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"THE PURITAN VIEW OF DEATH: ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH AND DYING IN PURITAN NEW ENGLAND."

DIPLOMOVÁ PRÁCE

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V Praze dne 18. ledna 2011

(I declare that the following MA thesis is my own work for which I used only the sources and literature mentioned, and that this thesis has not been used in the course of other university studies or in order to acquire the same or another type of diploma.
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1 PURITAN ATTITUDES TOWARD DEATH: AN INTRODUCTION

This thesis will be dealing with the way New England Puritans viewed death, prepared for it, died, and were buried. More specifically, I want to know what part death played in their thought, spirituality, and everyday life. What did their theology teach about it and what were the practical and religious implications of the concept? What, in their view, was its meaning?

The underlying question of the concern with attitudes toward death in the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England – whether Puritans faced death full of hope or full of fear - was a subject of quite a tumultuous scholarly debate among American historians in the 1970s. Although Allan I. Ludwig in his interpretative study of New England tombstones (*Graven Images*, 1966) pointed out that Puritans often personified death as a "King of terrors," he also observed that death had an obvious appeal to most of "the godly" Puritans who set their hopes on the moment when they would be delivered from the misery of their earthly existence. The grim symbol of the death's head carved in the gravestones was often accompanied by wings, crowns and flowers: symbols of anticipated resurrection. Walking in the footsteps of Perry Miller, who saw Puritans as "cosmic optimists" who "never doubted the ultimate outcome" of their God-given mission in the world, Ludwig went on to conclude that in the Puritan mind's eye "the triumph of Death was overcome by eternity" and "the fear of death gave way to the thrill of spiritual pleasures yet to come as archangels trumpeted the glorious day."[1] In a stark opposition to these statements, David E. Stannard wrote two articles (1973, 1974) and a book (1977) with an ambition to present a more objective assessment of

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[1] Perry Miller, The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) 37. Allan I. Ludwig, Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and Its Symbols, 1650-1815 (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966) 108.

"the Puritan way of death."[2] Using Clifford Geertz's anthropological terminology, he argued that the Puritan "ethos" of death (the "way" of dying) was in a conflict with their worldview (the concept of death). How was that possible? The incongruity between the two phenomena, which typically exist in harmony, was caused by a "stress-creating ambivalence built into the Puritan view of death."[3] The optimistic vision of death inherited from the Christian tradition was complicated by the deterministic Puritan notion of spiritual reality. Yes, death was a reward, but how could one be sure about one's eligibility for the prize? In spite of the "rhetoric of viewing death as a release and relief for the earth-bound soul," their "way" of death was marked by profound anxiety.[4] It resulted from man's dependence on God's inscrutable choice and the impossibility to attain full assurance of grace. Tensions in Puritanism generated, according to Stannard, "an intense and unremitting fear of death."[5] This proclamation made all expressions of joy and reassurance in the face of death look like aberrations and overshadowed Stannard's original thesis that Puritans viewed death with ambivalence. His controversial assumption provoked a sharp response by Gordon Geddes, who claimed that most Puritans found assurance of salvation and accepted death with peace when it approached.[6] The dispute ended up by a mutual accusation of dishonesty. Interpreting death was clearly a contentious issue back then.

This thesis will argue that the Puritan view of death *was* ambivalent, as there is not enough evidence to claim that it was either fear or hope which completely prevailed. In fact, it is possible to say that the dynamic relationship of hope for eternal bliss and fear of damnation

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[2] David E. Stannard, "Death and Dying in Puritan New England," The American Historical Review, Dec. 1973: 1305-1330; "Death and the Puritan Child." American Quarterly, Dec. 1974: 456-476; The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

[3] Stannard 75.

[4] Stannard 79.

[5] Stannard 79.

[6] Gordon E. Geddes, Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981).

accounted for an attitude which was not constant but was subject to perpetual change – sometimes the individual experienced anxiety, while sometimes the individual viewed death with confidence.

At this point, it should be clarified that the term "attitude" is not used strictly in the sense that Philippe Ariès, among others, popularized in his study of Western attitudes toward death.[7] In his judgment, it was an outward manifestation of the society's "collective unconscious" derived from the unspoken and invisible *mentalité*. He did not believe that attitudes were shaped by ideologies (e.g., religions) or determined by socio-economic conditions. He did not consider it important if the object of his examination was a Catholic or a Protestant, a Jew or a Calvinist; if they shared one cultural tradition and lived in one society, they had presumably the same "attitude." However, the religious beliefs and faith of the "objects" (i.e., New England Puritans) deeply matter to the author of this thesis. In a community defined and outwardly recognized by its religion, this factor must be taken extremely seriously, although the Puritan exiles in the New World were also Englishmen and heirs to the Western tradition that Ariès and others described.

To trace up attitudes, emotions, beliefs and rituals surrounding death and dying we need to examine a variety of sources including literature (poetry, spiritual biographies, journals), personal diaries and documents, instructional and educational books, theology treatises, divinity books and sermons, but also material culture (e.g., tombstones). The subject requires an interdisciplinary approach: theology, sociology of religion, social and cultural history, psychology, historical anthropology and literary science are all relevant ways to study attitudes toward death.

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[7] Philippe Ariès, Western Attitudes toward Death from the Middle Ages to the Present, trans. Patricia M. Ranum (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974); The Hour of Our Death (New York: Vintage Books, 1982).

The main emphasis will be placed on the role of the Puritan doctrine in formation of the official, prescribed view of death and its reflection in the spiritual journals, literature, work ethic, family relations and the reality of dying and burying. First, I will introduce basic Puritan vocabulary and beliefs regarding God, human condition, and salvation. Then, I will demonstrate how Puritan spirituality responded to these notions with the method of self-examination. I will contend that introspection was a reaction to the *memento mori* requirement of the doctrine. Chapter four will look at childhood in New England culture and analyze how the concept of death shaped Puritan education and the way children were treated in the society. The following chapter will be devoted to the *ars moriendi* and the idea of an "exemplary death." The last segment of the thesis will describe the burial ritual and the design of tombstones, their meaning and changes in the course of Puritan hegemony in New England.

2   DEATH IN PURITAN THEOLOGY

The Puritan ethos was shaped first and foremost by religion; it determined the believers' attitude toward God, men, and the world around them. What official attitude toward death did it prescribe? Most scholars observe that Puritan attitude toward death is ambivalent and contains both terror at the possibility of eternal damnation and hope for deliverance. Was the tension between these two opposing ideas intended by Puritan orthodoxy or was it a product of inner tensions and paradoxes within the belief system? Why is there any fear of death in Puritanism at all? Do not some of the principal tenets of Calvinism - the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of assurance - prevent Puritan believers from anxiety?

2.1   God, sin and regeneration

The main difference between Reformed theology (Calvinism) and other Protestant movements initiated in the Reformation is the emphasis placed on the omnipotence and inscrutability of a sovereign God. By this emphasis Puritans revived the spirit of the Old Testament God. This God conforms to no rules and his actions do not follow human expectations and logic. "What God is, none can perfectly define, but that hath the Logicke of God himself," says one contemporary source.[8] His actions are incomprehensible; His ways unsearchable. He is veiled by a cloud of mystery. The English minister John Preston compared God to an infinite sea; "if [man] goes into the deepe, he is drowned." Men are foolish in their effort to understand Him, he says, as "to think that thou couldest comprehend God, is, as if a man should think to hold the whole sea in the hollow of his hand."[9]

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[8] Perry Miller, <u>The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century</u> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) 11.

[9] Miller 11.

Although the Puritan concept of God defies any man-made definition, God can be described imperfectly as a sum of divine attributes which represent His essence. Even though some of them seemingly contradict each other - at least by the standards of human reason - the attributes can exist side by side in one being because they are perfectly balanced. Arguably, this explains how God can embody absolute justice and mercy at the same time. However, the Calvinist exaltation of His sovereign will above His other attributes complicates any effort of man to choose salvation. Selection of those who will receive His irresistible grace is the privilege of no one else but God.

The most significant consequence of the premise about the sovereignty and inscrutability of God is the doctrine of predestination. Calvin defined predestination as "God's eternal decree, by which he compacted with himself what he willed to become of each man. For all are not created in equal condition; rather, eternal life is foreordained for some, eternal damnation for others."[10] This concept is explicitly distinguished from foreknowledge, which was advocated by the Arminians, and earned Calvinism many critics who accused it of making God a ruthless and arbitrary tyrant. Calvinists themselves did not see anything wrong about God's freedom to choose whom He will save. In fact, adherents of Calvinism held that God had an undisputed right to send everybody to hell. But although He is a sovereign Lord, he is a loving one, too. God's love is demonstrated by saving at least the elected few through Christ.

The doctrine of predestination implies man's utter powerlessness in attaining salvation out of his own will. Calvin clearly stated what the Puritans later echoed: "God by his secret plan chooses whom he pleases."[11] The whole process of salvation is directed by God alone. No one deserves salvation because all have sinned and no one can earn it; it is a free gift of

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[10] John Calvin, <u>Institutes of the Christian Religion</u>, ed. John T. McNeill (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960) III, 21, 5.

[11] Calvin III, 21, 5.

God to the elect. The Puritan minister Thomas Hooker describes God's sovereignty in terms which imply His position beyond conventional ethical categories: "The Lord to shew the soveraign freedom of his pleasure that he may do with his own what he will, and yet do wrong to none, he denyes pardon and acceptance to those who seek it with some importunity and earnestness ... and yet bestows mercy and makes known himself unto some *who never sought him.*"[12] With his chosen ones God makes a contract, a "covenant of grace", which is the central message of the Bible and God's plan of salvation through Christ. This covenant stands in opposition to the "covenant of works" which stresses the importance of man's effort - good works, rituals and sacraments of the church - for receiving grace. Justification by works, attributed to Catholicism and offensive to every sincere Protestant, is impossible for man's innate depravity.

As all Christians, Puritans believed that sin –the innate sinfulness of man brought on the mankind by the fall of Adam - is the ultimate barrier between God and man. Not only does it prevent people from attaining salvation on their own, but it is also the reason they must die. In the Epistle to the Romans, the Apostle Paul explains that "the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."[13] Redemption is therefore possible only through the will of God who offers "saving grace" freely to whom He will. Although the gift of grace is free because it is dispensed by God's arbitrary will, it does not mean that nothing is expected in return: in the Epistle to the Romans - the scriptural foundation of the doctrine of grace - Paul demonstrates that some elect may fall (like Israel did) because of their unbelief. Some of the "old branches" were cut off so that new ones (the Gentiles) may be grafted in under a new covenant through Christ. It may seem as a contradiction to the doctrine of predestination and the concepts of "irresistible grace" and "perseverance" of the saved,

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[12] Thomas Hooker, The Application of Redemption (London, 1657) 299; quoted in Stannard 72.

[13] Rom. 6:23.

when Paul says: "Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, *if thou continue in his goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off* [emphasis added]."[14] He seems to imply that salvation and grace can be lost if the covenant is not kept.

Man's acceptance of grace, the spiritual rebirth which is a central drama in the Puritan's earthly pilgrimage, is called "regeneration." Faith is merely a man's response to God's calling. According to the psychoanalyst Erich Fromm, man's passive role in the process makes the doctrine of predestination an ultimate expression of the insignificance and powerlessness of the individual and the futility of his efforts. In his view, the spirit of Calvinism differed from that of the pre-Reformation church in two major respects: by denying that man innately strives for good and that the effect of man's actions on his own fate is of avail (which were the tenets that supported the belief in "justification by works"). Fromm's interpretation does not heed the full scope of practical implications of the doctrine and offers a simplistic idea of Calvinism. However, he points out that by making the doctrine of predestination central to the belief system, Calvinism represented a far-reaching attack on human dignity and confidence.[15] He observes, and I think he is right, that this "attack" was absolutely intentional in the Puritan morphology of conversion: only self-humiliation, the destruction of human pride, and the knowledge of one's inability to win salvation could bring individuals to unconditional subordination to God's will. Salvation was bestowed upon men regardless of their moral achievements or good actions and depended on God's autonomous decision.

What then is the point of man's commitment to ethical values? Puritans distinguished between "justification," or the gift of God's grace given to the elect, and "sanctification," the

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[14] Rom. 11: 22.

[15] Erich Fromm, The Fear of Freedom (London and New York: Routledge, 1991) 62.

holy behavior that was supposedly the consequence of being saved. Christian life was seen as a continual struggle against sin. This included its "mortification" (daily dying to sin) and "vivification" of the sinner by the grace of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. Sanctification was the spiritual progress which was a result of the constant overcoming of sin through the union with Christ. They believed sanctification was evidence of salvation; not its cause. So, although virtue is only a result of faith, it is clear that it should be present in the life of the regenerate. Not that the individual can change his fate by his moral effort, but the very fact that he is able to strive for holiness is a sign of his belonging to the elect. The emphasis on unceasing moral effort may seem as a contradiction of Puritan fundamentals. Arguably, a fatalistic attitude and resignation of any effort seems a more appropriate response to Puritan theological determinism. However, Puritan history demonstrates nothing close to passivity.

Max Weber's theory about the rise of capitalism from Protestantism illustrates the change of the concept of time and subsequently the concept of work in the Calvinist thought.[16] According to Weber, there is an imperative in Calvinism to use time effectively and bear fruit in one's "particular calling," or occupation. This urge was fueled by the Calvinist anxiety concerning predestination. Time is extremely precious because it is a gift of God's grace to the living and therefore must not be wasted in idleness, but used in accordance with His will. Striving for success in work became a way to glimpse the mystery of God's election since a worldly achievement was seen as a mark of God's blessing signifying His approval. What is important in terms of attitudes toward death, is that hard work in the calling manifests the Protestant rejection of the *contemptus mundi* view of Catholicism. Subsequently, laboring in accordance with God's "particular calling" is seen as a preparation for eternity and is

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[16] Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Dover Publications, 2003).

interconnected with man's "general calling" to salvation. Protestants did not see their earthly calling as a mere "bread-winning" necessity; to them it acquired a spiritual meaning which was missing in Catholicism. Its end was not an accumulation of capital and wealth *per se* but celebrating the glory of God through the fruit of one's labor.

For Weber, the Protestant work ethic was a way of working out the anxiety of believers over one's salvation or damnation. Erich Fromm adopted his premises and, ignoring theological aspects, gave a psychological explanation of the Calvinist effort as a religious neurosis:

> The state of anxiety, the feeling of powerlessness and insignificance, and especially *the doubt concerning one's future after death* [emphasis added], represent a state of mind which is practically unbearable for anybody. Almost no one stricken with this fear would be able to relax, enjoy life, and be indifferent as to what happened afterwards. One possible way to escape this unbearable state of uncertainty and the paralyzing feeling of one's own insignificance is the very trait which became prominent in Calvinism: the development of a frantic activity and a striving to do *something*. *Activity in this sense assumes a compulsory quality*: *the individual has to be active in order to overcome his feeling of doubt and powerlessness*. […] it is a desperate escape from anxiety.[17]

It is vital to realize that pursuing virtue and the practical and daily application of faith in their lives was for New England Puritans an obligation ensuing from the "covenant of grace." John Winthrop's famous and inspiring speech to the Puritan migrants aboard the *Arbella*, known as "A Model of Christian Charity," bound the future settlers of Massachusetts to a particular mission: as a "city upon a hill" they should lead exemplary lives of love and faith. The expected success of their "holy commonwealth" should be evidence of God's approval and set an example to the whole world. It was supposed to become a perfect model of the relationship between God and his people. This identification with the biblical "chosen people" meant that they would be held accountable by God for their performance. Committed to showcase the Puritan truth, they insisted on virtuous lives of all their members so they

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[17] Fromm 77-78.

would not put their God and their faith to shame. "The eyes of all people are upon us," Winthrop warned the Puritan Saints, and "if we shall deal falsely with our God in this work we have undertaken, and so cause Him to withdraw His present help from us, we shall be made a story and a by-word through the world."[18] In point of fact, their commonwealth was conceived as a test of Puritan ideology. In the words of Daniel J. Boorstin, "Puritan New England was a noble experiment in *applied* [emphasis added] theology."[19] According to Perry Miller, what distinguished Puritans from other religious movements of the time were not so much their doctrines and theological accents but their piety. It sprang up from their "urgent sense of man's predicament;" a deep-seated anxiety and thirst for spiritual deliverance.[20] Its expression was also a desire to experience living faith every day and put it into practice. The main tool of Puritan propaganda was not their words but their lifestyle. And sin was not to be tolerated among the regenerate. The responsibility implied in the collective "covenant of grace" was felt by many of the Puritan colonists as a huge burden and was another source of anxiety in their lives.

2.2 The doctrine of assurance

According to the French historian Jean Delumeau, the doctrine of justification by faith was the only means offered by the Reformers and later Protestant thinkers to conquer the believers' uncertainty about their salvation and their fear of death.[21] In his treatise *On the Bondage of the Will*, the Reformer Martin Luther trumpeted to the world with confidence:

> ... since God has put my salvation out of the way of *my* will, and has taken it under *His own,* and has promised to save me, not according to my working or

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[18] John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in <u>A Documentary History of American Thought and Society,</u> ed. Charles Crowe (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1965) 5.

[19] Daniel J. Boorstin, <u>The Americans: The Colonial Experience</u> (New York: Random House, 1958) 5.

[20] Miller 4.

[21] Jean Delumeau, <u>Hřích a strach</u> (Praha: Volvox Globator, 1998) 541; <u>Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries,</u> trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

manner of life, but according to His own grace and mercy, I rest fully assured and persuaded that He is faithful, and will not lie, and moreover great and powerful, so that no devils, no adversities can destroy Him, or pluck me out of His hand.[22]

The Epistle to the Romans and especially its passages about predestination seemed to Luther as a very pleasant and comforting read. Believing that God is in charge brought him peace and assurance that he could do nothing to lose salvation. By insisting that assurance about one's salvation can be attained, Protestants openly challenged the Catholic teaching. According to the Reformers, the "papal tyranny" was sustainable only because of a systematic denial of this truth. In their judgment, the Catholic belief in the justification by works puts on believers a greater burden than they are able to carry. Its intention is to keep believers in doubt about their qualification for salvation, as they can never know if they are righteous enough to earn it or not. Thus, it makes them toil without relief, practice religious rituals, and conform to the church authority in the hope of winning God's favor. Protestantism declared this effort meaningless. Referring to Paul's reasoning in the Epistle to the Romans, Reformers proclaimed that salvation is a free gift to believers, who are already justified by Christ's ultimate atonement for the sins of the mankind. From the perspective of Calvinism, the doctrine of justification by works limits the free and independent will of the sovereign God who has mercy "on whom he will have mercy" and to those He saved He also grants assurance.[23] For this reason the minister John Preston once declared Puritanism to be "a very *comfortable doctrine* [emphasis added]."[24] But, given God's free will, is it really so? And how can the assurance be achieved?

