Why We Need the Puritans

James I. Packer

Professor Packer has just retired from his Chair at Regent College, Vancouver. This article, which we could have retitled 'Why Theological Students Need the Puritans', is taken, practically without revision, from Among God's Giants, *copyright © J.I. Packer 1991. Used by permission of Kingsway Communications Ltd, Lottdridge Drove, Eastbourne BN23 6NT.*

Introducing the Puritans

Horse racing is said to be the sport of kings. The sport of slinging mud has, however, a wider following. Pillorying the Puritans, in particular, has long been a popular pastime both sides of the Atlantic, and most people's image of Puritanism still has on it much disfiguring dirt that needs to be scraped off.

'Puritan' as a name was, in fact, mud from the start. Coined in the early 1560s, it was always a satirical smear word implying peevishness, censoriousness, conceit, and a measure of hypocrisy, over and above its basic implication of religiously motivated discontent with what was seen as Elizabeth's Laodicean and compromising Church of England. Later, the word gained the further, political connotation of being against the Stuart monarchy and for some sort of republicanism; its primary reference, however, was still to what was seen as an odd, furious, and ugly form of Protestant religion.

In England, anti-Puritan feeling was let loose at the time of the Restoration and has flowed freely ever since. In North America it built up slowly after the days of Jonathan Edwards to reach its zenith a hundred years ago in post-Puritan New England. For the past half-century, however, scholars have been meticulously wiping away the mud, and as Michelangelo's frescoes in the Sistine Chapel have unfamiliar colours today now that restorers have removed the dark varnish, so the conventional image of the Puritans has been radically revamped, at least for those in the know. (Knowledge, alas, travels slowly in some quarters.) Taught by Perry Miller, William Haller, Marshall Knappen, Percy Scholes, Edmund Morgan, and a host of more recent researchers, informed folk now acknowledge that the typical Puritans were not wild men, fierce and freaky, religious fanatics and social extremists, but sober, conscientious, and cultured citizens: persons of principle, devoted, determined, and disciplined, excelling in the domestic virtues, and with no obvious shortcomings save a tendency to run to words when saying anything important, whether to God or to man. At last the record has been put straight.

But even so, the suggestion that we *need* the Puritans – we late twentieth-century Westerners, with all our sophistication and mastery of technique in both secular and sacred fields – may prompt some lifting of eyebrows. The belief that the Puritans, even if they were in fact responsible citizens, were comic and pathetic in equal degree, being naive and superstitious, primitive and gullible, superserious, overscrupulous, majoring in minors, and unable or unwilling to relax, dies hard. What could these zealots give us that we need, it is asked.

The answer, in one word, is maturity. Maturity is a compound of wisdom, goodwill, resilience, and creativity. The Puritans exemplified maturity; we don't. We are spiritual dwarfs. A much-travelled leader, a Native American (be it said), has declared that he finds North American Protestantism, man-centred, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sentimental, as it blatantly is, to be 3,000 miles wide and half an inch deep. The Puritans, by contrast, as a body were giants. They were great souls serving a great God. In them clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined. Visionary and practical, idealistic and realistic too, goal-oriented and methodical, they were great believers, great hopers, great doers, and great sufferers. But their sufferings, both sides of the ocean (in old England from the authorities and in New England from the elements), seasoned and ripened them till they gained a stature that was nothing short of heroic. Ease and luxury, such as our affluence brings us today, do not make for maturity; hardship and struggle however do, and the Puritans' battles against the evangelical and climatic wilderness in which God set them produced a virility of character, undaunted and unsinkable, rising above discouragement and fears, for which the true precedents and models are men like Moses, and Nehemiah, and Peter after Pentecost, and the apostle Paul.

