The Gospel of Reformation: the Origins of the Great Puritan Migration

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They [the Puritans] drew in a sea of matter, by applying all things unto their own company, which are any where spoken concerning divine favours and benefits bestowed upon the old commonwealth of Israel: concluding that as Israel was delivered out of Egypt, so they spiritually out of Egypt of this world's servile thraldom unto sin and superstition; as Israel was to root out the idolatrous nations, and to plant instead of them a people which feared God; so the same Lord's good will and pleasure was now, that these new Israelites should under the conduct of other Joshuas, Samson and Gideon, perform a work no less miraculous in casting out violently the wicked from the earth, and establishing the kingdom of Christ with perfect liberty.

(Richard Hooker, Of the Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity, 1593, 'Preface')

There is a tendency among historians of early Puritan New England to attribute the origins and causes of the Puritan migration to America to a certain 'crisis', be it economic, political or ecclesiastical, that took place within English society on the eve of the great Puritan migration, that is, the late 1620s and the early 1630s. This tendency, however, stands in sharp contrast to the approach evident in

1 It will be sufficient here to deal only with the representatives of each interpretation which seeks to explain the origins of the Puritan migration to New England by a 'crisis' within English society. Thus James Truslow Adams in his famous book, The Founding of New England, Boston 1949 [1931], 132-4, stressed the view that both a political 'crisis' and an economic 'crisis' in the late 1620s were responsible for the Puritan migration. A decade later Perry Miller, Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, Gloucester 1965 [1933], 99, distancing himself from the economic emphasis typified by Adams, stressed the essentially religious motivation behind the Puritan migration. Yet his account tended rather to reinforce Adams's emphasis on the importance of the political 'crisis' in the late 1620s. Thus, for Miller, a crisis occasioned by Charles I's dissolution of the parliament of 1629 had enormous consequences for the Puritan migration. The political 'crisis' then, according to Miller, was essentially associated with the ecclesiastical 'crisis'. Similarly, David D. Hall in his excellent book, The Faithful Shepherd, New York 1972, 72-3, attributed the Puritan migration, in part, to an ecclesiastical 'crisis' within the circle of Puritan ministers in England during the 1630s.


have been declineing or growing weak or wearisome in well doinge to offer me occasions manye wayes of continuance by good company, as cur[verwel]t. He and his friend, Ezekiel Culverweel, a famous Puritan divine and the author of a Treatise on Faith (1623), consequently made a covenant between themselves to lead a godly life and to watch over each other in that endeavours.

Seinge the lord had grunted to us some sight of the coldnes and halfe service of his [sic] which is in the world, and our selves also much caried away with it, that thus we wold renue our covenante more firme with the lorde, then we had done, to come neerer to the practize of godlines...and to indeavour after a more continual watche from thing to thing that as much as might be we might walk with the lord for the time of our abidinge here below. These and such lik we communed of toghter...with great inflauming of our hartes farbe above that which is common with us.

Later that year other godly people joined the two covenanters, ministers and laymen alike, and so this godly group came to constitute a covenant-ed society' in Wethersfield. 'Great hope we have by our private company amongst our neighbours to worooc as well more conscience in their whole course as knowledge.' Rogers wrote in his diary. By mutual scrutiny and admonition, the members of this godly company sought to support each other in their commitment to God.

Yet Richard Rogers came to be prominent and famous among Puritans in the early seventeenth century not for his diary, but for his important book of 1603, Seven Treatises. By 1630 this book, which prescribed in over 600 pages daily routines of spiritual exercise for Christian readers, had passed through eight editions. In Seven Treatises, Rogers stressed above all else the importance of godly company to a Christian life. He related much of his own hometown experience by way of illustration. 'There is,' he wrote, 'rule or dutie directing us in companie,' because men 'who are ignorant and careless' should be exhorted, stirred up, called upon and instructed', until they 'might be edified and built up in our most holy faith'. His aim was not to convert the sinners, but to edify the godly. 'Scornefull, prophan and brutish persons' were not to be admitted into godly company. According to Rogers, godly company was but one company among many companies men entered into in their life, and each of those companies should be made 'suitable and correspondent to the other parts of Christian life'. For Rogers, godly company was thus only an extension of other social activities undertaken by men in this world.

Although he made it clear that godly company was not necessarily

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3 'The diary of Richard Rogers', in Two Elizabethan Puritan Diaries, ed. M. M. Knappen, Chicago 1933, 61, 63, 64.