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[22] Martin Luther, <u>On the Bondage of the Will (De Servo Arbitrio)</u>, <ttp://www.mountainretreatorg.net/classics/bondage_will11.html> (accessed 28 Dec. 2010).

[23] Rom. 9: 18.

[24] John Preston, <u>The New Creature</u> (London, 1633) 23; quoted in David E. Stannard, <u>The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change</u> (New York, Oxford University Press: 1977) 75.

Protestants maintained that the transition into the state of grace which followed conversion is such a crucial change that each believer must be aware if he or she had experienced it or not. Puritans believed that there were signs of true regeneration. *The Marrow of Theology* by William Ames, the most influential and the most frequently quoted manual of the Puritan doctrine in New England, lists as the most important sign of salvation the acute awareness of the presence of saving grace and its effect on the soul. Regeneration and faith are a subjective experience. Although this sense of deep spiritual change perhaps cannot be easily articulated, the working of grace in one's life can be traced. Justification should be proved by sanctification, although a life of virtue is not necessarily a sign of being among the elect. Since regeneration can be proved either by one's subjective account of being born-again or by the externals, the verification of such symptoms of election is questionable. What if the Saint is only a hypocrite? And, what if one's regeneration was just a delusion?

"It is a great exercise to some Saints, whether they are sincere Saints," Solomon Stoddard observed in his congregation.[25] Puritans were exhorted to examine themselves to obtain at least some level of assurance based on the internal presence of saving grace. Once they did and were able to give testimony to the church elders, they were accepted to the community as "Visible Saints." Reaching this landmark was obviously no guarantee of salvation, neither was the opinion of other Saints. Being recognized as a Saint by others implied only *probable* election. As experts in conscientious self-examination, Puritans knew too well how deceptive their hearts can be. Complete assurance could never be obtained and the doubts therefore never ceased. They were inseparably connected with the Puritan spiritual experience. Edmund S. Morgan wrote that the absence of doubts signified to a devout Puritan "that he had never had faith to begin with, but had merely deluded himself and had not really

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[25] Solomon Stoddard, <u>The Tryal of Assurance</u> (Boston, 1699) 17; quoted in Stannard 73.

entered into the covenant of grace."[26] Puritans were convinced that it was better for them to be tortured by doubts than rely on a false feeling of security and stop searching God. As Arthur Hildersam warned, "for one that Satan hath overthrowne by desperation, there are twenty whom he hath overthrowne with this false assurance." The assurance, as it follows, must be tested by rigorous self-scrutiny because "as the true assurance of Gods favour is a comfortable thing; so is a false peace and assurance one of the most grievous judgements that can befall a man."[27]

Jonathan Edwards (1703 - 1758), the famous Puritan thinker and preacher, noticed that fear of self-deception and doubts about the authenticity of their regeneration were characteristic signs of a majority of new converts during the 1740s revival known as the Great Awakening. In his account of the events, he observes:

> the greater part of them have an awful apprehension of the dreadfulness and undoing nature of a false hope; and there has been observable in most a great caution, lest in giving an account of their experiences, they should say too much, and use too strong terms. And many after they had related their experiences, have been greatly afflicted with fears, lest they have played the hypocrite, and used stronger terms than their case would fairly allow of.[28]

Those who were honest troubled themselves with doubts of various degrees of intensity as long as they lived. As Morgan pointed out, "perhaps the surest mark distinguishing true assurance from false was its continuing imperfection."[29] Puritans knew one thing with certainty: if their regeneration was real, they had nothing to be afraid of and they were surely elect. But what if their conversion experience was not authentic? Unless they were born again,

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[26] Edmund S. Morgan, Visible Saints: The History of a Puritan Idea (New York: Cornell University Press, 1965) 69.

[27] Artur Hildersham, Lectures Upon the Fourth of John (London, 1629) 311; quoted in Stannard 74.

[28] Jonathan Edwards, A Faithful Narrative; quoted in Carl Van Doren, ed., Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards: Selections from their Writings (New York: Scribner's, 1920) 317-318.

[29] Morgan 69.

they were surely lost. And they could never be spiritually reborn unless it had been determined as their destiny before the foundation of the world. This predicament drove Puritans to an obsessive and compulsive self-examination. As the next chapter will illustrate, this method for attaining at least partial assurance of one's salvation was also problematic as it often brought even more desperation over one's unworthiness and guilt. Introspection usually conveyed the same ambivalence which was the reason of the scrutiny. As Solomon Stoddard noted about the members of his congregation, "sometimes they see the signs of Saints, and sometimes the signs of hypocrites: and they dont know what to make of themselves."[30]

It is hard to understand how the Puritan divines could think they were offering the believers an easier alternative to the Catholic notion of justification by works. Not that they meant to make access to salvation easier, quite on the contrary, but when it came to assurance about being saved most spokespersons of Protestantism including the Puritans promised it would surely drive away all fears. Can this be interpreted as mere religious propaganda? Rather than a "comfortable doctrine" Puritanism seems to be a belief system fraught with inner tension diffusing an atmosphere of doubt wherever it went. Puritan apologists made it clear that anxiety-driven questions about one's qualification for salvation and unending introspection were necessary steps on the road to salvation. Insisting that the doctrine of predestination and justification by faith give people a peace of mind which the Catholic teaching denies appears as an exaggeration based on a momentous spiritual exaltation of some Puritans.

Quiet confidence and peace definitely did not characterize everyday reality of Puritans. Their spiritual lives were affected by deep inner struggles - for who can be sure about being elect? In Jean Delumeau's observation, the most devout Christians regardless of

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[30] Stoddard 17; quoted in Stannard 73.

denomination have a tendency to feel they are the least worthy of salvation. The higher their souls can rise in spiritual exaltation, the lower they can later sink in desperation. The more pious they are, the more self-doubt they have. I think this generalization is very applicable to New England Puritans. Tormented by excruciating doubts, many were driven to hysteria, nervous breakdowns and suicides. An uncle of Jonathan Edwards slit his throat because he was unable to attain assurance that he was saved. Convinced he was reprobate, he could not bear to live a life which had thus lost its meaning. According to Calvinism, reprobate sinners are tolerated (which itself is a mark of God's grace) only for the sake of the saved: to highlight the magnanimity of God's grace given to the elect. Other than that, their lives are meaningless. The psychic strain, the unending yearning for a resolution of one's fate is reflected in Puritan diaries and spiritual journals. The fact that assurance "could be bolstered by the very doubts he was seeking to overcome" was not very helpful in easing a Puritan's predicament.[31] To some people, assurance of damnation was perhaps more bearable than the agonizing uncertainty. This extreme position can be illustrated by a story recorded by John Winthrop in his *History of New England*:

> A woman of Boston congregation, having been in much trouble of mind about her spiritual estate, at length grew into utter desperation, and could not endure to hear of any comfort, etc., so as one day she took her little infant and threw it into a well, and then came into the house and said, now she was sure she should be damned, for she had drowned her child; but some, stepping presently forth, saved the child.[32]

Later we read that this woman, "Hett's wife," tried to drown one of her children again. When she was questioned about what she did she replied she only wanted to "save it [the child] from

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[31] Morgan 71.

[32] John Winthrop, The History of New England from 1630 to 1649, vol.1, ed. James Savage (Boston: Little, Brown, 1853) 281-2.

misery."[33] How unbearable her doubts must have been, when they made her want to kill her child to spare it the same suffering she was going through! "Surely if ever a theology tortured its votaries," Perry Miller asserts, "it was that taught by New England divines."[34]

An epitaph carved on one seventeenth-century Puritan tombstone reads: "Death which came on man by the fall / cuts down father child and all."[35] This interpretation of death as a penalty for sin was counter-balanced by its other, sweeter side; it was also a homecoming to the Lord.[36] William Perkins called death "a blessing …as it were a little wicket or doore whereby we passe out of this world and enter into heaven."[37] Death in Puritan thought had a dual nature. We can see how the ambivalence of Puritan doctrines built itself into the attitude toward death. Death was both a punishment for sin and a blessing; a gateway to Hell for the reprobate and to Heaven for the elect. The traditional Christian optimism implied in the "good news" of the New Testament gospel was permeated with Puritan anxiety. The joyful theme of the *migratio ad Dominum* resonated with the Saints only at times when they were convinced grace was actively working in their lives, but when they saw they were backsliding, the horror of death prevailed. James A. Hijiya believes that "instead of eroding one another, terror and

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[33] John Winthrop, Winthrop's Journal 1630-1649, History of New England, vol.2, ed. James K. Hosmer (New York: Scribner's, 1908) 61, 132-3.

[34] Miller 56.

[35] Allan I. Ludwig, Graven Images (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966) 88; quoted in Stannard 77.

[36] Viz. Rom. 5:12,"Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Rom. 6:23, "For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord." 2 Cor. 5: 6-8, "We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord."

[37] William Perkins, Salve for a Sicke Man (London, 1597) 5; quoted in Stannard 76.

hope were mutually reinforcing" and "the more one feared death, the more one rejoiced at the hope of salvation."[38]

Puritan anxiety about death and one's postmortem existence was caused by tensions inherent in the doctrine of predestination and the doctrine of assurance. If one was really predestined to eternal salvation, nothing could thwart his road to Heaven. However, to most Saints the doctrines became a source of disturbing but legitimate questions: How can I be sure the arbitrary God, who transcends all rules and logic, really elected me to salvation? Was my conversion an authentic experience? Is my backsliding a sign of reprobacy? Moreover, constant doubts about one's election and searching for signs of God's favor were incorporated into the belief system as desirable. On the one hand, the regenerate had a right to anticipate eternal bliss in the hereafter, on the other hand, excessive certainty was very likely a sign of false hope.

Puritan anxiety resulted in obsessive self-examination and moral effort. The close correlation between the ethical and the religious existed in Puritanism in spite of the fatalistic doctrine of predestination. An earthly life of the regenerate, and especially the "worldly calling," was seen as a practical demonstration and test of the religious truth and was supposed to reflect one's commitment to the "covenant of grace." The pursuit of virtue and frantic activity of Puritans have even been interpreted as a consequence of religiously caused neurosis because they seemed to offer a way to mitigate the uncertainty about predestination. Whatever the interpretation, one thing seems clear: the stress-creating ambivalence of the notion of predestination made anxiety a logical response of a vast majority of Puritans who took their salvation seriously.

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[38] James A. Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History," <u>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</u>, Oct. 1983: 347.

3 MEMENTO MORI

Considering death was an occupation firmly knitted into the daily devotional practice of pious Puritans. In fact, remembering that one day they would die and give account to God marked every step of the Saints. Whether they were caught up in their mundane or in their spiritual pursuits, they had a *memento mori* always on their mind. What effect did it have on Puritan religious experience and lifestyle? And, what was its intended purpose?

3.1 Musings on death and self-examination

Samuel Sewall's diary contains a curious combination of the commonplace and the fundamental. Every incident, however banal, could offer a parallel to some profound idea. "A Glass of spirits my Wife sent stood upon a Joint-Stool which, Simon W. jogging, it fell down and broke all to shivers," serves him as an opening to a solemn observation: "I said twas a lively Emblem of our Fragility and Mortality...."[39] Although the *memento mori* emerges unexpectedly in the midst of a mundane scene, it seems like no coincidence to Sewall. As a Puritan he knew that every falling of a leaf was preordained by God and every seemingly trifling occurrence could be interpreted as a sign from God concerning his calling, salvation, and the meaning of life.

In historical and literary science, Puritans have quite a reputation as prolific writers of diaries. The considerable body of personal documents they left behind to scholars have recently drawn attention of both advocates and opponents of New Historicism. Personal journals make excellent sources for analysis of Puritan ways, thought, and spirituality. According to Margo Todd, who examined the diary of an English Puritan Samuel Ward from

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[39] Samuel Sewall, "Diary," in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. <u>The Puritans</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 514.

the New Historicist point of view, they can also be read as an exercise in "self-fashioning."[40] She uses this term, which was introduced by Stephen Greenblatt in 1980, to refer to diary writing as a means of defining and designing one's identity, or in Greenblatt's words, "fashioning of identity as an artful process."[41] With the same Foucauldian inspiration, Tom Webster considers Puritan diary-keeping as a "technology of the self," a means for constructing and maintaining the religious self through the action of writing.[42] However, he contests the view of New Historicism that spiritual journals in the sixteenth and early seventeenth century expressed the spirit of risk-taking individualism and believes that they should be rather seen as "a response to the specific demands of a particular religiosity." Instead of interpreting them by the cultural context in which they were created, he finds it more useful "to place the production of the self in a Christian context." [43]

What is less well known about Puritan journals is that not all of them were conceived as records of spiritual experience. In fact, as Lawrence Rosenwald assumes, most of them were almanac-diaries with margins full of notes about ordinary, mundane events. Only few of them have survived because when they fulfilled their intended function, they were thrown away like calendars are today. This sort of diary depicts a man in his "particular calling," namely his occupation, his business activities, routines, and social duties. *Homo economicus* of an almanac-diary only rarely commented on the "general calling" of men, i.e., man's relationship with God and attaining salvation.[44] The inward, invisible life of the mind is the

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[40] Margo Todd, "Puritan Self-fashioning: The Diary of Samuel Ward," The Journal of British Studies, Jul. 1992: 236-264.

[41] Stephen Greenblatt, Renaissance Self-fashioning from More to Shakespeare (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980) 1; quoted in Todd 239.

[42] Tom Webster, "Writing to Redundancy: Approaches to Spiritual Journals and Early Modern Spirituality," The Historical Journal, Mar. 1996: 40.

[43] Webster 40.

[44] Lawrence Rosenwald, "Sewall's Diary and the Margins of Puritan Literature," American Literature, Oct. 1986: 327-329.

subject of spiritual journals that every devout Puritan was recommended to keep. This autobiographical genre, classified by Tom Webster as "ego-literature," emerged in Elizabethan England among Protestants to whom the Calvinist soteriology meant more than just a set of dogmas to be intellectually acknowledged and who "made the search for the marks of election central to a practical divinity."[45] Writing a journal soon became an important tool of the Puritan devotional routine of self-examination.

Protestant premises of *sola fides* and *sola scriptura* strengthened religious individualism and as a consequence supplanted the ecclesiastical intermediary between man and God by the human conscience. A private dialogue between one's self and God thus gained more significance than any other worship practice or ritual. In the words of the Protestant cliché, every Christian became his own church. In Puritan circles, self-examination and reading from the Scripture became the essential points of religious practice. The culture of "quiet readers" became also one of inexhaustible diary-writers. While it is easy to understand the link between Bible reading, meditation, and the urge to note down one's impressions, confessions, and prayers, what accounts for the obsessive preoccupation with the self?

Webster observes that emergence of Puritan devotional manuals in the late sixteenth century signaled that clergy wanted to exercise some sort of control over the laity's spiritual practice which had become so internalized in Protestantism. This Foucauldian reverberation of the concept of "pastoral power" - a technique of maintaining church control over the consciences of its parishioners through the practice of confessions and sophisticated

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[45] Webster 36. "Ego-literature" is Webster's term for personal sources recording some form of spiritual experience. He explains the necessity for the new coinage: "It is necessary to dismantle some of our rigid general boundaries – autobiography, conversion narrative, spiritual journal – each of which is constructed within a particular project – ecclesiological study, the rise of the novel, the definition of Puritanism. This allows us to conceive a broader and rather less stable category which we might call "ego-literatures" which places the diary in a relationship with other forms of document used in close connection with the diary." Webster 35-36.

examination methods - is of particular relevance in the study of Puritan diaries. The Protestant spiritual exercise of self-examination related to journal-keeping is equivalent to the institutionalized Catholic practice of the sacrament of confession, which was a mechanism of pastoral power modernized and elaborated at the time of the Counter-Reformation. According to Foucault, the examination mechanisms devised by monks in early Christian monasteries permeated the Christian society in the sixteenth century and as we can see, it was a trend among both Catholics and Protestants. In Puritanism, examination of the soul became a form of self-surveillance, a technique for disciplining the corrupt self.

Many scholars have pointed out the self-renouncing language of Puritan self-examinations and confessions depicted in the diaries. Among the first, Sacvan Bercovitch in *The Puritan Origins of the American Self* analyzed their personal writings and linked the hatred for selfhood with the dilemma of Puritan identity.[46] Convinced they were innately depraved - and strengthening this conviction daily by their self-examination - they concluded that selfhood had to be destroyed so that Christ may dwell in them. A new "Christic" identity could only be asserted after a complete surrender of the self to God. Fighting sin was tantamount to waging war against the self, which was the heritage of Adam and the root of sin. The "old Adam" remained as an antagonist to the new, regenerated self until the end of the Saint's earthly pilgrimage. Richard Baxter's *Christian Directory* was eloquent in denouncing the self:

> Man's fall was his turning from God to himself; and his regeneration consisteth in the turning of him from himself to God. […] It is the self that the Scripture principally speaks against. […] The very names of Self and Own, should sound in the watchful Christian's ears as very terrible, wakening words, that are next to the names of sin and satan.[47]

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[46] Sacvan Bercovitch, <u>The Puritan Origins of the American Self</u> (London: Yale University Press, 1975).

[47] Richard Baxter, <u>Christian Directory </u>(Richard Edwards, 1825); quoted in Bercovitch 17.

Self-hatred was a necessary response to the self-knowledge gained through Puritan self-examination. The New England minister and poet Edward Taylor (1642 - 1729) recorded many of his introspective journeys in verse. In his *Preparatory Meditations*, he often describes himself through metaphors like "a varnisht pot of putrid excrements" and deplores his sinful heart:

> Oh! Woe is me! Was ever Heart like mine?
> A Sty of Filth, a Trough of Washing-Swill,
> A Dunghill Pit, a Puddle of mere slime,
> A Nest of Vipers, Hive of Hornets; stings.
> A Box of Poyson, Civit-box of sins.[48]

Bercovitch dispelled the myth of personal Puritan literature as an example of humanist self-consciousness and individualism. He maintained that while humanism optimistically celebrated human nature, Puritans were "convulsed with the nausea of their sins."[49] The self-scrutiny had one principal purpose: to detect the self and exorcise it. Another scholar, Tom Webster, only reiterated what Bercovitch had described in detail: "The disciplines of self-denial and self-examination are designed to turn the necessary condition of selfishness to the creation of a self-abnegating selfhood."[50]

Self-reflection provoked by *memento mori* also had an existentialist dimension. In *Being and Time*, the German philosopher Martin Heidegger defines a particular kind of fear which he calls "Angst," or existential anxiety. "Angst" is a response to the meaninglessness of human existence defined by temporality. We can say that Puritans experienced "Angst" when they contemplated on death, because it confronted them with the possibility of their life's

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[48] Edward Taylor, "Meditation 75" (II), "Meditation 40" (I), in Daniel Patterson, ed. <u>Edward Taylor's Gods Determinations and Preparatory Meditations: A Critical Edition</u> (The Kent State University Press: Kent, Ohio, 2003) 346, 186.

