CHAPTER NINE · CONCLUSION

Virtually all the modern world has been read into Calvinism: liberal politics and voluntary association; capitalism and the social discipline upon which it rests; bureaucracy with its systematic procedures and its putatively diligent and devoted officials; and finally all the routine forms of repression, joylessness, and unrelaxed aspiration. By one or another writer, the faith of the brethren, and especially of the Puritan brethren, has been made the source or cause or first embodiment of the most crucial elements of modernity.1 Undoubtedly there is some truth in all these interpretations and in the preceding pages many examples have been given of "modern" elements in Calvinist theory and practice, or rather, of elements later incorporated into the modern world. It is now necessary to add, however, that this incorporation was a long and complex process, involving selection, corruption, and transformation; it was the result of men working upon their Calvinist heritage. Calvinism in its sixteenth- and seventeenth-century forms was not so much the cause of this or that modern economic, political, or administrative system as it was an agent of modernization, an ideology of the transition period. And as the conditions of crisis and upheaval in which Calvinism was conceived and developed did not persist, so Calvinism as an integral and creative force did not endure. It gave way to other social and intellectual forces which sustained something of its achievement but not everything—indeed, very far from everything.


Conclusion

Calvinism was not a liberal ideology, even though congregational life was surely a training for self-government and democratic participation. The radically democratic Levellers probably had their beginning in the Puritan congregations, in the debates, for example, that preceded the elections of ministers and in the recriminations that so frequently followed.2 Even when the choice of ministers was not open to the church membership, as it often was not, politics in the congregation was very different from the influence, intrigue, and patronage that prevailed at the bishop's or the king's court. Personal loyalty and deference, so highly developed among the courtiers, declined among the brethren. Calvinist voluntarism established instead the freely negotiated contract as the highest human bond; in its terms, Puritan writers described the connection of man and God, of the saint and his associates, of minister and church, of husband and wife. All these relations were entered into willingly and knowingly, and if men were thus to negotiate contracts they obviously required some knowledge of the contract's content and purposes. The preaching and writing of the ministers was designed to provide such knowledge; so was the discussion among lay Puritans of the sermons and the texts; so also the congregational debates, the reading, note-taking and diary-keeping of the newly political, newly educated saints. And all this was preparation also for the debates and elections, the pamphlets and parties of liberal politics.

But Puritanism was much more than this, as the previous description of the "attack upon the traditional world" and the "new world of discipline and work" ought to have made clear. The associations of the brethren were voluntary indeed, but they gave rise to a collectivist discipline marked above all by a tense mutual "watchfulness." Puritan individualism never led to a respect for privacy. Tender conscience had its rights, but it was protected only against the interference of worldlings and not against "brotherly admonition." And the admonitions of the brethren were anxious, insistent, continuous. They felt themselves to be living in an age of chaos and crime and sought to train conscience to be permanently on guard, permanently at war, against sin. Debate in a Puritan congregation was never a

free and easy exchange of ideas; the need for vigilance, the pressures of war were too great to allow for friendly disagreement. What lay behind the warfare of the saints? Two things above all: a fierce antagonism to the traditional world and the prevailing pattern of human relation and a keen and perhaps not unrealistic anxiety about human wickedness and the dangers of social disorder. The saints attempted to fasten upon the necks of all mankind the yoke of a new political discipline—impersonal and ideological, not founded upon loyalty or affection, no more open to spontaneity than to chaos and crime. This discipline was not to depend upon the authority of paternal kings and lords or upon the obedience of childlike and trustful subjects. Puritans sought to make it voluntary, like the contract itself, the object of individual and collective willfulness. But voluntary or not, its keynote was repression.

Liberalism also required such voluntary subjection and self-control, but in sharp contrast to Puritanism, its politics was shaped by an extraordinary confidence in the possibility of both, a firm sense of human reasonableness and of the relative ease with which order might be attained. Liberal confidence made repression and the endless struggle against sin unnecessary; it also tended to make self-control invisible, that is, to forget its painful history and naively assume its existence.\(^8\) The result was that liberalism did not create the self-control it required. The Lockeian state was not a disciplinary institution as was the Calvinist holy commonwealth, but rather rested on the assumed political virtue of its citizens.\(^9\) It is one of the central arguments of this conclusion that Puritan repression has its place in the practical history of that strange assumption.

