

The Impact of Puritanical Values on the American Modern Life

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Abstract :

It is worthy to note that ancient civilizations and great nations were founded on solid foundations and strong pillars. The United States of America was deeply influenced by a powerful movement called Puritanism. The latter emerged during the 16th Century in England to grow stronger and efficient in America. Puritans with their powerful moral values and very deep religious beliefs succeeded in building one of the greatest civilizations in modern times. In fact Puritans do not only succeed in the construction of the thirteen colonies, but they truly led America to the leadership of the whole American Continent and the world too. The role of this paper is to probe the profound impact of Puritanical values and the powerful foundations they provided implicitly within the American society. Thus, Puritanical ideals sustained one of the strongest pillars of the American historical and cultural identity.

ملخص:

تعد المثل العليا و الركائز المتينة واحدة من المقومات الرئيسية في بناء أقدم الحضارات و ارقى الأمم في العالم .
وتعتبر الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية واحدة من هذه الأمم التي تأثرت إيجاباً بالحركة الدينية البروتستنتية المنشقة عن الكنيسة الانجليكانية. لقد نشأت هذه الحركة خلال القرن السادس عشر بالجلتلا لتنمو وتزعرع وتصبح أكثر فعالية بأمريكا. حقيقة فإن النجاح الذي حققته تلك الفئة البروتستنتية المنشقة بعيدا عن مسقط رأسها كان ناجما عن تلك المثل السامية والأسس المتينة والمعتقدات الدينية العميقة التي ميزت هؤلاء المنشقين فهم لم ينجحوا فقط في بناء الولايات المتحدة الأمريكية الثلاثة عشر بل تعدوه إلى أعظم من ذلك حيث إنهم قادوا أمريكا إلى تقلد زعامة القارة الأمريكية والعالم بأسره. إن هذا البحث يهدف إذن إلى تسليط الضوء على الدور المحوري لتلك القيم الراقية و الركائز الصلبة التي نجح هؤلاء البروتستنت المنشقين في غرسها لاشعوريا بالمجتمع الأمريكي، فبالرغم من مرور الزمن بقي ذلك الإرث العقائدي والثقافي واحد من أقوى الأسس الصلبة التي ساهمت إلى حد كبير في بناء الهوية الثقافية والتاريخية الأمريكية.

1-Introduction

Many historians and writers claimed that the Puritans' powerful vision planted the seeds for the intellectual construction of America and its mythology. As Perry Miller states, "Without some understanding of Puritanism, it may safely be said; there is no understanding of America." Is it true that great nations and very strong civilizations were mainly built on hard work, perseverance and powerful foundations? Is American success and glory mainly due to those new migrants who fled persecution and sought new life of worship in a remote corner in the New World? Could injustice and hardship be a driving force in founding exceptional nations?

In fact, it seems important to shed light on the role played by that special kind of people called Puritans. The latter left their homeland because of persecution to make an adventure which was crowned with success and became later on a landmark of American uniqueness and superiority. Puritanism was a movement that emerged after the Protestant Reformation led by the German theologian Martin Luther and after him the French theologian John Calvin during the 16th Century in Europe. In addition, that special stream was fueled in England by the political reformation led by the rebellious King Henry VIII. Effectively, the representatives of that stream were called Puritans because their main hope was the purification of the Anglican Church from the remnant practices of the Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, the reformers suffered a lot of injustice and many of

them were burned at the stake. As a result, Puritans preferred the migration to safer harbors to the Netherlands and then to a remote corner near the Atlantic Ocean to be free in their worship and create a new style of life of their own.

Is it true that Puritans with their strong background have left their traces innumerable within the American society? In fact those “pejorative” sects as they were called faced extreme obstacles in a new world very different from their original homeland.

Effectively, Puritans succeeded not only in constructing the American thirteen colonies. But, their imagination and their deep principles led the U.S.A to the leadership of the world. Puritanical values like hard work, individualism, democracy, sense of mission, and devotion to education were very deep backgrounds and very solid foundations in the establishment of modern America and true pillars in shaping American individuals to the extreme as they remained influential until nowadays.

2-Origins of Puritanism

Puritans were defined according to David Sceats: “.... Those committed to pushing to its logical conclusion the program of reform in the English Church initiated in the time of King Edward VI, but interrupted by Queen Mary’s reign of terror”(Patton 17).

