

Lesson II: Elizabethan Puritanism

I. The Rise of Puritanism

- Reign of Elizabeth I (r. 1558-1603)
 - Elizabeth was the only child of Henry VIII and Anne Boleyn
 - Ascended the throne at age 25 upon her sister Mary's death
 - Protestant but very cautious about church reform (traditionalist)
 - Act of Supremacy in 1559 made Queen Elizabeth the Supreme Governor of the Church of England
 - Episcopal church structure (bishops) with broadly Reformed theology
 - A *via media* (middle way) between Rome & Geneva
 - The Thirty-Nine Articles of Faith were issued by Convocation in 1563 and finalized by Parliament in 1571
 - Elizabeth's 45-year reign firmly established Protestantism as the faith of the English nation (though not without controversy)
- Rise of Puritanism
 - Puritanism had its roots in the pioneering work of bible translator William Tyndale in the 1530s and Edwardian Reformers like Bishop John Hooper in the 1550s
 - The term "Puritan" was first used in the 1560s as an insult against those Protestants that sought further reform in the Church of England (something Queen Elizabeth would not countenance due to the European political situation and her own religious proclivities)
 - Puritanism had many sympathetic friends within the political establishment including the Queen's best friend Robert Dudley (Earl of Leicester), chief advisors William Cecil (Lord Burghley) & Sir Francis Walsingham, and future Archbishop of Canterbury Edmund Grindal
- Puritan Objections to the Elizabethan Settlement
 - The movement known as "Puritanism" was principally concerned with fostering a learned preaching ministry in the Church of England (CoE) and an active, bible-focused laity
 - Early Puritanism was normally at odds with the Church over the concept of *adiaphora* (things indifferent) and church discipline. The Puritans believed that the Church's concept of *adiaphora* was far too broad and sinfully coercive.
 - The Puritans were opposed to four CoE practices:
 - Clerical vestments (surplice)
 - Sign of the cross in baptism
 - Kneeling at communion
 - Wedding rings
- Puritanism as a Lay Movement
 - It is a common but serious historical error to think of Puritanism as just a movement of "godly" ministers

- Puritanism was a vigorous movement of not only ministers but also of laymen from all classes of society
- These lay people wanted the truth of the Bible delivered from the pulpit and often endowed lectureships in order to employ godly preachers when their own parish ministers were lacking in knowledge, skill, or sound doctrine

II. Puritan Controversies

- The Vestiarian Controversy (1560s)
 - Vestments are special garments worn by clergy during religious services
 - The Puritans objected to vestments, particularly the surplice, because they felt it *“conjured up images of the Roman, and ultimately of the Jewish priesthood, clean contrary to the gospel and to the general tenor of scriptures; they were therefore snares for the simple, not matters of indifference...”* - Patrick Collinson
 - The earliest Puritan manifesto (1566) was written against vestments
 - Several Puritan ministers and their episcopal opponents appealed to Reformed leaders in Zürich and Geneva for their opinion on whether clerical vestments were permissible in worship (most of these leaders told the Puritans to get over it as long as the CoE maintained sound doctrine)
 - Archbishop Parker and Bishop Grindle enforced conformity around London in 1566 and deprived several leading Puritan ministers of their posts
- Prophesyings (1570s)
 - Prophesyings were routine, popular “bible conferences” held in many dioceses of the Church of England with the primary purpose being to foster biblical education and brotherly conference amongst the clergy
 - A typical prophesying involved:
 - Three or four ministers preaching different divisions (exegesis, doctrine, application) of the same biblical text in front of a public audience
 - Afterwards fellow ministers and, in some prophesyings, laymen would be allowed to ask questions or debate the doctrine preached
 - The ministers would then hold a private meeting amongst themselves to encourage/rebuke each other followed by an informal dinner
 - Elizabeth ordered the Archbishop of Canterbury, Edmund Grindal, to suppress these meetings in 1576 but he **BOLDLY** refused her demands
 - *And for my own part, because I am very well assured, both by reasons and arguments taken out of the holy Scriptures and by experience (the most certain seal of sure knowledge) that the said exercises for the interpretation and exposition of the Scriptures and for exhortation and comfort drawn out of the same are both profitable to increase knowledge among the ministers and tendeth to the edifying of the hearers: I am forced, with all humility, and yet plainly, to profess that I cannot with safe conscience and without the offence of the majesty of God give my assent to the suppressing of the said exercises; much less can I send out any injunction for the utter and universal subversion of the same. I say with St Paul, ‘I have no power to*