It is not possible to judge in any absolute terms the effectiveness of this repression or the extent of the social need for it. It can only be said that the Puritans knew about human sinfulness and that Locke did not need to know. This undoubtedly reflects not only different temperaments but also different experiences. The very existence and spread of Puritanism in the years before the revolution surely suggest the presence in English society of an acute fear of disorder and “wickedness”—a fear, it has been argued above, attendant upon the transformation of the old political and social order. The triumph of Lockeian ideas, on the other hand, suggests the overcoming of anxiety, the appearance of saints and citizens for whom sin is no longer a problem. The struggle against the old order seems largely to have been won by Locke’s time, and the excitement, confusion, and fearfulness of that struggle almost forgotten. Lockeian liberals found it possible to dispense with religious, even with ideological, controls in human society and thought enthusiasm and battle-readiness unattractive. But this was only because the controls had already been implanted in men. In a sense, then, liberalism was dependent upon the existence of “saints,” that is, of persons whose good behavior could be relied upon. At the same time, the secular and genteel character of liberalism was determined by the fact that these were “saints” whose goodness (sociability, moral decency, or mere respectability) was self-assured and relaxed, free from the nervousness and fanaticism of Calvinist godliness.

This, then, is the relation of Puritanism to the liberal world: it is perhaps one of historical preparation, but not at all of theoretical contribution. Indeed, there was much to be forgotten and much to be surrendered before the saint could become a liberal bourgeois. During the great creative period of English Puritanism, the faith of the saints and the tolerant reasonableness of the liberals had very little in common.

Roughly the same things can be said about the putative connection of Calvinism and capitalism. The moral discipline of the saints can be interpreted as the historical conditioning of the capitalist man; but the discipline was not itself capitalist. It can be argued that the faith of the brethren, with its emphasis upon methodical endeavor and self-control, was an admirable preparation for systematic work in shops, offices, and factories. It trained men for the minute-to-minute attentiveness required in a modern economic system; it taught them to forego their afternoon naps—as they had but recently foregone their saint’s day holidays—and to devote spare hours to bookkeeping and moral introspection. It somehow made the deprivation and repression inevitable in sustained labor bearable and even desirable for the saints.

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\(^8\) For some suggestion of that painful history, see Friedrich Nietzsche, The Genealogy of Morals, trans. Francis Golfeing (New York, 1966), esp. pp. 158ff. on the genesis of conscience.

\(^9\) For a discussion of Locke’s theory of political virtue, see Peter Laslett’s edition of the Two Treatises of Government (Cambridge, 1960), 108ff.
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And by teaching self-control, it provided the basis for impersonal, contractual relations among men, allowing workmanlike cooperation but not involving any exchange of affection or any of the risks of intimacy. All this, Calvinism did or helped to do. Whether it did so in a creative fashion or as the ideological reflection of new economic processes is not immediately relevant. The saints learned, as Weber has suggested, a kind of rational and worldly asceticism, and this was probably something more than the economic routine required. They sought in work itself what mere work can never give: a sense of vocation and discipline that would free them from sinfulness and the fear of disorder.6

But Weber has said more than this; he has argued that systematic acquisition as well as asceticism has a Calvinist origin. The psychological tension induced by the theory of predestination, working itself out in worldly activity, presumably drove men to seek success as a sign of salvation. The sheer willfulness of an inscrutable God produced in its turn, if Weber is correct, the willfulness of an anxious man and set off the entrepreneurial pursuit of better business techniques and more and more profit. At this point his argument breaks down. If there is in fact a peculiar and irrational quality to the capitalists’ lust for gain, its sources must be sought elsewhere than among the saints. For Puritanism was hardly an ideology that encouraged continuous or unrestrained accumulation. Instead, the saints tended to be narrow and conservative in their economic views, urging men to seek no more wealth than they needed for a modest life, or, alternatively, to use up their surplus in charitable giving. The anxiety of the Puritans led to a fearful demand for economic restriction (and political control) rather than to entrepreneurial activity as Weber has described it. Unremitting and relatively unremitting work was the greatest help toward saintliness and virtue.7