4 Richard Rogers, Seven Treatises...called the practise of Christianitie, London 1605 (2nd edn), 381–2, 385, 389. In the following discussion of 'covenant' and its important role in the Puritan experience in the early seventeenth century I owe much to Patrick Collinson's article 'Toward a broader understanding of the early dissenting tradition', in The Dissenting Tradition, eds. C. Robert Cole and Michael E. Moody, Athens, Ohio 1975, 3–38.

5 Rogers, Seven Treatises, 380, 497–8.


The covenant that John White drew up in Dorchester in the early seventeenth century shows clearly how pietistic yearning could lead to social reformation. As minister in his town White wrote the Ten Vows ‘for lifting up the weak hands and strengthening of the feeble knees’ so as ‘to bind ourselves by solemn vow, and Covenant unto the Lord our God’. The vows sought to encourage ‘true and pure Worship of God according to his own ordinance, opposing ourselves to all ways of Innovation or Corruption’. They entreated Christians ‘to labour for a growth in knowledge and understanding by attending to reading hearing and meditating Gods word’, ‘to instruct [u]r Children and families in the fear of the Lord’, ‘to watch our owne Ways daily’, ‘to submit to brotherly admonition and to perform that Christian duty towards others’, and so on. Here, as employed by White, the covenant formed the basis for a close-knit spiritual society in which religious reformation entailed social reformation as well. Certainly, there were different circumstances surrounding Rogers’s covenant and White’s ‘Ten Vows’, or covenant. The first bound together only a tiny minority of villagers in Wethersfield, while the Dorchester orders, designed for a town under Puritan discipline, were formed in order to embrace all but the ungodly. But, as Frances Rose-Troup shows, the importance of White’s covenant in Dorchester was in the fact that it served ‘as a touchstone to exclude the ungodly from the Sacrament’. And others followed White in this effort. In 1633 Hugh Peters, to whom White sent his Ten Vows, closely emulated White’s articles in the covenant he drew up for his own congregation in Rotterdam.9

More evidence exists to show that many Puritans who emigrated to Massachusetts Bay during the 1630s engaged before their departure in forming godly covenanted societies in England. Francis Higginson, who had already come to Salem on behalf of the New England Company in 1629, lived before his emigration in Leicester, a town divided into two parties. ‘On one side, a great multitude of Christians, then called Puritans’, attended the worship of God not only within the framework of the Church of England but also in ‘their assemblies and more secretly in their families, but also they frequently had their private meetings for prayer (sometimes with fasting) and repeating of sermons and maintaining of profitable conferences, at all which Mr. Higginson himself was often present’. Against this godly party, ‘there was a profane party, filled with wolvish rage against the flock of the Lord Jesus’. Similarly, in John Cotton’s Boston, in Lincolnshire, ‘there were some scores of pious people in the town, who more exactly formed themselves into an evangelical Church-State by entering into covenant with God, and with one another, to follow after the Lord, in the purity of his worship’.10

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10 Mather, Magnalia, i. 324, 238–9; Larzer Ziff, The Career of John Cotton, Princeton 1962, 43–49.
The details of the theological developments of the covenant theory need not detain us here. In *The New England Mind: the seventeenth century*, Perry Miller has dealt at length with "the covenant theory" and its many varieties, including the covenant of grace, the federal theology, church covenants and social covenants. Apart from its theological implications, however, the covenant theory had important social and political implications for Puritans and non-Puritans in Jacobean and Caroline England. What is evident from the experience of Rogers, Winthrop, Cotton, Wilson and Higginson is that godly people in England during this period entered into covenants among themselves without necessarily forming connections with the established Church. 'These covenants', wrote Collinson, 'were not church covenants but belonged to the Puritan experience of covenant grace, an area quite remote at this time from any overt ecclesiastical reference.' They were, in this sense, social covenants and, as shown above, they arose partly from the difficulties experienced by individuals in keeping their private covenants with God. Thus according to Thomas Cobbet, a minister in Lynn, Massachusetts,

God conveys his salvation by way of covenant and he doth it to those onely that are in covenant with him... This covenant must every soule enter into, every particular soule must enter into a particular covenant with God; out of this way there is no life.

Godly society, or covenanting company, as Rogers recommended, was a necessary device by which a member could keep his covenant through actual involvement with other members of the company.  