*destroy, but to only edify; and with the same apostle, 'I can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth'. If it be your Majesty's pleasure, for this or any other cause, to remove me out of this place, I will with all humility yield thereunto and render again to your Majesty that I received of the same...**Bear with me, I beseech you, Madam, if I choose rather to offend your earthly Majesty than to offend the heavenly majesty of God.***

- Elizabeth suspended Grindal in 1577 from exercising his duties as Archbishop and directly ordered her bishops to suppress the prophesyings in their dioceses
- Rise of Presbyterianism (1570s & 1580s)
 - Many Puritans believed in an “equality of ministry” in the church
 - There should be no bishops or at least no bishops with sole disciplinary power
 - Congregations should be able to choose their own ministers
 - Thomas Cartwright lost his position as Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity at Cambridge, and eventually his fellowship, after his 1570 lecture series on the book of Acts insisted that Scripture mandated a Presbyterian polity in the church
 - The 1572 *Admonition to Parliament*, written by John Field and Thomas Wilcox, insisted on eliminating the episcopacy and implementing a Presbyterian Church of England and created a pamphlet war over the issue between the now deprived Thomas Cartwright and his rival John Whitgift (future Archbishop of Canterbury)
 - Some Puritans continued to make a large push for Presbyterianism throughout the 1570s/1580s though most were willing to operate under the episcopal system
 - **Remember:** Not all Puritans were Presbyterians but all Presbyterians were Puritans
- The Classis Movement (1580s)
 - A Presbyterian movement **within** the Church of England where interested ministers would voluntarily join *classis* (aka presbyteries) for mutual edification, discipline, and provision of gospel ministry for the churches of their local area
 - Classis effectively created a “church within a church”
 - The classis movement flourished in secret during the 1580s but was ultimately suppressed in the wake of the Martin Marprelate controversy in the early 1590s
- The Martin Marprelate Tracts (1588-1589)
 - Seven anonymous tracts, penned mostly by Job Throkmorton and John Penry, that scathingly satirized the bishops of the Church of England
 - The tracts’ fictional character, Martin Marprelate, was nothing less than incendiary and Elizabethan England had seen nothing quite like these tracts
 - Marprelate claimed that all bishops were “*petty popes, and petty usurping antichrists...neither they nor their brood are to be tolerated in any Christian commonwealth.*”

- Marprelate vigorously argued that Presbyterianism was the biblical model of church government and thus not a matter of *adiaphora* (things indifferent)
 - The government thought the tracts were seditious and launched a nationwide manhunt for their authors in addition to initiating an anti-Martinist press campaign. Penry was executed in 1593, though not directly for being Marprelate, but Throkmorton managed to die in 1601 under prosperous circumstances
 - The tracts, while attempting to further a Presbyterian Church of England, were so salacious that they were opposed by many Puritans and inadvertently contributed to the destruction of the classis movement in the 1590s
- The Church Strikes Back (1580s & 1590s)
 - Archbishop of Canterbury John Whitgift (c. 1530-1604)
 - Succeeded the Puritan-friendly Archbishop Edmund Grindal in 1583
 - Some Puritan sensibilities in his early career but toned them down in order to advance in the church
 - A Calvinist in theology (*Lambeth Articles*) but an arch-enemy of the Puritans (*The Three Articles*)
 - Archbishop of Canterbury Richard Bancroft (1544-1610)
 - Instrumental in the suppression of Martin Marprelate and the classis movement in the 1590s
 - Sought to further restrict Puritans in the Church of England with the Canons of 1604
 - Chief overseer of the King James Bible translation
 - In 1593 Parliament passed an *Act Against the Puritans* which made Puritan nonconformity punishable by banishment, forfeiture of property, and even death for non-compliance
 - Richard Hooker (1554-1600) provided the anti-Puritan theological backbone for the later Anglican tradition through his *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* (1594)

