

Faith traveled across water: religious puritanism in the new world through winthr...

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Never before has American literature been filled with the views on the Lord than when the first Europeans started arriving in the New world in the early 1600's seeking religious freedom. William Bradford and John Winthrop were two of the most influential and progressive men of that time. Their beliefs and views are still instilled in the Puritan community today. Both of these men had very strong influences from God and that they were the chosen people which encouraged them to make the journey to the new world. If it wasn't for William Bradford making the journey and having strong faith, John Winthrop wouldn't have had the courage to do the same as well.

William Bradford was the first of many religious congregations to journey to the New World upon the Mayflower in 1620. His religious congregation was called the Separatists. The Separatists believed that the Church of England was so corrupt so instead of trying to reform the church they decided to separate from it. In England, it was illegal to have other religious congregations that were outside of the Church of England. You would go to jail for treason if you were caught. The Separatists were united by their strong beliefs and the desire to live in a community where they wouldn't be persecuted for their beliefs. In Bradford's important piece of work was called the Of Plymouth Plantation, which was a key source of information and incite about the Plymouth colony. It sheds a different light on how life was like in the colonial New England. Bradford believed that he was the chosen by God to lead his congregation to the "promised land". He also believed that the Pilgrims were the new Israelites from the old testament and that their lives

were a literal reenactment of the days of Moses and that they were to live by the word of God.

Bradford was a strong believer that all of the pain and suffering that the colony endured during the voyage and their arrival at the new colony was just trials and tribulations from God. In his account's, he describes arriving in New England in the late fall which was very fatal for many of the Pilgrims. He states " And for reason it was winter, and they that know the winters of that country know them to be sharp and violent and subject to search an unknown coast. Besides what could they see but a hideous and desolate wilderness, full of wild beasts and wild men". The New World climate was nothing like they have experienced before. Also, he points out some of the tests that they endured in the colony which include the conflict with Thomas Morton, tension with other colonies and the most challenging for Bradford was that some of the Pilgrims began to drift away from the colony because they were seeking economic opportunity. Like I stated before Bradford was a strong believer that " through the help of God" they will be able to overcome any hardship as long as the community united and remained strong with their faith.

Even though the Pilgrims and Puritans are very similar in seeking religious freedom their ideals are different. The difference between the Pilgrims and the Puritans is that the Puritans had no intention of breaking away from the Church of England. The Puritans were a group of Reformed Protestants who sought to " purify" the Church of England.

John Winthrop was the leader and first Governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony where he also established its center of government. Winthrop challenged the Church of England for change. He believed that the church was corrupted by selfish leaders. This made him into a radical in their eyes. If a person goes against the Church of England's ideals, it is considered treason and could be punishable by death. Winthrop didn't want to separate from the Church of England but he wanted reform more. He arrived in Massachusetts in 1630 aboard the *Arabella* where he travelled with 700+ puritans and immigrants seeking religious freedom and seeking a new life. While he was on the ship, he created his most important piece of work which was a sermon called "A Model Christian Charity". The sermon contains the ideals of having a "harmonious Christian community". It presents the religious ideals of how Puritans should treat one another in order to ensure the survival of the colony. It's either going to be very successful or end up being a huge failure. If everyone doesn't understand that they have to be the selfless community the colony will not thrive.

Winthrop starts the sermon by highlighting three main points. He begins by saying that he is delighted to show the glory of God's wisdom, power, and greatness. Secondly, that the rich and poor need to understand that they are on the same social status. No one is higher than the other. Lastly, that the community needs to be close. Brotherly love should be one of main things that the colony stands for. "All men, being this (by divine providence) rank into two sorts rich and poor, under the first are comprehended all such as are able to live comfortably by their own means duly improved; and all other are four, according to the former distribution". There are only two rules that

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the colony stood by “ justice and mercy”. The poor should show mercy to the rich and the rich should show justice to the poor. They also had other laws to follow like the law of nature, the law of grace, the law of the Gospel. “ Do good to all, especially to the household of faith, do good to them that hate you” As you can see, the colony followed the bible and its teachings very closely and also promoted love for one another even if you are the enemy. It’s a concept of “ what would Jesus do” in this situation.

Winthrop believed that “ A man’s duty to God was to work at his calling and improve his talents like a good faithful servant”. God was the overwhelming reality for many of the colonists. They have to live and breathe his teachings on a daily basis. The idea of “ calling” plays a significant role in one’s life according to Winthrop. God called them to set an example for the rest of the world. If the colonist try to go against the teachings and the rules, God will not hesitate to punish the colony. Winthrop believes that a man’s purpose on earth is to simply serve God, follow his teachings and become selfless. Once one becomes selfless, will they truly understand what it’s like to live for God.

Winthrop ends his sermon by saying “ For this end, we must be knit together in this work as one man, we must entertain each other in brotherly affection, we must be willing to abridge ourselves of our superfluities for the supply of others’ necessities. We must uphold a familiar commerce together in all meekness, gentleness, patience and liberality. We must delight in each other, make others’ conditions our own, rejoice together, mourn together, labor, and suffer together, always having before our eyes our commission and community in the work, our community as members of the same body.

So shall we keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace...We shall be as a city upon a hill." The colony needed to the example of perfection. It was held together by justice, mercy and especially brotherly love. That is why Bradford stressed that you must be selfless to really grasp what the colony was all about.

John Winthrop and James Bradford still remain two important figures in American Literature. They were very progressive and innovative with the little bit of resources they had to begin with. All they had was their strong faith and their followers which is all you need. They did what they could to preach the gospel and create a community where they were free to practice their religion without any restrictions.