and to the fulness and perfection of Holy Scriptures . . . to prescribe perfect rules . . . for the right ordering . . . of the commonwealth . . . and . . . avoid both the church's usurpation upon civil jurisdictions, in order toward things spiritual, and the commonwealth's invasion upon ecclesiastical administration, in order to civil peace, and conformity to the civil state. God's institution (such as the government of church and of commonwealth be) may be close and compact, and co-ordinate one to another, yet not confounded.[1]

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[1]John Cotton, "Copy of a Letter from Mr. Cotton to Lord Say and Seal in the Year 1636," *The Puritans,* eds., Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 209-212.

Cotton went on to say that while God had so framed the church as to be compatible with any form of human government, yet given a choice, the commonwealth should be framed similar to the church, i.e., a theocracy which is ruled by the Word of God and "referreth the sovereignty to himself."[2]

It was the separation of church and state that distinguished the Puritan from the Anglicans in England, but most Puritans wanted to separate church and state only to reunite them as a partnership. In other words, writes Alan Simpson, they want

> . . . to break the indissoluble unity of church and state in Anglican England so as to get the church on its scriptural basis . . . but once on that basis, they expect the state to uphold it . . . . Separation of church and state, in such a context, meant simply a division of functions between two partners with a tendency to reduce the state to a junior partner where the clergy claimed a superior insight into the Divine Will.[3]

Rutman, on the other hand, notes that

> . . . the historians have noted all too often those laws passed by civil authorities to further the views of the church and those cases where the ministry advised the magistrates on civil matters. But they have paid far too little attention to the arduous efforts made to define the respective spheres of church and state.[4]

One such effort at definition was that made by John Davenport, who wrote that the two different orders

> . . . be not set in opposition as contraries that one should destroy the other, but as co-ordinate states, in the same place, reaching forth help mutually to each other, for the welfare of both according to God, so that both officers and members of churches be subject in respect of the outward man, to the civil power, of those who bear rule in the civil state according to God and teach others to do so; and that the civil magistrates and officers in regard of the inward man subject themselves spiritually to the power of Christ in church ordinances and by their civil power preserve the same in outward peace and purity.[5]

John Cotton, who saw church and state as equally the "viceregents of God" and partners in the cause of truth,[6] wrote in 1640 that both church

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[2]*Ibid.*, p. 210.

[3]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 26.

[4]Darrett B. Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays,* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Masssachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), p. 161.

[5]John Davenport, *A Discourse About Civil Government* (Cambridge, 1663), pp. 8-9, quoted in C. Gregg Singer, *A Theological Interpretation of American History* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1969), pp. 15f.

[6]Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 187.

and state in Massachusetts were involved in "the establishment of pure religion, in doctrine, worship, and government, according to the Word of God; as also the reformation of all corruption in any of these."[7] And, accordingly, Urian Oakes described the Massachusetts arrangement as "a little model of the glorious kingdom of Christ on earth. Christ reigns among us in the commonwealth as well as in the church and hath his glorious interest involved and wrapt up in the good of both societies respectively."[8]

Though church and state shared the same ends and served the same purpose, they did not have the same function. Functionally, the church and the state were carefully distinguished and kept strictly separated. John Cotton wrote that "the government of the Church is as the Kingdom of Christ is, not of this world, but spiritual and heavenly . . . . The power of the keys is far distant from the power of the sword."[9]

This strict separation of function led Clifford Shipton to conclude that "in spite of the integration of civil and religious life in the seventeenth century, the government of Massachusetts never was a theocracy in any normal sense of the term."[10] In fact, writes Aaron Seidman, if we regard the colony as a state controlled or even influenced mainly by the clergy, it is necessary to ignore the facts:

> In the documents of the colony and in the writings of its leading men, separation was constantly implied and expressed. At no time do we find church and state operating as one unit . . . . the essential boundaries of the two organizations were kept well defined . . . .[11]

These definitions and boundaries were set forth in the Body of Liberties of 1641 and later in the Cambridge Platform and the Massachusetts Code of 1648. The Body of Liberties stated that the "Civil authority hath power and liberty to see the peace, ordinance, and rules of Christ observed in every church according to his word, so it be done in a civil and not in an ecclesiastical way." Law 95, section 8 stated that "all churches have liberty to deal with any of their members in a church way that are in the hand of justice. So it be not to retard or hinder the course thereof."[12] Thus the church was to deal in a church way and the civil government in a civil way. In the case of a conflict, the General Court would interpret and decide. Likewise the interference of each with the other was prohibited by laws 59

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[7]Quoted in Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," p. 162.

[8]Quoted in Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 148.

[9]Quoted in Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," p. 161.

[10]Clifford K. Shipton, "The Locus of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), p. 137.

[11]Aaron B. Seidman, "Church and State Reconsidered," *Puritanism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts,* ed. David D. Hall (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 84.

[12]"The Body of Liberties," cited in Aaron B. Seidman, "Church and State," p. 77.

and 60: "Civil authority hath power and liberty to deal with any church member in a way of civil justice, notwithstanding any church relation, office or interest." "No church censure shall degrade or depose any man from any civil dignity, office, or authority he shall have in the commonwealth."[13]

Since church and state had different functions but the same end, the relationship between church and state became a question of the specific power of the state in matters of religion. In Massachusetts the magistrate was given both compulsive and restrictive powers. Compulsive power was power to compel certain religious practices such as attendance at church or the payment of the tithe, which was collected like taxes for the support of the church.[14] It is an "ungodly imagination," said Cotton, that would limit the magistrate to caring for the bodies and goods of the people but not for their souls.[15]

The restrictive power of the magistrate was that of preserving the state from erosion by outlawing certain beliefs, practices, or even people from the colony. In either its compulsive or restrictive function, however, the state was still only concerned with external action. It could not compel belief or deal with private opinion. It could act only to compel outward action or to curb the open expression of heretical ideas. Its object was to preserve externally the spiritual good of the people, that "a right opinion and worship of God should be openly professed within the territories and jurisdiction of a state," as Thomas Cobbet of Ipswich put it. The magistrate should "inquire and judge profession and religions, which is true, and ought to be maintained, which is false and ought to be rejected." The magistrate, he said,

> . . . is a political minister of God, in his civil way, and by his civil means, of the subjects spiritual good; so he is to improve his authority, that the liberty, purity, and peace of God's own instituted worship, and ways, wherein their spiritual good, externally, doth much lie, be maintained and defended against all infesting, infringing, impugning or impairing principles.[16]

It is important to note, however, that in exercising his compulsive or restrictive function, the magistrate was not autonomous and could not be arbitrary. Winthrop argues in 1644 that

> . . . arbitrary government is, where a people have men set over them,

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[13]*Ibid.*, pp. 77f; Cf. "The Book of the Laws and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts," Ecclesiasticals, 15, *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 171.

[14]Shipton, "The Locus of Authority," pp. 137f.

[15]Irwin H. Polishook (ed.), *Roger Williams, John Cotton and Religious Freedom: A Controversy in New and Old England* (Englewood Cliff, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 74.

[16]Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p.260.

> without their choice, or allowance: who have power to govern them, and judge their causes without a rule.

But where the people could choose their officers and "require the rule by which they shall be governed and judged," there could be no arbitrary government.[17]

It was the basic contention of all Puritanism, of course, that the Word of God was the fundamental law, binding both subject and magistrate. Thomas Hooker could thus argue that ". . . the Magistrate hath a coactive power to compel the church to execute the ordinances of Christ, according to the order and rules of Christ . . . and in case she swerves from her rule, by a strong hand to constrain her to keep it."[18] But the same law also bound the magistrate and put a limit on his actions.

Such was the orthodox Puritan theory of church and state. Put into practice, writes Perry Miller, two difficulties soon became apparent: (1) not all people were regenerate and willing to view church and state from this biblical point of view, and (2) as religious fervor waned as the years (and generations) passed, it was more and more difficult to maintain the fiction of a holy commonwealth made up of and ruled by a covenant people who were committed to the law of God.[19] Massachusetts tried to meet these difficulties by the restriction of the franchise to those who were accounted "visible saints." In New England there was no established church (in the sense of a church ruled and governed by the state) even though the churches received financial support from the state. The limitation of the franchise to church members was not seen as an establishment of the church, but only as a necessary adjunct to the Congregationalist desire for a national church. It was necessary to restrict the franchise to church members since, as John Davenport put it, they are bound "unto all faithfulness in all things to God and man. . . ." and "the like assurance cannot be had in any other way, if this course be neglected."[20] Thomas Shepherd preached on the subject in 1638 before the General Court:

> Maintain the privilege to death. Whomsoever you shall choose let him be one from among yourselves; a member of some church; he that is shut out of the fellowship of churches will be an enemy unto the

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[17]John Winthrop, "Arbitrary Government Described: And the Government of the Massachusetts Vindicated from that Aspersion," *Life and Letters of John Winthrop,* ed. Robert C. Winthrop (2 vols.; Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864-1867 [Reprinted New York: Da Capo Press, 1971]), II, 440.

[18]Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline,* 1648, pt. II, p. 80, cited in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* pp. 259f.

[19]Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 191f.

[20]John Davenport, *A Discourse About Civil Government,* pp. 12, 22, cited in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 245.

> strictness of churches; and ruin church you ruin state; and Christ also.[21]

Cotton denied that such restriction of the franchise to church members subverted the state to the church since magistrates do not govern ". . . by directions from the church, but by civil laws . . . in all which, the church (as the church) hath nothing to do: only, it prepareth fit instruments both to rule, and to choose rulers."[22] Yet when membership in the church was limited to visible saints and that by means of an internal and experiential test, church and state, having been separated in Puritan theory, became confused again. Rushdoony, commenting that the Puritans in Massachusetts were in varying degrees of rebellion against establishment and civil supremacy, writes that

> the establishment, when it came to Massachusetts, was a product of a mutual compromise designed to perpetuate the holy commonwealth rather than return to the English pattern. The theological issues are not our . . . concern except in that, as the requirements for the mature fulfillment of the personal covenant moved from the Reformed doctrine of piety to Arminian moralism and experientialism, the people found themselves less able to share in the more private demands and tests of faith. Antinomianism had been the first manifestation of this demand for a private as against public test.[23]

The compromise, he says, appeared in two ways: "The church was established to create a *formally* Christian state and thereby retain the holy commonwealth goal. The church in turn established the world by means of the half-way covenant to ensure *formally* the co-existence of the church in the Christian commonwealth."[24]

Thus, again, the Puritan reaped the fruit of the autonomous doctrine of the visible saint, this time in the realm of establishment.

In England establishment caused an even greater conflict. There the Presbyterians stood for an established church while the Congregationalists opposed it. The idea of establishment is, of course, the demand for a supreme temporal ruler of the church. To the English Congregationalist the establishment of the church conflicted with his view of church government and of restricted membership. If the church were established, his synods would become coercive and his church membership comprehensive. Then in 1640 during the civil wars and the resulting spirit of anarchy, a new factor entered the picture: there was a multiplying of religious sects in England.

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[21]Thomas Shepherd, *New England Historical and Genealogical Register,* XXIV, 366, cited in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 245.

[22]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 244.

[23]Rousas John Rushdoony, *This Independent Republic: Studies in the Nature and Meaning of American History* (Nutley, N.J.: The Craig Press, 1964), p. 97.

