

the
Genius
of
Puritanism

the Genius of Puritanism

by
Peter Lewis

Foreword by D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones



SOLI DEO GLORIA PUBLICATIONS
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The Genius of Puritanism

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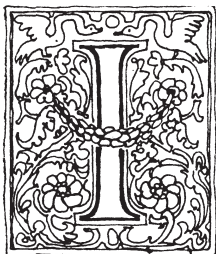
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FOREWORD



READILY WRITE THIS WORD OF COM-
mendation for this volume. I well remember
how Mr. Lewis as a student showed a real living
interest in the writings of the Puritans, and how
he came into my vestry at Westminster Chapel
from time to time to tell me of various purchases
he had been fortunate to make, and at times to
lend me some of these.

I am particularly glad that he has clearly kept
up this early interest and has continued his wide reading in, and
study of the Puritans. This volume provides abundant proof of
that.

He has chosen to concentrate attention on the preaching and
pastoral activities of those remarkable men of the 17th century,
while explaining in an introductory chapter that their original and
primary interest was in the nature of the Church.

He thus provides an excellent foretaste of the rich meal that
readers of the works of the Puritans can enjoy.

His arrangement of the matter – the brief biographical touches,
the judicious selections threaded into a continuing theme etc. – is
brilliant.

Here some of the leading Puritans are allowed to speak for
themselves, and I am sure that many who read this book will be
stimulated to acquire and read the works out of which these selections
have been made. Nothing but great spiritual good can result from
that, both in individual lives, and in the life of the churches.

D. M. LLOYD-JONES.

July, 1975



DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY
of Dr. Ernest F. Kevan, late
Principal of the London Bible College; Puritan
scholar and theologian.

He made the genius of Puritanism clear in his
teaching and visible in his demeanour and so
became his students' mentor in life and learning.

PREFACE



PREFACE AFFORDS THE WRITER OPPORTUNITY to be just a little more personal than he could be in the body of a book. Thus I may perhaps confess here, to my three great motives in writing this book in the way I have done. First of all I have tried to recall the paramount importance which right preaching has in the Nonconformist and biblical tradition – and that for both preachers and hearers. Secondly, I have sought to show pastors of our own day the way in which that most biblical race of men outside the Testaments, namely the Puritans, applied a deep doctrinal sense and spiritual wisdom to the various problems, especially depressions and discouragements, under which God's people have always had to labour in this life. Thirdly, I have sought to stimulate the reader not merely to be content with reading secondary works about the Puritans but to *read the Puritan writings* (now so frequently reprinted) themselves. That explains why I have sought at almost every point to let the Puritans speak for themselves: and as an author will often be forgiven anything but dullness, I have sought to avoid that most reprehensible of literary sins by choosing quotations and extracts which exhibit the winsome and colloquial style of the Puritan divines. In all this it has been my hope that many will be led to a wiser and deeper exploration into those works which have been for too long 'treasures of darkness'.

To the patience and kind assistance of the publishers and their keen-eyed proof-readers; to the long-standing encouragement and kindness of Dr. D. M. Lloyd-Jones whose patronage itself deserves an 'epistle dedicatory' and to my wife Valerie who has so well played her 'Margaret' to my 'Baxter', I remain under an obligation which I here acknowledge but can scarce repay.

HYSON GREEN BAPTIST CHURCH
NOTTINGHAM

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INTRODUCTION

THE CHARACTER AND COURSE OF ENGLISH PURITANISM



IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER CHRISTIANS can ever look for the regeneration of the world before they seek the reformation of the Church. If we are horrified at the state of the world in our generation, can we be less anxious about the state of the Church within that world? If the light that is in the world be darkness, how great is that darkness! And in a day when, in the very Church of God, we too often see law denigrated, grace abused, truth neglected as 'mere doctrine', and experience placed on a par with revelation, we have urgent need to ask (without fault) why 'the former times were better than these'.

To neglect God's work in the past is to neglect his Word in the present, for throughout history God has raised up men and movements whose great work was to expound and apply that Word to their own generation, and by implication to ours also. Such men were the Puritans and such a movement was Puritanism.

