SYMPATHETIC PURITANS

Calvinist Fellow Feeling *in* Early New England

ABRAM C. VAN ENGEN

Sympathetic Puritans

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For Kristin

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Sympathetic Puritans

Introduction

IN ALL THE *King's Men*, the Pulitzer Prize-winning novel of 1947, the main character must break some bad news to the governor's wife: her son, a spoiled boy too brash to ever heed his Christian mother, has impregnated a young and helpless girl. That might be trouble enough on its own, but given the politics—given that this is the governor's son and an election is nearing—the difficulties have only just begun. Sensing that she has not been told all there is to know, Lucy Talos, the governor's wife, asks Jack Burden, his right-hand man, to meet her at home. As he sets the scene for this encounter, Robert Penn Warren chooses a few select details to convey the deep unease: Jack walks through the yard as though he "were treading on dozens of eggs," feeling much like "a sneak thief in a dark house." Lucy meets him at the door, and they walk to the parlor. And then, to establish just the right amount of tension and gloom for all involved, Warren hangs some portraits on the wall: "big walnut and gilt frames … enclosing the stern, malarial, Calvinistic faces whose eyes fixed you with little sympathy."[1]

It is a simple detail in a far more elaborate scene, a small line in a 600-page novel, but it functions in the moment to tie *All the King's Men* to a whole literary history of unsympathetic Calvinists, a long American tradition of stern and stoic Puritans. The novel seems obsessed with the hardness of history and the depravity no person escapes—one of the few beliefs the governor retains—and these portraits reinforce the theme. No one is clean. Scrub the surface, and the dirt will appear. And as each person's sins come to light, the Calvinists in that dark parlor will continue to stare in their stern, discerning way, untouched by human sympathy and offering no reprieve. As Nathaniel Hawthorne described them in *The Scarlet Letter*—the book read by countless high-schoolers who never encounter Calvinists again—the Puritans were "a people amongst whom religion and law were almost identical, and in whose character both were so thoroughly interfused, that the mildest and severest acts of public discipline were alike made venerable and awful. Meagre, indeed, and cold, was the sympathy that a transgressor might look for, from such bystanders at the scaffold." According to the American literary tradition, sympathy was a quality that the Puritans neither admired nor possessed. Sometimes with a hint of praise, often with a good deal of rebuke, all seem to know that those early settlers of New England were built of nothing less—or more—than iron.[2]

That unmoved, unsympathetic gaze is a function of art, not reality. Most Puritans would be surprised to hear that they were made of iron. John Winthrop, the first governor of Massachusetts Bay, seemed composed of something far softer as he sat with his dying wife, weeping so bitterly that she had to ask him to stop, "for you breake mine heart (said she) with your grievings." Nor was he alone in shedding abundant tears; as pilgrim separatists fled England, soldiers forced the families apart. Far from looking on with stern and stoic gazes, the pilgrim band broke down: "what weeping and crying on every side," William Bradford wrote, "some for their husbands that were carried away in the ship . . .; others not knowing what should become of them and their little ones; others again melted in tears, seeing their poor little ones hanging about them, crying for fear and quaking with cold." "Pitiful it was to see," he insisted, suggesting that the reader might want to lend a little sympathy as well. In fact, the absence of sympathy could be considered a serious problem, a sorrow unto itself. When Anne Bradstreet, the great New England Puritan poet, depicted the woes of a war-torn England she specifically listed the affliction of "mothers' tears unpitied," implying exactly what the New England minister William Hooke had recently preached: "It is the part of true friends and brethren, to sympathize and fellow-feele with their brethren and friends when the hand of God is upon them."[3]

Tears and grieving, melting and weeping, pity and sympathy—each of these moments fits a broad tradition of Puritan fellow feeling. Drawing together such scenes and pronouncements—both the literary depictions and the preacherly declarations—this book argues that a Calvinist theology of sympathy shaped the politics, religion, and literature of seventeenth-century New England. From the origins of Puritanism in sixteenth-century England, Reformed ministers and writers stressed fellow feeling and mutual affections as necessary for the common good.

Using scripture, they called on readers and listeners to sympathize with the joys and sorrows of citizens and saints—fellow countrymen and fellow converts. In the process, they turned sympathy into a sign of membership: the experience and expression of mutual affections helped determine who belonged with whom. Sympathy thus became both an obligation and a mark of identity, an emotional duty to be performed and an irregular, ever-shifting experience identifying who was in and who was out. In seventeenth-century New England, this dual meaning of sympathy—the active *command* to fellow-feel (a duty), as well as the passive *sign* that could indicate salvation (a discovery)—pervaded Puritan society and came to define the very boundaries of English culture, affecting conceptions of community, relations with Native Americans, and the development of American literature.[4]