[49] Bercovitch

[50] Webster 43.

meaninglessness, if they were not elected to salvation. Their struggle with doubt concerning election was actually an existentialist struggle with the possibility of life's absurdity. Heidegger also contended that it was only in the confrontation with death that an authentic sense of being could be attained. As Jacques Derrida later argued in *The Gift of Death*, "the identity of the oneself is given by death," by which he meant that people become real individuals only at the moment of facing their own death.[51] Dying is the only thing that no one else can do for them. One's death is only one's own; it cannot be transferred on someone else. This reasoning makes death the ultimate expression of individuality. It can be argued that considering death made Puritans aware of the individuality that they wanted to "exorcise." It disclosed the dilemma of their split identity - with one "Christic" and one "Adamic" self. In Christianity, as the Apostle Paul argued, the singularity of death does not belong to the subject but to the one who made an atonement for it – Christ: "For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, *we are the Lord's* [emphasis added]."[52]

Puritan inward-turning was a direct response to the *memento mori* imperative inherent in Calvinist doctrines. Although remembering human mortality was a theme common enough in all Christian denominations for its expected ethical and spiritual impact on the believers, its implications in the Puritan context made the call particularly insistent. In the mind of every Puritan, *memento mori* was associated with the dogmas of predestination, election and assurance. It brought to the forefront of their consciousness the burning question: how can I know I am *really* saved? Puritan divines, trying to relieve their parishioners' "subjective" anxiety, encouraged careful soul-searching with the "objective" Scriptural mirror held up to

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[51] Jacques Derrida, <u>The Gift of Death</u>, trans. David Wills (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1995) 45.

[52] Rom. 14: 8.

every deed, thought, emotion, and motive. The English church leader Richard Baxter advised his readers in *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*: "The great means to Conquer this Uncertainty is Self-Examination or the serious and Diligent trying of a mans heart and state by the Rule of the Scripture."[53] The purpose of such meticulous introspection was therefore to verify the authenticity of Puritan's faith and his regenerate living by means of detecting and confessing sin and tracing up the presence of grace - which is granted to the elect – in his heart. It was to become a cyclical, repeated habit in which the believer fought a schizophrenic war against himself. The introspection can be best characterized as a spiritual conflict between the "old" unredeemed man and the new "Christic" identity of the regenerate Christian on the battlefield of the human heart. Military vocabulary is in place, as Baxter's use of "conquer" and "rule" suggest.

The paradox of the spiritual crusade is obvious: as sanctification is a process, and man can never reach perfection in a human body, the war can never be completely won in his lifetime. One of the problems with assurance was that it could never be attained for good. As the believer was to live by faith every day, the quest for testing his sincerity had to begin each day anew. Instead of bringing peace to the converts, the act of regeneration seems from this perspective like the launch of an ongoing military campaign in which the "new man" was to persevere until the Day of Judgment.[54] Another paradox of Puritan self-examination was the nagging conviction of one's fraudulence and hypocrisy. What if the assurance of election was mere self-deception or Satan's entrapment? Many Puritans were concerned that they could waste time on the wrong track by relying on false assurance. What if their righteousness was

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[53] Richard Baxter, The Saints' Everlasting Rest (London, 1654) 137; quoted in Bercovitch 18.

[54] This is a reference to the "new man" from Colossians 3:10 that each Christian is meant to "put on" and be "renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him."

only self-righteousness, their sanctification mere sanctimony, and their conversion just wishful thinking?

Thomas Shepard (1605 -1649), a minister of a church in Cambridge, Massachusetts, was famous for targeting and denouncing hypocrisy in his congregation. Puritans were convinced that "opportunities to misinterpret the signs of grace were virtually infinite."[55] Shepard believed that many of those who claim to have assurance of salvation are, in fact, reprobate. He called them "evangelical hypocrites." Unlike conscious impostors, these would-be elect deceived others and themselves unwittingly. As Shepard's journal reveals, the suspicion that he was an unconscious hypocrite haunted him constantly. He often felt like a reprobate, "without all sense as well as sight of God, estranged from the life of God."[56] Elsewhere in the diary he confesses: "I felt a wonderful cloud of darkness and atheism over my head, and unbelief, and my weakness to see or believe God."[57] Studies show that both clergy and laity in New England congregations felt at risk of being deceived by a false hope. The records of lay testimonies of conversion and spiritual experience, which were given by applicants for membership in Shepard's congregation, show the same dynamic alternation of anxiety and assurance in their lives. Commenting on Puritans' struggles with self-doubt, Professor McGiffert explains that "this notion of evangelical hypocrisy, pressed to its logical conclusion, had desperate consequences: it made hypocritical one's perception of one's own hypocrisy and so destroyed the cognitive basis of assurance."[58] What complicates the matter is the fallibility of man's perception and unreliability of his feelings in the process of self-examination. Identifying this problem exposes inner contradictions in Puritanism: the same

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[55] Michael McGiffert, ed. God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge (The University of Massachusetts Press, 1994) 17.

[56] Thomas Shepard, "The Journal," McGiffert 92.

[57] Shepard, McGiffert 103.

[58] McGiffert 18.

fallible man who can unconsciously deceive himself is supposed to examine himself and trust God through the same imperfect faculties.

3.2 Application of *memento mori*

Memento mori had various guises in Puritan culture. Some New England clergymen were fond of describing the horrors of Hell's torments to their parishioners until there were, in the words of Increase Mather, "more weepers than sleepers in the Congregation."[59] Solomon Stoddard's *The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell to Restrain Men from Sin* challenges the readers: "Who can dwell with everlasting Burnings?" [60] Further, it describes the state of the unregenerate souls in Hell:

> They will have Anguish of Spirit, not know what in the World to do; there will be dreadful Wailing, Mat. 13.42. They will lament their Sins, they will bewail the loss of Opportunities; […] they will wish they had no Senses; their Hearing and Seeing and Feeling will be their Misery, their Memory, their Understanding, their Conscience will be their Torment; they will wish they had no Bodies, and wish they had no Souls, their Bodies and Souls will be Vessels of Wrath.[61]

Convinced that conjuring up explicit images of the never-ending agony of the damned is an effective tool of conversion, preachers of the Great Awakening toured around New England in the 1740s and hypnotized the crowds. Jonathan Edwards (1703 -1758) - in spite of his many other accomplishments – is remembered mainly for his sermon entitled *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God.* In the well-known passage he tells his unregenerate audience: "the pit is prepared, the fire is made ready, the furnace is now hot, ready to receive the wicked: the flames do now rage and glow. […] The God that holds you over the

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[59] Jonathan Mitchel, <u>A Discourse of the Glory</u> (Boston, 1714); quoted in Stannard 84-85.

[60] Solomon Stoddard, <u>The Efficacy of the Fear of Hell to Restrain Men from Sin</u> (Boston, 1713) 26; quoted in Stannard 85.

[61] Stoddard; quoted in Stannard 85.

pit of hell, much in the same way as one holds a spider or some loathsome insect, abhors you and is dreadfully provoked."[62]

While most exhortations to think of death and use one's allotted time on earth wisely were given by ministers from the pulpit, some appeared in a literary form. The poet and clergyman Michael Wigglesworth (1631 - 1705) composed his poem about the Day of Judgment after a vision he had in a dream. As he was no mystic, but a sober Puritan preacher, his main inspiration was the Bible – nearly every line of the poem has a scriptural reference noted on the margin – and his main intention was to present "the truth," not an original approach to *Dies irae*. His epic poem called *The Day of Doom*: *or a Poetical Description of the Great and Last Judgment* is therefore based solely on the Calvinist interpretation of the scriptural Apocalypse. Lacking in aesthetics, the poem is valuable from today's point of view mainly for its presentation of the solid Puritan doctrine. The author devotes most of the 224 stanzas to depicting the separation of "sheep" from "goats," or the elect few from the large majority of mankind headed for eternal damnation. While "the wicked" tremble before the throne of the Judge and await the verdict which had been decided even before the human history began ("They are arraign'd, and there detain'd, before Christ's / Judgement-seat / With trembling fear, their Doom to hear, and feel his / angers heat."), the Saints seem to be enjoying the show.[63] The lack of sympathy for their impious neighbors, brothers, parents, spouses, and children ("now such compassion is out of fashion, and wholly laid aside: No Friends so near, but Saints to hear their Sentence can abide.")[64] is a manifestation of the radical change the Apocalypse brings into human relations. As Wigglesworth tried to

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[62] Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in Baum, Nina, ed., et al. The Norton Anthology of American Literature (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1995) 202, 206.

[63] Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom" (53), in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. The Puritans (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 598.

[64] Wigglesworth (196), in Miller 601.

demonstrate, the change also means abolition of all laws and rules of the old world, apparently including the biblical commandment of love for one's neighbor.

Although the description of fear of the damned by far exceeds that of Saints anticipating eternal happiness, it seems that Wigglesworth sought to bring his readers to repentance rather than despair. According to those who knew him, his purpose as a poet was "to set forth truth and win men's souls to bliss."[65] When the opening stanza describes the moment before the Apocalypse breaks out ("Calm was the season, and carnal reason thought so 'twould / last for ay."), it is a warning for people to mind God's ways while it is still time of grace.[66] Stanza 101 puts it even more directly with a question to sinners: "You had a season, what was your reason / such precious hours to waste?"[67] However, unlike those already facing the tribunal in the poem, the readers could translate these words as an admonition and encouragement to pursue their salvation ever more vigorously. Arguably, this is why the poem was so extremely popular in New England during the first century of its existence. In spite of its disturbing contents and graphic descriptions of the fate of the unregenerate, there is reason to believe that for most Puritans the ultimate message was one of hope. On the other hand, the horrors of Doom described by Wigglesworth reflected the Puritan anxiety about their own election. The vivid images of the poem undoubtedly found their way into Puritan nightmares. After all, it was a nightmare which gave the poet an impulse to write in the first place. We know that all the eighteen hundred copies of the first edition sold out in 1662, the year when the poem was published. This meant, according to Matthiessen, that one out of every thirty residents of New England owned a copy. This fact tells a lot about Puritan culture - which both produced and consumed the poem - and its view

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[65] F.O.Matthiessen, "Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan Artist," <u>The New England Quarterly</u>, Oct. 1928: 492.

[66] Wigglesworth (1), in Miller 587.

[67] Wigglesworth (101) <http://www.puritansermons.com/poetry/doom101.htm> (accessed 9 Jan. 2011).

of death. I think that in the cultural and religious setting of New England, where people were so preoccupied with death and religious doctrines, *The Day of Doom* can be interpreted as an embodiment of their spiritual concerns and as a *memento mori* of its kind.

We are told that Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728) was very impressed with John Endicott's habit of sealing each letter with a wax imprint in the shape of a skull. Repercussions of the morbid symbol led the preacher to formulate this counsel: "Let us look upon everything as a sort of Death's Head set before us, with a *Memento mortis* written upon it." And what, in his view, is the benefit of remembering human mortality? "*That Man is like to die comfortably* [emphasis added] who is every Day minding himself, that he is to die shortly," explains Mather.[68] Elsewhere he makes the same point by saying that "a Prudent man will Dy Daily […]. Every Time a Clock Strikes, it may Strike upon our Hearts, to think, thus I am one Hour nearer to my last." Similarly, John Calvin encouraged his readers: "Even in the best of health we should have death always before our eyes."[69] The purpose of such exhortations was obvious: to set the believers' eyes on the Kingdom of God while there was still time. *Memento mori* gave meaning and urgency to the daily confrontation of the godly soul with the godless self. It was an accelerator of Puritan spiritual struggles which were to reach their ultimate resolution after death.

"Dying daily" meant submitting to the authority which claimed power over death. The spiritual submission to Christ, which was central to the religious experience, translated into the Puritan's obedience to both religious and political authority. When we consider death as part of a broader discourse of power, the prescribed fear of death supported the hierarchical

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[68] Cotton Mather, <u>Death Made Easie & Happy</u> (London, 1701); quoted in David E. Stannard, <u>The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 77-78 and James A. Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History," <u>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</u>, Oct. 1983: 345.

[69] Philippe Ariès, <u>The Hour of Our Death</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) 302.

structure of Puritan patriarchal system and autocratic government. From a Foucauldian perspective, *memento mori* was a device of pastoral power to increase social and religious discipline. It can perhaps be argued that the emphasis on death in Puritanism was "deployed" in the discourse in similarity to the way sexuality was in the Catholic countries. The idea of the fear of death as an instrument of power within the social and religious system was also analyzed by Jean Delumeau, who classified the obsessive preoccupation with sin and punishment as a symptom of the "Western guilt culture."[70] The Protestant anxiety about death was related to the deep-seated awareness of one's guilt which was enhanced and even intentionally provoked by the practice of self-examination.

What other effect did *memento mori* have on the Puritan way of life? The Calvinist connotations associated with this reminder of mortality were also related to their worldly calling. Realizing that time was short, Puritans were supposed to work ever harder in fulfilling their earthly calling to increase God's glory. Time was too precious to be wasted. From this perspective, as Max Weber demonstrated in *The Protestant Ethics and the Spirit of Capitalism*, conscientiously and methodically fulfilling the duty of one's calling and attaining wealth through one's labor amounted to honoring God and doing His will. In the radical reversal of the concept of work, the *omnia vanitas* resonance of *memento mori* was repudiated by the Calvinist work ethic. Unless pursuing and accumulating wealth was meant as an end in itself, it was not considered vanity but it became a means to bring glory to the Lord. Importantly, systematic and fruitful work in a worldly calling was also believed to provide proof of one's genuine faith and election. Quoting from *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* by the English Puritan Richard Baxter, Weber makes a point that success in one's earthly vocation is a blessing from God and a sign of His approval: "on earth man must, to be certain of his state

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[70] Jean Delumeau, <u>Sin and Fear: The Emergence of a Western Guilt Culture, 13th-18th Centuries</u>, trans. Eric Nicholson (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990).

of grace, 'do the works of him who sent him, as long as it is yet day.'"[71] The Puritans saw this life as a time of grace appointed by God so that they could prepare for death by "redeeming the time" and "working out their salvation."[72] According to Weber, the urge not to waste this precious time manifested itself in their efficiency and together with other values of their "worldly asceticism" led to the emergence of Capitalist economy in the West. From this perspective, the Puritans' *worldly* pursuits were not separated from their *otherworldly* pursuits, but they mutually reinforced each other.

Remembering death was supposed to bring Puritans to self-reflection. The Puritan struggle with self-doubt and uncertainty about election at the thought of death gave it an existentialist edge. A thorough examination of their hearts was designed to test their faith, detect signs of grace, and attain assurance of salvation, but it was also a technique of self-discipline. Self-loathing, which was a side-effect of Puritan introspection, awakened both longing for death (to escape the body of sin) and dread of it (unable to see grace when overcome by sin). Thus, self-examination was like a double-edged sword. *Memento mori* was often declared from the pulpit, frequently in the form of evocations of Doom and the torments of Hell awaiting the unregenerate. While the inward turning was a devotional response, it also generated Puritan "worldly asceticism." It encouraged good performance in one's calling for the glory of God.

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[71] Max Weber, The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism, trans. Talcott Parsons (New York: Dover Publications, 2003) 157.

[72] In reference to Eph. 5: 16-17 and Phil. 2: 12.

4   DEATH AND CHILDREN

What did parents and the church teach children about death? How early in the life of a New England Puritan was religious terminology of eternal damnation, Hell and the Last Judgment introduced? Or, inquiring from the perspective of modern sensibility, how long were children spared the knowledge of the complex Calvinist doctrines which caused many of their parents such great inner anxiety and distress? My essential concern is to find out if Puritan children grew up in fear of death and its aftermath, or, if their religious education was marked by the optimistic Protestant emphasis on "sweet death" for those who have faith. The "miniature adulthood" theory of Philippe Ariès brings another challenge: did the society make any distinction between children and adults when it came to the reality of death and its religious meaning? [73] Therefore, before I begin exploring the role of death in Puritan upbringing, an important question must be asked: how was the notion of childhood in seventeenth-century New England different from today?

4.1   Did childhood exist in Puritan New England?

Ariès argued that childhood was a modern invention. In *Centuries of Childhood* he writes: "In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; [...]. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny, or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society."[74] The awareness of childhood as a distinct phase of life allegedly appeared in the West no sooner than in the early modern period (late sixteenth and seventeenth century) and that only in the upper classes of society. Before the Enlightenment

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[73] This theory was formulated in his famous work L'Enfant et la vie familiale sous l'Ancien Régime (1960). The English translation appeared only two years after its French debut as Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (1962). As a ground-breaking contribution to the study of the history of childhood it received considerable academic attention in the USA, which resulted in many attempts by American historians to apply the French pattern on colonial America.

[74] Philippe Ariès, Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1962) 128.

philosophy became influential in the late seventeenth century, children were regarded as "small-scale adults" and their specific sensibility, mental capacities, and needs had been largely ignored. Some of Ariès's main arguments were the absence of adequate children's literature and the same mode of dress for children and adults (according to family portraiture). Although he worked only with French sources, he believed his theory was relevant for describing the mentality of the entire western civilization. It was precisely this ambition to offer a totalizing scheme which caused so much controversy among scholars and provoked a sharp critical response.

Unfortunately, the lack of artistic and literary sources available about the society of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Massachusetts compared with the amount of data studied by Ariès complicates any verification of his ideas in the context of colonial America. In spite of this apparent handicap, many American historians welcomed the Frenchman's theory as a crucial point of reference to help explain an alleged ignorance of childhood among New England Puritans. Sandford Fleming explains that children were treated as "miniature adults" because they were exposed to the same means and experiences of religious life as their parents. He maintains that the Puritan theology „had *banished the child*, and classed everyone *indiscriminately* [emphasis added], infants and those of maturity, as sinners who were in urgent need of being saved from hell. "[75] John Demos and Arthur W. Calhoun, among many others, point out the harmful effect of precocity on children. Puritans are blamed for exploiting, overworking and traumatizing their children with their religious and educational zeal. Most scholars studying colonial attitudes towards children seem to agree that children became adults at the age of six or seven. Supposedly, it is because when they reached this age

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[75] Sandford Fleming, <u>Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of the New England Churches, 1620-1847</u> (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1933) 60; quoted in Ross W. Beales, Jr., "In Search of the Historical Child: Miniature Adulthood and Youth in Colonial New England," <u>American Quarterly</u>, Oct. 1975: 381.

they started wearing the same clothes as their parents and their technological training and work in the household were to begin soon. It is also believed that adolescence was not recognized as a distinct stage of life.

