

The Puritan Model of Success

Michael Mickler
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Reverend Sun Myung Moon was a great admirer of the Puritan movement, especially the pilgrims who migrated to Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620.

In “God’s Hope for America” he stated, “The story of the Pilgrims is a classic in God’s history. It fits into the pattern of the righteous people of history.”

What is that pattern?

Rev. Moon highlighted three elements. First, he said, the

pilgrims “longed for ... [a] new world ... [a] new heaven and new earth where they could find freedom to worship God.” Second, they gave up “their families, their relatives, their surroundings, and their country.” Third, they exemplified “total reliance on God.” As Rev. Moon put it, “Their only hope was in God. Every step they took they depended upon God ... When they were sick and dying ... they turned to God ... their life from morning to night, from dusk to dawn, was centered upon the will of God. God was their only comfort, their only hope and their only security.”



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These attributes comprised the “internal” aspect of the Puritan pattern or, in Unification terms, their “foundation of faith.”

Rev. Moon also spoke about the “external” aspect of the Puritan pattern. He stated, “the first thing they built was a church ... I am sure that after their church they built a school. They wanted outstanding schools for their children, better than any schools existing in the Old World. And their homes came last.”

Mrs. Moon made the same point in a recent address. Referring to the “Pilgrim fathers,” she said, “Before they built homes for themselves, first they built a church; then, for the sake of the future generations, they built a school, and then finally they built their own homes. That’s the ... course that humankind should follow.”

Church, school and family (represented by homes) comprised the “external” aspect of the Puritan pattern, their “foundation of substance.”

Taken together, the internal (attitudinal) and external (institutional) patterns constituted the Puritan model of success.

How does this relate to Unificationism?

Most Unificationists, following Rev. and Mrs. Moon, resonate with the heroic aspect of Puritan faith. Longing for a new heaven and new earth, forsaking family and/or nation, and total reliance upon God in a howling wilderness may not characterize contemporary Unification experience. However, “heroic faith” figured prominently in the lives of first-generation Unificationists. It remains an indelible part of the movement’s heritage and a living reality for those of any generation who continue the pioneering course.

The problem comes with the more pedestrian labor of institution-building.

Many Unificationists are deeply ambivalent about institutionalization. Some declare that they did not join the movement to start a church. Others question the need to support distinctively Unification institutions of higher education. There is unanimity as to the centrality of families but distress about marital and intergenerational conflict.

In order to relate contemporary Unificationism to the Puritan model of success, it is important to distinguish between the small party of pilgrims who landed at Plymouth in 1620 and the much larger “second wave” who founded Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1629. Some 20,000 emigrated over the course

of the following decade.

It was the “second wave” who assumed leadership in Puritan “New England.” Unlike the “pilgrim fathers” who were “separatists,” wanting only to separate from the irredeemably corrupt Church of England, the Massachusetts Bay Colony Puritans were “independents.” They understood themselves to be on “an errand into the wilderness” with the mission to set up a “holy commonwealth” that would serve as a model for the reformation in England and the rest of Europe.

Massachusetts Bay Colony fell far short of that vision. In many respects, their “city on a hill” was deeply flawed. They notably failed to harmonize with the surrounding native peoples. Rev. Moon stated, “As the population of the settlement grew, they ultimately pushed tribal groups away to enlarge their own colony.” Mrs. Moon simply commented, “As human beings they made a lot of mistakes.”

In fact, the Puritan “experiment” was in a state of collapse by the 1690s.

The experiment ended but the Puritan sense of mission and the institutions they created continued, eventually becoming the foundation of a new “redeemer” nation.

On coming to America, Rev. Moon stated his intention of launching a “New Pilgrim Movement” as the basis for “one world under God.” This article assesses contemporary Unificationism in terms of its alignment with the Puritan model of success, notably the core Massachusetts Bay Colony institutions of church, school and family.

Church

The Unification movement has an impoverished understanding of the church. In fact, it is questionable whether Unificationism possesses a doctrine of the church at all. This is far removed from the Puritans who were at odds with the Church of England not over theology, about which they largely agreed, but over conflicting conceptions of the “True Church.” The Puritans wanted to “purify” Anglicanism of “Romanist” vestiges and institute congregational governance. Since they understood each church to be under the direct lordship of Christ, they gave minute attention to congregational covenants some of which became models for secular governments.

