

## UNMASKING PURITANISM SO AS TO UNDERSTAND ITS MODERN EQUIVALENTS: A STUDY OF NATHANIEL HAWTHORNE'S TWO STORIES

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### Abstract

When the Puritans started agitating for the Church of England to shed off every resemblance it acquired from the Roman Catholic Church, all thought that they were just religious fanatics. The result was that many of them could no longer live comfortably in England and so, they left for America. When they landed there, their influence was so much that it was felt throughout the original thirteen colonies. When this phenomenon is studied from the perspective of Nathaniel Hawthorne's "Young Goodman Brown" and *The Scarlet Letter* (*The Custom-House*), it is discovered that this agitation has political undertone. The members are not fully sincere in their demands because they are not living out what they are demanding for. As it is in this case, so it is in many religious agitations even today in many third world countries, an example of which can be seen in Boko Haram insurgency which is currently being experienced in Nigeria, Chad, Niger and Cameroon. It is the stand of this paper that such demands are there to cover the real intentions of those making the demands. These real intentions range from having political power, being allowed to exploit and intimidate others and living lascivious life style. By and large, those they are persecuting live better and sincere lives than them.

**Keywords:** Puritanism, Motive, Unmasking, Religious, Boko Haram

## 1. Introduction

If there has ever existed any group with a strong inclination to change situations physically and spiritually, force others to toe their very strict moral inclination to handling affairs of life, and be seen by others as champions of faith and moral rectitude, it must be the Puritans. When they started in England, what people understood was that these were highly religious enthusiasts if not fanatics who were hell-bent on ridding the Church of England of remnants of Roman Catholicism. But by their zeal and their inability to accommodate opposing views, it did not take time before they fell out with the civil authority. As they are described by Taylor (1962, p. 111):

Religion ...was the chief thing. They meant it; they acted upon it. They did not attempt to combine the sacred and the secular; they simply abolished the secular, and left only the sacred. The state became the church; the king a priest; politics, a department of theology; citizenship, the privilege of those only who had received baptism and the Lord's Supper.

An attitude and mental bent of mind such as this can naturally lead to conflict with others who are not as fervent. This is more glaring when it is pointed out in the article 'Puritanism' which is in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* CD-Rom: "...they sought through church reform to make their lifestyle the pattern for the whole nation" (n.p.) That it was not everybody who belonged to their religion never disturbed them. It is then understood why the above CD-ROM further reveals that:

... at the Hampton court conferences in 1604, he [James], dismissed the Puritan's grievance with the phrase "no bishop, no king". Puritans remained under pressure. Some were deprived of their positions; others got by with minimal conformity; and still others who could not accept compromise, fled England (n.p.).

This source further hints that this religious movement is more than domineering and non-conformist.

For the Puritans, everything in life must be looked into and addressed accordingly – dressing, haircut, manner of speaking, associating with others, drunkenness and so on. That can explain why to Taylor (1962, p.115):

... blasphemy was to be punished with death; likewise the cursing of parents by one above sixteen years of age. Sabbath-breaking, neglect of public worship, and idleness were grave offences. Common fowlers, tobacco takers, and all other persons who could give no good account of how they spent their time were to be put into jail.

Offenders were punished depending on what the Puritans deemed an appropriate punishment – whipping somebody on the suspicion of slander; so also whipping due to idleness and stubbornness; setting somebody in stocks for being in company of drunkards; one Robert Shorthose for swearing by the blood of God had his tongue put into a cleft stick for thirty minutes; a servant who had a fraudulent bargain with a child had to stand for two hours with his hands tied to a bar with a basket of stones hanging about his neck (Taylor, 1962, p. 115). The list is inexhaustible with some being laughable and others being vindictive and innovative. In all, people with such inimical and innovative ways of hoisting their will on others cannot be wished to be somebody's next door neighbours.

It is then understood that since English culture and freedom of association could not tolerate them any longer, James A. Henretta, writing in the CD-ROM of *Microsoft Encarta* relates that:

They left England to escape religious persecution. In 1620, a group of these Puritan Separatists including some who had already left England for Holland, moved to America in a holy migration -- a *pilgrimage*. Before they disembarked from their ships the

*Mayflower*, these so-called pilgrims as well as a number of other passengers agreed to enact just laws based on the will of the majority (n.p.).