[24]*Ibid.*

Cromwell, unable to decide between the conflicting theories of the various sects and needing the support of all, began to advocate religious toleration. As he let the hundred flowers bloom in England, the New England Congregationalists looked on in horror and joined the English Presbyterians in condemning Cromwell. In England Presbyterians joined with Anglicans to restore Charles II to the throne in 1660, shortly after which the Anglicans turned on the Presbyterians and expelled them from the Church of England. The Presbyterians had no ground to stand upon other than justice and charity. In the Westminster Confession of 1648 they had asserted that the civil magistrate had authority

> . . . to take order, that unity and peace be preserved in the church, that the truth of God be kept pure and entire, that all blasphemies and heresies be suppressed, all corruptions and abuses in worship and discipline be prevented or reformed, and all the ordinances of God duly settled, administered, and observed. For the better effecting whereof, he hath power to call synods, to be present at them, and to provide that whatsoever is transacted in them be according to the mind of God.[25]

This section of the Confession was in conflict with a later part (Chapter XXX, l) which asserted that "The Lord Jesus, as king and head of his church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers, distinct from the civil magistrates." A modern commentator on the Confession has written of this conflict in the Confession and of this period of history that

> . . . it is not to be forgotten that subsequent to the Westminster Assembly, the Scottish Covenanters were called upon to suffer unto death from civil oppression. To these rugged Presbyterians, who more than others, resolutely adhered to the testimony of the Confession, we owe much, for it was to assert the absolute spiritual independence of the Church of Jesus Christ from civil authority that they gave their all. Those who loved the testimony of the Confession best, suffered most for the principle which was — after all — compromised in the original formulation of these sections.[26]

The compromise, of course, was to allow a temporal ruler over the church in the form of the civil magistrate. The Scottish Covenanters in the 1640's and the English Presbyterians in the 1660's had no defense theologically against the civil magistrate and his actions regarding the affairs of the church since they had compromised it away in the formulation

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[25]"The Westminster Confession of Faith," XXXIII, 3 *The Westminster Confession of Faith for Study Classes,* ed. G.I. Williamson (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1964), p. 244.

[26]*Ibid.*, p. 246.

of their own confession of faith. The result of that compromise was autonomy, dilemma, and ultimately for them, death.

Another problem associated with the Puritan doctrine of church and state had to do with the maintenance of orthodoxy in the holy commonwealth. If orthodoxy of doctrine is to be maintained, should it be done by the church or the state? Also, how can liberty of conscience and non-toleration of dissent exist at the same time? Again, we shall see that the principle of autonomy provides a key to a proper understanding of the Puritans' position on toleration and liberty of conscience.

In 1650 Sir Richard Saltonstall wrote from England to John Cotton and John Wilson concerning the "sad things" that "are reported daily of your tyranny and persecutions in New England, as that you fine, whip, and imprison men for their consciences." It is reported, said Saltonstall, that you compel men to attend your assemblies, and then punish them for their "public affronts" when they show their dislike of it. This practice forces them to sin by going against their consciences, and makes them hypocrites. We pray for you, he continued, "that the Lord would give you meek and humble spirits, not to strive so much for uniformity as to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace." Saltonstall added that when he had once written then-Governor Thomas Dudley concerning whether Anabaptists, Seekers, and Antinomians might be allowed to settle in New England, Dudley had replied rather curtly that "God forbid our love for the truth should be grown so cold that we should tolerate errors." But, added Saltonstall, "I hope you do not assume to yourselves infallibility of judgment when the most learned of the Apostles confesseth he knew in part and saw but darkly as through a glass."[27]

Cotton's reply to Saltonstall is a short but complete treatise on the Puritans' ideas on toleration and liberty of conscience. As usual, he turns the problem back on those who have been complaining and have been listening to complaints in England:

> The cry of the sins of Sodom was great and loud and reached up to heaven, yet the righteous God (giving us an example what to do in the like case), He would first go down to see whether their crime were altogether according to the cry before He would proceed to judgment . . . , and when He did find the truth of the cry, He did not wrap up all alike promiscuously in the judgment, but spared such as He found innocent.[28]

Cotton then addresses himself to the specific cases at hand, adding a few facts that might mitigate Saltonstall's reservations about New England's

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[27]John Cotton, "Letter to Richard Saltonstall," *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), pp. 200f.

[28]*Ibid.,* p. 202.

handling of the cases. Then Cotton turns his attention to a more general justification of New England's way: to Saltonstall's charge that to compel men to attend church is to force them to sin, Cotton replies that

> . . . if the worship be lawful in itself, the magistrate compelling him to come to it compelleth him not to sin, but the sin is in his will that needs to be compelled to a Christian duty. . . . Bodily presence in a stewes, forced to behold the lewdness of whoredoms there committed, is no whoredom at all. No more is it spiritual whoredom to be compelled by force to go to Mass.[29]

If it be objected that it makes men hypocrites, so be it. Yet better a hypocrite than a profane person.

And if the English Congregationalists hoped that New England would have so much "light and love" as to avoid practicing those courses which they went into the wilderness to prevent as well as to have been an example to God's people in England (as Saltonstall had put it), Cotton exhorts him to consider that

> . . . if our native country were more zealous against horrid blasphemies and heresies than we be, we believe the Lord would look at it as a better improvement of all the great salvations he hath wrought for them than to set open a wide door to all abominations in religion.[30]

Cotton then denounces the situation that is being tolerated in England: "Do you think the Lord hath crowned the state with so many victories that they should suffer so many miscreants to pluck the crown of sovereignty from Christ's head?" He details the various heresies that are being promoted in England and concludes:

> . . . And thus Christ by easing England of the yoke of a kingdom shall forfeit His own kingdom among the people of England. Now God forbid . . . that the people and state of England should so ill requite the Lord Jesus. You know not if you think we came into this wilderness to practice these courses here which we fled in England. We believe there is a vast difference between men's inventions and God's institutions. We fled from men's inventions, to which we else should have been compelled; we compel none to men's inventions.[31]

And finally to the charge that Anabaptists, Antinomians, and Seekers were not tolerated in Massachusetts, Cotton answered,

> Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, we have tolerated in our church some Anabaptists, some Antinomians, and some Seekers, and do so still at this day . . . . [Those that] carry their dissent . . . privately and inoffensively . . . , are borne withal in much meekness. We are

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[29] *Ibid.*, p. 203.

[30] *Ibid.*

[31] *Ibid.*, p. 204.

> far from arrogating infallibility of judgement to ourselves or affecting uniformity; uniformity God never required, infallibility he never granted us. We content ourselves with unity in the foundation of religion and of church order. Super-structures we suffer to vary; we have here Presbyterian churches as well as Congregational, and have learned (through grace) to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace. Only we are loath to be blown up and down (like chaff) by every wind of new notions.[32]

When Oliver Cromwell came to support toleration in the army in the late 1640's in England, he did it for a practical reason: "Shall that [opinion] render him incapable to serve the public? . . . Sir, the State in choosing men to serve it takes no notice of their opinions. Take heed of being sharp . . . against those to whom you can object little but that they square not with you in every opinion concerning matters of religion."[33] There was, however, a spiritual reason for toleration as well, and it was expressed in 1647 by the Army itself in its "Agreement of the People": ". . . matters of religion and the ways of God's worship are not at all entrusted to us by any human power, because therein we cannot remit or exceed a tittle of what our consciences dictate to be the mind of God without willful sin."[34]

New England was horrified, but in its efforts to seize and keep power, Cromwell's government did not have time to force such toleration on New England. Cromwell's New England brethren, writes Miller, "thoroughly sympathized with his efforts, but . . . they looked upon his policy of toleration as the sole stain upon the otherwise flawless record of the pre-eminent warrior saint of the age."[35] And they were determined that such a policy would not be followed in New England.

The problem of toleration and liberty of conscience had first come up in New England in 1635 with the case of Roger Williams, who had been banished for his separatist opinions, and then again in 1637 in the case of Anne Hutchinson. In 1644 a literary duel between John Cotton and Roger Williams did much to define the issues, but not to resolve them. At stake were actually two issues: one had to do with the function of church and state in maintaining theological orthodoxy and came to focus on the question of whether the state should enforce the first table of the law and punish heresy. The other issue had to do with the question of the liberty of conscience: whether diversity of religious opinion ought to be tolerated in any kind of society. These two issues overlapped in many places in New England, but it will be necessary to sort them out if we are to see clearly the significance of the New England position.

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[32] *Ibid.*

[33] Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 272.

[34] *Ibid.*, p. 273.

[35] Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 15f.

We have already noted that the New England Puritans maintained a separation of function between church and state, but not a separation of goals or ends. It followed, therefore, that open heresy within the colony was as much a matter for state concern as for church concern. But even here the boundaries between church and state were carefully drawn. Whenever a heretic was to be tried, the church tried him for heresy while the state tried him for sedition or civil disturbance. If he was found guilty, the church could only expel him from the fellowship of the church. It was then up to the state to try the heretic for his crime. But the point to note is that heresy was viewed as a crime because it was seen as subversive to the social order. The Cambridge Platform of 1648 provided that

> idolatry, blasphemy, heresy . . . , venting corrupt and pernicious opinions that destroy the foundation . . . , open contempt of the word preached . . . , profanation of the Lord's Day . . . , disturbing the peaceable administration and exercise of the worship and holy things of God, and the like . . . are to be restrained and punished by civil authority.

And

> if any church, one or more, shall grow schismatical, rendering itself from the communion of other churches, or shall walk incorrigibly and obstinately in any corrupt way of their own, contrary to the rule of the word, in such case the magistrate . . . is to put forth his coercive power as the matter shall require.[36]

The point was reiterated by the Massachusetts Code also passed in 1648:

> Forasmuch as the peace and prosperity of churches and members thereof, as well as civil rights and liberties are carefully to be maintained, it is ordered by this Court and decreed: that the civil authority here established hath power and liberty to see the peace, ordinances, and rules of Christ be observed in every church according to His word. As also to deal with any church member in a way of civil justice notwithstanding any church relation, office, or interest, so it be done in a civil and not in an ecclesiastical way.[37]

The line of separation between the church and the state in a particular case was not always clear, however, and sometimes the magistrates and elders found it necessary to take specific thought concerning the boundaries. Winthrop records that during the Antinomian crisis it was necessary to call the ministers to give advice "about the authority of the court in things concerning the churches," and that they "did all agree" on two points: (1) that no member of the General Court ought to be called in ques-

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[36]"The Cambridge Platform," XVII, 8, 9, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. 114.

