

***“Reflections on Puritan America & the
Constitution: Past Influences, Present
Decline & Future Hope in the light of the
2008 Elections”***

Russ Atmore

“Reflections on Puritan America & the Constitution: Past Influences, Present Decline & Future Hope in the light of the 2008 Elections”

Introduction

The events surrounding the establishment of a New England in a New World as opposed to Old England which came to be known as Puritan America & the ratification & implementation of the Constitution of the United States both hinge on watershed events. I hope to touch on these later.

Puritan influence across the water from Old England did not just happen because pilgrims and settlers decided to establish some new theology or principles of government that were free from monarchical hierarchy and interference. The New World was indeed subject to the King, and pilgrims were still his subjects. Freedom from the monarchy would come later at great price.

Puritan influence came across the water, and it came in the form of ministers ejected from their pulpits. It came in the form of the Geneva Bible of 1560. It came in the form of common citizens who desired to be free of oppressive tendencies that impinged on their worship of God. Ultimately, the form of Puritanism that made its way to the New World came either directly from the ever-increasingly influential Reformation city of Geneva and its academy or through the influence of Geneva upon Puritan England. This influence can be traced to John Calvin and Theodore Beza primarily.

In 1602, Theodore Beza, Calvin's successor led an independence celebration through the streets of Geneva. This is still celebrated and is known as the "Escalade". In Scotland, during the same decade, the ambitious King James VI (the future James I of England) began to settle Calvinists in Ulster in Ireland. He modeled this settlement along the lines of the Jamestown Colony chartered originally in 1606.

The influence and ramifications of the Reformation on the founding of America must never be discounted. We shall see these as we progress.

The Puritans

Why would anyone want to speak on the Puritans and the American Constitution, is a good question for a person to consider? It is accepted by many that the founding of America had its roots firmly entrenched in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Where did this Gospel come from? It came, as we have said, from Old England having been influenced by Geneva, and the ideas of the Genevan Reformer, John Calvin.

It is necessary, that before we speak of Puritan America, we must first examine the Puritans and Puritanism. What do these names or labels mean? For many they conjure up serious, stereotypical, morbid individuals obsessed with a strict morality and a hatred for anything Romish. The name "Puritan" has often been used as vile term describing supposedly perfectionist ambitions in those who were known as Puritan.

The English Puritans have been described as "California Redwoods," "a breed of giants" as J. I Packer has said, who are only been

newly appreciated in our time.¹ If ever there was a time when the Puritans can be of immense help to us, it is now. The Puritans loved the Bible, and they sought to apply the Bible to all of life. They wanted to know how the Bible influenced history, influenced society, influenced kings, influenced the Church, influenced governments, and influenced individuals. Puritanism was (and may I add, still is) a comprehensive worldview.

A Puritan conceives of God as the grand and supreme, all wise, eternal being who is to be adored, worshipped, loved and served. The Puritan was concerned for a truly spiritual Church – a pure Church.² Not a Church that was isolated, but a Church that spoke to all areas of life. The term “Puritan” came to be used in the 1560’s to describe English Protestants who were not happy with the reforms of Queen Elizabeth. They wanted further purification of the Church. The Puritans were Trinitarian in their theology. This is especially seen in the works of John Owen and Jonathan Edwards. The Puritans were interested in transforming society through the Gospel, and they stressed the need for personal individual salvation.

The father of Puritanism, can be said to be, a man by the name of William Perkins. William Perkins lived a short but highly productive and effective life from 1558 to 1602. He received his education at Christ’s College, Cambridge, and then served as a preacher in the church of great St. Andrews from 1584 until his death. Perkins was deeply committed to communicating the transforming power and impact of Christ in the lives of those individuals who professed to be Christians, but who knew little of the

¹ J. I. Packer, *The Quest for Godliness* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1990), p. 11.

² Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans, Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 258.

power of Christ in their lives. In order to achieve this, he began to proclaim the Gospel.

The impact and influence of Perkins is seen in the lives of subsequent preachers of the Gospel. John Cotton (who would later be one of the influential Puritans in America) declared, when he heard the church bells tolling the death of William Perkins that he rejoiced that his conscience would no longer be smitten by Perkin's sermons.³ In 1613, the future great Puritan, Thomas Goodwin, who was then twelve years old, came to Cambridge, and could testify that the whole town was taken up with the ministry of Mr. Perkins.

What is interesting about William Perkins is that his preaching, first of all, was very plain. This is crucial to understanding the Puritans. They aimed at simplicity in their preaching. Now not all the Puritans are easy to read, but we must remember that during the 17th century men and women wrote and spoke in terms that we would find hard and difficult. It must also be said that theological understanding among Puritan congregations was much higher than we would find in the 21st century.