It was with this zeal that they landed in American colonies of Virginia, New England, Maryland, New Jersey, New Haven, Plymouth, Rhode Island and so on, intent on forcing every opposition to bow to their whims and caprices. With this their ever flaring zeal, they reached almost all nooks and crannies of the continent.

Indeed, there was no colony in which Puritan influence was not strongly felt. One estimate identifies 85 percent of the churches in the original thirteen colonies as being Puritan in spirit. This can be seen in the article “Protestantism” which is in the CD-ROM of *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*.

However, in spite of their religious zeal, lofty ideals of organizing the civil society for it to wear the cloak of holiness and conformity, this paper has set out to prove that the movement succeeded in breeding pretentious and lascivious leaders and a corrupt laity. Although the movement belongs to the past stage of human development, it is the opinion of this researcher that behind this movement are gems and nuggets which the present age can garner so as to tackle the happenings in some developing countries of today, an example of which is Nigeria where some groups rise up from time to time and dictate how people should comport themselves.

One of such groups is the Boko Haram terrorist group which started in 2002 as a peaceful Islamic anti-corruption movement under the leadership of Mohammed Yusuf whose touted aim was to purify Islam. For him to catch the interest of some Muslims as reported by Temi Banjo, in an online publication, he:

... set up a religious complex which included a mosque and an Islamic school. Many poor Muslim families from across Nigeria as well as neighbouring countries, enrolled their children at the school. But Boko Haram was not only interested in education. Its political goal was to create an Islamic state, and the school became a recruiting ground for Jihadists (n.p.).

Just like Banjo, Guy Goyei Fineman in *The Nations* online paper (2012), reports that initially Boko Haram “emerged to correct the wrong teachings and doctrines of the Islamic faith and more essentially, to fight against all manifestations of westernizations.” Their correcting the wrong teachings and doctrines of the Islamic faith is similar to the Puritan’s removal of all the remnants of Roman Catholicism from the liturgy of the Church of England. In his zeal to fight the manifestations of westernization, he showed that he was either ignorant of what was fighting against or that he was blatantly lying by his using western weapons and technology. What is more, he was trained in a school modeled after the western type.

For this comparative exploration of what happened in England and what is currently happening in some parts of Africa, the researcher has to make use of two works from Nathaniel Hawthorne -- *The Scarlet Letter* (*The Custom-House*) and “Young Goodman Brown”. That Hawthorne’s works are to be used in this is born out of the fact that he is not only enthusiastic and is a student of the happenings surrounding Puritanism in New England, he is also: “... five generations removed from his Puritan American forebears. He read widely, preparing himself to be the chronicler of the antiquities and the spiritual temple of colonial New England” (Bradley et al, 1962, p.273).

Therefore, choosing him as the writer whose works are to be used in this study has to do with his study of the Puritan phenomenon and with his family being deeply involved in that movement. These his connections are reflected in his works to the extent that there is hardly any

writer on Puritanism who is as accurate and in-depth as him. Although these works are fictional narratives, they have been modified to reflect actualities -- literature being a mirror of reality of any society where it is set. What is more, the first section of *The Scarlet Letter* is autobiographical with his historical recollection of what he got about his ancestors when he was working in the Custom House. It is then with certainty that Bradley et al (1962, p.272) state that: "As a writer, he set out quite consciously to exploit his antiquarian enthusiasms and his understanding of the colonial history of New England".

So, that Hawthorne is to be used is due to his studies in antiquities and colonial history and his being a member of a family from which came two prominent individuals whose Puritan activities were glaringly recorded. What is more, Hawthorne was not only born in Salem, Massachusetts where the famous witch hunts took place but also, he grew up there. As Robert Scholes et al (2004, p.17) state, Hawthorne was born: "... in Salem Massachusetts at a time when the American Revolution was still living history and the Puritan heritage of Salem was very much alive. Nathaniel Hawthorne absorbed its preoccupation with sins and its remembrance on witch hunts...".