Spiritual warfare made the Puritans what they were. They accepted conflict as their calling, seeing themselves as their Lord's soldier-pilgrims, just as in Bunyan's allegory, and not expecting to be able to advance a single step without opposition of one sort or another. Wrote John Geree, in his tract *The Character of an Old English Puritane or Nonconformist* (1646): 'His whole life he accounted a warfare, wherein Christ was his captain, his arms, praiers and tears. The Crosse his Banner and his word [motto] *Vincit qui patitur* [he who suffers conquers].'[1]

The Puritans lost, more or less, every public battle that they fought. Those who stayed in England did not change the

Church of England as they hoped to do, nor did they revive more than a minority of its adherents, and eventually they were driven out of Anglicanism by calculated pressure on their consciences. Those who crossed the Atlantic failed to establish new Jerusalem in New England; for the first 50 years their little colonies barely survived. They hung on by the skin of their teeth. But the moral and spiritual victories that the Puritans won by keeping sweet, peaceful, patient, obedient, and hopeful under sustained and seemingly intolerable pressures and frustrations give them a place of high honour in the believers' hall of fame, where Hebrews 11 is the first gallery. It was out of this constant furnace-experience that their maturity was wrought and their wisdom concerning discipleship was refined. George Whitefield, the evangelist, wrote of them as follows:

> Ministers never write or preach so well as when under the cross; the Spirit of Christ and of glory then rests upon them. It was this, no doubt, that made the Puritans . . . such burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew-act [the 1662 Act of Uniformity] and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in an especial manner wrote and preached as men having authority. Though dead, by their writings they yet speak; a peculiar unction attends them to this very hour. . . .[2]

Those words come from a preface to a reprint of Bunyan's works that appeared in 1767; but the unction continues, the authority is still felt, and the mature wisdom still remains breathtaking, as all modern Puritan-readers soon discover for themselves. Through the legacy of this literature the Puritans can help us today towards the maturity that they knew, and that we need.

Six lessons

In what ways can they do this? Let me suggest some specifics. First, there are lessons for us in *the integration of their daily lives*. As their Christianity was all-embracing, so their living was all of a piece. Nowadays we would call their lifestyle holistic: all awareness, activity, and enjoyment, all 'use of the creatures' and development of personal powers and creativity, was integrated in the single purpose of honouring God by appreciating all his gifts and making everything 'holiness to the Lord'. There was for them no disjunction between sacred and secular; all creation, so far as they were concerned, was sacred, and all activities, of whatever kind, must be sanctified, that is, done to the glory of God. So, in their heavenly-minded ardour, the Puritans became men and women of order, matter-of-fact and down-to-earth, prayerful, purposeful, practical. Seeing life whole, they integrated contemplation with action, worship with work, labour with rest, love of God with love of neighbour and of self, personal with social identity, and the wide spectrum of relational responsibilities with each other, in a thoroughly conscientious and thought-out way. In this thoroughness they were extreme, that is to say far more thorough than we are, but in their blending of the whole wide range of Christian duties set forth in Scripture they were eminently balanced. They lived by 'method' (we would say, by a rule of life), planning and proportioning their time with care, not so much to keep bad things out as to make sure that they got all good and important things in – necessary wisdom, then as now, for busy people! We today, who tend to live unplanned lives at random in a series of non-communicating compartments and who hence feel swamped and distracted most of the time, could learn much from the Puritans at this point.

Second, there are lessons for us in *the quality of their spiritual experience*. In the Puritans' communion with God, as Jesus Christ was central, so Holy Scripture was supreme. By Scripture, as God's word of instruction about divine-human relationships, they sought to live, and here, too, they were conscientiously methodical. Knowing themselves to be creatures of thought, affection, and will, and knowing that God's way to the human heart (the will) is via the human head (the mind), the Puritans practised meditation, discursive and systematic, on the whole range of biblical truth as they saw it applying to themselves. Puritan meditation on Scripture was modelled on the Puritan sermon; in meditation the Puritan would seek to search and challenge his heart, stir his affections to hate sin and love righteousness, and encourage himself with God's promises, just as Puritan preachers would do from the pulpit. This rational, resolute, passionate piety was conscientious without becoming obsessive, law-oriented without lapsing into legalism, and expressive of Christian liberty without any shameful lurches into licence. The Puritans knew that Scripture is the unalterable rule of holiness, and never allowed themselves to forget it. Knowing also the dishonesty and deceitfulness of fallen human hearts, they cultivated humility and self-suspicion as abiding attitudes, and examined themselves regularly for spiritual blind spots and lurking inward evils. They may not be called morbid or introspective on this account, however; on the contrary, they found the discipline of self-examination by Scripture (not the same thing as introspection, let us note), followed by the discipline of confessing and forsaking sin and renewing one's gratitude to Christ for his pardoning mercy, to be a source of great inner peace and joy. We today, who know to our cost that we have unclear minds, uncontrolled affections, and unstable wills when it comes to serving God, and who again and again find ourselves being imposed on by irrational, emotional romanticism disguised as super-spirituality, could profit much from the Puritans' example at this point too.