[37]"The Book of the Law and Liberties Concerning the Inhabitants of the Massachusetts," Ecclesiasticals, 15, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. 171.

tion publicly for court actions or discussions without permission of the Court since state secrets may be involved that "may not be fit to acquaint the church with" and (2) that in cases of obvious and dangerous heresies the court need not wait for the churches to act, but in more doubtful cases the church should act first.[38]

As John Cotton reviewed the events of 1637, he saw the handling of the Antinomian crisis as an ideal application of the Puritan theory and the fruit of the Congregational way:

> Whatever assistance the civil government gave to the purging and healing of these evils, it was the fruit of Independent church government. For whether the neighbor churches suspected our church of Boston might be partial, and indulgent to these erroneous persons; or whether they saw, we wanted sufficient witnesses upon which we might proceed against them in a church way, they took a right course (according to the principles of the Independent government) to gather into a synod with the consent of the civil magistrates: and in the synod to agitate, convince and condemn the errors, and the offensive carriages then stirring. Whereat the magistrates being present, they saw just cause to proceed against the chief of those whom they conceived to have bred any civil disturbance: and the churches saw cause to proceed against their members, whom they found to be broachers or maintainers of such heresies.[39]

The state, however, could deal only with the "outward man" and that only, as Cotton put it, "when either his mental errors or heart's lust break out into open expression and view, and become scandalous and spreading."[40] Miller comments that it was possible for the magistrates to limit themselves to outward behavior because by their rules anyone who persisted in an opinion after "one or two admonitions thereby condemned himself."

> Heresy, in other words, was understood to be as concrete a crime as murder, and though the guilty one refused to recognize his offenses as such, society nevertheless had a right to judge him. Just as in the Church the clergy themselves determined when an obstinate heretic deserved excommunication, so, when the magistrates dealt with him, they too could legitimately decide at what point they should cease persuading and deliver a just sentence.[41]

Miller misses the point here by ignoring the distinction that he originally made between heresy and the expression of heresy. Heresy is not as concrete

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[38] John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England 1630-1649,* ed. James Kendall Hosmer (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), I, 210.

[39] John Cotton, "The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared," *John Cotton on the Churches of New England,* ed. Larzer Ziff (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 282.

[40] Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 258.

[41] Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 258.

a crime as murder, but the expression of heresy is. And it was that persisting expression of heresy that was seen as the sign of an autonomous spirit, a conscience not subject to authority or control, and therefore dangerous to the civil order. In the cases of both Anne Hutchinson and Roger Williams, this was precisely the point that led to their trial and banishment. When Williams refused to back down from his erroneous and dangerous opinions, says Winthrop,

> . . . time was given to him and the church of Salem to consider these things till the next general court, and then either to give satisfaction to the court, or else to expect the sentence; it being professedly declared by the ministers, (at the request of the court to give their advice,) that he who should obstinately maintain such opinions, (whereby a church might run into heresy, apostasy, or tyranny, and yet the civil magistrate could not intermeddle,) were to be removed, and that the other church ought to request the magistrates to do so.[42]

The idea that both the church and the state had a role to play in the maintenance of orthodoxy was not questioned by the Puritans. There could be and were disagreements about the application of the concept and about the specific boundaries of responsibility and function, but the idea was beyond question. Consequently, a change in the attitude of the state regarding heresy and orthodoxy was tantamount to a change in the religious philosophy of New England. This point was made by Nathaniel Ward in his *Simple Cobbler of Aggawam* in 1647. I dare aver, said Ward,

> . . . that God doth nowhere in his word, tolerate Christian states to give toleration to such adversaries of his truth, if they have power in their hands to suppress them. . . . That state that will give liberty of conscience in matters of religion, must give liberty of conscience and conversation in their moral laws, or else the fiddle will be out of tune, and some of the strings crack.[43]

Toleration, then, marked a change in religion. The state could not be neutral toward God or toward truth. "Not to tolerate things merely indifferent to weak consciences, argues a conscience too strong," wrote Ward; uniformity on these will only cause disunity. But to tolerate more than these indifferent things is "not to deal indifferently with God." In fact, "he that doth it, takes his Scepter out of his hand, and bids him stand by.[44] At the base of the argument over toleration and liberty of conscience was an autonomous attitude toward God and truth.

The Puritans who settled at Boston intended no such autonomy, and therefore no toleration of error or untruth. Religious liberty was not their

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[42]Winthrop, *Journal,* I, 154.

[43]Nathaniel Ward, *The Simple Cobbler of Aggawam in America,* ed. P.M. Zall (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 6, 10.

[44]*Ibid.*

objective. When Samuel Willard read in 1681 the claim of a group of Anabaptists that the founders of New England had established a haven for persecuted consciences, he commented that ". . . they are mistaken in the design of our first planters, whose business was not toleration; but were professed enemies of it, and could leave the world professing they died no libertines. Their business was to settle, and . . . secure religion to posterity, according to that way which they believed was of God."[45]

There is nothing so idle, said Perry Miller, "as to praise the Puritans for being in any sense conscious or deliberate pioneers of religious liberty — unless, indeed, it is still more idle to berate them because in America they persecuted dissenters from their beliefs. . . . To allow no dissent from the truth was exactly the reason they had come to America."[46] The Puritans made no apology for their stand and seem to have understood what the issues really were. Their position, in other words, was not one taken in ignorance or in an undeveloped humanity, which would be scrapped when once they had become enlightened. Their position depended instead on the content of the issue and not on the mere use of coercion, and their whole case rises and falls on that particular point. If the New England Way were not Christ's way, said Weld, then coercion would be wrong.[47] Their intolerance and coercion was right because it was God's truth that was at stake. The Simple Cobbler wrote that

> if the whole creature should conspire to do the Creator a mischief, or offer him an insolency, it would be in nothing more, than in erecting untruths against his truth, or by sophisticating his truths with human medleys: the removing of some one iota in Scripture, may draw out all the life, and traverse all the truth of the whole Bible: but to authorize an untruth, by a toleration of state, is to build a sconce against the walls of heaven, to batter God out of his chair; to tell a practical lie, is a great sin, but yet transient; but to set up a theoretical untruth, is to warrant every lie that lies from its root to the top of every branch it hath, which are not a few.[48]

What is involved here is a particular understanding of what liberty of conscience is. For the Puritan liberty of conscience was not liberty to believe whatever one chose to believe, but rather liberty to believe the truth as found in the Word of God. Such a liberty was a gift of God given to sinful men by the grace of God. The Westminster Confession of 1648 stated in its chapter "Of Christian Liberty, and Liberty of Conscience" that

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[45]Quoted in Miller and Johnson, *The Puritans,* I, 185.
[46]*Ibid.*
[47]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 168.
[48]Ward, *The Simple Cobbler,* p. 8.

> God alone is lord of the conscience, and hath left it free from the doctrines and commandments of men which are in any thing contrary to his word, or beside it, in matters of faith or worship. So that to believe such doctrines, or to obey such commandments out of conscience, is to betray true liberty of conscience: and the requiring of an implicit faith, and an absolute and blind obedience, is to destroy liberty of conscience, and reason also.[49]

True liberty of conscience was to believe the truth; to believe anything else was to betray true liberty of conscience. Likewise to require an implicit faith or obedience was to destroy liberty of conscience. Herein is the difference between the Puritan concept of liberty of conscience and the concept of toleration. New England did not require any kind of an inward faith or belief since that would have violated the principle of the liberty of conscience, but New England did refuse to tolerate other forms of belief or unbelief, heresies and blasphemies, especially whenever they became known through outward actions or proselytizing. The Westminster Confession continued in the next section that

> they who, upon pretence of Christian liberty, do practice any sin, or cherish any lust, do thereby destroy the end of Christian liberty; which is, that being delivered out of the hands of our enemies, we might serve the Lord without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him, all the days of our life.[50]

Thus liberty of conscience was the liberty to obey the law of God, not to do whatever one pleased, or to ignore the law of God. This is an important distinction in the Puritan's justification of his policy on toleration. The Simple Cobbler wrote:

> I take liberty of conscience to be nothing but a freedom from sin and error. Conscience is free insofar as it is free from error. And liberty of error nothing but a prison for conscience. Then small will be the kindness of a state to build such prisons for their subjects.[51]

But what if one should desire the freedom to do something other than that allowed by the Word of God, i.e., a "liberty of error"? The Cobbler's answer was direct: "The Scripture saith, there is nothing makes free but truth, and truth saith, there is no truth but one. . . ."[52] True liberty, in other words, is found in obedience to the Word of God, and anything else is less than liberty and not indifferent to God. In fact, said Ward, this truth is the greatest freedom: "If the States of the world would make it their

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[49]"The Westminster Confession of Faith," XX, 2, p. 149.
[50]*Ibid.*, XX, 3, p. 149.
[51]Ward, *The Simple Cobbler,* pp. 11f.
[52]*Ibid.*, p. 12.

[utmost] care to preserve this one truth in its purity and authority it would ease you of all other political cares." To desire any other law or liberty reflects an autonomous spirit. "I am sure Satan makes it his great if not only task, to adulterate truth; falsehood is his sole scepter, whereby he first ruffled, and ever since ruined the world."[53]

It is important, however, to note that even though the state was to proceed against heresies and other abominations, the state was not thereby to become arbitrary or tyrannous. Simpson observes that the unregenerate and the peaceful heretics "will be protected in such civil rights as God intended them to have, exposed to the sermons which will save a few of them, and prevented from dishonoring the community by scandalous conduct."[54] God's law, in other words, also limits the government, divides the authority, and checks and balances the impulses of sinful men and magistrates. The state is not autonomous in its proceeding against heresy. Thus even intoleration on God's standards and law can be just, fair, and righteous. Even the Simple Cobbler claimed to be a "crabbat," or stout club, against arbitrary government.[55]

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[53] *Ibid.*
[54] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England, p. 40.*
[55] Ward, *The Simple Cobbler,* p. 16.

8

Dilemma and Human Autonomy in Puritan Practice — III

The third dilemma faced by the Puritans came in the area of church government, specifically concerning congregational government. If independent congregations are the essence of church government, how can uniformity among the congregations be maintained? This particular dilemma, however, created a tendency toward disorder rather than toward a temporal autonomy centered in one person or institution. Reinitz points out that the problem was that of individualism rather than uniformity: "If the ultimate appeal on earth was to the individual conscience, how could a uniformity of reformation be imposed? If every congregation was to be self-governing, what was to prevent the development of different visions of the truth?"[1]

The Puritan efforts to make the visible and invisible churches as nearly identical as possible led, as we have seen, to the concept of a convenanted church made up of "visible saints." And the basis of "visible sainthood" was either the individual's possession or profession of an experience of saving grace. We have also seen that while the Puritans expected that such a covenanted church could serve as a national church (that is, the official church), they rejected the idea of a church coextensive with society.[2] On the other hand, they rejected the individualism of that separatism which saw the church as merely an independent group of autonomous individuals joined together in a voluntary association but entirely separate from any other covenanted group. It was this effort to maintain both the individualism and the corporatism of the church that made up the essence of the New England Way, or what Perry Miller described as "non-separating congregationalism."

There was both an internal and an external aspect to the problem. It was as necessary to achieve uniformity among the believers within the individual church as it was to achieve uniformity among the several churches. And the problem of governing and controlling the individual consciences in the local churches was not unlike that of governing the church at large in the congregational system. Thus the Puritans developed two ways of taking up the slack caused by the lack of due centralization in the congregational way.

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[1] Richard Reinitz (ed.), *Tensions in American Puritanism* (New York: John Wiley, 1970), p. 11.

[2] Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 15.

Within the church the power of the elders, as opposed to that of the congregation, grew, and between the churches the synod, or consociation, became more significant as a checking device.