The ideas of Puritan writers are here very close to those of such proto-Jacobins as Mably and Morelly in eighteenth-century France, who also watched the development of capitalist enterprise with unfriendly eyes, dreaming of a spartan republic where bankers and great merchants would be unwelcome.8 The collective discipline of the Puritans—their Christian Sparta—was equally incompatible with purely acquisitive activity. Virtue would almost certainly require economic regulation. This would be very different from the regulation of medieval corporatism and perhaps it was the first sense of that difference that received the name freedom. It was accompanied by a keen economic realism: thus the Calvinist acknowledgment of the lawfulness of usury. But Calvinist realism was in the service of effective control and not of free activity or self-expression. Who can doubt that, had the holy commonwealth ever been firmly established, godly self-discipline and mutual surveillance would have been far more repressive than the corporate system? Once again, in the absence of a Puritan state the discipline was enforced through the congregation. The minutes of a seventeenth-century consistory provide a routine example: “The church was satisfied with Mrs. Carlton,” they read, “as to the weight of her butter.” Did Mrs. Carlton tremble, awaiting that verdict? Surely if the brethren were unwilling to grant liberty to the local butter-seller, they would hardly have granted it to the new capitalist. The ministerial literature, at least, is full of denunciations of enclosures, usurers, monopolists, and projectors—and occasionally even of wily merchants.9 Puritan casuistry, perhaps, left such men sufficient room in which to range, but it hardly offered them what Weber considers so essential—a good conscience. Only a sustained endeavor in hypocrisy could have earned them that. The final judgment of the saints with regard to the pursuit of money is that of Bunyan’s pilgrim, angry and ill-at-ease in the town of Vanity, disdainful of such companions as Mr. Money-love and Mr. Save-all.10

Liberalism and capitalism appear fully developed only in a

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6 This much of Weber’s theory has no necessary connection with capitalism: it suggests that Puritanism fostered a rationalist “spirit,” but not an acquisitive one. A similar view seems to be implied in Herbert Marcuse’s discovery of a “protestant ethic” in Soviet Marxism: see Soviet Marxism: A Critical Analysis (New York, 1961), pp. 117, 228-233.
7 Weber, Protestant Ethic, pp. 171ff.
8 See, for example, Mably’s Entretiens de Phocion (Paris, 1804); the restrictionist attitudes of Mably and Morelly are discussed in J. L. Talmon, The Origins of Totalitarian Democracy (New York, 1950), pp. 58ff.
10 This literature is discussed in George, Protestant Mind, pp. 149ff.
secular form, that is, only after Puritanism is spent as a creative force. It seems likely that a certain freedom from religious controls and religious scruples is essential for their general triumph in modern Western society. This freedom may well have its origins in the Reformation, in the attack upon the established church and the traditional priesthood, but it was not the responsibility of the reformers; it lay beyond their intentions. The holy commonwealth would have been neither liberal nor capitalist—no more, indeed, than would the Jacobin Republic of Virtue. The spread of the capitalist and liberal spirits parallels the decline of radical enthusiasm. At the same time, however, radical enthusiasm in the years before its decline helped to shape the disciplinary basis of the new economy and politics. In a sense, worldly asceticism preceded entrepreneurial freedom, just as political zeal preceded liberalism. There is an historical interdependence, not easy to understand though vulgar moralists have made it a cliché, between discipline and liberty—or rather, between discipline and a certain sort of liberty.

II

Neither Max Weber nor any of his followers have ever demonstrated that the Englishmen who actually became Puritans, who really believed in predestination and lived through the salvation panic, went on to become capitalist businessmen. The burden of the evidence would seem to be against such a conclusion, though this is not certain; it is possible that businessmen are simply less likely to keep records of their spiritual struggles than of their economic affairs. The weight of such diaries, letters, and memoirs as we possess, however, suggests that the most significant expression of the new faith was cultural and political rather than economic. The saints were indeed activists, and activists in a far more intense and "driven" fashion than the men who came later: English gentlemen after their conversions attended to parliamentary affairs with a new assiduousness; pious mothers trained their sons to a constant concern with political life; enthusiastic apprentices took notes at sermons and studied the latest religious and political pamphlets. The outcome of Puritan activity was godly watchfulness, magistracy, and revolution.

Had the revolution succeeded, the discipline of the holy commonwealth, as of the Jacobin Republic of Virtue, would have required an institutionalized political activism. Each utopia would have proliferated a petty officialdom, a host of minor administrators busily enforcing the new rules and regulations. The ideas of John Eliot of Massachusetts suggest an image of the holy commonwealth as an over-governed society, with every tenth man an official. These zealous and conscientious magistrates—equipped with a realistic and intolerant sense of the sinfulness of their fellow men—would hardly constitute a modern bureaucracy, though once again their religious contentiousness may suggest the difficult, half-forgotten origins of modern bureaucratic discipline. The zeal of the saints seems to have little in common with the secular competence, functional rationality, and moderate devotion required of modern officials. Yet magistracy is a far better description of the saints' true vocation than is either capitalist acquisition or bourgeois freedom. It suggests most clearly the activist role that Puritanism called upon the saints to play in the creation and maintenance of a new moral order. This activity was political in the sense that it was always concerned with government—though not only or most importantly at the level of the state. For Puritans imagined the congregation as a "little commonwealth," debated worriedly over its constitution and sought means to discipline recalcitrant members; they saw the family as a voluntary community dominated by a godly father whom they described as a governor. And finally, they saw the self as a divided being, spirit at war with flesh, and there also they sought control and government.

