

--+Puritanism in America: 1600 - 1700

An Overview of Significant Concepts

Puritans were...

- English Protestants discontented with the Anglican Church/Church of England in the late 16th century; felt it was too “popish.”
- Pilgrims believed the church was beyond saving, were separatists, while Puritans wanted to “purify” the church from within (name “Puritans” first started as a taunt by Anglicans).
- Eventually becoming separatist, too, the Puritans came to America in 1630, formed Massachusetts Bay Colony (10 years after Pilgrims founded Plymouth Colony).
- *Scarlet Letter* takes place around 1642 in that colony (Boston & Salem included). *The Crucible* takes place in that region 50 years later, in 1692.

Basic Beliefs & Values ...

- **Theocracy**
Strong union of church & state, with religious leaders controlling most colonial activity
- **Predestination**
All events are foreknown and foreordained by God
- **Election**
-God chooses – at birth – who is saved and who is damned. And so the nagging question ... “Am *I* saved?”
-Nothing you do in life can change this, but religious leaders believed the testimony of one’s life could give clues as to who is elected
- **Total Depravity**
-Through Adam and Eve’s fall, every person is born sinful - concept of Original Sin. It means that sin is in every part of one’s being, including the mind and will, so that a man cannot save himself.
- **Unconditional Election**
-God “saves” those he wishes - only a few are selected for salvation - concept of predestination. People are not “chosen” on their merit.
- **Limited Atonement**
-Jesus died for the chosen only, not for everyone, though it is unknown who is chosen.
- **Irresistible Grace**
-God’s grace is freely given; it cannot be earned or denied. When God has chosen to save someone, He will.
- **Perseverance of the “saints”** - those elected by God have full power to interpret the will of God, and to live uprightly. Those people God chooses cannot lose their salvation. If they fall away, it will be only for a time.
- **The Bible**
Provided the indispensable guide to life, and the church should therefore reflect the express teaching of the scriptures. The Bible tells people exactly how to behave.
- **All humans are sinful & depraved**
-“Original sin” ... from the time of birth
-People have free will, but will *naturally* choose evil if left unchecked.
- **Forgiveness through Jesus Christ alone**
-But He died for only the elected & predestined
- **Abundant grace/Personal salvation**
-Given only by God
-Cannot be earned
- **Intolerance**
-Society is one unified whole, so sin & error of any kind must be opposed & driven out

- **Anne Hutchinson (1638)**
 - Criticized ministers for not preaching grace, that faith alone could get you into heaven
 - Held religious meetings in her home
 - Challenged political & religious leadership of Massachusetts Bay colony
 - Persecuted & banished
- **Intolerance**
- **Roger Williams (1638)**
 - Preached complete separation of church & state
 - Opposed taxes to support religious groups
 - Supported paying Indians for land
 - Persecuted & expelled for “new & dangerous opinions”
 - Settled Rhode Island
 - Established complete freedom of religion (including Jews, Catholics, Quakers)
- **Patriarchy**
 - Male-dominated society; only men can vote/hold office; women are in service to their husbands.
- **Superstitious**
 - Strong belief in the devil, witches, etc., and their ability to inhabit the bodies of people.
- **Puritan Childhood**
 - Little concept of childhood/play
 - Children should be seen and not heard--little adults
 - Sunday church services lasting 9 or 10 hours
 - Children put to work around age 7
 - Girls go to live/work in others' homes by age 14 or so
 - Most families have around 7 children; only 1 in 3 made it to age 10
 - Life expectancy in the 17th century (1600s) was about 32

Education

- **Education highly prized as a form of self-improvement, and to be able to read the Bible.**
 - Formed the first public school in New England, the Roxbury Latin School, in 1635
 - Mandatory public school for all children
 - Founded the first college, Harvard, in 1636 to train ministers
 - First to print children's books, *The New England Primer* (1688); had an alphabet and catechism (religious training). Was used for nearly 100 years throughout the region
 - As a result, about 70% of New England was literate in 1770

The New England Primer

- Alphabet book with religious instruction geared toward obedience:
- Letter A – “In Adam's fall, we sinned all”
- Letter I – “The Idle fool is whipt at school”

Puritan Legacy, Positive & Negative

- The need for moral justification for private, public, & governmental acts
- The quest for freedom - personal, political, economic, and social; democracy in church led to democracy in government
- The Puritan work ethic
- Shaming as a form of social control
- The city upon a hill – concept of manifest destiny, moral excellence & conscience
- Community values – that we are all responsible for the well-being of each other
- The value of education for individual & community success