Church governance has been mostly an afterthought for Unificationism. Instead, the movement has been inclined to operate within existing patterns of Christian worship. If anything, Unificationists view the Church within the context of “the withering away of religion.” Religious institutions have no ontological significance. There is no “True Church” in the mind of God. In addition, Unificationist church governance is centralized and hierarchical, under the authority of central figures and their designated representatives. Congregationalist patterns that the Puritans championed have yet to exert much of a countervailing influence.



“Pilgrims Going to Church,” painting by George Henry Boughton, circa 1867.

School

Puritan Massachusetts was renowned not only for its faith but for its learning. Some 130 Cambridge-educated divines emigrated during the course of its settlement, making it one of the densest concentrations of intellectual energy in history. Its founders established Harvard College in 1636 to “advance learning and perpetuate it to posterity, dreading to leave an illiterate ministry to the Churches

when our present ministers shall lie in the dust.” Historians of Puritanism remind us that they never dreamed the truths of scripture were to be maintained against the evidence of reason, science and learning. They rejected the chaotic emotionalism of religious “enthusiasts” and struggled to maintain the harmony of reason and faith, science and religion, the union of head and heart.

Unificationism resonates with Puritanism as an intellectual as well as a religious movement. The movement’s teachings appealed to college-educated youth from its beginnings and Unificationism extended its reach to a broad sector of academics over time. The movement also has developed an impressive number of schools, including institutions of higher education in its founding generation. Unificationism, like Puritanism, seeks to balance science and religion. The question is whether the movement’s theological and intellectual emphases will attain permanent institutional expression. Unification Theological Seminary failed in its initial effort to launch a college. Large-scale Unification-related institutions such as the University of Bridgeport and Sun Moon University combine some Unification emphases with secular models of higher education.

Family

The Puritan migration to the New World differed from that of the Spanish and French who preceded them and whose vast landholdings far exceeded England’s narrow strip along the Atlantic. The main difference was that the Puritan migration was an exodus of families rather than male adventurers and celibate religious. Nearly half the Puritan immigrants were women. As a consequence of this more “normal” population pattern, the Puritans established deeper roots and England eventually prevailed in the battle for the continent. Despite being caricatured as austere, dour, and loveless types, the Puritans exceeded their contemporaries in their emphasis on conjugal affection. Anthony Guerra (UTS ‘78) notes in *Family Matters* (2002) that the Puritan philosophy of marriage called for “spontaneous enjoyment, sexual pleasure and mutual delight.”

One of the anomalies of the Unification movement is its emphasis on the family and family values while at the same time calling for extended mobilizations of one or another spouse resulting in frequent family separations. On occasion, the movement has viewed family and mission as being in competition with one another. This is at odds with the Puritan experience. More recently, the movement has emphasized the priority of strengthening Unification families and being “strong first” in educating the next generation. A large number of Unification first generation couples were paired interracially, interculturally or internationally, and emotional intimacy took a back seat to public responsibility. This is changing and the movement’s next generation is inclining more toward the Puritan pattern of conjugal affection.

Historical analogies are difficult to sustain. Contemporary Unificationism is, perhaps, more comparable to the Puritans who stayed behind in England, seeking to transform the church and society. Unificationists are similarly working to construct *Cheon Il Guk* (the nation of cosmic peace and harmony) within the context of modern society. Those Puritans attained sovereignty and united the British Isles under Oliver Cromwell but, unfortunately, did so violently and their victory was short-lived. Unificationists have much to learn from the Puritan model of success as well as from their failures in seeking to realize Rev. Moon’s vision of “one world under God.”

Dr. Michael Mickler is Professor of Church History as well as Vice President for Administration at Unification Theological Seminary. His books include: Footprints of True Parents’ Providence: The United States of America (2013) and 40 Years in America: An Intimate History of the Unification Movement, 1959-1999 (2000).

Painting at top: *Detail from “The Mayflower on Her Arrival in Plymouth Harbor” (1882) by William Formsby Halsall. The Mayflower is shown at dawn after her landing in Plymouth Harbor and is portrayed as a symbol of the beginning of a new era. Courtesy Pilgrim Hall Museum.*