The government of the church, according to the New England Way, was a creation of the church members. "The saints constitute the matter of Christ's church," said Thomas Hooker, but "the form is only by mutual covenant."[3] That form was described in the Cambridge Platform (IV,3):

> This form is the visible covenant, agreement, or consent whereby they give up themselves unto the Lord, to the observing of the ordinances of Christ together in the same society, which is usually called the Church covenant; for we see not how otherwise members can have church-power for one over another mutually.[4]

Thus the Congregational Church consisted "of a company of saints by calling, united into one body by an holy covenant, for the public worship of God and the mutual edification of one another in the fellowship of the Lord Jesus."[5]

Within the church, once the members had covenanted together to form it, they were expected to elect elders to rule the church. Although officers were not "absolutely necessary" to the simple existence of a church, they were seen as necessary to the "Calling" and "well-being" of the church, and "therefore the Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath appointed ordained officers, which He would not have done if they had not been useful and needful to the church . . . ."[6]

These elders enforced the discipline of the church and directed the church trials whenever discipline had to be exercised. They interpreted the laws of the church, pre-interviewed candidates for membership, and advised the congregation whenever it was to take action. We "bring as few matters as possible, into the assembly," said Thomas Weld, "rather labouring to take all things up in private, and then make as short work in public (when they must needs come there), as may be."[7] The same thought was included in the Cambridge Platform. In Chapter VII on the duties of elders and deacons, one of the duties of elders is "to prepare matters in private that in public they may be carried [to] an end with less trouble and more speedy dispatch."[8]

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[3]Herbert Wallace Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p. 19.

[4]*Ibid.*, p. 19, n. 6.

[5]"The Cambridge Platform," II, 6, *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730,* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 99.

[6]*Ibid.*, VI, 2, pp. 100f.

[7]Quoted in Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 183.

[8]"The Cambridge Platform," VII, 2, p. 102.

Miller's summary of the New England Way is instructive:

> Thus when the internal government of a Congregational church was perfected in New England, the ostensible result was a peculiar system of balanced, interlocking, and yet independent authorities . . . . The elders administered and the congregations rendered judgments, each according to a set of rules devised for those particular functions . . . .
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> . . . . . .
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> This theory of dual authorities cooperating voluntarily in the advancement of Christ's kingdom was a triumph of ingenuity. It preserved the genuine Christian virtues that Puritanism opposed to the formalism of the Establishment, and projected a church system which followed the instructions of Christ, admitting members only upon profession of their faith and allowing them as Christians to exercise the privileges of the elect. At the same time, the theory provided a check upon human tendencies to go astray, a sure-fire method for maintaining law and order.[9]

But Miller continues, when the theory was put into practice, it turned out that the elders still held the crucial power because they were the interpreters of the Word in a church that was disciplined out of the Word. "Individual members were no match for those who devoted their days and nights to exegesis."[10] The answer, of course, is that not enough slack had been taken up to tighten the basic disorder of the congregational polity. A wall of brass or stone put in the wrong place, Cotton had said, is never as effective as a wall of sand in the proper one.

In the matter of external government, the need for consociations of the ministers began almost at once. In congregational theory the Bible, properly interpreted, was the standard for all matters of faith and practice and set forth the one way of church polity and practice. But, as Reinitz has noted, when the churches were actually set up in New England, it soon became apparent "that uniformity could not be achieved through the careful reading of the Scriptures" and thus "the independence of the congregations was compromised in order to ensure it."[11]

Reinitz also notes that when the same problem arose in England, it was handled by moderating uniformity and accepting toleration. Since toleration was not an option that the New England divines wanted to consider, it was necessary to find another means of ensuring uniformity. What they compromised to ensure uniformity was the independence of the congregation, a compromise which moved them away from the autonomy of the local congregation and back to a non-autonomous system of checks and balances between the individual congregation and the consociation of the several churches.

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[9]Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1959), p. 183.
[10]*Ibid.*, p. 182.
[11]Reinitz, *Tensions,* p. 11.

We have already seen that the Congregationalists and the Separatists opposed any kind of synod or consociation with coercive power. Though the Congregationalists did see the need occasionally for a voluntary meeting of the churches as a court of wider appeal, the Presbyterian alternative of a system of courts of higher appeal in the church was not open to the Congregationalists, not because they did not see the value of it, but because the accompanying idea of an established and comprehensive church made the synods coercive. Coercive synods, declared John Davenport, had been "the cause of many mischiefs in the church, for thereby the writings and decrees of men are made infallible and equal with the Word of God, which is intolerable."[12] John Cotton opposed both the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of "cathedral churches" and "classical assemblies," saying that "the keys of the government of His church are given to each particular congregational church respectively" and they united only by "voluntary consociation."[13]

Here Cotton reflected the thought of his mentors, William Ames and Robert Parker, the English theologians who did most to develop the theology of Puritanism. Parker had written in 1616 that "the visible church instituted by Christ and his apostles to which the keys are given, is not a Diocesan or Provincial or national assembly but a particular congregation."[14] In short, the particular congregations were autonomous.[15] Each church was to have "a pastor, a teacher, ruling elders, deacons, perhaps widows, and no other officers," writes Morgan, and "no church or minister should be subordinate to another but all should be joined in brotherly communion in some kind of association."[16]

In order to keep the churches all facing the same direction, the ministers of New England did meet periodically in the "voluntary consociations" to discuss matters of current concern. These congregational consociations were an aid to uniformity. English congregationalism had permitted synods as long as they were deliberative rather than ruling and persuasive rather than coercive. When Roger Williams objected to New England's consociations in 1633, fearing it "might grow in time to a presbytery or superintendency, to the prejudice of the churches' liberties," he was assured by the other ministers that it would never happen, that "no church or person can have power over another church" and "neither did they in their meetings exercise any such jurisdiction . . . ."[17]

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[12]Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 115.

[13]John Cotton, "The Way of Congregational Churches Cleared, " *John Cotton on the Churches of New England,* ed. Larzer Ziff (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1968), p. 198.

[14]Quoted in Schneider, *The Puritan Mind,* p. 18.

[15]Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England,* p. 25.

[16]Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), pp. 11f.

[17]John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England 1630-1649,* ed. James Kendall Hosmer (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), I, 112f.

But over the years the consociation device was used more frequently and for a growing list of problems, including the resolution of internal problems within individual churches as well as matters of general and mutual concern. Within a decade, says Miller, "it had become the established custom of the colony to require the presence of the neighboring ministers at the covenanting of new organizations, at the election of all officers, or at the deposition of erring ones, and to refer to outsiders for the arbitration of all parish quarrels."[18] The first such synod was held to deal with the Antinomian question in 1637. Another was held in 1643. In 1645 Thomas Hooker was asked to write a "Sum of Church Discipline" which became the basis for the Cambridge Synod which met from 1646 to 1648 and produced the Cambridge Platform. There was another assembly held in 1657, and in 1662, and again in 1667, 1679, and 1680. In short, writes Schneider, "the synod became a frequent and necessary institution."[19] Cotton would later attribute the success of the New England Way to the use of consociation:

> Mutual conference between Godly, ingenuous, and self-denying-Christians is a notable means sanctified of God for the instruction and edification one of another, till we all come to be of one mind in the Lord.[20]

The Cambridge Platform reflected and formally recognized this growing use of synods in 1648. The General Court had called for a synod to be held to establish the right form and government of the churches since "some differences of opinion and practice of one church from another do already appear amongst us, and others (if not timely prevented) are like speedily to ensue . . . ."[21] The deputies objected to the call for a synod, fearing for the independence of the individual churches in spite of the court's directive that they should rule not by power "but only [by way] of counsel from the word of God."[22]

This distinction was an important one in the Congregational theory. The consociation could not impose its will, but it could clear up the truth and withdraw fellowship from dissenting and obstinate congregations. The Cambridge Platform described the powers of the synod:

> . . . to debate and determine controversies of faith and cases of conscience . . . ; to clear from the word holy directions for the holy worship of God and good government of the church; to bear witness against maladministration and corruption for the reformation thereof; [but] not to exercise church censures in way of discipline, nor any other act of church authority or jurisdiction.[23]

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[18]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* pp. 189-190.
[19]Schneider, *The Puritan Mind,* p. 67.
[20]Quoted in Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 193.
[21]*Ibid.,* p. 298.
[22]*Ibid.,* p. 300.
[23]"The Cambridge Platform, " XVI, 4, p. 113.

To the degree that the deliberations and decisions of a synod were "consonant to the Word of God," they were

> . . . to be received with reverence and submission, not only for their agreement therewith . . . (which is the principal ground thereof, and without which they bind not at all), but also secondarily, for the power, whereby they are made, as being an ordinance of God appointed thereunto in His word. . . .[24]

Miller asserts that this was "about as far in the direction of centralization as Congregationalism could go without abandoning its basic premises."[25] And that was as close to the Presbyterian system as they could get without embracing the coercion of Presbyterianism's established church. When Presbyterianism finally gave up the idea of establishing itself, the Congregational opposition to its polity declined, and in the case of Connecticut, disappeared altogether. When the Connecticut colony adopted its Saybrook Platform in 1708, it instituted a "semi-presbyterian structure which provided for county consociations to enforce discipline and doctrine in the churches, ministerial associations to regularize ordinations and other matters, and a General Association of Ministers to oversee the commonwealth's church affairs."[26] This stand, says Ahlstrom, led to "ever closer ties" between the Connecticut churches and the Presbyterian churches of the middle colonies.[27] Thus in the matter of synods and consociations the Puritans' dilemma caused by autonomous individuals and a lack of due order was resolved as the churches developed the proper bounds of their power and the system of checks and balances between them.

Schneider, in reviewing the development of the synod and its increasing use in the history of the congregational church, concluded that the synod became a "frequent and necessary" institution and that that fact was evidence "that control was becoming increasingly difficult."

> Each synod was a symptom of differences, and each left its disaffected minority. Authority became more centralized, government more autocratic, and Hooker's vision of the democracy of the little kingdoms of Christ, wherein they shall teach no more every man his neighbor, faded into a dream. The theocracy became a government by the influential clergy, and the Holy Commonwealth degenerated into an ecclesiastical autocracy.[28]

What Schneider is describing is not so much an overdevelopment of centralized authority as it is a development of centralization out of a situation

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[24]*Ibid.*, XVI, 5, p. 113.

[25]Miller, *Orthodoxy,* p. 194.

[26]Sidney Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), p. 163.

[27]*Ibid.*

[28]Schneider, *The Puritan Mind,* p. 67.

that was basically anarchistic in the beginning. By asserting the autonomy of the particular congregation, the Congregational Way lacked due centralization; it had a less-than-autonomous central government. The growth and development of the synod as well as the increasing power of the elders within the particular churches can thus be seen as correcting movements, away from anarchy and back toward the balance of non-autonomy.