This interpretation of historical sources is not shared by Ross W. Beales. In his judgment, "accounts of children in early America are marked by condescension, sentimentality and even blank incomprehension."[76] It is not only Beales who thinks the concept of "miniature adulthood" is an exaggeration. One of its most compelling critics is David E. Stannard. Not only does he doubt the application of Ariès's thesis on colonial America but the French paradigm as such.

Stannard is convinced that Puritan autobiographies, journals, sermons, and colonial legislature imply that their authors were very well aware of the differences between themselves and their offspring. As evidence he cites frequent parental exhortations towards children, educational instructions, and child rearing advice which clearly demonstrate there was "no confusion or ambiguity in the mind of an adult Puritan as to the differences between him and his children."[77]

A number of laws which, from the early years of English settlement in the New world, distinguish children, adolescents and adults as different legal categories, provides very strong proof about the existence of higher awareness of childhood than the Ariès-inspired historians were willing to admit. Beales mentions a law concerning rebellious youths by which an incorrigibly stubborn son over sixteen years of age (this legal age was believed to ensure "sufficient understanding") could face execution for his disobedience.[78]

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[76] Beales 380.

[77] David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 46.

[78] Beales 392.

Concerning the same attire of children and adults, it can perhaps be explained as an attempt to distinguish between boys and girls from a certain age onward (as also Alan Macflaren had argued) or by effort to improve the family's social status when having a portrait painted (the same criticism was used against Ariès in the French context). The matter of dress served as an argument supporting both the advocates and the opponents of the Ariès's paradigm. Up to the age of six, boys and girls alike wore a long gown that opened at the front. The change of clothes at this age was used by Zuckerman and Demos as an example of "small-scale adulthood." Alan Macflaren, on the other hand, interpreted it as a mere signpost for gender differentiation.

Perhaps the most important point of Stannard's argumentation is the number of children's books published in England and its American colonies. The list of annotated bibliography compiled by William Sloane in the 1950s counts 261 books written for children (excluding instructional books for their teachers and parents) between 1557 and 1710. These books naturally differed from today's storybooks, but it was not out of neglect for children's special needs. According to Stannard, sources available to historians about seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England society demonstrate that children were not treated like adults, only their nature and capacities were viewed differently. As he concludes: "their status as children was recognized – and never questioned – by their parents, ministers, or by other adults in the community. In many ways those children were seen and treated differently from children of today. In many ways they *were* different."[79] As I will demonstrate further, how different the Puritan treatment of children was from today can be best seen in the way they were confronted with death and how they were expected to respond.

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[79] Stannard 47.

4.2 Puritan religious education

What did the Puritan society think about children? Personal journals and autobiographies reveal a strong parental affection towards their little ones. The relationship between parents and their children is often compared to the bond between God and his people. In the context of Calvinism this parallel implies an obvious ambivalence of the parental attitude. On the one hand, parents loved their children deeply; on the other hand, they were well aware of and hated their sinful nature. Samuel Willard, a Boston minister, expresses this paradox by referring to children as "innocent vipers". He captures the dynamics of love and discipline in the parent-children relationship by evocation of the biblical analogy:

> …that God is often angry with [his children], afflicts them, and withdraws the light of his countenance from them, and puts them to grief, is not because he loves them not, but because it is that which their present condition requires; they are but Children, and childish, and foolish, and if they were not sometimes chastened, they would grow wanton, and careless of duty.[80]

A child, as the Puritans believed, was not born innocent. Upon entering this world it had already been polluted by Adam's sin. Calvin himself put a great emphasis on the doctrine of original sin and in his *Institutions* wrote about children:

> Even infants bear their condemnation with them from their mother's womb; for, though they have not yet brought forth the fruits of their own iniquity, they have the seed enclosed within themselves. Indeed, their whole nature is a seed of sin; thus it cannot but be hateful and abominable to God.[81]

Children were perceived as creatures with endless potential to do evil, their hearts being but "a meer nest, root, fountain of Sin, and wickedness," and their spiritual condition was for this reason often compared to that of unregenerate adults.[82]

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[80] Samuel Willard, The Child's Portion (Boston, 1648) 31; quoted in Stannard 51-52.

[81] John Calvin, Institutes of the Christian Religion, ed. John T. McNeill, trans. Ford Lewis Battles (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1977) IV, 15, 10.

[82] Benjamin Wadsworth, A Course of Sermons on early Piety (Boston, 1721) 10; quoted in Stannard 52.

This view of children necessitated very strict discipline in Puritan families. John Robinson (1575-1625), a Separatist minister of the Pilgrims, was certain the main obstacle to good spiritual and moral formation was "a stubbornness, and stoutness of mind arising from natural pride." Parents were urged to crush their children's selfish and aggressive drives. He demanded that "children's wills and willfulness be restrained and repressed." In giving advice on child rearing he reveled in verbs like "destroy", "break", "beat down", "repress", or "pluck down".[83] As many observers pointed out, the "breaking" of children sought one objective – that they would "recognize their depravity and pray for their salvation."[84] In fact, the sole purpose of Puritan child rearing and the role of parents was to help children see their sinfulness and encourage them to seek God.

Although conversions of little children were considered rare, they were believed to be possible. Fearing for their children's souls if they died before being "born again" and taking to the heart that the "time is near" and not a minute should be wasted, Puritans educated their children in a manner which would accelerate their spiritual maturity as early as possible. Cotton Mather puts it plainly and clearly in his advice: "Are they *Young*? Yet the *Devil* has been with them already. […] And I pray, why should you not be afore-hand with *him*?"[85] According to Stannard, "it is hardly surprising that Puritan parents urged on their offspring a religious precocity that some historians have interpreted as tantamount to premature adulthood."[86] The pressure they were putting on them was therefore motivated by a strong sense of duty, certainly love, but also *fear*. Being a parent was, in fact, a great spiritual

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[83] John Robinson, "New Essays: Or, Observations Divine and Moral," in The Works of John Robinson, ed. Robert Ashton (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1851), vol.1, 246-248; quoted in Stannard 49.

[84] Stannard 50-51.

[85] Cotton Mather, Small Offers Towards the Service of the Tabernacle in this Wilderness (Boston, 1689) 59; quoted in Stannard 50.

[86] Stannard 50.

responsibility. Mather reminded parents that one day they would be held accountable for it by God. "Behold, thou hast Lambs in the Fold, Little ones in thy House;" he exhorts parents and immediately adds a warning: "God will strain for it, - if wild beasts, and Lusts carry any of them away from the Service of God through any *neglect of thine* [emphasis added] thou shalt smart for it in the fiery prison of God's terrible Indignation."[87]

If children are depraved and damnable creatures, does it mean they are all automatically predestined for damnation in case of premature death? What are the spiritual prospects of stillborn babies and children who died before conversion? These questions troubled many Puritans for the same reason as their own predestination: the answers were hidden from human knowledge as a part of God's inscrutable plan. However, Puritan descriptions of the age groups from which God was most likely to call his Elect show that infants and children were not among the luckiest ones. Understanding the doctrines and discerning the operation of saving grace in the soul required some maturity and experience which, according to Thomas Hooker, children under the age of ten could not possess.[88] Unless a child converted and demonstrated signs of regeneration which were accepted by the congregation, the odds he or she would be saved were extremely low. As is well known, Calvinist theology teaches that every baby is already born predestined; either for Heaven or for Hell. Chances for being born reprobate are, however, much higher than the chances for being born elect. The loss of a child was even more painful for Puritan parents as they did not know what awaited their loved one in the afterlife. Unlike the Catholics, Puritans understood infant baptism as a purely symbolic ceremony which did not guarantee salvation because sacraments could not confer grace, only

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[87] Mather, Small Offers Towards the Service of the Tabernacle in this Wilderness 18-19; quoted in Stannard 51.

[88] Thomas Hooker, The Unbeleevers Preparing for Christ (London, T. Cotes for A. Crooke: 1638) 199-200; quoted in Beales 386. For age groups from which God is most likely to draw his Elect see Beales 385-387 and Gerald F. Moran, "Religious Renewal, Puritan Tribalism, and the Family in Seventeenth-Century Milford, Connecticut," The William and Mary Quarterly, Apr. 1979: 248-249.

confirm it. In Calvin's view, it was equivalent to the Jewish ritual of circumcision; it was a promise of possible future regeneration. Neither did they believe in the existence of *limbus infantium*, or Limbo. This unofficial yet popular belief held by many Catholics in Europe introduced a place situated at the very edge (*limbus*) of Hell for children who died unbaptized in original sin. The absence of Purgatory in the Protestant and especially Reformed theology also excluded other Catholic practices, like the requiem mass or prayers for the deceased. There was therefore no way Puritans could safeguard Heaven for their dying children or at least increase their hopes. In my opinion, the effort to comfort anxious parents explains the unorthodox belief that unconverted children will suffer less than other reprobate sinners. The myth of "the easiest room in hell," shared by some Puritans, appeared in Michael Wigglesworth's bestseller, *The Day of Doom*. There is no theological justification for this idea, as neither Calvin nor any respected Puritan divine mention it in their official writings.[89] One of the most influential English Puritans, William Perkins, clearly states that the Bible "mentioneth only two places for men after this life, heaven and hell, with the two-fold condition thereof, joy and torment."[90] Yet, Wigglesworth's vision of God's Judgment in a poem which aspires to be the showcase of sound Calvinistic doctrine seems to blunt the sharp distinction between the saved and the damned. The poem depicts how unbaptized children plead before God they are innocent because they have done nothing wrong. Although they are still condemned on the basis of their inherited sinfulness (original sin), they are given consolation:

> A crime it is, therefore in bliss
> You may not hope to dwell;

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[89] For examples of Puritan speculation on the existence of various degrees of afterlife punishments see Gerhard T. Alexis, "Wigglesworth's 'easiest room,'" The New England Quarterly, Dec. 1969: 580-582.

[90] William Perkins, Works (London, 1612) I, 99; quoted in Alexis 576.

> But unto you I shall allow
> The easiest room in hell. **91**

These children contrast with a group of redeemed babies flocking like lambs around their Savior, as described earlier in the poem:

> And them among an Infant throng
> of Babes for whom Christ dy'd;
> Whom for his own by wayes unknown
> to men, he sanctify'd.[92]

Why one group of depraved children was pardoned and the other one condemned is a secret of the sovereign and arbitrary God who does as he pleases. Indeed, the only difference between the "babes" on Christ's right hand and those on his left hand is that while the former have been arbitrarily elected to salvation, the latter have been doomed the same way, which is the essence of Calvinist logic in this regard. What accounts for Wigglesworth's unorthodox concession, by which he ameliorated the fate of reprobate infants, remains obscure. Gerhard T. Alexis contends:

> […] since the poem was intended to vivify the dreadful Judgment and dramatize the lot of both saved and lost, the scene and its terrors become physically felt, as the poet intended. In the circumstances, the thought of equal suffering for little children, however doctrinally sound, might upset, rather than strengthen, one's convictions and commitments.[93]

His observation supports my hypothesis that the notion of the "easiest room" was meant to mitigate the fears Puritan parents had for their children.

As we know from the previous chapters, Puritans were extremely obsessed with thinking about death. As regards the matter of death and children, it is vital to realize that people in seventeenth-century New England were plagued not only by the *thought* of it, but

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[91] Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom," quoted in F. O. Matthiessen, "Michael Wigglesworth, a Puritan Artist," The New England Quarterly Oct. 1928: 499.

[92] Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom," quoted in Alexis 576.

[93] Alexis 583.

also felt its *physical* presence at every step. Death was an omnipresent threat to all populations at the time and lives of the youngest were particularly vulnerable. Demographic historians say that most New England families had to face death of at least one of their children and usually more than one. In fact, approximately 10 to 30 percent of children never reached their first birthday and one out of four did not live up to the age of ten. Moreover, these statistics are only rough estimates as most deaths of infants were probably not even recorded. Putting together mortality rates available from several New England towns, statisticians conclude that the average number of children born per family was 8.8, three of which did not survive until adulthood. Wars with Native Americans and outbursts of diseases meant that mortality rates rocketed to even more shocking figures. The infamous smallpox epidemic of 1677-1678 is said to have buried about one-fifth of Boston's population. The ever-present tolling of bells for the deceased made death almost the only subject of Puritans' daily devotions.

In connection with the King Philip's War (1675-1678), Increase Mather made his Boston congregation pray "for a spirit of Converting Grace to be poured out upon the Children and *Rising Generation* in *New England*." [94] This pleading was not motivated only by the obvious fact that men and women, the same as little children, are more spiritually sensitive at times of trouble and thus more likely to seek salvation. Hard times were interpreted as part of God's sovereign plan of salvation. In fact, the Lord was believed to be sending plagues on his people in order to humble them and bring them to repentance. The point is that afflictions and epidemics became powerful tools for disciplining children in the framework of Puritan religious education. They could, as the Puritans hoped, open their little hearts and minds to God by reminding them of their fragility.

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[94] Increase Mather, <u>Pray for the Rising Generation</u> (Boston, 1678); quoted in Stannard 61.

Among those affected by frequent children's deaths were some of the most prominent Puritan families. In his first marriage, the poet Edward Taylor lost five from his eight children. Only two out of Cotton Mather's fourteen children survived their father; seven died in infancy, one at the age of two and the remaining five died before reaching adulthood. Thomas Shepard lost three of his seven sons. And Samuel Sewall, having buried several of his children in infancy, and several as young adults, suffered from nightmares in which his offspring either died or disappeared. Surely the lives of children were "like as a bubble, or the brittle glass," as the Puritan poet Anne Bradstreet captured in her verse. She wrote this upon the death of one of her grandchildren, her namesake Anne Bradstreet, who was deceased at the age of three and a half:

> I knew she was but as a withering flower,
> That's here today, perhaps gone in an hour;
> Like as a bubble, or the brittle glass,
> Or like a shadow turning, as it was. [95]

To the poet, her granddaughter's death is a painful reminder of life's fragility and a warning that complete happiness cannot be found in "fading things" ("Was ever stable joy yet found below? / Or perfect bliss without mixture of woe?"). Although she grieves the little girl's death, she recognizes God's right to take her life anytime He pleases, for He alone decides the fate of mortals. Her total surrender to God's sovereign power to give and to take is even more apparent in an earlier poem written in memory of another deceased granddaughter, Elizabeth. The poet's response voices her unwavering trust in the one "that guides nature and fate," although the child's premature death is seen as a contradiction to the God-given order of things ("By nature trees do not rot when they are grown").[96] But God - for reasons which are

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[95] Anne Bradstreet, "In Memory of my Dear Grandchild Anne Bradstreet, Who Deceased June 20, 1669, Being Three Years and Seven Months Old," in Jeannine Hensley, ed. The Works of Anne Bradstreet (Cambridge, Harvard University Press: 1967) 236.

[96] Bradstreet,"In Memory of My Dear Grandchild Elizabeth Bradstreet, Who Deceased August, 1665, Being a Year and Half Old," in Hensley 235.

hidden from men - asserts his supreme will even against the very order of nature He Himself established. In spite of this, God's authority is not at all questioned but accepted with the knowledge that every experience, however tragic it might be, is meaningful in God's overall scheme of salvation.

High mortality rates of children contributed to the practice of keeping "due distance" from their offspring that parents were instructed to follow. Keeping affections on their guard would help them cope with the child's potential death. This emotional distancing of Puritan parents from their children is characteristic of the strict Calvinistic education in which imposing discipline and precocity were imperative. Deliberate effort to avoid too much intimacy with their offspring resulted in common extended stays of little children with other families and early apprenticeship. The separation and lack of intimacy must have been extremely difficult to bear for both parent and child. From the point of view of modern children's psychology it is clear that this practice surely caused a lot of emotional damage. However, what seems as unnecessary restraint and cruelty from our modern perspective made perfect sense to Puritans back then.

4.3 *Memento mori,* children!

Considering Puritan theology and the high mortality rates, it is only logical that children were fully included in the discourse about death. Frankness and honesty about death which characterized Puritan communication with their children is arguably a single most distinctive feature of Puritan child rearing in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England. All, children and adults alike, attended the same church services and were confronted with the same theology of death. *Memento mori* was mandatory for every member of the Puritan community regardless of age. Stannard asserts: „The sermons they [children] listened to, the parents who corrected them, the teachers who instructed them, and eventually the books they

read all focused with a particular intensity on the possibility and even the likelihood of their imminent death."[97]

The purpose of the book called *A token for children* by James Janeway was to remind children of the proximity of death, so that they could realize their need for salvation as soon as possible. It was one of the most popular books in New England written specifically for children. Yet, the most favorite of all was *The New England Primer*, which combined grammar and alphabet with catechism and religious doctrines. First published in Boston in 1690, it became the schoolbook from which generations of New England children learned the alphabet. It was frequently reprinted even in the nineteenth century. From our modern perspective it seems shockingly morbid. Not only is the study of reading and writing combined with application of biblical doctrines concerning sin and its consequences, but it is also full of images and symbols of human mortality. What made the Primer famous were its twenty-four little pictures with alphabetical rhymes. However, a majority of them were altered in the course of time to suit the public opinion. In the 1727 version, which is the oldest surviving edition, children could encounter rhymes such as: "A- In Adam's fall / We sinned all"; "G-As runs the Glass / Mans life doth pass"; "T – Time cuts down all / Both great and small"; "X – Xerxes the great did die / And so must you & I"; "Y – Youth forward slips / Death soonest nips."[98] A picture attached to the letter "Y" depicts the Grim Reaper holding an hourglass, a symbol of mortality, and simultaneously pointing an arrow at a terrified child who is running away. When later editions had the rhyme changed to "While Youth do chear / Death may be near" the picture was supplanted by a depiction of merry feasting and drinking

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[97] Stannard 65.

[98] The New England Primer [1727] (New York: Columbia University Press, 1962); quoted in Stannard 65.

of youths while the Grim Reaper is approaching.[99] Hourglasses, Xerxes lying in his coffin, and the Grim Reaper cutting down the young, are not the only evocations of human mortality contained in the textbook. The imminence of death is also remembered in this bedtime prayer, which was added to the primer in 1777: "Now I lay me down to sleep / I pray the Lord my soul to keep / If I should die before I wake / I pray the Lord my soul to take."[100]

Parents, teachers, and ministers did not have the least intention to spare children the facts concerning death, hell and judgment. During the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards is said to have announced to a group of children with a calm voice: "I know you will die in a little time, some sooner than others. 'Tis not likely you will all live to grow up."[101] There are words addressed to the youngest even in his most well known sermon, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God* (1741):

> And you, children, who are unconverted, do not you know that you are going down to hell, to bear the dreadful wrath of that God, who is now angry with you every day and every night? Will you be content to be the children of the devil, when so many other children in the land are converted, and are become the holy and happy children of the King of kings?[102]

It is clear that his famous hellfire speech did not terrify only adults, but listeners of all ages were supposed to take to heart the vivified images of God's wrath. Similarly, Cotton Mather recommended to the children in his church to take walks in graveyards to realize the fragility

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[99] The New England Primer [1777] <http://www.sacred-texts.com/chr/nep/1777/index.htm> (accessed 27 Dec. 2010).