The definitions of 'Puritan' and 'Puritanism' have been, since their earliest use in England, a matter of crowded debate and widespread confusion. National, political and social elements which were closely allied with the idea of Puritanism at various stages of its progress have largely obscured the vital religious and spiritual meaning of the term. Without attempting an exhaustive definition we may say that essential Puritanism grew out of three great areas: the New Testament pattern of personal piety, sound doctrine and a properly ordered Church-life, and it is the mingling and blending together of all three of these emphases which made English Puritanism the astonishment and the inspiration it was and is still. As it is largely out of an examination of these three areas that an understanding of Puritanism will come, we shall turn to each of them in succession before giving a brief account of the history of the movement.

William Ames, a great leader in the movement, once defined 'divinity' as 'the doctrine of living to God' and in making the definition he epigrammatically described the whole moving spirit of Puritanism. For Puritanism was not merely a set of rules or a larger creed, but a life-force: a vision and a compulsion which saw the beauty of a holy life and moved towards it, marvelling at the possibilities and thrilling to the satisfaction of a God-centred life. Moreover, iron discipline was combined with fervent devotion, saving the Puritan from a fitful mysticism on the one hand and a mere worldly religion on the other – and it was this marvellous marriage of law and grace which was not the least notable feature of Puritan piety. Every area of life came under the influence of God and the guidance of the Word. Each day began and ended with searching, unhurried and devout personal and family prayer. Each task, whether professional or manual, was done to the glory of God and with a scrupulous eye to his perfect will. Every relationship, business or personal, was regulated by spiritual principles. Hours free from labour were gladly and zealously employed in the study of the Scriptures, attendance upon public worship, 'godly converse' or intense witness and every other means which contributed to the soul's good. In a word, the 'great business of godliness' dominated the ardent believer's ambitions and called forth all his energies. We may say that to a large extent Puritanism succeeded where other more cloistered ideologies failed, because here men *embodied* true doctrine so that Puritanism was made visible before men. Men *saw* on earth lives that were not earthly, lives that touched their own at so many points, yet which rolled on into a moral and spiritual continent of breathtaking landscape. Indeed, it is not too much to say that Puritans *were* Puritanism proper – for Puritanism was sainthood visible.

With vitality of spiritual life, there was, of necessity, a doctrinal rectitude and firmness that based the biblical life upon biblical thought. Richard Baxter wrote at the beginning of one of his books: 'Sound doctrine makes a sound judgment, a sound heart, a sound conversation [life] and a sound conscience' – and if it was otherwise, then either the doctrine was not sound or it was not soundly understood! Piety does not grow out of the ground nor does it materialise out of the air. True godliness is born, not of mystical experience, nor of educated nature, but of the royal marriage of Truth with Grace, and the godly Puritan was a child of both parents. The literature of Puritanism is full of folios on Christian doctrine, leaving the mind with the impression of some-

thing majestic and it is beyond controversy that the men who wrote them were ennobled by the very doctrine they expounded. Their minds were as massive as their folios and their piety was not dwarfed by either. Vastly Calvinistic in their theological tradition, they treasured a high conception of the sovereignty of God in providence and grace, and reflected this in the tranquillity with which they were able to carry themselves in the stormiest experiences and the forcefulness with which they were able to show the desperate needs and the unfailing resort of fallen man. If their doctrine of God elevated them, their doctrine of sin humbled them. Recognising their own propensity to sin as well as the potential for evil in fallen human nature at large they did not tire of exposing sin as the plague of plagues and root of all man's ills. In their books and sermons they followed the devious course of sin in all its guises, demolishing self-confidence and pointing men to that salvation which could be of grace alone.

A third major characteristic of Puritanism was the place it gave to the doctrine of the Church. Indeed, Puritanism as a movement largely began as an endeavour to reform the face of the English Church, and to do so according to the Scriptures and the Scriptures alone. Neither the civil nor ecclesiastical powers, they maintained, had the authority to add to, subtract from, or modify the sufficient, definitive teaching of the New Testament in its pattern of Church government and Church life. It was for this reason that they rejected Anglican ceremonies and vestments, and Episcopal church government which, being the outgrowth of tradition rather than the New Testament, continued to make the Anglican Church less than consistent with some of the basic principles of the Reformation. When either monarch or bishops attempted to enforce tradition or hinder reformation, then what was at stake was not the wearing or not wearing of a few official costumes in public worship, nor the expedient government of the Church by this or that method of organisation; but rather the whole regulating principle of the Church of Christ on earth. The vital questions which so dominated Puritan thought lay here. In matters spiritual and ecclesiastical, was the Church to order her own course as distinct from the monarch, and were the Scriptures to order the Church as distinct from ecclesiastical tradition or expedience? In a word, who rules the Church and the spiritual realm of life – God or man? These were fundamental questions. Had they not been on countless lips in the days of Luther and Calvin? The answer of the Puritans was a confident affirmative for the freedom of the Church under the sole sovereignty

of the Scriptures. For this they were prepared to suffer with a determination as grim as it was serene.

Having seen some of the basic characteristics of Puritanism, we turn to a brief outline of the history of the movement. Although its origins are to be found earlier, the Puritan movement may be said to have begun around 1559 with the Act of Uniformity and to have ended as such during the second half of the seventeenth century – perhaps officially with the Act of Uniformity of 1662 and the ensuing ‘Great Ejection’. Thus it began under Elizabeth I who suspected it, grew under James I who feared it, increased in power under Charles I and his Archbishop, William Laud, who despised it, gained a brief but august ascendancy under Cromwell who honoured it, and ended under Charles II and his bishops who hated it.

Ecclesiastically, the Puritans were convinced, as we have seen, that the Reformation in England had, because of political expediency, been stunted before it had properly conformed the Church to the simplicity of the New Testament model. In the sixteenth century the first generation of Puritans tried to bring about the necessary reforms in church polity and worship largely by political means. Elizabeth had produced a ‘settlement’ which trod a middle way between Roman Catholicism on the one hand and Genevan Calvinism on the other. This was the archetype of the Anglican Church of our own day. While rejecting many of the political and religious tenets of Catholicism, Elizabeth, with the determination to retain full control of Church as well as State and to unite as far as possible the various elements within her realm, dismissed the ‘extremism’ of the Puritan faction within ‘her’ Church, and sought to impose conformity to her Anglican model by the Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity of 1559 and the fateful Convocation of 1563.

The Puritans were no match for Elizabeth in the field of politics and from this time the movement, politically defeated, began to channel its considerable energies in other directions. Having failed to reform the Church from the top down, by parliamentary legislation, the Puritans sought with greater vigour than ever to do so from the bottom up by the persuasion of pulpit, press and personal influence. From here on the real story of Puritanism is the story of its spiritual growth and power, and the history of the progress of Puritanism becomes not the record of councils and convocations, of legislation and counter-legislation, but the history of men whose crusade for a godly Church and a godly State could

not be either much hindered or much helped by parliaments and their acts. Puritanism became a grass-roots movement which the legislative scythe could limit but not destroy.

Yet, although Puritanism as a movement grew up within the framework of the Anglican Church, it is questionable whether we can ever regard it as an outgrowth of Anglicanism, much less a development of it or a form of it. When one sees the early radical differences between the Puritan mind and the Anglican mentality – as shown for instance in the differences between John Knox and Richard Cox at the English Church at Frankfurt, and between Hooper and Cranmer in the vestiarian controversy in England – one begins to ask if Puritanism was not always a cuckoo in the Anglican nest, in it but not really of it – and that from the beginning! True, under the exigencies of the times, the two for long lay close together like two sticks lying in such close proximity that they seem at first to be one, but with the advance of the years and the increasing intractability of the politically and episcopally-controlled Anglican Church, Puritanism irresistibly showed itself to be a species which had a life of its own, having a separate identity and being capable of a separate development. This resulted in and was demonstrated, by first, the successive ventures of independency in the non-conformity of individuals; later, by the course of the early Separatists; later still in the course of the Pilgrim Fathers during the reign of James I, and finally in the massive exodus of ‘The Two Thousand’ at the Ejection of 1662.

During this course, Puritanism must not be thought of as ‘tailing off’ into a separatist Nonconformity, for its story is one of amazing growth, advance and development into that full-blown Nonconformity which alone could express Puritanism’s true nature. The movement spread, from the last days of Elizabeth I, by the emergence of hundreds of men dedicated in their young ministries to a common vision and a common spirit which bound them together as no mere party machine could ever do. This vision did not fade with the years, but rather its lineaments became increasingly clear, and, to the army of new reformers, increasingly thrilling under the influence of the leaders of the movement. The volumes of William Perkins loaded the shelves of many who never heard his forceful preaching at Cambridge, and the famous *Seven Treatises* of Richard Rogers of Wethersfield in Essex fanned a thousand sparks into a thousand flames with their archetypal standards of Puritan piety. In the reigns of James I and Charles I the popular works of Richard Sibbes watered a soil well seeded by a former generation,

and throughout the succeeding period of Puritan prominence in the time of Cromwell's power, the ready pens of Owen, Baxter, Goodwin, and a score of others united those whom distance kept apart.

During these long years the Puritans had troubles-a-plenty and needed every encouragement and inspiration. James I (1603-1625) countered his Presbyterian cradle with an episcopalian cross and, seeing that Puritanism meant a serious limiting of his kingly 'rights' and powers, swore to the Puritan leaders that he would 'harrie them out of the land'. But while James 'harried' them out of Old England, God hurried them into the New, and others who did not go to the Americas sheltered in Dutch ports until better days should come. The majority stayed at home to weather the storm which, when James' crown sat on the head of his son Charles I (1625-1649), grew in force. But so also did the ominous cross-winds that countered it, for Puritanism did not stand alone in these turbulent years. The Puritan mind gave rise to thoughts on spiritual principles which were to have far-reaching effects in secular as well as religious life – in the State as well as the Church. Puritanism emphasised that the individual could never be regarded as a mere pawn of the times. Did he not have an immortal soul? Had not the Son of God himself come to die for such, as much as for princes and prelates? Also, the Puritan doctrine of the place of conscience, its laws and liberties in the life of the individual, placed the subject over against his monarch and not under his feet, and from his new position Everyman gained a new and very different perspective. This was no mere change in abstract thought: it was to change the face of English history. The erosion of English liberties by Charles I and the attempts by his bigoted High-Church Archbishop, William Laud, to manacle the free-souled Protestantism of so great a part of the nation, drew down upon the heads of that regime the wrath of both an outraged piety and a newly-awakened sense of the dignity and responsibilities of the individual. Out of this emerged a newly militant 'political Puritanism' which was to lead through Parliamentaryism to, in many cases, a full-blown Republicanism. It was this revolution which gave religious Puritanism, at last, its halcyon period of real liberty and when the Civil Wars (1642-1648) had drawn the teeth of Royalism and Prelacy alike, Puritanism, under the enlightened and prestigious rule of Oliver Cromwell (1654-1658), enjoyed its fullest expression and greatest expansion.

However, political and religious Puritanism were to prove uncomfortable bed-fellows. Many Puritans were still moderate Royalists, many had little love for, and much distrust of Cromwell,



WILLIELMVS PERKINSVS S^THEO. D.
PERKINSVS Christi defendens dogmatatatis
Vultu craxingentium scripta facuuda prebant

William Perkins stood at the fountain head of Puritanism's new and vigorous development in the last decades of the sixteenth century. Perkins' great ministry at Cambridge resulted in his becoming mentor of an army of young men who developed his expository and pastoral emphases.



*The Pourtraicture of the most tremly reuerend
faithfull Painefull and Profitable Minister of Gods
word M^r Richard Rogers Preacher of the word
of God at Wetherffeild in Essex .*

Richard Rogers of Wethersfield in Essex—a great father-figure in the Puritan movement. His famous 'Seven Treatises' on the godly life provided the pattern of Puritan piety for many years. On once being told by 'a gentleman', 'Mr. Rogers, I like you and your company very well, only you are too precise.' 'Oh sir,' replied Rogers, 'I serve a precise God.' There spoke Puritanism!

and of the Puritan clergy few could be found who had minds as broad, and political senses as acute as the Protector. 'The rule of the Saints,' throughout its various phases had within itself the seeds of its own destruction. There were many, for instance, in the dominant Presbyterian party who could be as narrow and harsh as their erstwhile Episcopal persecutors, while more moderate Puritans, such as were of the short-lived Barebones Parliament, were hopelessly fragmented, and it shortly became clear that if the Puritan minister could be incomparable in the pulpit, the Puritan politician could be insufferable in Parliament. The political groupings of Puritans, and of Republicans generally, fragmented both the rulers and the ruled. One hand alone was strong enough to hold so unruly a helm, and when the hand of 'Oliver Protector' was stilled in death, the ship of State was quickly guided from the real – or supposed – rocks of anarchy into the still – and stagnant – waters of a new period of monarchy.

The swift resumption of the English throne by the Stuart line, in Charles II, after the death of Cromwell and the downfall of his Republic, might have seemed the end of the 'Puritan revolution', and so it would have been if Puritanism had been merely a political revolution of the Civil Wars. However, we have seen enough to show that behind this, and rising above it at many points, was a larger and purely spiritual Puritan revolution: one that began long before Oliver's hand closed around an English sword – and one that would survive when that sword was laid down. However, after 1660, a Royalist Parliament, spiced once again with High-Church bishops, recommenced in earnest the persecution of the Puritans – a persecution which refused to distinguish between political and spiritual Puritanism. Soon the Prayer Book was re-imposed, having been so altered for its renewed imposition that there was justification in many eyes for one Puritan minister's summary criticism of it as 'defective in necessities, redundant in superfluities, dangerous in some things, disputable in many, disorderly in all'! This imposition was swiftly followed by the notorious Act of Uniformity (1662) to which, as well its architects knew, there was no chance of the Puritans as a whole submitting. This Act, as well as demanding 'unfeigned assent and consent' to everything in the new edition of the Prayer Book, required, among other things, the renunciation of Presbyterian ordination and a submission to Episcopal re-ordination. It required also an oath of allegiance to Charles which included an abjuration of the 'Solemn League and Covenant' of 1643 which had justified the resistance of Parliament to

Charles I. It was no surprise that many Puritans considered the renunciation of their previous ordinations as blasphemous and, for all their willingness to be loyal under the new king, the formal abjuration of the once-sworn Covenant as perjury; nor was it less than expected that the vast majority of Puritans found the demand for sworn assent and consent to the varied contents of the new Prayer Book a similar outrage upon true piety.

The inevitable followed and, before the winter of 1662, almost two thousand of the Church's best men had been expelled from their ministries – cast out into the world, many destitute, with their families. There followed a series of cruel and ingenious Acts aimed at preventing the ejected from preaching, even privately, under penalties varying from the petty to the vicious. Thereafter also, a campaign of libel and slander ensued in an endeavour to sully and besmirch the whole Puritan movement as one composed of sectaries, fanatics and rebels, ignorant and unbalanced men. It was soon forgotten that almost all of them were the scholarly products of Oxford and Cambridge Universities, many of them men of culture and much moderation and all men of irreproachable piety.

The question remains – did all this achieve the destruction and failure of Puritanism? The answer of history stands: no, it did not. Puritanism, not destroyed but metamorphosed by persecution and political defeat, passed over into a thorough-going religious Nonconformity, and, as such, began a new stage in its own and in the nation's religious development: a stage which survived the long period of Stuart persecution and saw the restoration of old liberties in the Glorious Revolution of 1688; a stage which survived, too, the more insidious, but no less dangerous period of widespread apathy and hardening in the earlier decades of the eighteenth century; a stage which survived to begin the notable period of missionary expansion that stretched from the Baptist, William Carey, in the 1790s, to the massive missionary movements of Nonconformity in the Victorian era, a stage which survives in our own day in evangelical Nonconformity for which the lives and writings of the Puritan brotherhood stand as an abiding monument and an unquenched inspiration.