Around the year 1564, the Reformation of the Church of England was initiated by King Henry VIII and followed by his dynasty except

for Queen, Bloody Mary, who was a devote Catholic and opposed the Protestant Reformation in favor of her mother. The Reformation led to the emergence of new clergy men (Duffield 1; Dwyer 1-3; Whitty, Schultz 12). Those rebellious members who protested against wrong practices incorporated within the ceremonies and rituals of the Anglican Church were called Puritans. The latter were not satisfied and saw the Anglican church half reformed because it kept the clerical vestment and ceremonies of Roman Catholic Church such as Clerical vestments particularly the surplice (a white wide-sleeved gown worn to officiate in church services) and (to a lesser degree) the Square cap (worn outdoors by ministers), kneeling to receive communion, making the sign of cross in baptism, bowing at the name of “Jesus”, using the wedding- ring in marriage services, Church bells (“Elizabethan Puritanism”).

In fact, the dissent sought a pure reformation of the Anglican Church; thus, they rose as a dominant force at the end of the 16th and 17th Centuries (Bishop 1; Howe 1057). The real reason for the appearance of those newly names of English religious men was due to Luther’s and Calvin’s Reformations. Consequently, new names emerged such as Lutherans, Calvinists, Protestants, Precisians, Unspotted Brethrens and Puritans (Collinson 20). All these names meant to express one central idea; it was their opposition to the Catholic doctrines and the hope to reform the Church’s structure and ways of worship with a newly ones. Puritans were the followers of Luther’s principles: Sola Scriptura, Sola fide, Sola gratia (Gleason,

Kapic 27; Thorson 20-21). Indeed the starting point was in February 1588, at Paul's Cross, when the future archbishop, Richard Bancroft, made a sermon in which he called the new Puritans: Schismatics (Collinson 21-22). They were considered new men, new reformers because they hold a new set of principles and ideas that made them exceptional at that time. The Archbishops celebrated the birth of a new religious movement characterized by newness and reformation (Mingiuc 212).

It is crucial to mention that there were two events which led to the emergence of Puritanism: the first one was the discovery of America and the second one was the development of Protestantism (Mckenna 9). Indeed, Puritans who experienced extreme persecution and felt unsecure in their homeland sought to establish a new life in a new land far from theirs. Puritans were zealous to be free in their way of worship. This historical mixture between religion and geography led to the intellectual foundation of a very strong society that paved the way to the birth of one major landmark of American culture which was the American Dream (Calabresi 1346).

3- Factions of Puritanism

According to Sacvan Bercovitch, Puritans were divided into three factions. The first one is considered to be the largest one and its members were called Non Conformist. Their main hope was the establishment of a real commonwealth under Cromwell's leadership

(Gleason, Kopic 18). The second faction was represented by the so called Separatists who formed a small group. The representatives of this faction rejected all sort of authority even that of the Anglican Church because they aimed at attaining a very high and pure form of their religious beliefs and life. Separatists went further in their imagination because they believed only in a universal invisible Church (Gleason, Kopic 18). Their organization derived from the first Christian communities. Among that section of separatists some remained in England, but others preferred to leave for Amsterdam and then to America. The Separatist immigrants were called the Pilgrim Fathers who founded Plymouth Colony in 1620 (Wilson 2). In addition to the third group of Puritans who voyaged to America in 1630. The representatives of this group sought a combination of ideals of the two factions in order to create a perfect society which came to be called afterwards: a society of visible saints (Calabresi 1354; Mingiuc 212; Beardsley 8). Representatives of this faction voyaged abroad the Arabella under the leadership of a great Puritan figure named John Winthrop. The latter pinpointed the main principles that would govern Puritans' life and society in America. Winthrop's strong vision in making America the land of hope and glory has reached its apogee and created a model society praised by all nations in the world.

Though that diversity of views within those factions, Puritans' legacy in addition to the Anglican faith and other religious convictions

remained a cardinal core that shaped the American culture and modern society until present times.