Secondly, Perkins pioneered what is known as Puritan casuistry, which was the ability to deal with "cases of conscience" through "self-examination and spiritual diagnosis."⁴ This method of dealing with the souls of people would become a Puritan trademark and the New England Puritans were no exception. The works of John Bunyan (Old England) and

³ William Perkins, *The Art of Prophesying* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, first published in Latin in 1592 and in English 1606; revised edition by Banner of Truth, 1996), p. viii. See also Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), p.153 where "Perkin's strong preaching on human sin and divine judgment "laid siege to and beleaguered" Cotton's heart.

⁴ *Meet the Puritans*, p. 472.

Jonathan Edwards (New England) reveal this over and over again. But more of Edwards later.

Suffice it to say, that through the example set by Perkins, many future Puritans would adopt his methods. Perkins focused on changing the Church from within by addressing pastoral weaknesses, the lack of spiritual life in individuals and by instructing the Church. It was truly a vision to reform the Church. Puritan casuistry was experimental or experiential, dealing with the heart of man through application of the Gospel truth and self-examination.

Let us return briefly to the history of England in order to see where we are at this point. The Reformation reached England during the reign of Henry VIII (1509 – 1547), but it was during the short reign of his son, Edward VI (1547 – 1553) that the theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin was introduced to England through the efforts of Archbishop Thomas Cranmer (1489 – 1556). Mary Tudor (1553 – 1558) reversed these reforms, reinstated the Roman Mass and enforced allegiance to the Pope. 270 Protestants lost their lives during this time of intense persecution. Many fled to Holland as a result of these hardships under Mary. When Elizabeth (1533 – 1603) came to the English throne many Protestants returned to England, in the hope of the Church being reformed. It was however, only partially reformed, and many felt the lack of spiritual life and power that they had experienced on the Continent under the Reformation.

The destruction of the Spanish fleet (Spanish Armada) in 1558 saw the thorough demise of Roman Catholicism, but the Puritans still felt that Elizabeth had not done enough in her reforms from Catholicism. It was

hoped that with the accession of James I (1566 – 1625) to the English throne, that Puritan concerns might be answered.

However, James I saw that his political power was tied to the Episcopal Church, and did nothing really to meet Puritan hopes. James agreed to a new translation of the Bible, but he demanded allegiance to the liturgy and government of the Church of England. James I's desire for conformity led again to a Puritan evacuation of England. Many of these Puritans went to the Continent and others became the settlers in the New World. William Bradford (1589 – 1657) was one of these men, and he became the future governor of the Plymouth colony.

In 1625, Charles I (1625 – 1640) came to the throne in England. His marriage to Henrietta Maria of France and his appointment of Archbishop William Laud re-introduced Roman Catholic ideas back into the Church. This prompted many Puritans to leave England again. John Winthrop (1588 – 1649) led the first great Puritan removal to Massachusetts on board the ship *Arbella*. 13,000 emigrants would sail for New England over the next decade. Among them would be great Puritans such as John Cotton, Thomas Shepard, and Thomas Hooker. Thomas Hooker (1586 – 1647) would be the great-grandfather of Sarah Pierpont, the future wife of Jonathan Edwards.

In England, events were reaching a climax between Charles I and his Parliament ultimately leading to Charles fleeing London in 1642. The English Civil War was fought from 1642 – 1648. Charles was simply not capable of handling the Puritan forces of Oliver Cromwell (1599 – 1658) known as the New Model Army. Archbishop Laud was arrested and

executed in 1645 for treason, and the king, Charles I was tried and executed on January 30, 1649.

During the Puritan era in England from 1648 to 1658/9, some of the most excellent Confessions of Faith ever written were constituted. They were written during the Civil War period (1642 - 1648). These are the Presbyterian Westminster Confession of Faith (1646), the Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647), and the Westminster Larger Catechism (1648). The Congregationalists' Savoy Declaration of Faith (1658) and the Baptists' London Baptist Confession of Faith (1689) were also later written to meet the need of the Independents and Baptists. America would feel the force of these documents in the years ahead. These Confessions and Catechisms followed the Reformation documents espousing solid and robust Calvinism. Two great consequences to come out of the Reformation and to be associated with Calvinism (which did not originate with John Calvin though he certainly espoused the doctrines later given his name) were the principles of Capitalism and Missionary endeavors around the world.

The Puritans who came to America brought these principles backed up by the Bible and explained in their Confessions of Faith.

The death of Oliver Cromwell in 1658 saw the recovery of the monarchy under Charles II (1630 – 1685). Cromwell's legacy had been to allow religious freedom which prompted growth in many religious sects. Charles II, despite his promises to promote religious freedom and preserve liberty of conscience failed to keep his word. Religious conformity was enforced through the Clarendon Code, and once again Anglo-Catholic influences began to be felt. During this time, men like John Bunyan and

Richard Baxter were imprisoned. Bunyan (1628 – 1688) was arrested in 1660 and would spend the next 12 years in prison. He wrote many works during this time.