Unearthing this Calvinist theology of fellow feeling helps us see the religious history of a concept that has largely been traced back to more secular roots in moral sense philosophy. The command to sympathize, after all, came from the Bible: it appears in Puritan writing because it surfaces in scripture. In attempting to live according to the Word of God, Puritan ministers and theologians had to make sense of the idea that their high priest, Christ, was "touched with the feeling of our infirmities" (Hebrews 4:15), along with the scriptural mandate to "rejoice with them that rejoice, and weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15), to have "one suffer with another" (1 Peter 3:8), and to "remember them that are in bonds, as though ye were bound with them: and them that are in affliction, as if ye were also afflicted in the body" (Hebrews 13:3). Early English translations did not specifically use the word "sympathy" in these and other verses, but in two of them they struggled with the Greek cognate of that word, and in all of them Calvinist commentators employed the language of sympathy to make sense of what they read. Scripture, in short, commanded the godly to unite and cohere, and many Puritans understood that concord and harmony to require an imaginative reciprocation of affections that involved putting oneself in another's place and feeling as that person felt. If the Bible demanded such a thing, then it would have to be learned, interpreted, preached, and lived.[5]

Most New England Puritans dealt with sympathy on a personal level: it spoke directly to anxieties raised by election. The idea that God chose some to be saved and others to be damned before the world began caused many early Calvinists to wrestle in unique ways with the meaning and limits of mutual affection, for the right feelings toward the right people expressed and demonstrated in the right way *might* testify to one's salvation. In unpacking the scriptural "love of brethren"—most significantly from 1 John 3:14—many Puritans concluded that one of the best ways to soothe anxious souls was to highlight their sympathy with members of the church. Fellow feeling implied union and belonging; having mutual and reciprocal affections with those already admitted to the church could therefore indicate that one should be welcomed to membership as well. Or to put it differently, sympathizing with those who were *presumably* saved could witness one's own salvation. This was a comfort many took.

Yet this pious application of fellow feeling to one's personal search for assurance tied sympathy to communal bonds in other ways as well. In searching out one's salvation, it mattered *with whom* one sympathized. Such a notion translated more broadly into the construction of emotional communities—communities defined by the mutual experience and transmission of affection.[6] The borders of a Puritan community, it turns out, were often determined by mutual affections: all would-be citizens and saints needed not just oaths of allegiance and legal obedience, but also the experience of fellow feeling that defined the very boundaries of belonging. A tight-knit society of saints *felt* together—both by matching each other's emotions (rejoicing with those who rejoice and weeping with those who weep) and by responding in the same way to the same events (all fasting for Parliament or giving thanks for the banishment of heretics). A unified community meant a single affection spread equally to all.[7]

This concept of an emotional community provides an additional explanation for New England's many Fast and Thanksgiving Days. On the one hand, Puritans believed that such days had a direct impact on events, moving God to bring relief or continue prosperity; they held spiritual meaning in their own right and deepened the community's relationship with God. In that sense, they were not merely religious masks for political ends.[8] On the other hand, days of fasting and thanksgiving offered certain political benefits. Desiring an emotional unity requires someone in charge to pronounce what that emotion must be; these public days in New England enabled magistrates to reassert authority by proclaiming mourning or thanksgiving for all. And as the colonists responded, the process of fasting or rejoicing reunited the community in a shared experience of affection. On Fast Days, for example, the community conducted itself in such a way as to generate widespread mutual mourning—a repentance both experienced within and witnessed without.[9] By binding hearts together, fasting and thanksgiving rebuilt Puritan emotional communities. Unity depended on this sort of sympathetic exchange. And setting the terms of that exchange (whether joy or sorrow, rejoicing or repentance) reveals one way that Puritan sympathy mingled with aspects of power and authority.

Sympathy further mixed with politics when it came to negotiating transatlantic relations. The Puritans who left England had a special need to assure their nonemigrating godly peers that they had never separated from the Church. They were not, they repeatedly asserted, allying themselves with separatist extremists who cut all ties with the Church of England. Whatever social or geographical withdrawal might suggest, New England Puritans remained loyal subjects of the crown and members of the Church. In fact, they argued, it was precisely because they loved the Church so much—precisely because they had never left the Church—that they sought its purification and reform. This need to assert unity despite a few thousand miles of intervening ocean sent Puritans in search of any language that would overcome and downplay the basic fact that they had physically abandoned England. One language was sympathy. Even though they departed England, many Puritans asserted, fellow feeling united them with their countrymen and demonstrated their unbroken loyalty to the brethren left behind. Sympathy connected them to the cause.

