Eric J. Lehner, M.DIV., TH.M., PH.D.
Foreword by John D. Hannah

Marks of Saving Grace

*Theological Method and the Doctrine
of Assurance in Jonathan Edwards's*
A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections

"Christians want, and sometimes lack, assurance of their salvation. Finding salvation and finding assurance are not quite the same thing. Eric Lehner sheds light on this problem by reading Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections* as a treatise on assurance. By setting Edwards against his historical, philosophical, and theological background, this reading provides fresh insight into one of the most widely read works of Christian theology and devotion. Lehner's contribution, while narrow, is important for a full understanding of Edwards."
—**Kevin T. Bauder**, Research Professor of Systematic Theology, Central Baptist Theological Seminary, Minneapolis

"Eric Lehner's academic *tour de force* hits two birds with one stone. First, it elucidates Edwards's view of assurance in the context of his Puritan ancestors, demonstrating his exegetical and pastoral sensitivity. Second, it explores how one of America's most brilliant minds integrated sources ranging from the Holy Scriptures to the philosophy of John Locke under a coherent theological methodology. Lehner's monograph makes a valuable contribution to the study of the premier pastor-theologian in the First Great Awakening."
—**Joel R. Beeke**, President, Puritan Reformed Theological Seminary

"I love it when scholars provide a close reading of a text! Dr. Lehner examines *Religious Affections* with a prodigious eye to detail, and he asks bigger questions about the theological method adopted in Edwards's exposition of Christian assurance and authentic spiritual experience. With clarity, common sense, and appeal to context, Lehner draws together the skills of theologian and historian to remind us that it is not how we set out on the journey that really counts but signs of progress along the way."
—**Rhys Bezzant**, Dean of Missional Leadership, Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center, Ridley College, Australia

"Sympathetic to Jonathan Edwards's own vision, enviably well-versed in the relevant literature, and carefully documented, *Marks of Saving Grace* is a significant new study of *Religious Affections.* Dr. Lehner's discussions range from a careful assessment of Edwards's theological method to a valuable and balanced assessment of his use of proof texts, and an illuminating analysis of his source material. This is an important contribution to the increasingly massive corpus of Jonathan Edwards scholarship. Given its subject matter, it merits the attention not only of scholars and students, but also of those who—like Edwards himself—are working pastors."
—**Sinclair B. Ferguson**, Professor of Systematic Theology, Redeemer Seminary

"Lehner's work fills a clear void in Edwards scholarship. After meticulous examination of *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections*, Lehner concludes: Let Edwards be Edwards—a Bible-centered theologian and churchman passionate to defend Christian assurance first and foremost from Scripture and, only after thus proved, to support and illustrate the doctrine by philosophical and historical means. Lehner's careful study advances our understanding of Edwards's theological method and commends his doctrine of assurance for the good of the church."
—**Kenneth M. Gardoski**, Assistant Director, Ph.D. Studies, Associate Professor of Systematic Theology, Clarks Summit University

"To bring new, significant insight to an already robust understanding and appreciation of Edwards's classic treatise on the doctrine of assurance is not an easy accomplishment. Yet this is indeed what Dr. Lehner has accomplished. He has succeeded in paying careful attention to contextualizing Edwards, offering the general reader, as well as the scholar, a dizzying composite of information with perceptive interpretation. Though a doctoral dissertation (evidenced by the mass of scholarly footnotes and conversations), the work is a delightful introduction to the mind of Edwards. It is also a serious antidote

to false ideas about the doctrine of God and the nature of redemption, and the consequent lifestyle of desires, passions, and priorities. I highly recommend this intriguing study, regardless of readers' previous acquaintance with Mr. Edwards."

—**John D. Hannah**, Distinguished Professor of Historical Theology, Research Professor of Theological Studies, Dallas Theological Seminary

"Few books are more needed for pastoral reflection than Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections*. Not only does Edwards help us pastors think through the nature of true conversion and assurance, he also warns us about the reality of hypocrisy and self-deception in ways that remain pastorally relevant. In addition, as the historian Perry Miller noted, Edwards offers the most wide-ranging and valuable textbook on religious psychology in recent times. Eric Lehner's treatment in *Marks of Saving Grace* offers something not only for Edwards specialists, but for pastors and leaders wrestling with the nature of assurance and saving faith. It proves to be a valuable addition to the literature on *Religious Affections*."

—**Sean Michael Lucas**, Professor of Church History, Reformed Theological Seminary, Jackson

"When Jonathan Edwards and his contemporaries emphasized conversion and the new birth in the eighteenth century, their preaching brought with it the question, "How can I know that I have been born again?" In *Marks of Saving Grace*, Eric Lehner takes up the crucial question in Edwards's thought about how one can distinguish between true and false conversions. Beginning with Edwards's own struggle over whether he had truly been converted, and then moving on to discuss how Edwards grappled with history, Scripture, and epistemology, this book offers a comprehensive look at Edwards's theology on a question that has been vital to evangelicals ever since at least the eighteenth century. Whether readers come to this book with historical questions or theological questions, they will benefit from

reading Edwards with Lehner as their guide."
—**Lincoln A. Mullen**, Assistant Professor, Department of History and Art History, George Mason University

"Professor Lehner has offered here an outstanding contribution to our understanding of Edwards, his doctrine of assurance, and his theological method, riding a wave of recent work on Edwards's biblical exegesis. I am happy to recommend it."
—**Douglas A. Sweeney**, Professor of Church History and the History of Christian Thought, Director of the Jonathan Edwards Center, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

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Marks of Saving Grace

*Theological Method and the Doctrine
of Assurance in Jonathan Edwards's*
A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections

Eric J. Lehner

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We look forward to seeing the RAD program grow into a large collection of curated dissertations that will help to advance Reformed scholarship and learning.

John J. Hughes
Series Editor

Foreword

With age, aggression is often replaced with reflection. As a student of the past, one seeking to squeeze from dusty tomes and dark archives timeless truths that, though contextually dated, possess a ring of relevancy and, hence usefulness, I have come to at least four conclusions as I increasingly reflect upon the task of mining the past for contemporary wisdom. First, the structure of past relevancies may be the seedbed of irrelevancy in a contemporary setting; there is a danger in "glorifying the past." As much as one ought to consistently disagree with Gotthold Lessing, the replication of the past is really tricky business. This I believe is so because of the tendency to read into the past contemporary concerns and insights that were unknown or unanticipated by the original audience. Bringing perceived insights from the past into the present, consequentially, can be distortive and misleading. This is because of the second lesson I have observed through reflection. It is this; we are not objective creatures. A subjective bias prevails even in those who arduously seek to avoid it, or at least are aware of its potency. This is, at least in part, because we are subject to preconditioned insights that form a sort of lens through which we see. What we often think we see most clearly is only a subject-impression reflectively garnered through an undetected mirror. What is the lesson in all of this philosophical meandering? It is that we are shaped in our perceptive faculties by the past, by inherited social experiences that have made an indelible imprint on us without knowing it.

The third conclusion is that humans often see value in the context of contrast; in fact, positive value has been frequently perceived

through the lens of negative avoidance. We are creatures that swing as a pendulum living our lives according to the relative virtue of seeking to minimize pain while maximizing the pleasurable. The fourth is this. We live our lives seeking to correct the impact and presence of the negative by constructing mechanisms of correction that have within them inherently the seeds of disappointment because we see value in contrast to the negative, but fail to see the negative potential of our corrective measures. Life seems to explode before us grasping yet not obtaining, avoiding but only temporally acquiring, acquiring only to later discover the fallacies of the benefit. I am sounding somewhat like the writer of Ecclesiastes who I once thought was a dire pessimist but now think was a realist and optimist. He lived in what the literary figure C. S. Lewis called "Narnia," but, like Abraham, we look expectantly for a city whose builder and maker is God.

As a Christian, pursuing the art of historical analysis as a professional endeavor within the academy, I practice my discipline through the lens of acknowledged biases and assumptions. For example, it is my conviction that the world we perceive through the collective capacity of the senses, assembled into a cognitive fabric through mental reflection, is real, but a mere shadowy reflection of a reality that is far greater and vastly more beautiful, so that the senses and mental activity can only vaguely comprehend being inadequate for the task of knowing beyond the material, though there are clues that the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. To truly begin to grasp the other, more real, existence requires "a sixth sense," a concept addressed by the British-American cleric Jonathan Edwards. To this brilliant man, situated in parish ministry in rural 18th century Massachusetts, the volume of natural revelation came close to the volume of special revelation of which he made a life-long, serious pursuit. The natural world, a "Book of Shadows," pointed to a greater world, a profoundly more prolific and magnificent reality. He entered more deeply into that world with a perception and precision as few before or since.

One of the most insightful comments concerning the mental life of Jonathan Edwards came from Paul Ramsey, expressed in his Introduction to the eighth volume of the Yale edition of Edwards's works. "One studies the times and backgrounds of some men in order to understand them. Others have such rare greatness that one studies *them* in order to understand their times, or even to comprehend the deepest meaning of the intellectual and other influences that were effectual upon them. Jonathan Edwards was such an original (*Ethical Writings*, WJE 8:12)." When one reads Edwards, at least I have concluded, you encounter a man that thought deeply on the issues of his day but in such a manner that he serves as an insightful bridge into the issues of our day. He was well aware of the inroads of the Enlightenment, but wrote with such insight that his answers, at least in the realm of epistemology, have a postmodern relevancy. American Evangelicalism, more frequently than not saturated by Enlightenment assumptions of measurability, progress, and triumphalism, would very much be the target of his polemics. Though a man of his time in many ways, such as in his aristocratic approach to ecclesiastical authority in his Northampton church, his devotion to a timeless book caused many of his insights to have the ring of relevance that transcends time, cultures, and geo-political structures.