Just as Hawthorne recorded the activities of the Puritans, many people noted that the initially seemingly pious sect, Boko Haram on February 2018, abducted 110 girls from Government Girls' Science and Technical College, Dapchi. Earlier in 2014, the group had kidnapped 276 girls from another girls' school in Chibok. When the first mentioned one occurred as Tara John reported in an online journal: "Parents feared [that] the girls will be made brides of Boko Haram fighters like many of the kidnapped Chibok girls who were forced to marry their captors."

Also, Ruth Maclean and Isaac Abrak in *The Guardian* newspaper online record that Boko Haram has "kidnapped thousands of girls, boys and women forcing some of them to blow themselves up, killed thousands of others and displaced millions." To these reporters, one of the aims of the insurgents is to stop children from receiving what it perceives as western-style education" (n.p.). Also, to be noted is that their leader, Abubakar Shekau had about 100 of the girls in his custody, having traded others for vast sums of money, according to an investigation by the *Wall Street Journal*" (n.p.).

On the part of the Puritans, it can then be understood why Rebecca Beatrice Brooks in an online article states that "many of Hawthorne's novels and stories which tend to be about overbearing Puritan rulers ruthlessly persecuting others were inspired by Hawthorne's ancestors, John Hawthorne and his father William" (n.p.).

Therefore, if there is any writer whose works should be used here, it must be Hawthorne's. If any of his works must be studied in this topic, one of them according to *Merriman Webster's Encyclopedia Literature* (1995, p.523) must be "Young Goodman Brown" which is "... perhaps the greatest tale on witchcraft ever written."

This view is not far from that of Robert DiYanni (2002, p.341) who states that: "'Young Goodman Brown' is one on his [Hawthorne's] most famous and one of his finest stories particularly in its reflection of the Puritan frame of mind which absorbed Hawthorne's literary imagination".

In addition, Rebecca Beatrice Brooks in an online study has pointed out that *The Scarlet Letter* is a classic of American Literature" (n.p.). Since the novel is both autobiographical and an eye opener into the activities on the Puritans, then it is necessary to study it in this research.

## 2. The Real Character of the Puritans

The expectation that comes out from any person who is religious is that the person will become an embodiment of the following: righteous living, self sacrifice, fairness in human interaction, moral rectitude and other attributes that make for harmonious living. The above expectation is more from those who are so assertive that they force others to toe their line of thought. That is the expectation but when the Puritans are assessed along this line, they fail below the mark. On looking at them through their depictions in the two selected texts, they are found to be garlanded with a lot of atrocities, for their lives eulogize the lifestyle they condemn publicly.

When the Boko Haram fighters are also assessed, one can see them as mass murderers who force hapless young people to blow up themselves and others with bombs; they kidnap people and sell their victims; they perpetuate forced marriages, bomb public places such as schools, market places, mosques, churches and so on, resulting in a lot of casualties. Even, it is no wonder that the group "...was blacklisted as a terrorist group by the United Security Council *al Qaeda Sanctions Committee*" (Fineman, 2018, p.114/115).

In addition, a cursory look at the demands of the Puritans reeks of political and administrative ambition for they were megalomaniacs who wanted others to toe their line and bow to them. Or what is their concern that the Church of England still contained elements of Roman Catholicism? To show that this uprising and many of its like throughout the world today especially in the third world countries have political undertone, one can look at their activities when finally they landed in New England and other places in the United States. As Hawthorne (2003, p.1337) records about a forebear of his family in *The Scarlet Letter*:

He was a soldier, legislator, judge; he was a ruler in the church; he had all the Puritanical traits, both good and evil. He was likewise a bitter persecutor, as witnessed by the Quakers, who have remembered him in their histories, and relate an incident of his hard severity towards a woman of their sect which will last longer, it is to be feared, than any record of his better deeds although these were many.

By the time these things were happening, the world had so progressed that the powers in the kings and queens had been separated from those with religious and prophetic dispositions. Yet, these Puritans must bend everybody's will to be subject to their views. What they succeeded in doing was to hoist on their neighbours a totalitarian government with which they monitored and directed the activities of others.