[100] The New England Primer [1777].

[101] Stannard 66.

[102] Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in Nina Baum, ed., et al. The Norton Anthology of American Literature (New York and London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995) 210.

of their existence: "Go into Burying-Place, Children; you will there see Graves as short as yourselves. Yea, you may be at Play one Hour; Dead, Dead the next."[103]

The most terrifying means by which Puritan children were reminded of death and the consequences of dying unconverted was evocation of the Day of Judgment. The aim was to show them that if they were to end up in eternal damnation but their godly parents justified, they would never see them again. In view of modern psychology, the dread of death in children is rooted in knowing they will be separated from their parents.[104] Comforting the "separation anxiety" by promising children a reunion in the afterlife was a luxury Puritan parents could not afford; the rules of salvation were clear. The theme of separation, as if it was not enough by itself, was further paralleled by the theme of parental betrayal. Increase Mather said to the children of his congregation: "Your godly parents will testify against you before the Son of God at that day: and the Ministers of Christ will also be called in as witness against you for your condemnation, if you dy in your sins."[105] Children often memorized long passages from *The Day of Doom* with detailed descriptions of the separation of friends, husbands and wives, and parents and children. In his poem, Wigglesworth made the elect watch the tribunal with satisfaction and without mercy for the condemned:

> The tender mother will own no other
> of all her numerous
> brood,
> But such as stand at Christ's right hand
> acquitted through his Blood.
> The pious Father had now much rather
> his graceless Son should ly
> In Hell with Devils, for all his evils
> burning eternally. [106]

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[103]Cotton Mather, <u>Perwasions from the Terror of the Lord</u> (Boston, 1711) 35; quoted in Stannard 66.

[104] For more on children's psychology in the anticipation of death see Stannard 63.

[105] Increase Mather, <u>Pray for the Rising Generation</u>, (Boston, 1678) 22; quoted in Stannard 63.

[106] Michael Wigglesworth, "The Day of Doom," in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. <u>The Puritans</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 600.

The separation of the elect from the damned on the Day of Judgment is seen as a manifestation of God's sovereign will as well as a confirmation of His grace. The very fact that He saves the elect, although He could rightfully send all to eternal damnation, proves his love and grace. The Lord also demonstrates His grace by permitting sinners to live freely to do what they please until they die. Arguably though, the freedom of the reprobate is not unreserved as they can never choose to seek God. They are bound to sin by their corrupt nature. Only God's grace which is given to the elect can transform human heart so they start longing for God and do His will. God is like a potter (a biblical allusion Puritans were fond of making) who has "power over the clay" and has a right to "make one vessel unto honour and another unto dishonor."[107] It may seem unfair but only because human perspective is limited. While *all* deserve to be cast in Hell, the existence of Heaven for the chosen few is itself an unmerited favor of a gracious God.

The frequent image of the Day of Judgment with parents rejecting their children, praising God for his justice in condemning them, and even testifying against their own offspring, made death the ultimate horror in the lives of many Puritan children. It can be illustrated by the case of little Betty Sewall, daughter of the famous judge. At the age of seven the girl burst into tears at any mention of the Last Judgment, Hell, or damnation and she could not be comforted. For a long time, the little girl was not able to read the Bible without fear that she was reprobate because she did not love her neighbors enough. Her father Samuel Sewall noted in his diary:

> "...a little after dinner she burst out into an amazing cry [...] at last said she was afraid she should goe to Hell, her Sins were not pardon'd. She was first wounded by my reading a Sermon of Mr.Norton's [...] Ye shall seek me and shall not find

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[107] Viz. Rom. 9: 19-21.

me. And those words in the sermon [...] Ye shall seek me and shall die in your sins, ran in her mind, and terrified her greatly. And staying at home Jan.12. she read out of Mr. Cotton Mather – Why hath Satan filled thy heart, which increas'd her Fear. Her Mother ask'd her whether she pray'd. She answer'd, Yes; but feared her prayers were not heard because her Sins not pardon'd."[108]

This passage obviously does not allow for a general conclusion that all Puritan children feared death so intensely. However, along with the style of Puritan religious education and children's required preoccupation with death, it entitles us to assume that to a majority of them death connoted certainty of guilt and uncertainty of being pardoned. This fear, as I shall examine in the following chapter, accompanied children into adulthood and often broke out with the greatest intensity when they were confronted with death face to face.

To summarize the findings about Puritan children and death, it is important to realize that death was ever-present in the life of a Puritan child, both as a religious concept and as a real physical threat. Death and its ensuing horrors for the depraved were used as a means of religious instruction to provoke spiritual precocity and conversion. It is evident that Puritan anxiety about one's destiny and the fear of death began in early childhood. Although the youngest members of the community were entirely included in the discourse about death and no concessions were made in explaining the doctrine, it is hardly credible that Puritan children were viewed merely as "small-scale adults." The specific nature of Puritan child rearing cannot be explained by the theory of Philippe Ariès but only by the inner logic of the Calvinist doctrine itself.

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[108] Samuel Sewall, "Diary", in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson 512.

5 ON THE DEATHBED

When the Saints reached the end of their earthly pilgrimage and were about to depart this world, they knew that soon they would know with absolute certainty what God had predestined long before they were born: if they are elect, or reprobate. In the light of this prospect, was the moment of death something that Puritans dreaded or welcomed with joy? Did they die peacefully, hoping they would soon be with the Lord, or did self-doubt complicate their *migratio* into alleged eternal bliss? Although answering these speculative questions is fraught with difficulty – for, who can tell what the dying person feels deep inside? – let us focus on the final moments of Puritan life as described in Cotton Mather's spiritual biographies. What did the ideal death of a Saint look like? And, did Puritan apprehensions necessitate any manuals on "the art of dying," with advice on how to "die well"?

5.1 "Exemplary death" and "the art of dying"

While Perry Miller believed that Puritans faced life and death remembering their "cosmic optimism" and "never doubted the ultimate outcome," and Allan I. Ludwig attributed to Puritans such confidence that "the triumph of Death was overcome by eternity" and "the fear of death gave way to the thrill of spiritual pleasures yet to come as archangels trumpeted the glorious day," David E. Stannard presented a different interpretation in his 1977 book *The Puritan way of death*.[109] In his judgment, "the Puritans were gripped individually and collectively by an intense and unremitting fear of death, while simultaneously clinging to the traditional Christian rhetoric of viewing death as a release and relief for the earth-bound

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[109] Perry Miller, <u>The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century</u> (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967) 37. Allan I. Ludwig, <u>Graven Images: New England Stonecarving and Its Symbols, 1650-1815</u> (Middletown, Conn.: Wesleyan University Press, 1966) 108. David E. Stannard, <u>The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change</u> (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977).

soul."[110] His assertion - which downplays any sign of hope for redemption in the face of death as "rhetoric" and characterizes Puritan fear as "unremitting" – is perhaps really an exaggeration, as some scholars have indicated. However, Stannard made a very good point when he noticed the significance of the rhetorical aspect of death, a pattern which Puritans used to describe the final moments of someone from their midst. While we cannot tell what was really going through the *moriens'* mind as he was leaving this world, we can tell – from the sources which are available – how his departure *appeared* to those who witnessed and recorded the deathbed scene.

The ambiguous view of death – the conflict between the religious ideal and the actual experience of dying – is, according to Stannard, embodied in the figure of Increase Mather (1639-1723). Mather represents both the yearning for death and the unease with which many Saints seemed to have left this world. In one of his sermons, he exclaimed: "I know that the time of my departure out of this world is now very near at hand. […] And now that I'm Preaching Christ how glad should I be, if I might dye before I stir out of this pulpit!"[111] Several years later, when his actual death approached, he did not seem that confident. According to the account of his son Cotton Mather (1663 - 1728), he was assaulted by the horror of "being Deceived at the last." Just like Shepard - or any other serious New England minister of the Puritan era – Increase Mather both emphasized the problem of self-delusion and false security in the matter of personal salvation and experienced on himself the pangs of the doctrine of assurance. Cotton relates:

> And in the Minutes of the Darkness wherein he lay thus feeble and sore broken, he sometimes let fall expressions of some Fear lest he might after all be Deceived in his Hope of the Future Blessedness. His Holy ministry having very much insisted on that Point, that no care could be too much to prevent our being Deceived in that Important matter.[112]

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[110] Stannard 79.

[111] Increase Mather, <u>Several Sermons</u> (Boston, 1715) 59-60; quoted in Stannard 79.

[112] Cotton Mather, <u>Parentator</u> (Boston, 1724) 207-208; quoted in Stannard 79.

What does it mean? Could a Saint be tempted at the final moment of his life? Apparently, as Cotton explains, it is a "very Supposeable thing, and not at all to be wondered at, if the Serpent be able to let vex a Servant of GOD in the Heel of his life." [113] By the Serpent he obviously means Satan and the word "Heel" is a reference to the text of the *protevangelium* in the Scripture, which is the first announcement of the gospel in the Bible: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head and thou shall bruise his heel."[114] Although the Devil is allowed the "bruising" of Christ's heel at the crucifixion, he is beaten by the Savior's ultimate victory when Jesus rises from the dead and redeems the mankind (Calvinistically speaking: the elect) from the consequences of sin. In a characteristic Puritan fashion of typology, the younger Mather compares his father's death to that of Jesus on the cross – which is the crucial event in the history of salvation - by linking it to its foreshadowing (or "type") in the Old Testament. This hermeneutical effort was definitely intended to present Increase's trial on the deathbed as a model of a Saint's passing. Thus, such circumstances of one's final moments – with "the Powers of Darkness, knowing the Time to be short" falling "with Great Wrath" on the *moriens* – were read as a sign of election. The spiritual war over the soul was believed to be raging with utmost intensity when a Saint was dying, as it was seen by the Devil as his last chance to trouble the elect. In fact, "a very Dark Time" experienced on the deathbed was typical of "the Great Opposers" of Satan and was symptomatic of salvation. And so, in spite of Increase's doubts, Cotton remained optimistic about his father's postmortem destination.

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[113] Mather 207-208; quoted in Stannard 79.

[114] Gen. 3:15.

Stannard emphasizes the "dissonant nature" between: (1) the elder Mather's pronouncements and his actual deathbed behavior and (2) the father's experience and the son's "rhetorical" interpretation of his death.[115] As for the first contradiction, it should be added that there is nothing sensational about discovering that such a pious man as Increase Mather - to whom the spiritual world was as real as the visible one - was wishing to die at the moment of spiritual excitement (when "Preaching Christ") and that he was frightened in the face of death, when he was physically sick and felt deserted by God. Such reactions do not prove that he feared death in general; they demonstrate the oscillation between the two poles of Puritan attitude toward death caused by Puritan understanding of predestination and assurance. Although Stannard explicitly declares that not all Puritans in New England died in despair, he seems to highlight specifically the instances in which the *moriens* suffered from self-doubt and anxiety. Contrary to Stannard, Gordon Geddes - another major scholar writing on the Puritan perception of death – concluded that after years of searching for assurance of salvation, most Puritans found it and welcomed death: "assured that Christ would preserve them even through the dark valley."[116] This statement seems to provide good counterbalance to Stannard's assumption, although it does not account for the cases of devout Puritans who were stricken with anxiety on their deathbed, the same as it ignores that some amount of doubt was considered normal and even desirable by Puritans themselves.

Another thing is Cotton Mather's depiction of his father's death. Any account of a deathbed scene is somewhat questionable and it seems to reveal more about the eyewitness – his perception and interpretation - than the dying person. The last thoughts of the *moriens* can never be completely guessed by someone who is standing by. It is the eyewitness who makes

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[115] Stannard 80.

[116] Gordon E. Geddes, <u>Welcome Joy: Death in Puritan New England</u> (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1981) 36; quoted in James A. Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History," <u>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</u>, Oct. 1983: 347.

the selection of information which he includes in the account, while other details - perhaps of great importance to the *moriens* - pass unnoticed. On top of this, when dealing with such documents, we should always ask about the author's intention. In the case of Cotton Mather, it is clear that he wanted to eulogize his father. The question remains if he "manipulated" the circumstances of his death to fit a hagiographical pattern.

As the author of *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), in which he maps the religious development of New England from 1620 to 1698, Cotton Mather conceived his biographical portraits of the Saints as *exempla fidei*. Sacvan Bercovitch observed that Mather was keen on showing how Puritanism "opened the way to material as well as spiritual prosperity" and his intention was to put forth exemplary lives to be followed.[117] He "advertised" his writings as "epistles of Christ," making frequent biblical parallels to urge his readers to "imitate our Savior."[118] His exemplary lives call for emulation the same way as the "exemplary deaths" he describes in his texts. The account of his father's end in the *Parentator* resembles the deathbed scenes of most *Magnalia* Saints. They were designed as Puritan *ars moriendi*, or instructions on how to "die well." According to this pattern, Saints should prepare to face temptation in their final moments, when God was supposed to cast "their souls down to hell, to rebound the higher to heaven."[119] The pattern is Christological; reminiscent of Christ's anxiety experienced in the garden of Gethsemane where he was tempted to refuse the way of the cross before he was arrested and crucified. Cotton's inspiration also comes from the Old Testament and the Protestant tradition of ecclesiastical biography.

A good example is the depiction and interpretation of the death of a long-term Massachusetts governor John Winthrop (1588 - 1649). Mather first frames the scene with the

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[117] Sacvan Bercovitch, <u>The Puritan Origins of the American Self</u> (London: Yale University Press, 1975) 3.

[118] Bercovitch 34.

[119] Bercovitch 32.

prophetical promise of Christ's sacrificial death from Genesis (*protevangelium*) to explain why the "Old Serpent will be nibbling more than ever in our lives" when our days draw to a close. It is because he "sees that we shall shortly be where the wicked cease from troubling." Being "an eminent saint," Winthrop "was buffeted with the disconsolate thoughts of black and sore desertions."[120] Just like Increase Mather, Winthrop felt abandoned by God on his deathbed. Moreover, he feared God would not pardon him as he reportedly cried out: "Recently I was a judge, now I am judged; I tremble as I stand before the tribunal, to be judged myself."[121] However, soon there was a twist:

> But it was not long before these clouds were dispelled, and he enjoyed in his holy soul the great consolation of God! [… Then,] having like Jacob first left his council and blessing with his children, and like David served his generation by the will of God, he *gave up the ghost* [emphasis added, Matt. 27: 50].[122]

The scriptural parallels culminate in Winthrop being likened to Christ and his sacrificial death. Importantly, he does not die in despair, but in peace after God comforts him. According to Bercovitch, "the threefold rhetorical pattern" of the personal, the biblical, and the Christological, is a recurrent theme of all hundred and thirty-four Mather's biographies.[123]

Mather's accounts of deaths of prominent New England Puritans call for a comparison with late medieval examples of dying from the *Ars moriendi* and their early modern Protestant equivalents. What were their prescriptions on the right way to die? William Perkins' *Salve for a Sicke Man* (1597) relates the death and the last temptation of the Scottish Reformer John Knox:

> …they asked him how he did, to whome he answered thus: that in his life he had indured many combates and conflicts with Satan, but that now most mightily the

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[120] Cotton Mather, <u>Magnalia Christi Americana: or, The ecclesiastical history of New England</u> […] (Russell&Russell, 1967) 131; quoted in Bercovitch

[121] Mather; quoted in Bercovitch 204.

[122] Mather 131; quoted in Bercovitch 32-33.

[123] Bercovitch 33.

roaring lyon had assaulted him: […] for the wily serpent would perswade me that I shall merit eternall life for my fidelitie in my ministrie. But blessed be God which brought to my minde such Scriptures whereby I might quench the fierie darts of the devil, which were, *What hast thou that thou hast not received* [1 Cor. 4:7]: and, *By the grace of God, I am that I am*: and, *not I But the grace of God in me* [1 Cor. 15:10]: and thus being vanquished he departed.[124]

Knox was tempted by the false premise of justification by works but resisted by putting his faith in Christ. This kind of trial was obviously missing in the Catholic guidebooks on the "art of dying." In contrast to Knox's deathbed scene, the mid-fifteenth century *Ars moriendi* gives an instructional example of a dying man who, after resisting the usual five temptations (spiritual pride, lack of faith, impatience, despair, and avarice) allegedly attains salvation by believing in his own blamelessness and God's justice.

The purpose of an English Calvinist guidebook to death and dying called *The Sicke Man's Salve* (1561), written by Thomas Becon, was to help the *moriens* combat despair which was supposed to be the main temptation used by the Devil. "Cast the eies of your mind with strong faith on the sed [seed] of the woman, which hath troden down the serpents head, and destroyed his power," counsels Becon.[125] Since the book became a bestseller and was repeatedly reedited, we should perhaps wonder, why the predestination-minded Protestants saw the last moments of life as significant. Of course the manual was also intended to equip the family and friends - since death was to be a communal affair - of the *moriens* to comfort him and make sure he dies a "good death;" that is ideally in prayer, without despair and full of hope. But, if the matters of election have already been decided and the choice cannot be undone, why fret about the last moment of life? According to Becon, God deliberately sends Satan as a last trial for the soul, "for the nature of God is to wound before he health, to throwe

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[124] William Perkins, Salve for a Sicke Man (London, 1597) 55; quoted in Stannard 83-84.

[125] Thomas Becon, The Sicke Man's Salve (London, 1561) 352; quoted in Richard Wunderli and Gerald Broce, "The Final Moment before Death in Early Modern England," The Sixteenth Century Journal, summer 1989: 265.

downe before he lifteth up, to kyll before he quickneth, to condemne before he saueth."[126] Explaining reasons of an inscrutable God is not easy for mortals, but Becon insists that God's intention behind the last temptation is to give His divine sign of election not only to the *moriens* but especially to the people who surround him. A number one indicator of election reportedly is that the *moriens* "hath a mynd to heare the word of God" and hopes for salvation.[127] Does Mather's hagiographical pattern have anything in common with Becon's model and advice? Although the English *ars moriendi* seems to put more emphasis on the importance of hope while the New England sources emphasize the temptation, the pattern is the same: first comes the trial and then comes the consolation. If this sequence is observed, it is considered a mark of salvation.