Once Calvinism and Puritanism have been described in the political language of repression and war it becomes easier to answer the question posed in the first chapter of this book: why did particular groups of Englishmen and Frenchmen, Scots and Dutchmen become Calvinists and Puritans? They did so, it may be suggested, because they felt some need for the self-control and godly government that sainthood offered. This is to push Weber's explanation of capitalism a step further back: he has argued that Calvinism was an anxiety-inducing ideology that drove its adherents to seek a sense of control and confidence in methodical work and worldly success. But he has not even raised the question of why men should adopt an anxiety-inducing ideology in the first
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place, a question to which his own concept of "elective affinity" offers a possible answer. Now it is probably not true that Calvinism induced anxiety; more likely its effect was to confirm and explain in theological terms perceptions men already had of the dangers of the world and the self. But what made Calvinism an "appropriate" option for anxiety-ridden individuals was not only this confirmation, but also the fact that sainthood offered a way out of anxiety. Puritan "method" led to tranquillity and assurance through the "exercises" of self-control and spiritual warfare, and it then led to the political order of the holy commonwealth through the corresponding "exercises" of magistracy and revolution.

Men were likely to become saints, or rather, it is understandable that certain men should have become saints, if their social and personal experiences had been of a certain sort. Three different sets of experiences have been discussed in the preceding pages: that of discontented and fearful noblemen like the French Huguenots who sought some way to adjust to a modern political order; that of clerical intellectuals, newly freed from corporate ties (and from the privileges that went along with those ties) and especially sensitive to the ambiguities of their own position and the disorder of their society; and finally that of new or newly educated gentlemen, lawyers and merchants, nervously making their way in university, parliament, and city, with a claim to stake in the political and social worlds. None of these group experiences make individual conversion predictable; each of them makes it comprehensible. Thus the moderate Calvinism of a man like Philip de Mornay can be viewed as the willful effort of an educated and ambitious French gentleman to demonstrate to himself as well as to others his worthiness for political office—a demonstration that required a rigid rejection of Renaissance pleasure and extravagance. The fanatical self-righteousness of that first Puritan John Knox, a Scottish peasant's son set loose in Europe by war and revolution, can best be understood as in some sense a function of his exile. Righteousness was a consolation and a way of organizing the self for survival. When John Whitgift, the future archbishop, cruelly taunted Thomas Cartwright for "eating at other men's tables," he was perhaps suggesting an important source of Cartwright's ideas of congregational unity and ministerial status. And finally, it can be argued, country gentlemen like John Winthrop and Oliver Cromwell, educated at Cambridge, knowledgeable but uneasy in London, full of new and vague aspirations, sought in Puritanism a self-confidence equal to their hopes and became saints on their way, as it were, to becoming governors of new worlds and new societies.

It should be noted that the elective affinity of aristocrats, ministers, gentlemen, merchants, and lawyers with the Calvinist and Puritan ideologies did not lie only in the anxiety they all shared, but also in the capacity they all shared to participate in those "exercises" that sainthood required. They were the "sociologically competent"—as has already been argued—they were ready for magistracy and war. The Calvinist faith did not appeal to men, however anxious, below the level of such competence. Laborers and peasants were more likely, if they were free at all from traditional ways, to adopt some more pacific or chiliastic faith whose promise did not depend upon their own hard work, that is, upon the control of themselves and the cruel, unwearying repression of others.

Puritanism cannot, then, be described simply as the ideological reflex of social disorder and personal anxiety; it is one possible response to the experiences of disorder and anxiety, or rather, it is one possible way of perceiving and responding to a set of experiences that other men than the saints might have viewed in other terms. There were both merchants and gentlemen, for example, who obviously enjoyed the very freedoms that frightened the saints so much—mobility, extravagance, individuality, and wit—and who eagerly sought out the Renaissance cities and courts where such freedoms were cultivated. And from among these new urbanites undoubtedly came many capitalists and liberals. It would not be easy to explain in particular cases why the court of James I held such attractions for some members of the English gentry while it was vicious and iniquitous in the eyes of others. No more is it readily comprehensible why some of the newcomers to


the burgeoning city of London merged into the mob or explored the exciting underworld, while others hated the "wickedness" of the city and sought out virtuous brethren and a sense of security and confidence in the Puritan congregations. All that can be said is that some of the men living in this age of social transformation found what was for them a suitable response in Calvinist ideology. In England, Puritanism was their effort to capture control of the changing world and their own lives—hence the insistent concern of the saints with order, method, and discipline.

