

International Calvinism and the Making of Puritan New England

(インターナショナル・カルヴィニズムと
ピューリタン・ニューイングランドの形成)

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Christianity is a religion that has been restlessly expansive ever since it originated in ancient Palestine. The first phase of that expansion saw it spread from Palestine to Asia Minor and the eastern Mediterranean. Several centuries later, it was taking root in western Europe and parts of Africa. Yet another major phase of expansion accompanied the age of exploration that began c. 1450, a period that saw Christianity implanted in the Americas and parts of Asia. Up to this point, Christianity in the west was synonymous with Roman Catholicism; indeed, to this day, Catholicism remains the most visible version of Christianity as a world-spanning religion. But ever since the fracturing of Christianity between Catholics and Protestants in the sixteenth century, Catholicism has had to compete against three main versions of Protestantism: Lutheran, Reformed, and “radical” or Free.

Of these three, the Reformed has had a special significance in British North America. Before any of its adherents arrived in the New World, the Reformed had come to power in several Swiss city-states or federations, most famously, Geneva, in much of Rhineland Germany, and in the northern provinces of the Low Countries that broke off from the Spanish empire and became an independent country at the end of the sixteenth century (the United Provinces or the Netherlands). Always subordinate to Catholicism in France, it became the official form of Christianity in Scotland as a consequence of the Scottish Reformation (c. 1560). The Reformation in England drew in important respects on the Reformed tradition, but departed from it by preserving some aspects of Catholicism, notably with regard to worship (the Book of Common Prayer) and polity (the office of bishop). These compromises irritated some of that country’s clergy and lay people.

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Never able to persuade Elizabeth I or her successors James I and Charles I to endorse a “thorough” reformation that would have purged the Church of England of its “catholic remnants,” these people acquired the nickname of “puritan” as early as the 1560s. Thanks to the planting of English colonies in North America and the Caribbean in the first half of the seventeenth century, the Puritan wing of the Church of England became an important presence in the New World, a presence reinforced in the eighteenth century by the arrival of tens of thousands of Presbyterians from Scotland and Northern Ireland. In any overview of the Calvinist diaspora, special mention must be made of the Dutch Reformed Protestants who, under the auspices of the Dutch East Indian Company, came to Africa in the seventeenth century.

These details about the international scope of the Reformed tradition serve me as a starting point for asking about theology and religious practice in those parts of Europe and North America where, before 1800, this tradition established a strong presence. What kind of religion united missionaries, converts, and immigrants? What kind of churches did they bring into being, and what form of civil government? Any attempt to answer these questions leads to another kind of inquiry. How did the far-flung communities of the Reformed international stay in touch with one another? How were ideas and practices communicated from one place to another, if not by the movements of people? And how was orthodoxy sustained within a religious tradition that never had a true center or cosmopolitan capital capable of regulating a far-flung tradition?

To these I add a question of great interest to those of us who study early America, the relationship between the Reformed international and Puritanism. Emerging in sixteenth-century England, and close cousin of the Presbyterianism that became the official religion of Scotland, the Puritan movement aspired to remake the Church of England. Not until the period of history known to us as the “Puritan Revolution” (1640-1660) did the reformers actually acquire the power to make this happen, only to discover that they could not agree on how to use it—and when they could agree, were unable to persuade most of the people in England to back their program. With the Restoration of 1660, when a monarch who detested Puritanism came back into power, the Puritan movement collapsed into what British historians name “Dissent”: no longer *of* the Church of England, and not really full citizens of their own society. Across the Atlantic, however, the “Puritan

experiment” in New England was spared these consequences. There, it took hold and survived well beyond 1700 as culture and social practice. Given the different histories of Puritanism in England and New England, historians of early New England find themselves asking what changed as well as what remained the same. Did the New England child continue to resemble the Reformed parent or strike off in new directions?

In the rest of this essay I take up these questions, beginning with the most basic of them, the question of identity. What were the principal themes of Reformed theology on which (as of 1600) everyone agreed? Five themes emerge from what the reformers, and especially John Calvin, said about theology and the church. In keeping with recent scholarship questioning a traditional emphasis on predestination, my list omits this doctrine, which most sixteenth-century Protestants endorsed.