In England, the cause of reformation united the godly against fellow English citizens who stood in the way of right religion. But in New England, the difference between citizen and saint more often blurred. The sympathy of *saints* involved a love of Christ that created and enabled a love of one another: such love matched sorrow and joy among a select group of the saved (or potentially saved), and it witnessed a renewed and sanctified self on its way to union with God. The sympathy of *citizens*, on the other hand, modeled itself on this elect community, but it could not signify salvation. Instead, it aimed at more practical matters involved in the common good of society. In other words, sometimes Puritans spoke of sympathy as good for one's soul, and sometimes they demanded it as necessary for the state. Yet the very fact that the term functioned in both domains occasionally made distinctions difficult in New England: if someone sympathized properly on a Fast Day with others, did that satisfy a civil duty or indicate a mark of grace? The double valence of fellow feeling in both politics and theology thus raised questions about when and how sympathy was possible, whether and to whom it could be extended, and what it revealed about a person when it was either experienced or expressed.

Finally, the Puritan linking of sympathy, salvation, and community—flowing in particular from the search for assurance—distinctly affected the concept of sincerity. The authenticity of an individual's heart took on a special value in Puritan churches, where authorities were asked to judge whether others had truly converted. In evaluating another's heart, several factors came into play: one had to have a basic, working knowledge of the catechism; one had to live a godly, pious life; and, frequently, one had to give a convincing testimony of grace.[10] In the last demand, the judgment of a sincere heart often turned on sympathy. Insofar as the Puritan minister could be moved to fellow feel with another through his or her narrative of conversion, the grace expressed in that confession would be considered a valid indication of election. That is, the operations of sympathy—the emotional exchange between narrator and listener—enabled an authoritative member of the church to judge a conversion true. Sympathy, in other words, came to play a prominent role in Puritan notions of persuasion. But here again, *who* had to be moved—and *by whom*—reveals a complex mixture of sympathy and power, nowhere more evident than in Puritan missionary activities among Native Americans.

In Puritan piety, politics, community, and sincerity, therefore, sympathy played a significant role in early New England. The Puritans were not the only ones, nor the first ones, to emphasize the importance of fellow feeling, but they *were* significant participants in a wider historical development that gradually emphasized the centrality of sympathy to ethics, literature, culture, and society, culminating in Adam Smith's *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759). In sermons, treatises, poems, journals, histories, and captivity narratives, Puritans repeatedly turned to a Calvinist theology of fellow feeling, urging it on all and using it to judge the virtue of a citizen and the sanctity of a saint.

The Genealogy of Sympathy

Revealing this Calvinist theology of fellow feeling in the seventeenth century helps us reimagine that dominant portrait in American culture cited briefly by Robert Penn Warren: the grim, unfeeling, black-clothed, dour-faced Puritan. This portrait, to be sure, is not one that actual scholars of Puritanism tend to paint. Even Perry Miller, the founder of modern Puritan studies, began his magnum opus *The New England Mind* with an elegant description of inner drives. As Miller pointed out, the Puritans turned whole*heartedly* to God or they did not turn at all. Indeed, they had a name for those who merely memorized the catechism and did good deeds from day to day: such persons were "civil Christians" with a "historical faith," and they were destined for a dire end. After Miller's reign at Harvard, historians and literary critics paid increasing attention to the power and presence of feeling in seventeenth-century New England. Since the 1960s, impressive studies have mapped the various emotions needed to demonstrate election, the conversion experience of actual lay persons, the rejuvenating power of daily sanctification, the devotional exercises and literature of seventeenth-century Puritans, and the presence within Puritanism of various—and sometimes competing—emphases on desire, longing, and love. For many years now, as one scholar explains, "the dynamics of New England's hearts and souls have taken precedence over those of its heads."[11]

Yet in this regard, scholars of the Puritans remain a rather lonely crowd. The picture of Calvinism that still prevails is one of unfeeling austerity and tyrannical judgment. Such a view became ingrained in American culture primarily through the work of nineteenth-century anti-Calvinists. To defeat predestination and original sin, a wide variety of born-again preachers and liberal Protestants began to caricature Calvinism as rigorous, gloomy, heady, and heartless. The power of their portraits turned this extreme view into a new norm, so that American culture ever since has tended to see Puritanism as a religion of unemotional intellectualism. Predestination itself, as various anti-Calvinists argued, represented an impassive, arbitrary parceling out of mercy by a God more cruel than kind; anyone who believed in such a doctrine *necessarily* lacked a basic capacity for fellow feeling.[12]

This picture of Puritanism took shape not just through theological tracts and pulpit oratory; it also came about through the cultural work that framed and waged the battle. Nothing has locked into place the modern-day picture of Puritanism quite like the work of Nathaniel Hawthorne. But such a view would not have stuck so firmly in American minds were it not also for the work of Hawthorne's main nemesis: that "damned mob of scribbling women," as he called the female sentimental writers who outsold him on a regular basis. While these sentimental authors differed in their aims and aesthetics, they even more adamantly argued that whatever good Puritanism once served, it held no place in a sympathetic age. In a series of novels, writers from Catharine Maria Sedgwick to Harriet Beecher Stowe rejected Calvinism as *immoral* precisely because it lacked the sympathy so essential to forming ethical bonds. Just as these writers had left the Calvinism of their own upbringings—freeing themselves from tyrannical theology—so, they believed, America also had to outgrow judgment, terror, and intolerance. The good of society and the salvation of one's soul depended on embracing sympathy and benevolence, not dogma and catechism. Thus, in the course of the nineteenth century, Calvinism became characterized as an intellectual love of law and doctrine enforced through the fear of God and a terror of hell. This is the portrait painted by the nation's earliest novels.