As for the Boko Haram insurgents, their leader is above the laws of Nigeria (where the movement started) and the other countries where it has spread into. That can explain why: "In August 2014, Abubakar Shekau proclaimed a 'Caliphate' in the town of Gwoza in Borno State" (Fineman, 2018, p.114/115). Therefore, because he is above the law of the land, he arrogated the right to himself of forming an Islamic territory of a civil and religious ruler in addition to sending out his people to rob and murder innocent victims.

In a similar way, for one to see that political manipulation is behind the Puritan endeavors, one can again read the article "Puritanism" which is in the CD-ROM of *Encyclopedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite* where it records that:

The New England Puritans fashioned the civil commonwealth according to the framework of the church. Only the elect could vote and rule. When these raised problems for second-generation residents, they adopted the Half-Way covenant which permitted baptized, moral, and orthodox persons to share the privileges of church membership (2015, n.p.).

Yet, the people to whom this excerpt is referring to are those who are taught that their kingdom is not of this world. They are those who are daily waiting for God's kingdom to come down to earth. But the reality is that there is an ulterior motive in their religious zeal for "God's kingdom" has already come down for them.

Therefore, whenever people start projecting any religious doctrine so ferociously that there is no room for negotiation, it is necessary to study their ways so as to know whether there is any hidden political undertone.

This is what Nigerian government would have done when Mohammed Yusuf believed that he was creating a "new order in which the impoverished should inherit the earth" (Fineman, 2018, p.105). Normally, people in that condition can easily be brainwashed. Whatever they are told can aid in changing positively their ugly situation is easily believed. These signs were there in 2002 but nobody took these terrorists at that incipient stage, serious.

In the case of the Puritans, they persecuted even other Christian groups such as the Quakers. Is this not wickedness of the highest order that a Christian denomination tries its best to wipe away another? In doing all this, they presented themselves as if they were not self-serving but doing the work of God.

In all, pretension seems to be the real identity of these Puritans. As it is pointed out to Goodman Brown by the old man (the wizard who leads him to the gathering of the witches when Brown shows some withdrawing tendency saying that none from his family has gone to such a place), the old wizard relates that: "the deacons of many a church have drunk the communion wine with me; the select men of divers towns, make me their chairman; and majority of the great and general court are firm supporters of my interest. The governor and I, too -- but these are State secrets" (2003, p.1265).

That pretension is their hallmark can be seen in the following episodes: Goodman Brown seeing in the coven Deacon Gookin who taught him his catechism; hearing his minister jogging along that night to the coven as it is recorded in "Young Goodman Brown" (2003, p.1268). He recognizes "a score of the church members of Salem village famous for their especial sanctity" as they are trooping down to the coven (2003, p.1270), and so on. To show that these Puritans are not different from those they are persecuting, the witch who initiates them that night in the coven has this as her verdict: 'Evil is the nature of mankind. Evil must be your happiness. Welcome, again, my children to the communion of your race.' Again, this is in "Young Goodman Brown" (2003, p.1271).

This is the case of kettle referring to pot as being black. The Puritans had hidden agenda that were propelling them to acts of devilry. As it happened then, so it is happening now among overzealous and religious fanatics who must force others to practise their way of life. Most often, the propelling force is either political or economic or both. But these are craftily hidden behind the cloak of religion. This is similar to how it used to be at the onset of Boko Haram formation.

It is not only in "Young Goodman Brown" that pretension glaringly shows. In *The Scarlet Letter*, the seven years old girl Pearl who is the product of the adulterous relationship between Prynne and the Reverend Dimmesdel observes the man of God to her mother thus:

"What a strange sad man is he?" said the child, as if speaking partly to herself. "In the dark night-time, he calls us to him, and holds thy hands and mine as when we stood with him on the scaffold yonder! And in the deep forest, where only the old trees can hear, and the strip of sky sees it, he talks with thee, sitting on a heap of moss! And he kissed my forehead, too so that the little brook would hardly wash it off! But here in the sunny day,

and among all the people, he knows us not; nor must we known him! A strange sad man is he, with his hand always over his heart!" (2003, p.1455)

The child does not know that she is referring to her biological father and the cause of the scarlet letter A (meaning adultery) which her mother is wearing. The Reverend is not bold enough to identify with them in public for such would not go down well in the people's assessment of his holiness. Also, she does not know that her father's placing of a hand on his chest is a trademark that attracts the eulogy of the people towards his zeal on the salvation of his soul. Yet, this is the holy man who should be wearing a double scarlet letter "A" for knowing and teaching the law of God, breaking it and shielding himself from public condemnation.