III

The Puritan concern with discipline and order, however, is not unique in history. Over and over again since the days of the saints, bands of political radicals have sought anxiously, energetically, systematically, to transform themselves and their world. The choice of sainthood, then, need not be described simply as a reasonable choice for sixteenth and seventeenth-century Englishmen to have made; it can be related systematically to other choices of other men in similar historical circumstances.

The very appearance of the Puritan saints in English history suggests the breakdown of an older order in which neither Protestant autodidacts, political exiles, nor voluntary associations of lay brethren were conceivable. At the same time that breakdown provides the context within which the choice of sainthood seems reasonable and appropriate, though not in any individual case predictable. It is possible to go further than this, however, and argue that given the breakdown of the old order, it is predictable that some Englishmen would make that reasonable choice. And further than this: given similar historical circumstances, Frenchmen and Russians would predictably make similar choices. Englishmen became Puritans and then godly magistrates, elders and fathers in much the same way and for many of the same reasons as eighteenth-century Frenchmen became Jacobins and active citizens, and twentieth-century Russians Bolsheviks and professional revolutionaries—and then in Lenin's words "leaders," "managers," and "controllers."14 The Calvinist saints were the first of these

bands of revolutionary magistrates who sought above all control and self-control. In different cultural contexts, at different moments in time, sainthood will take on different forms and the saints will act out different revolutions. But the radical's way of seeing and responding to the world will almost certainly be widely shared whenever the experiences which first generated that perception and response are widely shared, whenever groups of men are suddenly set loose from old certainties.

That older order in which Puritanism was unimaginable has been described in the preceding pages as a traditional society, that is, a society in which hierarchy is the fundamental ordering principle; patriarchy, personal loyalty, patronage and corporatism are the key forms of human relations; and passivity is the normal political posture of common men. At some point in the later Middle Ages, the complex institutional structure of European traditionalism began to weaken and erode; its philosophical rationalizations were called into question by bold speculators free, more or less, from traditional controls. Then there began a long period of transition, in which moments of rapid and explosive change alternated with moments of stalemate and frustration. Individual men experienced at once a new and exhilarating sense of freedom and mobility and an acute anxiety and fearfulness, both of which may be summed up in the Puritan notion of "unsettledness." Only gradually, at different times in different countries, did there emerge a new society, whose members were at least formally equal, their political relations impersonal, based either upon negotiation and contract or upon a uniform coercion. In this society the activity of the organized "people" was as necessary to social discipline as was popular passivity in the traditional world.15 The old order was imagined to be natural and eternal, but it is in the nature of the new that it be regularly renewed. It is the product of art and will, of human doing. If traditionalism was stable, modernity is founded upon change. Even so, however, it represents a routinization of the frenetic mobility that marked

14 Lenin, *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government* (1918) in *Selected Works* (New York, 1930-37), VII, 338-353. It was necessary, Lenin wrote, "to discover real organizers, people with sober minds and a practical outlook, people who

15 The importance of "participation" in modern politics is urged by Daniel Lerner, *The Passing of Traditional Society* (Glencoe, Ill., 1958), esp. pp. 57ff.
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the period of transition and of the zeal and anxiety that drove men forward during that exciting and painful time.

The significance of Puritanism lies in the part it played between 1550 and 1660. Those were crucial years of struggle and change in England and those were the years when Calvinism was a forceful, dynamic faith. After the Restoration, its energy was drawn inward, its political aspirations forgotten; the saint gave way to the non-conformist. Or, Lockeian liberalism provided an alternative political outlook. But Puritanism cannot be explained by reference either to its survivals or its transformations; it is necessary to confront the historical reality of those years when it was still an integral creed. In those years, Puritanism provided what may best be called an *ideology of transition*. It was functional to the process of modernization not because it served the purposes of some universal progress, but because it met the human needs that arise whenever traditional controls give way and hierarchical status and corporate privilege are called into question. These needs can be met in other ways: by ideologists of nostalgia, for example, who glorify the old security and the old bondage. But they are met most effectively by doctrines like Puritanism that encourage a vigorous self-control and a narrowing of energies, a bold effort to shape a new personality against the background of social "unsettledness." Once such a personality has been achieved, the saints proceed to shape society in the image of their own salvation; they become what the ideologists of nostalgia can never become: active enemies of the old order. Thus when country gentlemen have experienced a conversion like Cromwell's, they are transformed not only into saints but also into parliamentary intransigents, attacking the traditional hierarchy root and branch and experimenting with new forms of political association.