Taking such works more or less at their word, scholars of American sentimentalism—that expansive eighteenth- and nineteenth-century cultural movement which based ethics, politics, religion, and literature in theories of sympathy—have typically resisted the idea that sympathy ever found a home among the Puritans. When the literary scholar Ann Douglas opened sentimentalism to serious academic study in 1977, she described it as "feminine" and contrasted it with the "stern," "rigorous," "theological," "intellectual," "repressive, authoritarian, dogmatic, [and] patriarchal" culture of Puritanism.[13] Since then, the labors of countless historians and literary critics have vastly expanded our knowledge of sentimentalism, mapping a multitude of social, literary, political, and racial consequences. Yet while disagreements run rampant through the field, most scholars take for granted Douglas's backdrop of a rigid, unfeeling early American Puritanism. According to most accounts, Puritanism and the power of sympathy simply do not belong together; they represent separate eras, distinct movements, different phases of literary development.[14]

As for the roots of fellow feeling, the standard genealogy traces both sympathy and sentimentalism back to Latitudinarianism. Latitudinarians were members of the Anglican Church who gained prominence in England after 1660, when the Puritan Interregnum collapsed and Charles II took the throne. More moderate and liberal than other religious thinkers, Latitudinarians such as Isaac Barrow and John Tillotson believed that God cared far more for actions and morality than for the structures, disciplines, and doctrines of a national church (or any other particular sect). Elevating human nature and the power of reason, they preached a God at least as compassionate as human beings: if *we* can weep, they asserted, God must weep all the more; if *we* can sympathize, God's fellow feeling must abound. Human nature thus became the foundation for religious beliefs, which in turn reflected well on human nature. God has created us as essentially good, they claimed, and having filled us with sympathy, he expects it to play a role in the way we live.[15]

With such claims Latitudinarians paved the way to the Scottish Enlightenment, the second major phase in sentimentalism's evolution.

Over the course of more than half a century, several philosophers—including the third Earl of Shaftesbury, Francis Hutcheson, David Hume, and Adam Smith—began to theorize a moral sense guiding human action. Reacting against the Calvinist doctrine of original sin and the selfish state of nature proposed by Thomas Hobbes, these thinkers claimed that human beings were naturally sociable, not selfish; such a view, in turn, heightened the emphasis on both sympathy and benevolence. Fellow feeling became not just a basic tenet of human nature, but a pillar of virtue that could be exercised and trained.[16] These beliefs led to a cultural endorsement of refined sensibility—the catchword of the era—according to which people of good character possessed "a sympathetic heart, a quick responsiveness to the joys and sorrows of others, and a propensity toward the shedding of compassionate tears." The "central elements in morality" became "the feelings of sympathy and 'sensibility'—that is, a hair-trigger responsiveness to another person's distresses and joys."[17] Such traits would eventually define the heroes and heroines of sentimental novels in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In short, the Latitudinarians enabled a more secular, anti-Calvinist moral sense philosophy that paved the way to a broader sentimental culture.[18]

So goes the standard history. This book challenges that narrative. For example, while Latitudinarians and moral sense philosophers rejected the Calvinist doctrine of original sin and instead conceived of human beings as basically good, they did not invent, but rather *continued*, a perception of humans as naturally sociable. The great bogeyman of both Latitudinarians and moral sense philosophers was Thomas Hobbes. But Hobbes's concept of the state of nature—where all fight all in lives he characterized as "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short"—was never a secular version of original sin and total depravity; in fact, merging Calvinist theology with Hobbesian philosophy does the Puritans a disservice, for even with their dire view of the unregenerate heart the Puritans still insisted on "natural affections," which involved a basic level of sociability even among pagans, heathens, and the reprobate. The Puritans preached sympathy not just to saints but to citizens, and they assumed that even those who lacked a love of Christ still had hearts that could be moved.[19]

