

Comparing and contrasting writings of puritans and deist religion essay



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The writings of Puritans like John Winthrop, Michael Wigglesworth, John Dane, and Mary Rowlandson can be easily compared to the autobiography of Deist Benjamin Franklin. The two religious views have obvious differences while still having some relating ideas. These similar ideas found in Benjamin Franklin's autobiography could have come from his Puritan upbringing. He seems to take some key beliefs from the Puritan religion and develops them into more rational ideas he can believe in. Franklin looks to make his beliefs come from more tangible sources other than just faith. While Puritan and Deist beliefs on God's characteristics and the afterlife have several distinct differences, they also contain some similar ideas concerning God's existence and living with high moral standards.

In his autobiography, Franklin doesn't mention any of his religious beliefs affecting his life until he comes across Deism. While the Puritan readings discuss God's involvement in their lives frequently, Franklin does not. He is raised as a strict Calvinist until he was about fifteen and began doubting different books he read including the Bible (Franklin, 5). Instead of discussing God influencing his life, Franklin talks about his father in his autobiography. He describes all of his father's good qualities in much detail. Franklin's description of his father is an example of how he focuses on people's character and morals instead of looking to God for guidance. He seems to admire his father's traits and strives to have those same good qualities when he grows up.

These conflicting views seem to exemplify the differences between Benjamin Franklin's ideologies from the Puritans' beliefs. While the Puritans' values derive from complete faith of God, Franklin uses physical, real life examples

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like his father to build his foundation of faith. Another example of Purists and Deists' conflicting views can be found looking at their beliefs on the afterlife.

After reading excerpts of writings from these authors, it is interesting to see their differing views of the afterlife. While Franklin clearly states it is not necessary to worry about life after death, the Puritan readings all mention fearing God and their beliefs of salvation. As Franklin describes his ideas of pleasure and pain, he states that even if there is an afterlife, we won't remember our earthly existence so there is no importance of worrying about it (Franklin, 7). His ideas of life after death paint a very different picture than those of the Purist views.

Michael Wigglesworth's poem depicts what he believes will happen at the end of the world. In Wigglesworth poem, he describes what judgment day will look like and says " No heart so bold, but now grows cold and almost dead with fear" (Wigglesworth, 3). This description explains how all will fear God on judgment day no matter how brave they once were. Wigglesworth also goes on to explain how all people are predestined to be sent to Hell or given salvation. He mentions how easy it is to believe that you are among the saved when you really are not (Wigglesworth, 4). Both examples show very contrasting views of the afterlife between Puritan and Deist religions.

With these differences, readers can also find similarities within the Purist and Deist writings. One corresponding idea both Ben Franklin and the Puritan authors have is that God exists. While the two religions only partially agree, they still both claim there is a God and they both look toward him for guidance. All four Puritan readings openly express God their all-knowing

maker. They all try to lead lives following his moral laws. In Dane's reading, he and his parents look to the Bible to help him decide whether or not he should move to New England. After the Bible encourages him, his family helps him be able to move to New England as fast as possible. John Dane and his parents believed that God would guide them to the right decision by looking in to the Bible for answers. Soon after, before her son leaves home, John Dane's mother warns him "Go where you will, God he will find you." (Dane, 2). This warning means to tell Dane that no matter where he is, God will still be able to find him and see what he is doing. Dane's mother illustrates the Purists' certainty in God existence and in his guidance.

Ben Franklin, along with other Deists, also maintains that God exist; However, Franklin states that "there is a god, just not a Christian God" (Franklin, 6). He accepts that we were all created by one original maker. In his dissertation, Benjamin Franklin writes that "there is said to be a First Mover, who is called GOD, Maker of the Universe" (Franklin, 6). Franklin not only accepts there is a god, he also looks to him for guidance. During his journey in bettering himself, Franklin looks to God for guidance towards knowledge. He explains: "Conceiving God to be the fountain of wisdom, I thought it right and necessary to solicit his assistance for obtaining it" (Franklin, 14). He makes up a prayer that he says every day asking for wisdom from God. These examples show evidence of Benjamin Franklin's Purist upbringing and the adaptations he made towards his Deist beliefs. While he agrees with Dane and other Puritans that God does exist, he modifies certain ideas to make them more concrete and suitable for his religious conviction.

Another example of likeness between the Puritans and Deists' views is their beliefs on how one should behave. In terms of human nature, both readings state that it is important to live with high moral standards. From a Deist perspective, Benjamin Franklin composes a list of thirteen virtues to help him live as morally perfect as possible. He talks about reaching moral perfection and states: " I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time" (Franklin, 12). As Franklin continues in his autobiography, his reasoning for living towards moral perfection seems to come from a personal goal instead of a religious goal. He argues that since he is aware of the difference between right and wrong, he sees no reason why he shouldn't try to always choose to do the right thing (Franklin, 12). Like Franklin, the Puritans also believe in living morally correct; however, unlike Franklin, their reasoning stems from their religion.

John Winthrop, along with the other Puritan authors, also talks about living with high moral laws. Winthrop describes that the best liberty to live by is the civil liberty. This liberty is the only liberty " which is good, just, and honest" (Winthrop, 1). These proclamations appear to come from Winthrop's beliefs that civil liberty is God's moral laws. John Dane also touches on living morally correct. Dane speaks of how growing up with godly parents made his conscience able to identify evils that he should avoid (Dane, 1). His parents' religious rules taught Dane how to live his life through God's rules. While both the Deist and Purist authors have different reasons for living with high moral standards, they still both agree having high moral standards is important.

When comparing the readings from Puritans like Winthrop, Wigglesworth, Dane, and Rowlandson to Franklin's autobiography it is easy to see the many differences between Puritans and Deists' ideology on God and human nature. Differentiations between these Puritan and Deist authors' ideas like God's characteristics and ideas on the afterlife are exemplified throughout the readings. With these differences, similarities on Purist and Deist's beliefs of God and human nature can also be found. After looking at these discrepancies and resemblances, it is evident that Benjamin Franklin took his Puritan upbringing and molded those ideas into a more realistic and rational religion he could believe in.