In unmasking the Puritan movement, Hawthorne is unequivocal in showing that it is far from being a religious revival but a despotic and totalitarian organization that looks into every aspect of the life of the people. The religious life is nothing to write home about because those championing the cause are pretenders who use religion to achieve their aims.

That self aggrandizement is at the root of their action can be shown in their relationship with the lady of the scarlet letter. This lady is supposed to be so tainted that whenever she appears in public, everybody must leave a space for her. Yet, she is the one that makes gloves for Governor Bellingham. The truth is that when the Puritans see how to benefit from outcasts, they do so unhindered by their sanctimonious beliefs. That they exclude some in public only to go back in private so as to fraternize shows not only their pretension but their selfishness. That Hester is the one who should watch at Governor Winthrop's deathbed in order to take his measure for a robe is an indication of who these Puritans are indeed.

In addition, one must note that the number of witches sent to hell at Salem cannot be counted and was not counted because those who burnt them at the stake were exactly those who would have recorded the number. Some were dispatched just on the suspicion that they were witches – not that they were, actually. Similarly, the number of souls Boko Haram terrorists dispatched to untimely graves cannot be counted, judging from the attacks they have made in the affected countries:

Specifically, of the number of attacks in 2016, 80 took place in Nigeria, 26 in Cameroon, 3 in Chad and 18 in Niger; while in 2017, 109 attacks were carried out in Nigeria, 32 in Cameroon, 2 in Chad and 7 in Niger.... The method of attacks in all the locations ranges from armed assaults to suicide attacks – being the most common type (Fineman, 2018, p. 117).

But in *The Scarlet Letter*, a well-known and self-confessed witch, Mistress Hibbins has neither been burnt nor been excommunicated because she is Governor Bellingham's sister as it is in "Young Goodman Brown" (2003, p.1413). It is not that Mistress Hibbins hides her connection with Satan because of her witchcraft activities. She tells whoever that cares to listen that she is a witch. Nobody molests her for she goes about trying to see how she can get more converts to the coven as can be seen in her statement to Pearl, "They say child, thou art of the lineage of the Prince of the Air! Wilt thou ride with me, some fine night, to see thy father? ("Young Goodman Brown" 2003, p.1463)

Therefore, the punishment which the Puritans meted out to offenders was selective punishment which they did at their whims and caprices. In fact, their punishments were selective punishments against targeted recipients. In truth, their punishments were simply vindictive, the purpose of which was for self aggrandizement. But craftily, they clothed all with the garb of holiness, religious devotion, fervency and fair play.

The Boko Haram sect also decided what sort of punishment they would dish out to their victims. Either they blow up the persons with suicide bombers or they kidnap and release if they so like or if the government covertly settles them. Even when they release their victims, they do so as they like. That can explain what happened when the Dapchi schoolgirls were set free. Here, it is on record that “with prompt government effort, 104 out of the 110 missing Dapchi schoolgirls have been released by Boko Haram; five could not survive the ordeal, while one girl [Leah Sharibu] is still being held hostage” (Fineman, 2018, p.117). It was reported at the time in many news media that the lone girl, refused to renounce her Christian faith and so, they refused to release her.

In the case of the Puritans, from time to time, due to the fact that the whole thing lacked sincerity, what they covertly did, manifested unconsciously. Here, morality was lacking in many of them. Who would have believed that Hester was impregnated by Reverend Dimmesdale? When he is asking her in the presence of the town’s people to name her fellow adulterer that impregnated her, and she refuses, it is with glee that he speaks: “Wondrous strength and generosity of a woman’s heart! She will not speak!” (*The Scarlet Letter*, 2003, p.1370). This is a way of thanking her for shielding his identity.