Continuities between Puritanism and sentimentalism constantly emerge, as I hope to show. At the same time, it would be wrong to assert that the Puritans somehow *were* sentimental, or that they actually wrote sentimental literature. Rather, in their writing they had occasion to use techniques that would later be strongly identified with the sentimental tradition. And those occasions arose, in large part, from their thinking about sympathy. Bringing their ideas of fellow feeling and mutual affections to light will, I hope, revise the standard genealogies of both sympathy and sentimentalism, along with the traditional characterization of Puritanism that accompanies such stories. In other words, I do not challenge the usual genealogies by attempting to trace a whole new one; instead, I take a closer look at seventeenth-century Puritans and their largely unobserved language of sympathy, building on the work of those few scholars who have begun to note the significant presence of this idea and experience in early Puritanism.[20] The fact that a Calvinist theology of fellow feeling has gone so unnoticed—or that so many have assumed it could not exist based on traditional histories of sentimentalism—thus provides the impetus for a study focused primarily on the seventeenth century. Of that period, this book asks one seemingly simple question: how did sympathy shape the culture of Puritan New England?

The New England Puritans

That question, however, immediately raises two others that have to be answered: first, who were the Puritans? And second, what counts as sympathy? The former remains one of the great difficulties facing any scholar of Puritanism. In 1625, a wary King Charles, having just inherited the throne of England, asked his ally, the bishop of London William Laud, to produce a list of Puritan clergymen. Charles worried about such people because they seemed to threaten the ceremonies, hierarchies, and authority of the entire English Church. Such dissidents had existed at least since the 1570s, and the appellation "Puritan," a slur, had been slung at them for years; but Charles's sudden attempt to list and eliminate these people—to designate some and not others as Puritan—inaugurated a process of definitional ambiguity that continues still today.[21] What, then, is Puritanism? On the one hand, just as Supreme Court Justice Potter Stewart defined obscenity in 1964, everyone seems to know it when they see it. On the other hand, countless books and articles have attempted to distinguish the characteristics of this particular political, social, and devotional movement, often focusing less on the specifics of theology and more on the general mindset or attitude of those involved—to the point of avoiding the word "movement" altogether. A movement implies a unified force, whereas Puritanism often seemed more like a loose collection of zealous Protestants lacking agreement on aims or ends.[22] The trouble only mounts, meanwhile, for those who wish to speak of a Puritan New England. Over the past several decades, scholars have identified a vast diversity of persons and beliefs inhabiting seventeenth-century Massachusetts Bay, Plymouth, Connecticut, and New Haven, not to mention Rhode Island, Maine, and New Hampshire. The plurality of opinions cut not just between the clergy and the laity (who did not always share the same views), but also into and across the highest circles of society. Far from propounding a monolithic orthodoxy, New England comprised a host of different perspectives, doctrines, political objectives, and social ambitions. To call New England "Puritan," then, seems either to expand the word beyond its usefulness or to misconstrue the population.[23]

Yet while many have focused on New England's diversity, others have illuminated its remarkable coherence. When differentiating among the theological emphases and preaching styles *within* New England, the spectrum of viewpoints can seem vast; stepping back and placing the region in a broader context, however, reveals the presence of a distinct culture. Just as differences in similar objects fade when seen from a distance, so the gaps in New England's religious landscape narrow when nestled into one corner of the English Atlantic. Over the course of the seventeenth century, officials in England regularly viewed and treated New England as a distinct Puritan culture, different from other colonies and plantations. Indeed, the dissenters and critics of New England—many of whom had to *leave* the region in order to register their complaints—only increased the sense that this place contained one attitude, one way of life.[24] The many different settlers of New England certainly formed a disparate set of siblings who sometimes fought bitterly amongst themselves, and such distinctions should not be forgotten. But most still fit together as a family. Difference and dissent came embedded within a framework widely (though not exclusively or unanimously) accepted. In fact, it was precisely the reach and influence of Puritanism in New England that enabled it to contain—and in some cases, to *nourish*—so many tensions. In this book I try to do justice to difference, dissent, and transatlantic dimensions while focusing primarily on the people and tensions of Massachusetts Bay, where the godly were even more coherently unified than elsewhere in New England. I do so, in part, to show that the Puritan sympathy I identify was not some fluke or fleeting thought, but was instead to be found in the very heart of Puritan New England.[25]

So what was this Puritanism of New England? First, it implied a series of shared political concerns. During the English Civil Wars, when parliamentary forces squared off against the King, no one in England needed to guess where New England stood. Declarations of allegiance to the King disappeared, and all public days of Fasting or Thanksgiving responded to the fortunes of Parliament.[26] Such loyalty resulted from the fact that Parliament, like the Puritans, sought a greater restructuring and reform of the English church. Charles I, along with William Laud (now Archbishop of Canterbury), not only supported a system of hierarchical bishops that smacked of Catholicism; they advanced a theological system of Arminianism which flouted basic tenets of Reformed Calvinism. Instead of passively discovering saving grace (or searching for signs of its presence), Arminians proposed that a person could, by free will, accept or reject God's grace (often deemed a universal offer). In England, Puritan opposition to such views—along with their rejection of bishops in favor of the congregation's local authority—caused them to be silenced and pursued. Several ministers decided they could best serve the church and the cause of reform by leaving the country entirely, in many cases taking their congregations with them. By one definition, then, the Puritans of New England formed *an oppositional political party*—political precisely insofar as religious reforms inevitably concerned restructuring England's highest powers. Criticism of prelacy (the governing system of hierarchical bishops) and Arminianism (the religious position embraced by the most powerful bishops) translated into a bottom-up censure of the authorities in place.[27]