It was during a second spell in prison in the mid 1670's that Bunyan would write *Pilgrim's Progress* (among many other works). When Bunyan was first arrested, he was told that he would be freed if he gave up preaching, to which he replied, "If you free me today, I will preach tomorrow." *Pilgrim's Progress* sold more than 100,000 copies during its first 10 years in print. It has since been translated into more than 200 languages, and with the exception of the Bible has sold more copies than any other book. *Pilgrim's Progress* would make its way to the New World. An examination of many Puritan sermons in America give indication of familiarity with many of Bunyan's themes as found in *Pilgrim's Progress*.

In 1662, Charles II issued his famous Act of Uniformity requiring Puritan ministers to give up and repudiate their ordinations, and be re-ordained in the State Church. Failure to do so would lead to ejection from their pulpits, and on August 24, 1662, on a day known as St. Bartholomew's Day, nearly 2000 Puritan ministers were removed from their pulpits. The Act of Conformity of 1664 banned non-conformists from preaching in fields and private homes. This has (dare I say it) omens for 2009 and onwards. The Five Mile Act of 1665 prohibited these ministers from coming within 5 miles of their former pulpits. The Puritans were not silenced and a great writing ministry continued, but Puritanism in England was over⁵ and any hope for its future lay across the water in New England.

⁵ I have used material from Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson's excellent work, *Meet the Puritans* (pp. 3 – 9) for some of the historical facts regarding Puritan England. Additional valuable works to consult are: Peter Lewis, *The Genius of Puritanism* (Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1996); Martyn Lloyd-Jones, *The Puritans: Their Origins and Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust,

It was Thomas Jefferson who adopted as his personal seal, a motto closely associated with the Protestant Reformation period, namely; “Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God.”⁶ This is a subject related to the Revolution of 1776 and the formation of the Constitution, but this lies ahead of us at this point. At the time of the Revolution, John Adams believed that the small Republic of Geneva was the “first Puritan State.” He wrote, “Let not Geneva be forgotten or despised. Religious liberty owes it much respect.”⁷

The *Institutes of the Christian Religion* by John Calvin, the Geneva Bible, and Theodore Beza’s *New Testament Annotations* brought Calvinism to America. In essence, it was the Calvinism of the Puritans. Americans have decried Calvinism in much the same way as the Puritans have been derided, yet the facts are, that the founding of this great country is rooted in the work of Calvin and subsequently the Puritans. Today, many evangelical Christians are ashamed of both. The founding of America and the writing of the Constitution both owe their existence to these forefathers, and this fact was acknowledged not just by those who were Christians

1987); Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Westminster Assembly and Its Work* (Sweet Water Revival Books, 1991); William Barker, *Puritan Profiles: 54 Influential Puritans at the Time when the Westminster Confession of Faith was Written* (Fearn: Ross-shire Mentor, 1999); Ralph Bronkema, *The Essence of Puritanism* (Goes, Netherlands, Oosterbaan and LeCointre, 1929); Patrick Collinson, *English Puritanism* (London: Historical Association, 1987); Sinclair Ferguson, *John Owen on the Christian Life* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); Richard Greaves, *John Bunyan* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969); Paul Helm, *Calvin and the Calvinists* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1982); Christopher Hill, *Puritanism and Revolution: Studies in Interpretation of the English Revolution of the 17th Century* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964); Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987); Joseph A. Pipa, Jr. “William Perkins and the Development of Puritan Preaching.” (Ph.D. dissertation, Westminster Theological Seminary, 1985); Peter Toon, *God’s Statesman: The Life and Work of John Owen* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1971).

⁶ It has been suggested that Jefferson learned of this motto from Benjamin Franklin, however, John Bradford used it during the execution of Charles I and Samuel Rutherford was probably aware of it. It has also been suggested that William Penn may have used it. See Ellis Sandoz, *The Politics of Truth and Other Timely Essays* (Columbia: MO.: University of Missouri Press, 1999), p. 204.

⁷ Cited by Herbert Foster in Robert M. Kingdon’s *Calvin and Calvinism: Sources for Democracy* (Lexington, Mass.: D.C. Heath and Company, 1970), p. 39.

during the 18th century in America, but by those who were not (Jefferson and Franklin being examples). John Adams said that the American Revolution of 1776 did not occur instantaneously, but that the idea of New England sprang from religious impulses. New England may have physically been launched at Plymouth Rock, but as 19th century historian Carlos Martyn explains, “It was cradled in the pages of the first printed copy of the English Bible.”⁸

With the decline and death of Charles II in 1685, the way was paved for religious toleration under William of Orange and his wife Mary. His accession to the throne brought about broad sweeping Protestant reforms beginning in 1688. The increase of religious toleration opened the door for Reformation and Puritan ideas to flow from Old England to New England. As the Westminster divines gathered in London and produced their Confessions, the Massachusetts Bay and New Haven Colonies were working on their new government policies.