III. Notable Puritans

- Thomas Cartwright (1535-1603)
 - **Education:** B.A. (1554), M.A. (~1562), B.D. (1567) degrees from Cambridge
 - **Professional:** Fellow at St. John's College & Trinity College, Cambridge (1560s); Lady Margaret Professor of Divinity, Cambridge (1569-1570); various pastorates around Europe (1570s-1590s)
 - **Other Facts:**
 - An early leader in the Elizabethan Presbyterian movement of the 1570s
 - Beza, Calvin's successor in Geneva, said, "*I think the sun does not see a more learned man.*"
 - Did not believe in separatism from the Church of England despite his belief in the biblical basis of Presbyterian church government

- Briefly imprisoned on several occasions for his views and writings (3 years total) but had the support of Elizabeth’s best friend Robert Dudley, her chief minister William Cecil, and even King James VI of Scotland (the future King James I of England)
- Laurence Chaderton (c. 1536-1640)
 - **Education:** B.A. (1567), M.A. (1571), B.D. (1578), D.D. (1613) from Cambridge
 - **Professional:** Fellow at Christ’s College, Cambridge (1568-1576); First Master of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (1584-1622); preached at St Clement’s Church, Cambridge (1567-1618)
 - **Other Facts:**
 - Disinherited by his father while at Cambridge for adopting the Reformed faith
 - As Master of Emmanuel College he mentored over 1000 men to include Puritan greats Arthur Dent, William Perkins, and Arthur Hildersham
 - Leader in the Classis Movement and initiated “conferences” for Bible study at Cambridge
 - One of four Puritans at the Hampton Court Conference in 1604
 - One of the translators for the KJV Bible (First Cambridge Committee)
 - Called the “Puritan Methuselah” by one historian due to his extreme age (103)
 - *“Chaderton was the pope of Cambridge puritanism. In the ’sixties and ’seventies he made Christ’s [College] a puritan seminary in all but name, and then in the ’eighties he carried the tradition over to Emmanuel [College]. Much that was distinctive of English and American civilization in the seventeenth century was shaped in these two neighbouring colleges which bred John Cotton and John Milton.”* - Patrick Collinson
- Richard Greenham (c. 1542-1594)
 - **Education:** B.A. (1564) & M.A. (1567) degrees from Cambridge
 - **Ministry:** Rector of Dry Drayton (1570-1591); Lecturer at Christ Church Greyfriars, Newgate in London (1592-1594)
 - **Other Facts:**
 - Turned Dry Drayton into a “rectory seminary” and mentored several future Puritan leaders including Arthur Hildersham & Henry Smith
 - Preached six times a week (twice on Sunday and four early morning sessions during the week)
 - Catechized for two hours twice a week (Thursdays & Sundays)
 - A pioneer in the field of Puritan casuistry (cases of conscience)
 - *“many, who came to him with weeping eyes, went from him with cheerful souls”*
- William Perkins (1558-1602)
 - **Education:** B.A. (1581) and M.A. (1584) from Christ’s College, Cambridge