Beyond this political dimension, however, the Puritans comprised *a social movement* focused on tight-knit communities. In England, those who had been converted would travel together to hear the preaching of godly ministers (called sermon gadding), and they would gather together in conventicles—small groups of the godly—in order to share their experiences, converse about the cause of reform, study the Word of God, and refresh their spiritual lives. The experience of conversion and the piety of the saved, combined with the sense that they formed a persecuted minority, helped these gathered saints develop intense communal bonds. In other words, in a slight adaptation of Justice Potter Stewart, we might say that Puritans knew each other when they saw each other.[28] After emigrating, ministers and magistrates attempted to write such conventicles into the governing structures of New England. In many churches ministers required all would-be members to give a public conversion narrative, in effect forming a conventicle of godly persons within the wider congregation and tying it together through similar experiences of grace shared with one another. In the state, magistrates extended suffrage only to those who became members of a church, thus forming a kind of large-scale conventicle, an association of godly citizens united by shared goals and familiar accounts of conversion.

But it was *the experience of grace* itself—and the representation of that grace—which constituted Puritanism's primary distinguishing feature. Though they divided over emphases, Puritan ministers preached a remarkably similar version of the conversion process focused on the ramifications of predestination.[29] In his catechism, Thomas Shepard, the pastor of Newtown (now Cambridge), explicated the expected stages of grace. Conversion, he explained, began with *contrition*. Just as the sick do not seek a doctor until they realize they are ill, so sinners will not turn to God unless they recognize their misery. In addition, potential converts needed to acknowledge the absence of any internal, redeeming good—a process of *humiliation* in which the sinner gradually came to feel unworthy of Christ and his blessings. Only after being lowered could a convert rise. Such redemption began with *vocation*, which Shepard defined as "the Lord's call and invitation of the soul to come to Christ." Receiving such an invitation required faith—that is, "the coming of the whole soul out of itself unto Christ, for Christ, by virtue of the irresistible power of the Spirit in the call." Finally, then, by faith and through grace—both gifts of God—converts would be *justified*: "The gracious sentence of God the Father," Shepard explained, "absolves them from the guilt and condemnation of all sins, and accepts them as perfectly righteous to eternal life." Adopted and redeemed, justified sinners became new saints—children of God "crown[ed] . . . with [the] privileges of sons."[30]

Yet at this point conversion had only just begun, for once sinners received God's justifying faith they began the process of *sanctification*—the process "whereby the sons of God are renewed in the whole man, unto the image of their heavenly Father in Christ Jesus." In sanctification, a person killed off his or her sin and breathed life into a new self generated by grace. Such a transformation entailed a never-ending battle, "a continual war and combat between the renewed part, assisted by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, and the unrenewed part, assisted by Satan and this evil world." It called for *mortification*, a "daily dying to sin by virtue of Christ's death," and *vivification*, a "daily rising to newness of life, by Christ's resurrection." In sanctification, God's cosmic drama of redemption played out every day on the inner stage of each converted soul.[31]

The experience of grace mattered so much to the Puritans that it actually determined the political and social elements of their religious movement. For example, the Puritans hated the Church of England's *Book of Common Prayer* for two primary reasons: first, it violated norms of *sola Sciptura* and seemed to elevate manmade religious tradition to the same level as the Bible. Second, they believed that any form, as such, encouraged hypocrisy: written prayers, prescribed rituals, and recited sermons all prevented God from touching the heart, convicting sinners, and regenerating saints. According to many, the Church of England fostered a community of hollow Christians held together not by the inner experience of grace, but by the outward performance of ceremony. Opposition to the prelacy emerged from the same concerns: bishops gave church posts to priests according to personal preference and political need; they did not seek out those who had a proper experience of grace and could deliver the saving Word. Puritans expected preachers to change hearts; the Church of England employed them to maintain authority. Thus, for the sake of their devotion—to worship God in spirit and in truth—the Puritans of New England tied ordination to individual congregations. The local church, not some far-off bishop, would choose its own pastor and ordain him to deliver the Word.[32]