Thus, we come now to the relevancy of the work before us. Though the author has ventured into a realm that has been traversed by scholars before him, Eric Lehner provides fresh insight into the mind of Edwards that has a gripping relevance for Christ-followers struggling with an increasingly apathetic culture, graying church constituencies, and not-to-infrequent approaches to renewal that appear at times more culture-conforming than radically gospel impassioned.

The context in which Edwards wrote *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746) has a ring of continuity as well as remarkable contrast to today's American brand of popular Christianity. The point of similarity concerns the issue of the nature of genuine conversion. As in Edwards's day, a degree of superficiality is often observable of

those who claim to be known of Christ. Profession without Christ-likeness presents a dilemma for most pastors seeking to fulfill their ministry as shepherds of the flocks of God. Many in our churches appear to give lip service to the Savior, but do not seek identification with him in any consistent manner. Edwards feared empty professions in the enthusiastic excesses he witnessed, particularly in the 1740s Awakening, to such an extent that he became increasingly skeptical of many aspects of it. American Christianity, often focusing upon the subjective and personal rather than focusing on the person and claims of Jesus Christ, has been deeply influenced by the 19th century revivalist tradition and the political ethos of democratic volunteerism (i.e., Christianity as a personal choice rather than on the wonder of God's discriminatory and unmerited grace).

The contrast between Edwards's day and Christianity in the 21st century is that in his day the Bible was profoundly respected, the cleric central in community life, the church the foremost institution, and theological literacy widespread. The average parishioner was well aware and knowledgeable of his/her creed and catechism. Biblical literacy by contrast is in decline among the general laity in contemporary churches. Edwards struggled with a head knowledge that did not seem consistent with the nature of biblical regeneration; it is all-too-apparent that contemporary Christianity is often psychologically emotive but intellectually shallow. When head and heart, the intellect and the affections, function in discontinuity, can the profession of faith be genuine? In Edwards's day the problem was often intellectual orthodoxy, but affectional heterodoxy; in ours it tends to be quite the opposite, with the result of weakening the intellectual content of biblical faith by stressing the subjective experience of faith. This is the tension that underscores Edwards's discourse, found in several of his writings, but culminating in the work before us. Edwards attempted to bring the mental and the affectional together into a non-bifurcated unity.

The structure of Edwards's work is twofold: first, he described twelve signs or evidences that are not necessarily ground of a genuine

redemptive experience. The list is shocking, Edwards arguing that, if the devil can duplicate the same, it is impossible to base assurance of divine mercy upon such manifestations. Second, Edwards sets forth twelve signs that the devil cannot duplicate and these are evidences of a genuine work of God. Among the positive evidences of a genuine work of God, Edwards describes the nature of the Spirit's regenerative work, the initial positive signs. His point is that an effect participates in the nature of its cause. The nature of biblical rebirth is that it is a mighty work of the Spirit of God, who by divine mandate applies the benefits procured by Jesus Christ. The essence of the Spirit's redeeming work fundamentally acts upon the faculty of the affections, affections actuated by alluring insight (the utter beauty and unparalleled magnificence of Jesus's atoning sacrifice). The miracle of the overwhelming revelation of the love of God incites the affections and transforms priorities in everyone who is privileged to behold the ravishing beauty of God. Hence, for Edwards, profession of faith without moral conformity to the supposed object of faith is false faith. The basic principle seems to be two: first, the choices we make are predicated on two interconnected principles, the minimalizing of pain and the maximizing of pleasure. Second, choices are made freely (meaning we want to do it), but not without prevailing stimuli or prior options. While Christ is freely chosen, the embrace is because Christ is seen as the high object of our pleasure. It is the work of the Spirit in conformity to the good pleasures of God to reveal the Son. This transforming vision of Jesus is truly that—transforming. Edwards goes on to describe the nature of that transformation, recounting several realities that the devil cannot enduringly duplicate. Among these are admiration for Jesus Christ and the bearing of Christ-likeness, fruit being the cardinal evidence of regeneration.

This brings me to Eric Lehner's *Marks of Saving Grace*. While the work rehearses Edwards's argument for the grounds or evidences of a genuine work of God, it is makes a unique contribution to Edwardian scholarship. One of the neglected areas of such studies has been the biblical foundation of Edwards's insights; scholars of the

not-to-distant past have recognized that he operated from the sphere of the church and the pulpit, but they approached him through the lens of his intellectual accomplishments, some suggesting that he wasted his brilliant mind on archaic, worn-out topics such as religion. Dominated by secular assumptions, experts have rooted his scholarly attainments in the philosophical and social sciences, as a fruit of almost anything but the Bible. That trend has been reversed in the works of Stephen Stein, Robert Brown, and a growing host of interpreters. Lehner's work continues the positive trend using *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* to demonstrate the point that Edwards was preeminently a biblically-oriented cleric who read widely but only to validate and elucidate the Bible, the starting and ending point locus of knowledge.

I think the topic of the genuineness of Christian profession is a timelessly relevant topic for the serious pastor seeking to understand his flock, as in the case of Edwards, providing wise insight that does not trivialize the potency of the simplicity of child-like faith in Jesus, but at the same time does so with the firm conviction that belief without the regenerating reorientation of the Spirit is not saving faith at all. Thus, Dr. Lehner's work is important to the scholar, enlarging our perspective on a truly profound biblical thinker, the pastor struggling with the fact that regeneration does not cure human nature and yet desirous to comfort the troubled but unwilling to support a myth, and the informed Christian who wants to be a realist when it comes to struggling with sin and yet possess hope.

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22 July 2016

Preface

Of the many works of Jonathan Edwards, *A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* ranks as one of the most widely read and appreciated of his writings.[1] Prized for its astonishing intellectual and spiritual content, *Religious Affections* has been examined, analyzed, and acclaimed since 1760, when it was first publicly assessed.[2] With such an extensive body of commentary already available, one may question the place for yet another analysis of *Religious Affections*. Two considerations suggest such a place. First, recent literature has filled many voids in our understanding of *Religious Affections* while at the same time introducing new questions regarding Edwards's doctrine of assurance and the larger question of understanding his theological method. Second, a steady stream of leading evangelicals continues to address the persistent challenge of postmodernity to the proclamation of gospel truth. Postmodernity may be passé in the academy, but its influence in the culture remains potent. The church continues to grapple with the task of boldly affirming gospel certainty, not only to a culture that views doubt, ambiguity, and epistemological fog as the best evidence of humility, but also to a church that has adopted the

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[1] According to Smith, "It has unquestioningly been Edwards's most widely read book." John E. Smith, "Editor's Introduction," in *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. Perry Miller, vol. 2, *Religious Affections* (New Haven: Yale, 1959), 78.

[2] For the first public comment on *Religious Affections*, M. X. Lesser cites Joseph Bellamy's *A Careful and Strict Examination of the Covenant* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1760), 184, in his *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729–2005* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2008), 53.

culture's outlook on notions of certainty and propositional truth. This too suggests that a new examination of the subject of assurance within *Religious Affections* is timely.

Recent Literature

The major theme of *Religious Affections* is the subject of "defining the soul's relation to God."[3] Or, as Ava Chamberlain puts it, "Edwards's aim in this treatise was specifically to discriminate between gracious and counterfeit affections in order to establish a firm foundation for personal assurance."[4] It would seem, then, that the subject of Edwards's theology of Christian assurance would represent a significant portion of scholarship concerning this treatise. Surprisingly, this assertion has not been the case. There are, however, several relevant works worthy of note, both unpublished and published.[5]

Edwards's theology of Christian assurance is addressed to some degree in several unpublished works. Kilboi's M.A. thesis "The Assurance of Salvation in the Theology of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley" endeavors to show how the various perspectives of these three on the matter of assurance can actually be combined to form a more satisfying and comprehensive approach to the doctrine.[6] Calvin Malefyt's 1966 dissertation on "The Changing

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[3] Smith, "Editor's Introduction," WJE 2:1.

[4] Ava Chamberlain, "Self-Deception as a Theological Problem in Jonathan Edwards's 'Treatise Concerning Religious Affections,'" *Church History* 63, no. 4 (December 1994): 546.

[5] Verification of scholarship in the form of published works and dissertations, which is provided in the following section, is based on data provided by three sources: the online services of ProQuest/UMI, M. X. Lesser's exhaustive bibliographic work mentioned above, and the somewhat dated but still valuable bibliographic study by Richard S. Sliwoski, "Doctoral Dissertations on Jonathan Edwards," *Early American Literature* 14, no. 3 (Winter 1980): 318–27.

[6] John Michael Kilboi, "The Assurance of Salvation in the Theology of John Calvin, Jonathan Edwards, and John Wesley: Toward a Cumulative Case Argument," M.A. thesis (University of St. Michael's College, 2005).

Concept of Pneumatology in New England Trinitarianism, 1635–1755" devotes a chapter to *Religious Affections* and the role of the Holy Spirit in assurance.[7] Douglas Harrison, in his "Toward a Theology of Experience," offers a psycho-analytical solution to the dilemma of "belief and incapacity" in Calvinism, transcendentalism, and pragmatism, as represented by Edwards, Emerson, and James respectively.[8] Lowery's dissertation attempts to analyze Wesley's doctrines of assurance and perfection by examining his selective use of Edwards's *Religious Affections*.[9] David Clark's dissertation entitled "Leveling Mountains, Drying Up Rivers" argues that Edwards's belief he was living in the millennial era moved him to adjust his theology of preparationism which in turn impacted his doctrine of assurance.[10]

Other dissertations include those by Atchison, Lamborn, and Nichols. Atchison endeavors to demonstrate how Edwards's trinitarianism is a useful device for articulating the doctrine of Christian assurance from 1 John.[11] Lamborn's study "Blessed Assurance?" is an attempt to explain how New England Puritan theologians could reconcile the possibility of assurance with the belief of remaining sin in the regenerate amidst the ever-present danger of self-deception.[12]

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[7] Calvin Sterling Malefyt, "The Changing Concept of Pneumatology in New England Trinitarianism, 1635–1755" (Ph. D. diss., Harvard University, 1966).

