Puritan Background “Lecture” and Assignment

Online Lesson #4

Mrs. Bondi

APLAC

Directions: Read the background information on Puritans, their beliefs and the Plymouth Colony. At the end of this document is a short reading assignment. Please complete and bring with you to class on Tuesday, Sept. 8, 2015.

I. Basic Puritan Beliefs - Tulip

1. Total Depravity - through Adam and Eve's fall, every person is born sinful - concept of Original Sin.

2. Unconditional Election - God "saves" those he wishes - only a few are selected for salvation - concept of predestination.

3. Limited Atonement - Jesus died for the chosen only, not for everyone.

4. Irresistible Grace - God's grace is freely given, it cannot be earned or denied. Grace is defined as the saving and transfiguring power of God.

5. Perseverance of the "saints" - those elected by God have full power to interpret the will of God, and to live uprightly. If anyone rejects grace after feeling its power in his life, he will be going against the will of God - something impossible in Puritanism.

Additional Beliefs

Typology: The belief that God's intentions are present in human action and in natural phenomenon. Failure to understand these intentions are human limitations. Puritans believed in cyclical or repetitive history; they use "types" - Moses prefigures Jesus, Jonah's patience is reflected in Jesus' ordeal on the cross, and Moses' journey out of Egypt is played out in the Pilgrims' crossing of the Atlantic. God's wrath and reward are also present in natural phenomena like flooding, bountiful harvest, the invasion of locusts, and the lightning striking a home.

Manifest Destiny: The concept of manifest destiny is as old as the first New England settlements. Without using the words, John Winthrop articulated the concept in his famous sermon, the Arbella Covenant (1630), when he said: "... for we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill, the eyes of all people are upon us; ..." Winthrop exhorts his listeners to carry on God's mission and to set a shining example for the rest of the world. From this beginning, the concept has had religious, social, economic, and political consequences. The words manifest destiny were first used by editor John L. O'Sullivan in 1845.

Backsliding: The belief that "saved" believers, those with visible signs of grace, can fall into temptation and become sinners. To prevent this, believers were expected not to become smug, do constant soul-searching, be introspective, and pray constantly. Satan was particularly interested in snaring such believers.

II. The Function of Puritan Writers

1. To transform a mysterious God - mysterious because he is separate from the world.

2. To make him more relevant to the universe.

3. To glorify God.

III. The Style of Puritan Writing

1. Protestant - against ornateness; reverence for the Bible.

2. Purposiveness - there was a purpose to Puritan writing - described in Part II above.

3. Puritan writing reflected the character and scope of the reading public, which was literate and well-grounded in religion.

IV. Reasons for Puritan Literary Dominance over the Virginians

1. Puritans were basically middle class and fairly well-educated.

2. Virginians were tradesmen and separated from English writing.

3. Puritans were children of the covenant; gave them a drive and a purpose to write.

Common Themes in Early Puritan Writing

1. Idealism - both religious and political.

2. Pragmaticism - practicality and purposiveness.

VI. Forces Undermining Puritanism

1. A person's natural desire to do good - this works against predestination.

2. Dislike of a "closed" life.

3. Resentment of the power of the few over many.

4. Change in economic conditions - growth of fishery, farms, etc.

5. Presence of the leaders of dissent - Anne Hutchinson, Roger Williams.

6. The presence of the frontier - concept of self-reliance, individualism, and optimism.
7. Change in political conditions - Massachusetts became a Crown colony.

8. Theocracy suffered from a lack of flexibility.

9. Growth of rationality - use of the mind to know God - less dependence on the Bible.

10. Cosmopolitanism of the new immigrants.

Some Aspects of the Puritan Legacy: each has positive and negative implications

a. The need for moral justification for private, public, and governmental acts.

b. The Questing for Freedom - personal, political, economic, and social.

c. The Puritan work ethic.

d. Elegiac verse - morbid fascination with death.

e. The city upon the hill - concept of manifest destiny.

Introduction to the Puritans

The beliefs of the Puritans still affect the beliefs of Americans. The Puritans wanted a “pure” religion that they could no longer have in England, so in the 1600s they went to America. They valued reading the Bible and following its values. They greatly valued education. According to Kathryn VanSpanckeren, between 1630 and 1690, “there were as many university graduates in the northeastern section of the United States, known as New England, as in the mother country….They wanted education to understand and execute God’s will as they established their colonies throughout New England.”

Puritan writing had one goal: to teach people “the importance of worshipping God and of the spiritual dangers that the soul faced on Earth.” The Puritans wrote spiritual diaries, poetry, sermons, and documented religious history. William Bradford and Anne Bradstreet are excellent examples of Puritan writers who sincerely wanted to help people understand the word of God.

Sadly, the Puritans efforts to be “good” led them to become judgmental. Since there was no separation between religious rules and governmental laws, people could be punished for not attending church, working on a Sunday, dressing improperly, or other “crimes” against God. Also, the Puritan belief in a spiritual world caused them to accept as evidence the words of accusers who said they had seen the spirits of others attack them. Studying Arthur Miller’s play The Crucible shows how dangerous judging others without good evidence can be.

Much of America’s success is the result of the Puritan belief in “ambition, hard work, and an intense striving for success” (VanSpanckeren). Success showed that they were following God’s directives and would be able to go to heaven to have eternal life. They believed that everything they had in life came from God.