Third, there are lessons for us in *their passion for effective action*. Though the Puritans, like the rest of the human race, had their dreams of what could and should be, they were decidedly not the kind of people that we would call 'dreamy'! They had no time for the idleness of the lazy or passive person who leaves it to others to change the world. They were men of action in the pure Reformed mould – crusading activists without a jot of self-reliance; workers for God who depended utterly on God to work in and through them, and who always gave God the praise for anything they did that in retrospect seemed to them to have been right; gifted men who prayed earnestly that God would enable them to use their powers, not for self-display, but for his praise. None of them wanted to be revolutionaries in church or state, though some of them reluctantly became such; all of them, however, longed to be effective change agents for God wherever shifts from sin to sanctity were called for. So Cromwell and his army made long, strong prayers before each battle, and preachers made long, strong prayers privately before ever venturing into the pulpit, and laymen made long, strong prayers before tackling any matter of importance (marriage, business deals, major purchases, or whatever). Today, however, Christians in the West are found to be on the whole passionless, passive, and, one fears, prayerless; cultivating an ethos which encloses personal piety in a pietistic cocoon, they leave public affairs to go their own way and neither expect nor for the most part seek influence beyond their own Christian circle. Where the Puritans prayed and laboured for a holy England and New England, sensing that where privilege is neglected and unfaithfulness reigns national judgment threatens, modern Christians gladly settle for conventional social respectability and, having done so, look no further. Surely it is obvious that at this point also the Puritans have a great deal to teach us.

Fourth, there are lessons for us in *their programme for family stability*. It is hardly too much to say that the Puritans created the Christian family in the English-speaking world. The Puritan ethic of marriage was to look not for a partner whom you *do* love passionately at this moment, but rather for one whom you *can* love steadily as your best friend for life, and then to proceed with God's help to do just that. The Puritan ethic of nurture was to train up children in the way they should go, to care for their bodies and souls together, and to educate them for sober, godly, socially useful adult living. The Puritan ethic of home life was based on maintaining order, courtesy, and family worship. Goodwill, patience, consistency, and an encouraging attitude were seen as the essential domestic virtues. In an age of routine discomforts, rudimentary medicine without pain-killers, frequent bereavements (most families lost at least as many children as they reared), an average life expectancy of just under 30 years, and economic hardship for almost all save merchant princes and landed gentry, family life was a school for character in every sense, and the fortitude with which Puritans resisted the all-too-familiar temptation to relieve pressure from the world by brutality at home, and laboured to honour God in their families despite all, merits supreme praise. At home the Puritans showed themselves (to use an overworked term) mature, accepting hardships and disappointments realistically as from God and refusing to be daunted or soured by any of them. Also, it was at home in the first instance that the Puritan layman practised evangelism and ministry. 'His family he endeavoured to make a Church,' wrote Geree, '. . . labouring that those that were born in it, might be born again to God.'[3] In

an era in which family life has become brittle even among Christians, with chicken-hearted spouses taking the easy course of separation rather than working at their relationship, and narcissistic parents spoiling their children materially while neglecting them spiritually, there is once more much to be learned from the Puritans' very different ways.

Fifth, there are lessons to be learned from their *sense of human worth*. Through believing in a great God (the God of Scripture, undiminished and undomesticated), they gained a vivid awareness of the greatness of moral issues, of eternity, and of the human soul. Hamlet's 'What a piece of work is man !' is a very Puritan sentiment; the wonder of human individuality was something that they felt keenly. Though, under the influence of their medieval heritage, which told them that error has no rights, they did not in every case manage to respect those who differed publicly from them, their appreciation of man's dignity as the creature made to be God's friend was strong, and so in particular was their sense of the beauty and nobility of human holiness. In the collectivized urban anthill where most of us live nowadays the sense of each individual's eternal significance is much eroded, and the Puritan spirit is at this point a corrective from which we can profit greatly.

Sixth, there are lessons to be learned from the Puritans' *ideal of church renewal*. To be sure, 'renewal' was not a word that they used; they spoke only of 'reformation' and 'reform', which words suggest to our twentieth-century minds a concern that is limited to the externals of the church's orthodoxy, order, worship forms and disciplinary code. But when the Puritans preached, published, and prayed for 'reformation' they had in mind, not indeed less than this, but far more. On the title page of the original edition of Richard Baxter's *The Reformed Pastor*, the word 'reformed' was printed in much larger type than any other, and one does not have to read far before discovering that for Baxter a 'reformed' pastor was not one who campaigned for Calvinism but one whose ministry to his people as preacher, teacher, catechist and role-model showed him to be, as we would say, 'revived' or 'renewed'. The essence of this kind of 'reformation' was enrichment of understanding of God's truth, arousal of affections God-ward, increase of ardour in one's devotions, and more love, joy, and firmness of Christian purpose in one's calling and personal life. In line with this, the ideal for the church was that through 'reformed' clergy all the members of each congregation should be 'reformed' – brought, that is, by God's grace without disorder into a state of what we would call revival, so as to be truly and thoroughly converted, theologically orthodox and sound, spiritually alert and expectant, in character terms wise and mature, ethically enterprising and obedient, and humbly but joyously sure of their salvation. This was the goal at which Puritan pastoral ministry aimed throughout, both in English parishes and in the 'gathered' churches of congregational type that multiplied in the mid-seventeenth century.

The Puritans' concern for spiritual awakening in communities is to some extent hidden from us by their institutionalism; recalling the upheavals of English Methodism and the Great Awakening, we think of revival ardour as always putting a strain on established order, whereas the Puritans envisaged 'reform' at congregational level coming in disciplined style through faithful preaching, catechising, and spiritual service on the pastor's part. Clericalism, with its damming up of lay initiative, was doubtless a Puritan limitation, and one which boomeranged when lay zeal finally boiled over in Cromwell's army, in Quakerism, and in the vast sectarian underworld of Commonwealth times; but the other side of that coin was the nobility of the pastor's profile that the Puritans evolved – gospel preacher and Bible teacher, shepherd and physician of souls, catechist and counsellor, trainer and disciplinarian, all in one. From the Puritans' ideals and goals for church life, which were unquestionably and abidingly right, and from their standards for clergy, which were challengingly and searchingly high, there is yet again a great deal that modern Christians can and should take to heart.

These are just a few of the most obvious areas in which the Puritans can help us in these days.

The Puritan dream

The foregoing celebration of Puritan greatness may leave some readers sceptical. It is, however, as was hinted earlier, wholly in line with the major reassessment of Puritanism that has taken place in historical scholarship. Fifty years ago the academic study of Puritanism went over a watershed with the discovery that there was such a thing as Puritan culture, and a rich culture at that, over and above Puritan reactions against certain facets of medieval and Renaissance culture. The common assumption of earlier days, that Puritans both sides of the Atlantic were characteristically morbid, obsessive, uncouth and unintelligent, was left behind. Satirical aloofness towards Puritan thought-life gave way to sympathetic attentiveness, and the exploring of Puritan beliefs and ideals became an academic cottage industry of impressive vigour, as it still is. North America led the way with four books published over two years which between them ensured that Puritan studies could never be the same again. These were: William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism* (Columbia University Press, New York, 1938); A.S.P. Woodhouse, *Puritanism and Liberty* (Macmillan, London, 1938; Woodhouse taught at Toronto); M.M. Knappen, *Tudor Puritanism* (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1939); and Perry Miller, *The New England Mind Vol. I: The Seventeenth Century* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA, 1939). Many books from the thirties and later have confirmed the view of Puritanism which these four volumes yielded, and the overall picture that has emerged is as follows.

Puritanism was at heart a spiritual movement, passionately concerned with God and godliness. It began in England with William Tyndale the Bible translator, Luther's contemporary, a generation before the word 'Puritan' was coined, and it continued till the latter years of the seventeenth century, some decades after 'Puritan' had fallen out of use. Into its making went Tyndale's reforming biblicism; John Bradford's piety of the heart and conscience; John Knox's zeal for God's honour in national churches; the passion for evangelical pastoral competence that is seen in John Hooper, Edward Dering and Richard Greenham; the view of Holy Scripture as the 'regulative principle' of church worship and order that fired Thomas Cartwright; the anti-Roman, anti-Arminian, anti-Socinian, anti-Antinomian Calvinism that John Owen and the Westminster standards set forth; the comprehensive ethical interest that reached its apogee in Richard Baxter's monumental *Christian Directory*; and the purpose of popularizing and making practical the teaching of the Bible that gripped Perkins and Bunyan, with many more. Puritanism was essentially a movement for church reform, pastoral renewal and evangelism, and spiritual revival; and in addition – indeed, as a direct expression of its zeal for God's honour – it was a world-view, a total Christian philosophy, in intellectual terms a Protestantized and updated medievalism, and in terms of spirituality a reformed monasticism outside the cloister and away from monkish vows.

The Puritan goal was to complete what England's Reformation began: to finish reshaping Anglican worship, to introduce effective church discipline into Anglican parishes, to establish righteousness in the political, domestic, and socio-economic fields, and to convert all Englishmen to a vigorous evangelical faith. Through the preaching and teaching of the gospel, and the sanctifying of all arts, sciences, and skills, England was to become a land of saints, a model and paragon of corporate godliness, and as such a means of blessing to the world.

Such was the Puritan dream as it developed under Elizabeth, James, and Charles, and blossomed in the Interregnum, before it withered in the dark tunnel of persecution between 1660 (Restoration) and 1689 (Toleration). This dream bred giants.

Neglect at your peril!

What I present here is, I confess, advocacy, barefaced and unashamed. I am seeking to make good the claim that the Puritans can teach us lessons that we badly need to learn. Let me pursue my line of argument a little further.

It must by now be apparent that the great Puritan pastor-theologians – Owen, Baxter, Goodwin, Howe, Perkins, Sibbes, Brooks, Watson, Gurnall, Flavel, Bunyan, Manton, and others

like them – were men of outstanding intellectual power, as well as spiritual insight. In them mental habits fostered by sober scholarship were linked with a flaming zeal for God and a minute acquaintance with the human heart. All their work displays this unique fusion of gifts and graces. In thought and outlook they were radically God-centred. Their appreciation of God's sovereign majesty was profound, and their reverence in handling his written word was deep and constant. They were patient, thorough, and methodical in searching the Scriptures, and their grasp of the various threads and linkages in the web of revealed truth was firm and clear. They understood most richly the ways of God with men, the glory of Christ the Mediator, and the work of the Spirit in the believer and the church.

And their knowledge was no mere theoretical orthodoxy. They sought to 'reduce to practice' (their own phrase) all that God taught them. They yoked their consciences to his Word, disciplining themselves to bring all activities under the scrutiny of Scripture, and to demand a theological, as distinct from a merely pragmatic, justification for everything that they did. They applied their understanding of the mind of God to every branch of life, seeing the church, the family, the state, the arts and sciences, the world of commerce and industry, no less than the devotions of the individual, as so many spheres in which God must be served and honoured. They saw life whole, for they saw its Creator as Lord of each department of it, and their purpose was that 'holiness to the Lord' might be written over it in its entirety.

