

A GREAT APPEARANCE OF FORCE:  
PURITAN FAMILY GOVERNMENT IN COLONIAL CONNECTICUT, 1672-1725

By

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research is to take up Edmund Morgan's thesis in *The Puritan Family* that the family incorporated "economic as well as political and ecclesiastical functions" and discover how the Puritan family interacted with social and political structures, in this case religion, belief, and the community, in colonial Connecticut. In order to explore such dynamics, several cases of incest will be explored. Colonial Connecticut's history of incest prosecution provides a window into the workings of family government and its function in preparing individuals to integrate fully into Puritan society. Even as the American Puritan justice system based on *sola scriptura* began to give way at the close of the seventeenth century as a result of pressure from England to conform to English common law and judicial practice, the influence of Puritan familial ideology continued to be felt well into the eighteenth century, despite seventeenth-century ministerial assertions that the New England family was in decline. With an eye on maintaining social order, the descendants of Connecticut's founders continued to insist that the family constituted a vital force in socializing individuals into society, even as Puritanism was losing its exclusive hold over New England's institutions.

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## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

American Puritan studies have more often than not exhibited a tendency to focus on religious intellectualism, witchcraft trials, or even social history that describes day-to-day life in the household or town. And yet, Puritanism in the New England colonies linked religion inextricably with the political, social, and economic aspects of their lives. When scholars separate one from the other, they are doing something Puritans would not have done nor understood. Just as Puritans connected church membership to political franchise, religion was their political and social theory. Even in Connecticut Colony where some toleration of other religious groups occurred, the “blurring of Puritan ideas of religion and politics” operated at all levels of society.<sup>1</sup> In Puritanism’s view of a godly society, the distribution of land, membership in the church, and the election of town offices all hinged on an individual’s status as a converted Christian qualifying for full membership in the church.

Like other European Protestants of that era, to the sixteenth and seventeenth-century Puritans, the family was the basic, and most important, unit of society. It was the venue through which values and morality were transmitted to the next generation and the means for creating and nurturing a godly community, thus ensuring lasting social stability. Puritans made explicit connections between family government and a well-ordered society. Indeed, Puritans in England reacted to what they perceived as a

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<sup>1</sup> Joshua Miller, “Direct Democracy and the Puritan Theory of Membership,” *The Journal of Politics* 53, no. 1 (Feb., 1991): 58.

deteriorating morality and declining commitment to divine order in which church, family, and civil authority intersected and regulated human relationships with others and with God. In light of their views on the importance of educating their children that they might have access to scripture, experience conversion, and receive salvation through grace, Puritan parents in England worried that they were raising their children in a corrupt world, a particularly grave concern when considered from the Puritan view of depravity in which humans not only inherited Adam's sin, but came into the world sinful. Those who set out on an "errand" to establish a "city upon a hill" in the American wilderness did so with the express intent to create a colony in which family government would be fully integrated with Puritan social and political concerns. In the Puritan ideal of a divinely-ordered society, the family was the place where each individual learned how to function properly. When the family operated as it should, outside intervention from the church and the government were unnecessary. When it failed in its divine mission, society as a whole suffered and church and government were compelled to act.

In 1672, the widower Thomas Rood became the only individual in colonial Connecticut to be hanged for the crime of incest after town authorities discovered his twenty-two-year-old unmarried daughter was pregnant. Given the stereotypes that exist in popular perceptions surrounding Puritan religiosity and sexual repression, it might be easy to assume that his case was unique because incest, along with other illegal sexual acts, appears rare among the Puritans. But as any good historian knows, laws more often than not exist precisely because the members of a society feel compelled to prohibit acts they perceive as already occurring, acts that fall outside what society wishes to establish as norms for behavior. Any doubts that this "rule of thumb" applies to American Puritans

can be quashed rather quickly with a look at colonial records to see the numerous cases of sexual crime that Puritan authorities prosecuted in the courts.

Colonial Connecticut's history of prosecution of incest provides a window into the workings of family government and its function in preparing individuals to integrate fully into Puritan society. Even as the American Puritan justice system based on the religious principle of *sola scriptura*<sup>2</sup> began to give way at the close of the seventeenth century as a result of pressure from England to conform to English common law and judicial practice, the influence of Puritan familial ideology continued to be felt well into the eighteenth century, despite seventeenth-century ministerial assertions that the New England family was in decline. With an eye on maintaining social order, the descendants of Connecticut's founders continued to insist that the family constituted a vital force in socializing individuals into society, even as Puritanism was losing its exclusive hold over New England's institutions.

Even as Connecticut's justice system based on *sola scriptura* began to give way at the close of the seventeenth century as a result of pressure from England's restored monarchy to conform to English common law and judicial practice, the influence of Puritan familial ideology continued to be felt well into the eighteenth century. During these incest trials, those involved expressed the notion that pious, moral parents ensured pious, moral children. An analysis of such prosecutions begins to provide a barometer for how keenly Puritans outside of the elite classes perceived the decline in family

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<sup>2</sup> According to James D. Tracy, "the Protestant insistence on the sole authority of scripture." Martin Luther rejected the Roman Church's authority to interpret scripture on behalf of Christians and argued that only scripture, not ecumenical councils or church fathers, contained "saving truth." James D. Tracy, *Europe's Reformations 1450-1650: Doctrine, Politics, and Community* (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 13-14.

government and its effects on society of which ministers spoke. More research into sixteenth and seventeenth-century familial ideology using other types of documentary evidence and exploring other locales is necessary to fully understand the influence of such ideas. However, despite the lighter sentences that later cases received, those accused of incest always received a verdict of guilty from the court. Given that the demands of justice were more likely to be mitigated in the more common crimes of adultery and fornication, examining these cases helps explain why the official position of civil and ecclesiastical authorities treated incest so differently from other sexual crimes.

In looking at cases like these, several features emerge as avenues for exploring the dynamics of Puritan familial ideology and its connection to broader legal, political, and religious institutions. Thomas Rood was clearly not the only Puritan man in Connecticut to commit incest. Indeed, thirty years later his son George married a woman named Hannah Bush who was pregnant with her step-father Thomas Hall's child. Despite Hall's denials and his accusation that Hannah's mother Susannah confessed under the influence of witchcraft, the Court of Assistants found Hall guilty of incest and Susannah guilty of being an accessory to the crime. In contrast to Thomas Rood, neither was hanged. Instead, the court sentenced them to stand for an hour on the gallows with nooses round their necks and to wear a letter "I" sewn on their clothing for the rest of their lives. In another case involving a father and daughter in 1725, the father also received a sentence that included a whipping and the wearing of the "I" as punishment, but his daughter Sarah Perkins successfully pled for a commutation of her sentence. The question then is why Hall and John Perkins received what seems a rather lenient sentencing in light of the precedent set in Rood's case, for not only did Hall and Perkins rape their daughters, but

they also committed adultery and then denied it. When placed within the context of its time and place, Rood's trial and execution provide a starting point for an analysis of the political and social dynamics at work in colonial Connecticut from the late seventeenth to the early eighteenth century.

In my early investigations, I approached these trials as a means of understanding Puritan concepts of sin and the meaning of confession to individuals who faced the possibility of receiving a sentence of death. And yet, the more I examined the records, the clearer it became that an ideological focus on the role of the family in ensuring a pious society underpinned Connecticut's application of justice to these tragic events. Authorities, victims, and perpetrators alike appear to have shared similar views. Indeed, even when fathers denied their daughters' accusations, at no time in court did they dispute Puritanism's assertions regarding the proper exercise of parental authority or the colony's right to delve into and punish such dysfunction in the interests of preserving order. Even as Puritan theocracy gave way under pressure from internal and external forces, these particular functions of family and society were a common thread that continued to influence how the colony prosecuted such crimes.

These three trials can by no means provide the final answer on such matters. The number of trials is far too limited in number and scope to be comprehensive. However, they do provide a window into a society undergoing rapid change during the waning years of American Puritanism and illustrate the need to continue exploring the dynamics of the New England family and its function in society. Whatever subsequent generations of Puritan and Congregationalist ministers and intellectuals might have felt about the failure of colonists to bring to pass the Puritan founders' vision of a godly society, the

views expressed in these trials suggest that Puritan notions of the ideal family and its impact on the greater good persisted well into the eighteenth century. Indeed, I cannot help but be struck by the similarities between Puritan familial ideology and more recent debates centered round “family values.” I would suggest that further exploration of such matters by historians might even contribute to a better understanding of the development of modern American political and religious ideologies that periodically take up the message of family values, particularly those of conservative and evangelical Christians who argue for explicit connections between family and social order.

Nevertheless, despite the centrality of the family in American Puritan ideology, not to mention colonial New England’s social, religious, and political institutions, Americanist scholars have only begun to uncover the meanings of its role in colonial life. Although Puritan family life is not a recent topic of interest for scholars of American Puritanism, I faced great difficulty in finding scholarly works that explored the relationship between family and society and how Puritans and their descendants implemented familial ideology at the local level. The publication of Edmund S. Morgan’s *The Puritan Family* in 1944 signified a turning point in American Puritan studies in terms of his integration of the Puritan family into society and its institutions, and yet few historians have taken up his innovative approach as often as one might expect. While some historians have been concerned with describing how the family operated on a daily basis, fewer still have explored the ways in which Puritan ideology looked to the family to save the world from its descent into sin and degradation so that England and its church could be reformed and the kingdom of God on earth could be established. These were weighty matters for New England’s founders and ensuring godly

families motivated the way they structured this new society in the wilderness.

Intellectual history aside, an inquiry into the precise meaning and role of familial ideology in local affairs remains wide open in the ongoing discussion of the roots of American Puritanism and its contributions to later developments in U.S. history.

As a case in point, the Rood family's encounters with the colonial legal system have been well-documented by genealogists utilizing Connecticut's well-indexed holdings at the state archives, as well as by folklorists interested in several colorful, sometimes supernatural, stories in which the Roods have been featured. And yet, thus far their tragic story has attracted little attention from historians. One exception is Cornelia Hughes Dayton's *Women before the Bar* published in 1995. Dayton argued that women's participation in the legal system experienced critical change in the latter seventeenth century due to a "realignment of court and community" that shifted the focus of the courts from advocacy for a Puritan God-centered utopia to an emphasis on "English formalism."<sup>3</sup> Although Dayton mistakenly asserts that no familial relationship exists between the two generations of Roods prosecuted for incest, she uses their cases along with later incest trials in her chapter on rape to illustrate a few of the changes that the legal system underwent in the colonial period. Most notably, the later willingness of the courts to acknowledge coercion as a mitigating circumstance led to changes in the law that allowed for lighter sentencing of female victims.<sup>4</sup>

Although *Women before the Bar* provides an important contextualization of women's access to Connecticut's legal system that is vital to my analysis, at its core,

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<sup>3</sup> Cornelia Hughes Dayton, *Women before the Bar: Gender, Law & Society in Connecticut 1639-1789* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 8.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 274-282.



Dayton's book is a legal history of colonial Connecticut with gender as an interpretive framework. Missing from Dayton's work is a thorough analysis of the role played by familial ideology in the social and political dynamics of the Puritan belief system. Nor is she concerned with how uniformly change occurred throughout society. *Women before the Bar* reveals important trends in seventeenth and eighteenth century women's access to Connecticut's legal system, but I would argue that institutional change does not necessarily equate with societal change. Indeed, while Dayton's work constitutes a starting point for understanding the role of belief in how these trials played, it is also important to understand in some small way how Puritanism's weakening hold on society and its structures affected the lives of individuals in southeastern Connecticut in profound ways. These trials can also tell us how those who appeared before the bar perceived the legal system's role, whether that meant preserving and protecting the Puritan ideal of a godly society peopled by pious individuals as members of pious families, or whether the courts existed solely to maintain law and order. They can also provide a clue to the extent to which individuals like Thomas and Sarah Rood saw it as their duty to confess in order to reaffirm their beliefs and, by extension, to restore the cohesiveness of their community, even if that meant physical suffering or death. And finally, trial proceedings are suggestive of what may have motivated magistrates as they dispensed justice, as well as how they perceived sin and its consequences to the community and to the individual soul.

Certainly, it is noteworthy that, oftentimes, the courts willingly reduced charges made for capital offenses of a sexual nature, so that defendants would not be subject to

death penalties.<sup>5</sup> A perusal of Connecticut's indices to its colonial records reveals that the charge of lewd and lascivious conduct became a catch-all for accusations of rape, adultery, sodomy, and other sexual acts defined as criminal under Puritan law, allowing reluctant courts to avoid applying the prescribed death penalty more frequently than it did. Although Thomas Rood's case was the only instance in which the colonial government executed someone for incest, this particular crime did not receive the same level of leniency in sentencing as other categories of sexual crime. Thus, as an anomaly, even the infrequent prosecution of incest begs the question of why it deserved special treatment. Doing so with the intent to ascertain society's perception of incest's impact on the vigor of family government offers clues into popular attitudes about the function of the family in a broader context.

Early academic inquiries into the nature of Puritan family life hinted at its importance to larger Puritan society. Alice Morse Earle's descriptions of domestic life in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries deviated from the more usual studies preoccupied with Puritan intellectualism. Her work also foreshadowed social historians who began in the mid-twentieth century to take on the task of understanding the relevance of women's and children's lives to Puritan family order.<sup>6</sup> George Francis Dow, Arthur W. Calhoun, and Sanford Fleming followed in the early twentieth century with intensive research in these areas, delving into sources favored by later social historians like journals, wills, and

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 335.

<sup>6</sup> Earle's *Colonial Dames and Goodwives* (Boston, 1895), *Child Life in Colonial Days* (New York, 1899) and *Home Life in Colonial Days* (London, 1989) were an early indication of the value of cross-comparative studies in the way that she explored not only New England, but also the Mid-Atlantic and Southern colonies. Her work reflects her interest in the socio-cultural aspects of American colonial life and is significant for her departure from the history of the "great man," so to speak.

court documents and using a framework that began viewing family life in connection with Puritan faith and practice.<sup>7</sup> These sources demonstrate the contribution that local studies can make to a deeper understanding of New England's colonial past. Nevertheless, these endeavors often lacked the deeper analysis that came later with Morgan.

*The Puritan Family* changed the way historians approach this particular area of Puritan life, and its influence endures today. First published in 1944, Morgan compiled an intimate look at colonial family structures, demonstrating the family's role in society and in regulating human relationships both within the family and without. In his last essay, "Puritan Tribalism," he linked Puritanism's relatively quick demise as a distinct religious community to their Calvinist roots. Their certainty that God predestined individuals for salvation and that his chosen "elect" could not resist his saving grace contributed to the failure of fathers and mothers to look beyond the conversion of their own family members and spread Puritanism's message outside the immediate community.<sup>8</sup> According to Morgan, the family had an integral role in promoting social change.

An analysis of colonial Connecticut's incest prosecutions benefits from Morgan's work because of the ways that Morgan made connections between the American Puritan family and other colonial social structures, particularly in his discussion of Puritanism's theological influences. His analysis of the covenant of grace reveals the communal

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<sup>7</sup> See Arthur Calhoun, *A Social History of the American Family from Colonial Times to the Present*, 3 vols. (Cleveland, OH, 1917); Dow, *Domestic Life in New England in the Seventeenth Century* (Topsfield, MA, 1925); and Fleming, *Children and Puritanism: The Place of Children in the Life and Thought of the New England Churches, 1620-1847* (New Haven, CT, 1933).

<sup>8</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion and Domestic Relations in Seventeenth-Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 185.

aspect of Puritans' faith, such that their drive to experience conversion included a drive to reform society into one more befitting divine order. In what historian Harry S. Stout later so eloquently described as "corporate covenant keeping,"<sup>9</sup> spiritual conversion and the rigors of church membership demanded an outward appearance of election, and in turn, was accompanied by a duty to ensure that not only did the individual convert conform to Puritan ideals of Christian behavior, but their family members, their neighbors, and, for that matter, everyone in their community did so as well. In their minds, the kingdom of God on earth depended on it.

Nevertheless, Morgan realized that, for Puritans, salvation was an individual affair. Thus, this corporate covenant was a temporal one that had little or no bearing on individual salvation. Indeed, covenant theology addressed an apparent contradiction in Puritan thought in that if only the elect could be brought into church membership, how could Puritanism exert its influence over the unconverted and bring them under the authority of the church? In New England, this was particularly problematic. Puritan colonists sought to establish an exemplary community built on specific religious principles that would spread to England, purge the Church of England of what Puritans viewed as its remaining papist tendencies, and usher in the era of God's kingdom on earth. Even so, almost from the beginning, American Puritans worried over the problem of hypocrites who could assume the façade of the converted Christian, the "civil man" who did good deeds because of social constraints rather than the Holy Spirit's influence,

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<sup>9</sup> Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 281.

as well as the presence of non-Puritans who came to New England for reasons other than religious reform.<sup>10</sup>

While it deviated from European Calvinism,<sup>11</sup> the corporate covenant bound each individual to the group and encompassed the family, the church, and the state as varying expressions of the group. Simply put, covenant theology promised that God's favor on the colony would continue so long as each Puritan obeyed God's commands. Therefore, an individual's disobedience to civil and religious laws constituted a threat to the well-being of the group. Therefore, the group had a vested interest in regulating individual behavior and conformity to godly ideals.<sup>12</sup> Puritan views on social order went so far as to lay out the order of human relationships at all levels so that everyone had a place and a purpose to fulfill that would ensure Christian order and individual conversion.

Particularly useful is Morgan's approach to theological issues and his construction of a framework around which he analyzed and interpreted the function of marriage and the family in the Puritans' vision of divinely-ordained social order. He contended that the family was the means by which, beginning at birth, individuals were introduced and socialized into the proper order of things, until as adults, they could then fulfill their appointed roles in society.<sup>13</sup> While the social rank and status of a potential spouse were most often the determining factors dictating the approval of a spouse for their child,

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<sup>10</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 4.

<sup>11</sup> Perry Miller noted that not only was covenant theology absent from John Calvin's theology, but by making it the "foundations for the whole history and structure of Christian theology," Puritans "must have caused John Calvin to turn in his grave." Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1956), 60.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-9.

<sup>13</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 17-18.

Puritans' ideals concerning the nature of familial relationships included love, albeit a love tempered by the notion that love for God must necessarily supersede all other forms of affection.<sup>14</sup> Morgan pointed out that Puritans were no Victorians, but human affection could not be allowed to become so passionate and consuming that love of God no longer acted as a check on behavior or functioned as a basis for social cohesion.<sup>15</sup>

Morgan's analysis also revealed scholarly disagreement over the nature of parental authority. Arguably his most important hypothesis in *The Puritan Family* proposed that Puritan parents were affectionate and loving rather than rigidly authoritative,<sup>16</sup> an idea popularized in the American mind by such literature as Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. As strict as Puritan life in New England could be, Morgan suggested that a tension existed between Puritans' views of God as loving and their own sense of themselves as depraved sinners, so that Puritan stringency was attenuated by deeply-felt love and affection between family members.