Thus covenants were an essential part of the Puritan experience in early seventeenth-century England, and there is evidence that many Puritans, laymen and clergy alike, engaged in the establishment of godly societies in order to shape their lives according to God's word. But covenants were also an essential part of the Puritan migration to New England. The two most famous covenants in relation to the migration are of course the Mayflower Compact and Winthrop's 'A Model of Christian Charity'. In relation to the first, as Bradford wrote, the pilgrims 'solemnly and mutually, in the presence of God and one another, covenant and combine


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ourselves together into a Civil Body Politic, for our better ordering and preservation'. And Winthrop in his lay sermon made it clear towards what end the Puritan emigration was directed:

The end is to improve our lives to do more service to the Lord the comforte and the encrease of the body of christe whereof we are members that our selves and posterity may be the better preserved from the Common corruptions of this evil world to serve the Lord and worke out our Salvacion under the power and purity of his holy Ordinances.

And the means for that aim? 'For the means whereby this must bee effected, they are 2fold, a Conformity with the worke and end wee aime at.' Conformity and unity were thus, according to Winthrop, necessary conditions for the success of the whole emigration.

Thus stands the cause betweene God and us, wee are entered into Covenant with him for this worke, we have taken out a Commission, the Lord hath given us leave to drawe our owne Articles wee have professed to enterprise these Accion upon these and these ends, wee have hereupon besought his favour and blessing.

These covenants clearly were not church covenants. Likewise, as Lockridge has shown, before Dedham was a town and before it had a church, its settlers drew up a covenant in 1636, in which it was stated: 'that we shall by all means labor to keep off from us all such as are contrary minded, and receive only such unto us as may be probably of one heart with us'. Those who were within the company of covenanters had to work 'for the edification of each other in the knowledge and faith of the Lord Jesus'. The earliest covenant in the Bay colony was, of course, that of Salem in 1629. There, on 20 July, wrote the deacon in Salem church, Charles Gott, a company of believers... joined together in covenant, to walk together in all the way of God'. One month later, with the establishment of the church there, the members found it necessary to renew their previous covenant.

We... members of the present Church of Christ in Salem, having found by sad experience how dangerous it is to sitt loose to the Covenant we make with our God... Doe therefore... renewe that Church covenant we find this Church bound unto... That we Covenant with the Lord and with one another, and doe bynd our selves in the presence of God, to walk together in all his waires, according as he pleased to reveal him selfe unto us in his Blessed word of truth.

As a covenanting church, the members of the Salem church consequently declared that 'we willingly doe nothing to the offence of the Church'. Yet all the other articles of the covenant are similar to the civil covenants cited above.  


The emigrants who came to Massachusetts Bay were, therefore, engaged
and after their migration in an attempt to establish godly societies
or companies based on social covenants. This kind of Puritan activity,
though it does not get much attention from historians of the Bay colony,
was necessarily related to and was indeed a precondition of the
Puritan migration. For what these covenants reveal is a special engagement
by Puritans to reconcile here on earth the law of nature and the law of grace.
If the law of nature or the moral law was essential to man as a rational
being, the law of grace could be realised only by faith and by divine grace.
'There is likewise', preached Winthrop aboard the Arabella in 1630, 'a
double Lawe by which wee are regulated in our conversation one towards
another... the lawe of nature and the lawe of grace, or the morrall lawe
and the lawe of the gospel'. Thus, while the law of nature came to
regulate civil society as such, the law of the gospel or grace came to regulate
Christian society, a godly society in which one's covenant with God
corresponded to the covenant of society at large with God. By maintaining
the law of grace or the law of the gospel, which is the essence of the
covenants described above, godly people fulfilled the conditions they took
upon themselves in entering into covenant with God. At the same time,
they could expect that God would fulfill the conditions he had taken upon
himself concerning the covenant. 'Now, if the Lord shall please to heare
us... then hath hee ratified this Covenant and sealed our Commission,
[and] will expect a strict performance of the Articles contained in it.' And
if the covenaneters should succeed in their attempt, 'the Lord will be our
God and delight to dwell among us, as his owne people and will
command a blessing upon us in all our ways'.

