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Grace in American Puritanism

—— Its Self-Assurance and Insecurity ——

Izumi Ogura

Ever since Perry Miller published two volumes of *The New England Mind*, American Puritanism has been explored by such scholars as Edmund Morgan and Sacvan Bercovitch. Scholarship in the 1980's centered upon the motivation of the Great Migration of 1630. The problem in question is whether the first generation of Puritans had a "religious" motivation or not. Scholars since Miller, whether they passively accepted or challenged the thesis, have taken it for granted that America was sent on an "errand into the wilderness," which culminated in John Winthrop's "a city upon the hill."

What characterizes the Puritan scholarship in the 1980's is that the focus is placed on the Puritans' inner mind rather than their external mission. Andrew Delbanco introduces defectors who returned to England with disappointment in the New World.

With this critical trend in mind, this paper starts with the errand thesis, explaining the conscious intention of migration which the first generation of Puritans, such as Thomas Tillam, Thomas Hooker, and Winthrop, might have had. One of the characteristics of Puritanism is how this intention is combined with the covenant of grace. It is the central concept of "the middle way" Congregationalism in America and the leaders of the first generation explicate the theory in sermons from various points of view. John Cotton describes a man in God's grace in "Wading in Grace" and Thomas Hooker shows the process of assuring a sense of grace in "The Application of Redemption." Hooker refers to "a fit ground" (humiliation) and "a fat ground" (faith) as the requisites for the assurance of God's grace.

Yet the Calvinistic aspect of Puritanism does not guarantee the security and assurance of grace to Puritans. Puritans, though they seem to be

strongly mission-oriented, had to assure and ask themselves whether they *really* have grace. Thomas Shepard, the most popular preacher, was always aware of this uncertainty.

Based on Delbanco's interpretation of diffident and defensive Puritans, this paper then focuses on their inner mind after conversion and explores "a profound insecurity about their place": the "infinite unknown sweetness" of God brings men back to self-examination.

Finally, this paper shows that, in addition to this inwardness, Puritanism is sustained by a precarious balance between piety and morality. If Puritans pursue morality as a means of achieving grace, it becomes Arminianism, because grace is not a reward given by God for human efforts. On the other hand, if they rely on piety with no human efforts, it is Antinomianism. That is, to be extreme on one side is heresy in Puritanism. Being in such a precarious balance, Puritans could never remain in one place. Puritans are often called "kill joy" Puritans. Perhaps what made them so uncertain about their place in their mind is the reason why they were as they were.