*The Puritan Family* also reflected questions historians have asked concerning Puritan notions of declension, or spiritual and religious decline, and how pervasive it was. For Morgan, Puritanism's tendency toward tribalism was its own undoing.<sup>17</sup> It soon collapsed under the weight of external economic pressures and increasing immigration of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 47-49, 55.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid., 52-64.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 168-174. Morgan argued that Puritans came to see God as "not merely a husband or father but the husband or father only of families that belonged to orthodox New England churches." The presence of so many unregenerate so soon in the history of New England led to the development of a "defensive, tribal" theology that admonished Puritans to avoid evildoers and their snares. If they had wished to free the unregenerate from their sins, Morgan argued they would have focused on conversion. Instead, laws were designed to demonstrate to God their commitment to their ideals.

non-Puritans. And yet, like Dayton, Morgan's analysis did not fully address the problem of understanding whether variation characterized the level of change that occurred and how it was experienced in different segments of Puritan society. Certainly, the churches underwent significant structural changes with the Halfway Covenant and the Cambridge and Saybrook platforms.<sup>18</sup> To explain how this occurred, Perry Miller described Puritan colonization as a process whereby they went beyond the reforms of Presbyterian Scotland and John Calvin's Geneva and adopted a "more rigorous program" called Congregationalism. American Puritans would "conform their world" to their Protestant theology. In doing so, however, they did something decidedly un-Calvinistic and insisted that the converted, or regenerate, person's election could be differentiated from the corrupt state of the unregenerate sinner's soul. This assumption on the part of Puritans underpinned the formation of their social, political, and ecclesiastical structures. For example, Congregationalism also assumed that a church of regenerates did not need the "supervision of bishops" and gave its congregations autonomy.<sup>19</sup>

However, by the second and third generations, Puritans faced a problem when increasing numbers of their children failed to experience regeneration and no longer qualified as church members. The Halfway Covenant allowed these children to become

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<sup>18</sup> Both the Cambridge and Saybrook platforms addressed the nature of ecclesiastical authority and the independence of the churches. According to B.R. Burg, in response to an increasing exertion of civil authority in church matters, the Cambridge Platform of 1648 made civil authority the servant of the church, declared that a confession of faith was required for membership, and affirmed the independence of congregations. In contrast, the Saybrook Platform of 1708 dealt with the problem of rogue churches by establishing consociations and ministerial associations with authority over the individual churches. To critics of the platform, Congregationalism looked more and more presbyterian and became more orthodox. B.R. Burg, "The Cambridge Platform: A Reassertion of Ecclesiastical Authority," *Church History* 43, no. 4 (Dec., 1974): 484-486; J.M. Bumsted, "Revivalism and Separatism in New England: The First Society of Norwich, Connecticut as a Case Study," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 24, no. 4 (Oct., 1967): 591-592.

<sup>19</sup> Perry Miller, "The Halfway Covenant," *The New England Quarterly* 6, No. 4 (Dec., 1933): 677-678.

“halfway” members, able to take the Lord’s Supper and have their children baptized, but without the voting rights of confessed members. Morgan argued that in adopting the Halfway Covenant, many congregations did what their parents had cautioned against. As a result of their love for their children and their desire to see them become church members, Puritans compromised their hierarchy of affections in which God occupied the highest place. The children of the Puritans were no longer held to the same high standards of conversion and visible sainthood that had been so important to their forefathers.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, such changes may not necessarily mean that the influence of Puritans’ core philosophies regarding the centrality of family order in society crumbled beneath the weight of broader religious, economic, and political concerns.<sup>21</sup> Connecticut’s incest prosecutions demonstrate that such might not always have been the case. Indeed, we can see that in these trials at least, civil and religious authorities condemned perpetrators’ “carnal lusts” as a perversion of a divinely-ordered hierarchy of love and human relationships.

Some historians have been cognizant of such problems. For example, in 1960, Bernard Bailyn’s *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* revealed gaps in the historiography of American education and

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<sup>20</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 185-186.

<sup>21</sup> For a nuanced analysis of the diversity of belief and practice among New England’s Puritan population, see David D. Hall’s *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989). Hall argues that the clergy cannot be detached from the development of popular religion and culture in New England, nor can they be said to have dominated them since ecclesiastical influence was mediated by geography and Protestant structures. Nor can popular religion in New England provide as it has in a European context an explanation of how the laity broke with the clergy, since lay protest could and did receive support from the clergy, ex. John Cotton’s and John Wheelwright’s support of antinomian dissenters, John Davenport’s speaking out against the Halfway Covenant, and the involvement of Harvard and Yale graduates with the development of the New Lights. Studies of popular religion in New England must acknowledge the existence of both consent and resistance between the laity and the clergy.



argued that scholars had largely ignored the formative influence of family and community as social institutions in the frontier environment. He went beyond the notion that education occurred only as a formal process of schools and institutions by expanding its definition to one in which “culture transmits itself across the generations.” Such an assertion has important implications for research into the Puritan family, for Bailyn essentially pointed out that as a function of socialization, Puritan education in literacy and the catechism operated on multiple levels, not always formal, and was a product of time and place. Furthermore, the history of its development reflected a rapidly changing world in which traditional means of socialization and education based in the home or church gave way to more expedient methods like public schools. Thus, the transformation of education over time is not merely a story of change in one segment of society. The intricacy of its connections to other segments, like the family and the community, means that its history must be understood in a context of both formal and informal processes.<sup>22</sup> Bailyn’s approach provides a glimpse, via education, into the complex nature of the ideal family and its influence on colonial Connecticut’s formal and informal institutions. An analysis of Connecticut’s incest trials can further test his hypothesis of the family as a socializing institution by providing a point of comparison via a family’s failure to live up to the ideal.

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<sup>22</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *Education in the Forming of American Society: Needs and Opportunities for Study* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1960), 14.



**Figure 1** *A typical hornbook.* [database on-line] (HISTORY OF AMERICAN EDUCATION WEB PROJECT, accessed 20 March 2010) ; available <http://www.nd.edu/~rbarger/www7/colonial.html>. Educational materials like this hornbook not only taught children the basics of literacy, but also catechized them. As children learned to read, they also learned prayers and a moral code.

One example of a work that took up Bailyn's challenge exists in John Demos' *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony*, published in 1970. Placing the Puritan separatists in a social context that included the day-to-day organization of their material lives, Demos made several arguments that have important implications for an analysis of Connecticut's incest trials and the view they afford into familial ideology. First, he tested the myth that Puritanism was repressive<sup>23</sup> and found it too simplistic; religion was much more basic to Plymouth's society to be described merely as a tool of control. Indeed, while Puritan practices and beliefs were an integral part of a system in

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<sup>23</sup> For a discussion of how the history of American Puritanism became a victim of sensational journalism and "The Young Intellectual," an embodiment of a generation of writers in the interwar period who privileged science over the "outmoded" morality of religion, see Frederick J. Hoffman, "Philistine and Puritan in the 1920s," *American Quarterly* 1, no. 3 (Autumn, 1949): 247-263.

which society idealized certain behaviors while ostracizing and punishing behaviors considered incompatible with communal and family life, the very definition of repression implies that Puritan society exerted a tyrannical control over the lives of individuals. And yet, while the vision and tradition of original settlers continued to influence later generations, almost immediately after landing on New England's shores, the reality of life in the colony quickly led Plymouth's Puritans to renegotiate the strictness with which they adhered to their values and ideals. Those later generations "left behind" earlier Puritan ideals in a process that Demos calls "spiritual as well as spatial." Further, Demos takes up the issue of geographical mobility and population dispersion as part of greater social changes. Having arrived in the colony with the tenets of Calvinism, in particular the doctrines of election for salvation by God, human depravity, salvation through Jesus' grace rather than works, and a limited atonement, Pilgrims demonstrated flexibility in their application of these ideals as they negotiated their new environment.<sup>24</sup> Demos reminds us that culture can never be static.

Another history of the family published in 1970 was Philip J. Greven's *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts*. Like Demos, Greven was interested in discerning patterns in family structure and dynamics. Through a comparative approach to demographics using generational differences, Greven demonstrated that with the fourth generation, such factors as the age at which marriage occurred, the age of maturity, patterns of kinship and inheritance, and standards of economic independence underwent change. Greven argued that such change serves as

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<sup>24</sup> John Demos, *A Little Commonwealth: Family Life in Plymouth Colony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 11-12.

indicators of Puritan patriarchy's waning hold over society as couples married and young men achieved greater independence from their fathers at younger ages.

Like Demos, Greven demonstrated the feasibility of doing Puritan history at the local level. Greven especially incorporated change over time and utilized anthropological, sociological, and statistical methodologies. In doing so, he argued that the Puritan family should be viewed as a socio-cultural institution with measurable impacts on the world in which it existed. Of course, Greven was not explicitly concerned with ideological questions concerning the theological basis for family government, so that when he argued for the decline of Puritan patriarchy, he did so by relying heavily on a statistical analysis of quantitative data without much discussion of the ideological leanings of his four generations. The question remains whether such a heavy reliance on social science methods can adequately explain ideological change, particularly when Greven described his own work as an "approximation, at best."<sup>25</sup> To be sure, Greven's demographic history contributed a piece of the puzzle concerning changes to Puritan family structure into the eighteenth century but should by no means be seen as the answer in entirety.

While the historiography of the 1970s offered new insight into the Puritan family, Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis pointed out in 1982 that the "new social history" had yet to fully integrate the family into society and show its interactions as Morgan had done.<sup>26</sup> Like Morgan, Moran and Vinovskis saw Puritan piety as a

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<sup>25</sup> Philip J. Greven, *Four Generations: Population, Land, and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1970), 7.

<sup>26</sup> Gerald F. Moran, and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Puritan Family and Religion: A Critical Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1, *The Family in Early American History and Culture* (Jan., 1982): 29-30.

promising avenue for exploring the interaction of family and religion. They depart from Morgan slightly by interpreting the Halfway Covenant and the Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms as a “creative revitalization” of religion, rather than a decline of Puritanism. Such a deviation offers some interesting avenues for exploring the influence that Puritan familial ideology might have continued to exert into the eighteenth century. They argue that many New England families were successful in producing subsequent generations of church members and perpetuating religious observance in their descendants that owed much to the Puritan founders.<sup>27</sup> Further, given that access to sacraments depended on church membership and that the church continued to figure prominently in New England society, ideally the visible saint’s participation in religious practices signified their “closeness to the culture,” so that for the regenerate, their membership and their commitment to religious ideals paralleled their commitment to social values. In Puritan New England, conformity came to be equated with piety, and the family nurtured that conformity.<sup>28</sup>

Whether one agrees with Moran and Vinovskis, they bring up some important points, namely that it is part of the historian’s job to question assumption. In this case, asking whether Puritan ideals continued to prevail at the local level, as long as they continued to hold meaning for individuals and families, signifies a reasonable line of inquiry. Whether Puritans and their descendants held tight to a particular value or modified it, only by conducting further studies can the extent of decline or perpetuation of these ideals be fully understood. More specifically, colonial Connecticut’s stated

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid, 33, 41.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid, 35.

reasons for prosecuting incest support Moran and Vinovskis' contention that religion and family were tightly bound together in the work of ensuring a stable society for much of its history.

Within a few years of Moran and Vinovskis' critique of Puritan historiography, Melvin Yazawa published *From Colonies to Commonwealth: Familial Ideology and the Beginnings of the American Republic*, in which he attempted to trace broad-based ideological change in colonial America. While Yazawa's analysis suffers from overgeneralizations regarding ideological developments in the colonies, historians might find them useful as a jumping-off point to explore specific groups. For example, he argued that at its founding, American colonial society incorporated a belief that the family encompassed bonds holding all individuals together for the common good. Daily life reflected that paradigm, as did the church and politics. He went on to argue that "social evolution and political revolution" altered the nature of these relationships, so that a "virtuous citizenry" became the foundations of the emerging republic.<sup>29</sup> While his work also suffers from an overabundance of quoting sources and often lacks specificity regarding time and place, he presented a thorough intellectual history of the influence of familial ideology on the development of republicanism beginning with the early colonial period through the Revolutionary War. Such developments have relevance to explaining the concerns behind these trials, what Connecticut's colonial authorities hoped to accomplish via public examination and punishment, and how the participants might have perceived their own obligations to family and society.

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<sup>29</sup> Melvin Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth: Familial Ideology and the Beginnings of the American Republic* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 3-4.

In his chapter “Honor Thy Father,” Yazawa identified the “Three Chief Fatherhoods” in colonial America, namely civil authority, ecclesiastical authority, and paternalism. He argued that colonial writers looked to familial ideology to be the force that combined a restraint of passion with affection. They believed that such restraint was a natural condition for humans to live in and that government could do no better than to model itself on the traditional patriarchal family as divinely ordained by God. Thus, such a model offered the hope that communities could exist in harmony with God, dependent on the stability of each family which, in turn, depended on each family member’s piety and adherence to prescribed roles within the Puritan hierarchical order. Further, New Englanders made an explicit connection between the authority of the father and the authority of civil and religious leaders. As children were expected to be obedient to their parents, so were subjects expected to honor the authority of rulers. In an argument likely informed by John Winthrop’s *A Modell of Christian Charity*, Yazawa described a return of affection by those holding power, expressed as filial obligation, that charged them with seeking the common good out of concern for public welfare.

To American colonials, the best measure of affection was an individual’s demeanor. In lessons on the fifth commandment, children learned how they were expected to deal with their superiors at home and in the community and how they were to fulfill their obligations to these institutions. Such lessons began early and were expected to occur in the home. Parents who neglected their duty to educate their children in propriety and manners brought up unruly children. Such children, if they did not obey and respect their parents would not obey and respect civil and ecclesiastical authority. Thus, “[c]haotic families inevitably reduced the commonwealth itself to chaos.” Puritans

believed that such potential for chaos could not be tolerated and so, if necessary, civil and ecclesiastical authorities stepped in to correct a given situation with admonitions, fines, and perhaps even removal of children.<sup>30</sup>

According to Yazawa, familial ideology significantly influenced how justice was meted out in colonial America. Shame was one tool of colonial parenting and centered round the idea that children should choose good behavior out of a desire to please family and community rather than out of a fear of punishment. This use of shame also permeated civil justice so that a fatherly style of discipline in the courts meant that justice and mercy must temper one another.<sup>31</sup>

Puritans perceived that reform was the ultimate goal of such paternalism, and whether reform was possible could best be measured by an individual's outward demeanor, a notion consistent with American Puritanism's ideal of visible sainthood. An individual's demeanor revealed to their community whether they had experienced conversion and received salvation. Such outward appearances of piety became important to Puritans for determining the precise method for dispensing justice in colonial courts and in matters of church discipline, because only those exhibiting appropriate remorse and respect for authority could receive a mitigation of justice. To grant such mitigation to those undeserving had the potential to send a dangerous message to society regarding toleration for sin.<sup>32</sup> However, extremity of justice, both at home and in the courts, could, in theory, sever the very affections that bound individuals to family and community.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 39, 46.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 51-53.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.



Yazawa demonstrated the importance of the family as the keystone of colonial society to the extent that it not only fostered stability or chaos, depending on its level of functionality, but that it also provided a language all Puritans understood and internalized. Historian David M. Scobey also wove the intricacies of familial ideology into his discussion of Puritan controversies like the Halfway Covenant, arguing that ministers spoke of apostasy as “filial inadequacy writ large.” These ministers chastised the second generation and reminded them that they were the heirs of their parents’ sacrifices. As such, Puritans stood at a crossroads and faced a choice between “the continuation of the founders’ church polity and the betrayal of it.”<sup>34</sup> While Congregationalists may have abandoned the independence of their congregations with the adoption of the Saybrook Platform, the means by which cultural transmission occurred via the family figured largely in Puritan crises precisely because the family was so central to New England society.

Yazawa’s work illustrated the complexity characterizing Puritan society that integrated religious, social, and political systems. A secularization of Puritan history runs the risk of underestimating the power of ideology and theology at all levels of society. While it may not always be necessary to make a discussion of religious thought pivotal to every analysis, no history of Puritans would be complete without an acknowledgement of its centrality in people’s lives.

Clearly, the ministry cannot be ignored either. Its relationship with the rest of society was inextricable and its influence profound. However, in relying so heavily on

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 58.

<sup>34</sup> David M. Scobey, “Revising the Errand” *New England’s Ways and the Puritan Sense of the Past*, *The William and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series 41, no. 1 (Jan., 1984): 22.

intellectual sources, too often historians have not fully addressed the problem of explaining how familial ideology operated at the level of the village, or even individually and in the family itself. Nor has the question been resolved of how fully the ministerial message of the ideal family interacted with the reality and the extent to which Puritans would act to protect that ideal. Certainly, Morgan's *The Puritan Family* represented a turning point in the history of the Puritan family, but questions remain concerning ordinary Puritans' perceptions of the family's function in society, the role of such perceptions in daily life, and the consequences of family dysfunction to society as a whole. Given the Puritan emphasis on the interconnectedness of the family to social, religious, political, and economic institutions, more social, religious, and political history intent on discovering the role of family in local life is necessary.

Puritan historians of the last four decades have demonstrated the feasibility of moving beyond sermons and pamphlets and turning to alternative documentary sources, like household and court records, in order to explore beyond the elites who have occupied much of Puritan historiography. These efforts to understand what life might have been like for the rest of society have been fruitful, but given the continued paucity of historical analyses of the Puritan family, Bailyn's call to reexamine the past and understand formal and informal processes remains wide open. In this examination of incest prosecutions, county and colonial records are compared with ecclesiastical writings in order to provide a sense of how thoroughly invested were Puritans, their families, and their communities in the idea that the success of their mission to establish a godly society, reform England, and ensure a Christian world rose or fell on the piety of each and every household. Connecticut's county and colonial records reveal that, as the antithesis of pious parenting,

these incidences of incest can make a contribution, however slight, to a clearer view of Puritans' anxieties and expectations regarding the family's role in society. Historians have understood for some time that the assumption that the philosophies and ideologies of one segment of society reflect the beliefs and values of the whole may ignore important differences in experience between classes and social strata, never mind gender, race, and location. Using alternative sources like these records of incest prosecutions offers one means of analyzing the relevance of familial ideology to those who did not occupy the upper strata of class, wealth, and education.