But who would have believed her if she had named him? Will the people not see it that the sin-submerged woman is maligning the holy man of God? Will this not put her into more trouble? This is because the people:

...deemed the young clergyman a miracle of holiness. They fancied him the mouth-piece of heaven’s messages of wisdom, and rebuke, and love. In their eyes, the very ground on which he trod was sanctified. The aged members of his flock, beholding Mr. Dimmesdale’s frame so feeble, while they were themselves so rugged in their infirmity believed that he could go heavenward before them, and enjoined it upon their children, that their old bones should be buried close to their young pastor’s holy grave (*The Scarlet Letter*, 2003, p.1410).

Can somebody who is so regarded be accused in public of committing adultery? Is it not risky doing so seeing that any of those gullible admirers without thinking, may harm the accuser before he realizes what he has done? But the fact still remains that many of these Puritans were morally depraved and to hide their flaws, they had to be involved in acts of intimidation, subjugation and even murder. Hence, many innocent people lost their lives in Salem witchcraft hunts just like many lost theirs in Boko Haram suicide bombings.

That lust and immorality may go hand in hand with religious zeal can also be found in James Baldwin’s *Go Tell it on the Mountain* (1984, p.144). In this novel, Gabriel the man of God steals his wife’s money and gives it to Esther to enable her to escape to North America with her unwanted pregnancy of which he is responsible. This his lascivious behaviour can be similarly read in the statement of one of the pastors during the Twenty-four Elders Revival Meeting. When one of the pastors sees Deborah, he recalls how at the age of sixteen, some white men carried her into a bush and raped her. But judging from his statement, one can see the glee and pleasure that the pastor has in his recollection which he blurts out for all to hear: “She had been choked so early on white men’s milk and it remained so sour in her belly yet that she would never be able now to find a nigger who would let her taste his richer, sweeter substance” (1984, p.115).

That such a statement can be credited to a holy man of God leaves much to be admired most especially when the lady being discussed is a prominent member of the church. The message is that he is depraved, lascivious or immoral. His white garment is just an outward show

of inner and spiritual emptiness. What is in these Puritans is craftily and forcefully suppressed from public glare.

This suppression as can be seen in the life of Reverend Dimmesdale can lead to shattered and unstable emotion. That then leads to his living with the doctor whose wife he ravished, who now gets the opportunity to be tormenting him emotionally. But by Dimmesdale being shattered emotionally, what it means is that these Puritans cannot carry the loads they hoist on others' heads. But while Hester goes about with her health intact helping others, Dimmesdale ends up as a bundle of neurotic mass of decaying flesh. As Hester later puts it, the Minister "... stood on the verge of lunacy, if he had not already stopped across it" (2003, p.1422).

To show that his emotional breakdown is as a result of his religious profession, he confesses: "Were I an atheist, -- a man devoid of conscience, -- a wretch with coarse and brutal instincts, -- I might have found peace, long ere now. Nay, I never should have lost it! Hester, I am most miserable!"

That this life of lust is a disease found in many of those who must force others to toe the line of their religion can be seen manifesting in many organizations of today who behave like the Puritans. That explains why in countries like Nigeria, Cameroon, Chad and Niger, they kidnap girls and go into female hostels to kidnap more girls who they keep in hidden places to be servicing their lust. Why is it that when they get small boys, they brainwash them to be following their life of mass slaughter of human beings, and when they get girls, they gang rape them and finally marry them off to their ever ready members? But then, how many boys' schools have they intruded into? None, of course.

To Hawthorne the creative artist, those with an overwhelming holier-than-thou attitude have skeletons in their cupboards. Such is eating their conscience and reducing them to walking skeletons and bundles of trembling flesh. Such cannot happen in the life of people without their mental inclination. This is why the ostracized Hester is depicted in a colour far better than her judges who are persecuting her. In the event of social turmoil, Hester moves from person to person consoling and helping out. At a time, her scarlet letter A which is meant to show her as an adulteress is later interpreted as meaning "Able". As Hawthorne (2003, p.1422) writes about her:

... she might have come down to us in history, hand in hand with Ann Hutchinson, as the founders of a religious sect. She might, in one of her phases, have been a prophetess. She might, and not improbable would have suffered death from the stern tribunals of the period for attempting to undermine the foundations of the Puritan establishment.