9

The Application of Non-Autonomy

When John Winthrop lectured the General Court on the nature of liberty, he likened the Christian's submission to authority to a wife's submission to her husband:

> The woman's own choice makes such a man her husband; yet being so chosen, he is her lord, and she is to be subject to him, yet in a way of liberty, not of bondage; and a true wife accounts her subjection her honor and freedom, and would not think her condition safe and free, but in her subjection to her husband's authority. Such is the liberty of the church under the authority of Christ, her king and husband; his yoke is so easy and sweet to her as a bride's ornaments; and if through frowardness or wantonness, etc., she shake it off, at any time, she is at no rest in her spirit, until she take it up again; and whether her Lord smiles upon her, and embraceth her in his arms, or whether he frowns, or rebukes, or smites her, she apprehends the sweetness of his love in all, and is refreshed, supported, and instructed by every such dispensation of his authority over her. On the other side, ye know who they are that complain of this yoke and say, let us break their bands, etc., we will not have this man rule over us. Even so, brethren, it will be between you and your magistrates. . . .[1]

It would be easy to write Winthrop off as a seventeenth-century male chauvinist, but that would miss his point. Winthrop was not speaking of women's rights (or lack of them) or even of the church as the bride of Christ. His issue was autonomy, as evidenced by his last sentence: "Even so . . . , it will be between you and your magistrates." Winthrop continued:

> . . . If you stand for your natural corrupt liberties, and will do what is good in your own eyes, you will not endure the least weight of authority, but will murmur, and oppose, and be always striving to shake off that yoke, but if you will be satisfied to enjoy such civil and lawful liberties, such as Christ allows you, then will you quietly and cheerfully submit unto that authority which is set over you, in all the administrations of it, for your good.[2]

Winthrop, as early as 1639, had noticed a spirit of autonomous liberty in some, but also noted that the "wisdom and care of the elders" prevailed

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[1] John Winthrop, *Winthrop's Journal: History of New England 1630-1649,* ed. James Kendall Hosmer (2 vols.; New York: Barnes and Noble, 1959), 239.

[2] *Ibid.*

against it and that the people were generally of such understanding and moderation that they could be easily guided by rule from Scripture and sound reason.[3] But by 1645 he found it necessary to give a public warning against such a spirit.

Yet all things considered, New England was fairly peaceful as civil states go. Timothy Breen has noted that

> . . . when peace is considered normal and natural, social history becomes the search for the causes of conflict rather than the causes of cohesion; and the achievement of a genuinely cohesive society is ignored in an exclusive concentration on whatever flaws in the surface calm have subsequently widened into contemporary chasms.[4]

Such a concentration, says Breen, has led historians of Puritanism to ignore the Puritan's "most startling"accomplishment: "fifty years of relative social peace."[5] This accomplishment, however, was not unknown to the Puritans of the time, nor were they without their opinions of its cause. In 1648 Thomas Shepherd could write that "though we be a people of many weaknesses and wants, yet we acknowledge our God to have been to us a God of many mercies, in respect of that sweet peace which he hath taken away from so many nations, yet continuing the same to us . . ."[6] And a 1645 appeal for funds and support for Harvard College listed the blessings of God upon the colony, and concluded:

> Above all our other blessings, in planting His own name and precious ordinances among us (we speak it humbly and in His fear), our endeavor is to have all His own institutions, and no more than His own, and all those in their native simplicity, without having any human dressings; having a liberty to enjoy all that God commands, and yet urged to nothing more than He commands. Now, whereso-ever, He records His name, thither He will come and bless . . .[7]

There were three particular features of the Massachusetts Bay colony which go a long way toward explaining the relative social peace of New England, writes Breen: (1) the widespread existence of an accepted ideology, (2) responsive social and political institutions, and (3) a high level of general prosperity in the colony during the seventeenth century.[8] The

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[3] *Ibid.*, I, 326f.

[4] Timothy H. Breen and Stephen Foster, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement: A Study of Social Cohesion in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts," *The Journal of American History,* LI, 1 (June 1973), 5.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Thomas Shepherd, "A Defense of the Answer made unto the Nine Questions or positions sent from New England against the reply thereto by Mr. John Ball," *The Puritans,* eds. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 122.

[7] "New England's First Fruits," *1493-1754: Discovering a New World,* Vol. I of *The Annals of America,* ed. Mortimer J. Adler (18 vols.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), p. 179.

[8] Breen, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement," p. 9.

author of "New England's First Fruits" did not class them in those three heads, but he spoke to the same points.

The accepted and widespread ideology of Massachusetts was, of course, orthodox Puritanism in its non-autonomous form. From the beginning Massachusetts had been conceived as an experiment in Christian living; a model of Christian charity, said Winthrop, "under the power and purity of His holy ordinances."[9] The leaders, whom the people followed, proposed to develop the implications of Christian philosophy in church and state, family and school, ethics and conduct. The fact that they were starting fresh and were in substantial agreement made their situation much easier. It was not necessary to tear down or modify an old society in order to construct their new model. When they left England, they had left most of their opponents behind them, and those who came to the New World were in basic agreement over most of the essentials concerning the need of due form in church and state and the source of ultimate authority in the society. Bernard Bailyn has estimated that ". . . most of the 20,000 Englishmen who migrated to America in the 1630's sought to recreate the village and farm life they had known."[10]

> They accepted and probably welcomed the medieval social teaching of orthodox Puritanism if only for its inspiring support of the idea of the close-knit community that existed for the good of all its members and in which each man was his brother's keeper.[11]

Yet Breen also notes that Congregationalism itself was a source of stability. While it was "flexible enough to accommodate moderate differences, the orthodox faith still served as a useful test for detecting and expelling extremists, thereby precluding any prolonged clash over religious fundamentals."[12] True religion, explained Nathaniel Ward, is a testing fire which doth congregate homogeneity and segregate heterogeneity.[13] And thus Puritanism in Massachusetts congregated those of like faith and shunted the rest off to Rhode Island. The author of "New England's First Fruits" pointed out that

> in subduing those erroneous opinions carried over from hence by some of the passengers, which for a time infested our church's peace, but (through the goodness of God) by conference preaching, a general assembly of learned men, magistrates' timely care, and, lastly, by

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[9]John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *1493-1754: Discovering a New World,* Vol. I of *The Annals of America,* ed. Mortimer J. Adler (18 vols.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), p. 114..

[10]Bernard Bailyn, "The Merchants and the Protestant Ethic," *Puritanism in Seventeenth-Century Massachusetts* ed. David D. Hall (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968), p. 88.

[11]*Ibid.*

[12]Breen, "The Puritans" Greatest Achievement," p. 10.

[13]Quoted in Breen, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement," p. 10.

> God's own hand from heaven, in most remarkable strokes upon some of the chief fomenters of them, the matter came to such a happy conclusion that most of the seduced came humbly and confessed their errors in our public assemblies and abide to this day constant in the truth. These (that remained obstinate), finding no fit market there to vent their ware, departed from us to an island far off, some of whom also since that time have repented and returned to us and are received again into our bosoms. And from that time, not any unsound, unsavory, and giddy fancy have dared to lift up his head or abide the light among us.[14]

Thus Congregational Puritanism as the accepted ideology of Massachusetts Bay established and stabilized the colony, creating a church and community capable of both maintaining order and of disciplining its wayward membership. A due form of ecclesiastical government had indeed been established.

Likewise, the Bay Colony achieved a due form of civil government and leadership which was responsibe to the needs of the society. When Winthrop, aboard the *Arbella,* had described the operating premises of the colony to be formed, he had called it "a model of Christian charity" and pointed out that the whole basis of that society would be love and brotherly concern for one another:

> For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man; we must hold each other in brotherly affection; we must be willing to rid ourselves of our excesses to supply others' necessities; we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others' conditions our own and rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and common work, our community as members of the same body.[15]

For the Puritan the life and interests of society were equally as important as the life and interests of the individual. Society was an organism — Winthrop spoke of it as a body — and a harmony of individualism and society was to be sought and found. The covenant idea, as we have seen, enabled the Puritan society to reconcile the interests of the one and the many by enabling each sphere or component of society to seek its own good yet to contribute to and be subordinated to the whole at the same time. There was a multiplication of covenant activity, each covenant having a voluntaristic basis. Each covenant or sphere was limited, and no sphere had final power. Each compact was based on the voluntary consent of its participants since it was believed that meaningful obedience could not grow out of coercion.[16]

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[14]"New England's First Fruits," p. 178.
[15]Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," p. 115.
[16]Breen, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement," p. 12.

This voluntary consent gave rise both to social responsibility and to social harmony with the colony as a whole. Clifford Shipton has oberved that

> . . . what went on in these years has been quite generally misunderstood by historians, particularly by those who have not realized that . . . religious and civil life were an integrated whole. . . . The Puritan's preoccupation with moral values made him keenly aware that he should keep an eye out for the fallen sparrow, and should temper the law to the shorn lamb, or to the debtor. This is why Massachusetts passed the first statute forbidding cruelty to animals, and, for their day, the most liberal laws for the protection of debtors. With the concern for the physical well-being of the individual went a certain amount of respect for his opinions.[17]

Thus, within the bounds of their covenanted communities and churches, the Puritans exercised "relatively broad" powers both in church and civil affairs. And the governments were so constituted in each as to make them responsive to the people. Likewise, notes Breen, the judicial system of the Bay Colony contributed to tranquility. "As soon as the Puritans arrived in America, their leaders established clear procedures for handling legal disputes. . . . As long as the commonwealth provided an equitable means for hearing grievances, the citizens had little reason for disrupting the colony's internal harmony."[18]

The author of the "First Fruits" observed all this when he noted the "good hand of God" evidenced

> . . . in giving of such magistrates as are all of them godly men and members of our churches, who countenance those that be good and punish evildoers, that a vile person does not lift up his head; nor need to hang it down, that (to God's praise be it spoken) one may live there from year to year and not see a drunkard, hear an oath, or meet a beggar. Now where sin is punished, and judgment executed, God is wont to bless that place and protect it.[19]

Finally, the general prosperity of the Massachusetts Bay colony was a factor that engendered social peace and order in its first generation. There were no major wars, epidemics, famine, or social discontent or violence, but there was a great growth in commerce, trade, agriculture, and population. There was abundance of land and economic opportunity for all.

Part of that prosperity was due to the economic and social conditions of the day, of course. Any colony should have done as well. But part was due also to the ideology of Puritanism and the work ethic that stemmed from it. Larzer Ziff writes that the Puritans provided

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[17]Clifford K. Shipton, "The Locus of Authority in Colonial Massachusetts," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays,* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), p. 136.

[18]Breen, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement," p. 15.

[19]"New England's First Fruits," p. 179.

> . . . an ideal base for colonization in their fidelity to contract obligations; their conviction of the sanctity of hard work; their experience in the pragmatic organization of a self-governing community within the larger community; and their consciousness of the independence from human traditions in favor of their atemporal relationship to a true church and true society that was timeless. These characteristics would gain them financial backing and would provide them with a psychological stability under the strain of isolation from the habitual conveniences of the English community.[20]

Simpson, in discussing the Puritan's contributions to politics, lists this same ethic as one of the major contributions of Puritanism: ". . . it is no bad thing to have habits of honesty, sobriety, responsibility, and hard work impressed on a community."[21]

The prosperity of New England was known to the people of the time, and the fact was duly noted by the author of the "First Fruits," who saw the hand of God "in giving us such peace and freedom from enemies, when almost all the world is on a fire that (excepting that short trouble with Pequots) we never heard of any sound of war to this day," and

> in settling and bringing civil matters to such a maturity in a short time among us, having planted fifty towns and villages, built thirty or forty churches, and more ministers' houses, a castle, a college, prisons, forts . . . and all these upon our own charges, no public hand reaching out any help; having comfortable houses, gardens, orchards, grounds fenced, cornfields, etc., and such a form and face of a commonwealth appearing in all the plantation, that strangers from other parts, seeing how much is done in so few years, have wondered at God's blessing on our endeavors.[22]

In these ways, then, the Puritan philosophy was successfully implemented in Massachusetts Bay. The ideology of Puritanism with its emphasis on limited and divided power, its spirit of non-autonomy, and its insistence on the application of God's law as an absolute and sovereign authority outside of man was instituted in a form of government and social order which was based on the consent embodied in the covenant, limited by the law, and active both in preserving the social fabric and the individual liberty of its citizens. At the same time the Puritan ideology developed an ethic that enabled its adherents to live realistically and prosperously in the holy commonwealth that had been created. In recounting the blessings of God upon New England, Thomas Shepherd listed these same items, the

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[20]Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: Viking Press, 1973), pp. 35f.

