

A Fascinating Look into Disciplinary Religion and the Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638

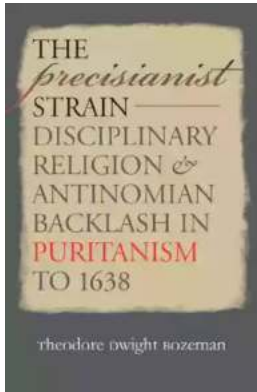
Throughout history, religious movements have shaped societies and individuals, serving as the foundation for moral codes and systems of belief. One such movement that had a profound impact on early American colonists and continues to capture the imagination of historians is Puritanism. In this article, we will explore the concept of disciplinary religion within Puritanism and the subsequent antinomian backlash that emerged in the 17th century.

What is Disciplinary Religion?

Disciplinary religion refers to the strict adherence to religious principles and practices, often enforced through a system of rules and regulations. Puritanism, a religious movement that originated in England during the late 16th century, encouraged its followers to live a life of strict moral purity and devotion to God. Puritans believed that society should be governed by God's laws, and they sought to create a community of believers who upheld these principles at all costs.

The Puritan lifestyle was marked by rigorous self-discipline, with emphasis placed on personal salvation and moral steadfastness. Attendance at church services, regular prayer, Bible reading, and personal introspection were considered essential components of the Puritan faith. Noncompliance with these religious requirements often resulted in public shaming or social exclusion.

The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638



(Published by the Omohundro Institute of Early American History ... and the University of North Carolina Press) by Theodore Dwight Bozeman (Kindle Edition)

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The Role of Antinomianism in Puritanism

As the Puritan movement gained popularity, it also faced opposition and internal conflicts. One such conflict was the rise of antinomianism, a doctrine that challenged the role of traditional morality in the quest for salvation. Antinomians believed that adherence to religious laws and regulations was unnecessary for salvation, arguing that true faith alone was sufficient for redemption.

Antinomianism spread within Puritan communities, causing a considerable division amongst its adherents. Individuals such as Anne Hutchinson, a prominent figure of the time, began preaching and teaching antinomian doctrines, leading to widespread controversy. Hutchinson and her followers questioned the authority of the Puritan church and its ministers, causing concern among the religious establishment.

The Antinomian Backlash

The emergence of antinomianism and its challenges to Puritan orthodoxy sparked a significant backlash from Puritan leaders and religious authorities.

They saw the antinomian doctrine as a threat to the social order and the spiritual well-being of their communities. As a result, efforts were made to suppress the antinomian movement and reaffirm the principles of disciplinary religion.

One of the notable events during this period was the trial of Anne Hutchinson in 1637. Hutchinson was brought before the Puritan church leaders, accused of spreading false teachings and challenging their authority. She defended her beliefs fiercely but was ultimately found guilty and banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony.

The antinomian backlash also led to a formal condemnation of antinomianism by the General Court of Massachusetts. In 1638, the court declared that antinomians were unfit to hold public offices and that they posed a threat to the stability of the colony. This decision solidified the opposition to antinomianism within the Puritan community and further emphasized the importance of disciplinary religion.

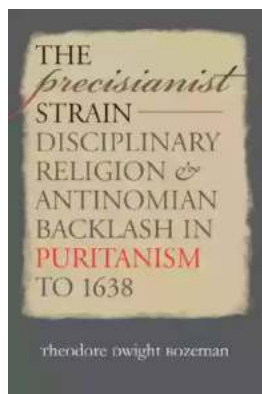
The Legacy of Puritanism and the Antinomian Backlash

While the antinomian backlash suppressed the immediate threat to Puritan authority, it did not eliminate the underlying tensions within the movement. The controversy surrounding antinomianism highlighted the challenges of maintaining strict religious orthodoxy in a rapidly changing society.

However, the legacy of Puritanism and the antinomian backlash left a lasting impact on American history. The ideals of discipline, morality, and the pursuit of religious purity deeply influenced subsequent generations, shaping the development of early American society and its legal framework.

Moreover, the antinomian backlash served as a precursor to further challenges to religious orthodoxy in American history, as dissenting voices and alternative religious beliefs continue to shape the country's religious landscape.

The disciplinary nature of Puritanism and the antinomian backlash it faced provide a fascinating glimpse into the religious dynamics of early American colonists. The tension between religious orthodoxy and individual interpretations of faith has continued to shape American religious traditions and attitudes towards authority. Exploring this historical period allows us to reflect on the ever-evolving nature of religious beliefs and the enduring impact they have on society.



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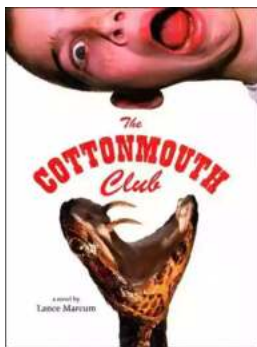
In an examination of transatlantic Puritanism from 1570 to 1638, Theodore Dwight Bozeman analyzes the quest for purity through sanctification. The word "Puritan," he says, accurately depicts a major and often obsessive trait of the English late Reformation: a hunger for discipline. The Precisianist Strain clarifies what Puritanism in its disciplinary mode meant for an early modern society struggling with problems of change, order, and identity.

Focusing on ascetic teachings and rites, which in their severity fostered the "precisianist strain" prevalent in Puritan thought and devotional practice, Bozeman traces the reactions of believers put under ever more meticulous demands. Sectarian theologies of ease and consolation soon formed in reaction to those demands, Bozeman argues, eventually giving rise to a "first wave" of antinomian revolt, including the American conflicts of 1636-1638. Antinomianism, based on the premise of salvation without strictness and duty, was not so much a radicalization of Puritan content as a backlash against the whole project of disciplinary religion. Its reconceptualization of self and responsibility would affect Anglo-American theology for decades to come.



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