1. A critique of “idolatry” that encompassed the whole of Catholic devotional and sacramental practice. John Calvin regarded man-made images of God and the worship of them as “idolatry.” So he reasoned on the basis of the Second Commandment (“You shall not make for yourself a graven image or any likeness”) and the principle that the finite (for example, saints’ relics or a statue) cannot contain the infinite. Armed with this denunciation of idolatry, Reformed communities engaged in spasms of iconoclasm.¹ Like most of the Reformed, moreover, Calvin extended this critique of idolatry to the Catholic mass or Eucharist.² According to Catholic doctrine, the Eucharist involved the miraculous transformation of wafer and wine into the body and blood of Christ. Hence the doctrine of the “real presence” that dictated how those who participated in the mass should behave—kneeling to adore the presence of Christ and receive the consecrated wafer, the wine reserved for the priest whose sacred (or “sacerdotal”) powers enabled “transubstantiation” to occur. Calvin exalted Christ’s spiritual presence and its consequences for believers, but he insisted that Jesus was speaking symbolically when he offered his body and blood to the disciples and asked them to remember him—“do this in remembrance of me”—and, as Calvin and his colleagues would insist, remember him by receiving both the bread and the wine in their pews, not by coming forward to kneel at an altar. No miracle of transubstantiation happened, if only because the resurrected Christ was beside the Father in heaven, and nowhere else: present in the sacrament,

but present only “spiritually.”

The reformers in mid-sixteenth-century Scotland and England shared Calvin’s hostility to the Catholic mass and all other versions of idolatry. Opening their Bibles, they came upon story after story in the Old Testament of righteous kings and prophets who, in the spirit of God’s command in Deuteronomy 12:3, undertook to “overthrow . . . their altars . . . and hew down the graven images of their gods.” It was axiomatic that Catholics were idolatrous and also axiomatic that all Christians were tempted by this sin. Hence the imperative to purge the church of whatever remained from Catholicism.

2. High praise for the church on earth—the “visible” church or church militant—as God’s instrument of grace and his means of bringing Christians together in a special kind of community where they would sustain each other. The visible church co-existed with the church universal and triumphant, or “invisible,” that encompassed all of the elect throughout the entire span of Christian history. Because God’s knowledge of who was of the elect was not shared with humankind, the visible church could hope to approximate but never actually achieve the purity of the invisible church.

The founders of the Reformed reasoned that the visible church owed its very being to God. He was also the source of certain rules that Christians must observe in their worship and ecclesiology. Scripture was normative, an assertion that is sometimes named the Regulative Principle, or the rule that no other rules or traditions had any merit: “no doctrine, no ceremony, no discipline can be attributed to Christ the King and to his Kingdom . . . except what has been instituted and come forth from the Holy Spirit.” The key biblical texts were the apostolic letters of the New Testament, seconded by the gospels. Searching these texts, the leaders of the Reformed came upon a form of ministry they regarded as what Christ had commanded: no longer the “extraordinary” offices of apostle and prophet but an “ordinary” ministry of pastors and teachers, together with the offices of elder and deacon, an argument grounded on Ephesians 4:11-13 and other references in the New Testament. Pastors and teachers were his ambassadors and, through the intermediary of the Holy Spirit, the crucial “means of grace” to humankind. Consistent with this reading of the New Testament, the Reformed abandoned a cluster of Catholic practices: ordination ceased to be a sacrament, celibacy

fell by the wayside, and the focus of ministry shifted from administering the Eucharist to preaching the Word as a means of liberating the faithful from false doctrine and Catholic tyranny.³

The organizers of the Reformed tradition also did away with most aspects of hierarchy in church governance. Christ as king of the visible church had a unique authority that could not be shared with any earthly ruler. This assumption disposed of the claims of the Papacy. A second, the principle of parity among the clergy as a whole, got rid of differences of rank and thus of bishops, although Calvin acknowledged the low-keyed English bishops of c. 1560. Simultaneously, the Reformed introduced a system of collective responsibility centered on inter-parish synods, assemblies, and (in Scotland) presbyteries—hence the term “Presbyterian.” In keeping with the principle of the priesthood of all believers that Luther introduced into Protestantism and in keeping, also, with a sympathy for the visible church as a community of “free” people, the leaders of the Reformed encouraged congregational participation in church government, suggesting, for example, that lay people should consent to the naming of their parish minister. But Calvin would not authorize lay people to go off on their own and create quasi-independent congregations, as had happened with the Anabaptists. For him and in general for the Reformed international, the merits of unity far exceeded the merits of any such schism.