In other words, the Puritan establishment is one that snuffs out lives from well meaning individuals. It is one that thrives on intimidation, and promotes lack of fair play. Challenge it and you are killed. This is because those who are projecting it are those who are after social uplift at the detriment of equity and fair play.

That explains why Governor Bellingham's estate in *The Scarlet Letter* is compared with his puritanical disposition. The estate is "...hardly in keeping with the appliances of worldly enjoyment wherewith he had evidently done his utmost to surround himself" (2003, p.1391). In all, the Puritan intention just like its modern equivalents is to use religious fervency to mask worldly intention.

But the difference with Boko Haram is that the governments involved are seriously fighting them and the members have been reduced to be hiding inside Sambisa forest. But their aim of creating "a new order in which the impoverished should inherit the earth" has let the cat out of the bag. Also exposing them is that: "The group also holds the belief that the country's

wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few political elites in the Christian-dominated South" (Fineman, 2018, p.105/106). Therefore, their main aim is far from heavenly but is an earthly desire which is craftily hidden behind noisy avowals of heavenly desires.

### **3. The Message of the Puritans to Today's Developing Countries**

History and literature can team up to make people to be wary. The first mentioned field of study recalls what happened in the past since happenings may be cyclical, and the knowledge gathered from past events can enable someone not to fall into a similar problem encountered in the past. The second entertains, educates and helps to build the culture of the people concerned. Therefore, what history recalls from the dim past, literature uses to enlighten the people for them to be careful. So, in the event of any group of people becoming unruly because of religious inclinations, it is necessary to calm them down for behind such is a hidden motive.

As was shown above, Puritanism had behind it political desire and ambition which those propounding the ideal could not exercise in England. When persecution came, they had no alternative other than to go on a pilgrimage to another continent. This pilgrimage is one where the pilgrim would never go back home. There at the pilgrimage centre, the original inhabitants were made to bow if they were to be left alive. The pilgrims dominated their culture, their continent, in short every aspect of their existence. But today, there is no place modern fanatics can shift to. That explains why the insurgents, Boko Haram, continue to live in Nigeria, Chad, Cameroon and Niger Republic. Because of modern ammunition and technology, the deceptive and brutal fanatics find it difficult dominating a large expanse of land.

When any group sees itself as holding the power of life and death over others, that is an indication that the bull must be held by the horn because things must go out of hand sooner or later. This is more so when such a group starts seeing what it is doing as a mandate from God. To the Puritans, they were the "... elect spirits chosen by God to live godly lives both as individuals and as a community" (2015 n.p.). This citation which is from an article entitled "Puritanism" can be seen in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica Ultimate Reference Suite*. So, the Puritans were spirits and so were above human laws and considerations. Any country with a group that sees itself as having God's mandate to carry out certain missions must be careful; for the signs are already there that soon, that group must arise as a ruthless group that can go to any extent in wiping out others.

Looking critically at the Boko Haram terrorists, one can see that their mission was to install the only refined sect of Islam. Therefore, other sects and other religions must be wiped out for God's kingdom and wish to be established. In view of this, one can see them killing other Islamic sects such as the *Sufi*, *Shiite*, *Izala*, and so on. Also, Christians who are thought to be infidels must be wiped out of the surface of the earth.

As it was among the Puritans, so it is today as can be seen in some third world countries. The leaders of these groups clothe themselves with a covering of holiness and divine zeal. Outwardly, their followers see them as their connection to the divine source. But come near them or be at the receiving side of their religious zeal, you see them as devil incarnates. In the case of Hawthorne as can be seen in an online article that bears his names but can be assessed in americanliterature.com: "His great-great-great grandfather and his great-great grandfather John Hawthorne ... he knew that men could, cloaked in the countenance of goodness and piety, commit great sin" (n.p.).

In addition, such groups that champion the will of God and hoist it on others are sexists with women being at the receiving and suppressed ends. However, in the case of Hester Prynne, her giving birth to an illegitimate baby, "... might seem common today but in the stern, God-fearing New England Puritan community, it was a flagrant defiance on church and state, which were all powerful (and were all one) (Kennedy and Gioia, 2005, p.124). But come to think of it, what is the punishment stipulated for the men, for it takes two to tango? When finally Reverend Dimmesdale has been reduced to a mass of palpitating flesh and he confesses his guilt, what punishment is meted out to him? There is none because later he only ends up dead without anybody coming near him. The whole pain must be borne by the woman.