Puritan America

The years 1607 to 1700 are known as the Colonial era. The First Charter of Virginia (April 10, 1606) resolved, “we greatly commending and graciously accepting of, their desires for the furtherance of so noble work, which may by the Providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the Glory of His Divine Majesty, in the propagating of Christian religion to such people, as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God.”⁹

⁸ W. Carlos Martyn, *The Pilgrim Fathers of New England: A History* (New York: American Tract Society, 1867), p. 18.

⁹ Catharine Millard, *Great American Statesmen and Heroes* (Camp Hill, PA.: Horizon Books, 1995), p. 13.

Benjamin Morris has written regarding the settlement of the American Continent by saying, that “no era in human history is more signally and sublimely marked with the manifest providence and presence of God than that of the discovery and Christian colonization of the North American continent.”¹⁰

Alexis de Tocqueville maintained that “religion, and specifically Protestant Christianity lay at the foundation of America.”¹¹ The task of any historian is to discover the reasons that lie behind the behavior and actions of the actors in history, especially that which is connected to their intellectual life. This is because ideas always have consequences, and theological ideas have massive repercussions.

The acorn of Geneva resulted in the oak tree of the United States, whose beneficent branches have sheltered many. The Puritan settlers whether they were of Scottish extraction, of Irish forebears, of Continental or of British stock viewed life through the lens of Geneva. This is why the Mayflower Compact reads as it does, “In the Name of God. Amen... having undertaken for the glory of God and advancement of the Christian faith, and the honor of the King and Country, to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, do by these present, solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and one of another, Covenant and Combine ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation”. Notice the distinctly Reformation and Puritan idea of Covenant.

¹⁰ Benjamin F. Morris, *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States* (Powder Springs, GA.: American Vision, 2008), p. 56, 57.

¹¹ Cited in David W. Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding* (Lanham MY.: Lexington Books, 2005), p. 17.

It was William Bradford (one of the signers of the Mayflower Compact) who later as Governor of Plymouth, sought to exhibit Puritan ideals in the Charter for Plymouth when he said, “that this New World Colony would conform to the church discipline of the French and other Reformed Churches.” This was a reference to the Huguenots primarily of France. Cotton Mather referred to Bradford as the “Moses of Plymouth Colony”

If William Bradford was the Moses of Plymouth, then John Winthrop was the preeminent Man of Massachusetts. He came to the New World in 1629 “to found the seat of the most reformed Christianity.”¹² Just prior to arrival in Massachusetts, Winthrop gave his famous sermon, “A Model of Christian Charity,” on board the *Arbella*, in which he said, “For we must consider that we shall be as a city upon a hill. The eyes of all people are upon us. So that if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken... we shall be made a story and a by-word throughout the world. We shall open the mouths of enemies to speak evil of the ways of God ... We shall shame the faces of many of God's worthy servants, and cause their prayers to be turned into curses upon us ‘til we be consumed out of the good land whither we are a-going.”

To say that William Bradford and John Winthrop were Calvinists would be the understatement of the century. Their lives by education and by conversion were rooted in the teachings of Geneva. John Winthrop was born to a Puritan minister in 1588. He learned his Puritanism at Trinity College, Cambridge. Winthrop also studied law, so he was essentially equipped for the issues of the New World and its future government.

¹² Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America*, vol. 1, (1702 reprint. Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1979), p. 119.

Winthrop clearly understood that there would be seasons of prosperity and hardship. This was evidenced during those first years and Thanksgiving seasons. Winthrop believed that it was the duty of the prosperous to care for the needy and poor. Charity was not the government's to give, for the governor could not give what he did not possess.¹³

In attempting to examine early Puritan America our task is not made any easier due to the establishment of separate colonies in New England. Diversity did indeed exist among the early colonists.¹⁴

For example, there was Massachusetts Bay, New Haven and Connecticut, of which the oldest and largest was Massachusetts. John Winthrop using Calvin's understanding of Scripture as a Revelation of Covenant relationship between God & His people, understood that God deals primarily with individuals, and secondarily with groups or nations – the Seed of Abraham are the Elect of God, and therefore are to be found in nations (as individuals).¹⁵

In the context of 16th & 17th Century England, this meant that God desired the nation as a nation to be obedient to Him. This understanding of Scripture was known as the National Covenant. It did not mean that God had entered into a specific covenant with England, but rather that England was to be subject to the totality of Scripture because it was God's Word to them.

¹³ David W. Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, p. 293.

¹⁴ Philip E. Gura, *A Glimpse of Sion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620 – 1660* (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1984), pp. 126 – 44.

¹⁵ Harry Stout, *New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 86 – 95.

This understanding was, of course, not unique to England only. Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* brought home to the English Puritan this truth very forcibly. John Foxe had experienced persecution himself, so when he described the suffering of the saints of God for their faith, he knew of what he was speaking.