Nor was this all. Knowing God, the Puritans also knew man. They saw him as in origin a noble being, made in God's image to rule God's earth, but now tragically brutified and brutalized by sin. They viewed sin in the triple light of God's law, lordship, and holiness, and so saw it as transgression and guilt, as rebellion and usurpation, and as uncleanness, corruption, and inability for good. Seeing this, and knowing the ways whereby the Spirit brings sinners to faith and new life in Christ, and leads saints, on the one hand, to grow into their Saviour's image, and, on the other, to learn their total dependence on grace, the great Puritans became superb pastors. The depth and unction of their 'practical and experimental' expositions in the pulpit was no more outstanding than was their skill in the study in applying spiritual physic to sick souls. From Scripture they mapped the often bewildering terrain of the life of faith and fellowship with God with great thoroughness (see *Pilgrim's Progress* for a pictorial gazetteer), and their acuteness and wisdom in diagnosing spiritual malaise and setting out the appropriate biblical remedies was outstanding. They remain the classic pastors of Protestantism, just as men like Whitefield and Spurgeon stand as its classic evangelists.

Now it is here, on the pastoral front, that today's evangelical Christians most need help. Our numbers, it seems, have increased in recent years, and a new interest in the old paths of evangelical theology has grown. For this we should thank God. But not all evangelical zeal is according to knowledge, nor do the virtues and values of the biblical Christian life always come together as they should, and three groups in particular in today's evangelical world seem very obviously to need help of a kind that the Puritans, as we meet them in their writings, are uniquely qualified to give. These I call *restless experientialists, entrenched intellectualists*, and *disaffected deviationists*. They are not, of course, organized bodies of opinion, but individual persons with characteristic mentalities that one meets over and over again. Take them, now, in order.

Those whom I call *restless experientialists* are a familiar breed, so much so that observers are sometimes tempted to define evangelicalism in terms of them. Their outlook is one of casual haphazardness and fretful impatience, of grasping after novelties, entertainments, and 'highs', and of valuing strong feelings above deep thoughts. They have little taste for solid study, humble self-examination, disciplined meditation, and unspectacular hard work in their callings and their prayers. They conceive the Christian life as one of exciting extraordinary experiences rather than of resolute rational righteousness. They dwell continually on the themes of joy, peace, happiness, satisfaction and rest of soul with no balancing reference to the divine discontent of Romans 7, the fight of faith of Psalm 73, or the 'lows' of Psalms 42, 88 and 102. Through their influence the spontaneous jollity of the simple extravert comes to be equated with healthy Christian living, while saints of less sanguine and more complex temperament get driven almost to distraction because they cannot bubble over in the prescribed manner. In their restlessness these exuberant ones become uncritically credulous, reasoning that the more odd and striking an experience the more divine, supernatural, and spiritual it must be, and they scarcely give the scriptural virtue of steadiness a thought.

It is no counter to these defects to appeal to the specialized counselling techniques that extravert evangelicals have developed for pastoral purposes in recent years; for spiritual life is fostered, and spiritual maturity engendered, not by techniques but by truth, and if our techniques have been formed in terms of a defective notion of the truth to be conveyed and the goal to be aimed at, they cannot make us better pastors or better believers than we were before. The reason why the restless experientialists are lopsided is that they have fallen victim to a form of worldliness, a man-centred, anti-rational individualism, which turns Christian life into a thrill-seeking ego-trip. Such saints need the sort of maturing ministry in which the Puritan tradition has specialized.

What Puritan emphases can establish and settle restless experientialists? These, to start with. First, the stress on God-centredness as a divine requirement that is central to the discipline of self-denial. Second, the insistence on the primacy of the mind, and on the impossibility of obeying biblical truth that one has not yet understood. Third, the demand for humility, patience, and steadiness at all times, and for an acknowledgment that the Holy Spirit's main ministry is not to give thrills but to create in us Christlike character. Fourth, the recognition that feelings go up and down, and that God frequently tries us by leading us through wastes of emotional flatness. Fifth, the singling out of worship as life's primary activity. Sixth, the stress on our need of regular self-examination by Scripture, in terms set by Psalm 139:23-24. Seventh, the realization that sanctified suffering bulks large in God's plan for his children's growth in grace. No Christian tradition of teaching administers this purging and strengthening medicine with more masterful authority than does that of the Puritans, whose own dispensing of it nurtured a marvellously strong and resilient type of Christian for a century and more, as we have seen.

Think now of *entrenched intellectualists* in the evangelical world: a second familiar breed, though not so common as the previous type. Some of them seem to be victims of an insecure temperament and inferiority feelings, others to be reacting out of pride or pain against the zaniness of experientialism as they have perceived it, but whatever the source of their syndrome the behaviour-pattern in which they express it is distinctive and characteristic. Constantly they present themselves as rigid, argumentative, critical Christians, champions of God's truth for whom orthodoxy is all. Upholding and defending their own view of that truth, whether Calvinist or Arminian, dispensational or Pentecostal, national church reformist or Free Church separatist, or whatever it might be, is their leading interest, and they invest themselves unstintingly in this task. There is little warmth about them; relationally they are remote; experiences do not mean much to them; winning the battle for mental correctness is their one great purpose. They see, truly enough, that in our anti-rational, feeling-oriented, instant-gratification culture conceptual knowledge of divine things is undervalued, and they seek with passion to right the balance at this point. They understand the priority of the intellect well; the trouble is that intellectualism, expressing itself in endless campaigns for their own brand of right thinking, is almost if not quite all that they can offer, for it is almost if not quite all that they have. They too, so I urge, need exposure to the Puritan heritage for their maturing.

That last statement might sound paradoxical, since it will not have escaped the reader that the above profile corresponds to what many still suppose the typical Puritan to have been. But when we ask what emphases Puritan tradition contains to counter arid intellectualism, a whole series of points springs to view. First, true religion claims the affections as well as the intellect; it is essentially, in Richard Baxter's phrase, 'heart-work'. Second, theological truth is for practice. William Perkins defined theology as the science of living blessedly for ever; William Ames called it the science of living to God. Third, conceptual knowledge kills if one does not move from knowing notions to knowing the realities to which they refer – in this

case, from knowing about God to a relational acquaintance with God himself. Fourth, faith and repentance, issuing in a life of love and holiness, that is, of gratitude expressed in goodwill and good works, are explicitly called for in the gospel. Fifth, the Spirit is given to lead us into close companionship with others in Christ. Sixth, the discipline of discursive meditation is meant to keep us ardent and adoring in our love affair with God. Seventh, it is ungodly and scandalous to become a firebrand and cause division in the church, and it is ordinarily nothing more reputable than spiritual pride in its intellectual form that leads men to create parties and splits. The great Puritans were as humble-minded and warm-hearted as they were clear-headed, as fully oriented to people as they were to Scripture, and as passionate for peace as they were for truth. They would certainly have diagnosed today's fixated Christian intellectualists as spiritually stunted, not in their zeal for the form of sound words but in their lack of zeal for anything else; and the thrust of Puritan teaching about God's truth in man's life is still potent to ripen such souls into whole and mature human beings.

I turn finally to those whom I call *disaffected deviationists*, the casualties and dropouts of the modern evangelical movement, many of whom have now turned against it to denounce it as a neurotic perversion of Christianity. Here, too, is a breed that we know all too well. It is distressing to think of these folk, both because their experience to date discredits our evangelicalism so deeply and also because there are so many of them. Who are they? They are people who once saw themselves as evangelicals, either from being evangelically nurtured or from coming to profess conversion within the evangelical sphere of influence, but who have become disillusioned about the evangelical point of view and have turned their back on it, feeling that it let them down. Some leave it for intellectual reasons, judging that what was taught them was so simplistic as to stifle their minds and so unrealistic and out of touch with facts as to be really if unintentionally dishonest. Others leave because they were led to expect that as Christians they would enjoy health, wealth, trouble-free circumstances, immunity from relational hurts, betrayals, and failures, and from making mistakes and bad decisions; in short, a flowery bed of ease on which they would be carried happily to heaven – and these great expectations were in due course refuted by events. Hurt and angry, feeling themselves victims of a confidence trick, they now accuse the evangelicalism they knew of having failed and fooled them, and resentfully give it up; it is a mercy if they do not therewith similarly accuse and abandon God himself. Modern evangelicalism has much to answer for in the number of casualties of this sort that it has caused in recent years by its naivety of mind and unrealism of expectation. But here again the soberer, profounder, wiser evangelicalism of the Puritan giants can fulfil a corrective and therapeutic function in our midst, if only we will listen to its message.

What have the Puritans to say to us that might serve to heal the disaffected casualties of modern evangelical goofiness? Anyone who reads the writings of Puritan authors will find in them much that helps in this way. Puritan authors regularly tell us, first, of the *mystery* of God: that our God is too small, that the real God cannot be put without remainder into a man-made conceptual box so as to be fully understood; and that he was, is, and always will be bewilderingly inscrutable in his dealing with those who trust and love him, so that 'losses and crosses', that is, bafflement and disappointment in relation to particular hopes one has entertained, must be accepted as a recurring element in one's life of fellowship with him. Then they tell us, second, of the *love* of God: that it is a love that redeems, converts, sanctifies, and ultimately glorifies sinners, and that Calvary was the one place in human history where it was fully and unambiguously revealed, and that in relation to our own situation we may know for certain that nothing can separate us from that love (Rom. 8:38f.), although no situation in this world will ever be free from flies in the ointment and thorns in the bed. Developing the theme of divine love, the Puritans tell us, third, of the *salvation* of God: that the Christ who put away our sins and brought us God's pardon is leading us through this world to a glory for which we are even now being prepared by the instilling of desire for it and capacity to enjoy it, and that holiness here, in the form of consecrated service and loving obedience through thick and thin, is the high road to happiness hereafter. Following this they tell us, fourth, about *spiritual conflict*, the many ways in which the world, the flesh and the devil seek to lay us low; fifth, about the *protection* of God, whereby he overrules and sanctifies the conflict, often allowing one evil to touch our lives in order thereby to shield us from greater evils; and, sixth, about the *glory* of God, which it becomes our privilege to further by our celebrating of his grace, by our proving of his power under perplexity and pressure, by totally resigning ourselves to his good pleasure, and by making him our joy and delight at all times.

By ministering to us these precious biblical truths the Puritans give us the resources we need to cope with 'the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune', and offer the casualties an insight into what has happened to them that can raise them above self-pitying resentment and reaction and restore their spiritual health completely. Puritan sermons show that problems about providence are in no way new; the seventeenth century had its own share of spiritual casualties, saints who had thought simplistically and hoped unrealistically and were now disappointed, disaffected, despondent and despairing, and the Puritans' ministry to us at this point is simply the spin-off of what they were constantly saying to raise up and encourage wounded spirits among their own people.

I think the answer to the question, why we need the Puritans, is now pretty clear, and I conclude my argument at this point. I, who owe more to the Puritans than to any other theologians I have ever read, and who know that I need them still, have been trying to persuade you that perhaps you need them too. Theological voices abound: I urge all theological students to give special heed to those of the Puritans.

[1]Cited from Gordon S. Wakefield, *Puritan Devotion* (Epworth Press: London, 1957), p. x.

[2]George Whitefield, *Works* (London, 1771), IV: pp. 306f.

[3]Wakefield, *loc. cit.* One cannot help thinking of the married lady who came to tell D.L. Moody that she thought she was called to be a preacher. 'Have you got any children at home?' Moody asked. 'Yes, six.' 'There's your congregation; off you go!'