[21]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 113.

[22]"New England's First Fruits," p. 178.

> . . . liberty we have in God's house, the blessed ministry of the Word, the sweet unity and communion of God's churches and ministers, increase and multiplication of churches, Christian government in the Commonwealth, and many other mercies we enjoy, but especially the gracious presence of Christ to many of our souls in all these.[23]

Shepherd thought that these facts would speak for themselves and convince any honest observer:

> . . . if it were well known and considered, or if we were able to express and recount the singular workings of divine providence, for the bringing on of this work, to what it is come into, it would stop the mouths of all that have not an heart to accuse and blaspheme the goodness of God in his glorious works: whatever many may say or think, we believe after-times will admire and adore the Lord herein, when all his holy ends and the ways he hath used to bring them about shall appear.[24]

It remains to show that the concept of non-autonomy was determinative. And that point was also observed by the author of the "First Fruits." It has been our endeavor, he wrote, "to have all [God's] own institutions, and no more than His own, and all those in their native simplicity, without having any human dressings; having a liberty to enjoy all that God commands, and yet urged to nothing more than He commands."[25] To have anything more than God commanded was human autonomy; to have anything less than He commanded was disorder and lawlessness. The essence of non-autonomy was to have all that God commanded and no more. To the extent that New England accomplished that, to that extent she prospered. The problems she had and the dilemmas she faced, as we have seen, can be traced to having or attempting to have either more or less than God's own institutions. What the historians have called the "declension" was simply the result of turning away from those institutions in one way or another to human autonomy.

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[23] "Thomas Shepherd, A Defense of the Answer . . . ," pp. 122f.
[24] *Ibid.*, p. 121.
[25] "New England's First Fruits," p. 179.

10

Declension

It is a matter of debate among historians whether a declension did in fact occur during the period following 1650 or 1660 (the first generation). And, if it did occur, there is further debate as to the nature of the declension and its elements. In his essay entitled "Errand into the Wilderness," Perry Miller made a distinction between an "errand" as, in the first sense, a short journey on which an inferior is sent by a superior, and, in the second sense, as the actual business which is done on an errand — "the purpose itself." Miller sees the Puritan attempt at a Holy Commonwealth as a transposition from the first sense to the second, i.e., the Puritans first thought of themselves as setting out to fashion a due form of government and to become a city set on a hill as an example for the whole world. But after they had created it, they found that the rest of the world was not paying any particular attention to them, and so they became an errand in the second sense: an attempt at least to make a due form in America in and for itself and not for England and Europe. Miller sees this as the significance of the impassioned pleas of the Mathers and other of the second generation divines who lamented the way that Massachusetts had turned in the 1660's. They were lamenting the failure of the errand in the first sense and were seeking for their own identification, and in so doing, were moving toward the errand in the second sense, even though they were not fully conscious of the change they were undergoing.[1]

Darrett Rutman, on the other hand, has shown that the people of that period did not necessarily share the idealism of the leaders; consequently, he says, we must revise our ideas about a Puritan decline. What was happening instead was that the view of life and society held by the leaders was gradually being modified to accommodate that view of life and the world held by the man in the street: ". . . what are we to describe as 'Puritan,' asks Rutman,

> . . . the ideals of the articulate few . . . or the actuality of the . . . man in the village lane? The very fact that such a question can be asked would seem to imply that the description of New England in terms of Puritanism, or of Puritanism in terms of New England, is erroneous. Certainly the concept of a Puritan golden age, followed by a decline, disappears. Mather's degeneration is, in large part, nothing more than the insistence by the generality upon a relationship between

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[1]Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), pp. 1-15.

> the individual and society rather different from that held to by the leaders. . . .[2]

In contrast to both Rutman and Miller is the position taken by Stephen Foster in his study of the Puritan social ethic in New England's first century. Said Foster,

> It has become a historiographical commonplace that New England society changed drastically between its foundation and the early eighteenth century, and in a setting of rapid social evolution towards modernity an archaic, partly static social ethic is undeniably inappropriate. But this very quality of the ethic, which is documented, should in itself cast some doubt on the commonplace about social change, which is not. Not even the law codes, the registers of social values most sensitive to the needs of a society in rapid transition, show much alteration until well into the eighteenth century.
>
> The formal literature yields still less comfort: New England authors were not particularly unobservant and yet somehow they seem to have overlooked entirely the alleged transformation of their society, unless one counts the ritualized lamentations about declension, which would fit as well in 1360 as in 1660. . . .[3]

It follows that generalizations about declension are at best dangerous and misleading. The historians have not even agreed on what constitutes declension. For Perry Miller, declension was that decline in religious fervor and the loss of the concept of "errand." For Darrett Rutman declension was nothing more than a shift in the relative influence of certain groups in the society. Herbert Schneider saw the declension in a declining sense of sin. The Mathers and other contemporary observers tended to see it as the loss of influence of church and clergy. And Foster denies that there was any development or change in any one coherent direction.

Yet it is obvious that there were changes in the social and spiritual life of New England. Some of the changes, writes Alden Vaughan, are hard to document, since they were more shifts in "mood" than in action: "The erosion was gradual, almost imperceptible, but few historians doubt that it took place or that it contributed significantly to the transformation of the Puritan into a Yankee."[4]

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[2]Darrett B. Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," *Law and Authority in Colonial America: Selected Essays,* ed. George Athan Billias (Barre, Massachusetts: Barre Publishers, 1965), pp. 163f.

[3]Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way: The Puritan Social Ethic in the First Century of Settlement in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), pp. xiii f.

[4]Alden T. Vaughan (ed.), *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 298.

What is needed, then, is a standard whereby to judge the shifts and changes that occurred in the holy commonwealth over the years: one that will enable us to distinguish between the changes that were merely changes and those which represented declension. The concept of human autonomy as we have developed it in this paper may serve us as such a standard. This is not to say that the definitions and standards applied by the historians listed above (and others) have been incorrect. But it is to say that the concept of human autonomy lends a clearer focus to the discussion both of the declension and the development of the holy commonwealth. In terms of human autonomy, declension may be defined as any change that involved a greater assertion of human autonomy and thus resulted in a growing disharmony and disorder within the colony. In terms of non-autonomy, the development of the colony may be seen as the fruit of Puritanism's "due form of government." For instance, there was in the development of the colony an evolution of congregationalism toward a more presbyterian form of government, as we have seen. Increase Mather had led the way with a call for a synod meeting to consider such measures as appeared necessary to prevent schisms, heresies, and other problems. In 1691 he attempted a union with the Presbyterians; in 1670 Solomon Stoddard proposed a national church along presbyterian lines; in 1705 a system of standing councils and associations was formed; and in 1708 the Connecticut church adopted the presbyterian-style Saybrook Platform. In light of the discussion above concerning the basic disorder and lack of due centralization (the autonomy) of the congregational theory of church government, these later developments would seem to be changes for the better, i.e., toward due order, rather than toward declension. But note that when the same presbyterian-style plan was proposed for Massachusetts in 1710, the congregationalists opposed it by arguing the traditional congregational arguments for separate churches, but this time with a new slant, which showed the inroads made by autonomous thinking. John Wise led the argument and based his arguments on the ideas of natural law, reason, and rights and liberties, whereas the traditional arguments had been based on the scriptural pattern of the early churches. "The former Congregationalism," writes Schneider, "was an integral part of the holy commonwealth; John Wise's congregationalism was the first formulation of secular republicanism."[5]

> Here we have a complete reversal of puritan philosophy. The state is not justified because it makes a contribution to the kingdom of God; the churches of God are justified because they tend to "cultivate humanity and promote the happiness of all and the good of every man in all his rights." [Wise] Nothing could be a more eloquent tribute to

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[5]Herbert Wallace Schneider, *The Puritan Mind* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1964), p.96.

> the new spirit of New England: the churches are to be modeled on the principles of civil society, not *vice versa.* It is not the concept of democracy which is significant here, for that had been present from the beginning of New England; it is the secularization, the dethronement of God, the unholiness of the commonwealth that marks the revolution.[6]

Wise, it should be noted, was only formalizing what had been in effect since 1691 when the Massachusetts State charter had cut the formal ties between the church and the state by providing for a property qualification for voting rather than a religious one. After that, the Congregational church was only formally established, supported and ruled by the state and definitely subordinate to it, but no longer in a position to exercise spiritual influence and control of the state.

There are two areas of Puritan life and thought in which we can observe a general decline, then — in the unity of Puritan thought and in the piety of Puritan life. The Puritan concept of unity, as we have seen, involved a commonwealth of separate spheres of covenant activity — close, compact, coordinate, but not confounded; independent but inter-dependent. Perry Miller observed that the concept of unity was not alone the possession of the Puritans, however. Both Puritans and Anglicans

> . . . still believed that all knowledge was one, that life was unified, that science, economics, political theory, aesthetic standards, rhetoric and art, all were organized in a hierarchical scale of values that tended upward to the end-all and be-all of creation, the glory of God. . . .[They] struggled to maintain a complete harmony of reason and faith, science and religion, earthly dominion and the government of God. . . . [B]oth were endeavoring to uphold a symmetrical union of heart and head without impairment of either.[7]

But though this was their goal, they were not so successful in maintaining it. Intellectually, they maintained it till the end of the century, but, as Miller puts it, "By the beginning or middle of the next century their successors . . . found themselves no longer capable of sustaining this unity. . . ."[8] In more tangible form, the decline of unity came in the clash between the individual and the society and between the state and the church. While authority was divided between certain limited and separate spheres, there was conflict between them and the separation of the spheres grew wider. "Society was not something to which the people of the Bay commonwealth invariably subordinated their own interests," writes Rutman.

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[6] *Ibid.*, p. 97.

[7] Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (eds.), *The Puritans* (2 vols.; rev. ed.; New York: Harper and Row, 1963), I, 10-11.