But though they appear in history as revolutionaries, who destroy the old order and kill the king, the primary source of the saints' radical character lies in their response to the disorder of the transition period. The old order is only a part, and not the most important part of their experience. They live much of their lives amidst the breakdown of that order or (as with the clerical intellectuals) in hiding or exile from it. Much as they hated bishops and courtiers, then, the Puritan saints hated and feared vagabonds more and dreaded the consequences of the vagabonds in themselves, their own "unsettledness." "Masterless men" are always the first products of the breakdown of tradition and the saints hardly thought such men less dangerous than did their former masters. Without the experience of masterlessness, the Puritans are unimaginable. Sainthood is one of the likely results of that experience, or rather one of the ways in which men seek to cope with that experience. Hobbes' authoritarianism is another way—and the contrast between Hobbes' appeal to sovereign power and the Puritan's struggle for self-control suggests the difficulty of describing sainthood, in Erich Fromm's terms, as an "escape from freedom."19

Fromm is certainly right, however, in viewing the saint in the context of "freedom." The Puritans were in no sense the products of a new order slowly growing up within traditional feudal society, as Marxist theory would have it. They were the products—though that word hardly suggests their extraordinary activism—of disorder. They inherited the critical and destructive work of writers like Machiavelli and Luther and they continued that work only after they had organized themselves to survive in the midst of criticism and destruction. They were second-generation men: they arrived in a world where courageous heretics and philosophers had already challenged the traditional masters; they encountered the difficulties of this world by being born again, by rejecting masterlessness and finding a new master in themselves and a new system of control in their godly brethren.

Coping with disorder meant being reborn as a new man, self-confident and free of worry, capable of vigorous, willful activity. The saints sometimes took new names, or gave new names to their children, to signify this rebirth. If the experience of "unsettledness" had made them anxious, depressed, unable to work, given to fantasies of demons, morbid introspection, or fearful daydreams such as Calvin had suggested were common among fallen men, then sainthood was indeed a triumph of character formation. Here the analogy with the Bolsheviks is worth pursuing. Lenin's diatribes against "slovenliness . . . carelessness, un-

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18 This view of radical ideology was first suggested by Adam Ulam in his study of Marxist thought, The Unfinished Revolution (New York, 1960).

19 Erich Fromm, Escape from Freedom (New York, 1941), pp. 84-98.
tidiness, unpunctuality, nervous haste, the inclination to substitute discussion for action, talk for work, the inclination to undertake everything under the sun without finishing anything” were intended first of all as attacks upon his fellow radicals and exiles—whatever their value as descriptions of the “primitive” Russia he hated so much. The first triumph of Bolshevism, as of Puritanism, was over the impulse toward “disorganization” in its own midst: here, so to speak, was Satan at work where he is ever most active—in the ranks of the godly. It should not be forgotten, however, that this was a triumph also over the impulse toward free thought and spontaneous expression that manifests itself with especial vigor in the period of masterlessness and with which modernity has, up to a point, made its peace. This was the sacrifice which the saints found necessary in their terrible struggle for self-control. The Puritans vigorously attacked Renaissance experimentation in dress and in all the arts of self-decoration and hated the free-wheeling vagabonds who roamed the countryside and crowded into cities, never organizing themselves into families and congregations. They dreaded the dance and the drama, tore down maypoles and closed playhouses; they waged a long, bitter and unending war against fornication. In a similar fashion, the Jacobin leader Robespierre attacked the hedonism and censured the morals of the new bourgeoisie and spitefully connected the radical free thought of the Enlightenment with anti-revolutionary conspiracy. Atheism, he declared, is aristocratic. And again Lenin, preaching with all the energy of a secular Calvinist against free love: “Dissoluteness in sexual life is bourgeois, [it] is a phenomenon of decay. The proletariat is a rising class . . . It needs clarity, clarity and again clarity. And so, I repeat, no weakening, no waste, no destruction of forces.”

In fact, Lenin’s morality had little to do with the proletariat and the “dissoluteness” he attacked had little to do with the bourgeoisie. He might as well have talked of saints and worldlings as the Puritans did. The contrast he was getting at was between those men who had succumbed to (or taken advantage of) the disorder of their time—speculators in philosophy, vagabonds in their sexual lives, economic Don Juans—and those who had somehow pulled themselves out of “unsettledness,” organized their lives and regained control. The first group were the damned and the second the saved. The primary difference between them was not social, but ideological.