4-The Tenets of American Puritanism

Puritanism stemmed from the ideas and principles of the French theologian, John Calvin who based his doctrine on the following principles (Bryson 51). The first main tenet of Calvin was the belief in the Supremacy Divine Will (Boettner 16-17). For him all natural phenomena represented the will of God and unnatural happening were caused by witches and were seen as the source of devil. The second basic of Calvin's doctrine is the Depravity of Man (Bryson 219; Best 17-18; Muller 8-9). This item expresses the idea that all men are corrupt, sinful by birth and that sin is inherited within the human nature. Indeed, this doctrine originated from Adam's sin when he disobeyed God. The third tenet is the Doctrine of the Elect (Cole 13; Pink 79-80). This tenet explained that after Adam committed his sin, another covenant was made according to Christ's sacrifice. But only few people who would benefit in order to be among the elect. Puritans were anxious a lot because they did not know if they were among the elect or not. The fourth tenet is free grace (Chay 1). This basic was related directly to those who were considered to be elected by God and received His Grace. It is important to mention the idea that free grace could not be achieved through good behavior simply because the elect were chosen in an arbitrary way (Brenner 1-2; Dally 4). The

fifth tenet is concerned with the doctrine of predestination which sets that God has already made His choice about those who will be elected and those who will be damned. As a result God's plan could not change. Puritans remained unknowledgeable about their real destination in life (Kearley 1; Talbott 1-2). The sixth tenet is the theocratic government. The construction of the government was based on ministers and church members who were the only representatives of that institution (Braithwaite 15).

It is very crucial to highlight that God supreme authority was the central tenet of Puritanism (Boettner 23-25). This idea derived from the Bible and urged Puritans to work hard in order to achieve individual and corporate similarities. According to Puritans, humans were inherently sinful and corrupt. The only way to purify themselves lay then in working hard to attain the grace of God for this reason the concept of hard work took a valuable dimension for Puritans who came to consider it as a religious duty (Browne 2; Van Noppen 1- 2).

Puritans led a modest way of life. For them studying the Bible was very essential. Their social relationships were based on the idea of contract between God and the elect. Several contracts characterized Puritan's life such as the Covenant of work, Covenant of grace, Covenant of Redemption (Boettner 205-206; Kang 149; Dennis 406-407).

It is worthy to mention that Calvinism played a primordial role in touching the essence of God's revelation in order to serve a very high level of knowledge. Calvinism aimed, also, at enlightening men's path

now and after. Indeed, the world needs really such categories of men like Calvin which played a radical role in stating holly doctrines and enlightening people's trajectories to the glory of the Lord (Dally 5).

5-Puritan's Migration to the New World

In the early 17th Century, English Pilgrims migrated from the Netherlands to the New World (Carpenter 33-34). They settled there and they soon constituted themselves into a new civil body politic (Maxwell 4; Bremer 5). Consequently, many colonies were built such as Plymouth which was founded in 1620 (Tetek 5; Sage 27). After that, many Puritans migrated to America and built other colonies such as Massachusetts in 1628, New Hampshire in 1629, Connecticut in 1633, Maine in 1635, Rhode Island in 1635, and Newhaven in 1638. In fact those Separatists brought new ideas to be planted in their "Holy Commonwealth"(Kang 148; Sage 29).

Throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries, Puritanism remained the major driving force in the Colonial Period exercising its influence on both religious and cultural patterns in the New World. By the year 1640, thirty five churches were established in New England. Puritans preserved the Calvinists distinction between the elect and the damned with the church's doctrines and theories which came to be seen by mainstream Protestants as strict and bigot (Braithwaite 15).

Ministers who benefited from huge political powers practiced a large control over the church affairs. However, in 1662, clerical power was

reduced due to the expansion of New England and the opening of frontiers settlements to new comers who were secular and faced problems to adapt themselves to the new environment (Kang 148).

During the year 1692, a new charter marked a shift from a theocratic to a secular state. The suffrage was taken off the religious qualifications. After 17th Century, Puritanism as a political body disappeared, but puritanical values and ethics continued to influence American society until present times (Andress 169; Elliot 4).

6- The Impact of Puritanical Values on the American Life

Though Puritanism as a political body has faded away, it still exerts its deep influence on both American modern life and American individuals. In fact, Puritans with their strong vision and solid background played a central role in building America. Puritans established themselves as the children of God and that they bore the mantle of Israel for that reason their voyage to America was turned into a holly quest (Calabresi1346; Elliott 4-5).

Puritans left their traces very profound within the American society and culture. First of all, one core element of American uniqueness is individualism which means the belief in the importance of the individual and the virtue of self reliance and self independence. This rooted value within the American culture is mainly based on self reliance, self discipline and self improvement (Howe 1059). Individualism is the real struggle of those puritans in that huge and strange nature, in the wilderness and all the hardships they faced in

their new home (Santee 1). This deep moral urged American individual to achieve great success and be that special person called the self made man i.e., a very successful man (Lee 26).