## CHAPTER TWO: AMERICAN PURITANS IN RETROSPECT

### **The English in America**

In order to understand the influence of familial ideology on New England, we must first recognize that American Puritans were a product of centuries of philosophical and religious debates that occurred in Europe. Puritans who migrated to the colonies did not become American revolutionaries overnight. Indeed, most rejected Plymouth Colony's intent to separate from England, believing that religious and political reform of England remained possible. Certainly, American Puritans were a product of a particular time and place and, in many ways, they had more in common with their fellow English than not. For example, New England's Puritans imported from England the definition of what constituted sexual crime, such as adultery, prostitution, incest, fornication, and "any other uncleanness and wickedness of life." Both Old and New England defined incest according to degrees of kinship and neither accepted ignorance of the law as an excuse for criminal behavior. Nevertheless, in response to Puritans' drive to reform Christian society, colonial Connecticut's approach to prosecuting such crimes exhibits some significant differences from that of England. In England, prosecutions of sexual deviancy fell under the jurisdiction of ecclesiastical courts. Further, Martin Ingram argued that Anglican Church authorities generally showed a reluctance to pry into the private lives of

parishioners, instead reserving prosecution for the most notorious of cases that the broader community deemed “worthy of discipline.”<sup>35</sup>

In other words, crimes of a sexual nature often came under scrutiny by ecclesiastical authorities as a result of either a person’s blatantly bad behavior or perhaps even because of an accuser’s ulterior motive. Ingram disputed previous historians’ assertions that a lack of privacy characterized English society in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, so that active spying was rampant. Delving into the context of such trials, he finds it far more likely that an individual who stood to benefit in some way from a defendant’s prosecution could potentially exploit another’s indiscretions for their own ends, bring them to trial, and receive some tangible reward by publically exposing a defendant’s guilt. Essentially, Ingram argued, accusers could choose to make accusations based on a perception of potential gain. Therefore, not only did the brazenness of a criminal act often dictate whether a perpetrator appeared in court, but political expediency and material gain figured much more prominently in an accuser’s decision to come forth with allegations than historians had previously supposed.<sup>36</sup>

In general, Ingram found that prosecution of sexual crime not only likely fell far short of what actually occurred in frequency and often had little relevance to the severity of the crime, but he also found that church authorities often leaned toward the imposition of fees rather than the prescribed acts of public penance. For one thing, such public humiliation had less stigma attached for those with less to lose, such as the poor and the mobile. For those with significant influence and wealth, public sanction could be a

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<sup>35</sup> Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex, and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 239.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 244-245.

powerful deterrent, but here too courts often turned to fees and reduced penance in order to lessen the impact on a person's reputation and business activities. In the interests of protecting the social hierarchy, the ecclesiastical courts in England exhibited a willingness to alleviate the harshness of public punishments of sexual sin, even in cases of incest. English Puritans of that time perceived that the exertion of such prosecutorial discretion by ecclesiastical authorities equaled corruption of the English Church.<sup>37</sup>

By the seventeenth century, Protestantism had a firm grasp on the English Church. And yet in the eyes of Puritan critics, neither England's authorities nor its communities had gone far enough in their reforms of the Church of England. Further, Puritans believed these authorities lacked the will to ferret out sexual sin. Demonstrating the fierceness of their fervor for reform by assuming a prophetic stance, the Puritan authors of the *Admonition to the Parliament* of 1572 called for "restitution of true religion...according to the prescript of Gods worde." And like the later Puritans of Connecticut, they looked to the "olde church" to reveal precisely what that true religion should look like.<sup>38</sup> Following a diatribe on the popishness of England's sacraments and ill-educated clergy, the *Admonition* addressed the nature of ecclesiastical authority in England, calling it perverted and concerned with riches, to the extent that it no longer resembled the pattern set by the primitive church.

The *Admonition* took on a rather ironic tone when it made the accusation that "great sinne" like blasphemy and adultery went relatively unpunished in English society, attenuated by the undue use of bribery and influence in "toyish censures." Meanwhile,

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<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 336-337.

<sup>38</sup> Walter Frere and Charles Douglas (editors), *Puritan Manifestoes : A Study of the Origin of the Puritan Revolt* (New York: E.S. Gorham, 1907), 8-9.

nonconformity by reform-minded English was met with excommunication, social derision, and even banishment. To the reformers, ecclesiastical authority no longer concerned itself with maintaining God's divine order, but showed far more interest in collecting fees and garnering greater status for the wielders of its power.<sup>39</sup> Regardless of whether church courts did, in reality, deal lightly with sexual sin, in this case, perception was important. The degree to which Puritans perceived England's judicial system, never mind its churches, as corrupt and willing to turn a blind eye to sinful practices, cannot be ignored when considering the development of New England's system of justice.

This is not to imply that Puritans were above the petty exploitation of sexual prohibitions to harass a neighbor or relieve him or her of property or position.<sup>40</sup> Nor would it be accurate to say that England made no effort to punish the most egregious cases of domestic abuse. In the same year that Connecticut codified its laws in 1650, England's government under Oliver Cromwell introduced the death penalty for both incest and adultery, although Keith Thomas argued that it was a "dead letter" even then, and with the restoration of the English monarchy under Charles II in 1660, it was allowed to lapse. Nevertheless, Puritans saw English justice as devoid of integrity and no longer serving God's purposes. As such, it threatened to destroy England.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 17-18, 34.

<sup>40</sup> For a discussion of slander's informal functions in resolving neighborly disputes and enforcing social conformity, see Roger Thompson, "'Holy Watchfulness' and Communal Conformism: The Functions of Defamation in Early New England Communities," *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (Dec., 1983): 504-522.

<sup>41</sup> Keith Thomas, "The Puritans and Adultery: The Act of 1650 Reconsidered," in Donald Pennington and Keith Thomas, *Puritans and Revolutionaries: Essays in Seventeenth-Century History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978), 258, 263.

American Puritans distinguished themselves from other English Protestants by the fervor with which they pursued reform as well as by their achievements in establishing a theocratic government partnered with Congregationalism and family government to regulate colonists' conduct and behavior.<sup>42</sup> Reformers took several steps to ensure that in Connecticut, God's laws remained supreme.<sup>43</sup> Sexual crimes fell under the jurisdiction of civil courts which, according to Puritan political theory, served the interests of the church. Connecticut disallowed the use of professional lawyers throughout much of the seventeenth century, so that from start to finish, plaintiffs, defendants, and magistrates were the primary actors in court proceedings. Complex legal documents and "legalese" had no place in the colonial Puritan system intended to dispense godly justice to all inhabitants. As a result of how Connecticut's founders structured the courts, men and women there enjoyed considerable access to the courts when making accusations. Indeed, it was no accident that cases of slander made some of the most frequent appearances before the magistrates. The level of access to the courts that individuals

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<sup>42</sup> For an example of how this pyramid structure of order and authority worked, see Yazawa's discussion of the importance of demeanor in family and communal relations. He argued that respect and obedience were learned at home whereupon children also learned to exhibit deference to church and government authorities. He argued that Puritans emphasized the importance of parental instruction in propriety because "[c]haotic families inevitably reduced the commonwealth itself to chaos." Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth*, 39.

<sup>43</sup> The Cambridge Platform of 1648 punctuated the difficulties Puritans faced in determining the exact nature of ecclesiastical and civil authority in the colonies. After years of "secular superintendency over the faith and practice of the churches," New England's clergy moved to limit civil authorities' involvement in what they saw as church affairs. In doing so, they sought a balance between ecclesiastical anarchy, embodied in the dissent of such high-profile figures as Roger Williams and Benjamin Hull, and secular domination that they believed held the potential to corrupt godly society. Burg, "The Cambridge Platform," 472-475.



enjoyed also ensured that some would utilize them to redress their grievances, however minor they might seem.<sup>44</sup>

### **Decentralization and Integration**

In light of the importance of court documents to this analysis and the scarcity of records left behind by non-elites in Connecticut, the relationship of political and religious leaders to the broader community needs to be considered. In *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, David Hall made some important observations regarding popular religion among New Englanders and its relationship to the ministry.<sup>45</sup> First, he argued that unlike in Europe where the religion of the lower classes coexisted, overlapped, and, at times, conflicted with that of clerics and the bourgeoisie, such a model has little relevance for American Puritans. Immigration required money, particularly when immigrating as families, and most Puritan immigrants tended to come from the middle class. In addition, Hall also pointed out that while a uniformity of belief did not exist among Puritans in actual practice,<sup>46</sup> the absence of Latin in religious services and printed materials

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<sup>44</sup> Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 31, 34. Dayton also pointed out that while the population remained small, the courts' ability to handle such cases was not seriously impacted by the number of cases. Growth in population and commercial interests factored into the willingness of colonial Connecticut to comply with imperial pressure and align its court proceedings with England's.

<sup>45</sup> European historians of popular religion use the term to connote a religion of the laity with both formal and informal aspects distinguishable from clerical religion.

<sup>46</sup> Note the difficulties that Puritan historians face in trying to define Puritanism. See Francis Bremer, *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, Massachusetts Historical Society studies in American history and culture, no. 3 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993). The first four essays take on the problem of "[d]efining Puritanism—again"—and its character. Peter Lake describes the inherent difficulties of doing so based on an individual's non-conformity since it could come and go and was, he argues, often a function of time and locale. Instead, he believes it is far more relevant to work from a position that Puritanism was a "style of piety and divinity" with particular theological and practical concerns. Stephen Foster then identifies some problematic trends in Puritan historiography and examines the diary of a layman named Thomas Minor to define Puritanism as a search for the civil and ecclesiastical "means...to bridge the gap between the God who created the universe...and the believers who strove to comprehend the purposes, revealed and hidden, that were

combined with high rates of literacy and a disdain for Catholic “superstition” lessened the ideological divide between the clergy and laypeople in colonial New England.<sup>47</sup>

Hall described the Reformation in Europe as a “people’s movement” that began with the clergy but quickly spread throughout the laity who were attracted by its “liberating message of free grace.” While in Europe conversion to Protestant thought could be accompanied by social costs such as imprisonment, family division, and loss of property, immigration to the Americas allowed Puritans to more fully reject the influence of older traditions of the Roman Church that they believed continued to corrupt the Church of England. They hoped that in the colonies they might construct a society reflective of their views on what Christian society should look like. The New England Way was to decentralize the churches and create a congregationalism that eventually changed from its initial form in which it was assumed that all members were regenerate and eligible to vote to a more democratic form enabled in large part by compromises over the definition of membership begun with the Halfway Covenant in 1662. If in England, a centralized church allowed a distinct peasant culture “rooted in folk ways of thinking” to flourish at a distance, in New England the distribution of like-minded ministers throughout the colonies helped further undermine the potential for two levels of religious

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already complete at the Creation.” Margo Todd and John R. Knott decry the tendency of historians to define the Puritan character in rigid and narrow ways in what Todd calls an abuse of the sources. They both turn to English literary sources and their importance in influencing and delineating Puritan character and identity. Whether or not these scholars have definitively described Puritanism in a way that approaches consensus is arguable. Indeed, Lake acknowledges the problem of looking to ideology for clues on how to definitively describe Puritans, particularly when viewed from Puritan historian Andrew Delbanco’s framework of ideological disharmony. Even so, the debate, in and of itself, has contributed to a more nuanced view of Puritanism that goes beyond a discussion of a few key figures to include a greater cross-section of Puritan society in the analysis.

<sup>47</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 5-7.

belief to develop along the European model at the same time that it allowed congregations to operate independently of one another.<sup>48</sup>

Nevertheless, American Puritanism was not without conflict. The ideals inherent in New England's congregationalism, such as that of *sola scriptura*, the importance of literacy to spiritual learning, and the laity's involvement in selecting ministers, promoted a tension between resistance and cooperation in Puritan society. There are indicators that the clergy were unable to dominate each other or their congregations so that laypeople lacked the ability to resist clerical assertions they found objectionable. Such indicators include the Antinomian crisis of 1637 in which Anne Hutchinson debated with Boston's clergy and condemned covenant theology as a covenant of works, as well as the Cambridge and Saybrook Platforms (1648, 1708) and the Halfway Covenant (1662). Indeed, ministers compromised and cooperated with laity, at times acting as the voice for lay dissatisfaction.<sup>49</sup>

If the colonies lacked a folk religion of local beliefs and practices that operated at a level distinct from and outside the influence and control of clerical religion as it did in Europe, it would be a mistake to simply assume that the ideals and musings of Puritan intellectuals reflect belief at all levels. Hall's analysis of the various levels of commitment to Puritan Congregationalism in New England, from "horse-shed"

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 6, 9-11. Also see Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 16-20. He argued that the American Puritan solution to tyranny was to establish church government and social order that spread power over the body of believers and ensured that no individual can seize power and exert God-like authority. The basis of this government would be God's word. The "Congregational Way" was anathema to English Puritans who perceived a potential for anarchy. To them, the New England model was separatist. In his first chapter, Stout argues that in reality, it helped promote cohesiveness and stability, since people's covenant, church membership, and landholdings were explicitly connected to the community in which they lived. Leaving a community meant giving up member status as well as property ownership. An incentive existed to stay put.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 11.

Christians to a higher ratio of conversion among women than men, demonstrates the fallacy in such broad generalizations that fail to account for both diversity of practice and thought among the laity and lay influence on congregations and in communities.<sup>50</sup> The clergy and the laity had a complex relationship in which ideology and social values flowed both ways. The clergy had a great deal of influence over their congregations, but members' exercise of their vote in church contributed to lay influence over ministers as well.<sup>51</sup> The centrality of the family in Puritan doctrine and society meant that while intellectual sources of familial ideology certainly helped shape Puritan ideals, such influence occurred as part of a complex system in which lay practice and belief played an important part.

The forms that familial ideology took in New England owed much to centuries of intellectuals in Europe. Indeed, American Puritans must be placed firmly within the European context of doctrinal restlessness. Francis Bremer described a “loop” of news and ideas that flowed between England and America and argued that it is too constricting to rely on categories like “American” and “English” when discussing Puritanism. She identified two errors prevailing in the field of Puritan studies—one in which New England existed merely as an extension of England and one in which it functioned as a

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 117-165. See Hall's chapter, *The Meetinghouse*, for his analysis of Puritan diversity in faith, experience, and perception. Puritan clergy attained a high level of success in their expectation that the laity know their Bible and catechism, but how the laity construed doctrine and ritual symbolism was highly individual.

<sup>51</sup> Daniel Rutman asserted that “what one who speaks (or writes) intends to convey is not necessarily what the hearer (or reader) understands.” Thus, what the clergy communicated can be no more than an influence. One person's “Puritanism” may not have been another's. Darrett Bruce Rutman, *Small Worlds, Large Questions: Explorations in Early American Social History, 1600-1850* (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994), 76.

completely different “new” world with little or no connection to England’s “century of revolution.” Instead, American Puritanism should be integrated into the history of England and vice versa.<sup>52</sup> In order to understand their familial ideology, we must reach back to New England’s intellectual and religious heritage.

### **As European as Europeans**

The Puritan vision of social order was neither monolithic nor original in its view. Challenging previous scholarship on the uniqueness of Puritan ideology, and by extension Calvinism, Margo Todd made explicit linkages between Puritanism and Christian Humanism to demonstrate that, at least in terms of their ideological assertions, Puritans were neither unique nor as thoroughly radical as Americanists have liked to believe. Todd pointed to the influence of “classical domestic theory” on humanists and Protestant reformers like the Puritans that formed the basis of their familial ideology. Christian humanists like the Catholic priest Erasmus, who took up reform from within the Roman Church, combined the Aristotlean idea that the “association of man and wife is based on reason and that its purpose is not merely existence, but the good life,” with “Stoic egalitarianism” and biblical doctrines to synthesize their view of marriage as a “state of intellectual and spiritual companionship.” Further, in critiquing monastic and clerical abuses, Christian humanists viewed marriage as the higher state and deemed celibacy as a crime equal to infanticide, since both thwarted birth.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> Francis Bremer, *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, Massachusetts Historical Society studies in American history and culture, no. 3 (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1993), xi.

<sup>53</sup> Margo Todd, *Christian Humanism and the Puritan Social Order* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 98.



**Figure 2** *A Puritan Family, 1563, frontispiece, Tenor of the Whole Psalms in Four Parts, 1563* [database on-line] (KIDIPEDE, accessed 20 March 2010): available [www.historyforkids.org/learn/northamerica/after1500/religion/puritans.htm](http://www.historyforkids.org/learn/northamerica/after1500/religion/puritans.htm)

As the superior state of relationship between men and women, marriage had three goals—companionship, procreation, and the prevention of fornication. But Todd questioned the assertion made by many scholars that the primacy of companionship as a core condition of marriage was a Protestant innovation spearheaded by Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other dissenters, since she finds in the writings of earlier humanists the same assertion. Procreation did not fall far behind companionship in importance, however, since humanists like Erasmus and their Puritan intellectual heirs believed that pious families produced pious future generations. That piety linked church, commonwealth, and family in a harmonious triad and had its basis in the Aristotlean ideal that the “household is the primary essential human association, out of which the highest

form of human society, the state, grows.”<sup>54</sup> Stable, companionable marriages led to stable social order.

According to many Christian humanists, the “spiritualized household” was one in which the family operated as a microcosm of the church and commonwealth, father and mother functioned as king and queen of their small domain, and moral and religious ideals were transmitted from one generation to the next, ensuring the perpetuation of Christianity.<sup>55</sup> Christian humanism and Puritans’ Calvinist theology included the expectation that parents raise their children to be pious and faithful Christians and those children owed their parents honor in return. Indeed this relationship was reciprocal; if parents failed in their duty to “teach and nurture” their children “to good manners,” children owed them less honor.<sup>56</sup> The repercussions of such ideology could be profound. When parents did not keep their covenant with God, their children would languish in ignorance of God. Practically speaking, for Puritans this meant that when children suffered from an ignorance of God’s law on which Puritan social order and government was based, the result would be social disruption and a withdrawal of God’s favor. Each member of the household had a specific role to fulfill and was to fulfill it in the service of God for the sake of themselves, their families, and their communities.

Among both Protestant and Roman Catholic reformers, such ideological musings resulted in the conclusion that parents held the key responsibility of educating their children. For example, Puritans stressed the importance of education “not simply as a

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 100-101.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 110.

polite accomplishment, nor as a means of advancing material welfare, but because salvation was impossible without it.”<sup>57</sup> Without education, children lacked access to God’s word and, by extension, salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ. A committed reformer from within the Roman Catholic Church, Erasmus asserted that to impart to a child a knowledge of God was more important than having borne one. Thus, it was not enough to have biological offspring, but, godly parents must ensure that their children were literate and knew scripture. For Puritans, without those things, children could not experience conversion and receive salvation through the grace of Jesus Christ that Calvin and his Puritan heirs would argue identified them as members of God’s elect.<sup>58</sup>

Under the corporate covenant, American Puritanism’s hierarchical scheme of an ordered society extended into the household and regulated all relationships within. Just as God’s covenant with Abraham bound Abraham’s descendants, the covenant of grace bound parents to children—and society to individuals, for that matter—in an expectation that as a father promised to be faithful in his covenant with God, so too would he ensure that members of his house fulfilled their obligations to God. These threads of obligation wound themselves throughout society, to the extent that neighbors concerned themselves with each other’s visible election, while the government was compelled to intervene when individuals failed to meet their obligations to God and to each other.<sup>59</sup>

The view of some Christian humanists that family, religion, and society operated as intermingled institutions profoundly influenced Calvinism and later American

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<sup>57</sup> Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Family: Religion & Domestic Relations in 17th Century New England* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), 89.