Puritans read John Foxe's book and were inspired through recognizing that because so much sacrifice had been made, and because England enjoyed the blessing of God, that therefore, they could not sit back and be satisfied with a half- finished reformation. John Bunyan confessed that next to his Bible, Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was second.¹⁶

The dashing of Puritan hopes back home in Old England fueled the effort to see the hand of Divine Providence (which it was) in coming to the New World. This was the position of John Winthrop. He came to the New World, not to *escape* society but to *establish* society – a society that would bring God glory. Winthrop wrote to his wife, words that indicated that Old England was done for, and that hope lay elsewhere, “if the Lorde seeth it wilbe good for us, he will provide a shelter and a hiding place for us and ours.”¹⁷ From such burning desires to be free of the encumbrances of a decaying old world, it is no wonder that he preached about a City set upon a Hill.

The impact of the Puritan upon New England is complex and profound. For one thing, how should government be construed? Should it follow rigorously the Old Testament civil code or not? There were some

¹⁶ John Adair, *Founding Fathers: The Puritans in England and America* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1986), p. 57.

¹⁷ “John Winthrop to His Wife,” May 15, 1629, in *The Puritans: A Sourcebook of Their Writings*, ed. Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson (New York: Harper & Row, 1963), pp. 466 – 67.

Puritans far more zealous for the implementation of the requirements of Moses than others. Above all, the Puritans in New England sought to be men and women of the Bible. They were passionate about their relationship with God whom they held to be absolutely sovereign. They believed that their calling in life was to honor Christ in every detail, whether you ploughed with the plough or lectured in the Academy. They sought to tie political power to the authority of Scripture rather than to financial or societal pressures (something politicians ought to learn from in 2008).

In November 1620, the Mayflower landed a group of forty-one men and their families at Cape Cod. For many the arrival in New England was similar to the journey of the ancient patriarchs in the land of Canaan. Just a few of them and strangers to everyone else. Within 20 years, the population around the Bay of Massachusetts had grown to more than 20,000. The great territories of land westward lay open, unexplored and unsettled. Puritan Thomas Hooker made his way inland in June 1636. Eventually after 2 weeks of travel, he and his group of about one hundred people reached the Connecticut River. They settled at a site called Hartford, fifty miles inland from the mouth of the river. A small settlement called Windsor existed a few miles to the north of them, where an English trader had built the first house in Connecticut.

A woman by the name of Ann Coles travelled with Thomas Hooker. Back in England, her husband had died. His name was Richard Edwards. With her son, William Edwards, she made the journey to the New World. William was the first line of the Edwards family in New England. William's son, also called Richard became in turn, the father of Timothy Edwards, of whose son it could be said, that he was truly the last great Puritan in America, namely, Jonathan Edwards.

We cannot understand Puritan America unless we understand Jonathan Edwards. I think it's true to say that the purity of everything Puritan resided in Edwards. His father, Timothy Edwards married Esther Stoddard in 1694. The Edwards parentage was of no great account, except that it was known for its godliness. Esther Stoddard's, however, was preeminent. Her father Solomon Stoddard (maternal grandfather to Jonathan) was probably the most well known minister in New England. Son-in-law Timothy shared the same views as Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard said that ministers were not sent into the pulpit to show their wit and eloquence, but to set men's hearts on fire.¹⁸ Timothy was the minister of East Windsor. The Bible was enthroned in the small community as the very Word of God. It was here in East Windsor, on October 5, 1703 that Jonathan Edwards was born. Four sisters were born before him and six more followed after him. Each daughter stood six feet tall, and so Timothy Edwards's girls were often referred to as his *sixty-feet of daughters*. It was here in the pristine world of New England, that Jonathan Edwards discovered and examined the glorious creation of God.

The Puritanism of Jonathan Edwards can be seen for example, in his view of conversion. He wrote, "they who are truly converted are new men, new creatures, new, not only within, but without; they are sanctified throughout, in spirit, soul and body; old things are passed away, all things are become new; they have new hearts, new eyes, new tongues, new hands, new feet; i.e., a new conversation and practice; they walk in newness of life, and continue to do so to the end of life."¹⁹

¹⁸ Iain H. Murray, *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1987), p. 8.

¹⁹ *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 2 vols. (London, 1834, reprinted Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), vol. 1: p. 316.

Iain Murray states that there was plenty of evidence that something had happened to Edwards at the time of his conversion. His personal papers indicate that a new master-interest held him – the Word of God became his central delight.²⁰

It was 1722, and Edwards was 19 years of age. Christ had captured his affections. It was during this year that he began to write his seventy “Resolutions” only completing them in 1723. Resolution 1 reads, “Resolved, that I will do whatsoever I think to be most to God's glory, and my own good, profit and pleasure, in the whole of my duration, without any consideration of the time, whether now, or never so many myriads of ages hence. Resolved to do whatever I think to be my duty and most for the good and advantage of mankind in general. Resolved to do this, whatever difficulties I meet with, how many soever, and how great soever.”