Above all else, Puritans of the covenant, in England and New England
alike, sought to realise the law of grace in this world. In pursuit of this
end Puritans turned their backs, not only on the established Church, but
on society at large. Not surprisingly, then, it was on this point, the
realisation of the law of grace in one's life and society, that Puritans clashed
with other groups in English society. In parish church, village, town and
city, Puritans faced non-Puritans in what amounted to a battle for social
reformation. The question at issue was how man was to live in society.
Conflict over this basically social - and not solely theological - question
thus provided the broad social context within which the Puritan migration
movement first took root. Ultimately, Puritans would turn to America to
attempt what they could not accomplish in England - the shaping of a
Christian commonwealth on earth constructed according to God's word.

The history of early Massachusetts is to a great extent the history of attempts
to fulfil the articles of the covenants, to realise on the North American
continent the law of grace. Yet, we must ask ourselves, why was
it necessary to cross the Atlantic to put into practice the law of grace? What
hindered these Puritans from realising their covenanted society in England?

Was it Archbishop Laud with the High Church party? Did he, and the
'political crisis' surrounding him, most significantly obstruct the Puritan
vision of a godly society and godly life? Or was Laud, major figure that
he was, only one aspect of a broader social situation out of which the
Puritan movement for emigration emerged? Our task here is to explore
some aspects of the real world from which the Puritan migration came.
An examination of the laity's unique and decisive role in the Puritan
movement, for example, is important within this context because it may
clarify more fully the origins and the causes of the migration.

Apart from studies of Puritan divines, recent studies of English Puritanism
have increasingly stressed the decisive role of the laity in the Puritan
movement. Dissertations have thus shifted our attention from the theo-
logical writings of ministers to the social and political foundations for
the movement. In her investigation of English villagers in the sixteenth
and seventeenth centuries, Margaret Spufford gives a vivid picture of
Puritanism as a popular movement in the diocese of Ely. At one point she
cites from an account of a Jesuit priest who had witnessed Puritan
gatherings while a prisoner in Wisbech Castle in the late 1580s and 1590s:

From the very beginning a great number of Puritans gathered here. Some came
from the outlying parts of the town, some from the villages round about, eager
and vast crowds of them, flocking to perform their practices - sermons,
communions and fasts... Each of them had his own Bible, and sedulously turned
the pages and looked up the texts cited by the preachers, discussing the passages
among themselves to see whether they had quoted them to the point, and
accurately, and in harmony with their tenets. Also they would start arguing
among themselves about the meaning of passages from the Scriptures - men,
women, boys, girls, rustics, labourers and idios... over a thousand of them
sometimes assembled, their horses and pack animals burdened with a multitude
of Bibles.

'There is then, proof, for the first time' in the late sixteenth century, notes
Spufford, 'that large numbers of the laity in the diocese... had been
influenced by Puritan teachings, and were actively involved in doctrinal
disputes'. According to her, the picture of the Puritans described by the
Jesuit priest 'shows better than any other source the ways the common
people had been affected by the reformation and the growth of literacy'.

Many other studies of Puritanism in England confirm the importance of
the laity in the Puritan movement. A. Tindal Hart has pointed out that
in many cases, 'the laity were much more protestant than their clergy,
had little sympathy with the Laudian ideals, and greatly dreaded a
re-introduction of popery'. In areas in which Puritanism was predominant,
as R. C. Richardson shows, laymen 'were sometimes even more insistent

15 On the issue of the laity and the Church see the two excellent studies by Claire Cross:
Church and People, 1450-1660: the triumph of the laity in the English Church, Trowbridge 1976,
14 Margaret Spufford, Contrasting Communities, English Villagers in the Sixteenth and

Winthrop, 'A Model of Christian Charity', 283, 294.
opponents of the sign of the cross than their ministers'. All this points to the fact that popular Puritanism was by no means guided and led by the clergy; the voice of the congregation or laity was important, if not always decisive. Patrick Collinson describes the relationship between the clergy and laity thus:

the popular protestant element in Elizabethan society was not subordinate to the preachers, but possessed a mind and will of its own to which the conduct of the Puritan minister, including his own nonconformity, was partly a response.\footnote{A. Tindal Hart, *The Country Clergy*, London 1938, 27; R. C. Richardson, *Puritanism in North-west England*, Manchester 1972, 27; Patrick Collinson, *The Godly: aspects of popular Protestantism in Elizabethan England*, cited by Richardson, op. cit. 74.}

With regard to the Puritan migration to Massachusetts Bay, the role of the laity can hardly be exaggerated. One need only look at the Adventurers' list of both the New England Company and Massachusetts Bay Company, in which ministers made up only a tiny minority, to see how the laity initiated this migration. More important, the Company invariably initiated the movement to send ministers to the colony. 'It was fully resolved, by God's assistance', wrote Matthew Cradock, governor of the New England Company and later first governor of the Bay Company, to John Endecott at Salem in February 1629, 'to send over two ministers.' In another letter, dated the following April, Cradock assured Endecott:

we have been careful to make plentiful provision of godly ministers ... And because their doctrine will hardly be esteemed whose persons are not reverenced, we desire that both by your own example, and by commanding all others to do the like, our ministers may receive due honor.