This model of the death of a Saint also occurs in John Bunyan's famous allegory of Christian life called *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678). The author compares death to a river which must be crossed on foot before the pilgrims can be welcomed in "the Celestial City." The river is as deep or shallow as one's faith. Christian, who is a "born-again everyman," is frightened, and when he enters the water, he starts sinking. "Ah! my friend, the sorrows of death have compassed me about, I shall not see the land that flows with milk and honey," he cries as "a great darkness and horror" falls upon him. Beset with despair and "heart-fears," terrified at the sight of his past sins, Christian doubts he will get to his heavenly destination. His friend Hopeful, who remains true to his name even in death, can reach the bottom of the river and helps Christian to keep up. He encourages him with verses from the Scripture and reminds him that the distress does not mean that God has forsaken him; it is but a trial in which he must remember what he received from Christ. This opens Christian's eyes to see Jesus and both pilgrims reach the Celestial City. In contrast, Ignorance, who is a man relying

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[126] Becon 379; quoted in Wunderli and Broce 265.

[127] Becon 452-453; quoted in Wunderli and Broce 265.

on his own righteousness and not on Jesus' sacrifice, is cast away to Hell, although he manages to get across the river easily on the boat of a ferryman named Vain-Hope. This implies that the ease with which some of the unregenerate leave this world is nothing to be jealous of, because it only signifies their "vain hope" and "ignorance." This allegorical account echoes some of our New England deathbed scenes: Christian's struggle with despair reminds us of that experienced by Increase Mather and John Winthrop. Ignorance, who is confident about salvation because of his alleged goodness ("I pray, fast, pay tithes, and give alms") is a perfect equivalent of the man from the medieval *Ars moriendi*. The Catholic source sets him as a model to be imitated, while the Puritan version sends him to Hell. [128]

Cotton Mather responded to his father's deathbed anxiety by fabricating a moral: "going to Heaven in the way of Repentance, is much safer and surer than going in the way of Extasy."[129] Similarly, Leonard Hoar pointed out in *The Sting of Death* that although it was a mistake for Saints to be too much frightened of death, it was better than not being afraid at all. He warned: "beware of indulging your selves in a stupid secure frame" because death "will sting like an Adder and bite like a Serpent."[130] It seems that dying with fear and trembling was an expected, necessary and desirable phenomenon on the road of Puritan Saints to attain salvation. Equally significant was to overcome the anxiety *in time* to actually die in the right mental composure, i.e., hoping for salvation. It was important not because one could lose salvation by his deathbed behavior - which was impossible in a predestined universe - but the right mental state in the last moments of life was considered a sign of election. At the point of dying, the *moriens* was supposed to be somewhere between complete assurance (mark of self-deception and pride) and inconsolable despair (lack of faith).

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[128] John Bunyan, The Pilgrim's Progress, <http://en.wikisource.org/wiki/The_Pilgrim%27s_Progress/Part_I/Section_5> (accessed 16 Jan. 2011).

[129] Mather, Parentator 207-208; quoted in Stannard 80.

[130] Leonard Hoar, The Sting of Death (Boston, 1680) 11-12; quoted in Stannard 81.

5.2 "King of Terrors" and "sweet death"

Cotton Mather's ministerial duty made him a witness of many deaths and as he related, he had "seen Persons Quaking on their Death beds and their very Beds therewith Shaking under them."[131] He observed that a common trigger of the deathbed anxiety was a retrospective of the *moriens*' sins and the lack of time left for repentance. "The Loss of Time…!" cried the most eminent of Saints. "How much Time have I to Repent of! And how Little Time to do it in!" uttered many with tears.[132] New England Puritans struggled with religious anxieties all their lives, but it was on the deathbed that these fears often climaxed. The turbulent reaction was caused primarily by the tensions in Puritan teachings which implied a constant struggle with sin, deception, and hypocrisy. Faced with their own powerlessness and depravity, convinced of God's ultimate inscrutability, and exhausted by the permanent introspective battles, many Puritans did not feel ready to meet the Almighty God when their time came.

Although Samuel Willard reminded the Saints: "it is a cursed death you are going to; well may it be called a King of Terrors," some examples on the record show that the dread of death was not mandatory. [133] The way Katharin Mather died surprised those who witnessed it as unusually calm and tranquil. Even this young woman was nonetheless not free from worry, as she was aware of the danger of false security. A glorious death was allegedly that of a Puritan missionary John Eliot (1632-1690). In the eulogy written by who else but Cotton Mather, it almost seems at odds with the pattern of a resisted temptation followed by a peaceful passing, which the prominent biographer of Puritan New England was so fond of. We could compare Eliot to Bunyan's character Hopeful and his crossing of the River of Death

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[131] Cotton Mather, Thoughts of a Dying Man (Boston, 1697) 37; quoted in Stannard, "Death and Dying in Puritan New England," The American Historical Review, Dec. 1973: 1317.

[132] Mather, Thoughts […] 27-28; quoted in Stannard, The Puritan […] 89.

[133] Samuel Willard, A Compleat Body of Divinity (Boston, 1726) 234; quoted in Ludwig 82.

without the dread and despair experienced by his fellow pilgrim Christian. On his deathbed, Eliot "uttered some things little short of Oracles," busy till his last moment with "speaking about the Work of the Gospel among Indians." He left in "joys" rather than "pangs of death," having exclaimed "Welcome Joy!" and urging others to "Pray!Pray!Pray!" Although no major trial and despair - an alleged sign of election - preceded death, Mather was positive that Eliot's "last Breath smelt strongly of Heaven."[134]

This way of dying became more common in the latter half of the eighteenth century when the perception of death as a "King of Terrors" gave way to a joyous and triumphant departure to Heaven. It was a symptom of the demise of Puritanism in New England and a sign of the growing influence of Romanticism with its "narcotic sweetness" of death. As Philippe Ariès relates, the main motif of the new sensibility was the anticipation of a reunion with the loved ones in the afterlife. *La mort de toi* (death of another) became a prevalent preoccupation of the era.[135]

After her little baby passed away, Esther Burr was overwhelmed by a desire to die herself - not out of nihilistic grief, but out of impatience. In a letter to her famous father, Jonathan Edwards, she wrote: "one day, in talking of the glorious state my dead departed must be in, my soul was carried out in such longing desires after this glorious state, that I was forced to retire from the family to conceal my joy. […] I cannot help hoping the time is near."[136] The year was 1757. It could be argued that her sentiments about death *may have* changed when her actual death was near at hand, but an overall shift in perception is still noticeable. For Puritans, the view of death was always ambivalent, signifying both fearful apprehension and longing for deliverance from misery. However, Jonathan Edwards's

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[134] Cotton Mather, "Life of John Eliot," <u>Magnalia Christi Americana</u> (London, 1703) in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. <u>The Puritans</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 509-511.

[135] Philippe Ariès, <u>The Hour of Our Death</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) 410-411.

[136] "Letter from Esther Burr to Jonathan Edwards, Nov. 2, 1757;" quoted in Stannard, <u>The Puritan</u> […] 150.

daughter exemplifies a different sensibility of death. The anxiety was replaced by reassurance of one's justification by faith. What happened to the Puritan fear of self-delusion? What did the new confidence about one's salvation spring up from?

Together with the new cultural and philosophical trends, the new vision of death was caused by a change of emphasis in the religious doctrine. Crucial in this respect was the "liberal theology" of the Congregationalist Boston minister Charles Chauncy and the revivalism of the Great Awakening. Both these forces – one liberal, the other one evangelical - undermined the Puritan doctrine of assurance which was the root of the Saints' deathbed anxiety. Chauncy, a staunch critic of the Great Awakening, advocated the notion that conversion did not occur through stages. In his view, regeneration was rather a spiritual renewal present in man from his physical birth. Examining the authenticity of one's conversion experience, which troubled many Puritans, thus lost its importance. Chauncy's theological liberalism ultimately led to the concept of universal salvation, which had hardly anything in common with his Calvinist origins. On the other hand, the belief of the revivalist Jonathan Edwards that "assurance is not to be obtained so much by self-examination as by active piety," blunted the Puritan emphasis on the necessity of self-doubt.[137] This is why more and more "born-again" Christians were able to say with confidence that they were saved and subsequently did not see death as a threat. Edwards's emphasis on "activity" as a principal demonstration of piety obviously did not contradict the doctrine of justification by faith alone, as Edwards was a committed advocate of Calvinist doctrines. Rather, this "empirical" Christianity was similar to the ideas of his favorite English philosopher, John Locke. The Lockean influence is seen not only in the importance of experiential knowledge of

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[137] Jonathan Edwards, An Humble Inquiry (Boston, 1749) 36; quoted in Stannard, The Puritan […] 154.

religious ideas, but also in the practical application of the "Truth, Simplicity and Reasonableness" of Jesus' teaching.[138]

It is now clear, that Puritans were not left unattended on their deathbed, without advice on how to "die well." They had an idea of what a saintly death should look like. Examples were set by influential spiritual biographies and prescriptions on the *ars moriendi* were often heard in sermons and read in books. What remains unanswered is whether the counsel was of any avail to the *moriens*, whether he drew any comfort from the alleged fact that a Saint must undergo a trial in order to be saved, a trial he is bound to pass (on condition he is *really* elect). It is hard to determine to what extent the deathbed anxiety – recorded in most Saints' biographies – was a common Puritan experience. Did the hagiographical convention precede or follow reality? What we can tell with a high level of certainty is that a completely peaceful death was considered suspicious, that the fear of death was better than "a stupid secure frame," and that the Puritan anxiety haunted the Saints both in life and death.

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[138] John Locke: The Reasonableness of Christianity (London: printed for A.&J. Churchill, 1696) 8.

6   DYING AND BURYING

Since the dawn of history, the conception of the afterlife has shaped the way people dispose of the dead. How did convictions affect the funerary and burial customs in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century New England? I wonder if the rites of Puritan exiles in the New World differed in any way from those of their English brethren. As we know, the Puritan tradition meant stripping religious life of all ceremoniousness and iconography. Did the new environment and circumstances call for a change in the form of the burial ritual and the tomb? Is it worth mentioning sepulchral monuments left behind by a culture known for its austerity, aversion to art, and zealous iconoclasm? And, how important was burial in Puritan society when a dead body was, according to Calvinist divines, nothing but an empty husk?

6.1   The burial ritual

Commenting on English burial customs in the seventeenth century, Philippe Ariès notices in *The Hour of our Death* the peculiar English tradition of burying *en plein air* in churchyards. In France, only the poor were buried outdoors, usually in common and unmarked graves, while the wealthy had their tombs inside the churches. But instead of anonymous graves, England had its churchyards filling with graves of people of all social ranks. What was an expression of ostensible humility of pious French noblemen, who asked to be buried outside churches as commoners, became in England a widespread custom characteristic of all social classes and religious denominations. On the ground, the graves were usually marked by a footstone and a headstone; more ordinary ones consisted of a simple flat slab. The original practice of burying outdoors in cemeteries was imported to America by English immigrants as arguably "a fundamental trait of

their culture."[139] In spite of different gravestone iconography, Puritan graveyards of New England had thus much in common with their Anglican counterparts in Virginia.

During the first two decades of Puritan settlement in New England funerary rites remained unchanged from the English model. The ritual ceremony was simplified to the utmost: at the tolling of the bell the coffin was carried to the cemetery where it was followed by a swift interment in the presence of the family and neighbors of the deceased. Puritan funerals were characterized by emotional restraint and a complete absence of sermons, unnecessary words or prayers for the dead. As all Puritan practice it was motivated by the Reformist eagerness to purify religious life from all idolatry and popish delusion. Unless it was directly mentioned in the Scripture, the practice was either unimportant or heretical. As the aim of a Catholic requiem mass and prayers for the dead was to improve the soul's postmortem prospects, it was an utter fallacy in the eyes of the Reformers. Any effort to change the fate which had been already appointed to each individual by the sovereign God before the world's creation was not only futile but downright blasphemous. The medieval idea of Purgatory as a cleansing station before entering one's heavenly existence was one of the first Catholic tenets which the Reformers attacked. Selling of indulgences, so fiercely denounced during the Reformation as a profanity, was directly connected with the concept of Purgatory and human ability to atone for the sins of the deceased by prayers, rituals and church donations. However, the dogma of predestination and the Calvinist concept of grace nullified any effort of this kind. After someone died, there was nothing the church could do. This attitude accounts for Puritan indifference to funerary rituals.

It can hardly surprise us that during the Puritan reign in England, funerals were exempted from the church authority and became wholly secular affairs. *The Directory of the Public Worship of God*, the Puritan-enforced replacement of *The Book of Common Prayer* officially used from 1645

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[139] Philippe Ariès, <u>The Hour of Our Death</u> (New York: Vintage Books, 1982) 339.

until the Restoration, did not provide for funeral ceremony at all. Concerning burials, it only ordered that "when any person departeth this life, let the dead body, upon the day of Buriall, be decently attended from the house to the place appointed for publique Buriall, and there immediately interred, without any Ceremony."[140] Interestingly, this prescription was not just a result of Puritan efforts to purify the Church of England. Much to the horror of foreign travelers and Catholics, the simplification of funerals was a prevalent trend even among orthodox Anglicans. One observer mockingly remarked: "The Burials now among the Reformed in England, are in a manner prophane, in many places the dead being throwne into the ground like dogs, and not a word said."[141]

The most tangible, the most material sources which tell us about the Puritan view of death in New England are the tombstones. Yet, antagonism to the burial ritual in the 1630s and 1640s went hand in hand with a rejection of funeral iconography. At this point, let us remember the rages of Puritan iconoclasm in England which destroyed nearly all pre-Reformation tombstones by 1600 and made the non-Puritan English majority careful not to use any offensive religious symbols on their burial sites for fear of having them vandalized. Arguably, this iconoclasm was a domain of the lower classes. Although it demonstrated Puritan aspirations for religious purity, it also manifested the zeal of radicalized mobs with their social motives. Adherents of Calvinism in the New World were recruited from higher social ranks; many were country gentlemen, members of the gentry, city merchants and Cambridge-educated clergymen and intellectuals. They were not likely to form or oppose an identical funerary culture like the English Puritans. However, gravestones from the earliest phase of colonization are characterized by a complete absence of iconography and decoration, the same as their English counterparts. Minimal inscription consisted only of names,

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[140] A Directory for the Publique Worship of God (London, 1646) 35; quoted in David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 101.

[141] Benjamin Carier, A Missive to His Majesty of Great Britain […] By Doctor Carier, Conteining the Motives of his Conversion to Catholike Religion (Paris, 1649); quoted in Stannard 105.

dates and an introductory "Here lies" or "Here lies the body of." A simple, unadorned gravestone can be equally interesting for interpretation as a richly decorated sepulcher. So, what kind of statement does it make?

Simplicity of graves was obviously intended to reflect the theological principle that body was unimportant after the soul's departure. Emphasis on the triviality of people's physical remains was complemented by typical Puritan humility inherent in the sharp contrast between the perfect God and sinful man. However, according to James Hijiya, an expert in American tombstones, their plainness cannot be explained by the Protestant doctrine alone. It also implies a lack of tools, technical and artistic skills and wealth of the first settlers. Some stones are carved so imperfectly that it is clear a more intricate design was beyond the artisan's ability. This explains why the Plain Style was never completely abandoned during the colonial period; as the frontier moved west, so did artlessly executed gravestones. Triviality of people's physical remains was not emphasized merely by undecorated graves. It is estimated that most colonists before 1660 had their burial sites marked only by a wooden sign or an uncut rock, if at all. Yet again, it may have been mainly due to financial and technical limitations. Interpreting the relative lack of concern of Puritans with their gravestones, Hijiya asserts: "Insofar as American colonists possessed this "traditional" attitude toward death, they were likely to build Plain Style gravestones. Feeling no particular elation or trepidation over death, the carvers and their customers saw no reason to call attention to the everyday fact that somebody was dead." [142] The attitude to death he talks about can be classified in Ariès's scheme as "tame death." This notion, which Ariès uses to describe the approach to death in early medieval Europe up to 1100, means that death is familiar; it is not seen as a threat, and is accepted as inevitable.

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[142] James A. Hijiya, "American Gravestones and Attitudes toward Death: A Brief History," <u>Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society</u> , Oct. 1983: 343.

In the 1650s significant changes in New England funeral practice took place. Quite contrary to Puritan tenets, funerals became elaborate and ritualized affairs. To begin with, more attention was given to the corpse itself: immediately after he breathed his last, the deceased was washed, dressed and then displayed either at home or often in his church, where the body stayed even while a regular service was conducted. One of the first things on the list when the preparations began was sending of symbolic gloves to family, friends, and acquaintances. In the closely-knit Puritan communities of New England it was not uncommon that a few hundred funeral guests were invited. The invitation itself was a very expensive matter especially when we consider that each adult guest (not just the men) was to receive a pair of gloves, and their quality varied depending on the social status of the invitee. As ministers were never missing at funerals, the heads of large congregations must have, in their lifetime, come by a nice collection comprising hundreds of pairs. What did they do with them? Alice Morse Earle, the author of *Customs and Fashions of Old New England*, mentions one Andrew Eliot of North Church, whose record of the funeral gloves he received in thirty-two years of service counted nearly three thousand pairs. Having sold them to milliners in Boston, he was paid a considerable sum of money.[143]

On the day of burial the guests were summoned by the ringing of the church bell and then the procession of mourners wearing their gloves and often also scarves, ribbons, cloaks, or other symbols of grief, departed for the cemetery. Unless the coffin was transported to the grave on a hearse or coach drawn by horses, bearers were appointed to carry the deceased. Under-bearers were strong young men who carried the bier with the coffin, and pall-bearers, men of age or dignity, held the corners of the mort-cloth. The coffin was often made of fine wood and was lined with cloth and covered by a dark mort-cloth. On the outside it could be marked with the year of death inscribed by small nails hammered into the wood. Increasingly popular was decorating the coffin with funeral

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[143] See Alice Morse Earle, "Funeral and Burial Customs," in <u>Customs and Fashions of Old New England</u> (New York: Scribner's, 1894) 365+.

verse on pinned-on bits of paper, which was composed for the particular occasion by the relatives or friends. Sometimes even the hearse was decked out in mourning and the horses adorned with symbolic death's heads on their foreheads. After they buried the body, either in a grave or a family tomb, the guests returned to the home of the deceased for a rich funeral feast where wine and liquor were served in plenty. At the funeral of a minister, the liquor was usually sponsored by the church or town. Regarding Puritan funerals, I think it is worth quoting Nathaniel Hawthorne's interpretation in one of his less known stories, *The Main Street*:

> I will exhibit one of the only class of scenes, so far as my investigation has taught me, in which our ancestors were wont to steep their tough old hearts in wine and strong drink, and indulge an outbreak of grisly jollity. [...] look back through all the social customs of New England, in the first century of her existence, and read all her traits of character; and if you find one occasion, other than a funeral feast, where jollity was sanctioned by universal practice, I will set fire to my puppet-show without another word. [...]Well, well, old friends! Pass on, with your burden of mortality, And lay it in the tomb with jolly hearts. People should be permitted to enjoy themselves in their own fashion; every man to his taste; but New England must have been a dismal abode for the man of pleasure, when *the only boon-companion was Death!* [emphasis added][144]

By emphasizing that funerals were the only events at which his Puritan ancestors were able to drink and "party," an assumption which can be contested, Hawthorne only reiterates his favorite literary stereotype of a somber and joyless New England Puritan. Yet, his caricature helps me stress an important point: in the latter half of the seventeenth century, funerals among the proverbially frugal, sober, and thrifty Puritans became costly, extravagant, and lavish ceremonies of great social significance.