Such a view of church governance begins to reveal how communal bonds also flowed from Puritan devotion. Sermon gadding, conventicles, and the requirements for church membership in New England emerged from the basic belief that Christian conversation refreshed the heart and nourished the soul. The godly needed each other for grace.[33] And precisely because the Lord used the godly to deliver his grace, the community of Puritan saints embraced a spiritual unity that rejected the unregenerate. They bound themselves together and separated themselves from others.[34] Thus when certain Puritans met in England and discussed the possibility of emigration, Arthur Tyndal, John Winthrop's brother-in-law, resolved "to give up all my faculties, and powers both of soule, and bodie, instruments, weapons and ministers to serve yow in that unitie bond, and waie of pietie, and devocion, which your selves shall imbrace, and insue."[35] For Tyndal, as for other ardent converts, Puritanism was a "way of piety and devotion" that entailed ecclesiastical consequences (giving up one's ministers) and a new "unitie," a "bond" tighter and more significant than all the rest. That is the definition of Puritanism this book uses (one that is admittedly, but necessarily, circular): beginning with a piety and devotion aimed at both conversion and assurance of salvation, Puritanism was a way of life that collected together groups of the godly, identified them as distinct, and called on them to live lives of holiness in pursuit of wider reform—precisely so that a reformed church and society could nourish the piety and devotion aimed at true conversion and assurance.

Puritan Affections

Defining New England Puritanism, however, still leaves us with the second problem: what counts as sympathy? In tracing out a Calvinist theology of fellow feeling, one must decide whether to study words or ideas: that is, should one focus on the *term* "sympathy"—including the many words spun from a translation of the original Greek—or the *concept* of mutual affections reached through identification with another (regardless of what terms that idea attracts). In this book, I do both. Puritans focused on different aspects as the occasion required, but they understood sympathy as identification with another's experience, often involving an imaginative transfer of oneself into the place of another. In this regard, it was closer to the modern meaning of "empathy"—a word not coined until the twentieth century. Modern usage sometimes defines sympathy not as transference into another's place, but rather as an *understanding* of someone else's pain, acknowledging someone's hardship and providing comfort but not identifying with the suffering; so, for example, doctors and nurses today are often told to sympathize but not to empathize. Because of certain scriptural passages (such as Hebrews 13:3), Puritans included identification in their definition of sympathy. It applied as much to joy as to grief, and it was thought to be a reciprocal sharing of affection through the imaginative process of identification. While I study the history of a word most associated with this idea, then, I also expand my study to examine how the idea was affected by, or became conjoined to, a much larger family of terms, including "fellow feeling," "love of the brethren," and "mutual affections."[36]

The last phrase is perhaps the most important and the most difficult to define. "Affections," which the Puritans frequently wove into their definitions of faith, blurs the modern-day division of head and heart. At first, the word sounds like an affirmation of the heart—and in many cases it was—but what the Puritans understood by both "heart" and "affections" was something far more than feeling. Affections, for the Puritans, included not just particular loves and longings, but also one's understood *purpose*—one's entire orientation. To put it another way, affections were defined not just by the presence of love and longing, but also by their object: *who* or *what* one loved and desired in turn indicated the purpose of one's actions—the explanation that colored how, why, and to what end a person lived. Affections, in short, encompassed the whole bent of a person's being.[37]

The emphasis Puritans placed on the heart and the affections came from reformers like Martin Luther and John Calvin. For example, in Calvin's systematic theology *The Institutes of the Christian Religion*, he asserts that "Scripture seriously affects us only when it is sealed upon our hearts through the Spirit." For knowledge of God to be true, he emphasized, it had to "take root in the heart"; true conversion meant replacing a "heart of stone" with a "heart of flesh." That, for Puritans, was precisely the problem with the Church of England. Its uninspired preachers, its prescription of prayers, its opulence and formalism all prevented the possibility that God's word would ever change hearts. As Calvin argued, "wherever there is great ostentation in ceremonies, sincerity of heart is rare indeed."[38] He summarized the significance of a sincere heart with his personal motto: "My heart I offer to you, O Lord, promptly and sincerely." For participants in this Reformed tradition, the disposition of the heart defined the status of the person, and thus true religion dwelt primarily in religious affections—a point that would persist from John Calvin through Jonathan Edwards.[39] Here then, affections were not *feelings*; they could more properly be understood as *dispositions*.