The essential and decisive role of the laity in the Puritan migration can be illustrated through a few examples. When Thomas Hooker departed for Holland in 1631, 'Mr. Hooker's company', wrote Winthrop in his *Journal* in 1632, 'came to the Bay colony'. The godly people, the laity, did not follow their minister to Holland but journeyed to Massachusetts and waited for him there. Many parishioners of St Stephen's, London decided to emigrate to New England with Winthrop's fleet, so that their former vicar John Davenport, found himself preaching 'before pews vacated by the great exodus to Massachusetts Bay'. Even before their ministers were ready to emigrate, many laymen had chosen migration.\footnote{Alexander Young (ed.), *Chronicles of the First Planters of the Colony of Massachusetts Bay*, from 1620 to 1636, Boston 1846, 134, 142, 144; John Winthrop, *The History of New England, from 1630 to 1662*, ed. James Savage, Boston 1853, i. 74; Isabel M. Calder, *The New Haven Colony*, New Haven 1934, 16.}

Captain Roger Clap supplies us with first-hand evidence as to the way godly people had been engaged in preparation for emigration. Upon leaving his parents' house, Clap writes, he went 'to live with a worthy Gentleman, Mr. William Southcot', who lived near the city of Exon [Exeter] in Devonshire. This gentleman 'was careful to keep a Godly Family'. Proceeding on in his search for good 'preachers of the Word of God', Clap then travelled to Exeter to Puritan gatherings where he met the Puritan minister John Warham. 'I did desire to live near him: so I remove[d] ... into the city.' In Exeter, Clap lived with 'one Mr. Mossiour, as Famous a Family for Religion as I ever knew'. In his house a 'conference' of godly people met each week. Clap does not tell us if this godly company was based on a covenant. But he does indicate that he himself 'covenanted' with Mr Mossiour. Later, in the late 1620s, Clap describes how he came to emigrate to the Bay colony.

I never so much as heard of New England, until I heard of many godly Persons that were going there, and that Mr. Warham was to go also... These godly People resolved to live together; and therefore as they had made choice of these two Revd. Servants of God, Mr. John Warham and Mr. John Maverick to be their Ministers, so they kept a solemn Day of Fasting in the New Hospital in Plymouth in England, spending it in Preaching and Praying.\footnote{Roger Clap, *Memoirs of Roger Clap*, Boston 1844, 18, 39.}

What motivated these 'godly people' to emigrate? Surprisingly, no clear answer to this question exists. Historians of early Massachusetts have dealt almost exclusively with the emigration of clergymen, and not with that of the laity. Even in relation to John Winthrop, whose life has been the subject of many books, we still do not know exactly his motivation for emigrating, because (surprisingly again) historians in many cases have tended to overlook his 'Religious Experiencie'. Yet, if the argument about the decisive role of the laity in the development of Puritanism in England is correct, it seems that this is the place to look for explanations for the migration.

From its beginnings the Puritan movement in England did not operate in a vacuum. Theological developments accompanied developments in social action and behaviour among Puritans; for this reason, Puritanism often drew the critical attention of many sections of English society. Religious reformation, as contemporaries well knew, carried social implications. Illustrating this point are the many satires penned against Puritans in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. In this genre many in England expressed their dislike of the Puritan concept and practice of the godly life. For example, one W. M. wrote in 1609 in his satire about the social outcome of the Puritans' ideas:

- My calling is divine
- and I from God am sent
- I will not chop-church be,
- nor pay my patron rent...

Satires against the Puritans' way of life were widespread, for to many the Puritans' religious and social manners and their devotion and pious behaviour caused irritation and outrage. Thus in Thynne's *Emblemes and Epigrams* (1600) the author wrote of the Puritans that
They set up churches twenty for their one, for everie private house spirittually must be their church, for other will they none.