Resolutions 5, 6, & 7 read, “Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it the most profitable way I possibly can. Resolved, to live with all my might, while I do live. Resolved, never to do anything, which I should be afraid to do, if it were the last hour of my life.”

Resolution 28 reads, “Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same.”

These are the words of a simple profound devout Puritan.

One of the amazing differences between the world of Thomas Hooker (1586 – 1647) Edwards’ wife’s great-grandfather, and the world of

²⁰ *Jonathan Edwards: A New Biography*, p. 41.

Jonathan Edwards' (1703 – 1758), was that they lay on either side of the Newtonian Revolution.²¹ The last 50 years of the 1600's saw incredible strides in science. Bertrand Russell comments, that someone born in 1700 was modern and someone born in 1600 was medieval.²²

It was Johannes Kepler's Laws of planetary motion (1609 – 1619) along with Isaac Newton's three laws of motion and his law of gravitation (1687) and Robert Boyle's law in chemistry (1688) that brought the world to modernity. The Copernican Revolution was complete when Newton published his *Principia* in 1687. Newton launched the mathematical concept of the Calculus, being the study of change by way of limits, derivatives, integrals and infinites. It was Newton's laws that seemed to imply a deistic concept of God. In other words, there were laws in motion and God was not needed, so God could sit back and observe His world as a watchmaker observes the regularity of a clock ticking. Such thinking would lie at the back of Thomas Jefferson's mind and Benjamin Franklin's mind. Scientific discovery with its laws, to use Karl Popper's concept, sometimes yields "an unintended consequence."

For Jonathan Edwards, it was simply the confirmation of the Scriptures that God is the First Uncaused Cause of everything, and that He has established secondary causes dependent upon His Sovereignty and Providence. This is Puritan thinking. Edwards was certainly no deist.

What is still more amazing about Jonathan Edwards is that he thought like a Reformer and a Puritan looking backwards, but that he was

²¹ John Carrick, *The Preaching of Jonathan Edwards* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 2008), p. 21 – 23.

²² Bertrand Russell, *History of Western Philosophy and its Connection with Political and Social Circumstances from the Earliest Times to the Present Day* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1961), p. 522.

thoroughly modern looking forward. His modernity was subsumed by his Puritanism, or should I say, by his Biblicism.

What fascinates one with Edwards is that he was so God-centered. This theme of God dominates his every move. All of his writings are expressions of his longing to be filled with God, to magnify God. This is Puritan thinking.

This is not the thinking of the 21st century. Sad to say, our world has abandoned God, even the Church is not immune to this accusation, as we see the Scriptures and their authority abandoned for cultural relativity and tolerance.

It was Augustine in His magnificent *“City of God,”* who explained to the Romans that their decline and collapse was because they lusted for luxury and prosperity. Their desire for peace and abundance blinded them and secured for them an endless parade of pleasures and vices.²³ Such is America today.

Jonathan Edwards left to the Church and the world his writings and sermons. The Great Awakening, of which he was so much a part (along with George Whitefield) and of which he wrote detailed his observations of the great Revival that swept the Colonies. These works are *“A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred souls in Northampton and the Neighboring Towns,”* (1737) and *“The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God”* (1741). His most

²³ Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. and trans. by R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007 printing), pp. 44 – 48.

famous sermon, "*Sinners in the hands of an Angry God*" saw revival break out in the town of Enfield on July 8, 1741.

Edwards would write some of the most remarkable pieces of theological literature that the world has ever seen during the last 5 years of his life in relative obscurity on the New England frontier. Apart from his *Treatise Concerning Religions Affections* (1746), and *The Life of David Brainerd* (1749), these would be his *Freedom of the Will* (1754), his *Doctrine of Original Sin Defended* (1758), and *The Nature of True Virtue* (1765 published after his death).

Jonathan Edward died of smallpox complications received through inoculation at Princeton a few months after becoming its President on March 22, 1758. America has never been the same. The grandson of Jonathan Edwards, Aaron Burr (1756 – 1836) became Vice-President of the United States under Thomas Jefferson. He was no credit to his grandfather having abandoned his grandfather's faith. Aaron Burr was responsible for the needless death of Alexander Hamilton through a pistol duel. He asked to be buried at the feet of his grandfather, of whom he said, he was not worthy.

The American Revolution & the Constitution

With the death of Edwards and his successor, the young Samuel Davies (perhaps the greatest preacher America has ever produced) the winds of change began to prevail over the Colonial theological and political landscape. Ongoing difficulties with the King in England began to stir ferment in the Colonies. George III was the King who lost America through his harsh and excessive taxation and particularly by the Stamp Act. When

this was repealed he pushed through the famous Townshend Acts of 1767 which taxed commodities (especially tea, leading to the Boston Tea Party) thus paving the way for rebellion, revolution and independence. It took 150 years for the motto of Calvin and Beza's Geneva, and then adopted by Jefferson, "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God" to come to fruition.