[8] *Ibid.*

> . . . Indeed, the abstract concept of 'society' seems to have held little meaning for a generality intent upon individual pursuits. Nor was authority a pervasive thing, obliging the individual through the family, church, and state to sublimate his personal aspirations to the community as a whole.[9]

As the spheres separated more widely, the division between church and state was more pronounced: the church was seen as ruling in spiritual matters while the state ruled in temporal and secular matters. The elements of authority were seen as separate and divided rather than as cooperating and unified. The individual looked to the church on moral, spiritual, and theological matters, but to the secular state for protection, welfare, prosperity, and justice — the "keys to personal aggrandizement."[10] In tracing this development through the writings of the Puritans, we should be aware, warns Rutman, that there "is a subtle difference between a Winthrop or Cotton for whom the goal of society was the pleasing of God; a Samuel Williard to whom a happy, contented people was most pleasing to God; and a John Wise to whom 'the Happiness of the People, is the end of [the State's] being; or main business to be attended and done.' "[11] The transformation from the "pleasing of God" to the "happiness of the people" as the end of the state is certainly an example of the developing autonomous outlook, but the more significant development is the acceptance of the division of the commonwealth, the acceptance of the idea that the interests of church and state were mutually exclusive, divided and distinct, and that the more important concerns of the people were bound up with the state rather than the church. It was not until 1830 that the Congregational Church was disestablished institutionally, but the spiritual separation had taken place a hundred years earlier.

The decline of Puritan piety came about in a similar way, by an acceptance of what had become a commonplace in New England. As Rutman noted above, the view of society held by the leaders was not always the same as that held by the man in the village lane, and the leaders finally found it necessary to modify in that direction.

It is an error to believe that the leaders rationalized or accommodated the decline in religious faith, writes Robert Middlekauf: "a more prevalent preaching upheld the old creed. . . . [But] this preaching represented a largely clerical culture increasingly at variance with the chief dispositions of society in New England."[12]

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[9]Rutman, "The Mirror of Puritan Authority," p.160.

[10]*Ibid.*, p. 163.

[11]*Ibid.*

[12]Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596-1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), p. 9.

The impact of such preaching was described graphically by Herbert Schneider, who pictured a Puritan sitting in the Old South Church of Boston in about the year 1724, listening to the Reverend Mr. Samuel Willard, Vice-President of Harvard College, preaching on the first question of the Shorter Catechism, touching on the emptiness of life without God. Schneider continues:

> Unless you are exceptionally irresponsive, the boundless imagination and occasional eloquence of the preacher has touched you. Your soul expands until it can grasp the whole creation and scarcely feel it. The world looks empty, void and waste, full of horrible disappointments and broken cisterns. You turn therefore, for your own best good and enjoyment to the glory of God and in him you dwell at home. But now church is over and you are plunged into the heart of Boston, the metropolis of New England, growing, enterprising, exciting and absorbing. It is not empty, void, or waste. God himself must find his own best good and enjoyment in dwelling at home in Boston![13]

Some such "intellectual sommersault," says Schneider, was performed each week by the Puritan layman. "On Sunday the Puritan as wholeheartedly lost himself in God as on Monday he devoted himself to business."[14] Thus the Puritan leaders and intellectuals, though they continued to hold to the ideals and creeds of Puritanism, were increasingly out of touch with the reality of the man in the pew. The theological struggles revealed that New England was no longer in unity and harmony as far as theology went, and the "internal decay of the saints" forced them to choose at last "between remaining loyal to the Holy Commonwealth . . . and remaining loyal to New England, though it refused to be holy."[15]

By the eighteenth century the holy commonwealth was no longer a peaceful, harmonious colony, but was, rather, shaken with internal disorders. During the 1680's the Dominion of New England was established as the "antagonized crown" began to apply imperial pressure on the New England colony.[16] The forms of government and social order which had formerly worked to minimize grievances and conflict were undermined. The common ideology, the accepted order of society, the natural authority of the chosen leaders, and the decline of prosperity as a result of the war and the new navigation laws all worked together to change Massachusetts from a relatively peaceful to a relatively turbulent society.

The colony declined in terms of its covenanted community, the social fabric being rent for personal advantage, in terms of its govern-

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[13]Schneider, *The Puritan Mind,* p. 101.
[14]*Ibid.*
[15]*Ibid.*, p.73.
[16]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. xv.

ment with a significant popular base which would elect the governor and assistants as well as the deputies, and in terms of its economic prosperity as the lack of specie and the growth of paper currency bankrupted the economy.[17]

Even more significant was the deterioration of Puritan piety, a deterioration which was "entirely compatible with the most preserving virtues," writes Simpson. But it means

> . . . contracted sensibility; gestures replacing feelings; tastes subduing zeal; pride elbowing out humility, intellect playing a game; divided souls acting a part their ancestors have forced on them. . . . Equally far is the distance between the Puritan who knew the difference between spiritual and financial success and his descendant who sometimes confused them. The old Puritans had a grim description for this compromise with the covenant: they called it "the forms of godliness without the power."[18]

Such is the fruit of human autonomy. William Bradford's lament in his old age may serve for Massachusetts Bay as well as for the Plymouth colony:

> O that these ancient members had not died or been dissipated . . . or else that this holy care and constant faithfulness had still lived, and remained with these that survived, and were in times afterward added unto them. But (alas) that subtle serpent hath slyly wound in himself under fair pretence of necessity and the like to untwist these sacred bonds and ties, and as it were insensibly, by degrees, to dissolve or in a great measure to weaken, the same. I have been happy, in my first times, to see, and with much comfort to enjoy, the blessed fruits of this sweet communion, but it is now a part of my misery in old age, to find and feel the decay and want thereof . . . , and with grief and sorrow of heart, to lament and bewail the same.[19]

But even at that, declension came slow and hard to New England because of the non-autonomous institutional forms that had been developed. Stephen Foster notes that the

> . . . quintessential Puritanism of New England reveals above all that tensions and contradictions were an inherent part of the Puritan outlook, not mere products of its strained co-existence with traditional social forms. American Puritanism managed to combine the traditional and the radical, the voluntary and the authoritarian, as well as a host of other diametrically opposed impulses, into one organic whole that apparently thrived on its own internal conflicts. . . . Contradictions within Puritanism produced tensions and schism

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[17]Breen, "The Puritans' Greatest Achievement," p. 20.

[18]Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), p. 36.

[19]Quoted in Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England,* p. 33f.

> but they also enabled it to embrace the most diverse kinds of individuals . . . and to adapt to the most abrupt shifts in the fortunes of its adherents. In this it bears a marked resemblance to another and more modern idealogy [sic] whose internal tensions have also been productive of both fission and durability. . . .[20]

It was the concept of checks and balances between spheres of divided, limited, and non-sovereign authority that enabled the holy commonwealth to embody such tensions, balance them, and turn them to productive energy. Thus they built not so much an institutionally balanced society as a self-correcting and self-stabilizing society. As excesses or imbalances built up in one area, the pressures for a reaction in the other direction also built up. Just as the Puritan dilemmas had given rise to corrective adjustments, so many other distinctive features of Puritan society were abandoned or modified as the years passed. Open communion replaced the closed communion of the Congregational church and its visible saints. The Brattle Street church professed to vary "in some circumstances" from the other churches of New England, but only in these and no others, among them, membership by profession only and baptism to any person requesting it. And there was an attempt in 1710 to establish a presbyterian form of church government. Likewise, Gary North, in his study of "Puritan economic experiments," observed that Puritanism with its emphasis on frugality, responsibility, wise and rational use of resources, and optimism, should have resulted in individual and aggregate economic growth, yet the Puritan theologians of the second generation tried to limit such growth with sumptuary legislation both civil and ecclesiastical. He notes, however, that such laws went unenforced, and fashions continued to degenerate until in 1680 the civil magistrates "abandoned the attempt to maintain medieval concepts of social status in an increasingly modern culture."[21] But, concludes North,

> . . . cultural and economic Puritanism, . . . still operated, but on a private level. Individual saints saved, planned, built for the future. The Holy Commonwealth . . . was more mature. It had freed men from many of the shackles that had bound them for a thousand years. . . . What was socially inoperative in Puritanism had been largely scrapped by a later generation of Puritans.[22]

Some of these changes, though they may have been called declension at the time, did not involve any assertion of human autonomy nor result in disorder or disharmony, and therefore cannot be classed as part of the declension. There were simply changes, some more successful than others,

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[20]Foster, *Their Solitary Way,* xvi f.
[21]Gary North, *Puritan Economic Experiments* ([n.p.]: Remnant Press, 1974), p. 38.
[22]*Ibid.,* p. 39.

and they also generated their own reactions and corrections, as happened, for instance, when the evangelists of the Great Awakening reacted against the changes instituted by Solomon Stoddard (open communion) and the Brattle Street Church.

Thomas Prince reflected both the declension of autonomy and the self-correcting power of the non-autonomous society when he put the people of New England "in mind of the Righteous Acts of the Lord to them and their fathers" in 1730, the hundredth anniversary of the founding of New England. First he spoke of the declension in terms of the loss of piety and reality in spiritual life:

> But O! Alas! Our great and dangerous declensions! To what an awful measure are they gone already, how transcendently guilty do they make us, how threatening do they grow. . . .
>
> Though 'tis true we still maintain in general the same religious principles and profession with our pious fathers, yet how greatly is the spirit of piety declined among us, how sadly is religion turning more and more into a mere form of godliness, as the apostle speaks, without the power, and how dreadfully is the love of the world prevailing more and more upon this professing people! And this notwithstanding all the zealous testimonies which have from time to time for above this threescore years been borne against these growing evils.[23]

But then he used that declension to encourage a corrective reaction among his people:

> Now then let the affecting view of all these things, both present, past, and future, excite us all in our several places to do our utmost that we may not share in the dreadful guilt of this declension, nor have our part in drawing on the lamentable consesquences of it. But let us lay it to heart and mourn before the Lord, first our own apostasies and sins and then the apostasies and sins prevailing among this people. Let us cry earnestly for the spirit of grace to be poured forth on us and them, that the hearts of the children may be returned to the God of their fathers and may continue steadfast in His sacred covenant. And being revived ourselves, let us labor to revive religion in our several families, and then rise up for God in this evil day, bear our open witness also against the public degeneracy, and do what in us lies for the revival of the power of piety among all about us.[24]

Not long after, the Great Awakening broke out. For the Puritan, it seems, not even declension could be autonomous! Vaughan comments that

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[23]Thomas Prince, "The People of New England Put in Mind of the Righteous Acts of the Lord to Them and Their Fathers, and Reasoned With Concerning Them," *The Puritan Tradition in America 1620-1730* ed. Alden T. Vaughan (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. 347.

[24]*Ibid.*, p. 348.

Prince's sermon may be read as an obituary as well as a celebration, for the age of Puritan hegemony was dead and not even the Great Awakening could revive it although ". . . New England, even all America, would long bear the impact of the Puritan tradition."[25] It was that Puritan tradition, however, that was most important about the Puritan hegemony, especially its non-autonomous institutions with its system of checks and balances. They, and the doctrines on which they were based, were God's own institutions. To the extent the Puritans maintained them, they succeeded in establishing their due form of government. To the extent they turned away from them, the holy commonwealth declined. The existence of what is called the "Puritan tradition" should tell us that they succeeded more than they failed.

[25]Vaughan, *The Puritan Tradition,* p. 338.