<sup>58</sup> Todd, *Christian Humanism*, 107.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.



Puritans. So thoroughly convinced were Puritans that God intended all people to live in families that all New Englanders in Puritan colonies, regardless of their status in the church, were required to do so. In the first decades of the colonies, if an immigrant arrived without a family, he was assigned to one. If a man remained unmarried and lacked the means to hire a servant, he was expected to choose a household and subject himself to its family government.<sup>60</sup>

### **A Transported Community**

To be sure, the development of Europe's complex intellectual and religious landscape before and during the Protestant Reformation had profound consequences for England and, in turn, the development of Reformed ideas in England was shaped by the particulars of English experience. For Puritans, embracing Reformed ideas meant embracing a certain lifestyle, stemming from the doctrine of vocation, or the idea that "each man owed to God the service of his life."<sup>61</sup> While scholars have grappled with the difficulty of defining Puritanism,<sup>62</sup> that lifestyle distinguished early "Puritans" from the broader community and led to conflict between Anglicans and those who criticized episcopacy for allowing the hypocrite and the unregenerate to have access to the sacraments. Such conflict contributed to the sense among Puritans that they constituted an outgroup and must, of necessity, form their own community. Their covenant with the Lord came to develop into a corporate covenant that encompassed that community and

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>61</sup> David D. Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1972), 22.

<sup>62</sup> See footnote 47 for a discussion of some of the difficulties.

became the focus of their radicalism. As a community, they may not have been unique in their belief that they must establish the kingdom of God on earth, albeit amidst internal disagreement on whether separatism or reform of the existing establishment in England's churches was in order. And yet, their fierce radicalism was enough to serve as a distinguishing marker that separated Puritans from the mainstream Church of England, exposed them to persecution, and left many Puritans looking for alternatives to reform from within the church.<sup>63</sup>

Before arriving on the shores of New England in 1630 with hopes of creating the ideal Christian society, John Winthrop outlined his program for reform with *A Modell of Christian Charity*, composed aboard the *Arbella*. In it, he laid out his vision of Christian love and community. He began with an observation that God had ordered human society so that "in all times some must be rich, some poore, some high and eminent in power and dignitie; others mean and in submission...for the preservation and good of the whole." Winthrop believed that God intended each person to fulfill their divinely-appointed roles, but with certain caveats that would protect society from disruption and chaos. First, he urged those who enjoyed a superior status to demonstrate a benevolent paternity characterized by love, mercy, gentleness, and temperance to their subordinates. In turn, those who were relegated to a subordinate status were expected to show obedience to their superiors that they might develop faith and patience as they endured their lesser status. Winthrop argued that when each member of the godly society understood their proper role, each person was bound to the other in love and harmony so that strife and

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<sup>63</sup> For an analysis of England's dealings with Reformed ideology, see David Hall's essay "English and Reformed: Puritan Doctrines of the Church and Ministry," in Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century*, 21-47.

contention would not exist. Under such conditions, God's kingdom would prosper on earth.<sup>64</sup>

While not original in his analogy, Winthrop's use of an organic model to describe the relationship of members to the church and the church to Christ illustrated his thinking. First, he asserted, all "true Christians are of one body in Christ." Then he made clear that this relationship is an unequal one, with each person constituting a different part of Christ's body. No one person could fulfill the function of each and every body part. It was necessary that each member dedicate themselves to the role they must fill in order to ensure that the body as a whole functioned well, because "[n]oe body can be perfect which wants its proper ligament." Love was the ligament that bound the body of Christ together. Winthrop made the implications of his model clear—just as the whole body feels the pain of one part's suffering, so too does the whole church suffer when individuals do not function as befits their appointed roles, defined by status, occupation, and gender, or as members of a family.<sup>65</sup>

Winthrop had high hopes for this new society. He did not see himself as a separatist in the same sense that the Pilgrims of Plymouth colony were separatists, but he wished to establish a colony grounded in charity, a godly principle he believed was crucial to averting disharmony and conflict. Andrew Delbanco argued that not only were Puritans driven by the urge to reform, but in opting to colonize New England, Winthrop and other Puritans also fled the rapid changes occurring in England that they felt no

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<sup>64</sup> John Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity (1630)*, Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society (Boston, 1838), 3rd series 7:31-48m at Hanover Historical Texts Project, <http://history.hanover.edu/texts/winthmod.html> (accessed December 28, 2009).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.

longer valued interpersonal relationships. In their view, English society and institutions increasingly favored self-interest at the expense of others. Delbanco pointed out that in England beginning in the late sixteenth century, landlords faced the problem of increasing land values that rose significantly above the rents that tradition dictated they could collect from tenants. Some of these rents had been fixed for generations, so landlords raised rents where they could with the result that the poor became even more miserable. Frustration had grown among like-minded men of Winthrop's rank and status over the problem of how to avoid "slipping into dependency" without exploiting their own tenants. They mourned the loss of the medieval system that emphasized the interconnectedness of a community and believed that the economic and social changes accompanying the emerging mercantilist system made it virtually impossible to practice the principle of charity in their dealings with others.<sup>66</sup> In light of Delbanco's analysis of religious, social, and economic push factors on Puritans' decisions to leave for the colonies, Winthrop's use of the principle of charity constituted a nostalgic effort to restore the past, albeit an idealized past.

It is also important to note that Winthrop's emphasis on God's order for human society replicated the stratification that existed in England at the same time that it argued for greater love and charity. While Puritans in general enjoyed greater economic prosperity than most in England, their original intent did not include introducing a more

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<sup>66</sup> Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1991), 73-75. For a detailed discussion of Puritan ethics concerning self-interest and the common good, see Donald E. Frey, "Individualist Economic Values and Self-Interest: The Problem in the Puritan Ethic," *Journal of Business Ethics* 17, no. 14 (Oct., 1998): 1573-1580. Frey argues that Puritan moralists sought a balance between individualism and the common good, believing that the unbridled self-interest of the individual was antithetical to their core principles and could potentially undermine societal well-being if left unchecked by moral concerns. Instead, the moralists advocated "ethical individualism" in which individual salvation and the pursuit of vocation were indeed central, but tempered by a "calling...toward a greater good."

egalitarian social structure to their colony. They spoke of the relationship of rulers to subjects, parents to children, husbands to wives, and masters to servants as conditions that nurtured each individual's faith, encouraging them to understand the depravity of their own natures, turn to God, and experience conversion.

Indeed, Puritan society, from politics and government to the family, was ordered paternalistically. It is no accident that Winthrop frequently used the filial terms "father," "brother," and "marriage" and spoke of mutual love as a condition that brought sweetness and comfort out of life's troubles. Not only did Winthrop follow in the footsteps of countless Christian writers before him when he invoked a familial theme, but given that Puritans tended to immigrate in family groups, it was a logical premise from which to frame a corporate covenant that would resonate among colonists.<sup>67</sup> Winthrop saw the world as a troubled place and Puritan ideals as a shelter in which self-interest gave way to the proper exercise of authority and moderate love that bound family members and neighbors to each other, but most importantly to Christ.<sup>68</sup> As Puritans loved their spouses, their parents, their siblings, and their children, so too must they love their neighbors. And just as they respected the hierarchy of family authority, they must also respect political and religious authority if they were to be called Christian.

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<sup>67</sup> See Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Puritan Family and Religion: A Critical Reappraisal," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 1, *The Family in Early American History and Culture* (Jan., 1982): 31-32. Moran and Vinovskis point out that "domestic themes" were quite common as "expositional props" and the interaction between religion and family an extensive one. They agree with Edmund Morgan's *The Puritan Family* that religion informed the family experience and vice versa, so that each "sphere supplied codes for interpreting acts played out in the other sphere."

<sup>68</sup> Winthrop, *A Modell of Christian Charity*.

## The Importance of Duty and Covenant

Puritan writers in America urged readers to tend to their prescribed duties as members of families, and by extension, as members of communities. In a sermon published in 1656, the minister Thomas Cobbett understood this in terms of a covenant and advised:

The greatest love and faithfulness which Parents as Covenanters can shew to God, and to their Children, who in and with themselves, are joynt Covenanters with God, is so to educate them, that what in them lieth, the conditions of the Covenant may be attended by their Children, and so the whole Covenant fully effected, in the promised mercies of it also to them, and to their Children.<sup>69</sup>

The relationship between parents and children consisted of a covenant with God that bound them together in a triad of reciprocal duties and obligations. Expectations regarding parents' responsibility to educate their children in basic literacy offer some insights into the role that the family played in perpetuating Puritan ideals and spirituality and in the preparation of individuals to conform to societal ideals. For example, the doctrine of *sola scriptura* led to an emphasis in New England on the reading of English over writing, so that New Englanders and their children would have access to scripture. While some communities throughout New England started schools early on, for the most part both fathers and mothers of the first generation carried full responsibility for the literacy and the socialization of their household. However, as the second and third generations of New England Puritans increasingly failed to convert and join the ranks of church members, colonial governments perceived that a contributing factor to such decline in membership was a failure of parents to educate their children. For example,

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<sup>69</sup> Thomas Cobbett, *A Fruitfull and Usefull Discourse* (London, 1656) at *Early English Books Online* <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> (accessed January 25, 2010).

Massachusetts Bay Colony enacted the Old Deluder Satan Law in 1647 mandating townships of fifty households or more to open schools and hire teachers in order to prevent children's minds from being "clowded by false glosses of Saint-seeming deceivers."<sup>70</sup> Hoping to address the problem of negligent parents, in 1650 Connecticut's General Court followed Massachusetts's lead and made the education of local children the responsibility of their parishes. Indeed, New England's Congregational churches demonstrated their willingness to act in the interests of their communities' well-being by forming schools.<sup>71</sup>

Indeed, Connecticut's codification of colonial law in 1650 expressed a concern that some parents exhibited an "over tender respect to their own occasions, and businesses" and neglected their duty to educate the children under their care while they remained young and teachable. Children who failed to learn godly principles might be "in danger to grow barbarous, rude, and stubborn, through ignorance." The penalty for such lack of parental diligence could be severe. In addition to levying fines of ten shillings and more, the law gave magistrates the power to remove children in their jurisdictions from negligent homes, placing them under the care of more dutiful adults until they came of age.<sup>72</sup> When New England's religious and political elites perceived that parents failed to fulfill their duties toward their children, they acted to protect their

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<sup>70</sup> *Old Deluder Satan Law*, Massachusetts Bay Colony, 1647, <http://www.lawlib.state.ma.us> (accessed May 5, 2010).

<sup>71</sup> Gerald F. Moran and Maris A. Vinovskis, "The Great Care of Godly Parents: Early Childhood in Puritan New England," *Monographs of the Society for Research in Child Development* 50, no. 4/5, History and Research in Child Development (1985), 32-35.

<sup>72</sup> *Earliest Laws of the New Haven and Connecticut Colonies, 1639-1673*, edited by John D. Cushing (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977), 25-26.

vision of social order, believing that in doing so, future generations would not be handicapped by their predecessors' failures.

Vocal in many of New England's controversies during his life, Richard Mather published his *Farewell Exhortation to Dorchester* in 1657 in response to what he saw as a decline in conversion among Puritans. The Mather patriarch included a warning to parents to teach their children and servants Christian principles in all that they said and did, to pray with and for them, or answer to God for their failures. He argued that parents who loved God and their children would naturally tend to this particular commandment. The implication, of course, is that those who do not love God have little interest in raising up a posterity who will worship and honor God. Indeed, he pointed out to his congregants that "Pagans and Infidels" clothe and feed their children. Merely tending to children's bodily needs could not provide the standard for the ideal Christian parent's care of their offspring, because it did not truly reflect the level of godly love and affection that Mather believed separated the true and faithful Puritan parent from everyone else.<sup>73</sup>

Like Cobbett, Mather understood parental obligations to children as necessary and vital to the perpetuation of a covenant with God. As for the consequences for failing to live up to that covenant, Mather was clear on that point as well. He instructed parents to remind children that "if they be the Lord's," God's blessings will be theirs. But if they break their covenant with God and "continue impenitently therein," their sins will incur the "sorer and more dreadfull judgments."<sup>74</sup> Richard Mather's vision of the

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<sup>73</sup> Richard Mather, *A Farewell Exhortation to the Church and People of Dorchester in New England* (Cambridge, MA: Samuel Green, 1657) at *Early English Books Online*, <http://eebo.chadwyck.com> (accessed January 25, 2010), 9-10.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.



consequences for Puritans' failings was a grim one, wherein ignorance of God's laws, whoever's fault it was, provided no excuse. Children who had never been given access to God's word could not experience regeneracy and were consigned to hell. The parents who failed to teach them would join them there, condemned by God, as well as by their own children, who would assign blame for their tormented condition to their parents, saying:

You were the meanes of our Originall Corruption and guiltiness, and yet you never shewed any competent care that we might be delivered from it, from you we did receive it, by your neglect we have continued in it, and now we are damned for it...."<sup>75</sup>

The links between parents and their children's regeneracy were explicitly drawn and ignored at one's own risk.

### **The Reality of Change**

The social and political context of the mid-seventeenth century shook Puritan confidence to the core. By the 1640s, a return migration to England occurred with Puritans who became disillusioned with the colonial experiment intent on carving out a godly society from the "wilderness." Those who remained in New England came to view this "diaspora" of early American Puritanism as a purification of God's people.<sup>76</sup> In England, the English Civil War from 1642 to 1651 had resulted in the execution of Charles I in 1649 and, for a few years, American Puritans believed that a new, godly age had dawned with Oliver Cromwell's regime. However, adding to their sense of loss, the restoration of the monarchy and the Church of England in 1660 dashed such hopes,

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 10-11.

<sup>76</sup> Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal*, 215-216.

leaving Puritans with a feeling of “collective loneliness” rather than of “collective chosenness.” There arose a sense that the rest of the world had failed to recognize the significance of the Puritans’ “city on a hill.” Their goal of reforming the English church and society had not come to fruition as they hoped.<sup>77</sup>

Amid these uncertainties, Puritan intellectuals exhibited a sense of urgency concerning their mission during the second and third generations. Delbanco argued that without a clear understanding of how they had failed to perpetuate their parents’ vision, these later generations reacted in several ways. First, they mythologized the founders. The now grown children of the Puritan immigrants reduced their parents to heroic paragons of virtue and described themselves as protectors of their traditions against those who would disparage them.<sup>78</sup> Second, they further solidified Puritan practices and beliefs as a religion of discipline even as they tried to recapture the past. Nevertheless, a relative increase in toleration began causing dissent even among ministers, while the proposal of the Half-Way covenant, in which children of non-communicating parents could be baptized, added to the rifts. Ministers kept pointing to parents’ and society’s failures as the reasons for diminishing numbers of members but failed to recognize that the process of conversion was a demanding one that left many uncertain of their own salvation. The more the second generation tried to emulate their parents, the more they failed without ever fully understanding how or why.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 224-225.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 221-224.

Given the changes and the uncertainty that Puritans experienced in those first three generations, we might ask how widely felt these views on family government were among ordinary Puritans, and whether the majority of Puritans were invested in the ideal of perpetuating their vision of social order via the family, particularly given external pressures stemming from political, social, and economic change. Delving into court records to find those cases that would seem to subvert intellectual and ministerial assertions regarding the sanctity of the family and the structure of the ideal society offers a useful exercise in comparing local and individual responses to such ideas. The history of colonial Connecticut's prosecution of incest suggests that, beyond intellectual elites, the importance of family government in maintaining the integrity of broader social and political systems was keenly felt at the local level.

## CHAPTER THREE: PATERNAL TYRANNY IN NORWICH, CT.

### Connecticut Colony's Legal Foundations

Numbering less than a handful of cases, surviving records from the Colony of Connecticut offer the greatest number of father-daughter incest prosecutions to explore than either Massachusetts Bay or Plymouth Colonies, which each had one. Further, the depth of Connecticut's records is richer, with each case taking up sometimes a dozen or more pages of victims' pleas, witness statements, rebuttals, and court findings. In contrast, other colonies' cases usually have less than a page surviving, assuming that originally there might have been more. Connecticut's incest prosecutions occurred in the years 1672-1673, 1702-1703, and 1725, with another post-colonial case occurring during the Revolutionary period in 1778, this time concerning the marriage between a man and his half-sister's daughter.

In his book, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance*, Kai T. Erikson argued, "When the Word was read from the pulpit it seemed to provide a crisp set of rules for men to walk by, but when it was brought into court to judge the ordinary run of civil and criminal cases it no longer seemed so exact." Keeping Erikson's observation in mind, each case of incest provides the historian with the opportunity to glimpse the implications of Puritan theology on trial participants in comparison with the ideal that ministers preached.<sup>80</sup> Each case exhibits similarities in the way that

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participants, from the victims of abuse to the magistrates deciding guilt, perceived the role of family government. In particular, there existed in each case an assumption that male family members were responsible for ensuring their female relatives received a moral education. Further, the outcomes of each case suggest that when sexual abuse occurred within the family, male abusers were seen as more culpable than their victims precisely because they had failed in that responsibility, despite the law's equal treatment of abusers and victims. By exploring Connecticut's legal foundations and changes in the system between 1672 and 1725, followed by the details of each trial, we are offered a window into the workings of family government, how such ideology was understood by Puritans at the local level to operate within the family, and how it was connected with social stability, not only by the clergy who offered their opinion on how incest should be punished, but also by political and legal authorities, victims, and abusers.

Connecticut was founded without a charter in 1636 by a group of wealthy Puritans from Massachusetts Bay looking to expand their holdings and intent on creating a "Bible Commonwealth." For the most part, Puritan elites modeled the colony's political and legal structures after Massachusetts Bay, and yet there were differences. For example, exercising the vote did not require church membership and town inhabitants elected their deputies.<sup>81</sup> By 1650, Connecticut's authorities moved to compile and arrange the colony's array of laws into a code that would regularize the legal system.

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<sup>80</sup> Kai T. Erikson, *Wayward Puritans: A Study in the Sociology of Deviance* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1966), 56-57.

<sup>81</sup> Perry Miller, "Thomas Hooker and the Democracy of Early Connecticut," *The New England Quarterly* 4, no. 4 (Oct., 1931): 693-695.

This code was distributed in manuscript form and was intended to function cooperatively with Connecticut's "Fundamental Orders" of 1639.