3. “Discipline” as a necessary feature of the Christian community. The great distance between the invisible church and the quite imperfect mixtures of people in the visible church could not be closed entirely, but the Reformed wanted to reduce it by employing the instrument of discipline. In the words of Martin Bucer, who led the Reformation in the Rhineland city of Strasbourg, the church was “the Kingdom of Christ,” a veritable Zion or new Jerusalem where, as indicated in places such as Isaiah 11:4, a “severity of judgment against sins” was practiced so that all within the Church were challenged to repent. Hypocrites—those who failed to repent their sins—could remain in the church for the time being, but would eventually be forced out. The overall name for this process of enforcing righteousness was discipline, a task assigned to the office of elders. What put teeth into the work of these officers was the expectation that the “scandalous” would be excluded from the Lord’s Supper, a sacrament reserved for the “worthy”

who satisfied the elders that they were morally righteous and familiar with Protestant theology. To be sure, the church included everyone, for Calvin and Bucer firmly rejected Anabaptist-style exclusivity. Yet neither man wanted “pigs and dogs” to go unpunished. Moral lapses could also prompt a parish or congregation to admonish or excommunicate (exclude from Christian fellowship) the wayward, although anyone punished in this manner was welcomed back once he or she repented. Whether discipline should be considered one of the “notes” of the true church was a question some, such as Calvin, answered by saying no and others, such as the leaders of the Scottish Reformation, answered by saying yes. Yet all agreed that discipline had a high importance alongside the two other notes of the true church, correct preaching of the Word (i.e., proper doctrine) and the proper administration of the sacraments (i.e., not the Catholic version).⁴

4. An evangelical and social activism predicated on transforming the whole of society into a “new order” approximating the kingdom of Christ. This activism was fed by three assumptions: that true Christians would manifest their faith in good works and holiness, that biblical rules like those found in the Ten Commandments were normative in civil society, and (as noted more fully in point five, below) that God was enabling the reformers to emancipate church and society from the corruptions of Roman Catholicism. Much of Jewish law was no longer binding, but Calvin and many others argued that some moral rules were everlasting, as much a part of the new covenant with Christ as they had been of God’s covenant with ancient Israel. This “legalism,” as it is often termed by modern scholars, co-existed with an emphasis on restoration and redemption—restoration of the true church and the redemption of humankind—as forward-looking or progressive. Bucer outlined such a program in a book he completed shortly before his death in England in 1551, *De Regno Christi (On the Kingdom of Christ)*, a plea for church and civil state to cooperate in accomplishing an array of social and moral reforms.

As every leader of the Reformed was quick to recognize, a program of this kind would require the support of civil rulers: kings, princes, aristocracies, councils, magistrates. This was a lesson Bucer and Calvin learned the hard way in the Rhineland city of Strasbourg, where the civil elite turned against them, and a lesson Calvin learned anew in Geneva, where a

divided and sometimes hostile civil leadership dragged its feet. He believed that rulers were responsible to Christ for seeing that idolatry was suppressed and righteousness enforced, an assumption he validated by citing the Old Testament kings who stamped out idol-worshipping, the Emperor Constantine, and Romans 13:1-2, which described civil officers as commissioned by God. Now, with reform beckoning, leaders of the Reformed called on the Christian ruler to restore “the true, pure, and sincere Christian religion” and to “destroy . . . all false worshipping and superstitions, contrary to the Word of God.”⁵ But in the course of demanding action and insisting on the accountability of the Christian prince to God, Calvin and company worried about giving the civil state any real power over religion or the church any direct role in affairs of state. Fiercely critical of the Papacy in Rome for claiming authority over the state, Calvin and his colleagues wanted to protect the state from the church but, above all, the church from the state. Hence their insistence on a “two kingdom” approach to church and state: the spiritual kingdom of the church could not employ “temporal” authority, nor the temporal kingdom the “spiritual” authority of the church. This distinction evolved into a set of rules designed to prevent each from trespassing on the other, with the civil state prohibited from telling the church what doctrines it should teach and church officers barred from holding positions in civil government. Alongside the two kingdom framework, Calvin and other Reformed leaders articulated a “constitutional” approach to civil governance. Civil rulers had to acknowledge the superior authority of divine law. Moreover, the very office they held—itself of divine origin—was constrained in its powers.

5. Apocalypticism as a means of understanding the history of the church. Opening their Bibles to the prophetic books of Isaiah, Daniel, and Revelation, the leaders of the Reformed came upon a narrative of ongoing warfare between the “true” followers of Christ and the many who, although possibly declaring themselves Christians, were aiding the Antichrist or “man of sin” (1 John 2:18, 22; 2 Thess. 2) in his persecution of the saints. The prophetic books also contained the more hopeful message of the coming kingdom when Christ would return in triumph and release the saints from their suffering. At that moment, as foretold in Revelation, “Babylon” would give way to “the holy city, [the] new Jerusalem” which descends from the heavens with God declaring, “Behold, I make all things new” (Rev. 21:2-5).