[8] Douglas Harrison, "Toward a Theology of Experience: Belief and Incapacity in Edwards, Emerson, and William James" (Ph. D. diss., Washington University, 2005).

[9] Kevin Twain Lowery, "Constructing a More Cognitivist Account of Wesleyan Ethics" (Ph. D. diss., University of Notre Dame, 2004).

[10] David Edward Clark, "Leveling Mountains, Drying Up Rivers: Jonathan Edwards' Historiography Applied" (Ph. D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2001).

[11] Thomas F. Atchison, "Towards Developing a Theology of Christian Assurance from 1 John with Reference to Jonathan Edwards" (Ph. D. diss., Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, 2004).

[12] James Spencer Lamborn, "Blessed Assurance? Depraved Saints, Philosophers, and the Problem of Knowledge for Self and State in New England, 1630–1820" (Ph. D. diss., Miami University, 2002).

Stephen Nichols's "An Absolute Sort of Certainty" argues that Edwards's theology of Christian assurance functions for him as the basis of his apologetic and epistemology.[13] However, none of these fine unpublished works seeks to address the assurance theology of Edwards within *Religious Affections* as the main subject, nor do any of these consider the role of theological method with respect to either assurance or *Religious Affections*.

Published material on the themes of Edwards's assurance theology is also quite limited. According to Lesser, the first published work to address Edward's assurance theology in any thematic sense was John Gernster's *Steps to Salvation* in 1960, but this work discusses Edwards's assurance theology as a subset of his larger conversion theology.[14] In fact, to date no major published work exists dedicated solely to the assurance theology of Edwards. Published discussions of Edwards's theology of assurance are relatively few, variable in degree of directness, and limited to articles, chapters in edited works, and brief discussions within broader works.[15] Furthermore, none but

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[13] Stephen J. Nichols, "'An Absolute Sort of Certainty': The Holy Spirit and the Apologetics of Jonathan Edwards" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 2000). This work was subsequently published as *An Absolute Sort of Certainty* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2003).

[14] John H. Gerstner, *Steps to Salvation: The Evangelistic Method of Jonathan Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960); Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards*, 220–21; 675.

[15] The most noteworthy of these include C. C. Goen, *Revival and Separatism in New England, 1740–1800: Strict Congregationalists and Separatist Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale, 1962), 13–15, 45–46; Robert Clifton Whittemore, "Jonathan Edwards," in *Makers of the American Mind* (New York: William Morrow, 1964), 32–45; Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in Puritan Life* (New Haven: Yale, 1966) 208–12; Terrence Erdt, *Jonathan Edwards, Art, and a Sense of the Heart* (Amherst, Mass.: University of Massachusetts, 1980); Henry H. Knight, III, "The Relation of Love to Gratitude in the Theologies of Edwards and Wesley," *Evangelical Journal* 6 (Spring 1988): 3–12; William J. Abraham, "Predestination and Assurance," in *The Grace of God, the Will of Man*, ed. Clark H. Pinnock (Grand Rapids: Academie, 1989), 231–42; Volume 3 of John H.

Chamberlain directs a study of assurance with respect to *Religious Affections*.[16]

Currents in Evangelical Theology

Presently, Reformed theology is experiencing a resurgence within much of English-speaking evangelicalism and a consequent renewed attention to the historic doctrines of grace. Simultaneously, broader philosophical and cultural currents suggest that notions of certainty are illusory at best and arrogant at worst. Consequently, the doctrine of Christian assurance and the discipline of theological method have become subjects of renewed interest in evangelicalism. The Lordship Salvation controversy of the 1990s and the resurgence of Calvinism in American evangelicalism appear to have contributed to the former.[17] Interest in the latter may be attributed to the larger philosophical currents which have called into question the notion of foundational categories of thought. As a consequence, renewed interest in epistemology has compelled evangelical scholarship to revisit the subject of theological method.[18] The heightened attention paid to both of these subjects—the doctrine of assurance and theological method—attests to the impact of postmodernity in the academy, the church, and the culture at large.

Gerstner, *The Rational Biblical Theology of Jonathan Edwards*, 3 Vols. (Powhatan, Va.: Berea, 1993); Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (Oxford: Oxford, 2012), 371–72.

[16] Chamberlain, "Self-Deception as a Theological Problem," 541–56.

[17] The Lordship Salvation controversy of the 1990s centered on John MacArthur's *The Gospel According to Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988); the resurgence of Calvinism in American evangelicalism is succinctly captured in Collin Hansen's *Young, Reformed, and Restless* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

[18] See, for example, Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 11–15.

An attentive reading of *Religious Affections* will lead the reader to concur with John E. Smith that it "contains his [Edwards's] most acute and detailed treatment of the central task of defining the soul's relation to God."[19] As such, *Religious Affections* remains Edwards's most complete treatment on the subject of Christian assurance. The question of assurance is epistemological in nature; assurance speaks not only to the idea that one can know his or her standing before God but also to the ground of that knowledge. In other words, a theology of assurance must contain its own justification in order for it to provide the assurance of which it speaks. Therefore, an explanation of Edwards's theology of assurance is incomplete if it simply conveys the immediate rationale for that theology; it must also account for the epistemological ground that serves as the foundation for that rationale.

The proposition of this study—that Edwards's theological method in *Religious Affections* is best viewed as a matrix of informing sources with Scripture as the primary and governing source—is significant, for it challenges the validity of two ideas basic to many interpretations of Edwards. The first is the idea that Edwards's thought was fundamentally governed by the philosophical categories of the Enlightenment. The second is the idea that Edwards's entire corpus is governed by a central interpretive motif. If principles such as these govern his entire corpus, then a careful analysis of any one of his prominent works would supply confirming evidence. However, a close examination of *Religious Affections* indicates otherwise: this key work is governed by biblical, not philosophical, categories; furthermore, *Religious Affections* is also formulated apart from a larger controlling motif of either its content or argument. These conclusions are borne out in the method that Edwards employs in *Religious Affections* and the result of that method as expressed in his theology of assurance.

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[19] Smith, "Editor's Introduction," 1.

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The Puritan Model of Assurance

A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections speaks directly to the individual and experiential aspect of the Christian faith, so not surprisingly, the degree of attention the church has given to the work spans over two centuries. Furthermore, *Religious Affections* is especially valued because it addresses that one question which is more significant than any other: how can a person avoid self-deception regarding one's own profession of faith and know that one's own faith is genuine and saving? *Religious Affections* seeks to answer the question of Christian assurance in terms that are definitive and theological. *Marks of Saving Grace*, in turn, seeks to understand Edwards's answer to that question as well as the method he used to justify his answer.

Several layers of context, moving from the general to the specific, overlap one another to bring a clear picture of Edwards's background and his motivation for writing. First, the doctrine of assurance was a substantial component of the overall Puritan idea, and as such the essential idea of Puritanism itself is critical for understanding *Religious Affections*. Second, it is important to account for the early Puritan motivations for the development of the doctrine of assurance. Building on these two principles, necessity then demands the examination of the substance of the Puritan doctrine of assurance; this third step will establish the theological context of *Religious Affections*. Fourth, the doctrinal components of syllogism and preparation, which the

Puritans employed to enhance their theology of assurance, are key to understanding Edwards's approach to assurance.

The Essential Idea of Puritanism

Efforts to define *Puritanism* have typically assessed the concepts, agendas, values, or ideas which were essential to the movement. A number of single governing motifs have been suggested, as have certain combinations of motifs, in order to explain what Puritanism really consisted of.

Interpretations of the Essence of Puritanism

Interpretations of Puritanism have varied considerably over the last hundred years or so. A concise analysis by Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson[1] documents competing definitions of *Puritanism* which center upon single governing ideas such as predestination,[2] covenant,[3] conversion,[4] politicized socio-economics,[5] and anti-Anglicanism.[6] Additionally, Edmund Morgan proposes that separatism was the central idea that propelled Puritanism.[7] Andrew Delbanco's work is typical of the socio-political interpretation in which New England Puritanism is viewed as the key to comprehending the moral and religious fabric that is unique to the American mind set.[8]

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[1] Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2006), xvi.

[2] William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (New York: Harper, 1938), 83.

[3] Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (New York: Harper and Row, 1956), 48–49.

[4] Alan Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1955), 2.

[5] Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (London: Panther, 1964).

[6] John S. Coolidge, *The Pauline Renaissance in England: Puritanism and the Bible* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1970).

[7] Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1963), 139–52.

[8] Andrew Delbanco, *The Puritan Ordeal* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1989), 25–27.

An alternative approach, however, has emerged: one which suggests that Puritanism should be understood in terms of a multi-faceted rubric. Beeke and Pederson see Puritanism as a movement comprised of a combination of theological, practical, political, and experiential components.[9] J. I. Packer defines *Puritanism* as "that movement in sixteenth- and seventeenth-century England which sought further reformation in the Church of England than the Elizabethan settlement allowed." This movement enveloped clergy, laity, and powerful public figures who found common cause in resisting Anglican formalism, embracing Presbyterian causes, promoting Calvinist forms of theology and practice, and employing the legal system for the purpose of establishing societal norms compatible with their values.[10] Francis Bremer likewise takes a synthetic view but with a pronounced emphasis on the theological element.[11] Alan Simpson seems agreeable to such an approach when he suggests that the various groups in the movement were united by the conversion experience, the establishment of a holy community, an apocalyptic view of their destiny, and the shared community experience.[12]

Conversion as the Essence of Puritanism

When considering the essence of Puritanism from the Puritan perspective, it appears that the idea of conversion rises to the place of prominence. The idea of conversion accounts not only for particular claims of certain Puritans,[13] but, more importantly, it explains the

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[9] Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, xvi–xviii.

[10] James I. Packer, *A Quest For Godliness* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1990), 35.

[11] Francis J. Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, rev. ed. (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1995), 15–28.