The "Orders" included the expectation that the governor and colonial magistrates would execute justice "according to the rule of God's word."<sup>82</sup> The influence of scripture on law was common both in the colonies and in England. Also in 1639, New Haven Colony enacted the first colonial law prohibiting incest. It stated:

It is Ordered, &c. That if any persons shall commit *Incest*, which is, when being near of kin, within the degrees by God forbidden, they wickedly defile themselves one with another, they shall be put to death.<sup>83</sup>

To provide weight to such heavy pronouncements, the compilers of Connecticut's colonial laws referenced Leviticus 20. This is one example of the significance of Puritanism's reliance on the doctrine of *sola scriptura* in forming the basis for the theocratic legal system in general, and for the law prohibiting incest in particular, so that, in theory, the Bible functioned as the ultimate and final authority in all things public and private. In reality, Connecticut's colonial authorities had, from the beginning, removed from the colonial system English legal structures that the Puritans found objectionable, retained elements they found compatible with biblical authority, and instituted reforms they believed were necessary to a godly society. For example, in New Haven, the use of juries and lawyers was eliminated, administration of the oath in court only occurred when magistrates felt certain after extensive questioning that the oath-maker would not commit perjury, and office-holding required church membership.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> *Earliest Laws of the New Haven and Connecticut Colonies, 1639-1673*, edited by John D. Cushing (Wilmington, DE: Michael Glazier, Inc., 1977), 62.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 35.

<sup>84</sup> Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 27-28.

The formerly separate New Haven Colony merged with the Colony of Connecticut in 1665, following the resolution of the charter crisis in 1662. When the unified colony revised its laws in 1672, New Haven's law against incest did not appear in the "General Laws." In examining the deliberations surrounding these cases of incest, it is important to note, however, that regardless of how clearly the authors of the law may have felt the biblical position on incest to be, the actual application of the law required some reasoning, because, as it turned out, the Bible does not list the father-daughter relationship among those prohibited from having sexual relations.<sup>85</sup>

In theory, the reliance on scriptural reference in providing justification for legal codes and punishments imparted uniformity to the system. New Haven's law dealing with the crime of incest treated victim and abuser the same. It did not acknowledge the abuser's misuse of authority and provided no attenuation of guilt to victims. The consequence for abuser and victim was the same regardless. Each would be put to death.

In the two or three decades that passed from one case to the next, the courts, and Connecticut colony for that matter, saw significant changes. Richard L. Bushman noted that as a result of its relative isolation and homogeneity, the colony's people and government developed a quality of self-assurance and independence.<sup>86</sup> After the Pequot War of 1637 effectively eliminated the Pequot presence in Connecticut, Connecticut's Puritans also had the luxury of living in relative peace for most of the last half of the

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<sup>85</sup> Leviticus 18: 6-18 (KJV) list the kin with whom, the ministers believed, scripture implied sexual relations would be considered incestuous or forbidden by God. The phrase "uncover the nakedness of" is used. Parents are listed first. The more specific prohibitions against incest occur in Leviticus 20 where a man is prohibited from lying with his daughter in law, but no mention is made of his daughter.

<sup>86</sup> Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), ix-x.

seventeenth century, with much of the violence of New England's wars and political conflicts remaining north in Massachusetts. For example, during King Philip's War from 1675 to 1676, Massachusetts, Plymouth, and Rhode Island fought a costly and bloody war with Wampanoags and their allies, but in Connecticut, violence was limited to some raids by Naragansetts, the deaths of some Connecticut militiamen fighting in the north, and the burning of the town of Simsbury.<sup>87</sup>

Following the restoration of the monarchy in 1660, Connecticut was able to negotiate a charter in 1662. Aside from a momentary scuffle over the authority of its charter with Sir Edmund Andros, the Royal Governor of the short-lived Dominion of New England from 1686 to 1689, Connecticut went largely ignored until the 1690s. Left to their own devices, the colony's Puritans valued propriety, rectitude, and adherence to scripture to the extent that they codified it in their legal structures. God's society was a well-ordered one, so that when conflict broke out between individuals or within the colony, they feared that their entire enterprise could be at risk of collapsing in sin and disorder. Thus, as exemplified in the trial of Thomas Rood, Connecticut's Puritan leaders saw the role of law and government as containing the "wicked passions released at the fall," controlling disorder resulting from "the corrupt human will," and maintaining a harmonious community. Each failure by colonists to live orderly lives was met with efforts by authorities to restore order. And yet, by the turn of the century, social, religious, and economic change, brought on by a growing population and the need to expand, created tension between those elite families who held power in Connecticut and those dissenters who became increasingly vocal over the prospect of opening new lands

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<sup>87</sup> Robert M. Bliss, "A Secular Revival: Puritanism in Connecticut, 1675-1708," *Journal of American Studies* 6, no. 2 (Aug., 1972): 130-131.



and trade. The ability of colonists to be physically and economically mobile culminated in the demands by “outliers,” who lived far from already existing town centers, for new parishes.<sup>88</sup>

It is important to note that Connecticut’s laws drew a line between appropriate rule and tyranny that sought total domination. Resistance to tyranny was a duty. The courts became a means by which individuals could protect their lawful liberties, defined as the right to be “good, just, and honest,” at the same time that such “civil liberty” operated as a check on potential lack of restraint.<sup>89</sup> But beginning with the ascension to the English throne in 1685 by James II, Connecticut became increasingly subject to pressure from England to submit itself to the authority of the monarchy. As a result, its political institutions underwent a transformation. While lawyers previously had been barred from the system and any colonist could petition the court for redress in plain and simple language, New England at the turn of the century saw more and more lawyers composing documents and entering the courtroom on behalf of their clients. Testimony began to be recorded. New England’s charter crises had made it expedient to formalize its legal proceedings and impose English common law.<sup>90</sup>

Indeed, the changes were already evident by 1702 when the second case of incest appeared in the courts.<sup>91</sup> In 1695, Massachusetts passed “An Act to prevent Incestuous Marriages,” which duplicated the degrees of affinity and consanguinity that England had

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<sup>88</sup> Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee*, 3-5, 20-21.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 7, 20-21, 71.

<sup>90</sup> Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 45.

<sup>91</sup> Court documents issued by some justices included language referring to “his majestys Justices of the peace” and “his Majestes Name.” *Crimes & Misdemeanors*, I: 269, 332.

included in its own 1563 and 1650 laws. Connecticut followed Massachusetts's example in 1702 by passing a duplicate act. Lawmakers in the two colonies did not perceive that female victims could consent to incest. All acts of incest constituted an abuse of paternal authority. Nevertheless, like post-Cromwell England, neither Massachusetts nor Connecticut prescribed death for incest any longer. Instead, the penalty included standing on the gallows, a whipping, and wearing the capital "I" on clothing.<sup>92</sup> At least formally, justice for victims of sexual abuse in the colonies looked more and more like England's.

Formal institutions are one thing, however, and how much this had changed the way colonists perceived the role of the courts is debatable. For example, although in 1725 Sarah Perkins appears to have sought legal advice, none of the participants in the Hall-Bush trial nor those in a 1702-1703 Simsbury trial of incest used lawyers. Indeed, accusers, defendants, and witnesses reveal in startling detail the circumstances that brought them before the bar. These trials suggest that Puritans at the local level not only expected the colonial government to resolve these family crises and punish the perpetrators but that they also placed a great deal of emphasis on the importance of family government in perpetuating the Puritan sense of morality.

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<sup>92</sup> For example, both laws prohibited an individual from marrying parents, grandparents, children, siblings, aunts or uncles, a mother's husband, a father's wife, a wife's mother or daughter, a husband's father or son, and even brothers-in-law and sisters-in-law. *Documentary Annals of the Reformed Church of England*, ed. Edward Cardwell, vol. 1 (Ridgewood, NJ: Gregg Press, 1966), 316-320; *An Act for Suppressing the Detestable Sins of Incest, Adultery, and Fornication* (London: John Field, 1650), 827-831; *The Public Statute Laws of the State of Connecticut* (Hartford: Hudson & Goodwin, 1808), 477-479; *Acts and Laws of His Majesties Province of the Massachusetts Bay in New England* (Boston: Bartholemew, Green, & John Allen, 1699), 78-79.

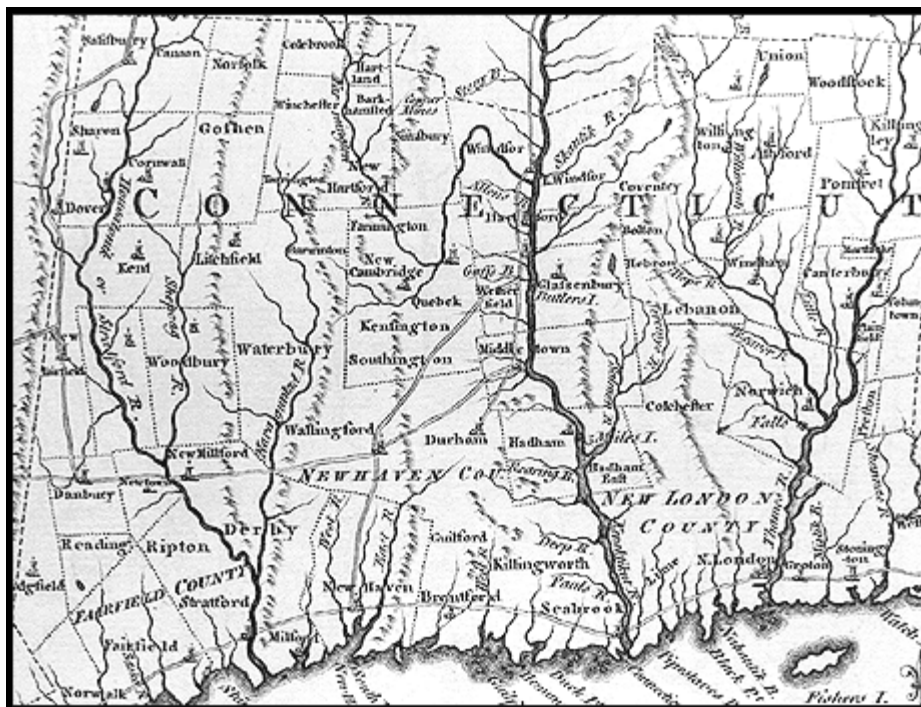
### **In the Beginning: *Rex v. Rood and Rood***

In 1672, Thomas Rood of Norwich, Connecticut, had been a widower for four years. Surviving vital records indicate that he and his deceased wife, Sarah, had at least nine surviving children who, at the time of his trial, ranged in age from Samuel, the youngest at six years old, to his unmarried oldest daughter, also named Sarah, who turned twenty-three in October of that year.<sup>93</sup> Rood was himself within a few years of his fifth decade and, as an early settler of Norwich, had acquired at least 180 acres of land since the town was founded in 1659.<sup>94</sup> Indeed, for the most part, his appearance in Norwich's records usually had some connection with his land holdings. There are anecdotal suggestions that he may have had a familial connection to Thomas Leffingwell, a prominent founder of Norwich admired for his leadership, and a further connection to the Mohegan sachem Uncas, who deeded much of Norwich's land to the original Puritan settlers, but concrete evidence that the two families were related is lacking. Until 1672 at least, it appears that Rood led a relatively quiet existence. If he was involved in any family or town disputes, the record is silent.

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<sup>93</sup> *Vital Records of Norwich, 1659-1848* (Hartford: Society of Colonial Wars, 1913), 34.

<sup>94</sup> Norwich Land Records, 269-270.



**Figure 3** *Colonial Connecticut, 1758, map, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, CT.*

The village of Norwich was originally founded in 1659 by a group originating from Saybrook, a settlement established first by the Dutch in 1623, then resettled by the English in 1635, lying twenty-five miles to the south and west where the Connecticut River empties into the Long Island Sound. The Norwich settlers' motivation for moving away from the coastline is unclear. Saybrook held opportunities for those interested in agriculture and was well-positioned for maritime trade, but a tradition has survived that this founding group fled a plague of voracious crows that devoured tender shoots of corn as soon as they emerged from the soil.<sup>95</sup> Whether this was truly the case, it is not unlikely that the Saybrook group sought more and better lands for agriculture. Although

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<sup>95</sup> Frances Manwaring Calkins, *History of Norwich, Connecticut from its Possession by the Indians to the Year 1866* (Hartford, 1878), 55-56.

Norwich lies in the hills some twelve or fifteen miles north of the Connecticut coast, it is positioned at the convergence of three rivers from which flows an even larger river known today as the Thames. Even though Norwich has a long history of prosperity because of its river trade, originally the old town site was located away from the Thames' hilly riverbanks, implying that the transportation of goods and people by water was not yet the primary concern of the community.



**Figure 4** W.L. Sheppard and J.A. Bogert, *Hooker's Emigration to Connecticut*, image of engraving, in William Cullen Bryant and Sydney Howard Gay, *A Popular History of the United States* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1881), 552.

In this setting, the first recorded case of incest in Connecticut Colony appeared before the local magistrate in the spring of 1672. It is important to note that the documentary evidence laying out the trajectory of Thomas and Sarah Rood's trial is more limited than in later cases. There are no first-hand accounts given by either Thomas or Sarah, therefore, we must tease out the particulars of their experience by examining

carefully the records that remain, in this case, several pages of findings of the local and colonial courts recorded by their clerks, as well as a written opinion of four prominent ministers on the demands of justice concerning acts of incest. We know that on May 9, 1672, the first mention of accusations made against Thomas Rood for committing incest appeared in the record when the Court of Election held at Hartford ordered him returned to the county court at New London for examination in June. Apparently, it had been discovered that Thomas' unmarried daughter, Sarah, was pregnant and, when questioned about the paternity of the baby, she confessed that it was her father's. Thus, the purpose for the scheduled examination was to determine if there was any merit to the accusation that would justify his continued imprisonment until tried by the Court of Assistants. Another record appears noting that, also in June and presumably as a result of Thomas' examination, the court "submitted to several of the neighboring ministers, the query concerning whether a person guilty of the crime of incest ought to be put to death."<sup>96</sup> Four clergymen replied and urged that Thomas and Sarah Rood be put to death.

In October of that year, Thomas was indicted by the Court of Assistants at Hartford and pled guilty to "that abominable sin of incest haveing carnall copulation" with his daughter, Sarah. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, the General Court recorded that the Deputy Governor and the Assistants of Connecticut sought the "advice of the Generall Court concerning Incest, whether...we should have recourse to the word of God." Having received the ministers' opinions asked for in June, the General Court advised the Assistants that the Roods deserved death.<sup>97</sup> After hearing the ministers' views on the

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<sup>96</sup> J.H. Trumbull, *The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut from 1636-1776*, vol. 2 (Hartford: F.A. Brown, 1852), 184.

necessity of imputing guilt to those who committed incest and stem its corrupting influence on others, the Court of Assistants decided Thomas' fate relatively quickly. They ordered the public execution of Thomas Rood to take place in Norwich, instructing the marshall to carry out the sentence a mere ten days later on the 18<sup>th</sup> of October.

In contrast, the Assistants hesitated in determining Sarah's fate. She was also indicted and pled guilty on October 8<sup>th</sup>, but the Assistants met again for more deliberations on October 19<sup>th</sup>, the day after her father's execution. However, "having considered the verdict of the Jury concerning Sarah Rood & finding some of the assistants not fully satisfied therein so as to concur to the passing of sentence of death upon her," the Court of Assistants could not agree on whether Sarah's culpability in the crime was the same as Thomas Rood's.<sup>98</sup> She had to wait until the following May for the court's decision.

On May 19, 1673, the Court of Assistants took up the matter of deciding Sarah's punishment. The Assistants took note of "a great appearance of force layd up upon her spirit by her father overaweing & Tiranical abuse of his parentall authority besides his bodily striveings." They found that Thomas had "brought her into the snare" so that she yielded to "his Temptation & the consealment of the fact & cause of being with childe." The Assistants recognized that in forcing Sarah to have sex with him, Thomas had exploited his daughter, who "so ignorant & weake in minde to withstand the Temptation," could not be "equally Guilty." On these grounds the Assistants found "the fathers fault was much aggravated," so that Sarah's culpability was "exceedingly

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid. When quoting from documents in each of these cases, spelling and grammar have been duplicated.

<sup>98</sup> *Colonial New England Records, 1643-1702*, 53:13.

mittigated.” Clearly, Sarah’s demeanor was consistent with one who had been victimized and abused, for the Assistants observed that Thomas had been able to intimidate his daughter into complying with his demands and then hiding the crime from the community. Thus, the Assistants determined that she deserved only to be “severely whipt on the naked body once at Hartford & once at Norwich.” While harsh, such punishment was not exclusively in the interests of reforming Sarah; the Assistants intended that in witnessing her whippings, others in the colony “may heare & fear & do no more such abominable wickednesse.”<sup>99</sup> By virtue of both Thomas and Sarah’s public punishments, the Assistants sought to make them an example to other parents who might be tempted to abuse a child in such a way, and to abused children who failed to report such abuse.

From beginning to end, Thomas Rood’s trial and execution took a mere five months. However, it would be a mistake to assume based on the time span that the Puritan system was equipped to deal with the consequences of these tragic events. For one thing, Sarah had given birth in late 1672 to a son named George. In addition, regardless of what the law said, no precedent existed in colonial Connecticut for the actual prosecution and sentencing of incest. Thomas Rood may or may not have been the first Connecticut father to sexually abuse his daughter, but he was the first prosecuted in a public forum and, if their actions were any indication of their concerns, the Assistants appear to have wrestled with how best to understand jurisdiction and implementation of the law that had only recently been codified in 1650. Such concern is exemplified by

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<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 15. Spelling is as it appears in the record.



their caution in punishing Sarah and in their consultation with neighboring ministry on God's word concerning incest.

New London County, in which Norwich lies, continued to deal with the consequences of Thomas' abuse by arranging for the care of each of his children, including Sarah. On June 15, 1672, a brief record appears in which the county court ordered the townsmen of Norwich to take control of Thomas Rood's estate and manage it for the support of Sarah and her child.<sup>100</sup> Then, in 1675, the court ordered Thomas Leffingwell to "keepe the child of Sarah Rood."<sup>101</sup> The fact that Sarah was an unmarried woman with a child meant that both now became the responsibility of the community. If her family environment had failed to educate her properly in pious living, it now behooved the people of Norwich to step in and see to her well-being.