Secondly, Puritanism laid the foundation for American democracy; the latter started earlier within the American history when the Pilgrim Fathers established the May flower Compact in 1620 (Maxwell 1). It was the first act announcing the establishment of a new temporary government for self-govern. Another landmark which formed the seeds of American democracy is the Declaration of independence issued in 1776. Effectively, it embodied ideals that were and are still exceptional to the U.S.A “All men are created equal and they are endowed by their creator with unalienable rights like freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.”(Zynda 4). Also, another crucial characteristic of American modern society is concerned with the separation between the state and religion (Doerr 2; Hamburger 1). Consequently, this idea led to the separation of powers in the American political system.

Then, it is important to state that the doctrine of predestination urged Puritans to work constantly in order to be chosen for an eternal life. The term Puritan hard work ethic is based upon the notion that Calvinists emphasized hard work ethic as a component of a person's calling and that a worldly success should be the result of a person's salvation (Arrunada 5; Williams 22-23; Morgan 4). Puritans believed strongly that God has made a covenant with their people and has

chosen them to be a model for other nations in the world. This deep belief in hard work and thrift is still an influential element in modern America because today Americans are described of being the most workaholic people in the world.

In addition, Americans are characterized by having a special mission in this world (Blanke 84; Bercovitch 142-143). Actually, Americans sense of mission started earlier when the Puritans reached the American shores. Their major hope was the establishment of a new style of life in which they will be free in their worship and be secure far away from the torture and injustice experienced in their homeland. Puritans dreamt of establishing a city upon a hill in their new home (“Winthrop’s John “*City upon a Hill*,” 1630” 1; Dennis 410). It is worth noting that Winthrop’s expression of building a city upon a hill developed a great sense of mission to become later on an argument of American’s intervention in world affairs and manifested itself widely in American’s foreign policy (Graebne 75).

Moreover, Puritanism created the American complete devotion to education. This basic stemmed from the Puritan’s doctrine of covenant which stated that the human beings are sinful since their birth (Andress 163; Schwertley 1; Kapin, Taylor 33-34). Consequently, schools are needed to teach them the way they would purify themselves and reach salvation. Puritans focused on reading the Bible and establishing new schools for free to permit any one to be literate (Douglas 1). In addition, Puritans encouraged liberal arts education for that reason they were suitable for everything. They did not only

limit education to religious subjects. In fact, Puritans were convinced that all kinds of truth was derived from God.

7-Conclusion

It is very clear that Winthrop's vision of building a city upon a hill has reached its apogee and left its consequences deep within both the American society and culture. When John Winthrop reached the American shores, he did not really expect that his vision of building a city upon a hill would remain a rhetoric in American culture and literature. Indeed the previous expression itself has been a very rich area of study and allows writers to excel in its exploration. It is worth noting that success is mainly a simple idea that needed to be effectively analyzed and then planned to be achieved. It is through such strong ideas and beliefs that great civilizations and successful nations have engraved their names with golden scripts.

Puritanical values could be considered a driving force in the intellectual construction of America in its beginning and remained a cardinal core in giving America a shape and a counter until present times. In fact, those great ideals have played a crucial role in the making of America. On the one hand hard work ethic is a core element that is burned into the nerve fibres of American individuals, and on the other one individualism is rooted within the American culture and played a crucial role in creating the self made man i.e., a special rhetoric in the concept of the American Dream. The American

democracy, indeed, was experienced earlier in times when the Pilgrim Fathers reached the American shores and established the Mayflower compact. This act planted the seeds for the American democracy. In fact, America experienced democracy very earlier in times when the whole world was under the fire of oppression and injustice. Another land mark of the American democracy is the declaration of independence stated in 1776. This document expresses ideas that were exceptional at that time: "All men are created equal and they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights like liberty, freedom, and the pursuit of happiness." This expression was and is still a major source of inspiration and a worthwhile field of study for many writers, politicians and historians. Through their sense of mission, Americans believed strongly that they are the chosen people by God to civilize the whole world. This idea originated from the Bible and it paralleled with that of Israel to shed light everywhere in the world. American political system is characterized by the separation of powers. This idea is clearly expressed in the first amendment in the American Constitution that there is no stated religion and that religion should be independent from the state. Religious education was mainly derived from the Puritan's doctrine of covenant which stated that the human beings are sinful since their birth. As a consequence, schools are needed to teach them the way they would purify themselves and reach salvation.

It is obvious that puritanical values remained one of the strongest pillars in shaping the American cultural identity and are still a driving force in the intellectual construction of the American modern society.

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