The issue is somewhat muddled, though, for Puritans did occasionally use the word "affections" to identify particular passions or emotions, such as "joy, sorrow, love, [and] hatred." For example, when the influential Puritan theologian William Ames discussed the affections that arise from conscience, he listed joy, confidence, shame, sadness, fear, despair, and anguish. Another powerful Puritan, William Perkins, also aligned affections with emotional states resulting from the dictates of conscience. Instructing Christians to shape their affections appropriately, he gave the example of "choler and anger," which instead of being aimed at our neighbor ought to be redirected at ourselves. A third influential Puritan, Richard Sibbes, explained that godliness required both good judgment and "holy inclinations of our will and affections, that so a perfect government may be set up in our hearts, and that our knowledge may bee with al judgment, that is, with experience and feeling." Here, affections seem to encompass both the idea of a person's disposition—one's "experience"—and that more modern sense of "feeling."[40]

In preaching, the importance of the affections became even more apparent. Puritan ministers were instructed to stir up affections, which meant inducing an experience beyond mere understanding of the Word. Summarizing several preaching manuals in his *Marrow of Sacred Divinity*, Ames wrote, "Men are to be pricked to the quick so that they may feel individually what the Apostle said, namely, that the word of the Lord is a two-edged sword, piercing to the inward thoughts and affections and going through to the joining of bones and marrow." As a result, preaching should be "alive [or, 'lively'] and effective so that an unbeliever coming into the congregation of believers should be affected and, as it were, transfixed by the very hearing of the word so that he might give glory to God."[41] Congregants, in other words, had to be *moved*; the affections went beyond, but still included, an emotional state. The experience of grace required, in part, a feeling.

Yet the primary meaning of "affections" still identified a person's most basic disposition. As Perkins taught, in Adam's fall the affections "received a disorder, and by reason of this disorder they do eschew good; and pursue that which is evil." In other words, the heart of an unregenerate person *always* leans away from God. So, Ames wrote, "The fourth signe [of being in a state of sin], is perversnesse of the affections wherby men, turne away from God, and wholy cleave, and adhere, to worldly things, 1 *John*. 2. 15." Illustrating these unregenerate affections, Ames cited examples that had little to do with feeling: "The aversnesse of a man from God, is wont to be seene, 1. By his alienation from the Word of God, especially when it is preached to him powerfully . . . 2. By a neglect of prayer, and other parts of Gods worship . . . 3. By an alienation from the servants of God."[42] Failing to attend or be moved by a worship service, refusing to pray, distancing oneself from godly neighbors (either in action or in feeling)—all of these revealed a person's affections, the inclination of his or her heart.

In this deeper meaning of the word, no amount of effort or choice could produce godly affections. Only grace could alter the unregenerate heart, so that "through the renewing of the affections by the Holy Spirit, a man doth begin to will that which is good, and to refuse evil." Equating the affections with a person's ultimate desires, Sibbes proclaimed that nothing "sets a stampe upon a Christian so much as desires, All other things may bee counterfeit, words and actions may bee counterfeit, but the desires and affections cannot, because they are the immediate issues and productions of the soule." In other words, it took God's grace to set the affections straight—so that desiring God and Christ could in turn indicate election, the possibility that God had chosen one for salvation.[43]

The renowned Puritan minister and master of Emmanuel College, John Preston, explained that when God attracts a person to faith, "it is not such drawing as when a man is drawne by force, but it is a drawing which is done by changing the will and affections; when GOD alters the bent of the mind, when GOD justifies a man, hee will affect a mans heart so, that hee shall bee so affected with Christ, as that he shall have no rest till he have him."[44] In countless Puritan tracts, the affections indicated a leaning of the heart, which might or might not have anything to do with temporary emotional states.

Indeed, Puritan conversion required a transformation of *both* head and heart. Preston's claim that regeneration would alter not just one's affections but also "the bent of the mind" reveals the close link between intellect and will in Puritan conceptions of the human person. For the most part, Puritans accepted the dominant psychology of their day, which understood persons as possessing three primary faculties: the reason, the will, and the appetites. As one scholar explains, "The rational faculties are humanity's peculiar glory and its noblest powers; in a well-ordered soul, will commands the inferior appetite, and reason governs the passions."[45] In the tripartite human being, peace could be maintained only through proper order and subordination, the will and the passions following wherever reason might lead. Such a view lent itself to what one scholar has called the "intellectualist position," wherein "the understanding shows to the will what is to be embraced or rejected. As the understanding judges, so the will desires."[46] In general, faculty psychology moved down a hierarchy from the understanding through the will to the affections, and it identified disorders as, in part, a rebellion of the passions. Sibbes, for example, wrote that "thoughts breed desire; thoughts in the minde or braine, the braine strikes the heart presently. It goes from the understanding to the will, and affections; what we thinke of that wee desire, if it be good." Speaking of sanctification, he explained, "Light in the understanding breedeth heate of love in the affections." Thomas Hooker, the renowned minister of Hartford, Connecticut, put it more simply: "That which the Mind conceives not, the Heart affects not."[47]

But not all Puritans accepted wholesale the idea that a changed mind could or would lead to an altered will and right affections. Instead, many simultaneously maintained an Augustinian view of human persons in which the intellect and will remained separate entities, sometimes working together, sometimes not. "In this doctrine," Norman Fiering explains,