And the Puritans’ militancy, along with their pretense to exclusive possession of the requisite knowledge of the true mode of salvation, brought in 1614 one R. C. in the Time Whistle, to write:

There is a sort of purest seeming men, That aide this monster in her wrongfull cause, Those the world nameth — Puritans I mean — Sent to supplant me from the very jaws Of hell, I think; by whose apparent shew Of sanctity doe greatest evils grow.

Most common were satires against Puritan insistence on the holiness of the Sabbath. Those who preferred recreation and sport most often charged the Puritans with hypocrisy: ‘Upon the Sabbath, they’ll no Phisicke take, Lest it should worke, and so the Sabbath breake’. Or, in relation to Sunday, ‘Suppose his Cat on Sunday killed a Rat, She on Monday must be Hanged for that’. Although the term ‘Puritan’ had not been sharply defined in the early seventeenth century, the satires evidence the fact that, among contemporaries, Puritanism had come to represent certain manners and modes of behaviour.

These satires of, and attacks upon, Puritans and their ways of life and belief reflected the fears and anxieties they created in English society. Winthrop described this world in his ‘Religious Experience’ in 1616, writing from the point of view of being Puritan and addressing God,

Thou tellst me that in this way there is least company, and that those which doe walke openly in this way shalbe despised, pointed at, hated of the world, made a byword, reviled, slandered, rebuked, made a gazing stocke, called puritans, nice fools, hypocrites, hair brained fellows, rashes, indiscreet, vain glorious, and all that is naught is; all this is nothing to that which many of thine excellent servants have been tried with, neither shall they lessen the glory thou hast prepared for them.

Richard Baxter gives a similarly vivid picture from his recollections of his youth. He reports that in and near the village where he grew up in the 1620s many ministers lived scandalous lives and that only three or four constant competent preachers lived near us, and those (though conformable all save one) were the common marks of the people’s obloquy and reproach and any that had but gone to hear them, when he had no preaching at home, was made the derision of the vulgar rabble under the odious name of a Puritan.

On Sundays ‘the reader read the Common Prayer briefly, and the rest of the day ... was spent in dancing under a maypole and great tree... where all the town met together’. With all this activity, Baxter continued,


13 Ibid. 48.
an attack on the ancient practices, 'the lawful rites and ceremonies' of the Church of England.

These conflicts directly raised the issue of separation. The experience of John Cotton shows one of the many ways Puritans could seek after true reformation within the Church of England, and how the parishioners reacted to it. As early as 1615, Cotton, 'with cautious firmness rather than enthusiastic zeal', as his biographer says, 'set about distinguishing the lily from the thorns'. The issue he confronted was how to maintain the ideal of the Church as a community of visible saints together with the notion of the established Church as inclusive of all the inhabitants of a given area. He did so 'not by withdrawing from the parish church...but by identifying the elect and withdrawing into a tighter inner group with them'. This chosen group consequently 'entered into covenant with the Lord and with one another'. Thus, what was formed by Cotton in his Lincolnshire parish was a godly company within the parish church. Such an arrangement amounted to what contemporaries referred to as semi-separation, which stopped short of total separation from the parish church and thereby from the Church of England as a whole. What Cotton formed was not a church but a godly company based on covenant, a company that – without leaving the church – could avoid 'the offensive ceremonies' and 'was truly qualified to receive the sacrament'. The social implications of this act were immediately apparent. Those in the parish excluded from Cotton's godly group 'were outraged at the action of the covenancers'. They ran to the bishop's court in Lincoln, and the bishop suspended Cotton.

But Congregationalists in England did not stop where Cotton had stopped. In many cases during the 1640s and the 1650s, as Geoffrey Nuttall shows, the godly group of covenancers took over the parish church and remade it in their own image. Clearly, what could be done in the 1640s and 1650s, with the fall of the ecclesiastical order during the revolution in England, could not have been so easily accomplished in the 1630s, namely, the identification of God's covenanted company with the Church and the exclusion from the Church of all those not belonging to the godly. It is true that most Puritans who demanded separation from the profane, including almost all of those who emigrated to Massachusetts, strongly denounced the stand of rigid separation which would unchurch the Church of England. Emigration as a legal and loyal withdrawal may therefore be seen as an acceptable alternative to separation, as John White, for example, wrote in his defence of the Puritan migration to Massachusetts, The Planters Plea (1690). Evidence of the actual practices in the Massachusetts Bay churches indicates, however, explicit separation, as well as many instances in which the Bay Puritans accused the Church of England of being a false church. Emigration and the unlimited ecclesiastical freedom in Massachusetts thus radically transformed the Bay Puritans' attitudes towards separation from the Church of England. Full discussion of this important historical phenomenon would, however, lead well beyond the limits of the present study. In short, the option open to Puritans in the 1630s was the moderate course taken by Cotton in Lincolnshire whereby a congregation of godly people was assembled within the established Church.