- **Ministry:** Fellow at Christ's College (1584-1595); Lecturer at Great St. Andrew's Church (1584-1602); Dean of Christ's College (1590-1591)
- **Other Facts:**
 - Principle architect of the Puritan movement
 - Writings in England outsold Calvin, Beza, and Bullinger combined in his lifetime and his influence was sizable over the Synod of Dort
 - Pioneered Puritan casuistry (dealing with cases of conscience)
 - *"As his preaching was a comment on his text, so his practice was a comment on his preaching"*
- An example of Perkins' pastoral care as told in *Meet the Puritans* by Joel Beeke & Randall Pederson
 - Samuel Clarke offers a striking example of Perkins' pastoral care. He says a condemned prisoner was climbing the gallows, looking half-dead, when Perkins said to him, *"What man! What is the matter with thee? Art thou afraid of death?"* The prisoner confessed that he was less afraid of death than of what would follow it. *"Sayest thou so,"* said Perkins. *"Come down again man and thou shalt see what God's grace will do to strengthen thee."* When the prisoner came down, they knelt together, hand in hand, and Perkins offered *"such an effectual prayer in confession of sins...as made the poor prisoner burst out into abundance of tears."* Convinced the prisoner was brought *"low enough, even to Hell gates,"* Perkins showed him the gospel in prayer. Clarke writes that the prisoner's eyes were opened *"to see how the black lines of all his sins were crossed, and cancelled with the red lines of his crucified Savior's precious blood; so graciously applying it to his wounded conscience, as made him break out into new showers of tears for joy of the inward consolation which he found."* The prisoner rose from his knees, went cheerfully up the ladder, testified of salvation in Christ's blood, and bore his death with patience, *"as if he actually saw himself delivered from the Hell which he feared before, and heaven opened for the receiving of his soul, to the great rejoicing of the beholders"*

Elizabethan Puritan Timeline

- 1558 - The Protestant Queen Elizabeth I ascends the throne upon the death of her Catholic half-sister Queen Mary
- 1563 - 39 Articles of Religion first issued
- 1564 - First known use of the term *Puritan*
- 1566 - Vestiarian Controversy ends (Puritans lose)
- 1570 - Thomas Cartwright loses his professorship at Cambridge over his Presbyterian views
- 1571 - Parliament approves the 39 Articles
- 1572 - The *Admonition to Parliament* calls for a Presbyterian Church of England and leads to an intense pamphlet war between Cartwright & Whitgift
- 1576 - Archbishop Grindal refuses the Queen's command to suppress prophesyings
- 1577 - Archbishop Grindal suspended from performing his duties by the Queen
- 1580s - Rise of the *Classis* movement
- 1583 - John Whitgift becomes Archbishop of Canterbury (enemy of the Puritans)
- 1588 - First *Martin Marprelate* tracts published
- 1590s - *Classis* movement suppressed
- 1593 - *Act Against the Puritans* passed by Parliament
- 1594 - *Of the Lawes of Ecclesiastical Politie* published
- 1603 - Queen Elizabeth dies after a 45-year reign

Important Ecclesiastical and Academic Titles in Early Modern England

Ecclesiastical

1. **Benefice** - An ecclesiastical office which, under Canon law, carries certain duties and conditions (called the spiritualities) together with certain revenues (called the temporalities). The office holder is known as the Incumbent.
2. **Curate** - Assistant to a parish Incumbent (rector).
3. **Dean** - (1) A priest who is the administrator of a cathedral and the most senior priest of a diocese after the bishop. (2) In many parts of the Anglican Communion, parishes are grouped together to form deaneries, each being a constituent administrative district of the diocese. Usually, a deanery is led by one of the incumbents of the deanery's parishes, who is called a *rural dean*. Such a dean chairs the meeting of the deanery's clergy (which, like a cathedral, is called a chapter), and may also chair a deanery synod. Rural Deans (and those known by alternative titles) rank as *first among equals* of their chapters, and do not have the seniority of cathedral or diocesan deans.
4. **Incumbent** - This is a technical term for a member of the clergy who has primary administrative, pastoral, and liturgical responsibilities in a parish or congregation.
5. **Lecturer** - Clergy paid by lay church members to preach/teach in addition to the regular services conducted by the parish clergy.
6. **Rector** - A priest who has primary administrative, pastoral, and liturgical responsibilities in a parish or congregation (aka Incumbent).
7. **Vicar** - Functioned as parish priest in the place of a rector.

Academic

1. **Fellow** - An academic elected to a college at Cambridge or Oxford that preached, lectured, and tutored students in addition to acting as a guardian of their finances, morals, and manners.
2. **Master** - The principle of a college at Cambridge or Oxford.
3. **Vice Chancellor** - The chief academic & administrative officer at Cambridge or Oxford.