At the feast, close relatives and persons of high regard in the community were given funeral rings as a memory of the deceased. They were not just any old rings; decorated with enameled symbols of mortality, such as death's heads, coffins with skeletons lying in them, or winged skulls,

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[144] Nathaniel Hawthorne, "The Main Street," in <u>The Snow Image and Other Stories</u> <<u>http://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au/h/hawthorne/nathaniel/snow/chapter3.html</u>> (accessed 18 Dec. 2010)

they were clearly designated for such occasions. They were made of gold and were often fashioned with the initials of the dead person and the date of his or her death. On the other hand, mourning rings were not only distributed as memories of the beloved who passed away, but they served as yet another reminder of death's imminence: a *memento mori*. This is apparent especially from some of the popular legends engraved on them: "Death conquers all," and particularly "Prepare for Death," or "Prepared be / To follow me."[145] Earle recounts instances of people, often clergymen or dignitaries, who accumulated mugs or tankards full of funeral rings, which they passed to their heirs.

It is evident that all the necessities of a funeral ceremony cost a lot of money. There are cases of wealthy families which spent one fifth of the estate of the deceased on the funeral. Such extravagance would not have been tolerated by Puritans in England. Bell-tolling was criticized by the Non-conformists as a Catholic custom; rings were frowned upon as meaningless and idolatrous trinkets. Conversely, in New England the reasons for deploring funerary opulence were mostly pragmatic: the fact that they led many families to bankruptcy. In the 1720s, first acts to regulate high funeral expenses were passed in Massachusetts; some reacted to the excessive wearing of mourning apparel, some were targeted against the use of alcohol, and other penalized giving rings to guests.[146] Such legislature is very rare in the New World; in New York, laws had to be created to make sure at least minimal care is given to the dead by the family.

Another important diversion from the English model of Puritan funeral was its newly acquired religious importance. While there were no prayers and sermons delivered over the grave in

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[145] Earle 377.

[146] Alice M. Earle quotes the 1741 Massachusetts Provincial Enactment which ordered that "no Scarves, Gloves (except six pair to the bearers and one pair to each minister of the church or congregation where any deceased person belongs), Wine, Rum, or rings be allowed to be given at any funeral upon the penalty of fifty pounds." In Earle 379.

the English homeland, New Englanders incorporated this practice into their funeral ritual. There is evidence in journals of funeral prayers in the 1680s; sermons became regular parts of the ceremony by the turn of the century. Moreover, the funeral sermon was not a common scriptural exegesis, but it became a grief-laden elegy.

6.2 New England tombstones

In spite of all the violations of Puritan funerary customs in the New World, David E. Stannard points out that the most striking difference between Puritan England and Puritan New England was the area of iconography. Given the tumultuous iconoclastic history of the English Non-conformists, it is most unexpected that by the 1660s elaborate funeral iconography dominated New England graveyards. The morbid style it developed resembles the *danse macabre* imagery of the late Middle Ages in Western Europe. Tomb sculpture representing vermin-infested and disintegrating corpses, so called *transi*, never appeared in New England, but grim representations of death, such as death's heads and skeletons, took complete possession of Puritan gravestones.

How can this morbid fascination be explained? The late medieval frenzy concerning death, largely a response to the devastating plagues, was concerned first and foremost with the physical horrors of death, as demonstrated by the literal depiction of cadavers devoured by worms and toads. After all, *danse macabre* focused on "a dance of the dead and not of Death," as the Dutch cultural historian Johan Huizinga pointed out.[147] Although its aim was a *memento mori*, I believe it was rather different from the Puritan concept. Though reminding people of life's vanity and the frailty of their bodies, the dread of death was still blunted by the optimistic Christian tradition and the belief in Purgatory. Philippe Ariès interpreted the medieval imagery as an expression of *avaritia*; excessive attachment to earthly possessions, or *temporalia*. He says: "The images of death and

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[147] Johan Huizinga, The Waning of the Middle Ages (London: Edward Arnold, 1952) 131; quoted in David E. Stannard, The Puritan Way of Death: A Study in Religion, Culture, and Social Change (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977) 16.

decomposition do not signify fear of death or of the beyond, although they may have been utilized to that end. They are the sign of a passionate love for this world and a painful awareness of the failure to which each human life is condemned." [148] However, the loss of earthly pleasures, the pain of dying, and the horror of bodily decay were not primarily the concern of Puritan obsession with death. Their anxiety was related to the spiritual; the soul's fate in the afterlife was what troubled them most. James Hijiya believes the main difference between the *transi* and the Death's Head Style in New England was that the Puritan tombstones were not supposed to affect people's emotions but rather their intellect. He contends:

> ...the transi had produced instant and inescapable revulsion. The Death's Head, in contrast, was sanitized to such an extent that rather than represent the concrete reality of dying, it represented the abstract reality of death. The dry white skull, stripped of flesh and blood, directed attention away from the material world of the grave and evoked thoughts of the spiritual world which lay beyond. These thoughts may have led to anxiety, even terror, as one imagined the emptiness of non-existence or the punishments of hell; but the point is that one had to imagine, and imagination could lead to more than one state of mind. [149]

In the Puritan context, the motif's significance as a *memento mori* is therefore ambivalent. Death could be a gateway to Hell but also to Heaven. The death's head was not necessarily an embodiment of fear of damnation, because it was also an evocation of resurrection and redemption. While Stannard saw the motif as an unequivocal symbol of Puritan anxiety concerning one's salvation, Gordon Geddes and later scholars interpret it as an illustration of the ambivalent Puritan attitude toward death. In the words of Hijiya, "the Death's Head, consequently, was not merely horrific, like a *transi*, but also beatific."[150]

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[148] Ariès 130.

[149] Hijiya 348.

[150] Hijiya 348.

The fact that the death's head iconography could also evoke pleasant thoughts casts more positive light on the favorite pastime of some prominent Puritans to stroll through a graveyard as a form of recreation. Samuel Sewall, for instance, noted in his diary after visiting the family tomb at the funeral of his little daughter: "I was entertain'd with a view of, and converse with, the Coffins of my dear Father Hull, Mother Hull, Cousin Quinsey, and my Six children… […] 'Twas an awfull yet pleasing Treat; Having said, The Lord knows who shall be brought hether next, I came away."[151] Although his words show the awe he felt at the presence of his dead relatives, he left the tomb with refreshed spirits. The idea of a graveyard as a place for contemplation, equally "awful" and "pleasing," does not reflect morbidity of the likes of Cotton Mather or Sewall. Their frequent viewing of the tombstone engravings and reading through the epitaphs only gives evidence of the importance of death in their spiritual life.

6.3   Interpretation of the New England diversion

Arguably, the death's head iconography did not signify the dread of death but sprang up from the tension of ambivalence death represented. It was connected with the dizziness Puritans felt at the thought of the great Last Judgment which was to follow after death. Knowing they will meet the sovereign Lord of the Universe face to face and their ultimate fate will be revealed once and for all made them tremble with awe. The resigned attitude to death, which was typical of the early years of colonization, was supplanted by one of fearful reverence. Death became so important in the Puritan mind that it made them, the most consistent of the Reformers and confirmed iconoclasts, to revaluate their approach to its ceremonial aspects and create an iconography worthy of the pre-Reformation spirit. It is evident that the need for ritualization of death and the social and religious role it attained characterized the Puritan community of New England in the latter half of the seventeenth century. What change of circumstances, we must ask, brought about this need?

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[151] Samuel Sewall, <u>Diary</u>; in Perry Miller and Thomas H. Johnson, eds. <u>The Puritans</u> (New York: Harper & Row, 1963) 513.

The archeologist V. Gordon Childe asserts that elaborate and pompous funeral rite tends to appear in societies which experience social and cultural instability. The same can be said about iconography; the more ornate and extravagant it is, the more unstable the society. In the case of New England after 1650, his theory seems to be pointing in the right direction. Although the first New England Puritans were an exiled community facing the unknown in the New World, they felt strong. They believed themselves to be elected by God as an example for the whole world. As all sectarian groupings they believed they were exceptional and they were in the right. The first generation of settlers felt a strong affinity with brethren of the same faith in England. Their identity remained unchanged as they were one with their English counterparts in terms of religion, politics, and culture. The first emigrants of the Massachusetts Bay Colony hoped that they would one day return to England in glorious victory, and in the flush of Puritan political success in England in the 1640s, many returned to their homeland. However, this dream was shattered by the English Civil War which brought official religious toleration. This was a severe blow to the Puritan apostles of truth, who considered toleration one of the greatest evils for their idea of doctrinal righteousness: "the toleration of all Religions and Perswasions, is the way to have no religion left."[152] By this betrayal, the ties with their English brethren were severed and New England Puritans sank more into isolation. But disappointment from the situation on the other side of the Atlantic was only one of the sources of the general sense of defeat, powerlessness, and pessimism which prevailed among New England Puritans in the second half of the seventeenth century. Around mid-century John Winthrop, Thomas Shepard, John Cotton, and Thomas Hooker, four of the narrow circle of leading men of the first Puritan generation, died in close succession, one after another. The community felt considerably weakened by the loss, as if the social order had been disrupted. The rapid development of commercialism and urban culture caused a diversification of the society which the Puritan patriarchs wished could stay as homogenous as possible. Last and not least, the sense of

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[152] Increase Mather, "A Discourse Concerning the Danger of Apostacy," in Stannard 124.

disillusionment was intensified by the unfulfilled eschatological prophesies centered on the mid-century.

According to Sacvan Bercovitch, "[the] New England ministers, already committed to a scheme which could not admit of failure, compensated for their thwarted errand by constructing a legendary past and a prophetic future for the country."[153] Shattered dreams and unmet expectations gave rise to a retrograde, self-centered and rigid culture which defined itself against the evil, treacherous world around, and retreated inward. Its bearers identified themselves with the ideals and values of the first generation of settlers. Their disillusionment with the present made them set their eyes on the idealized and mythical past. *Magnalia Christi Americana*, the monumental ecclesiastical history of New England written by Cotton Mather, is a product of this state of mind. The old New England is glorified and its founders compared to biblical heroes; for instance, John Winthrop is called "the American Nehemiah." Beset by misfortunes and isolated, New England Puritans had never before felt more like a threatened remnant of Saints ("the Holy Remnant"). This self-reflection found its expression in the jeremiad. This literary genre, written either in prose or verse, was characterized by an intense preoccupation with lamentations over the moral and spiritual deterioration of the Puritan society. The tirades against present corruption also vocalized apprehensions about God's destruction of the commonwealth if the "covenant" with Him should be violated. Puritans in the New World were convinced that God made a covenant with them, which bound them to fulfill a mission in the world. If they were to follow their mission, He would bless their community, but if they betrayed Him, they would be punished. For example, the devastating drought in 1662 was by many interpreted as a sign of God's disfavor. The aim of a jeremiad was to inspire the spirit of repentance among believers and reconcile them with God. In fact, its origins are found in the fast-day sermons declared with the same intent. Commenting on the jeremiad, Jeffrey

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[153] Sacvan Bercovitch, "Horologicals to Chronometricals: the Rhetoric of the Jeremiad," <u>Literary Monographs </u>3, 1970; quoted in Stannard 126.

Hammond points out: "The gap between the ideal and the real in the New Zion seemed alarmingly wide, and ministers seized on the deaths of first-generation stalwarts as opportunity to voice their growing concern over New England's direction."[154] Funeral sermons more and more frequently amounted to jeremiads, bemoaning not only the death of one individual but also the deplorable state of society. At the same time, jeremiads often sounded like elegies for the deceased.

The ritual diversion from the Puritan model of funeral ceremonies must be seen in the context of social changes documenting the crisis and instability of the struggling Puritan community. Edmund S. Morgan compares New England Puritans to a tightly-knit tribe. The way they dealt with death is an example of their tribalism. Death of every individual was conceived in such a vulnerable and unsettled society as a great loss. In funeral sermons, the deaths were compared to collapsing of pillars supporting the community. "The whole Building of this Country trembles at the Fall of such a Pillar," lamented Cotton Mather over the death of John Eliot.[155] An intrusion of the spirit of jeremiads into funeral sermons is apparent from the speeches of Samuel Willard: "When a Saint dies there is manifold ground of Mourning; there is then a Pillar pluckt out of the Building, a Foundation Stone taken out of the Wall, a Man removed out of the Gap; and now it is to be greatly feared that God is departing, and Calamities are coming, and are not these things to be lamented?"[156] At one funeral he asks: "When the Pillars are gone, how shall the building stand?"[157] An example of a combined jeremiad and elegy is a funeral speech of Urian Oakes delivered upon the death of Thomas Shepard, Jr., in 1677:

> What! Must we with our God, and Glory part?
> Lord: is thy Treaty with New England come

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[154] Jeffrey A. Hammond, The American Puritan Elegy: a Literary and Cultural Study (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000) 88-89.

[155] Cotton Mather, Magnalia Christi Americana, in Miller and Johnson 511.

[156] Samuel Willard, The Death of a Saint, in Miller and Johnson 372.

[157] Samuel Willard, The Righteous Man's Death (Boston, 1684) 160; quoted in Stannard 132.

> Thus to an end? And is War in thy Heart?
> That this Ambassadour is called home.
> So Earthly Gods (Kings) when they War intend
> Call home their Ministers, and Treaties end.[158]

Jeremiads and elegies were signs of the inner doubt and instability the community of New England Puritans was going through after 1650. Another symptom of the crisis was the attention paid to the funeral ceremony itself and the "anti-Puritan" ritualization of death. The need for a ceremony to mark somebody's passing emerged as a compensation for the loss felt by the society as a whole. And while Ariès saw the Puritan death's head iconography as an anachronistic anomaly in the development of Western attitudes toward death, I think that in the context described above this anomaly becomes understandable.[159]

When the eighteenth century brought a sentimental idea of blissful death and the New England society stopped cultivating the monstrosity of death, it became apparent in all areas of the funerary ritual including the speeches and elegies, epitaphs, tombstone iconography and the condition of graveyards. The change signalized the waning of Puritanism as a dominant cultural force and liberalization of its orthodoxy. By the middle of the eighteenth century the perception of death as a profound deprivation for the society disappeared from elegies and funeral sermons, and the emphasis was on the "liberation" and "bliss" that death reportedly brought to the deceased:

> Absent from Flesh! O Blissful Thought!
> What unknown Joys this Moment brings!
> Freed from the Mischief sin hath wrought,
> From Pains, and Tears and all their Springs.[160]

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[158] Urian Oakes, <u>An Elegie Upon the Death of the Reverend Mr. Thomas Shepard</u> (Boston, 1677) 7; quoted in Stannard 131.

[159] Ariès 340.

[160] Josiah Smith, <u>Doctrine and Glory of the Saints' Resurrection </u>(Boston, 1742) 14; quoted in Stannard 155.

Not only can we see the conviction of one's heavenly destination after death was stronger, but we can also notice how death lost its public aspect and became solely the death of an individual. It is interesting to compare the following excerpt with the elegy of Urian Oakes, as it also addresses the theme of loss which is here overcome by the awareness of the soul's happiness:

> But shall we mourn? Our Loss is great,
> Yet greater is her Bliss.
> She's gone to dwell with Jesus Christ,
> And see him Face to Face![161]

The most visible change can be seen in the development of the iconography. The grim motif of a winged skull, which was dominant on New England tombstones between 1660 and 1730, gave way to a friendly face of a cherub. The engravings from the first half of the eighteenth century show how the strict contours of the death's head image soften and slowly metamorphose into the Romantic angel's head, which sometimes even wears a smile and a crown on his head and is adorned with flowers. Philippe Ariès notes the "cinematic" change of the cherub's face and classifies it as a sign of the Romantic attitude toward death which became widespread in Europe at the time.[162] Under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophy, which conveyed the idea that human beings are good by nature and therefore need not fear death, the traditional Puritan concepts of innate depravity and damnation were marginalized in the mainstream society. The optimistic and confident approach to death became common especially after the Great Awakening. The image of a winged cherub's head was a symbol well known in the Middle Ages as a reference to the mortal soul, but even if it represented only an angel as a heavenly creature, its message was without a doubt Heaven. Although some tombstones were adorned with occasional death's heads, hourglasses, and scythes well into the end of the eighteenth century, the change of the central design epitomizes the collective turn to a more optimistic attitude toward death.

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[161] The Dying Mother's Advice and Farewell (New London, 1749); quoted in Stannard 156.

[162] Ariès 340.

Another indication of the changing attitude toward death and the waning of Puritanism was the state of New England graveyards. Around mid-eighteenth century they became unkempt, overcrowded, and sometimes even littered with bones. Just like a century earlier in New York, it was necessary to pass legislation appointing specific individuals to attend funerals and bury the deceased. When complaints concerning the health risks posed by the neglected cemeteries became frequent, Boston authorities had to order in 1786 that coffins be placed at least three feet under the ground. They also appointed superintendants to make sure no bones are left on the surface of tombs and the cemetery gates always locked. [163] Stannard explains: "The Puritan community was becoming a relic of history, and the tribal unity that had given meaning to the bones of its ancestors and that had thus necessitated care of those remains was now rapidly dissipating."[164] As a logical consequence of the growing indifference to the dead body, the funeral ceremony was considerably simplified. When Samuel Mather from the famous Puritan family died in 1785, he was buried according to his wishes in a simple coffin, without any funeral speech, and the bell was allowed to toll for only five minutes as he had explicitly asked.

While Puritanism in England was the main factor responsible for simplification of the funeral ritual and for generally reducing its ceremonial importance in public life, in America it produced a culture in which ritualized death played a crucial part in the attempt to consolidate the New England community. According to some scholars, elaborate burials were a means to sustain Puritan "tribal" unity and identity in a rapidly changing New England society. The pompous funerary style and the outward splendor of tombs reflected the social dimension individual funerals acquired in seventeenth-century New England. Puritans felt an acute need to mark a passing of every fervent adherent of their faith and honor them in a memorable way. The "Baroque" splendor of burials was also an articulation of the feeling of dizziness springing from a profound awareness

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[163] See Stannard 157, 160.

