Franklin As A Spiritual Descendant Of The Puritans

Benjamin Franklin could easily be considered America's patron saint, based on his beliefs and values. Franklin stood for the cultural good and was not obsessed with his own limited existence. The Puritans, on the other hand, had the mission of purifying the Church of England from 'Catholic' influence. Both the Puritans and Benjamin Franklin believed in living a life o virtue, one that transcended the self. Hence, Benjamin Franklin could easily be considered Puritan. However, Benjamin Franklin is not considered Puritan because he viewed God differently and had a different motivation for living a virtuous life, when compared to the Puritans.

Benjamin Franklin cannot be considered Puritan because his view of God differed from that of the Puritans. While Benjamin Franklin had an optimistic view of God, the Puritans had a pessimistic view of God. The Puritans obtained their beliefs through studying the word of God. Based on readings in the Bible such as the punishment of Sodom and Gomorrah, the Puritans believed God was a harsh deity, ready to wield his judgment upon sinners. (Vaughan)Puritans lived in fear o God's judgment and lived in caves in fear of eternal damnation. Franklin, on the other hand, did not base his understanding of God purely on the Bible. Instead, he rationalized his thoughts. (Isaacson) For example, if God is all loving and pure, then evil cannot exist. Hence, Franklin cannot be considered a Puritan since his view of God was opposite that of Puritans, and the manner in which he arrived at that view also differed from that of Puritans.

Another reason Benjamin Franklin cannot be considered Puritan is because of his ideas of how God operates. The Puritans believed in predestination, that everything happened the way God had predetermined. They believed that nothing happened out of chance, but as part of a grand plan. (Vaughan) That everyone's life plan was decided before birth. Franklin, on the other hand, believed that God created the universe and allowed science and mathematics to operate in it. Franklin was interested in getting explanation of phenomena using science, rather than base all happenings as the will of God. (Isaacson)Both Franklin and the Puritans sought a way to understand how things operated in the universe, and arrived at different ideologies. Hence, their divergent explanation of how the universe operates serves to distance Franklin from the Puritans.

Franklin and the Puritans also differed in the motivation behind following their moral codes. Franklin's moral code could easily be similar to that of Puritans. He believed that he ought to live a virtuous life through a certain code of conduct. (Pangle)He said that "I wish'd to live without committing any fault at any time". (Franklin)Puritans also believed in living a life of virtues. However, they believed so as a way of avoiding eternal damnation. Their code of conduct arose from the Bible only. However, Franklin believed that a life of virtue could earn one benefits in the present life and in the afterlife. He explained that "certain actions might not be bad because they were forbidden, or good because it commanded them, these actions might be forbidden because they were bad for us, or commanded because they were beneficial to us' (Franklin)Franklin believed that people tried to be good because they were naturally good while Puritans believed that people lived a virtuous life to escape their evil selves. Hence the motivation of the Puritans and that of Franklin of living a virtuous lie differed greatly.

While it is easy to identify Benjamin Franklin as a Puritan based on his general beliefs, a further look at what drove his beliefs and his belief in God reveals otherwise. Franklin and the Puritans differed in; their views of God, their ideas of how God operates and their motivation to loving a virtuous life. Based on these findings, Franklin cannot be considered a Puritan.

References

1. Franklin, Benjamin, John Woolman, and William Penn. 'he autobiography of benjamin franklin.' Vol. 1. PF Collier, (1909).
2. Isaacson, Walter. 'Benjamin Franklin: An American Life.' Simon and Schuster, (2003).
3. Pangle, Lorraine Smith. ' The political philosophy of Benjamin Franklin. .' JHU Press, (2007.).
4. Vaughan, Alden T. 'New England Frontier: Puritans and Indians, 1620-1675. .' University of Oklahoma Press, (1995.).