The American Revolution centered its hopes on essentially 2 ideas: freedom from the control of imperfect overlords and the creation of republican structures to restrict individual abuses of power.²⁴

It was Alexander Hamilton in Federalist Paper # 8 who declared that "safety from external danger is the most powerful director of national conduct."²⁵ How do we apply such wisdom to the current war situation facing America at this time? The Revolution was carried along by ideas of liberty and republican government. The essential features of an ideal and virtuous republican government focus on 1) the distribution of powers; 2) legislative checks and balances; and 3) an independent judiciary. This is why the Federalist Papers were written.

James Madison clearly understood the difficulties connected with the establishment of government. In his famous Federalist # 51, he stated that, "in framing a government which is to be administered by men over men, the great difficulty lies in this: you must first enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself."²⁶

²⁴ David. W Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, p. 346.

²⁵ Alexander Hamilton, James Madison and John Jay, *The Federalist*, original text 1818 edition (New York: Barnes & Noble Classics, 2006), p. 42.

²⁶ *The Federalist*, p. 288.

Two great Revolutions occurred towards the end of the 18th century. The one, American and the other, French. The one saw the dignity of men lifted up in liberty and the other saw the dignity of men trampled underfoot. Both claimed true liberty, yet the American Revolution was fought over ideals grounded in the acknowledgment of the Creator and the freedom of men, and the French Revolution despised the Creator and set up man in His place.²⁷ The supposed ideals of the Enlightenment and Renaissance did not exalt God and did not enhance man.

This is why Puritan America is so important. It recognizes the place of man under the supremacy of God, and in so doing lifts man to his rightful place – to exercise dominion as he was commanded to do at his creation. It recognizes the place of God as Supreme, and man as being under the superintending Providence of God.

The Revolution needed the Declaration of Independence and then subsequently the Constitution to give it impetus and legitimacy. This paper does not need to explore the Revolution and all its associated events. What is significant is the Constitution, simply because it was intended to have a permanent impact. The Puritan understands that nothing is permanent except God & His Sovereign purposes.

The Constitution operates on well founded principles. These principles were incorporated into the American government more than 200 years ago. Each Constitutional Article or Amendment reflects a specific intent that was designed to avoid specific problems. It is the role of the

²⁷ Alistair McGrath, *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution – A History from the Sixteenth Century to the Twenty-First* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), p.161.

Judiciary to interpret law according to the original intent of the Constitution, and not according to the dictates of revisionist thinking.

Revisionist philosophy drives our country today. Puritan thinking, however, is original in intent. What God has said, is still the same today as when He said it. The framers of the Constitution understood the Constitution in this way, and they fully expected their descendents to do the same.

Failure to do this will result in unintended consequences to the detriment of national life. This is why *Roe v. Wade* is significant, in addition to many other laws. The intent of God is despised and rejected, and therefore the ruin of national life must follow. The Puritan understood all of this. This is what they saw in Old England, and this is the place where we have come to again.

Liberty depends upon virtue, and virtue depends upon Christianity.²⁸ Even Americans like Jefferson and Franklin understood this. Virtue and liberty are inseparably united, and where virtue is absent, liberty must soon give way to tyranny and moral degeneracy. Is this not where we are today? Society has become troubled, education is in a crisis, freedom is being nationalized, and justice is perverted constantly.

It was Thomas Paine who really began to subvert the claims of Christianity, but he would be opposed by that great Christian Statesmen John Witherspoon. Paine dedicated his life to opposing Christianity. His book *Rights of Man* published in London in 1791 apparently sold a million

²⁸ Benjamin F. Morris, *The Christian Life and Character of the Civil Institutions of the United States*, p. 8.

and a half copies and his *Age of Reason* which argued for deism was even more popular.²⁹ Paine claimed that he had, “gone through the Bible as a man would go through a wood with an ax and felled trees. Here they lie and the priest may replant them, but they will never grow.”³⁰ It was the Age of Skepticism and Atheism making its voice heard in the American landscape. If you listen carefully, you will hear it shouting loudly tonight across this land.

William Wilberforce expressed concern after meeting John Jay, who was Ambassador in London in 1794, by writing in his journal, “I feel there is little spirit of religion in America.”³¹

It was John Witherspoon who advised that the civil governor had three responsibilities concerning religion; 1) to encourage piety by his own example; 2) to defend the rights of conscience and tolerate religion as long as it did not injure his neighbors, and; 3) in keeping with the standard of Geneva, the magistrate could enact laws for the punishment of profanity and impiety.³² In many respects Witherspoon was way ahead of his time. He thought like a Puritan and we need his kind today.