“The first Puritan colonists who settled New England… were known at the ‘Pilgrims.’ They were a small group of believers who had migrated from England to Holland – even then known for its religious tolerance – in 1608, during a time of persecutions” (VanSpanckeren).

Quick Summary

Puritan Literature

· 1600 – 1860
  · Taught that ambition, a good education, God’s blessing, and hard work led to success
  · Believed humanity’s role in the universe was to worship God and follow His word

In September 1620, during the reign of King James I, around 100 English men and women – many of them members of the English Separatist Church – set sail for the New World aboard the Mayflower, a three-masted merchant ship. The ship landed on the shores of Cape Cod, in present-day Massachusetts, two months later, and in late December anchored at Plymouth Rock, where they would form the first permanent settlement of Europeans in New England. Though more than half the original settlers died during that grueling first winter, the survivors were able to secure peace treaties with neighboring Native American tribes and build a largely self-sufficient economy within five years.

Journey to the New World

Among the group traveling on the Mayflower in 1620 were close to 40 members of a radical Puritan faction known as the English Separatist Church. Feeling that the Church of England had not sufficiently completed the necessary work of the Protestant Reformation, the group had chosen to break with the church altogether. The Separatists had sought religious freedom before, fleeing England in 1607 and 1608 to settle in the Netherlands, first in Amsterdam and later in the town of Leiden, where they remained for the next decade. Wanting to secure their English language and heritage, and seeking more economic opportunity, the group – later known as the Pilgrims –
laid plans for a voyage to the New World aboard the Mayflower.

Did You Know?

Three more ships traveled to Plymouth soon after the Mayflower, including the Fortune (1621), the Anne and the Little James (both 1623). Passengers on these first four ships were called the "Old Comers" of Plymouth Colony, and were given special treatment in later colonial affairs.

Rough seas and storms prevented the ship from reaching its initial destination—a region near the Hudson River—and after 66 days it reached the shores of Cape Cod, anchoring at the site of Provincetown on November 21. They sent an exploratory party ashore, and on December 18 docked at Plymouth Rock, on the western side of Cape Cod Bay. The explorer John Smith had named the area Plymouth, and the settlers decided the name was appropriate, as the Mayflower had set sail from the port of Plymouth in England.

Surviving the First Year in Plymouth Colony

For the next few months, many of the settlers stayed on the Mayflower while ferrying back and forth to shore to build their new settlement. In March, they began moving ashore permanently. More than half the settlers fell ill and died that first winter, victims of an epidemic of disease that swept the new colony. Soon after they moved ashore, the Pilgrims introduced to a Native American man named Tisquantum, or Squanto, who would become a member of the colony. A member of the Pawtuxet tribe (from present-day Massachusetts and Rhode Island) who had been kidnapped by the explorer John Smith and taken to England, only to escape back to his native land, Squanto acted as an interpreter and mediator between Plymouth’s leaders and local Native Americans, including Chief Massasoit of the Pokanoket tribe. In the fall of 1621, the Pilgrims famously shared a harvest feast with the Pokanokets; the meal is now considered the basis for the Thanksgiving holiday.

All the adult males aboard the Mayflower had signed the so-called Mayflower Compact, a document that would become the foundation of Plymouth’s government. Though the Separatists were a minority in the group, they formed its powerful center, and would entirely control the colony’s government during its first 40 years. William Bradford, a leader of the Separatist congregation, was one of the framers of the Mayflower Compact, and would serve as Plymouth’s governor for 30 years after its founding. Bradford also kept a voluminous journal chronicling the ship’s voyage and the founding of Plymouth Colony.

Growth and Decline of the Plymouth Colony

With peace secured, the colonists in Plymouth were able to concentrate on building a viable settlement for themselves rather than spend their time and resources guarding themselves against attack. Squanto taught them how to plant corn, which became an important crop, as well as where to fish and hunt beaver. Though Plymouth would never develop as robust an economy as later settlements—such as Massachusetts Bay Colony—agriculture, fishing and trading made the colony self-sufficient within five years after it was founded.

Many other European settlers followed in the Pilgrims’ footsteps to New England. As the settlers sought to occupy more and more land in the region, relations with Native Americans deteriorated, and sporadic violence broke out that would culminate decades later in the bloody King Philip’s War of 1675. By that time, the ideal of Plymouth Colony—conceived in the Mayflower Compact as a self-contained community governed by a common religious affiliation—had given way to the far less lofty influences of trade and commerce, and the devout Pilgrims had fragmented into smaller, more self-serving groups. Still, the original concept served as the foundation for many later settlements. These included John Winthrop’s Massachusetts Bay Colony, founded in 1630, which became the most populous and prosperous colony in the region. Plymouth’s influence in New England declined accordingly, until it was absorbed by Massachusetts in 1691.

Reading Assignment

Directions: Read the excerpt from History of Plymouth Plantation (posted on my website).

When you have finished reading, complete the following:

1. Compose of 5-6 sentence “first impressions” response to the text. Consider what your first impressions are and how you see Puritan ideals evident in the text.

2. Provide a one-two sentence summary of each section (sections are bolded).

That’s it! 😊