[12] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 17–22.

[13] Cromwell's acceptance of Presbyterians, Anabaptists, and Independents was on the basis of conversion and was expressed in terms which historians have often recalled: "Though a man be of any of those three judgments, if he have the root of the matter in him, he may be admitted." Oliver Cromwell,

logical relationship the Puritans maintained between the community and the individual. The importance of this relationship is seen in the Synod of 1662 and its consequent "Half-Way Covenant." These two events illustrate how Puritans perceived conversion to be the key to uniting the individual to the holy community, so conversion became the priority that defined the existence and purpose of Puritanism.

The Vision for Establishing the Holy Community

The vision of the New England Puritans was to succeed where the Puritans of Old England had failed. The attempt to establish a holy state under the Cromwell regime rapidly degenerated into a failed cause, but the Puritans did not abandon all hope. The colonial enterprise on the other side of the Atlantic promised another opportunity. America, it seemed, promised the Puritans a blank slate for the establishment of a pure community.

Perry Miller's definitive *Errand into the Wilderness* unfolds this visionary element of the Puritan enterprise. The book's title, and its governing thesis, is drawn from the sermon delivered by Samuel Danforth on May 11, 1670 entitled *A Brief Recognition of New England's Errand into the Wilderness*.[14] Miller is convinced that Danforth intentionally used the term *errand* with a double meaning: that of having a purpose of business to accomplish and that of performing a duty in obedience to a higher power. Miller convincingly argues that the "Puritans did not flee to America; they went in order to work out that complete reformation which was not yet accomplished in England and Europe, but which would quickly be accomplished if only the saints back there would have a working model to

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Oliver Cromwell's Letters and Speeches, ed. Thomas Carlyle (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1851), 2:340.

[14] For a critical introduction to the sermon, see A. W. Plumstead, *The Wall and the Garden: Selected Massachusetts Election Sermons, 1670–1775* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1968), 47–52. Text for the sermon immediately follows.

guide them."[15] In the words of John Winthrop, "Wee must Consider that wee shall be as a Citty upon a Hill, the eies of all people are uppon us."[16] New England, then, would have a divine purpose:

> A society despatched upon an errand that is its own reward would want no other rewards: it could go forth to possess a land without ever being possessed by it. . . . For once in the history of humanity (with all its sins), there would be a society so dedicated to a holy cause that success would prove innocent and triumph not raise up sinful pride or arrogant dissention.[17]

Of course, the success of this enterprise was not guaranteed; it "would come about if the people did not deal falsely with God."[18] But the errand failed; the Puritans failed to set up the kingdom, and their kingdom theology could not adequately explain their failure. For this reason, says Miller, the theology of Puritanism was abandoned, and the "errand" was redefined by man to serve his own interests.

The Logic for Attaining the Holy Community

As important as the realization of the holy society was, the spiritual condition of the individual was the prerequisite for such a society. Without the conversion of the individual, the purpose and the logic of the Puritan agenda was lost. So essential was the conversion of the individual that, by 1660, the issue of conversion had plunged New England Puritanism into crisis. While the Restoration had sealed the demise of the Puritan community in Old England, New

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[15] Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 11.

[16] Cited by Miller in *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 11. For text of the sermon, see John Winthrop, "A Modell of Christian Charity," in *The Literatures of Colonial America: An Anthology*, ed. Susan P. Castillo and Ivy Schweitzer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001), 245–50. The "city on a hill" expression has been viewed as paradigmatic for the Puritan agenda; see Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 55–72.

[17] Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 6.

[18] Ibid.

England Puritans were discovering that the holy community was rapidly suffering a disintegration of its own. The second and third generation offspring of the original colonists were not giving sufficient evidence of conversion and its attending holiness, precipitating a dilemma which threatened the very existence of the Puritan vision of a holy church-state.

In keeping with the recently established Westminster Confession (1646), the sacrament of baptism carried the significance of circumcision, requisite to acceptance in the covenant community. The first generation of American Puritans professed conversion and received baptism. They baptized their children, making the second generation external participants in the covenant community; the children were committed to God with the anticipation that God would bring them to conversion. These were not to participate in communion until such a time that they could profess godliness (conversion). Therefore, until they evidenced conversion, they were, in effect, half-members.

Some of these children, those of the second generation, grew to adulthood without evidencing or professing conversion. Should their children be permitted to be baptized? If the answer was "no," then the vision of an undivided church-state community was compromised. If the answer was "yes," then the vision of a pure church was compromised. The Puritans, then, were forced to choose between (a) an undivided Christian community and (b) a pure church comprised of regenerate membership.

The Synod of 1662 addressed the conundrum. The signatories implemented a compromise designed to buttress the fragile church/state union while maintaining a semblance of church purity. The compromise became known as "the Half-Way Covenant,"[19] because it permitted baptism (the first half of the covenant) for the children of the unconverted, but not communion (the second half).

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[19] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 35–36; George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale, 2003), 29–30.

Thus the covenant of grace was taken to be one that extended through generations even if only as a gateway to salvation.

Although numerous interpretations have been proposed concerning the essence of Puritanism, the collective action of the New England community in 1662 gives compelling evidence that, in their view, the conversion of the individual was the decisive component of Puritanism. Both Simpson and Packer, who prefer a synthetic definition of Puritanism, are nevertheless willing to concede that the matter of individual conversion is the pre-eminent element.[20]

Puritanism, then, was variegated in agenda, but its essential and foundational principle was the conversion of the individual. The regeneration of the person was the single element from which the variety of Puritan expression found its motive to collective action, whether toward a united national church or toward a separated one.[21]

The Impetus for the Puritan Doctrine of Assurance

With conversion in the foreground of the Puritan mind, it comes as no surprise that three important factors converged to motivate the Puritans to aggressively focus on the doctrine of assurance. The first is the very close proximity, both in time and in topic, of Puritan soteriology to the Reformer's work on justification. The second is the variety of opinion concerning the essence of assurance that extended without a clear resolution from the Reformation into the Puritan period. The final factor that motivated the Puritans to develop their understanding of assurance was their commitment to the effective function of the pastor, especially as it concerned his role as spiritual counselor to those seeking to know their spiritual state.

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[20] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 2; Packer, *A Quest For Godliness*, 35–36. Packer qualifies this central idea as "revival," which entails both the conversion of the unbeliever and the reinvigorating work of sanctification of the believer.

[21] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 15.

Support for the Reformers' Doctrine of Justification

The fact that the Puritans made much of assurance is due largely to the fact that this doctrine was the unfinished business of the Reformers' soteriology. If the Elizabethan Settlement is accepted as the catalyst of Puritanism, then the birth of Puritanism is little more than four decades removed from the *Ninety-Five Theses*, suggesting a significant overlap between maturing Reformation doctrine and initial Puritan thought.[22]

The first and second generation Reformers, typically represented by Luther and Calvin, were keenly aware of the implications that extended from their theology of justification. A definition of *justification* as given by the Reformers entailed a radical departure from Rome on the subject of assurance.[23] In the effort to redefine *justification*, the Reformers had moved the seat of authority from the church to the text of Scripture, the act of redemptive mediation from the clergy to Christ alone, and the means of grace from the sacraments to the faith of the individual. As a consequence of this systematization, all that salvation entailed—from its epistemological ground to its means to its personal realization—was redefined. This comprehensive and systematic redefinition of salvation enveloped the subject of assurance, which

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[22] R. N. Frost, "Puritanism," in *The Dictionary of Historical Theology*, ed. Trevor A. Hart (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 441–43. While there is a high degree of unanimity among scholars regarding the beginning of Puritanism, its point of termination is not agreed upon. Bremer's perspective is comprehensive, beginning with the Act of Supremacy in 1534 and ending with the death of Edwards in 1758; see Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, xi–xxvi.

[23] The position represented here is that the Reformers, and most notably Luther and Calvin, were in essential agreement regarding the doctrine of assurance and that their differences were peripheral. However, this is not the traditional opinion of critical historians. Randall Zachman's recent work argues against the traditional view and in favor of essential agreement between Luther and Calvin. See Randall C. Zachman, *The Assurance of Faith: Conscience in the Theology of Martin Luther and John Calvin* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993); Martin I. Klauber, "Review of *Assurance of Faith* by Randall C. Zachman," *The Sixteenth Century Journal* 24, 4 (Winter 1993): 997–98.

included objective certainty regarding the authority, ground, means, and personal application of salvation. If, as the Reformers asserted, salvation was objectively grounded in the promise of the Word of God and obtainable by faith, the logical consequence was objective certainty.[24]

Rome, on the other hand, claimed that salvation was proprietary to the church and to the sacraments and insisted that assurance was, at best, a matter of probability. The Tridentine statement cemented that position firmly, anathematizing opinions to the contrary. Notions of certain assurance, according to Rome, were dangerous, in that they engendered independence from circumspect living, the church, and the sacraments.[25]

Unresolved Problems in the Reformers' Doctrine of Assurance

While the Reformers were unified in maintaining that assurance was attainable, certain, normative, and grounded in the Spirit and the Word, they were by no means uniform in other aspects. Considerable debate ensued between the Protestants concerning the precise nature of assurance. The debate concerned various issues including whether or not assurance was itself the essence of faith, whether or not assurance was always consciously experiential, and whether authentic assurance entailed absolute certainty or was obtained in degrees. Other questions remained: the question regarding in what sense the Holy Spirit was a means of assurance, the question concerning in what sense Christ served as grounds of assurance, the question regarding what role syllogism played in the formulation of assurance, the question as to what extent assurance was subjective vis-à-vis

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[24] Allister E. McGrath, *Studies in Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997), 390–97.