George Washington who kept his religion close to his heart, had no doubts concerning a democracy sustained by religious foundations. It was absolutely fundamental in Washington’s eyes (and in Jefferson’s), but not in Thomas Paine’s. It is to Benjamin Franklin’s credit that he refused to

²⁹ Iain H. Murray, *Revival and Revivalism, The Making and Marring of American Evangelism 1750 – 1858* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1994, rep. 2002), p. 113.

³⁰ Quoted in Arthur B. Strickland, *The Great American Revival* (Cincinnati: Standard Press, 1934), p. 36.

³¹ R.I. and S. Wilberforce, *The Life of William Wilberforce* (London, 1838), vol. 2, p. 57.

³² David W. Hall, *The Genevan Reformation and the American Founding*, p. 371.

publish the works of Thomas Paine. His words to Paine were, “he who spits in the wind, spits in his own face.”³³

These swirling issues concerning Christianity flowed then around the Continental Congress, and in the early years of the United States when the Constitution began its illustrious dominion of American life. Additional revivals did occur in the first half of the 19th century, so the flickering light of the Gospel continued to burn.

The Constitution and the Founding Fathers are bound together, and we do not have the time in this paper to consider every detail. Suffice it to say, that Puritan influence had waned, yet the influence of Christianity remained.

One of the prominent characteristics of the government under Washington and Adams was the strong concern that each State should protect its own powers and rights, and prevent the national government from usurping its powers.³⁴ It is this issue that I believe lies before us in the elections of 2008.

The 2008 Elections

Within days we shall elect a new government. What lies behind the political agendas of those seeking the highest office in the land? Is it the glory of God? I believe not. A noticeable absence in our political arena, are the issues of morality and virtue. And where these do not exist – freedom has long departed, slavery has returned to the hearts of men. Are not the

³³ Quoted in Arthur B. Strickland, *The Great American Revival*, p. 31.

³⁴ David Barton, *Original Intent: The Courts, the Constitution, & Religion* (Texas: WallBuilder Press, 2005), p.17

pulpits of the land awash with neutrality and impotency? Rampant sin exists and the nation does not see its disaster. Ancient empires have come and gone for the same reasons. Seemingly indestructible in their prowess, independence, prosperity and degeneracy, they have all passed away. Such is the course that lies before America tonight. There must be a return to a godly vision that in turn flows from submission to God. This is what the Puritan would think.

The increasing decline in moral standards leads inevitably to the preponderance of atheism. It is inevitable, and do we not see this in our society? The absence of God in government, in education, and in family will continue to plunge this country into ruin and despair. Already the hearts of men quake at the slightest pronouncement of woe, whether it is financial, economic, legal or religious. Despondency abounds, for the simple reason that God has vanished, and is nowhere to be found. He has been shut out.

It was Patrick Henry, who said in 1775, “Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? **Forbid it, Almighty God!** I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death.”³⁵

Benjamin Franklin said, that “only a virtuous people are capable of freedom. As nations become more corrupt and vicious, they have need of more masters.”³⁶

³⁵ Patrick Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, ed. William W. Henry (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1891), Vol. 1, p. 266.

³⁶ Benjamin Franklin, *The Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Jared Sparks (Boston: Tappan, Whittemore and Mason, 1840), Vol. X, p. 297 to Messrs. The Abbés Chalut and Arnaud on April 17, 1787.

There is an indissoluble link between religion and morality. Jefferson considered the teachings of Christianity as those that “purified the waters at the fountain head.” Christianity did not merely address the civil law or attempt merely to restrain outward behavior. The civil law, for example, addresses the crime of murder. Jesus addresses the intent of the heart of the murderer before the murder takes place. Civil laws can never address the heart. It was the task of the Puritan to address these issues, and he or she did so recognizing that the power of the Gospel which is Christ Himself overcomes sin in the heart of man.

The issues at stake in this election are momentous. They are moral in character yet we have heard no real addresses dealing with these very issues. The issues before us will not go away. We are inextricably bound to technology, to medical and scientific advancements. These assert the independence of man, yet they are granted in the merciful Providence of God. The Puritan would recognize that they are opportunities to display the greatness of God and not the so called greatness of man.

In these elections we must consider education, marriage, divorce, abortion (with all its associated crimes), sexual orientation, religious freedoms, the decline in morals and the increase in wickedness, ongoing war, firearms, taxation, the financial situation, cloning and stem cell research, gambling, obscenity laws, immigration laws. The list is endless. Perhaps we should add government interference, nationalization and socialism. These issues will be dealt with by a new government next week or they might not. But they should and they need to be.

The Puritan would say, “God is still on His Throne, my life is still in His hands, the night is nearly past, the light of God’s day is coming” and he

or she would prepare themselves to live life to the fullest confident that God will do that which is right. This is what America needs – more Puritans whose hearts burn first for God and then for their fellows. Only then will America be truly great, because God will be their God.

To God alone be all the glory.