The church was at the heart of this transformation-in-the-making, a church burdened by the deceptions of the Antichrist until finally God would make “his Church glorious to him selfe, without spot and miracle.” The Scottish reformer John Knox summed up this mixture of militancy and optimism by imagining two armies “betwixt [whom] there continueth a battell, which never shalbe reconciled until the Lord Jesus put a finall ende to the miseries of his Church.”⁶

Turning to the question of how these themes were communicated, a multitude of factors come into view. In Britain, a crucial event was the premature death of Edward VI, an ardent Protestant, in early 1553. He was succeeded by his half sister Mary Tudor, a Catholic, who imposed her faith on the country and, by 1554, was authorizing trials for heresy of lay people and church leaders who refused to give up their Protestantism. This situation prompted dozens of English clergy and a handful of Scots to seek refuge in Europe. Almost to a person, these “Marian exiles” settled in cities where they came into contact with the Reformed version of Protestantism—Geneva, Frankfurt, Strasbourg, Emden, and elsewhere. The years of exile were formative for many of these men. When the wheel turned with the death of Mary Tudor in 1558, they returned to England and Scotland and threw themselves into designing a program of evangelization along the lines of what Calvin had accomplished in Geneva. In the context of this essay, the letters that passed back and forth between them and the allies and friends they had acquired in Zurich and elsewhere are immensely revealing of hopes and disappointments. All too soon, Elizabeth I was thwarting a “further reformation” of the kind these men wanted. The “Zurich letters” and others of their kind also demonstrate the inevitable tensions that arose when principles and context are not aligned: offering advice from Zurich on the situation in England was, at best, a challenge.⁷

In exile, the English and Scots were active as writers, editors, and translators of books that became immensely significant in the making of Protestantism in the British isles. The best known product of this program is the “Geneva” translation of the Bible into English, which, once it was published in England, became a runaway success thanks to being published in a variety of formats (sizes); it remained the dominant version of Scripture in English until the Authorized (or “King James”) version of 1611 began to supplant it. The immense influence of the Geneva Bible was seconded

by many other books, first and foremost Calvin's writings, not only the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* but also a catechism and his commentaries on Scripture. After 1560, the London book trade issued translation after translation of these and works by other Reformed theologians, supplementing them with books in Latin that, for the most part, were imported. A careful count of both kinds of evidence demonstrates that, where printed books are concerned, Calvin was "the dominant theological influence in Elizabethan England," published and republished far more often than any native theologian. His one serious rival was William Perkins of Cambridge (d. 1602), but the writings of Theodore de Beze (or Beza), who assumed the leadership of the Geneva church after Calvin's death in 1564, rank third in a tabulation of editions, with another Reformed theologian, Heinrich Bullinger of Zurich, in sixth place, just after Luther.⁸ Scottish Protestants read the same books in Latin, English, or, by 1567, in Scots Gaelic,⁹ and formed close ties with the French Reformed community, which recruited students and faculty from Scotland for its seminaries. A handful of Scottish clergy settled in France, where Robert Boyd (1578-1627) and John Cameron (1579/1580-1625) spent most of their lives as pastors and seminary professors.¹⁰ English academics also went to Europe to teach, the path followed by William Ames (1575-1633) who had to leave Cambridge University because of his non-conformity and, some years later, became a professor of theology at the University of Franeker in the Netherlands. Two of his books, *De Conscientia* (in Latin, 1630, in English, 1643) and the much-reprinted *The Marrow of Theology* (1623 in Latin, 1638 in English, 1656 in Dutch) enjoyed a long life on the Continent and the New England colonies. This traffic in books had an unusual importance for the more outspoken or radical tendencies within the Puritan movement, for printers in the Netherlands issued the manifestoes of the Separatists and the "Presbyterian" movement of the 1570s and 1580s. Then, in the early seventeenth century, it was the turn of Separatist printers in Leiden and Amsterdam, the best known of them (from an American point of view) William Brewster of Plymouth Colony fame, to issue or re-issue a string of books by writers such as Ames and the fiery Scottish radical David Calderwood.¹¹