[25] Joel R. Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance: The Legacy of Calvin and His Successors* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1999), 9–15. Especially helpful is Beeke's analysis of assurance theology as articulated by the Council of Trent, 14–15.

objective, and the question as to what relationship the act of assent (of the mind) had to the act of trust (of the will).[26]

The rise of Puritanism as a movement grounded in Reformation theology meant that the movement adopted the assets and the liabilities of its theology. By embracing Reformation soteriology, Puritanism committed itself to sustaining its views of assurance in the face of traditional Roman dogma. It also committed itself to completing the unfinished business of defining the nature of Christian assurance in terms that the heirs of the Reformation could agree upon. The Puritans engaged these unresolved issues, and in so doing sustained the momentum of the work initiated by the Reformers.

Pastoral Considerations

A third impetus that motivated the Puritans to define *assurance* was pastoral in nature. The central message of Puritanism was conversion—what it meant, why it was so important, and how it was obtained. To this end, pastors proclaimed the danger of sin and the consequent eternal wrath of God. The anxiety that followed was intended as the means to move the sinner to repentance. However, Puritan pastors also noted that the work of Satan and the evil propensity of the sinner complicated the matter by introducing the possibility of self-deception into the equation. As a result, the capacity for self-deception and the danger of false conversion was another major theme in Puritan preaching as was the consequent call to self-examination.[27] Anxiety and self-examination were considered appropriate when produced by a conscience that perceived a gap between one's own self and God.[28] Yet the Puritans saw the temporary sufferings of the

[26] William Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation* (1862; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2000), 113–26; Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 16–81; Gregg R. Allison, *Historical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), 550–57; R. Michael Allen, *Reformed Theology* (New York: T&T Clark, 2010), 87–88.

[27] Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 120–21.

[28] Thomas Shepard, *God's Plot: Puritan Spirituality in Thomas Shepard's Cambridge*, ed. Michael McGiffert, rev. ed. (Amherst, MA: University of

anxious soul to be an ultimate mercy, and they regarded gentle preaching to be the instrument of ultimate harm, in that it neglected the duty to warn those in peril of losing their souls.[29]

Regardless of what the Puritans may have intended, the very fact that Puritan pastors sought to create anxiety in the minds of anyone is considered by some to be inexcusable by any standard. According to Perry Miller,

> The doctrine of regeneration caused the founders of New England to become experts in psychological dissection and connoisseurs of moods before it made them moralists. . . . . It is often difficult to see how Puritan divines could believe that they offered battered humanity any more of a haven than the priests, for in practice he who was justified by faith was taken from the rack of fear only to be strapped to the wheel of doubt.[30]

Miller's critique is worthy of note because it represents a significant segment of critical Puritan scholarship.[31] Yet the critical perspec-

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Massachusetts, 1994), 19–21. This work is Shepard's autobiography accompanied by the editor's commentary.

[29] G. A. Hemmings, "The Puritans' Dealings with Troubled Souls," in *Puritan Papers*, ed. J. I. Packer, vol. 1, *1956–1959* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2000), 32–34; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 21.

[30] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1939), 53. Miller's final comment here requires some explanation. William Stoever's observation, which elaborates on the problem of assurance in Thomas Shepard's journal, is helpful: "This document evokes the full range and intensity of spiritual anxieties to which the Puritan saints were subject. Indeed, it suggests that the Protestant *sola fide*, while rescuing the individual from endlessly having to earn sufficient merit to cover his daily sins, in Puritan hands might deliver him to seemingly endless pursuit of firm evidence of his justification." See William K. B. Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven': Covenant Theology and Antinomianism in Early Massachusetts* (Middleton, CT: Wesleyan University, 1978), 148.

[31] In addition to the works of Perry Miller, see Delbanco, *The Puritan*

tive of Miller, which passes judgment on the Puritan system of belief and practice, does so having already presupposed a non-Biblical world view with its standard of morality. The Puritan clergy embraced a world view defined by the Bible and centered upon the need for humanity to reconcile with God by means of conversion. For this reason, the pastoral emphasis was to guide each member of the flock from a place to doubt to a place of peace and assurance.[32]

Distinct Features in the Puritan Understanding of Christian Assurance

Understanding Edwards on the subject of assurance requires some understanding of the Puritans on assurance. The Puritans prioritized conversion and consequently established significant motivation for framing the doctrine of Christian assurance. A full exposition of this subject is beyond the scope of *Marks of Saving Grace* and would require a substantial volume.[33] However, for the sake of

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Ordeal; Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*; Theodore Dwight Bozeman, *The Precisionist Strain: Disciplinarian Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina, 2004); *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008). John Coffey, in his contribution to *The Cambridge Companion* entitled "Puritan Legacies," provides an orderly account of the extent to which scholarship looks to Puritanism as "an explanatory tool" for understanding America, its incurably religious character, and its embrace of capitalism, American exceptionalism, sexism, morally motivated politics, intolerant attitudes, and the various evils of modernity. See John Coffey, "Puritan Legacies," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2008), 327–40.

[32] It should also be noted that anxiety was not the only theme by which Puritan pastors exhorted their parishioners to seek assurance. Themes such as the joy of salvation, the love of Christ, and the blessings of fruitfulness in the Christian life were also employed to this end. See, Michael G. Hall, *The Last American Puritan: The Life of Increase Mather, 1639–1723* (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University, 1988), 102.

[33] To date such a work does not exist. The most thorough examination to

establishing the theological context for Edwards on the subject of assurance, surveying the distinctive elements of Puritan assurance theology remains vital.

The doctrine of assurance gained stability under the care of the Puritan divines. By the time the Westminster Assembly had convened in 1643, a high degree of unanimity prevailed as to how the doctrine should be expressed. Although the doctrine of assurance was a significant component of the Confession, the Assembly did not address the subject until 1646. When it finally addressed the doctrine, it did so for two days in February, and another two days in July.[34] The doctrine of assurance was not addressed again by the Assembly although it continued to convene until February of 1649 for a total of 1,163 sessions.[35] Such minimal attention on the part of the Assembly

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date of the Puritan doctrine of Christian assurance has been conducted by Joel Beeke in two separate works. Beeke's aforementioned *Quest for Full Assurance* (1999) devotes its major portion to the doctrine of assurance in the Puritan era, yet the work is constrained by the limits of the design of the project which examines, by means of comparison and contrast, select representatives of English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation. Beeke's recent publication of "The Assurance Debate" is a brief but thoroughly researched accounting of the major issues attending the Puritan discussion of this doctrine. See Joel R. Beeke, "The Assurance Debate: Six Key Questions," in *Drawn Into Controversie: Reformed Theological Diversity and Debates Within Seventeenth-Century British Puritanism*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Mark Jones (Göttingen, Germany: Vandenhoeck and Ruprecht, 2011), 263–83.

[34] Based upon Beeke's analysis of the Assembly's minutes in "The Assurance Debate," 264; minutes referred to are published in *Minutes of the Sessions of the Westminster Assembly of Divines*, ed. Alex F. Mitchell and John Struthers (London: Blackwood and Sons, 1874).

[35] Adam Loughridge, "Westminster Assembly," in *The New International Dictionary of the Christian Church*, ed. J. D. Douglas, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 1039; F. L. Cross and E. A. Livingstone, eds., "Westminster Assembly," in *Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University, 1974), 1472; Philip Benedict, *Christ's Churches Purely Reformed: A Social History of Calvinism* (New Haven: Yale, 2002), 200–202. It should be noted that the date of the Confession's completion has been variously represented, ranging from December of 1646 to April of 1647.

should not be taken as a token of disinterest: the Confession devoted an entire section to the doctrine of assurance; and of the 159 members of the Assembly, no fewer than twenty-five wrote works dedicated to the subject of Christian assurance.[36] The relatively short period of time devoted to a significant section of the Confession testifies to the harmony of the members of the Assembly. This harmony is confirmed by the general consensus of opinion expressed in the body of Puritan writings devoted to assurance.[37]

Assurance was understood, first and foremost, as a matter of individual experience. The Puritan theologians typically served in pastoral capacities; therefore, they were motivated to define *assurance* in terms that accounted for both the Scriptures *and* their pastoral observations. As a result of this dynamic, the Puritan doctrine of assurance entailed an experientially-oriented definition that accounted for its nature, meaning, extent, basis, and appropriation.[38]

The Nature of Assurance: An Experience Independent of the Essence of Faith

The most significant feature of the Puritan doctrine of assurance is its affirmation that Christian assurance is not of the essence of

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[36] John M. Frame, "Westminster Confession of Faith," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 1271; Beeke, "The Assurance Debate," 264.

[37] For the sake of restricting the length of this discussion, it is not within the scope of this study to examine the pertinent primary sources. The following summary is based on competent engagement and synthesis of primary sources as represented by the secondary sources cited in this section.

[38] Other delineations of the salient points of Puritan doctrine of assurance have been offered. The Westminster Confession outlines four: 1) the possibility of assurance, 2) the foundation of assurance, 3) the cultivation of assurance, and 4) the renewal of assurance. WCF, 18.1–4. Joel Beeke also proposes a four-fold set of distinctives: 1) the distinction of saving faith from assurance, 2) assurance by the agency of the Holy Spirit, 3) assurance on the basis of the covenant of grace and the work of Christ, and 4) the provisional and incomplete character of assurance as normative. See Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 113–19.

saving faith. The consequence of such a view was the possibility for a person to believe in Christ and be truly saved without actually possessing assurance of his/her salvation.[39] The significance of this stance is that it appears to be a reversal of the doctrine taught by the early Reformers, many of whom stressed that assurance was of the very essence of faith. In other words, they affirmed that the character of saving faith was such that it comprehended both certainty concerning the truth of the gospel *and* the knowledge of its actual saving application to the one who believes. Though the question was clearly unsettled during the last half of the 16th century, the first half of the 17th century gives clear evidence of a consolidation of opinion.[40] The Westminster Confession was unequivocal in its position separating assurance from faith, and subsequent confessions confirm that the Confession's influence on this subject was decisive.[41]

Why did the Puritans depart from the Reformers on this point? In Cunningham's estimation, the Reformers took up the view that assurance was of the essence of faith for two reasons. First, full and immediate assurance was the norm that was experienced and witnessed by the Reformers. Cunningham argues that this phenomenon should be interpreted as one of temporary experience: the Reformers and those who followed them were granted an extraordinary measure of grace by God so that they might persevere through the spiritual

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[39] Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 87–88; Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 181–82.