All forms of radical politics make their appearance at moments of rapid and decisive change, moments when customary status is in doubt and character (or “identity”) is itself a problem. Before Puritans, Jacobins, or Bolsheviks attempt the creation of a new order, they must create new men. Repression and collective discipline are the typical methods of this creativity: the disordered world is interpreted as a world at war; enemies are discovered and attacked. The saint is a soldier whose battles are fought out in the self before they are fought out in society. Revolution follows from Puritan sainthood—that is, from the triumph over Satanic lusts—and also from Jacobin virtue and from the Bolshevik “steeling” of character; it is the acting out of a new identity, painfully won. This connection between sainthood and revolution is nicely illustrated in John Milton’s eulogy of Cromwell: “A commander first over himself; the conqueror of himself, it was over himself he had learnt most to triumph. Hence he went to encounter with an external enemy as a veteran accomplished in all military duties . . .” In traditional societies, this self-conquest is not necessary—except for relatively small numbers of men who for personal reasons choose monasticism as a way of life. In modern societies, it is routine. But there is a point in the modernization process when large numbers of men, suddenly masterless, seek a rigid self-control; when they discover new purposes, dream of a new order, organize their lives for disciplined and methodical activity. These men are prospective saints and citizens; for them Puritanism, Jacobinism, and Bolshevism are appropriate options. At this point in time, they are likely options.

This is not to reduce political radicalism to the psychological therapy of “unsettled” men. The “unsettledness” which Knox, Cartwright, and Cromwell experienced, with all its attendant

19 Quoted in A. Aulard, Christianity and the French Revolution (Boston, 1947), p. 118.
fearfulness and enthusiasm, sometimes disfiguring and sometimes ennobling, was only a heightened form of the feelings of many of their fellow Englishmen—for ultimately the sociological range of the Puritan response was very wide. Of course, “unsettledness” was not a permanent condition and so sainthood was only a temporary role. The Puritans failed in their effort to transform England into a holy commonwealth and, in one way or another, their more recent counterparts have also failed. Sainthood mediated the dangerous shift from one social routine to another; then it survived only as a remembered enthusiasm and a habitual self-control devoid, as Weber’s capitalism is, of theological reason. What this suggests, however, is not that holiness was an impractical dream, the program of neurotic, muddled, or unrealistic men. In fact, Puritan ministers and elders (and fathers) had considerable political experience and the holy commonwealth was in part achieved—among those men who most needed holiness. Nor is it correct to argue from the inability of the saints to retain political power that Puritanism represented only a temporary triumph of “ideas” over “interests,” of the holiness doctrine over the ultimately more significant secular purposes of gentlemen, merchants, and lawyers. 

For what needs to be explained is precisely why the saints over a long period of time acquired such an intense interest in ideas like predestination and holiness. Puritan ideology was a response to real experience, therefore a practical effort to cope with personal and social problems. The disappearance of the militant saints from English politics in the years after the Restoration suggests only that these problems were limited in time to the period of breakdown and psychic and political reconstruction. When men stopped being afraid or became less afraid, then Puritanism was suddenly irrelevant. Particular elements of the Puritan system were transformed to fit the new routine—and other elements were forgotten. And only then did the saint become a man of “good behavior,” cautious, respectable, moved only by a routine anxiety and ready to participate in a Lockeian society.

Conclusion

It is now possible to suggest a model of radical politics based on the history of the English Puritans and developed, at least in part, in their own terms. Such a model may serve to reveal the crucial features of radicalism as a general historical phenomena and to make possible a more systematic comparison of Puritans, Jacobins, and Bolsheviks (and perhaps other groups as well) than has been attempted here.

(1) At a certain point in the transition from one or another form of traditional society (feudal, hierarchical, patriarchal, corporate) to one or another form of modern society, there appears a band of “strangers” who view themselves as chosen men, saints, and who seek a new order and an impersonal, ideological discipline.

(2) These men are marked off from their fellows by an extraordinary self-assurance and daring. The saints not only repudiate the routine procedures and customary beliefs of the old order, but they also cut themselves off from the various kinds of “freedom” (individual mobility, personal extravagance, self-realization, despair, nervousness, vacillation) experienced amidst the decay of tradition. The band of the chosen seeks and wins certainty and self-confidence by rigidly disciplining its members and teaching them to discipline themselves. The saints interpret their ability to endure this discipline as a sign of their virtue and their virtue as a sign of God’s grace. Amidst the confusion of the transitional period, they discover in themselves a predestination, a firm and undeviating sense of purpose, an assurance of eventual triumph.

(3) The band of the chosen confronts the existing world as if in war. Its members interpret the strains and tensions of social change in terms of conflict and contention. The saints sense enmity all about them and they train and prepare themselves accordingly. They keep watch and continually calculate their chances.

(4) The organization of the chosen suggests the nature of the new order they seek, but also reflects the necessities of the present struggle.