Taking a broader view of this traffic, every Reformed-style theologian in seventeenth-century Britain and New England relied on second and third generation Continental writers who carried on the traditions established

by Calvin, Bucer, and Bullinger.¹² Important figures in this next wave of Reformed “scholastics” were Bartholomaeus Keckermann, Johann Piscator, Francois du Jon (Franciscus Junius), Girolamo Zanchi, Daniel Chamier, Johann Alsted, and Amandus Polanus. One measure of their influence in Britain and New England is how often they were cited. In the only book of systematic theology written by a first-generation minister in New England, John Norton’s *The Orthodox Evangelist* (London, 1657), he made at least seventy-five references to these men and a few of their English counterparts. Less well known to many historians of this period is the traffic in texts from England to the Continent. According to Ian Beward, “at least fifty editions of Perkins’s writings were printed in Switzerland, the same number in various parts of Germany, almost ninety in the Netherlands, with smaller printings in France, Bohemia, Ireland, and Hungary.” Perkins is often characterized as one of the founders of the “practical divinity,” a way of preaching that focused on the inner self, or “heart.” Thanks to translations of Perkins and other English writers, including John Cotton of New England, the practical divinity prepared the way for the next stage of Continental Reformed Protestantism, the movement known as Pietism.¹³

The regulating of orthodoxy was of great concern to Calvin and his colleagues in Europe. One means to this end was to create official creeds or confessions: the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563, usually approached through a much-reprinted commentary on it by Ursinus, a professor at Heidelberg who helped draft the catechism, and the firmly predestinarian Second Helvetic Confession (1566), the doing of Bullinger. When heterodoxy in the form of “Arminianism” threatened the unity of the Reformed International, the advocates of orthodoxy staged an international “synod” in the Dutch city of Dordrecht (Dort) in 1618-1619, with English delegates attending alongside representatives from many regions in Europe. The influence of the Dortian “Five Points” persists to this day, mediated for many British and American Protestants through another document, the Westminster Confession, drafted by a group of English and Scottish clergy who met for several years in London (1643-1650). Well into the nineteenth century, the Westminster Confession was authoritative within the Presbyterian tradition and some wings of the Congregationalist. Thanks to schoolbooks like the *New England Primer*, printed in tens of thousands of copies in eighteenth-century America, the Shorter Westminster Catechism influenced popular Protestantism as well.

Its influence lingered into my own childhood when, as part of my preparation for becoming a regular member of my local Presbyterian church, I was handed this text and asked to study it.

Apart from Arminianism and “liberal” tendencies arising out of the European Enlightenment, the other source of strain within the Reformed international was evangelical revivalism. Revivalism became controversial in Britain and British North America once it began to create divisions within parishes and congregations between the people who were suddenly “awakened” and those who were not. Invariably, the awakened wanted fervent preaching and denounced as “unconverted” any ministers who failed to meet this standard. George Whitefield, the instrument of so much of this revivalism in Britain and North America, was hailed in 1739-1741 during his first preaching tour of the colonies. When he returned a few years later, however, many ministers refused to let him use their pulpits and the Harvard faculty weighed in with unkind words about him, a tit-for-tat given Whitefield’s well-publicized criticism of the school. In any larger history of the Calvinist diaspora, the awakenings deserve attention because of the ways in which evangelicals communicated with one another across the Atlantic and, in doing so, formed alliances or friendships of great importance to the careers of a handful of colonial ministers, most notably Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies. After both died, Edwards in 1758, Davies (a Presbyterian) in 1761, each would be published extensively in England and Scotland, with English and Scottish admirers using manuscripts sent them from the colonies. Davies’ three volume *Sermons on the Most Useful and Important Subjects, Adapted to the Family and Closet* (London, 1766) may be the earliest example of a “collected works” or its near equivalent for a colonial American writer. The 1766 printing is arresting as well because it contains a printed list of subscribers, some British, others American, that functions as something of a mirror to the web of transatlantic sympathies and connections.¹⁴

Turning, now, to the last of my questions, I want to ask how the principal themes of the Reformed fared in seventeenth-century New England. This question was immensely important to Perry Miller, who answered it in his explorations of the “New England Mind” by asserting that the colonial clergy altered Calvinist theology by introducing themes such as “preparation for salvation” that Calvin himself would have rejected. Miller was part of

a generation of scholars who sought to uncover an authentically American culture.¹⁵ Taking such a culture for granted, historians of New England Puritanism of my generation have generally tried to reclaim its ties with the Reformed International, and it is now well established that the colonial clergy were *not* distinctive in their preaching. Yet if we look elsewhere—to aspects of church and state or to their understanding of the church—no simple yes or no will do.