[40] According to Stoever, "by about 1630, the notion that justifying faith is properly assurance had become an issue with elements of English nonconformity that even the more extreme Puritans regarded as excessively radical." Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven,'* 130. However, Stoever observes that the shift of opinion was general in nature and that some Puritans continued to closely associate the two. See 129–37.

[41] Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 111–27. Though the Confession's influence was indeed the watershed for the main body of the non-Conformist faiths, the Confession's interpretation was not accepted by all as the Marrow Controversy demonstrated. See D. Beaton, "'The Marrow of Modern Divinity' and the Marrow Controversy," *Princeton Theological Review* 4, 1 (January 1906): 327–31.

conflict at hand. Second, the Reformers were contending for an absolute form of assurance in order to buttress justification by faith in the face of criticism from Rome. Cunningham asserts that in the heat of the contention, the Reformers overstated their case; as a consequence, they involved themselves in contradictory and untenable statements concerning the nature of assurance.[42] As the decades passed, the accumulation of pastoral experience and theological reflection tempered the overstatement of the Reformers.[43]

[42] Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 113–25. In an alternative interpretation, Joel Beeke argues for a substantial continuity between Calvin and the Westminster Confession. Joel R. Beeke, "Does Assurance Belong to the Essence of Faith? Calvin and the Calvinists," *The Master's Seminary Journal* 5, 1 (Spring 1994): 43–71.

[43] Cunningham's argument is not altogether sustainable. The subjectivity involved in his first point is evident: "The Reformers . . . seem to have enjoyed usually an assurance of being in a state of grace and of being warranted to count upon salvation. God seems to have given to them the grace of assurance more fully and more generally than He does to believers in ordinary circumstances. And this is in accordance with the general course of his providential procedure. The history of the church seems to indicate to us that two positions are true, with references to this matter, viz.— 1st, That assurance of salvation has been enjoyed more fully and more generally by men who were called to difficult and arduous labours in the cause of Christ, than by ordinary believers in general. And 2dly, that this assurance, as enjoyed by such persons, has been frequently traceable to special circumstances connected with the manner of their conversion as its immediate or proximate cause. So it certainly was with the Reformers." While Cunningham's proposition sounds plausible, he supplies no data to sustain the assertion that *history* indicates that God supplies more assuring grace in times of duress. Second, the attempt to explain the Reformers' view of assurance on the basis of experience is not presented clearly. It is not clear whether, in Cunningham's estimation, the Reformers were leaning on their own personal experience of conversion, or depending upon their overall acquaintance with the conversion experiences of others. In any case, it appears that he places considerable confidence in the noble character of the leaders of the Reformation. On this point Cunningham's work (first published in 1862) seems to have imbibed a measure of the "Great Man" historiography typical of 19th century European historians. See Alan Edelstein, *Everybody's Sitting on the Curb: How and Why America's Heroes Disappeared* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1996), 33. Cunning-

The Meaning of Assurance: Certainty of Personal Election

The question as to whether or not assurance was of the essence of saving faith was somewhat complicated in that the term *assurance* was applied to more than one subject within general discussion of the doctrine. *Assurance* often was a reference to certainty concerning the objective work of Christ and the propositional content of the gospel. At other times, the term was used in reference to the subjective, experiential sense of certainty that the self was truly converted and belonged to the elect.[44] This equivocation, when not clearly distinguished, contributed to a degree of confusion since at times the content of the assurance being referred to was the former objectivity, and at other times it was the latter subjectivity.

The separation of assurance from the essence of faith was in fact a recognition that the question of the content of faith was not being clearly addressed. The reason that assurance could not be of the essence of saving faith was that the content of saving faith differed from that of assurance. The content of saving faith was confidence in the propositional message of the sufficiency of Christ on behalf of sinners; the content of assurance was confidence that Christ's sufficiency had been applied to the self.

The Puritan view of *assurance*, then, was that of "a God-given conviction of one's standing in grace, stamped on the mind and the heart by the Spirit."[45] Or, in the words of Brooks, it was the "reflex act of a gracious soul, whereby he clearly and evidently sees himself in a gracious, blessed and happy state; it is a sensible feeling, and an experimental discerning of a man's being in a state of grace."[46]

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ham's second line of reasoning is more reliable, sustained on the grounds of the documentation of the debate. Cunningham correctly observes that the Reformers overextended themselves in attempting to objectify the agency of the Spirit in assurance. Cunningham, *The Reformers and the Theology of the Reformation*, 113–25; for quotation, see page 113.

[44] R. M. Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," *Westminster Theological Journal* 52, 2 (Fall 1990): 249–50.

[45] Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 182.

[46] Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth: A Treatise on Christian Assurance*

The Extent of Assurance: An Experience Attained by Degree

The extent of assurance was taken by the Puritans as one of degree; assurance was not possessed in absolute terms. A low state of assurance was possible among the truly regenerate; many Puritan commentators suggested that even those professors who claimed to be devoid of any assurance whatsoever actually possessed assurance in some incipient form.[47] Though such a professor found the comfort of assurance beyond his/her grasp, yet the impulse to persevere in faith gave evidence that some seed of assurance was present.

On the other end of the spectrum was "full assurance," a certainty that was a "heaven on earth," a joy to which every believer was spiritually entitled and a source of strength for holy living so remarkable as to be described as a "second conversion." The true convert could experience any degree of assurance, from a low state in which assurance seemed non-existent, to a very high state in which one's election was perceived as certain.[48]

The Basis of Assurance: Spirit, Word, and Sanctification

The experience of assurance was regarded by the Puritans as having its foundation in the Spirit, the Word, and in sanctification. This complex basis was an attempt to explain both the objective and the subjective elements of assurance that were attested to in the Scriptures.[49] Although assurance was seen to be objectively grounded in the

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(1654; repr., Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1982), 14.

[47] Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 91.

[48] Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 181; John Spurr, *English Puritanism* (London: Macmillan, 1998), 157–58.

[49] The idea of the Puritan "ground of assurance" has been interpreted in a variety of ways. Stoever maintains that "this private seal [of the Spirit] is the true foundation of assurance." Miller and von Rohr argue that the Covenant served the Puritans as the basis of assurance. See Stoever, "*A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*," 120; Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 389; John von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," *Church History* 34, 2 (June 1965): 195–203.

promise of the Word of God,[50] the Scriptures also attested that assurance was a sovereign work of the Holy Spirit and that assurance also maintained a direct relationship to personal holiness.[51]

All the Puritans agreed that it was the Holy Spirit who, according Romans 8:15–16, assumed the role of bringing the comfort of salvation to believers. However, the precise manner in which the Holy Spirit performed this work was the subject of some disagreement among the Puritans. Stoever suggests that Richard Sibbes is representative of Puritan opinion on the manner of the Spirit in bringing assurance. Sibbes saw a fourfold "sealing" work of the Spirit in which he directly communicates words of comfort, moves the heart of the believer to prayer, imparts Christ's image to the soul, and supplies joy in triumph over temptation. This view saw the work of the Spirit as primarily immediate, though not exclusively so.[52]

This immediate view of the Spirit's work seemed to be not unlike the doctrine of Rome, which insisted assurance was not possible apart from special revelation. For this reason, Puritans who held to a more immediate approach were careful to explain that the Spirit employed providential means, rather than miraculous ones. In this way, the Puritans believed they were able to maintain sufficient distance from the Catholic position. Yet the practicality of the Puritan culture demanded that its theologians explain how such an immediate view of the Spirit's work manifested itself in the life of the church and in the life of the individual. The explanation inevitably reverted to external forms that indicated that the Spirit's work was not quite as immediate in practice as suggested in theory.[53]

Miller is convinced that neither Sibbes nor the Puritans should be interpreted as basing assurance in the work of the immediate and subjective workings of the Spirit but in the objectivity of the Cove-

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[50] Beeke, *The Quest for Full Assurance*, 124–30.

[51] Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 163.

[52] Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven,'* 121–23.

[53] Ibid.

nant.[54] A more balanced interpretation is offered by Packer, who suggests that Sibbes is in essential agreement with Thomas Brooks, Thomas Goodwin, and John Owen. According to Packer, these men represent the best of Puritan thought on the subject of the Spirit and assurance, when in the course of their writing,

> They take the text [Rom. 8:16] as referring to two distinct modes of witness, the first being inferential . . . and the second being that of the Spirit testifying, no longer indirectly, but immediately and intuitively; not merely by prompting us to infer our adoption, but by what Goodwin calls an "over-powering light" whereby he bears direct witness to the Christian of God's everlasting love to him, of his election, and his sonship, and his inheritance.[55]

The Spirit's testimony—whether direct or indirect—was subjective in nature. However, the Spirit's testimony was not the exclusive basis for assurance. The promises of the Word of God also functioned as a basis for assurance, one which the rational mind could appeal to. Such an appeal to the subjective and to the objective simultaneously did not present a situation that was contradictory, but rather one that was complementary:

> Because they speak of an operation of the Spirit within human reason, it is possible to present the Puritans as either anti-intellectual or rationalistic. Thus, we find Thomas Brooks saying that "reason's arm is too short to reach this jewel of assurance." Yet John Preston asserts that "there is no grace that any man hath, but it passeth in through the understanding." There is no conflict here. Rather, the Puritans regard reason,

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[54] Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 388–89; for a similar view see von Rohr, "Covenant and Assurance in Early English Puritanism," 195–203.