The county also ordered Norwich's selectmen to arrange for the rest of Thomas' children to be "placed out Into sum orderly families where they may bee well Educated."<sup>102</sup> Here the court and the town utilized the practice of "putting out" that Edmund Morgan described in *The Puritan Family* to solve the problem of caring for and educating Thomas' now-orphaned children. Placed in proper homes, they would be raised in a pious family, given an education, and, it was hoped, become pious adults. Thomas' lands and possessions were eventually distributed to his children, most of whom remained in Norwich or close by, and, with the exception of Micah, led lives largely unremarked upon by the courts.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> County Court Trials, New London County Court Records 1670-1681, III:49.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*, 108.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*

### **Rex v. Rood, Hall, and Hall**

Thirty years later, George Rood, the son of Sarah and her father, reappeared in court records, this time in connection with a case of incest involving his wife Hannah and her step-father, Thomas Hall. Indeed, George's life is tinged with tragic irony. Just before his third birthday in 1675, the court ordered that he be placed under the care of Thomas Leffingwell of Norwich until he reached the age of twenty-one. His mother, Sarah, moved downriver to New London, the county seat situated at the mouth of the Thames River. In July 1702, at the age of thirty, George married a twenty-year-old woman named Hannah Bush. Neither she nor her family was originally from Norwich, a fact that figured prominently in her subsequent appearance before the court. Her widowed mother Susannah had remarried Thomas Hall while Hannah had been away from home, living as a "drudge sometime in one house and sometime in a nother." At some point, the Halls had moved to Norwich, and Hannah returned to her family, not long before she married George.<sup>104</sup>

As it turned out, Hannah was pregnant when she and George married. In October 1702, Hannah appeared in the New London County Court and revealed to the magistrate

<sup>103</sup> Thomas' sixth child Joseph died in 1682 at the age of twenty-one. After two pounds five shillings were allocated to his debt, the remainder of his estate was divided up between his eight siblings. "County Court Trials," *New London County Court Records*, 4-6:41. Toward the end of his life, Micah lived in Franklin, CT where he was prosperous for a time, but came to be known among townspeople for his peculiarity. Indeed, one cannot help but wonder how much of Micah's "strangeness" might be attributed to his family's history of abuse. A tradition persists that he murdered a peddler in his orchard and as a sign of his crime, one particular apple tree bloomed red and produced yellow fruit containing a "drop of blood." Micah sank into a depression, neglected his farm, and the record tells us that in 1717, he took over the care of the meeting-house in exchange for a yearly peck of corn to feed his family. In July of 1727, the town voted to pay townsmen the sum of two shillings per night and three shillings per day that they stood watch over Micah. In December of 1728, the town paid Jacob Hyde four shillings to bury Micah. P.H. Woodward, "The Tradition of Micah Rood," *Records and Papers of the New London County Historical Society*, 1891; David E. Philips, "The Tell-Tale Apples," in *Legendary Connecticut: Traditional Tales from the Nutmeg State* (Willimantic, CT: Curbstone Press, 1992), 213-215.

<sup>104</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors, I:325a.

Richard Bushnell that her step-father had raped her repeatedly and fathered her unborn child. Her mother, she said, had helped Hall. As a result, Bushnell summoned Hall and his wife Susannah to be questioned in his court. Bushnell recorded that he told Thomas Hall of Hannah's accusation and Hall denied it, saying, "he know nothing of it, and positively denied that he ever had anything to do with her."<sup>105</sup> Nevertheless, Hall's demeanor convinced Bushnell to hold Hall in jail, at least for the time being. Indeed, he found Hall "to be suspiciously guilty" and believed that Hannah's mother, Susannah, was "instrumental to force her." Bushnell then ordered Hall committed to jail until he could be tried by the county court that next June. Hannah was released on a bond paid by Samuel Lothrop, while her mother, Susannah, had her bond paid by Samuel Rood, Thomas Rood's youngest legitimate son, and an older half-brother and uncle to George.

Bushnell recorded that he questioned Susannah on October 26<sup>th</sup> and heard a disturbing confession. Susannah revealed that one morning at Hall's request, she went and found Hannah by the fireside and asked Hannah to "let her father lye with her." Hall had told Susannah it was "no sin" to do so. When asked by Bushnell if she had ever seen her husband and daughter together, Susannah replied in the affirmative. When asked how many times, Susannah answered, "I do not know but it might be two or three times." Further, Susannah also overheard Hall repeat to Hannah that "there was no sin in it."<sup>106</sup> As a result, Bushnell ordered Hannah to appear before a special court in New London to be held on the next day so that she could be further examined. After listening to Hannah's story and Susannah's confirmation that Hannah told the truth, the magistrate

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<sup>105</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors I:323.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 326.

found that the case did not “properly belong to the Cognizance of this Court” and ordered the Halls and Hannah Rood to be held for trial in the Court of Assistants at Hartford on the first Thursday in May 1703.

What Hannah and Susannah said precisely on October 27, 1702, was not recorded, but sometime in the months before their next appearance in court, Hannah wrote in what appears to be her own hand a detailed confession and appeal to the General Assembly and the Court of Assistants “before whome i am to answare for the sine of uncleanenes.” She began by begging God for forgiveness and asking the Assistants that they would “seriously consider the sircomstances of my case and granted me such favor as may be consistant boath with the law of god and man.” Hannah asserted that she had been raised “in great ignorance and [not] instructed either in the law of god or man not understanding what was lawfull or what was sinfull.” She confirmed Susannah’s story that her mother had found her by the fire one morning and asked her to go to her step-father’s bed. Hannah told her mother, “I was afraid to doe anny such thing for it was a great sine.” Susannah replied that it was no sin, but was Thomas’ command, which she ought to obey. Thomas apparently overheard the argument, because he called out to Susannah that if Hannah would not come, Susannah should “box hir ears and make hir come.” Susannah then grabbed Hannah by the hand, pulled her to Thomas’ bed, and began taking Hannah’s clothes off. Forced into the bed, Hannah said she told Thomas, “I did not know but he would be hanged.” She then said he replied that he was “profit prist and king and if [Hannah] did not obaye him [she] would resist the motion of the holy goste.”

Despite her protestations of having been raised in ignorance, Hannah clearly understood that what was occurring to her was wrong. Further, she feared becoming pregnant. When she asked her parents what she should do if she should “be with childe by him,” Susannah suggested that “we should have a good cloake for that for they would say i was poisoned with a botell of water i had of good wife rude.” Nothing Hannah could say or do prevented what happened next. Having been robbed of her clothes and forced into bed with her step-father, her mother “held me by the hand whilst my father did abuse me and had his will of me.” Although the law required her to report the crime, Hannah went on to write, “i can not say i did cry out nither did i know it would avale me nither was there anny nibour so neare as to heare me if i had cryed out....i had no frinde nor aquantance to whome i durst make complaint.” Like many victims of abuse, Hannah was isolated, first by her family’s move to a new community where she had no one to whom she could turn and then by her parents’ horrific abuse she then felt compelled to hide.<sup>107</sup>

Afterwards, Hannah became so “grived and tormented” that she “went to one house and to another and to a third thinking to declare my [grief].” And yet, everyone she met was a stranger to her, and she found she could not reveal what had been happening to her. Instead, she “had not power to speake but sit downe and cry.” Sometimes, Susannah would notice that Hannah had disappeared and would soon find Hannah, removing her from a neighbor’s home “sometimes persuading me sometimes threatening me.” Not only was Susannah complicit in her husband’s crimes, but she made a concerted effort to prevent Hannah from leaving their home or speaking to others

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<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 325a.

about what was happening to her. In the event that Hannah slipped away, Susannah would find the young woman and force her to return.<sup>108</sup>

Hannah wrote that, sometime later, George Rood began courting her. By this time, Hall must have feared that Hannah might be pregnant, because he attempted to persuade George to “stay all night and lye with [Hannah] and told him it was as lawfull as if we were marred.” George refused. Hannah ended her plea, petitioning the court “that i may not be punished with that severity for that which i could not helpe or prevent as if it wear a sin by me willfully committed.”<sup>109</sup> Clearly, Hannah understood that the court’s perception of her culpability depended on the Assistants comprehending that, first, she had resisted her step-father’s demands, and, second, that she had lacked the ability to prevent the attacks.

In May 1703, Thomas wrote his rebuttal. He related an incident in which Hannah and George came to his house to borrow some sewing items from Susannah. Thomas said he confronted Hannah, and she confessed that her child was indeed her husband’s and that a “grat many lis told.” Further, George told Hall that he wanted the baby “at last.” They all shook hands, and Hall promised to “tak no advanteg” of them if they would go to the authorities and tell the truth.<sup>110</sup> With this story, Thomas appears to have hoped to cast doubt on Hannah’s accusations by providing a less horrific explanation for Hannah’s early delivery of a child. He implied that Hannah and George had conceived

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 328a-b.

the child before they were married and hoped to conceal the fact with Hannah's accusations of incest.

Hall might have hoped that by telling a story the Assistants had probably heard many times before from other couples that he would escape punishment, but he followed up with some elaborate accusations. In Hall's written hand, Susannah confessed that "it has plesed god to restor my sense" and that she "wos bewiched for I felt my strength and senses fald me." Essentially, Susannah and Hall attempted to explain away Susannah's earlier confession of her participation in the abuse by claiming that Susannah had been bewitched to lie. Hall also complained that "had she bin woth child by me," Hannah should not have married George. And once George discovered Hannah was pregnant, it was his responsibility to divorce her. Hall said that instead of seeking a divorce, George and Hannah had allowed seven pounds worth of "goodes" to be stolen from his house.<sup>111</sup> Later Hall added that George's brother and sister-in-law, Samuel and Mary Rood, were behind the "plot" to steal Hall's possessions.<sup>112</sup> Hall placed himself in the role of victim as he argued that the accusations of incest were a ploy to cover-up the misdeeds of several parties. In addition to Hannah and George's avoidance of fornication charges, Hall asserted that the incest charges provided an opportunity for Samuel and Mary Rood to steal Thomas Hall's estate and for an unnamed witch to practice her evil art.

His accusations do not appear to have found a sympathetic audience in the court. Connecticut experienced its own period of witchcraft hysteria in the 1660s, and as a result, changes had occurred in the way the colony prosecuted witchcraft. A minimum of

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 329a.

two witnesses who had both seen the witch were required by the courts to testify, and a “new pattern of ministerial and magisterial skepticism” helped limit Connecticut’s involvement in the 1690s hysteria that overtook Salem, Massachusetts, to a “minor panic” in which no executions occurred. Indeed, the virulence of this second period of witchcraft hysteria in New England had peaked in the colonies ten years prior and been followed by a tempering of such feverish accusations, culminating in Massachusetts overturning all witchcraft accusations in 1701.<sup>113</sup> Puritan values concerning “education and godly behavior” became more pronounced than ever in Connecticut, while the intensity of Puritans’ religious experience moderated so that turn-of-the-century Puritans began to express skepticism concerning an overlap between this world and the supernatural.<sup>114</sup> Witchcraft accusations simply no longer had a place in a society intent on putting the horrors of the past behind it.

The fact that such an accusation was made, though, merits some discussion. Whether the Halls believed the accusations they made is not really the point. The fact that they made them is. However naïve or duplicitous they might have been in believing that the mere suggestion of witchcraft could free them of the charges made by Hannah Rood, it is feasible that the Halls represent a divide between those ministerial and political authorities who no longer showed a willingness to prosecute witches and those

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<sup>113</sup> While the Salem Witch-hunts of the early 1690s gets the most attention, Connecticut experienced its own period of intense witch-hunting in the 1660s, begun when, just before she died, an eight-year-old girl named Elizabeth Kelly accused Goody Ayres of tormenting her. Thirty-four people were accused of witchcraft and nearly half were hanged. Walter W. Woodward, “New England’s Other Witch-Hunt: The Hartford Witch-Hunt of the 1660s and Changing Patterns in Witchcraft Prosecution,” *Magazine of History* 17, no. 4, Witchcraft (Jul., 2003): 16-20.

<sup>114</sup> Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Women and Religion in Early America, 1600-1850: The Puritan and Evangelical Tradition* (London: Routledge, 1999), 72.



among the Puritans who still believed that Satan walked the Earth looking for ways to introduce chaos and sin. In bringing up the possibility, the Halls suggest that rationalism and the formalization of New England's legal system existed alongside the view that just as God represented harmony and order, Satan lay at the root of all sin and disorder.

Late in May 1703, Thomas and Susannah Hall pled not guilty to the charges of incest and accessory to incest, but a jury found them guilty. On May 29<sup>th</sup>, the Halls were both sentenced under Connecticut's new marriage law passed in 1702, which eliminated the death penalty for sexual crimes. Instead, Thomas and Susannah were to stand at the gallows with a rope around their necks for one hour, receive a whipping not to exceed forty stripes, and wear a capital "T" two inches long and "proportional bigness in a contrasting color" for the rest of their lives. Hannah, having already confessed, but found to have concealed the crime for "So Long a time" was to be whipped in Norwich.<sup>115</sup>

### ***Rex v. Perkins and Perkins***

In February 1724/5, a third case of father-daughter incest appeared in the courts after the widowed and remarried John Perkins, Jr. repeatedly assaulted Sarah, his daughter from his first marriage, despite her continued attempts to resist him. Surviving records include the court's findings, witness statements, a plea to the Superior Court written on behalf of the victim, as well as legislative action taken to commute Sarah Perkins' sentence and punishment. By this time, the Court of Assistants, the General Court, and the Particular Court had been replaced by the Superior Court and the General Assembly. In this instance, the Chatterton family with whom Sarah had been living perceived that the relationship between the father and daughter was not a normal one.

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<sup>115</sup> Norbert Lacy, *The Records of the Court of Assistants of Connecticut 1665-1701*, II: 417-419.

Suspecting that all was not right, Mrs. Chatterton testified that during one of John Perkins' visits to her home she had spied on the two through a hole and was disturbed by Perkins' behavior toward his daughter, which she regarded as "unchast and unseemly." Mrs. Chatterton also noted that Perkins would demand that Sarah go on walks with him, but that Sarah acted "as if she were going among rattlesnakes," hinting to Mrs. Chatterton that her father drove her to "uncleanness with him."<sup>116</sup>

Despite having been accused by several neighbors, John Perkins pleaded not guilty to the charge made against him. Perhaps sensing an opportunity to expose and end John's abuse of her, Sarah confessed that her father had sent her away to live with the Chattertons because of her refusal to "comple" with his demands to "lie carnally with him." Nevertheless, while living with the Chattertons, John came frequently to visit Sarah, during which time he abused her. However, Sarah asserted that although she pled guilty to the crime of which she was accused, she had "opposed [her father] by arguments, and was never willing to comply with him, and that he has been want to kick and strike her for her noncompliance, and that he has threatened her he would have her hand cut off for being a disobedient child." Both were found guilty and sentenced to a whipping and the wearing of the capital "T" on their clothing. John Perkins failed to show up for his sentencing and may have escaped punishment altogether, but the court delayed Sarah's punishment until the following June, likely because her testimony revealed a picture of a father who had abused his authority as a parent with threats and physical violence in order to rape her repeatedly.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> New Haven Superior Court Files. Box 307.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

In the meantime, Sarah pled her case to Connecticut's General Assembly in May 1725. Here the transition to a more formal legal system is evident as Sarah indicated that she received advice from others to plead not guilty, advice she feared might have been in error. Further, the language of her plea is much more formal than the simple phrasing that characterized previous cases. Nevertheless, in language reminiscent of the previous cases, the Puritan influence regarding orderly familial relationships is evident, albeit altered by the reality of what Richard Bushman described as the transition "from Puritan to Yankee." Robert Bliss described this process as the secularization of Connecticut in which old forms were retained out of "force of habit."<sup>118</sup> By 1708, Bliss argued, Puritans' congregationalism in Connecticut had given way to presbyterian forms with associations of ministers and consociations of churches having authority to correct erring clergy and laity. The Saybrook Platform extended the vote to all inhabitants of a town and gave them a voice in settling a new minister, for which every townsman would be taxed. While ministers hoped to maintain their authority within the towns, the power and fiscal responsibility of settling ministers was transferred from a congregation of church members to the entire town. Such reforms broke the corporate covenant between ministers and their congregations and replaced them with a secular form of government in which old ideas concerning the role that government played in ensuring order in society were institutionalized.<sup>119</sup>

In this way, the colonial government's role in ensuring stable family order continued while gradually losing its explicit language of religiosity. This does not mean,

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<sup>118</sup> Bliss, "A Secular Revival: Puritanism in Connecticut, 1675-1708," 136.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 150-151.

however, that participants in the judicial process no longer expressed a sense of their own depravity and a desire for reconciliation with God. Indeed, Sarah Perkins begged the General Assembly for forgiveness if she erred in listening to others' advice to plead not guilty. She did not wish to hide her "sins" and apologized for not having made them public sooner.<sup>120</sup>

Sarah stated that her motivation for concealing her father's abuse lay in her grief at the loss of first her mother and now her father, as well as in her despair because of her family's dysfunction. If love and affection tempered by moderation were the Puritan ideal, her father had perverted and corrupted it by demanding that he had a "right to require [Sarah's] obedience." Her reason for pleading not guilty, she said, lay in how "difficult it was to withstand the authority of a father, and so for to destroy him" by revealing his crime to authorities. Apparently, John Perkins had tried to rationalize a sexual relationship with his daughter by attempting to persuade her that it was no sin to be obedient to one's father. Resorting to language with biblical overtones, John Perkins told Sarah that if she did not "consent," she would be "stoned as a Disobedient Child" for her failure to yield to John Perkins' demands. Yet, if Sarah believed him, she continued to resist him, only to be kicked and beaten by her father until forced to submit.<sup>121</sup>

Sarah appealed to the General Assembly as "fathers of the Commonwealth." Lacking a father who exercised his authority properly and had failed to show her appropriate fatherly affection, she looked to the colonial government for protection while appealing to the laws of mercy and justice. The vocabulary that her forebears used is

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<sup>120</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors, III:42

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

sprinkled throughout her language—the desire to confess in order to restore her standing with God and with the community, the role of the government in mitigating justice with reasoned mercy, the requirement that individuals root out evil in themselves and their neighbors, and the perception that a father’s undue exercise of his authority was subversive of family order.<sup>122</sup> Robert Bliss may have been correct that such ideas had become old habit, and yet they still resonated sixty years after Thomas Rood was hanged, and a century and more after the founders first imported them into New England. Despite the institutional changes the colony of Connecticut underwent in its legal and political structures, the Puritan founders’ familial ideology continued to inform the role that government took in the lives of colonists, particularly when it was deemed necessary to correct deviance from accepted norms.

