

Puritans, Separatists, Pilgrims

Historical Theology

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Author: Lonnie Moore

Who were the Puritans?

Why did some give up on Puritanism?

Why was it dangerous to separate from the Church of England?

- I. English Reformation Review
 - A. Early Signs of true Christianity
 1. John Wycliff 1328-1384
 - a. Catholic priest
 - b. Translated the scriptures into English
 - c. Questioned the privileges of the clergy
 - d. Did not believe in transubstantiation
 - e. Often in trouble but had friends in high places
 - f. Followers were called Lollards
 - g. Died in 1384, but bones dug up and burned in 1428
 2. Lollards
 - a. Derogatory term- muttering
 - b. Some Lollards were knights
 - c. Never were viewed a major threat to the Church
 - d. Kept the faith alive and laid the groundwork for real separation from the Church
 3. William Tyndale 1494-1536
 - a. Bible translator
 - b. Wycliff used the Vulgate, Tyndale used Greek and Hebrew
 - c. King James translators used Tyndale's work
 - d. Had spent a lot of time in Reform strongholds on the continent of Europe
 - e. Was against Henry VIII getting an annulment
 - f. Eventually was arrested for at the request of Henry
 - g. Probably kept on translating the Scriptures while in prison
 - h. Was executed for heresy (straggled, then burned at the stake)
 - B. The English Reformation Begins
 1. Henry VIII takes England out of the Roman Church
 - a. Originally a stalwart Catholic
 - b. Motivation for leaving the Church was a desire to have a male heir
 - c. Also, the King gained all of the Roman Church land
 - d. No real plan by the King to change doctrine or practice
 - e. But God had real reformers in place
 - f. Henry also allowed translation of the Scriptures into English
 2. When Henry died his young son (9 years old) took the throne
 - a. Abolition of clerical celibacy and the Mass
 - b. Edward became terminally ill at age 15
 3. Mary (daughter of Catherine) became the Queen
 - a. Just like her mother, she was strongly Catholic
 - b. Tried to reverse the changes made by Henry and Edward
 - c. Many reform leaders escaped to Reform strongholds on the continent such as Basil, Zurich and Geneva
 - d. (this made these leaders even stronger in seeking biblical reforms)
 - e. Mary died at age 42, after two false pregnancies-- perhaps cancer
 4. Elizabeth became Queen

- a. She had resisted moves by Mary to get Elizabeth locked into a Catholic marriage
- b. Reformers, who had fled, returned to England, intent upon changing the Eng. Church
- c. Elizabeth steered a course down the middle between keeping things the same/change

II. The Puritans

- A. For the most part, Puritans were English Calvinists.
There were some English Christians that were Arminian that identified with the Puritan movement. Examples: John Goodwin and John Milton (Paradise Lost)
- B. They were called puritans because they wanted to restore the pure practices and doctrines of the New Testament.
- C. Puritans were not necessarily an organized group, so their beliefs varied.
- D. Puritans, for the most part, were against:
 - 1. Use of the cross
 - 2. Priestly garments
 - 3. Celebration of communion on an altar
 - 4. The theater – the immorality depicted and the duplicity of acting
 - 5. Written prayers—prayers should come from the heart
 - 6. Elaborate worship services
 - 7. The office of Bishop—church organization should be like that of the New Testament
- E. The Puritans were for:
 - 1. Leading a sober life
 - 2. Following the commandments of the Scriptures
 - 3. Forsaking luxuries and ostentations
 - 4. The Lord’s Day should be devoted to religious exercises and charity
 - 5. Drinking in moderation, no drunkenness
- F. They wanted to purify the Church of England and believed they should stay with the Church
- G. Nick Needham believes that Puritans are more easily defined, not by doctrine, but by their view of worship. Puritans believed that Christians should follow the “regulative principle” – that is worship should only include what is authorized by the Scriptures.
- H. Some items that Puritans did not all agree on about worship
 - 1. Lord’s Prayer
 - 2. Hymns
 - 3. Apostle’s Creed
 - 4. Funeral Sermons
 - 5. Christmas Day Sermon

III. The Separatists

- A. Separatists (Pilgrims)
- B. Separate from the Church of England--- don’t try to purify such a corrupt institution
- C. Believers (led by the Holy Spirit) should seek out other believers and form a church – called a “gathered church”
- D. Each local church is autonomous. It does not have to submit to any higher human authority
- E. Congregational form of church government (each congregation makes its own rules, independent and self-supported)
- F. A famous Separatist that managed to stay and thrive in England was Oliver Cromwell
- G. According to Needham, the most Separatists were Arminian.

IV. The beginning of Separatism

- A. In 1567, a group was been caught in London that were truly Separatist. They rejected all liturgy—no prayer books, hymns, psalms--- worship should come from the heart—something spontaneous. Many of the members of this separatist congregation went to prison. Their leader died in prison.
- B. A month later, a more famous or infamous event occurred. The local authorities (sheriffs) discovered a meeting of a group (at Plumbers’ Hall) of over one hundred. The meeting was supposedly a wedding but it was really a worship service complete with preaching and communion. This group had held