[55] Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 184.

though helpless on its own, as a ready instrument by which the Spirit may, across time and through experience, establish an assured faith.[56]

The subjectivity of the Spirit and the objectivity of the Word, then, are complementary because the latter functions as the instrument of the former. Packer, referring to Goodwin's doctrine, concurs:

> The Spirit witnesses to the truth of the Word of God and its application to the individual. In creating faith, he convinces the sinner that the conditional promises of the gospel are held out by God to him . . . and prompts him to make the appropriate response, i.e., to trust. In giving assurance, he convinces the Christian that the absolute promises of Scripture include him in their scope . . . and moves him to make the appropriate response, i.e., to rejoice.[57]

In short, "the Spirit applies words and thoughts of Scripture to the heart so powerfully and authoritatively that the believer is left in no doubt that they are being spoken by God to him."[58]

In addition to the testimony of the Spirit and the Word of God, the Puritans were convinced that the Scriptures attested to a third basis of assurance: the evidence of sanctification within the professing believer. True Christians give evidence of conversion in the form of holy dispositions, words, and actions. This third element, though objective in nature, was notoriously difficult to interpret. Self-deception could distort one's interpretation of the evidence. Certain attitudes and behaviors might prove to be, upon close inspection, inconclusive for ascertaining the holiness that attended conversion.

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[56] Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," 255. This quotation cites Thomas Brooks, *Heaven on Earth*, 109; John Preston, *The New Covenant or Saints Portion* (London, 1630), 451.

[57] Packer, *A Quest for Godliness*, 185.

[58] Ibid.

But self-deception was not inevitable. Safety from this danger was found in the testimony of the Spirit and the Word. These served as the frame of reference by which the claims of a changed life could be introduced as reliable evidence into the court of conscience.[59]

For the Puritans, the Spirit, the Word, and sanctification worked in unison by means of an interdependent relationship. The Word stimulates sanctification; and in a "living spiral of assurance," sanctification appeals to the Word for authenticity so that "the reflective act combines the internal evidence of a Christian with the infallible revelation of Scripture to arrive at a full assurance. Thus, the Christian spirals upward in a knowledge of God, turning from Scripture to endeavor, from endeavor back to a scriptural evaluation."[60] And both the Word and the evidences of sanctification are authenticated by the testimony of the Spirit. Thus, in the Puritan perspective, the three grounds of assurance did not compete, nor contradict, but cohered into a unified, consistent, and reliable ground of assurance.[61]

Distinct Features in the Puritan Appropriation of Christian Assurance

All of the theological substance behind the doctrine—the nature, meaning, extent, and basis of assurance—culminated in practical implementation. Such was the objective of all Puritan theology. The question of how the believer was to practically pursue and obtain assurance reduced to two basic components. One component involved

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[59] This relationship between the Spirit, the Word, and sanctification points to a priority of the Spirit and the Word, given that the Spirit and the Word served as both the cause of sanctification and the measure of its authenticity. Similarly, it may be argued that the relationship between the Spirit and the Word points to a priority of the Spirit, given that the Spirit (as agent) is the source of the Word, as well as the agent who employs the Word (as instrument).

[60] Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," 256, 258.

[61] Beeke, "The Assurance Debate," 280–81.

the use of reason by way of syllogism so that the rational nature of truth might unfold in such a way as to instruct and comfort the troubled conscience. A second component involved an examination of the history of events which preceded the time of supposed conversion. A series of events which were of a certain kind and order were considered holy preparation by the Spirit of God for authentic conversion and were considered to be in and of themselves a mark of true conversion. These two exercises—examination by syllogism and examination of preparation—were means by which the doubting soul could receive assurance.

The Use of Syllogism

The Puritans employed syllogistic reasoning as the instrument by which one could reliably demonstrate the relationship between the propositions of Scripture and the self. The syllogism enabled questions regarding the witness of the Spirit, the promises of Scripture, and the reality of sanctification to find answers grounded, at least in part, outside one's own personal senses. The promises of Scripture served as this basis, and Scripture's reliability proceeded from the very faithfulness of its Divine Author. Confidence in Scripture was thus reckoned as confidence in God Himself.[62]

The Puritans' use of the syllogism for cultivating assurance brought the authority of the Word of God to bear on the reality of the evidences of sanctification. The value of this usage was that it established a trustworthy arbiter for determining whether or not such evidences were produced by the Spirit of God and should be taken as His witness. Beeke suggests the following example as typical of the Puritan approach:

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[62] Beeke, "The Assurance Debate," 271–72; Hawkes, "The Logic of Assurance in English Puritan Theology," 254–55.

Major premise: According to Scripture, only those who possess saving faith will receive the Spirit's testimony that their lives manifest the fruits of sanctification and good works.

Minor premise: I cannot deny that by the grace of God I have received the Spirit's testimony that I manifest the fruits of sanctification and good works.

Conclusion: I am a partaker of saving faith.[63]

Use of the formal syllogism was applied to both the outward evidences of grace and the inward evidences of grace. The former, a practical syllogism, worked in conjunction with those passages of Scripture, such as those contained in 1 John and James, which link true regeneration with outward manifestations of holiness. The latter, a mystical syllogism, pointed the conscience to biblical texts which relate authentic salvation to a substantive internal change of attitudes, dispositions, and affections. Both forms are clearly expressed in the Westminster Confession (16.2 and 18.2 respectively).[64]

Beeke's discussion on this subject of syllogistic usage becomes especially pertinent to the examination of Edwards's doctrine with the following observation:

> By the 1640's, Puritans were using both mystical syllogisms and practical syllogisms. Consequently, mid-seventeenth-century Puritan preachers often answered the question "How do I know whether or not I am a believer?" by offering a combination of signs containing the good works of the practical syllogism as well as the inward evidences of grace of the mystical syllogism. For example . . . Burgess delivers eight messages on the true signs of grace and fifteen on the false signs of grace. True signs include obedience, sincerity, opposition

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[63] Beeke, *The Assurance Debate*, 274.
[64] Ibid., 273–75.

against and abstinence from sin, openness to divine examina-
tion, growth in grace, spiritual performance of duties, and
love to the godly. Signs that fall short of saving grace include
outward church privileges; spiritual gifts; affections of the
heart in holy things; judgments and opinions about spiritual
truth; great sufferings for Christ; strictness in religion; zeal in
false worship; external obedience to the law of God; belief in
the truths of religion; a peaceable frame of heart and a persua-
sion of God's love; outward success; prosperity and greatness
in the world; and an abandonment of gross sins.[65]

The sign, then, is an instrument for implementing the syllogism.
Edwards's use of signs, both positive and negative, will play a signifi-
cant role in his approach to assurance, first in "Distinguishing Marks,"
and then in *Religious Affections*.[66]

The Use of Preparation

In addition to the use of the syllogism, which concerned evi-
dences of grace following conversion, the Puritans also appealed to
personal experiences preceding conversion. Such experiences were

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[65] Ibid., 275–76.

[66] It is important to observe that the use of the syllogism, which involved a
cyclical relationship between the Word and the life, between faith and works,
is that very feature which has been the occasion for so much criticism. For the
Puritans, this cycle was a logical spiral upwards, sustained by the grace of
God, to the end of accomplishing a glorious end for the believer. For critics
of the Puritan way, this cycle was a tyrant, a downward vicious spiral
entrapping those who embraced its twisted logic. See Hawkes, "The Logic of
Assurance in English Puritan Theology," 253, 256–61. Hawkes cites Miller
as representative of the critical opinion: "Perry Miller, in a statement which
may be equally applied to all of Puritanism, echoes the complaint of four
centuries when he asserts the Puritan theology 'devolves upon man the
responsibility for fulfilling moral terms in return for irresistible grace.' Miller
presents Puritan logic as illogic: if God saves, why do the Puritans bother us
with obedience?" Ibid., 253; citation of Miller from *The New England Mind:
The Seventeenth Century*, 391.

regarded as the preparatory work of the Spirit and as valuable evidence because they themselves could be assessed. If the character and order of these experiences proved to be of a divine character, then the conversion experience in question could also be considered to be authentic.

The Puritan practice of examining the preparatory experiences had its origins in the importance attached to the *ordo salutis*. This delineation of the doctrine of salvation concerned ultimate and proximate cause-and-effect relationships, which in turn had implications for assurance. To the degree the nature of the cause was certain, the effect could be considered certain. Since the matter of certainty was the currency that Christian assurance traded in, the relationship between the *ordo salutis* and Christian assurance seemed natural.

The number, order, and nature of each aspect of salvation along with the relationship that each sustained to one another was the subject of intense debate in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. The Protestant scholastics, leaning on Ramist logic, developed increasingly complex models of the *ordo salutis*. William Perkins supplied a chart to accompany his version of the order of salvation (the "golden chaine"), without which his description bordered on the incomprehensible.[67]

All of these details regarding number, order, and nature were highly significant to the assurance discussion. When the framers of Dort (1618) committed to a theology that saw God as the ultimate cause, the certainty that proceeded from God's character was imputed to the rest of the order of salvation.[68] Since the aspects of salvation functioned in a logical (even causal) relationship, two conclusions could be drawn concerning assurance. First, God's sovereignty in the decree of election brought certainty to the success of the entire sequence of salvation. Second, the very fact that salvation entailed a sequence meant that each built upon the other, meaning that authen-

[67] Felicity Heal, *Reformation in Britain and Ireland* (Oxford: Oxford University, 2003), 342–44.
[68] Ibid., 342.

tic salvation not only had to include all the pieces of the sequence, but that each piece had to follow another in the proper order.

