



## *Puritanism* in Anne Bradstreet (1612–1672)

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Puritanism was an interpretation of Christianity that developed as a limited Calvinism. John Winthrop determined that Puritanism should flourish in colonial America as a “city upon a Hill.” As governor and religious leader, he entwined property titles and church membership. Male members elected town’s “selectmen.” A recipient of this vision, Anne Bradstreet was, however, a “thinking” Puritan, a “doubting” one, and so questioned the meaning of the contradictions she observed and lived with, coming to advance a more liberal Puritanism. Bradstreet’s writings minimized the notion of God’s elect, its patriarchy in dictating to women, and its stance on depravity and of distancing parent and child. Her Quaternion poems present women making wide and profound observations on the universe and man from pre-Socratic and Newtonian perspectives. Their judging of the preeminence of spirit and importance of unity, provides a foundation for the “The Four Monarchies” that value the political action of women leaders. Using the logic of “similitude,” Bradstreet formulated her Puritan notions of divinity and morality in seventy-seven aphoristic essays in *The Meditations*.

Her virtue ethics advocated: compassion (love being a word she repeated often), humility as opposed to self-aggrandizement, chastity, and wisdom (educating children by fitting nurture with nature and understanding reflection as inner action), and also the traditional patience, work, cleanliness, simplicity, and plain and truthful speech. God’s desire being sometimes unclear, one should nevertheless practice faith and hope that He be near, just, and merciful. She argued the importance of attitude toward human actions. By human action one gains “spiritual advantage,” especially actions within community, for “God will have us beholden one to another.” Convinced that the Church of England needed reform and that Catholics should be excluded, Bradstreet yet displayed an outlook akin to that of the Catholic nun Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz (1651–95).

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### **Keywords:**

calvinism, community, divinity, god, humility, love, morality, patriarchy, puritanism, virtues, Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz