

## A CHURCH 'HALFLY REFORMED' - THE PURITAN DILEMMA

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### INTRODUCTION

In William Fuller's 'Booke to the queene', he complains that Queen Elizabeth 'hath so insufficientlie heard, believed, and taken to heart what God hath commanded you, and so weakly and coldly obeyed', that 'but halflie by your majesty hath God been honoured, his church reformed and established, his people taught and comforted.'<sup>1</sup> His complaint is of a church 'but halfly reformed', a church in which the Reformation has proceeded 'but halfly forward and more than halfly backward.'<sup>2</sup> The great Puritan plan to reform the national church was to continue for one hundred years. Some gave up the attempt and started new churches in the American colonies; many resigned in 1662 rather than continue ministry in a church that made unacceptable demands on them, and was so resistant to reform.

The subject of this lecture is the reformation of the church. We will outline the Puritan attempt to reform the church by political action and by the preaching of the word. We will identify with the great dilemma of those who wish to purify the church in any age; how can we best achieve reformation, and what should we do when that reformation limps on 'but halfly forward', or when it seems to be going backward? This is the problem of living in a mixed church, when those opposed to its reformation by the word of God seem to have power and influence, and when ungodly patterns of life and ministry seem to be increasing. The dilemma of the Puritans from 1559 to 1662 is shared by would-be reformers in every age, not least at the end of the 20th century.

For those Puritans who were motivated by godly zeal, the honour of Christ, and obedience to the word of God, were certainly committed to the reformation of the national church. Theirs was not just a quest for personal reformation, nor merely the reformation of local congregations. Their aim was the reformation of the national church in England, the body John Foxe called 'the true members and faithful Congregation of Christ's Church, wheresoever either congregated together, or dispersed through the whole Realm of England.'<sup>3</sup> In the words of the Admonition to Parliament of 1572, their complaint was that 'we in England are so far off from having a Church rightly reformed, according to the prescript of God's Word, that as yet we are not come to the outward face of the same.' [In this lecture the word 'church' usually means 'denomination'.]

By 'Puritans' I mean those whose concerns were primarily religious, who were committed to Reformed theology and the reformation of the church, whether their preferred system of church government was that of reformed Episcopacy,

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1William Fuller, *Booke to the queen, The Second part of a Register*, ii. 52, quoted in Collinson, 1967, p. 29.

2Fuller, ii, 60, in Collinson, 1967, p. 36.

3John Foxe: *To the True and Faithfull Congregation of Christ's Universal Church*, in Parker, 1966, p. 73.

Presbyterianism, or Independency.

I realise that at least two groups of writers on Puritanism prefer the theory that Puritans cannot be Anglicans, nor can Anglicans be Puritans. Some Non-Conformists take this stance because they want to emphasise the gulf between Anglicanism and Puritanism, to show that true Puritanism is found outside Anglicanism.<sup>4</sup> Some Anglican writers take this stance because they want to claim that Puritanism has no place in mainstream Anglicanism.<sup>5</sup>

However Patrick Collinson has shown that Puritanism was part of Anglicanism: 'our modern conception [that] Anglicanism commonly excludes puritanism is...a distortion of part of our religious history,'<sup>6</sup> and A. G. Dickens claims that 'Puritanism in our sense was never limited to Nonconformists; it was a powerful element in the origins of the Anglican Church and it was through that Church that it won its abiding role in the life and outlook of the nation.'<sup>7</sup>

The leaders of Puritan Anglicans included: Archbishop Grindal of Canterbury, who tried to defend Puritan practice against the attacks of Queen Elizabeth; Archbishop Williams of York, author of The Holy Table, Name and Thing, a sturdy defence of the Reformed theology and practice of the Lord's Supper; and Archbishop Ussher of Armagh, who together with Richard Baxter promoted a Reformed model of Primitive Episcopacy.<sup>8</sup> Nigel Atkinson has shown that Richard Hooker, that great architect of Anglicanism, was clearly in the Reformed tradition, and was closer to Calvin in theology than some of his Puritan critics.<sup>9</sup> Even in the days of the Commonwealth, 300 Episcopal Puritans [called 'Evangelicals' by a contemporary writer] used to meet regularly in Oxford for Anglican worship.<sup>10</sup> We should not underestimate the 'Anglicanism' of some of those who left the Church of England in 1662. Henry Havers, the Rector of Stambourne in Essex was one such; the congregation who left with him were still using the Prayer Book in 1735.<sup>11</sup> Paul Zahl points out that the English Reformation lasted 170 years, from 1520 to 1690, and resulted in 'a Protestant Reformed Church and a Protestant Reformed nation.'<sup>12</sup>

It is important to recognize that the Puritans had two methods of reformation, one that we can describe as reformation 'from above', and the other as reformation 'from below'. Reformation 'from above' was the attempt to change the church by public authority, by appeal to Queen, King, or Parliament, by political influence and legislation. Reformation 'from below' meant publishing Bibles and other literature, producing able ministers, securing appointments to parishes, establishing reformed congregations and communities, and setting up conferences of ministers to promote the reform movement. One was reform by political influence, in an age when the government of the church was under the control of the state. The other was reform by the word of God, what we would now call 'grass roots' reform, in an age when ordinary people were gaining more influence in society and when democratic power was increasing. First we look at a brief survey of reform 'from above'. We will then look at reform 'from below' in more detail.

#### REFORM 'FROM ABOVE'

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<sup>4</sup>For example Bugden, 1977, and Lloyd-Jones, 1987.

<sup>5</sup>For example New, 1964.

<sup>6</sup>Collinson, 1967, p. 467.

<sup>7</sup>Dickens, 1967, p. 428.

<sup>8</sup>Collinson, 1979, Williams, 1979, pp. 106ff., and Nuttall, 1965, p. 80.

<sup>9</sup>Atkinson, 1997.

<sup>10</sup>Green, 1964, p.147.

<sup>11</sup>Spurgeon 1975, p. 44.

<sup>12</sup>Zahl, 1998, p. 27.

Patrick Collinson has written that the Elizabethan Puritans 'were organized to secure reform in the whole body of the Church, and by means of public authority...to complete the English Reformation.'<sup>13</sup> We look first at this attempt to reform 'from above'.

The success of reformation 'from above' depended on the policies of the King or Queen, the possibilities of influencing those policies, the attitudes to reform of the Archbishops and Bishops, and the power and membership of the Parliament.

In the 1560s, the issue was that of clerical dress. Some Puritans opposed the cap and surplice, because they regarded them as reminiscent of popish garments. Queen Elizabeth was determined to retain them, Archbishop Grindal disliked them, but adopted a general policy of insisting on them, because they were things of no importance, and in these matters it was best to obey lawful authority. The cap and surplice remained in common use.

In the 1570s the issue was that of church government. Cartwright promoted the Presbyterian polity of the ruling power of courts set up by local congregations. This policy had no place for the government of the church by bishops or magistrates. These ideas made no progress at the time, though they were to bear fruit in the 1640s. They had the effect of dividing the Puritans into those who were committed to Presbyterian policy, and those who wished to, or were prepared to, retain bishops. Although the Puritans had not won any political victories, they managed to continue and increase their ministries. Some powerful lay leaders and sympathetic bishops protected them, and so managed to dull the effects of Queen Elizabeth's opposition to them. This protection disappeared from the 1580s, with the death of Archbishop Grindal and of lay leaders such as the Earl of Leicester and Sir Walter Mildmay.<sup>14</sup> Even though the Puritans commanded a majority in the house of Commons at the end of Elizabeth's reign, they had not yet gained great political influence.

The Puritans hoped for some improvement in their cause as King James began his reign in 1603, and they made their moderate proposals for reform in their Millenary Petition at the Hampton Court conference. They failed, not because the King opposed Puritan theology but because he was reluctant to allow any dissent. Obedience to church rules was a matter of civil obedience, and no civil disobedience was allowed in any part of national life.

The Puritans regarded the content of worship and church government as religious issues. For the King these were matters of political obedience, so he resisted any sign of rebellion.

From now on the Puritans divided into those who believed that these debated matters of liturgy and church government were of essential importance, so that no compromise could be accepted, and those who believed that these matters were not essential, and that some compromise was acceptable and even strategic. Some of those Independents who separated from the Church of England left for America in 1620, unwilling to submit to the pressure of belonging to a church not fully reformed. Those who remained were also divided on whether church government should be Reformed Episcopal, Presbyterian or Independent. They were also under increasing anti-Puritan pressure under Archbishop Laud. The effect of Laud's persecutions on the one hand, and more extreme Puritan claims on the other, made it increasingly difficult for Anglicans like Williams and Ussher to maintain and promote Puritan Anglicanism.

With the execution of King Charles in 1649, those Puritans who gained political power were the Independents, while the Presbyterian and Episcopal Puritans lost any influence. On the surface the Commonwealth seemed to have been the triumph of the Puritan reform movement. If it had succeeded in the long term, the English church would have been a Puritan church. It did not succeed. In terms of politics it could not succeed, because

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<sup>13</sup>Collinson, 1967,p. 13.

<sup>14</sup>Collinson, 1967, p. 387.

though the monarchy had been removed, no satisfactory replacement was put in place. The Parliament was clearly not representative, and an alternative Cromwell dynasty was not available. It was also a costly success, in that it was victory only for the Independent Puritans, and not Presbyterian and Episcopal Puritans. The success of the Puritan movement also brought with it the seeds of its failure, because it gathered to itself political Puritans, committed to the politics of revolution and democracy, but not committed to Gospel priorities.<sup>15</sup>

Though the Presbyterian Puritans were influential in bringing Charles II to power in 1661, he was unsympathetic to their polity or theology, and in 1662 those Puritan ministers of the Church of England who refused to submit to the new requirements resigned from their ministries. Again the King was determined to win political obedience, and used liturgical submission as the test. The Puritans had been divided, and were now conquered. The Independents had gone to America, or been discredited with the fall of the Commonwealth. The committed Presbyterians resigned in 1662, and those Puritans who remained within the Church of England were discredited by their association with other Puritans, and disheartened by accusations of compromise.

Most viewed the political attempt at Puritan reform as a failure, caused in part by the theological divisions within Puritanism, in part by its political ineptitude, and in part by the historical accidents of the power play between monarchs, parliaments, and people.

So far I have given a summary of the attempt to reform the church 'from above' from 1559 to 1662, in which the Puritans tried to use public authority, monarch and parliament, to achieve their program of reformation. Of course as far back as 1582, Robert Browne had argued for 'reformation without tarrying for any.' He wrote as a Puritan committed to the independence of the church from secular authority, and the Independent model of congregational life. He was arguing for reform 'from below' and against reform 'from above'. As we have seen, reform 'from above' was less than successful: what can we say of reformation 'from below'?

#### REFORM 'FROM BELOW'

This was a program to reform the church by the Word of God. It was not merely an attempt to reorganise church life in a way that satisfied Puritan preferences; religion was a public duty, not a private opinion, and they knew that a reformed church best served the welfare of church, nation and people, and the honour of God.<sup>16</sup>

This reform 'from below' was reformation by the Word of God, by studying, teaching, and applying the Bible. The Bible not only provided the model of a reformed church, but was itself also the means by which it would be reformed. How did the Puritans reform the church 'from below' by the Word? What were the ingredients of their reform program?

##### 1. Bibles and Christian books.

This was the age of new translations of the Bible into English and of the growth of printing and publishing. In addition to the Bible translations of Tyndale and Coverdale in the 1530s, English refugees in Geneva completed the Geneva Bible in 1560, including comments of interpretation throughout. In the five years from 1578, there were no less than 16 editions of the Geneva Bible printed in England, some of which included a Puritan revision of the Prayer Book.<sup>17</sup> Even the Bishops' Bible, published in 1568, included Protestant comments, though not as strongly worded as in the Geneva Bible. The Authorised Version had its origin in the Hampton Court conference of 1604 as a result of a request by the Puritan John Reynolds. As Christopher Hill puts it, England developed a

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<sup>15</sup>Hill, 1964, pp.13-29.

<sup>16</sup> Collinson, 1967, p. 25.

<sup>17</sup>Collinson, 1967, p.165.

Biblical culture: "The vernacular Bible became an institution in Elizabethan England - the foundation of monarchical authority, of England's protestant independence, the text book of morality and social subordination."<sup>18</sup>

In addition to Bibles, most with interpretive comments, Puritan literature also included sermons [such as Richard Sibbes' The Bruised Reed and Smoaking Flax], biographies [John Foxe's Book of Martyrs], discussions of moral and social issues [Richard Baxter's The Christian Directory], and works of practical and pastoral theology [Baxter's The Reformed Pastor, and William Perkins' The Art of Prophesying]. In Haller's words: 'By 1640 the number of books circulating among the people had increased and accumulated beyond anything that had ever been known in England before, and a prodigious amount of that material came from the pens and brains of the Puritan preachers.'<sup>19</sup> This represented a massive educational program, in producing the literature, in circulating it, and in ensuring sufficient education so that people could read it. They made good use of the printing press, the new technology of their day, to continue the process of reform.

## **2. Preachers of the Word.**

One of the great achievements of the Puritans was the number of preachers of the Word they produced. They rightly saw that to reform the church and convert the nation they needed a great company of well-qualified preachers. In Baxter's words: 'All churches rise and fall as the ministry doth rise and fall [not in riches or worldly grandeur] but in knowledge, zeal and ability for their work.'<sup>20</sup> The Puritans knew that they needed good quality ministers to preach the Gospel, teach godliness from the Bible, and grow the church.

William Perkins wrote: 'The means God uses to restore a sinner after a fall is to raise him through repentance to a better condition...the instrument by whom this remarkable work is to be accomplished is.. a minister of God, lawfully called and sent by his church for such a great duty.'<sup>21</sup> Henry Barrow's 'True Description of the Visible Church' includes this model of ordained ministry: 'Their doctor or teacher must be a man apt to teach, able to divide the word of God aright, and to deliver sound and wholesome doctrine...he must be mighty in the Scriptures, able to convince the gain-sayers, and carefully to deliver his doctrine pure, sound and plain, not with curiosity or affectation, but so that it may edify the most simple....to feed the sheep of Christ in green and wholesome pastures of his word...he must guide and keep those sheep by that heavenly and pastoral staff of the word...discerning their diseases, and thereby curing them...that the church may increase with the increasing of God, and grow up into him which is the head, Jesus Christ.'<sup>22</sup>

The program to reform people, church and nation depended on producing able ministers of the Word. This ministry also called for people who were ready to respond to the Word of God. In the words of Richard Rogers: 'God hath appointed this preaching of his Word to perfect the faith of his elect...First..they are cleansed from error and darkness about religion and manners...and grow more sound in the knowledge of the truth...and this is the mean whereby they are fast settled into a godly course.'<sup>23</sup> Puritan preachers flourished because Puritan hearers wanted to receive that Word of God.

## **3. Biblical Training for Ministry.**

They provided Biblical and effective training for ministers. This training had two parts;

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<sup>18</sup> Hill, 1994, p. 4

<sup>19</sup> Haller, 1972, p. 82.

<sup>20</sup>Baxter, in Packer, 1990, p. 38.

<sup>21</sup>Perkins, 1996, p. 84.

<sup>22</sup>Henry Barrow, in Murray, 1965, pp. 198,199.

<sup>23</sup>Richard Rogers, in Lewis 1975, p. 41.

the training that potential preachers received in their local church, and academic training at University.

The Puritans rightly recognized that a formative influence on preachers is the ministry that has nurtured them in Christ, and has provided them with early ministry opportunities. This happened in the context of family life, with its provision of mutual encouragement in godliness, and discussion of the sermons heard in church. Many Puritan clergy also trained up young preachers in their local churches, and gave them opportunities to preach trial sermons in meetings of local ministers.

The Puritans also used the new forms of education that were part of the Humanist tradition, and adapted them for the training of ministers at Universities. In addition to the training provided in other colleges, Puritans founded two new colleges in Cambridge; Emmanuel in 1584, and Sidney Sussex in 1596. Both were established in order to provide preachers. These preachers became the chief force for the spread of Puritanism among all classes of society. When Queen Elizabeth questioned Sir Walter Mildmay about his founding of Emmanuel College, he commented: 'I have set an acorn, which when it becomes an oak, God alone knows what will be the fruit thereof.'<sup>24</sup>

Those who trained in Cambridge could also hear good preachers in local churches, such as Richard Sibbes at Holy Trinity and William Perkins at St. Andrew's.

#### **4. A new style of Preaching,**

They created a new style of preaching to bring the Word of God to their generation. They preached in English, and their preaching reflected the more popular and appealing style of Medieval outdoor preaching which Latimer had used so effectively to serve the Reformation. They created a new style of preaching, a new rhetoric that was both practical and affectionate; practical because they taught what to believe and how to act, and affectionate because they appealed to the imagination through the emotions. Their detailed study of scripture was matched by their study of human beings, especially in struggles of faith and unbelief. In their preaching they were 'Physicians of the soul.'<sup>25</sup> Their plain prose style was in contrast both to the ignorance of many preachers, and to the scholarly complexities of Lancelot Andrews and John Donne.<sup>26</sup>

William Perkins has provided an outline of the Puritan sermon:

'Preaching involves;

1. Reading the text clearly from the canonical Scriptures.
2. Explaining the meaning of it..in the light of the Scriptures themselves.
3. Gathering a few profitable points of doctrine from the natural sense of the passage.
4. If the preacher is able, applying the doctrines thus explained to the life and practice of the congregation in straightforward, plain speech.'<sup>27</sup> Perkins wrote new training manuals for preachers, The Art of Prophesying in 1592, and The Calling of the Ministry in 1605.

On one occasion, Laurence Chaderton, later Master of Emmanuel College, had been preaching for two hours and announced that he would soon stop. His congregation replied 'for God's Sake Sir, Go on, go on.'<sup>28</sup> Good preaching from the pulpit developed an appetite for good preaching in the congregation. The Word reformed the church.

#### **5. In-service training for Ministers.**

The Puritan program of reform depended on a good supply of able and godly preachers, and they provided what we now call 'in-service training' by two structures,

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<sup>24</sup>Haller, 1972, p. 20.

<sup>25</sup>Haller, 1972, p. 3.

<sup>26</sup>Hill, 1966, p. 508.

<sup>27</sup>Perkins, 1996, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup>Haller, 1972, p. 55.

### Prophesyings and Conferences.

Prophesyings were meetings of ministers at which a number preached sermons, received comments on their sermons, discussed the interpretation of the text, and discussed matters of ministry. Often several learned ministers chaired the event, and prospective preachers also contributed. They based these Prophesyings on the system employed in Zürich in training ministers in exegesis, and they derived the name from Paul's words: 'Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said'. They held these on market days, and so many people were able to hear the sermons and take part in at least some of the program.

These Prophesyings provided training and mutual encouragement for ministers, the chance for young or potential preachers to test their abilities, and for good quality preaching to be heard by the lay people who attended. Sometimes these events were initiated by the Bishop, but in most instances they were organised by local ministers. In the Diocese of Norwich prophesyings were grafted into the structure of meetings of rural deaneries. Archbishop Grindal was one who recognised the need for these events in order to promote the training of the clergy, and he defended the practice from biblical, patristic, medieval and modern sources. It was his commitment to these which led Queen Elizabeth to suspend him from functioning as Archbishop of Canterbury, because she wanted to stop the Prophesyings, and he refused to act on her request. Despite this official opposition, these events provided effective training in ministry, and some of those who led them became leaders of an army, providing leadership in reform for clergy who did not find that in their Bishops.

Conferences were private meetings of clergy in a local area who had covenanted to meet together for mutual encouragement, usually once a month. The meetings included a sermon, a chapter by chapter exegesis of a book of the Bible, prayer, discussion of issues of ministry and Puritan policy, and matters of discipline. Local ministers set up these programs, and they committed themselves to the decisions of the Conference.<sup>29</sup>

The Puritan program of reform depended on a good supply of able ministers on the Word, and we have seen the great energy they expended in achieving this. A. G. Dickens comments on the Puritan preachers: 'their preaching ability and their numbers had no equivalent in pre-Reformation or mid-Tudor England.'<sup>30</sup> They were also better trained: in the Diocese of Worcester the percentage of clergy who were University graduates grew from 19% in 1560, to 84% in 1640.<sup>31</sup>

### **6. New models and opportunities for ministry.**

While some Puritans were appointed as Rectors or Curates of parishes, others went on itinerant ministry around England, or became chaplains in Puritan households. They were not often offered higher ecclesiastical positions, and when they were offered them, did not always accept. They had to work hard at finding opportunities for ministry in a church that did not always welcome them. Puritan lay people did their best to secure good ministers, and the gentry and nobility used their influence when they could. Laurence Chaderton at Emmanuel College became a mentor to many young preachers, and people often contacted him when looking for a new minister.

However the great Puritan venture was the creation of a new model of ministry, the appointing of 'Lecturers'. A Lecturer had the task of preaching regularly in a church, in a position funded by Puritan lay people. Lectureships were often founded in parishes where the Rector or Curate had little ability in preaching the Bible, and where the rising

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<sup>29</sup>Collinson, 1967, pp. 222-239.

<sup>30</sup>Dickens, 1967, p. 428.

<sup>31</sup>Dickens, 1967, p. 419.

educational standards and expectations of the people led to a demand for good preaching. The Lecture was a teaching sermon, and the people expressed their eagerness by paying for and attending the lectures.

One striking example in London was in the London parish of St. Antholin's Budge Row, where Charles Offspring was the Puritan Rector for forty years. Here a team of three preachers gave early morning Lectures six days a week. These lectures were preceded by an hour of psalm singing.<sup>32</sup> In addition to providing edification for the people of St. Antholin's, these Lectures also gave training in preaching to those who would later minister throughout England. London Puritans also founded a society to fund Lectureships across England, 'to plant a powerfull Ministry in Cities and Market-Towns here and there in the Country for the greater propagation of the Gospell.'<sup>33</sup> This society was closely associated with St. Antholin's church, and was known as the Collectors of St. Antholin's, or the Feoffees for Impropriated Tithes. It operated from 1626 until it was suppressed in 1633.<sup>34</sup> Haller comments that if it had not been closed down 'the English church... would have been reformed by the spiritual brotherhood from within, bishops or no bishops.'<sup>35</sup>

In addition to using recognized models of ministry, the Puritans were creative in developing new models that worked effectively within the church, and worked to reform it.

### **7. Committed and trained lay people.**

Puritans regarded the godly family as a key unit in God's economy: husband and wife have the task of 'erecting and establishing Christ's glorious kingdom in their house,' for 'a household is as it were a little commonwealth, by the good government of which God's glory may be advanced,' and 'these families...are...little churches, yea even a kind of Paradise on earth.'<sup>36</sup> They published Bibles with notes commenting on the text and other Christian literature to strengthen this ministry within households. In some cases, the godly family provided an alternative source of Christian nurture when the ministry of the local church was weak and unprofitable. This meeting of a family for prayer and instruction could easily be extended to include neighbours and friends.

We should not think that the Puritan movement was predominantly clerical in character. It was a mark of the success of Puritan ministry that it attracted so much lay support from every part of society. Magistrates and the nobility were often present at Prophesyings, and those who gave money for the appointment of Lecturers in churches included those who signed with a mark as well as the well educated. When Archbishop Grindal suspended a popular Lecturer at St. Giles' Cripplegate, sixty women came to his house to remonstrate with him; he requested they send instead 'half-a-dozen of their husbands'. Opposition to vestments was expressed by laity as much as clergy. Andrew Marvell objected to 'so many cringes and genuflexions that a man unpractised stood in need to entertain both a dancing-master and a remembrancer', and complained that 'these things were very uncouth to English Protestants, who naturally affect a plainness of fashion, especially in sacred things.'<sup>37</sup>

It was when the Puritan movement was losing political power after 1590 that the attempt to reform the nation turned to an attempt to reform families, towns, parishes, and individuals, in what has been called 'the birth of the great age of puritan religious

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<sup>32</sup>Collinson, 1967, p. 50, and Hill, 1966, ch. 3, and Seaver, 1970.

<sup>33</sup>Haller, p. 81.

<sup>34</sup>Calder, 1957.

<sup>35</sup>Haller, 1972, p. 81.

<sup>36</sup>From Ryken, 1986, pp. 74, 75, 85. See also *The Spiritualization of the Household*, ch. 13, in Hill, 1966.

<sup>37</sup> Marvell, 1986, p.147 [from *The Rehearsal Transposed*].

experience.<sup>138</sup> This saw the production of literature that dealt with religious experience, Christian biography, journals of daily piety, issues of social and personal morality, and Christian life. The relative lack of success in reforming church and nation led to a concentration on personal and community reform. Puritanism had a program for personal and community change, as well as for the reformation of the church.

There was generous support both in London and in the country for Puritan ministry, and of course the final demonstration of this was found in the increasing Protestantism of the Parliament, leading to what used to be known as 'the Puritan Revolution' of the Commonwealth. Lay Puritanism opposed the anti-Puritan policies of monarchs and bishops, and the political revolution was the sign both of the strength of the Puritan movement and of the effectiveness of their reform program.

#### **8. Godliness in daily lives.**

The renewed study of the Bible led to the development of reformed patterns of church life and godliness. The Puritans needed to do this to find patterns that were Biblical, and to develop models of godliness for ordinary lay people in the world.

John Dod published his A Plaine and Familiar Exposition of the Ten Commandments in 1603. Richard Baxter wrote the most complete example in his Christian Directory, with its four parts: Christian Ethics [or Private Duties], Christian Economics [or Family Duties], Christian Ecclesiastics [or Church Duties], Christian Politics [or Duties to our Rulers and Neighbours]. In this work Baxter carries on the medieval tradition of systematic ethics found for example in Aquinas' Summa Theologica, and tackles the subject in cases, that is specific examples. So he takes cases like these: 'Whether a vow of chastity or celibate may be broken, and in what cases', 'Doth adultery dissolve marriage?', 'May a man be oft or twice ordained?', 'Is it lawful to stand up at the Gospel as we are appointed?', 'The duty of physicians', 'May I take that which another is bound to give, and will not?', 'When is it lawful to go to law?', 'What must be the qualifications for a bosom friend?', 'Is it better to give in life-time or in death?'<sup>139</sup> Here is healthy 'casuistry', in which he deals with 'cases' with Biblical wisdom and integrity, and with relevance to the daily issues of ordinary Christians. These new patterns of godliness were an important aspect of the reformation of church and nation.

The Puritans also objected that in the Elizabethan church the power of excommunication was mostly used for trivial offences against Ecclesiastical courts. They wanted an effective power of discipline in local churches, and tried to set this up in a variety of informal ways in conferences or 'classes' of clergy and local elderships.

#### **9. Gospel and Church.**

They knew that the Gospel would produce the church, and also reform it. The early Puritans were not influenced by the individualism of later Protestantism, and knew that the full earthly effect of the gospel was not the conversion of individuals but the forming of the church. As Baxter wrote: 'It is the *Church of GOD* which we must oversee - that Church for which the word is chiefly upheld, which is sanctified by the Holy Ghost, which is the mystical body of Christ.'<sup>140</sup>

They also developed a clear model of the church that they expected. Though they disagreed among themselves about the Biblical requirements for church government, whether Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Independent, they still agreed on the shape of a reformed church. Henry Barrow outlined this shape in his 'A True Description of the Visible Church' of 1589.

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<sup>38</sup>Collinson, 1967, p. 433.

<sup>39</sup>Baxter, 1990, pp. iii - xix.

<sup>40</sup>Baxter, 1974, p. 130.

He has what we might call a 'high' view of the church: not a merely human institution, nor only a useful provision for individual Christians.

'As there is but one God and Father of all, one Lord over all, and one spirit: so there is but one truth, one faith, one salvation, one church, called in one hope, joined in one profession, guided by one rule, even the word of the most high...it consisteth of a company of faithful and holy people gathered together in the name of Jesus Christ their only king, priest, and prophet, worshipping him aright...keeping the unity of faith in the bond of peace and love unfeigned....it is called the city, house, temple, and mountain of the eternal God...it shall appear most beautiful, yea most wonderful, and even ravishing the senses to conceive, much more to behold, what then to enjoy so blessed a communion...In this church is the truth purely taught, and surely kept: here is the covenant, the sacraments, and promises, the graces, the glory, the presence, the worship of God.'<sup>41</sup>

However the church was always in need of reformation. The options were to leave the Church of England or to stay in and reform it. The call to leave was most often expressed by the Independents or Congregationalists: Presbyterian and Episcopal Puritans were committed to staying and reforming it.

So for example Thomas Cartwright answered those who claimed that the church was so corrupt that true believers should leave it. Peter Lake has summarised his arguments:

- i. The church must be mixed, as it is made up of people who are a mixture of grace and sin. The search for a pure church is doomed to failure.
- ii. The church is like a disobedient wife: still a wife 'not having abandoned her husband by atheism nor by idolatry'.
- iii. It is wrong to judge before the time. The time for the separation of sheep and goats is at the return of Christ, and not before.
- iv. Christ did not separate himself from the church of his time, even though the people of God had allowed corruptions to enter into holy things, and despite the enmity of the leaders of God's people against him.
- v. Peter and the other apostles still treated the Jews as the people of God, despite their sins.
- vi. The Church of England still retained the preaching of the Word, ministry and sacraments, and so continued to be the church of God.
- vii. As in the church the godly were 'the leaven that leavened the whole lump,' so in the church's ministry it is the activity of Puritan ministers that helps the church remain the church of God.<sup>42</sup>

Puritans also worked for the reform of their local churches by forming 'covenant communities' within those churches for mutual edification, rebuke and exhortation. These were led by ministers, but they also provided opportunities for lay people to engage in this ministry especially within households.

#### **10. Prayer and Suffering.**

They knew that they had to pray and to suffer for the gospel to produce the church. They encouraged their followers to pray for the church. Jeremiah Burrows, preaching on Gospel Worship, says: 'The church is, as it were, in the midst of the sea, tossed up and down in a great storm. Now why do you not pray as earnestly for the kingdom of Christ among His churches as for yourselves when you are in a storm at sea?'<sup>43</sup>

They also knew that they were called to suffer for the gospel. John Calvin's sermons on Timothy and Titus were translated into English and published in London in 1579. He

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<sup>41</sup>Barrow, in Murray, 1965, pp. 196, 7, 202.

<sup>42</sup>Lake, 1982, pp. 80-86.

<sup>43</sup>Burrows, 1990, p. 365.

comments on 2 Timothy 3: 11: '[St Paul] was faithful in preaching the word of God where it was received, so when there were any persecutions, they never saw him any changling, in so much that he spared not his own life' and he adds 'we must dispose ourselves, if it please God, to venture our lives for the witness of the Gospel.'<sup>44</sup> The Puritans knew from their experience that the reformation of the church was always achieved through suffering, including persecution from those both outside and inside the church.

They were most effective in bringing about change when they implemented the changes they wanted, and suffered the consequences until the church as a whole caught up with them. This was a far more effective method of making changes than that of thinking and writing about possibilities. It provided a visible model of Biblical ministry, and encouraged commitment from young adherents. While it was not always successful, it was then as always the best way to achieve change; the same method was used so effectively by the Oxford Movement in the 19th century.

### **11. Gospel outreach.**

As we have seen, they reformed the church because this would serve the nation, and they trained more ministers so that the Word of God would be preached. One of the reasons for endowing Lectureships was so that the Gospel would be preached in new places in England. They also made sure that able gospel preachers went to the new colonies in America.

This Gospel outreach was not in a religious vacuum. Indeed Richard Baxter encouraged the training of many ministers with these words:

'Papists are up, and Atheists and Infidels and Jews are up, and abundance of secret Apostates are up openly reproaching the Ministry, that privately deride Christ and the Scripture, and the life to come....Quakers are up, and all the prophane as farre as they dare: And shall we not be up to further that Gospel and Ministry and Church of Christ, which so many bands of the Prince of darknesse are armed to assault?', and he hoped that these ministers would be raised for Wales as well as England.<sup>45</sup> They recognized a universal, urgent and continuing need for able preachers of God's Word.

### **12. Planning for the future.**

The Puritan program of reform also included preparing preachers for the next generation. It is obvious that in any plan to reform a national church must have a long term view; and equally obvious that training up the next generation of ministers is the most effective way to achieve that reform.

Many preachers recognized their responsibility to train up the next generation. At Reading for example, Thomas Taylor maintained 'a little nursery of young Preachers, who under his faithful Ministry flourished in knowledge and piety'. Richard Greenham did the same at Dry Drayton, as did Richard Rogers at Wethersfield.<sup>46</sup> John Preston declined to become a university lecturer, choosing rather to continue local church preaching, because 'preaching was like to work more and win more souls to God', yet he was also aware the advantage of preaching at Cambridge, because he was then likely to 'beget begetters', to produce preachers<sup>47</sup>. That is, he saw the strategic value of converting people who would then be able to become preachers themselves, and so increase the ministry.

Robert Stock, Rector of All Hallows was commended because: 'Many famous lights in God's Church and faithfull Ministers of the Word do profess to have lighted their candles

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<sup>44</sup>Calvin, 1983, p. 912, with modern spelling.

<sup>45</sup>Baxter, in Nuttall, 1965, pp. 79, 80.

<sup>46</sup>Haller, 1972, pp. 148, 28, 35.

<sup>47</sup>Haller, 1972, p. 73.

at his Lampe.<sup>48</sup> So young preachers learnt their model of ministry before they went for academic training, and they were likely to reproduce that ministry by which they had themselves been formed. The Puritans wanted to convert and train up the next generation of preachers.

#### EVALUATION

This program of reform 'from below' was successful to a remarkable degree. We can demonstrate this in four ways.

First, when the moment came for decisive political action in reform 'from above' in the setting up of the Commonwealth and Puritan church structures in the 1640s, such an achievement was only possible because of the reformation 'from below'. Without the grass roots movement of reform, there would not have been enough political strength to achieve the reform 'from above'. For political power without the support of the people cannot succeed in the long term. Puritanism's best chance lay in its reform 'from below'.

Second, although it is commonly held that the Puritan movement failed in its attempts to reform the national church, we should not ignore its very considerable achievements in changing English national church life. The fact that England became so resolutely Protestant in the Glorious Revolution of 1689, was due to the work of the Puritans over the previous 130 years. It is also the case that Anglican preaching after 1662 followed the plain style of the Puritans rather than the intellectual style of some pre-1662 Anglicans.<sup>49</sup> Christopher Wren's intention to design and build church buildings as 'auditories for the Word of God' after the fire of London of 1666 similarly indicates the triumph of Puritan principles. Many features of the post-1662 Church of England reflect Puritan priorities, even if they lacked the spiritual fervour of the constructive days of Puritanism.

Third, the Puritans left behind a positive model of ministry that would last for at least three centuries. So, for example, C. H. Spurgeon, the great and effective preacher of the 19th Century [1834-1892], was trained up in his early years by his grandfather, James Spurgeon. James Spurgeon was minister of the Congregational Church at Stambourne for fifty years, and had a deep knowledge of Puritan writings as well as of the Bible. Charles began reading those Puritans at an early age, and was also instructed in those doctrines by Mary King, his housekeeper when he was a schoolboy at Newmarket. He later wrote: 'Out of the present contempt into which Puritanism has fallen, many brave hearts and true will fetch it, by the help of God, ere many years have passed.'<sup>50</sup> Of his own ministry he said: 'Believing that the Puritanic school embodied more of gospel truth in it than any other since the days of the apostles, we continue in the same line of things, and, by God's help, hope to have a share in that revival of Evangelical doctrine which is as sure to come as the Lord himself.'<sup>51</sup> He also wrote: 'The doctrine that I preach to you is that of the Puritans: it is the doctrine of Calvin, the doctrine of Augustine, the doctrine of Paul, the doctrine of the Holy Ghost.'<sup>52</sup>

The 20th century has also seen successful ministries in Britain that have reflected Puritan priorities and methods, not least in preachers such as Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer, John Stott, R. C. Lucas, and Willie Still. The Puritan model of ministry is still productive.<sup>53</sup>

Fourth, the social effects of Puritanism were evident for nearly 300 years. The social reform movements of the 19th century were a result of the expression of Puritan

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<sup>48</sup> Haller, 1972, pp. 148, 73, 291.

<sup>49</sup> Hill, 1966 p. 508.

<sup>50</sup> Dallimore, 1962, p. 11.

<sup>51</sup> Dallimore, 1962, pp. 387, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Spurgeon, 1975, p. 127.

<sup>53</sup> See also Benn, 1993.

democratic principles, and England's residual 'no Popery' sentiment, still effective in Parliament in 1929, was also a long term result of Puritan teaching. It is not too much to claim that the comparative vigour of evangelical faith in England today as compared with the rest of Europe is due in part to the Puritan reform program of 1559-1662.

At the same time they failed to achieve that measure of reform for which they struggled for so long. This was because they could not agree on what a reformed church would look like [Episcopal, Presbyterian, or Independent]. They were internally divided, and often at odds with each other. They were also defeated by their political weakness, and by the accidents of England's political development, especially in the various policies of the monarchs of their age.

They also suffered from unrealistic expectations of the extent of reform that would be possible. Henry Barrow's 'A True Description out of the Word of God, of the Visible Church'<sup>54</sup> is moving to read not only because of the beauty of church life that it describes, but also because it describes a church that has never existed, and will never exist on earth. It pictures the ideal church, which did not exist in New Testament times, and which is an unrealistic model for any age. It was bound to bring disappointment. In Calvin's words: 'Saint Paul meant to meet with such stumbling blocks as trouble us and torment us very much: when we do not see the church of God so well reformed as we would desire, we think all is lost...men must not discomfort themselves too much, but wait patiently... for the end shall always be good, so that we be constant, and not shaken.'<sup>55</sup>

Another reason for the lack of effectiveness was that some Puritans began to change their theology in the 1620s towards 'Cambridge Platonism', a kind of moral Rationalism. They wanted to leave behind controversy in religion, and the result was that they ignored the traditional heart of Puritan theology, the person and atoning work of Christ. Instead they pointed to Christ as a moral teacher of laws that would bring about moral purity.<sup>56</sup>

Some of those who were disappointed went to the colonies in America for a new start. In the words of one of them '[in New England] the Lord will create a New Heaven and New Earth, new Churches and new Commonwealth together.'<sup>57</sup> Others who were still ministering in 1662 resigned rather than continue in a church that placed so many restrictions on them.

What should reformers do when their long term program of reform has not succeeded as they have hoped and prayed?

It would be presumptuous to say what others should have done in another age. However here are four comments on the Puritans we have been studying:

1. Their sense of failure should not lead us to undervalue what they achieved. If they did not succeed in reforming the church as they wished, they still preserved and preached the Gospel in England in their own generations, worked to support Gospel outreach in America and elsewhere, and provided as much as they could for the future. They did what each generation of God's people is called to do, in proclaiming the word of God. The fact that nearly 2000 ministers resigned in 1662 [about 20% of the clergy] is a reflection of the success of the Puritan reform program, especially if we remember that in addition many godly ministers decided to continue in Church of England ministry. Also around 120,000 lay people suffered for being Non-Conformists after 1662, and there were many who stayed in the Church of England as well.

2. In their desire to reform the church, they had unrealistic expectations. The church is made up of new generations of sinners, and so will always need to be reformed. And if the

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<sup>54</sup>Murray, 1965, pp. 196-202.

<sup>55</sup>Calvin, 1983, p. 834, with modern spelling.

<sup>56</sup>Willey, 1962, p. 139.

<sup>57</sup>Capt. E. Johnston, in Zakai, 1986, p. 600.

sinner is saved by grace, so is the church. If the sinner is justified by grace, so is the church. The church on earth will always be sinful, and any attempt at reformation must accept this reality. There are many warnings that the last days will be days of confusion and error in the church of God, and those last days include the time of the New Testament, the time of the Puritans, as well as our own days. They should not have been surprised that their efforts did not achieve what they had hoped for.

3. A strong theme in the last sermons of those who resigned in 1662 was the reality of God's judgement coming on the church. So Edmund Calamy preached:

'Did the church at Ephesus lose the candlestick, because they had lost their first love? And have not we lost our first love to the gospel and its ordinances?' He quotes the martyr Bradford 'Lord, it was my unthankfulness for the gospel that brought in popery in Queen Mary's day; and my unfruitfulness under the gospel that was the cause of the untimely death of King Edward the Sixth.'<sup>58</sup>

John Whitlock taught his hearers: 'The silencing of ministers calls aloud on us all to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. It bids us repent of our sins, the causes of God's judgements.'<sup>59</sup>

Any reformers have to leave room for the judgements of God on a church, see them as part of God's good Gospel plan, and not give up because of them. For God may judge a church by silencing true preachers and sending false ones. In Calvin's words: 'it is certain that if matters go on, God must send worse confusions by a thousand parties than ever were in Papistry. For those blind creatures did never so extremely offend against God as we do nowadays.'<sup>60</sup> We must leave room for the judging and correcting hand of God.

4. Some Puritans were committed to the Bible as the 'regulative principle', to the idea that godly practices are restricted to those actions ordained in the Bible. It is hard to think of a Biblical precedent for resignation from the ministry. In Elijah's time of despair, God refused him permission to give up his task of reforming God's people, and instead recommissioned him for further service that would achieve both the judgement and saving plan of God. Paul warned Timothy of the difficulties of gospel ministry, of opposition from the majority of teachers in the church at Ephesus, of the prevalence of false doctrine, and of growing impatience with sound doctrine among his hearers. Yet there was no suggestion that he should give up; rather a challenge to persist in his ministry. As John Flavel wrote: 'O be not too quick to bury the Church before she is dead.'<sup>61</sup>

There is now more scope for us to help to reform the church 'from above', as decision-making power is now spread more widely through Synods, and that work is worth doing. However reform 'from below' is more lasting, and without it reform 'from above' will not be effective.

## CONCLUSION

God's call to the Puritans in 1559-1662 was to preach the Gospel, to convert unbelievers, to reform the church, and to shape their lives by the Bible. His call to us is the same. We can learn much that is useful and positive from them, especially in their work in reforming the church 'from below', by the preaching of the Word. We might remember that all effective reforms come 'from below', as they have again and again over the last four hundred years of the church. We should also note that although change always appears to happen slowly, a great deal of change can occur in 100 years, as is evident from the history of the Church of England from 1559 to 1662, and again from 1890 to 1990.

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<sup>58</sup>Murray, 1962, p 27.

<sup>59</sup>Murray, 1962, p. 197.

<sup>60</sup>Calvin, 1983, p. 969, with modern spelling..

<sup>61</sup>Flavel in Thomas, 1977, p. 58.

In this lecture I have concentrated on reform in the Church of England, but my comments apply as well to the reformation of any denomination, even those founded by Non-Conformist Puritans

What I have given so far is in the form of a Lecture as we understand it in the 20th century. However as we have seen, when this Lectureship was endowed, a Lecture was not an academic exercise, but a challenge to Biblical godliness. Let me demonstrate that I have been true to the original intention of this Lectureship by showing that the Puritan program to reform the church was nothing other than an application of Biblical principles to the church of their day.

The Puritans rightly saw that their context was that of the church in the last days, a post-apostolic church, with all the pressures of ungodly religion, declension from the Gospel, and corrupt behaviour. As Paul encouraged Timothy and Titus in their ministries, God provides sufficient instructions for the Puritans and ourselves to know how to live and minister in our different times. The Puritan program of reform 'from below' reflected the instructions that Paul gave to Timothy and Titus.

1. The Puritans printed **Bibles and Christian books**: Timothy was told that the Scriptures make us wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ, and that he is to use these Scriptures in his preaching and teaching [2 Timothy 3: 15-4: 2, 1 Timothy 4: 13].

2. The Puritans recognized the key role of **Preachers of the Word**: Titus was told to make up what is lacking and appoint elders for the churches who are of sound moral character, and who are able to teach the truth and correct error [Titus 1: 5-9].

3. The Puritans provided **Biblical Training of Ministers**: Timothy was urged to pass on apostolic words in which the Gospel is preserved by training faithful people who will be able to teach others, and Paul trains by example as well as by instruction [2 Timothy 1: 13, 14 and 2: 2].

4. The Puritans created **a new style of Preaching**, and worked hard at finding an effective method of communication: Paul urged Timothy to teach with great patience and careful instruction, and to pay attention to his teaching [1 Timothy 4: 13, and 2 Timothy 4: 2].

5. The Puritans provided support and **in-service training for Ministers**: Paul provided this in 1 and 2 Timothy and Titus, and also appealed for support in his own ministry [2 Timothy 4: 9-22].

6. The Puritans created **new models and opportunities for ministry**: Paul encouraged Timothy to look for new opportunities and to fulfil his ministry [2 Timothy 4: 5, 9].

7. The Puritans had **committed and trained lay people**: Titus was told to encourage members of the church to teach each other [Titus 2].

8. The Puritans promoted **godliness in daily living**: Titus was to teach different groups how to lead godly lives, how to adorn the teaching of Christ [Titus 2, 3].

9. The Puritans recognized the centrality of **Gospel and Church** in God's saving plan: Paul taught how believers are to live in the church [1 Timothy 3: 15].

10. The Puritans were committed to **prayer and suffering** for the sake of the church: Paul instructed Timothy and Titus on how to reform the churches of their day, and called on them to join with him in suffering for the gospel [2 Timothy 1, 2].

11. The Puritans promoted **Gospel outreach**: Paul tells Timothy to do the work of an evangelist, and his aim was that the Gospel might be fully proclaimed, that all the nations might hear it [2 Timothy 4: 5, 17].

12. The Puritans had a strategy of **planning for the future**: Paul encouraged Timothy and Titus to plan for future ministry in subsequent generations [2 Timothy 2: 2, Titus 1: 5-9].

I am not suggesting that we should adopt an archaic style of ministry in imitation of the Puritans. They were the Biblical radicals of their day, and we should be the Biblical radicals

of our day. Nor have I fallen into the 20th century trap of trusting in methodology, of claiming that what the Puritans did was successful, and if we do the same, we will be successful too. What we should gain from the Puritan attempt to reform the church is an encouragement to follow their example in so far as it reflects the instructions of the Word of God, and the encouragement of seeing our place and role in God's great Gospel plan for the world for the 21st century, that at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let me urge you to find your place in this Gospel plan, to do the work of an evangelist, to build up and reform the church, and to preach Christ in all his glory as God's Son, the Head of his church, and our Saviour.

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