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Summary and Conclusion: Human Autonomy and the Puritan Dilemma

> Beloved, there is now set before us life, and good, death and evil, in that we are commanded this day to love the Lord our God and to love one another, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His ordinances and His laws, and the articles of our covenant with Him, that we may live and be multiplied, and that the Lord our God may bless us in the land whither we go to possess it. But if our hearts shall turn away so that we will not obey, but shall be seduced and worship other gods, our pleasures and profits, and serve them, it is propounded unto us this day, we shall surely perish out of the good land whither we pass over this vast sea to possess it. Therefore let us choose life, that we, and our seed, may live by obeying His voice, and cleaving to Him, for He is our life, and our prosperity.[1]

When John Winthrop spoke these words to the passengers on board the *Arbella,* he was concluding a sermon in which he had set forth some of the operating premises and goals of the holy commonwealth the Puritans hoped to create in America. He had called his sermon "a model of Christian charity," arguing that for the end they had in mind

> . . . we must be knit together in this work as one man; we must entertain each other in brotherly affection; we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of other's necessities; we must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience, and liberality; we must delight in each other; make other's conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor and suffer together always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body, so shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace.[2]

If we do this, said Winthrop, then the Lord will command a blessing upon us and will make us "a praise and glory," so that men shall say of plantations to come "the Lord make it like that of New England."[3]

On the other hand, he continued, if we deal falsely with our God in this work, we shall be made "a story and a byword." "We shall open the

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[1] John Winthrop, "A Model of Christian Charity," *1493-1754: Discovering a New World,* Vol. I of *The Annals of America,* ed. Mortimer J. Adler (18 vols.; Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1968), p. 115.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God and all professors for God's sake. We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants . . . and be consumed out of the good land. . . ."[4]

The history of the study of the Puritans has never quite resolved that particular dilemma. Were the Puritans "a praise and glory" or "a story and a byword"? Does the Holy Commonwealth merit our imitation or our shame? How are we to understand and interpret the Puritan experience? In the course of the present study we have surveyed the problems and dilemmas the Puritans faced as they attempted to formulate a due form of government within the model of Christian charity. We have also reviewed many of the answers and explanations given in the past by the major historians of Puritanism. Let us now address directly some of the questions that have been raised and the issues that must be faced and show that the concept of human autonomy was determinative in the way the Puritan saw himself and his problems.

The Puritan dilemma was not a product of the Puritans' conflict with reality. It was rather an inherent part of his worldview. The Puritan saw life as a complexity, not as a simple uniformity of the one or of the many, but as a complexity of both, a cosmic net of unity and diversity at the same time — a corporate whole made up of significant and individual parts. The Puritan saw the creation as created in the image of the Creator, and the Creator was the Triune God. Therefore the creation reflects the same principle in reality; in social intercourse the reality of unity and diversity must be maintained. Failure to understand this complexity in the Puritan worldview has given rise to a situation in the study of Puritanism wherein one part of the complexity is used as a definition and then the other part is used to show the dilemma or the declension. A typical example is that of Stephen Foster who wrote that

> Puritan doctrine itself tended to contradict its own social ideal. Advocates of political hierarchy would do well to base their franchise on something other than church membership; governors who rule by God's ordinance should not make their offices dependent on popular elections; ministers who preach that every man should remain in his calling should not call upon every man to increase his estate; above all, anyone who maintains traditional concepts of social relationships should not found them on voluntary contracts. The drama of Puritan society in New England lies in the extent to which the force of ideological commitment alone could maintain a system of political and social subordination for which the traditional material and institutional bases were lacking and which was undermined by many tendencies within the very ideology which supported it.[5]

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[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Stephen Foster, *Their Solitary Way: The Puritan Social Ethic in the First Century of Settlement in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1971), p. 7.

The Puritan worldview would maintain that these dilemmas are not inherently contradictory, but rather that each horn of the dilemma is simply there as a limited aspect of reality and ultimately resolved only in the sovereignty of God. The Puritan could experience the unity of the various aspects of reality, but he could not without sin unite them visibly on earth or reduce them to less than their created complexity. Such a reduction was the essence of autonomy.

To preserve the complexity of the creation, therefore, the Puritan used the doctrine of the covenant and the spheres of covenant activity to divide, limit, and balance the complexities of reality. The result was a society that was full of tension, contradictions, and internal conflicts, none of which could dominate and none of which was final or universal. For the Puritan, the sovereignty and absolute authority of God was a real, tangible, feature of life.

In a similar way the dilemmas of balance were resolved in the Puritan worldview. The idea of balance is always related to a reference point. Without a stable reference point, the concept of balance simply degenerates to a contentless power struggle. But not for the Puritan. They had a stable reference point; they found it in the Triune God who was sovereign in the affairs of men and who had revealed his law in the Bible. Thus in the Bible God spoke in a meaningful way to the problems of life. This stable and meaningful reference point is also a key to the Puritan worldview. The dilemmas of balance were resolved not merely in the act of balancing one concept against the other, but in defining from Scripture the specific content of the concepts to be balanced. Winthrop's treatment of liberty and authority in his "little speech" is the best example of this kind of resolution.

It was these aspects of the Puritan worldview that enabled them to cope realistically with the problems they faced in implementing their holy commonwealth and to avoid being disillusioned by them. But if they were able to cope so well, why did the problems arise in the first place and why did the holy commonwealth ultimately fail? The answer lies precisely in the concept of sin as human autonomy. The Puritan was ever aware that man, even regenerate man, was still a fallen and limited creature and therefore at best able only to implement and obey the law of God substantially and never perfectly. There were problems in the holy commonwealth at those points where Puritan theory sought autonomy, such as in trying to identify the visible and invisible churches as in the concept of "visible sainthood," or where they abandoned non-autonomy by allowing a confusion of the spheres of church and state, or in allowing a lack of due order in church government. These problems and their fruits continued to haunt New England in various forms throughout the rest of the seventeenth century. The ultimate failure of the holy commonwealth came with the decline of the concepts of unity and piety, as the Puritans lost both the sense of the covenanted spheres united in the Truine God and the reality of the spiritual

view of life. The concept of human autonomy was expressed in the secularization of the state and in the "intellectual sommersaults" the Puritan made as he moved back and forth between his secular and spiritual interests.

But even at that, the Puritan built better than he knew, for in the complexity of his institutions he had incorporated so many counterbalancing interests and tensions that none could gain ultimate power. Thus the society became a self-correcting and self-stabilizing society. Thus declension came slowly, and what was best about Puritanism was preserved and passed into the life of the nation.

Finally, what is the significance of the concept of human autonomy for the study of Puritanism and Puritan historiography? How does this concept relate to the problem of understanding Puritanism from the viewpoint of the Puritan intellectual or the man in the village lane? How does it relate to the problems of dealing with Puritanism, especially the relation between ideas and institutions, the historical and intellectual limits of Puritanism, the definition of Puritanism and the range of Puritan types? How does this thesis modify or change the concept of the Puritan dilemma as a device for understanding Puritanism?

As to the problem of understanding Puritanism from the viewpoint of the Puritan intellectual or of the man in the village lane, the concept of human autonomy enables us to understand both. It was the Puritan intellectual who understood best the doctrines of authority and sin and who applied them more or less consistently in his thinking, writing, and preaching. It should not surprise us, however, to find that the man in the village lane was not theologically reflective, and therefore that he was more inclined to act and react in ways that reflected human autonomy. But the tensions between the two groups could be contained as long as neither asserted its ultimate power and autonomy. The Puritans did not compel belief, but they did restrict certain concepts and practices which they believed were contrary to the law of God. Within those bounds, both the intellectual leaders and the men in the village lane, the regenerate and the unregenerate, the orthodox and the heretic could live together, agreeing to disagree as it were. When once the rules changed so that the restrictions of the Word of God and the Congregational Way were no longer given favorable status, the "quiet revolution of the suppressed majority"[6] occurred, and biblical non-autonomy gave way to human autonomy and a struggle for power and influence between the various groups and factions.

The relation between ideas and institutions is a similar problem. In the light of the principle of non-autonomy, we may assert that there is no institution that does not embody an idea, that is not an idea in action. We

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[6]Alden T. Vaughan (ed.), *The Puritan Tradition in America, 1620-1730* (Columbia, S.C.: University of South Carolina Press, 1972), p. xv.

may also assert that all ideas are embodied in institutions or potential institutions. Ideas and institutions are inseparable, and both are equally ultimate. Thus the Puritan's theology was instituted in his due forms, and his due forms in turn both reflected his theology and his modifications of it over time. The problem should not be reduced to a matter of correlating theory and practice, doctrine and action. Foster has observed that

> . . . men may not always act according to the rules, and yet the existence of accepted rules can influence their style of action even when they ignore virtue and apparently quite regularly practice vice. . . . Intimations of mortality come more often to ordinary men, who usually take some comfort in knowing that they have followed their particular set of eternal verities part of the time and have not really enjoyed themselves the rest. . . . Either way the rules remain even to those who value deeds above thoughts, for we cannot really explain what was done without some reference to what was thought.[7]

The concept of human autonomy is also helpful in the problem of defining and limiting the concept of Puritanism both historically and intellectually. The Puritan was one who asserted the authority and sovereignty of God and the non-autonomy of man — and sought to enthrone that distinction in every facet and institution of life and society in a practical way. The Quakers were not Puritans because they held to the autonomous conscience and inner light as a foundational principle. The Anglicans were not Puritans because they held to a supreme king as the authority in the church. The Antinomians were not Puritans — or ceased to be Puritans — when they asserted an autonomous spirit ruling in their hearts. The Separatists were not Puritans because they held to the autonomous individual and an autonomous local church.

This is not to say that none of these groups were part of the Puritan movement which agitated the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. They were both in it and out of it. But it seems clear that the Puritans themselves understood who, or which groups, were truly Puritans and which were merely dissenters from the English establishment, and they either separated themselves from, or the other groups from themselves, as the need arose. Simpson's inclusive definition of Puritanism as the whole movement from the Presbyterians on one extreme to the Quakers on the other may be helpful in defining a Christian, or an evangelical protestant, but it certainly is not seeing seventeenth-century men as they saw themselves.

But the primary significance of the concept of human autonomy and non-autonomy is in the way it modifies the concept of the Puritan dilemma as a device for understanding Puritanism by supplying a clearer focus on the Puritan dilemma. On one hand it gives a standard whereby to distinguish between those Puritan dilemmas that were irreconcilable and those that

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[7]Foster, *Their Solitary Way,* pp. xvii f.

were merely matters of balance or of unintended consequences, giving the student of Puritanism a better basis for understanding why the Puritan dilemmas were significant and what made them so. On the other hand, in its non-autonomous form it enables us to understand why the Puritans developed the particular institutions they did and why there was such social stability even in the face of the dilemmas and problems. Where the Puritan dilemmas did not involve autonomous and irreconcilable contradictions, they could be incorporated into the very social structure of the colony. The holy commonwealth was just that: a union of limited, separate powers, united under the Triune God to His glory. The concepts of autonomy and non-autonomy simply focuses for us in a practical way what the Puritan meant when he said he wanted a "due form of government both civil and ecclesiastical . . . under the power and purity of His holy ordinances."

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Acknowledgements

Appreciation is expressed to those who assisted me in the preparation of this work: Miss Nell Harden, who proofread the manuscript and advised me on the fine points of English grammar and manuscript form; Mrs. Pat Midkiff, who typed the manuscript; and Dr. John Bell of Western Carolina University, who oversaw the work from the beginning. They are not, of course, responsible for its weaknesses but were certainly contributors to its strengths.