Consider church and state, for example. The “Marian exiles” who returned to England and Scotland at the end of the 1550s wanted to forge an alliance with their country’s monarch or leader. Without such an alliance, they knew that reform would be extremely difficult to accomplish. Moreover, they had absorbed Calvin’s dictum that magistrates were just as responsible to God for righteousness as the clergy were. But theory was of little use in two countries, Scotland and England, where the reigning monarch or the aristocratic elite preferred an Erastian policy (the state over the church) to the two kingdom theory that made them equal and separate. Hence the enduring frustration of the Puritan movement in England and Scotland and the crisis that occurred in both countries at about the same moment (1637-1638 in Scotland, 1640-1641 in England) when political authority and religious principle clashed in ways that prompted an insurgency in Scotland and the beginnings of the “Puritan Revolution” in England. No such insurgency or revolution occurred in the colonies of Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Connecticut. Here, uniquely within the world of the Reformed, the two kingdom theory was fully implemented: no ministers held civil office, the civil state was prohibited from appointing ministers or regulating doctrine, and the churches handled cases of “discipline” (misbehavior) on their own.¹⁶ Only in New England, moreover, was it possible to implement a policy proposed by the English Puritan leader Thomas Cartwright in the 1570s, to give the men who were “worthy” church members a voice in civil affairs. Thus in Massachusetts, the civil government ruled in 1631 that no man could become a “freeman,” i.e., entitled to vote in colony affairs, unless he had been accepted into a church.

In this case as in how the colonists defined the nature of the church, Reformed themes had unintended consequences. Instead of unifying the colonists, the rule of 1631 in Massachusetts divided them: some able to participate fully in political affairs, others severely excluded. This

contradiction was partly resolved in 1647 when the central government ruled that, in towns, all landholders were entitled to participate as voters in town meetings. This decision eased some of the tensions that had accumulated around the law of 1631, but not all of them, and by the mid-1640s critics of that law were appealing to the disenfranchised to mobilize in protest.¹⁷

A far more serious division or difference among the colonists arose around church membership, for the ministers and many of the lay people chose to create “gathered” or selective churches rather than reproduce the state or national church system that prevailed in England and Scotland. By the late 1630s, it was being rumored that only about half of the colonists had qualified for church membership in Massachusetts—this in contrast to the situation in England, where *all adults and children* would have been (and therefore the immigrants themselves had been, before they crossed the Atlantic) part of the church. To put this decision in context, we must return to two of the themes of the Reformed tradition, the church as sanctified community and the apocalyptic story of the few true Christians warring against the many who were false. Among the colonists, hopes ran high for a new beginning, a genuine return to the purity of the apostolic age and, more radically, of genuine progress toward the coming kingdom, or the return of Christ. We hear the both of these ambitions in statements by John Cotton, the first in a document of June 1636 in which he reminded the colonists that they had taken “Christ for [their] king, and priest, and prophet” and were therefore bound in covenant with him to “reform both church and commonwealth” as prescribed by the “moral laws, and statutes, and judgements, unto which [God] doth require obedience.” The second occurs in a letter he sent another radical Puritan shortly after arriving in Massachusetts, a passage in which he asserted that “the Order of the Churches and of the Commonwealth was so settled, by common Consent, that it brought to his mind, the New Heaven and New Earth, wherein dwells Righteousness.” Other clergy and lay people were saying the same thing—in essence, agreeing that the purpose of coming to New England was to achieve a purity that would approximate the purity of the kingdom of Christ.¹⁸

Other than limiting church membership to “visible saints,” what other steps did the colonists take to fulfill their apocalyptic hopes? Three of these became especially important: transferring power from the clergy to the ordinary people who were church members; insisting that ministers be paid

by voluntary contributions rather than, as in England, a system of taxation; and eliminating any kind of centralized control over individual congregations, as happened within the Presbyterian system of church government. The first of these involved a dramatic shift in opinion about the capacities of ordinary people to use power wisely. According to a commonplace (or truth) that everyone in Elizabethan England accepted, the “people” were “weak giddie and rash, and therefore” incapable of using “liberties” wisely. This judgment was reversed within the apocalyptic framework of the few against the many and of the coming kingdom. Thus in Thomas Hooker’s *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline* (1648), he insisted that “these are the times when people shall be fitted” to use their power wisely. Those of low rank or status, Hooker argued, were now being raised up: “the weak shall be as David.”¹⁹