From the point of view of the established Church, however, Cotton's moderate course carried the revolutionary threat of congregationalism. The nature of this threat was made explicit by William Ames, the most prominent theologian of this form of church government. 'A congregation or particular Church', proclaimed Ames, 'is a society of believers joined together by a special bond among themselves, for the constant exercise of the communion of Saints among themselves.' In this proclamation, Ames made it clear both that the essential foundation of a particular church was the social covenant made among the godly people and that a necessary connection existed between the two.

Believers do not make a particular church, although peradventure many meete and live together in the same place, unless they be joined by a special bond among themselves. This bond is a covenant, either express or implicit, whereby believers doe particularly bind themselves, to performe all those duties, both toward God and one toward another, which pertaine to the respect and edification of the Church. Ames thus enlarged the covenant's meaning, making it an indispensable feature of a true Church. Ames had transformed Rogers's restricted notion of covenant – as a social covenant with an emphasis on mutual edification among godly people – into nothing less than the essential core of the Church. Indeed, the godly company only became a Church by virtue of the covenant its members concluded among themselves.

The transformation defined by Ames was, in broad outline, the history of the early Massachusetts Bay colony. If godly people could not fulfill their religious goals in England, they had no other choice than to emigrate to America and seek those goals there. Already in 1630 the godly company to which Roger Clap belonged drew up a covenant and formed a church in old Plymouth on the very eve of their migration. But such conduct was exceptional in the great Puritan migration. More common was the Dedham pattern in which emigration preceded the drawing up of a covenant and the forming of a church. Cotton's attempt in old Boston was doomed to failure not only because the bishop objected to it, but because many parishioners objected to it as well. Yet, despite their uncomfortable predicament, Cotton and others of like mind were free to contemplate an

enticing prospect. What if the godly simply left the parish churches and gathered in the Bay colony? There the way would be open to the proper execution of the premises of a true Church. Central to these was the belief that the Church should exclude all but visible saints. Precisely on this point Cotton and his associates in England had no hope. However, in New England prospects were entirely different. And so contemplation gave way to action. Emigration was far preferable to the forced inclusion of sinners in the church covenant. As Ames wrote, this was indeed the whole reason for the Puritan emigration to Massachusetts. Well informed in Holland concerning the migration, Ames justifies it on these grounds. ‘Yet if believers contend ing for their liberty cannot procure this right in that partner without more grievous discommodities depart to a more pure Church, and doe keep themselves from the approbation of sinne... they sinne not.’ Only by leaving sinners in England could the true reformation be fulfilled in New England.

The failure to achieve reform in their local societies, the impossibility of reconciling the principle of a Church based on visible saints with the established one, continuing attacks on the Puritan way of godliness – all these stood in the background of the Puritan migration. The emigrants demanded nothing less than the whole – the transformation of society and state according to God's word. This radical plea could not be fulfilled in England. It only raised the ire of other sections of society, so that the attempt to distinguish and separate godly from ungodly people was accompanied by social struggles within the community and within the parish church. Emigration therefore represented the possibility, not only of establishing a true Church, but also of achieving social reformation through social covenants. As Captain Edward Johnson who sailed with Winthrop’s fleet wrote, ‘[In New England] the Lord will create a new Heaven and New Earth, new Churches and new Common-Wealth together’. For without a Christian commonwealth, godly people and their true churches could not be sustained.

Johnson, like Ames before him, revealed how much the social context in England caused the migration.

When England began to decline in Religion, like lukewarm Laodicea, and instead of purging out Popery, a farther compliance was sought not only in vain in holy Ceremonies, but also in prophaning the Sabbath, and by Proclamation through their Parish churches, exasperating lewd and profligate persons to celebrate a Sabbath like the Heathen to Venus, Bacchus and Ceres; in so much that the multitude of irreligious lascivious and popish affected persons spred the whole land like Grashoppers.