Sarah Perkins, unlike Sarah Rood and Hannah Rood, was successful in her plea for clemency. Finding her “grossly ignorant, not only of the heinous nature of the crime laid to her charge, but also of the paternall authority of her said father over her,” the Assembly released her from all punishment. The members of the General Assembly recognized her father’s failure to conduct himself morally in his behavior toward Sarah as a father should. They also recognized that Sarah lacked the ability to resist her father’s demands. In the interests of mercy, justice was mitigated and Sarah was set free.<sup>123</sup>

### **Ecclesiastical Contributions to the Application of Law**

Given that Connecticut operated as a Puritan theocracy for much of the seventeenth century and that Puritanism’s heir, Congregationalism, continued to

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors, III:43.

influence Connecticut into the eighteenth century, it is helpful to understand the position that Puritan clergy took on family government. Fortunately, we have the opinion of the four clergy in the first Rood case to provide us with their view of how these types of crimes subverted family government and order. The court records include an opinion written and signed by four members of Connecticut's clergy that responded to the court's inquiry regarding God's laws governing familial relationships and the role government should take in regulating them. These four clergymen—John Whiting, Gershom Bulkeley, Joseph Haines, and Nathan Collins—primarily drew on two sources of knowledge. First, they constructed their argument using Leviticus in the Old Testament, primarily chapters 18 and 20, which delineated the immediate and extended family relationships prohibited from having sexual relations. Second, they referenced John Calvin's own views on incest and the necessity of punishing such crimes. While English common law may have had a role in Connecticut's legal proceedings, the four clergymen did not, however, feel the need to refer back to English common law practices nor to precedents set by English ecclesiastical courts that had jurisdiction over "sins of the flesh" in old England.<sup>124</sup> Connecticut's colonial lawmakers, magistrates, and clergy believed that the Puritan emphasis on scripture as the primary source of moral law enabled them to govern justly and rightly. The four ministers that the Assistants consulted in the matter of Thomas and Sarah Rood exemplify such an approach. They inferred from reading in Leviticus that, in undermining the divine prescription for family order, incest constituted a discernable threat to the colony's status as a godly society.

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<sup>124</sup> Martin Ingram, *Church Courts, Sex and Marriage in England, 1570-1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 238.

Such a conclusion had its roots in the message of God's providence that was prominent in Calvinism. Puritans believed that God was active and present in the world and was the "ultimate force behind everything that happened." And God was an angry God in response to a world rife with sin. Indeed, portents and signs of God's wrath occurred as a consequence of men and women who failed to obey God's laws. Puritans believed that such violations would eventually provoke warnings from God that could take the form of comets or crop failures or, if the crimes of the people warranted, perhaps result in their destruction.<sup>125</sup>

In the case of incest between fathers and daughters, the line of such thinking was not a straight one, since, as previously noted, Leviticus failed to directly address it. Here, the ministers approached the problem via the law of nature to draw connections between those types of incest clearly prohibited by God and Thomas' abuse of his daughter Sarah. Puritans like John Cotton, Thomas Hooker, and Peter Bulkeley believed that this law of nature was the covenant of works under which Adam lived while in the Garden of Eden and was "that which uncorrupted man would naturally know and by which he would naturally regulate his life." Prior to Adam's Fall, God had placed Adam under covenant to obey His law and in return Adam would be rewarded with eternal life. This covenant of works was necessarily replaced by the covenant of grace after the Fall, which resulted in the inability of mankind to fulfill the original covenant between Adam and God.<sup>126</sup> Nevertheless, Puritans believed that the essence of the law of nature lay in its implication that moral law is discernable and knowable by all. Thus, when contemplating the Roods'

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<sup>125</sup> David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), 77-78.

<sup>126</sup> Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness*, 60-61.

crimes, the ministers argued that the purpose of moral law, “which Nature itself doth dictate,” was to “preserve *that* reverent respect” between those of the same flesh.<sup>127</sup>

A desire to strictly adhere to moral law does not fully explain the position of the Assistants and the ministers they consulted. In a survey of Puritan Massachusetts’ adjudication of criminal cases prior to 1650, Howard Schweber found that magistrates reserved the most severe punishments, including death, for crimes involving speech and sexual misconduct. He concluded that Puritans viewed improper speech as at least as dangerous as sexual misconduct, because they both undermined the Puritan hierarchical social order that depended on each individual fulfilling his or her prescribed role.<sup>128</sup> Schweber also pointed out that Puritans held a different view of what constituted “private matters” than currently exists in the U.S. He explained that a “tradition of neighborly watchfulness was a natural outgrowth of the idea that the maintenance of civil order was a collective responsibility.” Given the connections that Puritans made between household order and social stability, the severity of punishments that the magistrates meted out for sexual offences and improper speech reflected the seriousness of the threat that these crimes presented to household order. Both upset the prescribed Puritan hierarchy as described by Winthrop in his *Modell of Christian Charity*. In light of Schweber’s argument, describing sexual crimes only in terms of their moral depravity ignores Puritans’ social and political concerns centered on the connections they made between family and social order.

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<sup>127</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I: 39.

<sup>128</sup> Howard Schweber, “Ordering Principles: The Adjudication of Criminal Cases in Puritan Massachusetts, 1629-1650,” *Law and Society Review* 32, no. 2 (1998): 382.



While a similar study of colonial Connecticut's adjudication of criminal cases remains to be done, Schweber's conclusions can be tested using the ministers and magistrates' own findings in Connecticut's prosecution of incest. Indeed, approaching these documents while asking questions regarding Puritans' social concerns reveals striking similarities to Schweber and other scholars' assertions that Puritans equated pious households with a stable society. Ultimately, of course, Puritans were concerned with reforming English society and establishing and maintaining God's kingdom on earth, a kingdom that functioned according to a particular moral code. Further, Puritans were specific in how they envisioned such a kingdom to be.

In Connecticut, such specificity informed the colony's first constitution, the *Fundamental Orders*. In its opening sentences, the colony's founders put together a statement that revealed their view on the purpose of government, namely that:

where a people are gathered together the word of God requires that to maintain the peace and union of such a people there should be an orderly and decent Government established according to God, to order and dispose of the affairs of the people at all seasons as occasion shall require....

Thus, the theocratic government that Puritans envisioned functioned to maintain order according to God's prescription, which according to the *Fundamental Orders* included preserving the "purity" of the Gospel, maintaining church discipline, and regulating civil affairs.<sup>129</sup>

The precise form that such maintenance might take came to be expressed in the various laws and decisions included in the 1650 codification of Connecticut's legal system, but Thomas Hooker, the minister who led the founding of Connecticut, left clues

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<sup>129</sup> *Earliest Laws of the New Haven and Connecticut Colonies*, 59.

as to his expectations. In *The Application of Redemption*, published posthumously in 1656, Hooker commented on the responsibility he believed each Christian had in rooting out sin in himself and then in his family and neighbors. He believed that the hatred of sin “begins at home” and that the truly converted individual would not rest until he had eradicated all sin within his power to do so. It simply was not enough to eliminate sin in oneself, but duty and a love of God required that the convert remove sins “out of the families where he dwells, out of the plantations where he lives, out of the companies and occasions, with whom he hath occasion to meet and meddle at any time....”<sup>130</sup> To Hooker, the pursuit and destruction of sin until not one remained must be relentless if a person was truly converted.

Such a view is consistent with that of the four ministers who informed the Assistants of their interpretation of God’s law concerning incest. Indeed, they believed in a moral law that was both “universall & perpetuall,” so that the laws and commandments that applied to the Jews of the Old Testament applied to all of God’s people, regardless of time or place. Thus, when they read in Leviticus 18 that God forbade a man to lie with his daughter-in-law, they reasoned that doing so with one’s daughter must be the more heinous crime.<sup>131</sup> The ministers’ position also hinted at Puritan expectations concerning family relationships or, in other words, what was orderly and appropriate within the household. They cited Leviticus 18:8 in which the Christian is advised that to uncover the nakedness of one’s father’s wife is to uncover the nakedness of one’s father. Put another way, a sin committed between two people, whether related by blood or by

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<sup>130</sup> Thomas Hooker, *The Application of Redemption* (London, 1659), 684-685.

<sup>131</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I: 39a.

marriage, had wider implications for the family. In the case of incest, it was “larger” than either category of incest; otherwise, God would need only to prohibit adultery or fornication. The basis of their concern is revealed later in the document when they argue that incest invited “confusion” about the nature of divinely-ordered relationships and that toleration of such crimes could only lead to the Puritans’ destruction, because the sin of incest was “as severe of *the* Abominations of *the* heathen, for *which* God destroyed them.”<sup>132</sup>

Further, when the magistrates accused Thomas Rood of encouraging such heinous sin within his family and rendering Sarah too “ignorant & weake in minde to withstand the Temptation,” they likely agreed with Richard Mather’s *Farewell Exhortation*.<sup>133</sup> Thomas Rood had not only failed in his obligation to teach his daughter what she needed to know in order to turn to God, experience conversion, and receive salvation, but he had also failed to ensure that his daughter Sarah would perpetuate the Puritan vision of Christian order into the next generation by marrying and establishing a pious household. He had subverted the law of marriage as contained in the Bible, “which is that a man shall leave his Father & Mother & soe a man or woman shall leave son or daughter & cleave to his wife.”<sup>134</sup> Practically speaking, in a society where women’s identity centered round their roles as wives and mothers, the scandal of incest, and perhaps even the trauma of having been a victim of her father’s sexual abuse, likely had much to do with Sarah Rood never marrying and having more children.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 39a-b.

<sup>133</sup> *Colonial New England Records, 1643-1702*, 53: 15.

<sup>134</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I: 39b.



**Figure 5** *New England Kitchen Scene*, illustration (author unknown), in Joel Dorman Steele, *A Brief History of the United States* (New York: American Book Company, 1885), 94.

Given the time period in which the Roods were tried and convicted, such concerns regarding the perpetuation of Puritanism through pious New England families is not surprising. The year 1672 was, after all, a mere decade after the compromise of the Halfway Covenant that allowed the unregenerate of the second generation to retain halfway membership, thus remaining under the jurisdiction of church government. Nor

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<sup>135</sup> Laurel Thatcher Ulrich has done a fascinating study of women's various roles in seventeenth and eighteenth century New England, which she describes as including helpmeet, deputy husband, mother, neighbor, and mistress, among others. While she argues that gender was less rigid than would occur in later periods of American history, so that women were involved in decision-making, finances, and the economic production of their households, all of these roles centered round her home and family. Laurel Thatcher Ulrich, *Good Wives: Image and Reality in the Lives of Women in Northern New England 1650-1750* (New York: Vintage Books 1982), 37-38.

was the issue of the next generations' conversions resolved by this time. Many ministers and congregations still wrestled with adopting the covenant for themselves, fearing that doing so meant they compromised their institutions and diluted their theology and their faith.<sup>136</sup> Others feared that a failure to adopt the Halfway Covenant would leave more and more New Englanders and their children outside the influence of the church and hoped that by exposing the unregenerate to the Lord's word, halfway membership would bring them to a sense of their own depravity and then be led by the Holy Spirit to experience conversion. In Connecticut where the idea of the Halfway Covenant was born, the issues surrounding it and the ministers' position on incest reflect a concern that sin and evil laid siege to family order and, by extension, the colony's godliness.

The ministers' focus on Leviticus 18:8 also exposes a dichotomy in Puritan sexuality. Historians have largely agreed that American Puritans were not nearly as prudish as popular depictions frequently portray. Edmund Morgan noted that Puritans "were neither prudes nor ascetics. They knew how to laugh, and they knew how to love." And yet Morgan's own study of Michael Wigglesworth recognizes that at least some Puritans expressed anxiety over what they perceived as their own "carnal lusts."<sup>137</sup> In part, such lack of ease with sexuality along with Puritans' emphasis on marriage can be traced to reformers' critique of monastic abuses in Europe, but Puritan literature on the topic of marriage also frequently charged readers to moderate their love for their spouses, lest they place their spouses above God and risk God's anger and retribution. Puritans

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<sup>136</sup> Delbanco, *The Puritan Ideal*, 229-230.

<sup>137</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 64; Edmund S. Morgan, introduction to *The Diary of Michael Wigglesworth, 1653-1657: The Conscience of a Puritan*, ed. Edmund S. Morgan (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), p. v.

knew how to love and show affection, but they believed that in order to attain salvation, love too must exist in a hierarchal order that placed love of God above all other forms of love and affection.<sup>138</sup>

Leviticus 20:12 provided an explanation for the potential disruption that could arise out of a failure to properly prioritize the various kinds of love. In committing incest, the Roods, and by extension others like them, “wrought confusion.”<sup>139</sup> Marriage had specific goals, and incest subverted those goals. First, according to the seventh commandment, marriage functioned to preserve chastity in and out of marriage. Second, proper familial relationships fostered “reverent respect” between the members of a household. They believed that “Nature” taught the proper order of relationships. Third, in committing incest, the Roods failed to heed God’s law concerning marriage, that a man leave his parents and cleave to his wife. The influence of centuries of theologians on the nature of marriage can be felt here, for the ministers insisted that the relationship between a husband and wife exhibited “parity,” a state “Inconsistent *with the* superiority and inferiority” that Nature and God dictated must exist between father and daughter. “Hence,” the ministers argued in their opinion to the court, “their marriage causeth confusion and if he may not have her for his wife much lesse may he have her for his whore.”<sup>140</sup> By placing his child on an equal plane with himself, Thomas Rood violated the law of marriage and undermined his own authority as a parent by failing to maintain a hierarchy of relationships and causing confusion in his own household.

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<sup>138</sup> Kathleen Verduin, “‘Our Cursed Natures’: Sexuality and the Puritan Conscience.” *The New England Quarterly* 56, no. 2 (Jun. 1983): 225-228.

<sup>139</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I: 39a.

<sup>140</sup> Ibid.

The ministers feared that such confusion could spread among their people if left unchecked. In the minds of Puritans, if the basic unit of society is the family, then disruption and confusion within the family carried the potential to “abound like a Flowr” throughout society.<sup>141</sup> No doubt the ministers felt these fears were justified. In the years surrounding the Halfway Covenant in 1662, ministers throughout New England still spoke of the Puritans’ divine mission but worried that backsliding might lead God to withdraw his favor. For example, following a terrible drought that occurred around the time of the Halfway Covenant, Michael Wigglesworth of Connecticut wrote a poem in which God indicted New England, saying:

Oft have I charg’d you by my Ministers  
 To gird your selves with sack cloth, and repent.  
 Oft have I warnd you by my Messengers;  
 That so you might my wrathfull ire prevent:  
 But who among you hath this warning taken?  
 Who hath his Crooked wayes, and wicked works forsaken?

In particular, Wigglesworth pointed to sexual excesses as particular examples of Puritan backsliding, such that those who had supposedly been educated in Christian piety appear to “run with greater speed and Courage to Damnation.”<sup>142</sup>

Worse, the toleration of sinners invited God’s wrath on all of New England. Wigglesworth’s views on New England’s sins and backsliding are consistent with the four ministers’ opinion of incest and its prosecution. In their interpretation of Leviticus 18, the ministers perceived that New England would find itself in a precarious position should God withdraw his favor as a result of the colony’s toleration of sin. Indeed, the

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<sup>141</sup> Ibid. I:39b.

<sup>142</sup> Michael Wigglesworth, *God’s Controversy with New-England* (1662), ed. Reiner Smolinski, at Digital Commons @ University of Nebraska-Lincoln, *Electronic Texts in American Studies*, <http://digitalcommons.unl.edu> (accessed October 12, 2009), 9.

colony would be as the land of Canaan if it failed to heed warnings given to Moses' people, while the Puritans would be as the heathen, whom God destroyed because of their iniquities.<sup>143</sup> Further, they argued, Leviticus 18:26 commanded God's people not only to avoid committing "abominations," but also to prevent "any of your own nation, nor any stranger that sojourneth among you" from doing so. Believing that God's law was universal and perpetual, Puritans felt an obligation to root out such sin in themselves and in their neighbors in order to ensure that God's favor would persist, thus staving off any threat of destruction.

The ministers ended their response to the Assistants' query by briefly turning to John Calvin to justify a death sentence further. Calvin, they argued, offered the solution by which the community could be absolved of any implication in these crimes. Executing the Roods meant that their "Blaid shall bee upon them." If appropriately punished, their crime would be theirs alone, not to be "imputed to others." Further, they warned, a misguided show of clemency would surely provoke God's vengeance, "because by Impunitye Iniquittye is noriched."<sup>144</sup> In this case, the ministers believed that a show of mercy for either Thomas or Sarah had no place in the court's deliberations.

### **Justice v. Mercy**

Despite the ministers' parting comments, the Assistants felt justified in deviating somewhat from the ministers' findings. They believed they had grounds to do so based

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<sup>143</sup> See Levit. 18:3, 24, 25, 27 KJV (1611), "After the doings of the land of Egypt, wherein ye dwelt, shall ye not do: and after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances....Defile not ye yourselves in any of these things: for in all these the nations are defiled which I cast out before you:...And the land is defiled: therefore I do visit the iniquity thereof upon it, and the land itself vomiteth out her inhabitants...(For all these abominations have the men of the land done, which were before you, and the land is defiled;)"

<sup>144</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I: 39b.



on their interpretation of biblical principles of justice and mercy. Indeed, there are clues in the ways that they handled the Roods' trials indicating that while the ministry had a great deal of influence among Puritans at all levels, there existed some leeway in the system. In a system that could afford to rely on a judge's "intimate knowledge" of his neighbors for as long as the colony's population lacked England's density, the Puritan reformers who colonized New England expected that colonial magistrates would be able to ferret out the truth and use their best judgment in dispensing justice and mercy.<sup>145</sup>

The historian E. Clinton Gardner notes that, in his role as governor of Massachusetts, John Winthrop was himself heavily influenced by William Perkins, an English Puritan intellectual of the late sixteenth century who wrote extensively regarding the relationship between justice and mercy as reflected in the covenant of works and the covenant of grace.<sup>146</sup> According to Perkins, the Puritan sense of justice operated on two levels comprised of the "extremity of the law" and "mitigation of the law."<sup>147</sup> The first required that the law be applied strictly and literally without regard for "good and convenient cause," running the risk of making justice a "cover for cruelty." The second moderated such harshness, what Perkins called "flat injustice," but he warned that, here too, magistrates must exercise caution lest in the name of mercy they "turne to the maintenance of malefactours, the abolishing of lawes, the despising or weakening of authority."<sup>148</sup> In Perkins' view, the demands of justice must be satisfied in the Christian

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<sup>145</sup> Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 33-34.

<sup>146</sup> E. Clinton Gardner, "'Justice in the Puritan Covenantal Tradition.'" *Journal of Law and Religion* 6, no. 1 (1988): 54.

<sup>147</sup> William Perkins, "Epiekeia, or a Treatise of Christian Equity and Moderation," in Edmund S. Morgan, *Puritan Political Ideas, 1558-1794* (), 60.

order, but God required that the magistrates exercised their reason and judgment to discern when and to whom the application of mercy was appropriate.

Thus, the principles of justice and mercy help explain what concerned the Court of Assistants, and later the General Assembly, when the victims and abusers in these incest cases were brought before the bar to face harsh consequences already prescribed by law. In reading the colonial law, the penalty hardly seems ambiguous, but perhaps because the Assistants lacked precedent for its actual implementation in the original 1672 case, they hesitated to prescribe such harsh punishment, at least for Sarah and certainly for later defendants. Perhaps too, determining the extent of each woman's guilt was an uncomfortable task given that some were pregnant and each of their confessions contained details of force and abuse that disturbed authorities. These were precisely the sort of mitigating circumstances that Perkins had asserted must be considered and balanced with the demands of justice.