As news of these practices made its way back to England and Scotland, the Puritans in those countries responded with shock and disapproval. If churches were limited to “visible saints,” how would the people outside the church ever be nurtured in the ways of grace? If “the people” were in charge, was the minister powerless, his own voice overruled by the majority? As the men asking these questions pointed out again and again, the colonists had gone too far—so far, in fact, that they were undermining the core principles of the Reformed tradition. To use anthropological categories of our time, the critics were saying that structure had been replaced by anti-structure: in New England, they saw a “world turned upside down” rather than the kind of order—an inclusive church, a strong role for clergy—that, from Calvin onward, had been characteristic of the Reformed tradition. As it happened, some of the ministers and lay people in New England were having second thoughts. Take, for example, the system of voluntary contributions to ministers. By 1637, this system was breaking down and, by 1638, the government in Massachusetts was ordering *all* householders in each town to contribute to the minister’s salary. Nothing quite this rapid happened with church membership, but by the middle of the 1640s the ministers were exploring the possibility of making the sacrament of baptism more widely available and, by 1662, had adopted new rules to this end. Slowly but surely, a church made up of a few expanded into a church that resembled the comprehensive state churches in England and Scotland. The empowering of lay people could not be undone, but by the early 1640s the ministers

were insisting that their “office” allowed them to veto any decision by the congregation. Now, less enchanted with the people than they had been in the 1630s, they wanted to protect their own privileges and prevent majority rule.²⁰

What lessons do the back and forth of structure and anti-structure in early New England offer for understanding the Calvinist diaspora? Let me re-emphasize the important elements of continuity. After the Westminster Confession was approved in England, the ministers acknowledged it as the standard of orthodoxy in New England. The curriculum of Harvard College was utterly traditional, as were the books in the college library, many of them written by Reformed scholastics. The teaching program emphasized the classic “arts” of rhetoric and logic, together with science, mathematics, the classical languages, and the like. Harvard was a little Oxford or Cambridge that replicated for native-born New Englanders the training their fathers and grandfathers had received in England. Intellectual connections were also nurtured by a remarkable group of ministers who kept up with what was being published in Europe and, in two instances, studied there before returning to New England, men such as Increase and Cotton Mather, Benjamin Colman, and Thomas Prince. Consciously or unconsciously, these men re-enacted the role of a William Perkins or a John Knox in the making of an international network of exchanges.

But let me also re-emphasize the dynamic qualities of the Reformed tradition. I began this essay by making a list of themes or characteristics of that tradition. The task of the historian is to set those themes in motion and watch as they intersect with context and circumstance, be it in the Netherlands, Edinburgh, or Boston, Massachusetts. In every place where it took hold, the Reformed changed its shape in certain ways while still being recognizably part of a longer tradition. The making of the “Congregational Way” in New England is a striking example of change that nearly carried the colonists outside of the boundaries of the Reformed, as would happen in the mid-seventeenth century with the Quakers who abruptly emerged in England. Being “international” does not guarantee sameness.

Notes

- 1 Carlos M. N. Eire, *War Against the Idols: The Reformation of Worship from Erasmus to Calvin* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986); Margaret Aston, “Iconoclasm in England: official and clandestine,” in *The Impact of the English Reformation 1500-1640*, ed. Peter Marshall (London: Arnold, 1997), 167-91; Keith Thomas, “Art and Iconoclasm in Early Modern England,” in Kenneth Fincham and Peter Lake, eds., *Religious Politics in Post-Reformation England: Essays in Honour of Nicholas Tyacke* (Woodbridge, Suffolk: Boydell Press, 2006), 16-40.
- 2 Brian A. Gerrish, *Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharist Theology of John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993); but the key text remains the *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, on which I have based this brief summary. The Swiss reformers were not of one mind on the nature of the Eucharist, some preferring a “memorialist” approach. English debates and the theology of the colonists are described in E. Brooks Holifield, *The Covenant Sealed: The Development of Puritan Sacramental Theology in Old and New England, 1570-1720* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).
- 3 Francois Wendel, *Calvin: The Origins and Development of His Religious Thought*, trans. Philip Mairet (New York: Harpers, 1963), 295; David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 9-12; Martin Bucer, *De Regno Christi*, reprinted in *Melanchthon and Bucer*, ed. Wilhelm Pauck (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 194. See also James L. Ainslie, *The Doctrines of Ministerial Order in the Reformed Churches of the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1940).
- 4 *The Scots Confession of 1560*, ed. G. D. Henderson (Edinburgh, St. Andrew Press, 1960), 70; Bucer, *De Regno Christi*, 181, 193, 221; Martin Greschat, “The relation between church and civil community in Bucer’s reforming work,” in *Martin Bucer Reforming Church and Community*, ed., D. F. Wright (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 17-31; Richard Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation: Studies in the Thought of John Knox* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1980), chap. 3; Alastair Duke, “Perspectives on European Calvinism,” in *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620*, ed. Andrew Pettegree, Alastair Duke, and Gillian Lewis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 9-11.
- 5 Tames Kirk, *Patterns of Reform: Continuity and Change in the Reformation Kirk*, (Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1989), 234 quoting a 1548 statement by a Scottish Lutheran. As Alastair Duke points out, “No thorough-going reformation in the Calvinist sense could take place without substantial support from the civil authorities.” Duke, “Perspectives on International Calvinism,” in *Calvinism in Europe*, ed. Pettegree, Duke, and Lewis, 14.
- 6 Greaves, *Theology and Revolution in the Scottish Reformation*, 45; Crawford Gribben, *The Puritan Millennium Literature and Theology, 1550-1682* (revised ed., Paternoster, 2008), 25-26, 73-74; Adrian Chastain Weimer, *Martyrs' Mirror Persecution and Holiness in Early New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 5.
- 7 *The Zurich Letters*, ed. Hastings Robinson (Cambridge, England, 1866).
- 8 Andrew Pettegree, “The Reception of Calvinism in Britain,” *Calvinus Sincerioris Religionis Vindex Calvin as Protector of the Purer Religion*, ed. Wilhelm H. Neuser and Brian G. Armstrong, (*Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies* 36: Kirksville MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1997), 267-89; Francis