ORIGINS OF THE PURITAN MIGRATION

These ‘prophane persons’ and that ‘multitude of irreligious lascivious persons’ had obstructed Puritans in England; they were a stumbling block to the Puritans’ search for further reformation in social life and in the Church. The proclamation Johnson mentioned was the Declaration concerning Sports first issued by James I in 1617 and repeated by his son Charles I in 1633. To the Puritans’ chagrin, this declaration allowed the populace to play games on Sunday after church service. Yet one needs to go beyond the royal proclamation, as in the case of Baxter above, to see in the interactions between the Puritans and the ‘prophane’ how the highest interest of the Puritans – keeping the purity of the holy day – clashed with the multitude’s interest in having recreation on the same day. Concerning the latter Johnson wrote that, ‘ever corner of England was filled with the fury of malignant adversaries’ of God and Godly people. So when the Puritans emigrated to Massachusetts they intentionally separated themselves not only from ceremonies, popery and bishops, but also from this multitude of ‘malignant and prophane’ people; for these people, in Puritan eyes, were the reason that further reformation was not attainable in England. It was, they believed, as a result of this struggle between godly and ‘malignant’ people that ‘in this very time Christ the glorious King of his Churches’ had raised ‘an Army out of our English Nation’ and created ‘a New England to muster up the first of his Forces in.’

The present discussion has focused on the Puritan migration as an event arising out of the Puritan experience in England in the early seventeenth century. It is the thesis of this study that the appropriate context for examining the Puritans’ reasons for emigrating is the small worlds of their individual communities. It was in these immediate worlds of their everyday lives that the Puritans faced opposition to their vision of godly life and the dilemma of whether they should or should not continue to live among ‘prophane’ people. This view partly contradicts the traditional assumption made by historians that the great Puritan migration was caused by a certain ‘crisis’ in England in the late 1620s or early 1630s. The differences between these two points of departure are clear enough. The former calls our attention to the long-term trends in English society in which puritanism increasingly revealed itself not only as an ecclesiastical power but also as a strong social and political force able to disturb and divide communities by its uncompromising plea for full social and religious reformation. The latter explanation, or theory of ‘crisis’, in attributing the origins of the Puritan migration to events occurring at the actual time of the migration, ignores some profound developments in English society that took place well before, and continued well after, the Puritans had sailed to the New World.

Undoubtedly, only further research will fully reveal the whole story of the origins and causes of the Puritan migration. This study, however, has

attempted to explore some dimensions of the real and actual world out of which the great Puritan migration came, a world of conflict in local communities, parishes, churches, villages and towns, in which Puritans struggled for religious and social reformation against fellow members of their own local societies who worked to defeat their social and ecclesiastical programme. These divided communities and churches provided one of the primary sources of the migration, and we should look more closely into the process by which godly people alienated not only ecclesiastical authorities but, more importantly, their own local communities. We know surprisingly little about this kind of social dynamic in relation to the Puritan movement in England as a whole, and in relation to the Puritan migration in particular, though there exists much evidence attesting to the profound social, political and ecclesiastical consequences of the rise of puritanism on English society in the early seventeenth century.

In general, then, it seems that the lessening of the prospects for reform on the local level and the interaction there between godly and ‘prophane’ people determined the Puritan migration. Emigration emerged as a possible solution for many for whom the only alternative was life among the ‘prophane’. After all, Puritans carried with them not only theological tenets but also new visions of a godly society. And when the attempt to achieve and build a godly society in England failed, some of the Puritans turned their eyes to New England, deeming it the ideal place to make their vision a reality. Thomas Tillan, for example, describes this Puritan expectation upon his first sighting of New England in the summer of 1638:

Hayle holy-land wherein our holy lord
hath planted his most true and holy book
hayle happy people who have dispossest
yourselves of friends, and means to find some rest
for Jesus sake...
Posses this Country, free from all anoye
heare I’le be with you, heare you shall Injoye
my sabbaths, sacraments, my ministrye
and ordinances in their purity.

But the urgency of the need for emigration is perhaps best revealed by the Rev. Thomas Welde in a message he wrote in 1633 in Massachusetts to his friends in England:

Here are none of the men of Gibea the sonsnes of Belial knocking at our doors disturbing our sweet peace or threatening violence. Here blessed be the Lord God for ever. Our eares are not beaten nor the aire filled with Oaths. Swearers nor Railers, Nor our eyes and eares vexed with the unclean Conversation of the wicked.32