Cornelia Hughes Dayton noted some significant differences in the way that the Court of Assistants handled incest compared with other sexual crimes, like rape, fornication, and adultery, which were often mitigated to the lesser charge of lewd and lascivious conduct in order to avoid the death penalty. The magistrates involved in each case believed that, in abusing their female relatives, males were driven by carnal lusts, while the women did not appear to be, as they might have been in cases of adultery or fornication. Instead, even if the magistrates sensed that a woman consented to her abuser's mistreatment, they believed that she did so out of obedience to a male authority figure, however reluctantly that obedience might have been given. Thus, while men and

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 61-62.

women accused of incest in colonial Connecticut were found guilty, female victims often received a mitigation of justice and were given either a lighter punishment or even granted a suspension.<sup>149</sup>

### **Failing to Fear God**

Over the course of his career as a minister from the 1680s to the 1720s, Cotton Mather wrote hundreds of sermons and books on religious topics. Several addressed obligations owed to parents by their children and vice versa. Mather made explicit connections between family order and the greater good. For example, in one sermon entitled *The Duty of Parents to their Children*, he asked parents:

How often in a week, are we Diverting ourselves, with our Children in our Houses? There thy stand before us; There is nothing to hinder our saying some very profitable thing for them to think upon; well, can you let fall Nothing upon them, that it will be worth their while, for them to think upon?

Parents, Mather believed, should stop wasting opportunities to provide their children with moments for thoughtful contemplation on worthy topics.

In tending to their duties as parents, Mather urged Puritans to remember that everyone in the community had a vested interest in the well-being of each family. He argued, “To Serve the Families of our Neighborhood, will be a Service to all our Interests,” and urged parents to “consider the condition of their children ... [and] to endeavor their salvation.” Further, in a twin tract called *The Duties of Children to their Parents*, he maintained that, “Natural Parents cannot safely come under the Contempt of

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<sup>149</sup> Dayton, *Women before the Bar*, 282. See Martha Saxton, *Being Good: Women’s Moral Values in Early America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 29-35. Saxton argued that, for Puritan girls, obedience to a number of superiors in her family, school, church, and community equated with her fear of God. Disobedience rarely took the form of a physical assault on her parents, but instead usually expressed itself as sexual rebellion or “possession of the devil.”

their Children: God will Curse the Children that Set Light by Them; and can you dream then, that God will allow any Contempt of Political Parents, of Ecclesiastical, or of Scholistical?" Mather believed that children who dishonored their parents also dishonored all of society. In failing to show respect for family, church, and government, such disobedient children threatened to bring down God's "curse" not just on themselves, but also on those political and religious leaders who tolerated such an attitude.

When Boston minister Benjamin Wadsworth commented on family relationships in a series of sermons, he included a discourse on "Good Order" in his preface. "Good order in any Society," he wrote, "renders it beautiful and lovely. The upholding of Good Order in it, tends to promote the benefit and comfort of the members of it."<sup>150</sup>

Wadsworth's style was more direct than Mather in his assessment of the consequences for family disorder. He advised children that they should show love, fear, obedience, honor, and reverence to their parents who justly governed them. Wadsworth feared that disobedience made children vulnerable to sin and its consequences, namely God's disfavor. He wrote:

It may be you idle away your time, you'd be abroad very late on nights, very unseasonably; you'll get into ill company, frequent Taverns, take to Gaming and other ill practices, and all this quite contrary to the plain commands of your Parents, is it so? If it is, then you disobey and rebel against God himself. Tis no small evil you're guilty of; you greatly provoke the Holy God, you're in the way to ruin.<sup>151</sup>

Wadsworth spoke to parents as well, saying that because children were not "fit to govern themselves... parents should give suitable precepts to, and maintain a wise government

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<sup>150</sup> Benjamin Wadsworth, *The Well-ordered Family, or Relative Duties* (Boston: B. Green, 1712), 1.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 97.

over their children; so carry it, as their children may both fear and love them.”<sup>152</sup> He warned that the “Ignorance, Wickedness (& consequent Judgments) that have prevailed, & still are prevailing among us, are not more plainly owing to any one thing, than to the neglect of Family Religion, Instruction & Government.”<sup>153</sup> Like other ministers, Wadsworth linked family government and religious education to the greater good. Ignoring them left the community vulnerable to sin and God’s subsequent anger.

In each of these trials, there are elements that suggest that, like these and other contemporary commentators on the family, the participants understood family government to operate in specific ways, namely that parents were responsible for the moral education of their children, that children were expected to respect their parents’ authority, and that the failure to tend to these obligations threatened social stability when individuals failed to behave appropriately. For example, although we lack Sarah Rood’s precise words to the magistrates in 1672, whatever she said led them to believe that her father had abused his authority and she had not been a willing participant. As a result of her confession, they noted in her demeanor “a great appearance of force layd up upon her spirit by her father.” Sarah Rood stood before the magistrates as a victim of her father’s tyranny. “Overaw[ed]” and forced into “yielding to...temptation,” Sarah Rood had been subjected to a corruption of her community’s ideals concerning divinely-ordered family government, leaving her and potentially her community vulnerable to the spread of such “abominable wickednesse.”<sup>154</sup>

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>154</sup> Court of Assistants, I:15.

In the trial of 1702, the Halls and Hannah Rood also expressed these beliefs in the proper order of family relationships. In the struggle between the Halls and Hannah that preceded Thomas Hall's rape of Hannah, we see frequent references made to the expectation that Hannah's duty as a daughter was to obey her step-father, Thomas. Both Susannah and Thomas demanded that Hannah obey her father's command, because he was "prophet, priest, and king" of their household. In turn, Hannah also alluded to her parents' having neglected their duty to her, since she had been brought up "in great ignorance...in the law of god or man." Even Thomas's repeated denials were grounded in the argument that children owed deference to their parents. Instead, Thomas accused, Hannah subverted his authority as the patriarch of their family and plotted with the Roods to imprison him and steal his "estate."<sup>155</sup>

Later in 1725, Sarah Perkins spoke of the difficulty of disobeying her father, because the impulse to obey was so strong. She recognized that under normal circumstances, her father had the "right to require my obedience." She also knew that in raping her, her father defied God's law by exerting "unnaturall authority."<sup>156</sup> In each case, the demand by fathers for respect and obedience was normative. It was the degree to which their specific demands ignored Puritan society's prescriptions concerning the proper exercise of parental authority that became the problem. Puritans perceived that abuse by an authority figure was accompanied by the victim's ignorance of God's law and his word, and by extension, each daughter's inability to experience regeneracy without the influence of the Holy Spirit.

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<sup>155</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors I:328a, 329a.

<sup>156</sup> Ibid., III:42-43.

Needless to say, New England society remained patriarchal throughout the seventeenth century and into the eighteenth century, and according to Dayton's argument, became more so as the English system of law and justice prevailed and women's ready access to the courts became a thing of the past. Each abuser's demands that their daughters obey them may have been perverted in their ultimate purpose, but each father expected that his authority as the male head of his household would trump his daughter's objections to his abuse. Susannah Hall even went so far as to aid and abet her husband's assault on her daughter, stating that she did so because Thomas Hall said it was "no sin."<sup>157</sup> Unfortunately, the obedience of each of these women, including Susannah, is a tragic example of the potential for abuse that existed in Puritanism's view that the proper exercise of authority and deference to superiors ensured pious families and a well-ordered society. Those on the bottom rungs, like women and children, were particularly vulnerable. When men functioned as "prophet, priest, and king" in their households, religious legitimacy was given to parental authority, in particular patriarchalism, that made it difficult to challenge.

In all of these cases, incest remained a crime because, in the eyes of the authorities and society at large, it indicated that the perpetrator did not fear God and had come under Satan's influence when he abused his daughter. For example, according to the grand jury's indictment of Thomas Hall, his abuse of his parental powers occurred at the "Instigation of Satan and thy own Wicked heart" and "such Inhumane Transgression" merited punishment.<sup>158</sup> Each case used similar language to castigate abusers for their

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid., I:327.

<sup>158</sup> Norbert Lacy, *The Records of the Court of Assistants of Connecticut 1665-1701*, II: 412.

misuse of their parental authority, connecting it explicitly with wickedness or Satan. The connection that participants made in each of these trials between the failure to maintain proper family order, disobedience to God's laws, and Satan's temptation suggests that Puritans were concerned that in failing to adhere to God's divine order, they "nourished" Satan's influence over the colony "nie it abound like a Flowr."<sup>159</sup> Even in 1725, Satan remained a real and threatening force to Puritans' descendants.

### **Communal Resolution**

It is important to note that half of the abusers and all of the victims pled guilty to the crime of which they had been accused. There is no evidence in the record that their confessions occurred as a result of coercion, although silence should not be taken for proof. However, according to Elizabeth Reis, for Puritans in the colonies, confession was restorative. She argued that during the Salem witch trials, those who confessed were far more likely to return to their communities, while those who denied the charges and maintained their innocence were more likely to receive a death sentence. The simple act of acknowledging Satan's power to tempt set the sinner on the path to repent, renounce sin, and turn back to God.<sup>160</sup> The public forum of such confessions was vital to the judicial process, because it helped stop the spread of sin. Given the nature of the Puritans' corporate covenant, any sin had ramifications for everyone in the community, and in turn, confession and repentance, whether in church or in court, helped restore not only the individual, but the community to godly society. Confession also functioned to

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<sup>159</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I:39b.

<sup>160</sup> Elizabeth Reis, "Confess or Deny? What's a 'Witch' to Do?" *OAH Magazine of History* 17, no. 4, Witchcraft (Jul., 2003): 12.



acknowledge the sinner's own culpability and "justify" the community's right and obligation to punish sin.<sup>161</sup>

In 1672, Puritan authorities felt compelled and justified in placing each of Thomas Rood's children, including Sarah and George, into pious homes, making them the responsibility of their community as a means of integrating them into society.<sup>162</sup> Indeed, with the exception of Thomas Rood who was hanged and Sarah Perkins whose sentence was suspended, each individual involved was allowed to return to their communities only after a public show of punishment. Prior to that they were either held in jail for some time or their cooperation was secured by a bond. As we can see in the ministers' treatise from 1672 on punishing incest, Puritans believed that in meting out justice they averted God's anger toward the community, so that regardless of the sinner's sincerity, the community was absolved of any responsibility and remained in God's good graces.<sup>163</sup> But they also believed that once the process of confession and punishment was complete and the potential spread of sin eliminated, individuals could reside once again within their communities.

Even though most of the accused confessed, the crime of incest was serious enough that, in each of these cases, the legal system clearly felt it was important to provide an example for all of Connecticut's colonists. Even in 1725, the Superior Court felt it necessary to publically punish Sarah Perkins. It took an order by both houses of the General Assembly to suspend her sentence.<sup>164</sup> Colonial authorities intended that public

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<sup>161</sup> Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*, 173-174.

<sup>162</sup> County Court Trials, New London County Court Records 1670-1681, III:49, 108.

<sup>163</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I:39a-b.

punishment of incest should serve as a warning to women who might “yield” to temptation and then hide their “sin,” as well as to men who might abuse their authority over women in their families. Further, as expressed in the clergy’s analysis of John Calvin and the Bible on the form Thomas and Sarah Rood’s punishment should take, the severity of their punishment signified to God that the colony had acted in accordance with God’s laws of justice and mercy, so that the crimes of these individuals should not “bee imputed to others.”<sup>165</sup> And crime included both the sins committed by abusers and the hiding of sins by victims.

The prosecutions of these trials reveal some important implications and concerns of such a system and in turn reflect the broader concerns of Puritan society in colonial Connecticut that are evident in ministerial writings and sermons. Puritans believed that family government and the exercise of proper authority by parents were integral to their children’s socialization into prescribed roles and prepared them for a pious life. Indeed, their beliefs concerning the dynamics of family structure and relationships provided the model for all Puritan institutions, especially the church and the government. Thus, even in 1725, Sarah Perkins could refer to the colonial government as “fathers of the Commonwealth” and petition for mercy.<sup>166</sup> It says a great deal concerning the continuing importance of family government that the Lower House of Connecticut’s General Assembly cited not only her ignorance of the “heinous nature of the Crime laid to her Charge” but also pointed to her ignorance of the proper exercise of “Paternall authority.”

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<sup>164</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors, III:43.

<sup>165</sup> Ecclesiastical Affairs, I:39b.

<sup>166</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors, III:42.

The assertions made by the four ministers in 1672 and the General Assembly in 1725 concerning the importance of parental authority in raising moral, pious children demonstrate that the colonial government and the individuals who appeared in the courts charged with incest believed that society had a vested interest in seeing that each family unit functioned well and within their proper hierarchical roles. In a society that viewed Satan as a real figure who walked the Earth, his perceived “instigation” of these crimes suggests that Melvin Yazawa’s argument that Puritans viewed the potential for disruption in even one family as a threat to their society’s prosperity, resulting from chaos and God’s wrath, bears further examination.<sup>167</sup>

The events surrounding these trials also provide examples of how the political, religious, and social concerns of Puritans and their descendants could influence the actions they took to punish impiety, beginning with the family. Of course, in 1672 when the first case appeared, the Puritan hold over colonial New England’s institutions remained strong. The ability of Puritans to integrate theological arguments into legal prosecutions was consistent with the strength of their institutions. Cornelia Hughes Dayton’s analysis of the colonial legal system’s realignment with England’s following the monarchy’s assertion of control over Connecticut beginning in the 1680s and her assertion that women’s access to the courts declined as a result of these changes bears examination if we are to ascertain precisely how Puritans experienced such transition. The next prosecution of incest in the colony did not occur until 1702, but later cases indicate that while the end of the Puritan theocracy was made certain by the eighteenth century, local ideological change may not have occurred as seventeenth-century ministers

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<sup>167</sup> Yazawa, *From Colonies to Commonwealth*, 39; With the exception of the 1672 case, each case points to “Satan” or the “Devil” as the instigator of these crimes.

feared. In other words, the evidence suggests that the monarchy may have been successful in pressuring Connecticut to conform its formal institutions to England's, but the decline in New Englanders' commitment to the ideology of family government that seventeenth-century ministers worried over did not transpire as completely as they feared. In the local milieu, while the death penalty would never again be applied in colonial Connecticut's incest cases after 1672, the influence of Puritan notions regarding family government continued to be felt.

### **Conclusion**

During the Revolutionary period, such ideas could still surface in Connecticut's handling of incestual crimes. In 1778, Connecticut brought charges against Dudley Drake and Abigail Holcomb, who testified that "som year ago they entertained an affection for each other & agreed to marry & did in the presence of the Rev. Mr. Newland, an ordained minister take each other to be husband & wife & solemnly promised to behave toward each other agreeable to the duties of such a relation."<sup>168</sup> They attempted to argue that because Abigail's mother was merely a half-sister to Dudley Drake, their marriage was no nearer in relation than a brother and sister's children and fell outside biblical prohibitions.<sup>169</sup> The court deemed their argument "insufficient in the law." It is noteworthy that, like incest trials in the colonial period, the indictment against them also spoke of "Instigation of the Devil" and "unnatural and abominable lust," while bemoaning incest's threat to the "peace, Dignity, and laws of this state."<sup>170</sup> Puritanism

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<sup>168</sup> Crimes & Misdemeanors VI:84b.

<sup>169</sup> Ibid., 83b.

had long since lost its veritable monopoly over religious, political, and social institutions in Connecticut and yet the language contained in the 1778 suggests that familial ideology remained relevant to society. Of course, Connecticut by this time had a diversity of religious groups and only further studies in the history of American familial ideology can say for sure to what extent these other groups shared such ideology in common with Puritans and Connecticut.

Taken altogether, these trials point to the variability with which the descendants of Connecticut's original Puritan settlers modified or discarded their grandparents' ideals. Dayton argued effectively that changes in the formal processes of the legal and political systems occurred quite rapidly and rightly so, considering the influence of England's often precarious political situation on its colonies throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Conflict between pro-monarchy and parliamentarian factions in England may have been focused in events happening across the Atlantic, but it could and did make its way to America's shores and force change. Clearly, Puritan theocracy had given way to pressure from the monarchy, particularly when political expediency and a desire to protect the colony's right to exist led Connecticut colonists to align their formal institutions more closely with England's. Even so, the values and morés expressed in these trials concerning the role family government played in producing pious children remained remarkably consistent throughout the colonial period, albeit somewhat moderated in tone.

As important as the current trends in social history are for giving a voice to women, children, and non-elites of the past, when describing Puritan life in seventeenth-

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<sup>170</sup> Ibid., 84a-b.

century New England, historians of American history should be mindful of any potential for segmentation their frameworks might carry. For example, an analysis of seventeenth-century Puritan parenting practices would be insufficient without a discussion of Puritan theology concerning parental love and duty because such theology informed Puritan parenting. The nature of Connecticut's integration of political, social, and religious systems necessitates a holistic approach to Puritan social history because these systems were intertwined. Puritans did not subdivide their lives, and any foray into their world should keep that in mind. These trials suggest that scholars would find continued exploration into the dynamics of the New England family and its role in the broader context a profitable exercise, particularly regarding the question of how influential Puritan familial ideology remained throughout the colonial period and perhaps even longer. Historians often credit Puritans with giving birth to the ideal of the American work ethic, our separation of church and state, and our system of public education, but have largely ignored the question of how much influence Puritan familial ideology had or continues to have on the development of American culture and politics. Indeed, a comprehensive history of familial ideology in the U.S. from the colonial period to the current era that asks and answers the question of how more modern frameworks of familial ideology developed, while identifying specific influences, has yet to be written. Perhaps one day it will be.

The prosecution of incest in colonial Connecticut offers some clues as to the pervasiveness of Puritan familial ideology among those who did not necessarily qualify as elites or intellectuals, especially given that defendants were not merely passive bystanders in the Puritan legal system. These trials also suggest that the decline of

Puritan theocracy was not so thorough that colonial Connecticut's social, political, and religious institutions were purged of Puritanism's influence in a matter of decades, if at all. If Connecticut underwent a period of legal and institutional secularization in the eighteenth century, it was neither complete nor prohibitive of the continuing power that religious ideals exerted over peoples' lives. As anomalies, these crimes hint that, despite the ministry's assertions that New England families were in decline, institutional change in colonial Connecticut happened much more rapidly than did social change, while Puritan familial ideology continued to resonate at the local level. Edmund Morgan observed, "If men had only behaved themselves in the beginning, they would never have needed such complicated things as churches and civil governments." His keen insight that in the Puritan mind, God "developed churches and states out of the family" bears continued exploration in order to ascertain how thoroughly, how pervasively, and how long New Englanders at all levels of society held these values close, believing that in doing so they ensured the well-being of themselves, their families, and their communities.<sup>171</sup>

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<sup>171</sup> Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 133.

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