(5) Men join the band by subscribing to a covenant which testifies to their faith. Their new commitment is formal, im-

22 This is the view of revolutionary enthusiasm suggested in Crane Brinton’s book on the French Revolution, Decade of Revolution (New York, 1934), and again in his Anatomy of Revolution (New York, 1938).
personal, and ideological; it requires that they abandon older loyalties not founded upon opinion and will—loyalties to family, guild, locality, and also to lord and king.

(b) This commitment is voluntary, based upon an act of the will for which men can be trained, but not born. It is not possible to take one's place in the chosen band through any sort of patronage. To be chosen, one must choose.

(c) The commitment and zeal of prospective saints must be tested and proven. Hence it is not easy to choose sainthood and the band of the chosen remains exclusive and small, each of its members highly "talented" in virtue and self-discipline. Even after men have been accepted as saints, they must still demonstrate their godliness on every possible occasion. They are subject to examination and as they could once have been rejected so they can always be purged. The godly tension which the saints maintain is thus in vivid contrast to the apathy of worldlings, secure and at their ease with their customs and traditions.

(d) Within the band of the chosen, all men are equal. Status counts for little. Members are measured by their godliness and by the contributions they can make to the work at hand.

(5) The acting out of sainthood produces a new kind of politics.

(a) The activity of the chosen band is purposive, programmatic, and progressive in the sense that it continually approaches or seeks to approach its goals. This activity may be defined as an organized effort to universalize sainthood, to reconstruct or reform the political or religious worlds according to objective criteria (revealed, predetermined, written), without any regard for the established forms.

(b) The activity of the saints is methodical and systematic. Politics is made into a kind of work, to which the chosen are required to commit themselves for long periods of time. At work they must suppress all purely personal feelings and behave in a disciplined fashion. They must learn to be patient and to concern themselves with detail. Above all, they must work regularly and hard.

(c) The violent attack upon customary procedures sets the saints free to experiment politically. Such experimentation is controlled by its overriding purposes and the right to engage in it is limited to the chosen few who have previously accepted the discipline of the band. It is not a grant of political free-play, but it does open the way to new kinds of activity, both public and secret. The saints are entrepreneurs in politics.

(6) The historical role of the chosen band is twofold. Externally, as it were, the band of the saints is a political movement aiming at social reconstruction. It is the saints who lead the final attack upon the old order and their destructiveness is all the more total because they have a total view of the new world. Internally, godliness and predestination are creative responses to the pains of social change. Discipline is the cure for freedom and "unsettledness." As romantic love strengthens the bonds of the conjugal family, so ideological zeal establishes the unity of the nonfamilial brethren and makes it possible for men to feel secure outside the traditional system of connections.

One day, however, that security becomes a habit and zeal is no longer a worldly necessity. Then the time of God's people is over. In this world, the last word always belongs to the worldlings and not to the saints. It is a complacent word and it comes when salvation, in all its meanings, is no longer a problem. But the saints have what is more interesting: the first word. They set the stage of history for the new order.

Once that order is established, ordinary men are eager enough to desert the warfare of the Lord for some more moderate pursuit of virtue. Once they feel sufficiently secure as gentlemen and merchants, as country justices and members of Parliament, they happily forego the further privilege of being "instruments." Hardly a moment after their triumph, the saints find themselves alone; they can no longer exploit the common forms of ambition, egotism, and nervousness; they can no longer convince their fellow men that ascetic work and intense repression are necessary. The experience of other revolutionaries has been similar: the history of their success is brief. An enthusiastic poet of the Bolshevik Revolution, for example, wrote as early as 1924 that his verse was no longer needed.28 The vanguard, he suggested (not quite accurately) had settled down to a new routine:

The Revolution of the Saints

I see before me
Villagers in Sunday best.
Transact a meeting as if attending church.

The good old cause had quickly become only a memory:

Wrinkling his reminiscent forehead,
A lame Red Army man with drowsy face
Grandly expatiates upon Budyonny
And the Reds who captured Perekop by storm.

And the "rebel soul" felt like an alien again:

What a misfit I've become
... I feel a foreigner in my land.

So too the Puritan saint was a stranger before his revolution, and after. There was a difference, of course, for the new routine embodied many aspects of his radical faith. But the enthusiasm, the battle-readiness, the confident enmity, the polemical eagerness, the sense of unity among the brethren, the first pride of self-control—all these were gone. Something of the tension, vigilance, and excitement they suggest might have been maintained in the holy commonwealth, but not in the world of the Restoration or the Whigs. They had helped carry men through a time of change; they had no place in a time of stability. They had been elements of strength in an age of moral confusion and of cruel vigor in an age of vacillation. Now it was suggested that saintly vigor had its own pathology and conventionalism its own health; peace had its virtues as well as godly warfare.