- secret meetings during Mary's reign and now they felt like the Church of England was still controlled by "papists". Some of this group spent a year in prison for their separatist behavior.
- C. There, almost undoubtedly, were probably other groups of Separatists that defied the authorities and we don't know about them because they were never caught.
 - D. The next known groups were in the 1580's. One group was led by Robert Browne. He was well educated and was on his way to becoming an Anglican minister, but he became convinced that the Church of England was too corrupt to be reformed. He took his group to Middelburg in the Netherlands. The group did not last. They suffered through many quarrels and Browne was too strict for them. He was kicked out of the group and moved to Scotland.
 - E. Browne wrote: *A Treatise of Reformation without Tarrying for any*. It was the first and most famous work on the theology of the Separatists.
 1. The Anglican Church is so corrupt that it is not worth the wait (tarry) for it to reform
 2. A local church should not just be the people who reside within a parish
 3. A local church should be made up of people who truly have faith in Christ
 4. Local churches should operate on Congregational principles.
 - F. Browne was not successful trying to promote Separatism in Scotland and he ended up in prison for a second time. When released this time, he decided to give up on Separatism and become a minister in the Anglican system again.
 - G. Even though he gave up on Separatism, his two writings continued to inspire: *Treatise of Reformation*, and *A Book which Sheweth the life and Manner of all True Christians*. His work was so powerful that people often referred to Separatists as Brownists.
 - H. How serious was the Church of England in stamping out Separatism? Two men, John Copping and Elias Thacker, were hanged for distributing the above works.
 - I. Men martyred for being active Separatists:
 1. John Greenwood- a Cambridge graduate, originally a Puritan, was in and out of prison, for seven years, starting his first arrest in 1586 for preaching from the Scriptures in an unauthorized meeting.
 2. Henry Barrow- an ex-lawyer and a Cambridge graduate. Was arrested when he went to visit Greenwood in prison. He wrote several short works calling for separation from the Church of England. His works were so good, that his detractors sometimes referred to Separatists as Barrowists.
 3. John Penry- was, at first, a strong believer in Presbyterianism, but became Separatist and was thrown in prison. There his stance became even stronger after meeting Greenwood and Barrow. -----All three of these men were hanged for publishing malicious material and inciting rebellion.
 - J. Almost all of John Greenwood's congregation escaped to Amsterdam
 1. Unfortunately, they did not prosper there
 2. They quarreled about major and minor points
 3. They finally split over arguments about the pastor's wife's dress.
 - V. Separatism: underground and moving
 - A. During the time of King James reign the movement continued to grow
 - B. Some of the leaders: John Smyth, Thomas Helwys, John Robinson, William Bradford and William Brewster.
 - C. The group became so large that out of fear of being discovered, they split into two groups: 1. Smyth-Helwys and 2. Robinson-Bradford-Brewster
 - D. Both groups moved to the Netherlands.
 - E. The Smyth-Helwys congregation was strongly influenced by the Mennonites that lived in Amsterdam.
 1. They adopted believer's baptism, but rejected original sin.
 2. Helwys and Smyth disagreed over baptism. Who could perform the baptism?
 3. Helwys moved back to England and ended up dying in prison, because of a tract he wrote attacking The Church of England.
 - F. The Separatists under John Robinson went to Leyden instead of Amsterdam.
 1. This group remained harmonious and Calvinist in doctrine
 2. They kept infant baptism

3. This is the group that eventually moves to North America under the leadership of Bradford and Brewster.
4. They contracted two ships, The Speedwell and the Mayflower.
5. They were to land in Virginia, but instead, ended up in what is now Massachusetts.
6. Mayflower Compact and attempt at a communal society
7. They are called Pilgrims because their journey to America was not for any other reason than religion.
8. For a group that lost half their members in the first few months, they were very prolific—35 million descendants today (out of the 327 million U.S. citizens)
9. The next settlers to come to New England were Puritans, but in a sense, they were Separatist, as well, as they gave up on the Church of England and formed local churches.
10. Separatists, eventually, disappeared as an independent group and assimilated into the Puritan Communities.

VI. Pilgrim Leaders

A. William Brewster

1. The only one of the Pilgrims with diplomatic and political experience.
2. After studying at Cambridge, he served the English minister to the Netherlands.
3. This exposed him to Reformed preaching and theology from continental Reformers
4. When Archbishop Bancroft forced Puritan pastors out of the ministry, Brewster joined John Robinson's "house church" in Scrooby.
5. Brewster organized the "escape" to the Netherlands and continued to be an elder
6. He published several works that criticized King James, which resulted in an order for his arrest.
7. He and his family, along with two adopted children, voyaged to America on the Mayflower
8. Only half of the one hundred Pilgrims survived the first year, yet Brewster's family only lost one.
9. He was one of the main preachers for the Pilgrims in the early years.

B. William Bradford

1. He had a really rough go as a child with many deaths in his immediate family
2. He was often sick as a boy, so he read many books that probably led him to Puritanism and eventually, a Separatist.
3. Some of the books came from the postmaster, William Brewster.
4. Bradford became part of the group at Scrooby and at age 18 left England for Leiden, Netherlands
5. He married and started a family while in Leiden
6. He was part of the Separatists that journeyed to America on the Mayflower. His wife went as well but they left their three-year-old son with his wife's parents.
7. Bradford was one of the main leaders in writing the Mayflower Compact and exploring for a suitable place to build a village.
8. His wife fell overboard and drowned during one of Bradford's explorations.
9. Bradford became the governor of the colony after the death of the original governor.
10. He wrote a short book, *Of Plymouth Plantation*, which is one of the main sources for knowing about life for the Pilgrims. He draws parallels to their lives and events in the Bible.

C. Myles Standish

1. Not a Separatist
2. Was a soldier in the English army and stationed in the Netherlands
3. Was hired to be the main protector for the Pilgrims
4. Took care of Bradford when that leader became gravely ill during the first year
5. Very good friends with Bradford
6. Don't really know about his Biblical beliefs

VII. More Separatists

- A. JIJ Church—Henry Jacob fled to the Netherlands but returned to England in 1616 and formed a church that was semi-Separatist. They had meetings separate from the official Church of England but had their children baptized by the English Church and often attended official Church services.
- B. John Bunyan—Famous for his work, *Pilgrim's Progress*. Before that, he wrote, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, while in prison for his Separatist preaching.