[164] Stannard 157.

of the contrast between God's glory on the one hand and man's depravity on the other. As opposed to England, New England Puritans generally represented educated and wealthy elite and their lavish funerals exhibited the social position of the deceased. What seems contrary to the Puritan doctrine and is often cited as an anomaly was a consequence of a combination of social and religious factors in the New World which differed from the conditions and needs of the Puritan minority in England. The same circumstances which produced the jeremiad gave rise to the elaborate funerary culture. With the decline of Puritanism as the leading religious, social, and political force in New England the role of funeral became diminished and so did its ritual aspects. This is marked by a changing attitude toward death symbolized by the pleasant face of a cherub carved in New England tombstones.

7 CONCLUSION

What then was the Puritan view of death? It should be reiterated that the Puritan attitude toward death in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England was ambivalent and contained both terror at the possibility of eternal damnation and hope for deliverance. Death was seen as both a reward for the faithful (the elect) and a punishment for the wicked (the reprobate). The tension between these two extremes – the hope for Heaven and the fear of Hell - generally characterized the Puritan spirituality, because one's "identity" and final postmortem destination could not be fully resolved in the earthly life. This thesis contends that the ambivalence was fully consistent with the Puritan doctrine and did not contradict it, as some scholars had suggested, but rather it reflected the doctrine's inherent contradictions. Both reassurance and anxiety were inseparable from the Puritan religious experience and mutually reinforced each other.

Puritan anxiety about death and the afterlife was a response to the doctrine of predestination, which implied man's dependence on God's inscrutability, and in the doctrine of assurance, which implied that self-doubt was a more likely sign of election than a complete peace of mind. The premise was that there was no way to attain salvation unless one had been elected to it before the world was created and that one could only be justified by faith through the covenant of grace. Achieving salvation through good works was not possible because of man's innate depravity. If one was elect, death was to be a gateway to eternal happiness. However, not even the "Visible Saints" could ever acquire full assurance about being saved.

This predicament encouraged Puritans to perform well in their worldly calling to compensate for the uncertainty about election. It also accounted for the devotional practice of meticulous self-examination. Puritan introspection was a search for God's presence in the believer as well as a crusade against the sinful self. Both these ways of coping with anxiety -

the worldly and the otherworldly - were believed to mitigate the psychic discomfort by exposing signs of divine grace. Puritanism conceived of time as an opportunity to glorify God by the fruit of human labor. This concept made life a race in the limited time span which was terminated by death. *Memento mori* thus served as a catalyst for the economic, moral, and spiritual effort.

The anxiety about one's destiny began in early childhood when death and its ensuing horrors for the depraved were used as a means of religious instruction to provoke spiritual precocity and conversion. Death, damnation and the Last Judgment were Puritan *trivia* necessary for understanding man's purpose in the world. This early immersion into the discourse about death has been erroneously interpreted as a proof of the non-existence of childhood in Puritan New England. Contrary to the Ariès-inspired historians who believed Puritans treated children like "small-scale adults," this thesis contended that the number of books for and about children published at the time imply that Puritans were well aware of the difference between themselves and their own offspring. Although children were not treated like adults, they were definitely treated differently from today's standards. The necessity of an early preoccupation with death was given by the specificity of the Calvinist theology which had cast away all ritual reassurances of salvation.

The pattern of a saintly departure from this world was formulated in Puritan spiritual biographies and manuals on "the art of dying." The very existence of these guidelines demonstrates that there was an anxiety concerning death. An ideal passing of a Saint was not a peaceful affair but God was believed to send a last trial on the elect when he lay on his deathbed. Therefore, anxiety was read as a surer indicator of salvation than confidence in the face of death. However, the believer was meant to overcome his struggles before his last moment came and die with hope. This challenges the opinion of some scholars who claim that the deathbed anxiety was inconsistent with the "optimistic" rhetoric of Puritans. This

assumption is clearly disproved by the official pattern of dying which *includes* the fear and trembling and was designed by the Puritans themselves.

Around mid-seventeenth century, New England Puritans developed a pompous burial ritual and elaborate tomb imagery dominated by death's heads. Although it seems like a contradiction to the Calvinist contempt for religious ceremony as such, it was a reflection of the role death acquired in the exiled Puritan community at a time of social and religious crisis. The morbid tombstone iconography has often been interpreted in terms of the medieval *transi,* but evidence shows that the death's head did not signify merely the dread of death, especially not its physical aspects, but it embodied the anxiety concerning the spiritual fate of the immortal soul.

As for the fundamental question tackled by most scholars, if Puritans viewed death optimistically or pessimistically, there are good reasons to believe that the idea of death had both pleasant and negative connotations in their minds. The anxiety was rooted in the fact that God was inscrutable (predestination), human beings were polluted by sin (innate depravity), genuine regeneration could not be completely verified (problematic assurance), and the horror of Judgment, Hell and damnation was constantly emphasized. On the other hand, it was possible to partially combat the fear by a strong work ethic and self-scrutiny. The constant examination of their faith, which was produced by in-built tensions in the Calvinist doctrine, also demonstrates that the question had an existentialist dimension. The challenge represented by *memento mori* - the "Angst" concerning the inevitability of death and the necessity for every individual to face it alone - translated in the Puritan mind into the fear of separation from God which death would bring if they were reprobate. This anxiety was mitigated by the hope that if they were elect, their death would be meaningful and they would not face it alone, but Christ would be with them.

Concerning the future of Puritan studies and the perception of death, my modest proposal is to analyze in more detail, in the footsteps of Delumeau and Foucault, the relation of the introspective fear of death and the structures of power and authority in the context of the New England theocracy. Another interesting perspective is offered by the use of a comparative method. An analysis of attitudes toward death of New England Puritans and their Calvinist counterparts in England, France, and the Netherlands would be a welcome contribution to the early modern history and sociology of religion, while an inter-denominational comparative study of Puritans and Quakers would enrich the research on the American colonial history.

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9 ABSTRACT

The Puritan attitude toward death in seventeenth- and early eighteenth-century New England was ambivalent and contained both terror at the possibility of eternal damnation and hope for deliverance. The joyful theme of the *migratio ad Dominum* resonated with the Saints only at times when they were convinced divine grace was actively working in their lives, but when they saw they were backsliding, the horror of death prevailed. Puritan anxiety about death was caused by tensions inherent in the doctrine of predestination, which implied man's dependence on God's inscrutability, and in the doctrine of assurance, which implied that self-doubt was more desirable than full assurance of salvation. What complicated any verification of the presence of grace was man's endless potential for self-deception. *Memento mori* gave urgency to the Puritan work ethic and the effective use of time. The anxiety about one's destiny began in early childhood when death and its ensuing horrors for the depraved were used as a means of religious instruction to provoke spiritual precocity and conversion. This early immersion into the discourse about death has been erroneously interpreted as a proof of the non-existence of childhood in Puritan New England. Deathbed scenes depicted in Puritan spiritual biographies were designed as examples of *ars moriendi* and demonstrate that dying with fear and trembling was expected of the elect, but it was equally significant to hope for salvation. The pompous funerary style and the outward splendor of tombs implied a social crisis and a newly-acquired importance of individual's death in the Puritan culture. In opposition to some other researchers in the field, this thesis contends that the ambivalent attitude toward death does not contradict the Puritan doctrine but reflects its inherent contradictions. Both reassurance and anxiety were inseparable from the Puritan religious experience and mutually reinforced each other.

10 SMRT OČIMA PURITÁNŮ: POHLED NA SMRT A UMÍRÁNÍ V NOVÉ ANGLII (RESUMÉ)

Puritánský postoj ke smrti je jednoznačně ambivalentní a spojuje jak radostné očekávání nebeské blaženosti, tak úzkostnou bázeň a strach ze zatracení. Představa smrti se puritánům spojovala s tématikou *migratio ad Dominum* ve chvílích, kdy byli přesvědčeni o působení spasitelné milosti ve svých životech. Jakmile však prohrávali svůj zápas s hříchem a svou vlastní zkažeností, převážil u nich děs ze smrti. Domnívám se, že příčnou této dvojznačnosti smrti je napětí přítomné ve dvou kalvinistických doktrínách: v doktríně o predestinaci a v doktríně o ujištění. Z první vyplývá naprostá závislost člověka na svrchovaném a nevyzpytatelném Bohu, který si sám již před stvořením světa vyvolil ty, které spasí. V puritánství tedy není možné si spasení zajistit dobrým chování, skutky nebo náboženskými rituály. Svatý život je však důležitým znakem vykoupeného člověka a samotné morální úsilí svědčí o přítomnosti milosti v životě věřícího. Znovuzrozený je navíc vázán tzv. smlouvou milosti, na základě které ho Bůh spasil, aby o něm svou ctností vydával svědectví. Puritáni v Nové Anglii věřili, že jejich společenství je Bohem vyvolené jako ukazatel správné cesty a pravdy zbloudilému lidstvu a cítili proto velkou zodpovědnost za svůj morální život. Navzdory ospravedlnění z víry je pro věřícího otázka ujištění o spáse problematická, protože plnou jistotu není možné získat a navíc je podle puritánů neutuchající pochybnost lepší než falešná jistota. Pochybnost o autentičnosti prožitku znovuzrození a tudíž božím vyvolení ke spáse činila z nejistoty neoddělitelnou součást puritánského života a představovala obrovský emocionální stres. Ke smrti se tak upínala touha po rozřešení palčivé otázky vyvolení, která mohla znamenat buď přijetí do Nebe, nebo odvržení do Pekla. Proto se v tomto pohledu mísí naděje na věčnost s Pánem spolu s nejistotou a strachem.

Příkaz pamatovat na smrt, tedy *memento mori*, provázel zbožné puritány při jejich světských i duchovních činnostech. Protestantské premisy *sola fides* a *sola scriptura* posílily náboženský individualismus a jejich důsledkem bylo nahrazení církevního zprostředkování vztahu mezi Bohem a člověkem vlastním svědomím. O puritánské zbožnosti svědčí množství dochovaných duchovních deníků, s pomocí nichž prosívali své myšlenky a skutky, zpovídali se a zpytovali své nitro. Psaní deníku bylo doporučováno puritánskými duchovními jako užitečný nástroj k sebehledání a sebereflexi. Prozkoumávání vlastního nitra mělo za cíl odhalit stopy milosti, tedy znaky vyvolení, a dodat věřícímu ujištění o spáse. Také sloužilo k odhalení hříchu a boji proti vlastnímu hříšnému „já.“ Pomocí sebezpytování vykonával věřící dozor sám nad sebou. Nutnost pamatovat na vlastní smrtelnost a prohledávání nitra vedlo puritána zpět k nepříjemné otázce, jak si může být jist, že je spasený. Čím více se totiž zabýval sám sebou, obával se nebezpečí sebeklamu, který by z něj činil pouhého zbožného pokrytce. Nemohl se nikdy přesvědčit o pravdivosti své víry a vnitřním působení milosti, protože se ve svém hodnocení mohl jako nedokonalý člověk snadno mýlit. *Memento mori* a uvědomění si časové ohraničenosti lidské existence vedlo spolu s nejistou o predestinaci ke vzniku typické protestantské pracovní morálky. V ní se projevila snaha osvědčit se ve svém světském povolání a oslavit Boha skrze dobré výsledky své práce. Světská askeze byla projevem změněného konceptu práce, která přestala být v protestantském pojetí pouze zdrojem obživy a získala duchovní rozměr. Existenciální výzva, kterou představovalo *memento mori* – tedy strach z osamocenosti a nezastupitelnosti jedince v umírání, byla u puritánů přebita spíše strachem z odloučení od Boha, které by pro ně smrt znamenala v případě, že nejsou vyvolení. Zároveň byl existenciální strach zmírňován nadějí, že i ve smrti budou patřit Kristu. Symbolem nejistot týkajících se připomenutí smrti byla představa Posledního soudu, kde se s konečnou platností ukáže, kdo je vyvolený a kdo zatracený. Evokace dne zúčtování a pekelných utrpení pro hříšníky se často vyskytovala v puritánských

kázáních, ale objevila se i v literatuře, na příklad v básni Michaela Wigglesworotha *The Day of Doom.*

S nejistotou ohledně posmrtného osudu se puritáni seznámili již v raném dětství, když byli vyučováni náboženským doktrínám o Bohu, hříchu, predestinaci, Posledním soudu a věčném zavržení. Kalvinistický důraz na vrozenou lidskou zkaženost a dědičný hřích vedl k přísné výchově. Úloha rodičů byla spatřována zejména v tom, aby co nejdříve přivedli své děti k poznání vlastní hříšnosti, pokání a obrácení. Rodiče cítili výchovu jako velkou zodpovědnost, ze které budou jednou vydávat Bohu počet. Snaha urychlit duchovní zralost dětí byla motivována strachem o jejich duši v případě, že zemřou a nebudou znovuzrozeni. Vysoká dětská úmrtnost v Nové Anglii sedmnáctého století tuto snahu jenom podtrhovala. Dospělí si také snažili udržet od dětí patřičný odstup a nerozmazlit je, ale to snad bylo způsobeno i intuitivní obranou před šokem z jejich případné smrti. Jako prostředek náboženské výchovy sloužilo časté připomínání smrti, pekla a soudu. Příklady se dají nalézt v knihách a učebnicích určených dětem, ale i v nedělních kázáních, na kterých byly děti přítomny se svými rodiči. Největší děs jim působila představa Posledního soudu a strach z oddělení od svých rodičů, se kterými nebudou moci sdílet věčnost v nebi, pokud jsou zatracení. Přímočarost, se kterou děti slýchaly o smrti, byla asi nejvýznačnějším rysem puritánské výchovy. Důraz na předčasnou vyspělost byl některými badateli vykládán jako důkaz, že děti byli v puritánské Nové Anglii pojímány jako „malí dospělí" v souladu s teorií Philippa Arièse o dětství jako moderním vynálezu. Z množství dětských a výchovných knih však spíše vyplývá, že si puritánští rodiče byli rozdílu mezi sebou a svými potomky velmi dobře vědomi. Brzké zahrnutí dětí do diskursu o smrti bylo dáno spíše specifičností kalvinistické teologie a snahou postarat se o jejich spásu v mezích určených jejich vírou, která zavrhla všechny spásonosné rituály.

Ač provázel puritány tísnivý neklid po celý život, často propukl s největší intenzitou, až když se ocitli na smrtelné posteli. O popis umírání puritánských „svatých" se postaral zejména Cotton Mather ve svých duchovních životopisech předních osobností Nové Anglie sedmnáctého století. Jeho pojetí posledních chvil člověka, zachycené zejména v jeho monumentálních církevních dějinách *Magnalia Christi Americana* či biografii jeho otce *Parentator*, se většinou řídí christologickým schématem. Vzbuzuje tak podezření, že se jedná pouze o interpretační šablonu, jejímž použitím chtěl autor ukázat, jak vypadá podle kalvinistických představ ideální smrt puritánského věřícího a neodpovídá úplně reálnému prožitku. Význam těchto příkladů umírání jako *ars moriendi* je však patrný i tím, že se v jádru shoduje s jinými dobovými manuály a radami kalvinistů, jak správně umírat. Věřilo se, že před smrtí dovolí Bůh Satanovi, aby naposledy pokoušel jeho věrné; vyvolený ale samozřejmě zkoušku překoná (byl k tomu přeci předurčen) a v poslední chvíli života doufá v Boha a spasení díky boží milosti. Očekávalo se, že věřící bude spíše umírat s bázní a chvěním, než s přehnanou jistotou spasení, která mohla být ukazatelem sebeklamu. Do tohoto modelu se promítla představa o intenzivním duchovním boji zuřícím v posledních chvílích lidského života. Názor některých badatelů, že strach na smrtelné posteli byl nekonzistentní s „optimistickou" puritánskou ideologií, se ukazuje jako mylný již proto, že bázeň zcela odpovídala oficiální puritánské představě o umírání vyvolených. Některé příklady předsmrtného chování puritánů svědčí sice o pokojnějším odchodu z tohoto světa, bázeň před Bohem však byla nutně přítomna.

Zatímco bylo anglické puritánství zdrojem zjednodušení pohřebního rituálu a snížení důrazu na ceremoniální důležitost smrti ve veřejném životě, v Americe vytvořilo ve druhé polovině sedmnáctého století kulturu, kde hrála ritualizovaná smrt podstatnou roli ve snaze stmelit novoanglickou společnost pod puritánským vedením. Zprvu byly novoanglické

hřbitovy i pohřby velmi minimalistické a odpovídaly tak puritánské doktríně, ze které vyplývalo, že pokud není k nějakému úkonu přímé biblické opodstatnění, je zbytečný či dokonce proti Bohu. Časem se však v pohřebním rituálu i podobě hrobky projevila barokní pompa, která byla vyjádřením nového společenského významu smrti jedince ve společnosti, která se cítila oslabená odchodem každého svého člena. Vnější nádhera puritánských hrobů a pohřebních ceremonií odrážela i nově posílenou bázeň věřících před svrchovaným Bohem a pocit vlastní bezvýznamnosti v rychle se měnící novoanglické společnosti. Důležitost věnovaná pohřebnímu rituálu byla znakem vnitřní nestability novoanglické společnosti, jejímž vyjádřením byla i „jeremiáda" naříkající nad ztracenou minulostí, zkaženým dneškem a obávající se brzké zkázy. Morbidní ikonografii, která se v souvisloti s touto proměnou pohřebního rituálu objevila, dominuje motiv lebky, která je interpretována jako výraz dvojznačného puritánského pohledu na smrt: ztělesňuje jak strach a bázeň ze smrti, tak očekávané vzkříšení a vykoupení. Byť byla někdy tato umrlčí tematika přirovnávána k vyobrazením smrti na středověkých náhrobních kamenech, nevyjadřuje u puritánů strach z tělesného působení smrti, jako spíše nejistotu týkající se posmrtného osudu duše. Nová sensibilita začínajícího osvícenství a romantismu stejně tak jako změny spojené s tzv. velkým probuzením se v osmnáctém století projevily i v liberalizaci puritánské doktríny a přispěly k novému, sentimentálnějšímu pohledu na smrt. Jeho symbolickým vyjádřením byla proměna umrlčího motivu na novoanglických náhrobcích ve vyobrazení anděla. Ambivalence v pohledu na smrt se tak v Nové Anglii vytratila spolu s odezníváním puritanismu jako hlavní kulturní, politické a společenské síly.

V této diplomové práci došlo k přehodnocení puritánského pohledu na smrt a výsledků dosavadního bádání na toto téma. Oproti jiným interpretacím se diplomantka domnívá, že ambivalence spjatá v puritánské mysli se smrtí byla neoddělitelnou součástí náboženského

prožitku puritánů a strach i naděje se vzájemně posilovaly. Až existenciální dynamika neustálého přezkoumávání jejich víry byla způsobena vnitřním pnutím v kalvinistických doktrínách. Meze ujištění byly jasně dány povahou puritánského predestinačního vidění spásy a potřebou udržet křehkou hranici mezi falešným pocitem bezpečí a nadějí plynoucí z božího zaslíbení a prožitku spasitelné milosti.