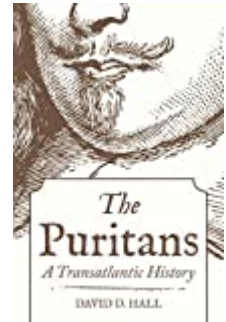


**David D. Hall.** *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019. v + 517 pp. \$35.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-15139-7.



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**Published on** H-Early-America (February, 2021)

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## Putting the Puritans in Their Place: Transatlantic Puritanism in England, Scotland, and New England

David D. Hall's most recent work, *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History*, builds on an impressive body of scholarship to deliver a synthesis of Puritan theology and the political struggle to implement reform in England, Scotland, and New England. The book covers wide-ranging topics merging political, religious, and social history to tell a deeply nuanced history of Anglophone Puritanism from the onset of the Reformation through the Restoration set within an Atlantic framework. Hall makes clear from the outset that this work differs from his famous studies of popular and prescriptive religion in *Worlds of Wonder*, *Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (1989) or his work on "lived religion." Indeed, with *The Puritans* Hall moves beyond Boston and other New England communities to paint a stunning portrait of Puritans and the movement and evolution of their ideas across the Atlantic, focusing far more attention on reform efforts in Eng-

land and Scotland than he did in his previous works.

In the introduction, Hall proposes that his book is one of the first to trace the expansion of Reformed ideas and church history across England, Scotland, and New England. While this is true to an extent, Philip Benedict's classic study *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (2002) also frames a study of Reformed history in this manner and includes chapters on each of these regions while covering the expansion of Reformed practices beyond the Continent. Stephen Foster's *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (2012) also explores the connections between New England and England to embed the colonial experience within that of the metropole. However, Hall's singular focus on Anglophone Reformed history and his primary devotion to events

in England allows him to explore his subject with greater depth than was done in those works.

The first chapter offers a general religious history of Protestantism on the Continent and the ways it came to reach England and Scotland through individuals who traveled back and forth across the English Channel and via the books that spread out from Reformed publishing centers. One of the overarching points stressed by Hall in this chapter is that the impulse to reform ecclesiastical and liturgical practices coincided with the ethics of humanism to produce a vibrant, activist drive within individuals who embraced Protestantism. The intricacies of the transition within England from the initial separation from Catholicism by Henry VIII through the Elizabethan era are peripheral to Hall's treatment of the ideas that animated reformers during this period, though other classic studies, like Eamon Duffy's *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400-1580* (1992), fill in the gaps. Hall identifies six key Reformed ideas that shaped the English and Scottish reformations: a critique of "idolatry"; fixed or constant divine revelation; praise for the church on earth; discipline within the Christian community; evangelical and social activism to transform self, church, and society; and divine providence and apocalypticism. Hall identifies the economic entanglements between the established churches and the monarchy as a primary impediment to a thorough reformation in England, along with opposition from elites who eschewed curtailing their status with a more "participatory form of religion" (p. 32).

The second and third chapters investigate the divergent nature of early reform efforts in England and Scotland respectively. The English chapter tells a familiar story of the hopes that nonconformists held entering the Elizabethan period and the mixed reception they received from the queen. The Puritan movement coalesced in the wake of the Elizabethan settlement with a desire to reform the clergy to produce a better-educated

cadre of men who ascribed to Reformed theology. Worship proved to be another topic of Puritan concern, as they preferred extemporaneous prayers and preaching to the formality of the *Book of Common Prayer*. The heart of Puritan frustration lay in their inability to enact the two-kingdom model of church and state, proposed by Continental theologians like John Calvin, to sever the monarch's headship over the church.

In contrast, the Scottish Reformation of the late sixteenth century unfolded more in line with the dream held by English Puritans. Hall describes the Scottish Reformation as "Puritan" due to reformers' commitment and success at "installing moral discipline in practice as well as in principle, aligning worship, doctrine, and ministry with Reformed models, and aspiring to implement the two-kingdoms understanding of church and state" (p. 80). The emerging Presbyterian model embodied in the Scottish kirk enabled nonconformists to initially practice in "privy kirks" or private gatherings, though civil war and the unfolding political controversies in the 1560s ensured that the official kirks remained in control of benefices and revenues that provided state support for reformers. The trajectory of reform reached loggerheads with the ascension of James VI to the throne and his insistence on preserving the notions of hereditary kingship and headship over the state church. Nevertheless, as Hall traces the tug-of-war between Scottish reformers and their king, he makes it clear that the "Protestant imaginary that fused kirk, covenant, and anti-Catholicism with a critique of imperial kingship" refused to die (p. 108).

Chapter 4 outlines the theology that Puritans promoted and the texts and individuals most responsible for codifying their thought. The fourth chapter also provides a thorough explanation of key Puritan beliefs that raised the bar on participation and called for individual engagement—an "affective experience"—unlike any found in Catholicism or the partially reformed Church of England (p. 111). Drawing from his previous work edit-

ing *The Colonial Book in the Atlantic World* (2007), Hall traces the people and books that promoted the spread of Reformed ideas on election, typology, soteriology, providence, and covenant, among others, and the English reception and adaptation of these ideas to their local context. Devotion and self-examination formed the heart of the “practical divinity” promoted by these reformers, which required an attentive and educated clergy. This emphasis on producing scholar-ministers served Puritans well for much of English history as bishops frustrated efforts to enforce conformity from the top-down with the knowledge that doing so would mean censuring or removing the strongest clerics under their supervision.