Because the *ordo salutis* was a sequential explanation, it was natural to refer to its practical aspects in terms of "steps." The steps not only attributed to God his causation of salvation aspects, but it also explained how man's responses related to God's sovereign workings. It is not difficult, then, to see the close proximity among the ideas of sequence, salvation, and assurance. God's sovereign causation of these steps was, for the Puritans, his means of preparing the soul for conversion. Since God's means and God's ends attended one another, one could safely conclude that the presence of one signaled the presence of the other.[69]

Consequently, the *ordo salutis* evolved into a primary instrument for ascertaining the true state of one's soul. The urgent need for assurance in the Puritan community placed pressure on its pastors to refine their exposition of the order of salvation, as Stoever explains:

Because the question of assurance was an urgent one for the Puritans, they devoted much space to delineating steps toward, and degrees of, rebirth, which steps and degrees might be experienced in time. These gradations, however, insofar as they belong to a coherent scheme, were not understood necessarily or primarily as a temporal sequence. Puritan discussion of "stages" and "morphology of conversion" (in the idiom of modern interpretation), while exceedingly useful in preaching, pastoral care, and personal devotion, was chiefly a description of an order of causes and only secondarily of a series of historical events.[70]

Moreover, as Puritanism matured, its view and its use of the *ordo salutis* became increasingly sophisticated. The *ordo salutis* began as a model that was basic in form, closely tied to biblically defined categories and causes and reflective of the logical order of God's decrees. It evolved into complicated sub-steps, developed ties with experiential

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[69] Stoever, *'A Faire and Easie Way to Heaven*,' 123–26.
[70] Ibid. 124–25.

causes, and increasingly reflected temporal order rather than logical order.[71] Furthermore, earlier exponents of preparatory steps were reluctant to embrace preparatory steps in any dogmatic form since "it was evident from pastoral experience that the marks of regeneration were rarely all together and were not likely to be experienced always in the same order."[72] However, the later Puritans, in addition to introducing complexity, experience, and temporal elements, became increasingly dogmatic concerning the model's necessary place in obtaining assurance.

Why did the later Puritans lean on the *ordo salutis* so heavily as to freight it with preparatory steps that were experiential, temporal, and uniform for all conversions? In short, the later generations of Puritans were alarmed at the lack of piety and the rise of antinomianism in the holy community. True conversion was at the heart of Puritanism, and preparatory steps provided the means for objectifying whether or not a profession of faith was authentic. By appealing to the preparatory steps, false professions were more easily exposed. True conversion would be further promoted and the cause of the holy community upheld.[73] Here we see a phenomenon that recurs in the context of *Religious Affections*: the effort to comprehend and to influence the spiritual state of the community by comprehending and influencing the spiritual state of the individual.

[71] Ibid.

[72] Ibid., 125.

[73] This development of preparationism, essentially an American phenomenon, is most thoroughly addressed in Norman Pettit, *The Heart Prepared: Grace and Conversion in the Puritan Life* (New Haven: Yale, 1966). The second half of this volume narrates the Puritan dilemma in terms of the role preparationism played and how its rigid use for preserving ecclesiastical purity contributed to the tensions that led to the Half-Way Covenant as well as to Solomon Stoddard's reversal of communion standards. See also Stoever, 'A *Faire and Easie Way to Heaven,*' 193.

Approaches to Preparation

Most Puritan theologians on both sides of the Atlantic agreed that some form of soul preparation necessarily preceded a genuine conversion experience.[74] Preparation of the soul for conversion was more than simply a matter of spiritual counsel; it was part of the truth of the gospel inasmuch as it hung on the implications of the doctrine of total depravity. But what this preparation consisted of was a matter of debate. As in many a theological disagreement, the matter hinged on how one viewed the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility.

Passive Preparation. Conversion was considered by many Puritans to be a matter that required passivity, not activity.[75] The doctrine of total depravity meant that man could do absolutely nothing to bring about his own conversion.[76] Rather, he was to wait for the effectual call of God to bring about his conversion.[77] The Puritans believed that a mark of a person under the convicting hand of God was his cry, "What must I do to be saved?"[78] Yet they would not simply reply "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." Perry Miller, speaking of John Cotton, illustrates:

> He believed it obvious that the gulf between nature and grace is absolute: "A man is passive in his Regeneration, as in his

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[74] The doctrine of preparation can be traced to the earliest stages of covenant theology. "A large portion of the Reformed community" was convinced that the nature of the covenant was such that children who were consecrated to its community were to be assumed as elect until proven otherwise. "This view of covenant children clearly helped produce Puritan preparation for regeneration." This preparation was deemed necessary because "the distinction between regenerate and unregenerate covenant children was almost totally obscured." John H. Gerstner and Jonathan Neil Gerstner, "Edwardsian Preparation for Salvation," *Westminster Theological Journal* 42:1 (Fall 1979): 7.

[75] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 4.

[76] Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 17.

[77] Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 27.

[78] Ibid., 3.

first generation." Only when the spirit has burned up, "root and branch," our legal righteousness are we "fit for any duty." There might be something called a "saving preparation," but as Pemble has said, this was not an antecedent but a consequence, and "for our first union, there are no steps to the Altar." "Drowsie hearts" do not open upon the knocking of Christ "unless he be pleased to put the finger of his spirit into our hearts, to open an entrance for himselfe." A blind man cannot prepare to see, and the supreme refinement of false faith is the self-induced resolution to stand ready: "Here is still the old roote of Adam left alive in us, whereby men seek to establish their own righteousness."[79]

Though they certainly affirmed that the call to "believe on the Lord Jesus Christ" was the call to salvation, they could not conceive of salvation being granted by God in response to a "decision." A sinner was simply not able to make a decision for Christ. The depraved condition of man rendered him incapable of responding.[80] But when God sovereignly regenerated him, he would necessarily believe by virtue of his new life. This, in the logic of the Puritan mind, eliminated the need for the call to believe: man's total depravity made such a call irrelevant, and God's effectual call made it unnecessary.[81]

Active Preparation. Thomas Hooker disagreed with passivity in preparation, contending that depravity did not mean that the sinner

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[79] Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Boston: Beacon, 1953), 58.

[80] Thomas Goodwin considered the conversion experience to be one in which a person "is completely passive, for this is a Divine power exerted on a soul which is incapable of helping itself." Simpson, *Puritanism in Old and New England*, 4–5.

[81] So passive is this view of preparation than some historians have interpreted this view as a stance against preparation. Morgan associates Edwards with this passive view. See Edmund S. Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma*, ed. Oscar Handlin (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1958), 136–37.

could do nothing on his own behalf or was free of responsibility.[82] Speaking of self-preparation,[83] Hooker asserted, "Undoubtedly that soule which hath this worke upon it, shall have faith poured into it."[84] To the person desiring conversion, Hooker replied with the following:

> If you ever thinke to share in the salvation that Christ hath purchased . . . if you would have him dwell with you, and doe good to you, either prepare for him, or else never expect him . . . Christ is marvellous ready to come, only he watcheth the time till your heart be ready to receive and entertaine him . . . If the whole soul be broken and humbled, he will come presently.[85]

To engage in preparation meant to put one's self "in an attitude of receptivity" so that he would not "turn down the covenant when it seem[ed] to be offered to him."[86] This attitude adjustment is what Nathaniel Vincent apparently had in mind when he offered "some directions as to how to become sincere converts."[87] These directions included reflection on one's own sins, the justice of hell, "the vanity of former excuses," forsaking evil company, attending to preaching, and

[82] Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 87n154. On the other side of the Atlantic, Stephen Charnock concurred, calling seekers to anticipate the sovereign work of God by pursuing every possible means for the preparation of their hearts. Stephen Charnock, *The Doctrine of Regeneration*, (1840; repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 210–14.

[83] Thomas Hooker and John Cotton, though divergent on their views of preparation, are considered to be the two individuals most influential in transplanting the doctrine to New England. Gerstner and Gerstner, "Edwardsian Preparation for Salvation," 9.

[84] Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Preparation* (London, 1632), 155, in Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 87n154.

[85] Thomas Hooker, *The Soules Implantation* (London, 1637), 47, in Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 87n154.

[86] Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness*, 87.

[87] Nathaniel Vincent, "The Conversion of a Sinner," in *The Puritans on Conversion*, ed. Don Kistler (Ligonier, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1990), 157.

readiness to obey the conviction of the Holy Spirit. Only then would the soul be ready to "lay hold upon and plead the Lord's covenant" in expectancy of the Lord's sovereign regenerating work.[88] Preparation also included self-examination on a daily basis (comparing the state of one's soul with the evidences of conversion),[89] exposure to preaching, the influence of godly people, and even the Lord's Table.[90]

Fear of self-deception among professing believers justified the development of preparation and its increasing sophistication. The practical value was irresistible as it served to enhance discernment among the New England clergy as they dealt with troubled souls in their congregations. By employing the powers of observation and the powers of induction so prized by the Enlightenment mind, pastors could detect patterns which, they concluded, were reliable indicators for identifying a genuine conversion. The doctrine of preparation, in its active sense, became increasingly defined. In some circles, preparation for conversion involved particular steps and even particular steps in a particular order.

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[88] Ibid., 157–63.

[89] Miller, *The New England Mind: The Seventeenth Century*, 53.

[90] Admittance of unbelievers to the Lord's Table was advocated (to the extreme disapproval of his contemporaries) by Edwards's grandfather and predecessor in Northampton, Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard was motivated by evangelistic zeal, being convinced that the ordinance was a means by which the sinner could be prepared for conversion. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 122–23.

ERIC LEHNER EXAMINES EDWARDS'S USE of philosophical, historical, and biblical sources in *Religious Affections* and demonstrates that Edwards's theology in this key work is governed by Scripture, rather than by historical, metaphysical, or epistemological considerations.

Lehner calls into question the proliferation of proposals that suggest Edwards's theology is driven by central interpretive ideals, socioeconomic forces, philosophical models, or other nonbiblical considerations. He uncovers the shortfalls of secular interpretations of Edwards and advances an interpretation—valuing an interpretation that endeavors to understand him in terms of his faith, rather than apart from it.

"Professor Lehner has offered here an outstanding contribution to our understanding of Edwards, his doctrine of assurance, and his theological method."
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"Dr. Lehner examines *Religious Affections* with a prodigious eye to detail and he asks bigger questions about the theological method adopted in Edwards's exposition of Christian assurance and authentic spiritual experience."
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