- Higman, "Calvin's works in translation," in *Calvinism in Europe*, ed. Pettegree, Duke, and Lewis, 82-99. Higman's notes on the English translators indicate that most of them (e.g., John Field and Anthony Gilby) participated in the Puritan movement.
- 9 Jane Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland," in *Calvinism in Europe*, ed. Pettegree, Duke, and Lewis, 231-53; Arthur H. Williamson, *Scottish National Consciousness in the Age of James VI: The Apocalypse, the Union and the Shaping of Scotland's Public Culture* (Edinburgh: John Donald Publishers Ltd, 1979), 76-77.
- 10 Connections between Scotland and France are described in W. Stephen Reid, "Reformation in France and Scotland: A Case Study in Sixteenth-Century Communications," in *Later Calvinism: International Perspectives*, ed. W. Fred Graham (Sixteenth Century Essays and Studies 22: Kirksville, MO: Sixteenth Century Journal Publishers, 1994), 195-214.
- 11 The substantial traffic of people and books between Britain and the Netherlands is described more fully in Keith L. Sprunger, *Dutch Puritanism: A History of English and Scottish Churches of the Netherlands in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1982). For other essays that deal with the flow of ideas and people, in this case to Britain from the Continent, see Polly Ha and Patrick Collinson, eds., *The Reception of Continental Reformation in Britain*, Proceedings of the British Academy 164 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010).
- 12 Basil Hall, "Martin Bucer in England," in Wright, ed., *Martin Bucer*, 144-60. The best guide to the theologizing of the "scholastics" is Richard A. Muller, *Post-Reformation Reformed Dogmatics 1 Prolegomena to Theology and 2 Holy Scripture: The Cognitive Foundation of Theology* (1987; repr., Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1993).
- 13 Ian Bewerd, ed., *The Work of William Perkins* (Appleford, England: Sutton Courtenay Press, 1970), xi; F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965). Bewerd's edition of Perkins's writings concludes with an impressive bibliography of Continental translations.
- 14 Susan O'Brien, "Eighteenth-Century Publishing Networks in the First Years of Transatlantic Evangelicalism," in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1900*, ed. Mark A. Noll, David W. Babbington, and George A. Rawlyk (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 38-57. I describe Davies's transatlantic career more fully in "Afterword," *The Atlantic World of Print in the Age of Franklin*, *Early American Studies* 8 (Winter 2010): 199-212.
- 15 A story told in Richard Ruland, *The Rediscovery of American Literature: Premises of Critical Taste, 1900-1940* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1967), without, however, close attention to Miller. For a characteristic attempt to indicate difference or deviation from authentic Calvinism, see Miller, "'Preparation for Salvation' in Seventeenth-Century New England" (1943), reprinted in *Nature's Nation* (Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1967), 50-77. Of the critical responses to this essay, which overlooks the central question of assurance of salvation in the Antinomian controversy of 1636-37, the most useful are Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), and William K. B. Stoever, "A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven": *Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middletown, CT.: Wesleyan University Press, 1978).

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- 16 David D. Hall, *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (New York: Knopf, 2011), chap. 3; see also Hall, *Faithful Shepherd*, chap. 6.
- 17 Hall, *Reforming People*, chap. 2.
- 18 Quoted in *ibid.*, 106, 108.
- 19 Glenn W. LaFantasie, ed., *The Correspondence of Roger Williams*, 2 vols. (Hanover, N.H.: University Press of New England, 1988), vol. 1, 24; Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Sunme of Church Discipline* (London, 1648), 7-8.
- 20 These developments are described in Hall, *Faithful Shepherd*, *passim*.