Chapter 5 traces the Puritan desire to enact social reforms in the arena of manners and behavior. The Puritan fascination with the idea of a federal, or national, covenant drove their efforts to reform the actions of their English or Scottish neighbors. Puritans hoped to form a partnership between church and state to change the behavior of everyone within the commonwealth because the stakes were high: “A narrative shaped around covenant, decline, and rebuke was double-edged. A nation or church that disobeyed divine law would be punished, but righteous monarchs and a faithful people could expect great blessings” (p. 146). In the end, this reform suffered from a disjunction found in the desire to include people in the campaign for moral reform and the theological implications of a limited atonement.

Chapter 6 picks up chronologically with the ascension of James I to the English throne in 1603 and the creation of a truly British monarchy with the addition of England, Wales, and Ireland to his Scottish kingdom. This raised the hopes of reformers who hoped that the regime change might usher in a new era of reform in line with Reformed aspirations and theology. The story of these reform efforts, their frustrations, and collapse into civil war with Charles I takes place across chapters 6 through 8. Rather than focusing exclusively on the

political interplay between the two kings and their parliaments, Hall threads the debates surrounding reform topics and their relationship with, and influence on, the politics of the era, beginning with the Millenary Petition that James I received shortly after taking the throne. This petition called for higher standards for clerics and lamented ongoing issues with bishops, among other things, and signaled the persistence of reforming aspirations. Hall notes that the growth in sales of Reformed books suggests the emergence of a nascent Puritan culture in England, tied in part to anti-popery and anti-Catholicism.

It is only in the seventh chapter that New England emerges as a locus of study, as the ascension of Charles I to the throne and the unfolding efforts by William Laud and his supporters to enforce conformity created an environment that Puritans found hostile. Hall contextualizes Laud’s canon reforms and their role in alienating Puritans and other nonconformists, setting the stage for their removal to New England and their efforts to create novel and innovative reforms to church and state with the Atlantic separating them from England. Here there are echoes of Hall’s *A Reforming People: Puritanism and the Transformation of Public Life in New England* (2011) but within a new Atlantic context that stresses the interconnection between the New England colonies and their connections to England and Scotland.

The eighth chapter tells a familiar story of Puritan hopes at the outset of the English Civil War and their frustration with the shift under Oliver Cromwell to a policy of state-mandated toleration that carried through the Restoration. For Hall, religious struggles drove the events that led to the civil war as both James and Charles attempted to wrest greater control over the commonwealth and church from the hands of Parliament and the church.

The ninth chapter shifts from the political story of the civil war and the emergence of toleration to the social practice of Puritan theology dur-

ing the same period. In doing so, it focuses specifically on the Puritan responses to Socinianism and Antinomianism as a reflection of their efforts to defend orthodoxy and codify the relationship between church and state in England and in New England. Like Foster's findings in *The Long Argument*, Hall portrays these fears and responses as parallel in both regions. Scholars of New England will find familiar material within this chapter on the Cambridge Platform, Roger Williams, and Anne Hutchinson.

Within the epilogue, Hall makes the case for dispelling a number of myths about the Puritans as historiographic fictions created by later generations to underscore the validity of their own movements. He also muses on the lasting Puritan legacies that he sees in the reformation of manners, commitment to Reformed orthodoxy, and the ways the Puritans function within historical memory. As a scholar who has spent the majority of his career breaking new ground on the Puritans and dispelling the two-dimensional myths of Puritans as angry boors who hated anybody having any fun, Hall provides an excellent overview of the evolution of Puritan scholarship to the present in his epilogue.

The greatest strength of *The Puritans* lies in its sweeping synthesis and attentive coverage of Anglophone Puritanism in the Atlantic. Readers will find new connections between locations as ideas, people, and books traveled and influenced the local context in unexpected ways. The diversity of thought between Puritans in England, Scotland, and New England is also a strength of the book and it helps refute the notion that Puritanism was monolithic. Hall's mastery over the subject matter allows him opportunities to dispel myths that persist, such as the Weberian thesis that Puritanism appealed to the emerging middle class and served as a way for them to oppress those below them. The theological ground that Hall covers is staggering, as is his familiarity with individuals and their relationships.

However, Hall's emphasis on details in such a lengthy book lends itself to a few critiques. As scholarship on the Atlantic World has grown, nomenclature and the use of the term "Atlantic" is increasingly a topic of debate. Is a work like Hall's truly "Atlantic" when it focuses primarily on New England and the British Isles? Puritan contributions to these debates or discussions from such locations as Virginia, Maryland, Bermuda, and Barbados—all destinations for Puritans in the seventeenth century—are largely absent from Hall's discussion, so it will be up to readers to determine whether the story is incomplete as a result. Even a section or two on Puritans and their contributions from these regions would make Hall's coverage of the Puritan Atlantic more complete.

The last critique worth mentioning is the density of the book and the impact that this has on marketability. While I teach courses on colonial and New England history, I would not assign the entire book to an undergrad class because it would be too complex for them. Students unfamiliar with the general arc of English history and the major players in the religious history of England and New England will find themselves bewildered with names, places, and events that Hall presumes to be commonplace. However, individual chapters (particularly the fourth, "The Practical Divinity") would serve as an excellent introduction to Puritan beliefs, though the book as a whole is better suited to specialists and graduate students.

Despite these limited critiques, in *The Puritans*, Hall has delivered an excellent synthesis of Anglophile Reformed history that should be essential reading for scholars of American and British history.

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**Citation:** Gregory Michna. Review of Hall, David D. *The Puritans: A Transatlantic History*. H-Early-America, H-Net Reviews. February, 2021.

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