By and large, the most exalted position occupied in the novel ought to be done by Hester but the sexist society would not allow such. The wearer of the scarlet letter "A" as it is in the novel:

... had no selfish ends, nor lived in any measure for her own profit and enjoyment, people brought all their sorrows and perplexities, and besought her counsel, as one who had herself gone through a mighty trouble. Women...came to Hester's cottage, demanding why they were so wretched, and what the remedy! Hester comforted and counselled them, as best she might (*The Scarlet Letter*, 2003, p.1473).

To be precise, she is the saint of her community for the holiness and religious behaviour which the Puritans are touting can be found in her although her society is too myopic to see it. She has learnt to be at peace with where society places her. As Susan Nagelson in an on-line article observes: "Hester is at peace with herself and with life. She has come to terms with whom she is, and she is happy to give to those around her. She understands the concept of sin, and it does not stop her from showing compassion to others, who cross her path" (n.p.).

As it was in the Puritan New England, so it is today in any country where a group hoists its spiritual beliefs on others. In both places, women's marginalization is rampant. Even in today's world, some of such women are kidnapped and hidden so as to be serving the sexual crave of the agitating terrorists as can be seen in the cases of Chibok schoolgirls since some of them were later discovered to be with babies and protruding stomachs.

These and more are signs that people should be watching for when any group comes up with a holier-than-thou attitude for in actual truth, such a group may have a hidden agenda. Give the members of that group an inch, they take a mile. Before you know the actual situation, you have been turned into a squatter even in your own home. It could have happened in England if the Puritans had not been properly handled. That which failed to sprout in England, later did in New England, Boston, Salem, Newport in Rhode Island, Massachusetts Bay and so on. The original inhabitants they met were reduced to nothing. That is how it happened in those days. Such can happen in the modern world with its hardship breeding excess fanaticism for in actual truth, religion is the opium of the masses.

#### 4. Conclusion

In the early 17<sup>th</sup> century, a group known as the Puritans arose in England demanding more reformation in the Church of England. The demand of the members was that whatever remnants of Roman Catholicism that still existed in the Church of England must be expunged. But when the state could no longer tolerate them and their demands, they were forced to go out of the country. That was how these "pilgrims" landed in New England and influenced all the thirteen

colonies seriously. However, there were some places such as Salem where the influence was much.

In order to study this historical happening from a literary perspective and know possible results that such uprising may have in today's world, the works of Hawthorne were chosen. These works are: "Young Goodman Brown" and *The Scarlet Letter*. The reasons for choosing this American novelist are many: ranging from his ancestors who were key players in the activities of the Puritans when they landed in New England, to his having taken keen interest in the activities of the group. These interests are reflected in the two works.

The truth so far garnered from the two texts is that far from being a pure religious movement, Puritanism with its religiosity has a cloak of political undertone but craftily hidden. Furthermore, their religious purification is selective. What they condemn in public, they practice in private. An illustration is that many of them belong to witches' covens but they set suspected witches ablaze while tying them to stakes. Not only that, their persecuting zeal is directed to every aspect of life ranging from hairdo, clothing and so on. Their punishment, outlandish in nature, is meted out to real or supposed defaulters. But come to think of it, these persecutors' lifestyle is far worse than the lifestyle of those they are persecuting.

Come to think of it, there are many groups who are ready to die if their religious inclination cannot convince others to follow them as in the case of Boko Haram terrorists. Such groups are ready to kill and be killed. But on studying them closely, one can discover that far from being a religiously motivated movement, such groups have political agenda. Their hallmark is intimidation, self aggrandizement, women subjugation and a plethora of other outdated and satanic behaviours. Therefore, whenever such a group is seen, it is necessary to show the members a way out of the country or nation as did the English men to the Puritans. This, in the main, is this paper's message from the Puritan uprising in the 17<sup>th</sup> century England.

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