

ENGLISH POLITICS, PURITANISM, AND JOHN BUNYAN

Introduction

English politics and Puritanism are inextricably intertwined.¹ Before we can look more closely into this relationship, however, we must first answer two questions: 1. Who were the Puritans? and 2. What are their dates? That is, when did the Puritans come on the scene of world history, and when did they exit? Although Puritanism flourished in both England and the American colonies (as well as a few other places), our discussion in this paper will be exclusively focused on what is typically called “English Puritanism.”

So who were the Puritans? Unfortunately, this question is much easier to pose than it is to answer. Many authors begin their studies of Puritanism by noting the variety of ways in which the term has been used and defined. Hence, Christopher Hill begins his book, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, with a chapter entitled, “The Definition of a Puritan.”² Similarly, John Spurr, in his book on English Puritanism, has an introductory section on “Defining Puritans.”³ Other books that draw our attention to the problem of definition include *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* and *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction*.⁴

¹ Some excellent general histories of the period which make this point quite clear include the following: Robert Bucholz and Newton Key, *Early Modern England, 1485-1714: A Narrative History*, 2nd ed. (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009). Barry Coward, *The Stuart Age: England, 1603-1714*, 4th ed. (New York: Pearson, 2012). Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain, 1603-1714*, ed. David Cannadine, The Penguin History of Britain (London: Penguin Books, 1997).

² Christopher Hill, *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 1-15.

³ John Spurr, *English Puritanism, 1603-1689*, ed. Jeremy Black, *Social History in Perspective* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998), 3-8.

⁴ See John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim, "Introduction," in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 1-7; Francis J. Bremer, *Puritanism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 2-3.

So what do these books and authors tell us about the meaning of the terms “Puritan” and “Puritanism”? According to Coffey and Lim, “Defining Puritanism has become a favourite parlour game for early modern historians.”⁵ But the problem is not limited only to “modern historians.” For as Hill observes, these terms also “had wide and ill-defined meanings” for those living and writing in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, meanings “which were at least as much political as religious.”⁶ Bremer suggests that at least one reason for these difficulties is the fact that, unlike “other religious movements” of this time period (e.g. Lutheranism, Catholicism, etc.), Puritanism never “became institutionalized” with “official statements of faith and formal membership in churches.”⁷ And Spurr reminds us that since Puritans of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries were typically “defined by their relationship” to the Church of England, then, “should the Church of England change . . . so would the puritan.” And since the Church of England did change (quite often) during this period, there were also “changes in who was perceived as a puritan.”⁸

Does this, then, mean that we can have no clear idea about the “puritans” of sixteenth and seventeenth century England? Not necessarily. Although the term may have been used in a variety of ways, nevertheless, as one continues reading these books about the puritans, one quickly discovers that there is actually a substantial amount of agreement about how the term should be generally understood.⁹ Hill tells us that Puritans held “a core of doctrine about religion and Church government,” which aimed at “purifying the Church from inside.”¹⁰ In a similar

⁵ Coffey and Lim, “Introduction,” 1.

⁶ Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, 7.

⁷ Bremer, *Puritanism*, 2.

⁸ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 4.

⁹ In other words, while the term may admit of a certain amount of “fuzziness” around the edges, it nonetheless seems to still maintain a good bit of clarity at the center.

¹⁰ Hill, *Society and Puritanism*, 14.

manner, Bremer writes that Puritans “were those who sought to reform themselves and their society by purifying their churches of the remnants of Roman Catholic teachings and practice then found in post-Reformation England during the mid-sixteenth century.”¹¹ Coffey and Lim define Puritanism as a “particularly intense variety of early modern Reformed Protestantism which originated within the unique context of the Church of England.”¹² And Mark Noll, while observing that Puritans were also interested in purifying both “self” and “society,” notes that the term originated with “efforts to ‘purify’ the Church of England by those who felt that the Reformation had not yet been completed.”¹³ Hence, we would seem to be justified in saying that the Puritans were English Protestants who, influenced by the theology of the Reformation, were zealous to “purify” their Church, their society, and themselves, from any and all doctrinal, ceremonial, and moral impurity, for the glory of God. And as we will soon see, these zealous desires for religious purity had plenty of social, cultural, and political implications as well. If these, then, were the Puritans, then what were their dates? When was English Puritanism born, and when did it die?

Although some scholars have argued for the origin of Puritanism in the early 1560s, others have suggested as more plausible a date in the late 1550s.¹⁴ As Galen Johnson and Charles Pastoor observe, it was during the reign of “Bloody” Mary (1553-1558), when English

¹¹ Bremer, *Puritanism*, 2.

¹² Coffey and Lim, “Introduction,” 1-2.

¹³ Mark A. Noll, “Puritanism,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 897.

¹⁴ Galen Johnson and Charles Pastoor note that those scholars preferring a date in the early 1560s point to Thomas Fuller’s, *Church History of Britain* (1665), which claims that the term “Puritan” was first used in 1564. However, Johnson and Pastoor argue for a date in the late 1550s, claiming that “Puritanism” cannot really be understood without reference to those Marian exiles who returned to England when Elizabeth assumed the throne in 1558. Many of these exiles, they remind us, had fled from persecution in England to the continent, where they were instructed in the faith by such great Reformation leaders as John Calvin and others. It was during this time, claim Johnson and Pastoor, that “they collectively developed the theological sensitivities that drove them to campaign for a new Church of England once Elizabeth began her reign and they could return home.” See Galen K. Johnson and Charles Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, ed. Jon Woronoff, The A to Z Guide Series (Lanham, MY: Scarecrow Press, 2009), 3.

Protestants were being persecuted by the staunchly Roman Catholic Queen, that many fled England for the continent. There, under the leadership and teaching of many of the great Reformers, including John Calvin, these English Protestants imbibed many of the ideas that would result in their desire to “purify” the Church of England, once they could safely return home at the beginning of Elizabeth’s reign. Queen Elizabeth’s desire to find an acceptable compromise between Roman Catholicism and Protestantism distressed many of these returning exiles. According to Johnson and Pastoor, it was this distress which “broke out into the first signs of recognizable Puritanism.”¹⁵

Just as there are arguments about when English Puritanism began, so there are arguments about when it met its end. Bucholz and Key argue that with the passing of the laws included in the “Clarendon Code,” which they prefer to call the “Cavalier Code,” during the years 1661 to 1665, the Puritans ceased to exist. As they see it, it was at this time that those Protestants who would once have identified themselves as Puritans, “no longer had any hope of ‘purifying’ the Church of England of its more conservative practices.” Hence, they suggest that from this point forward, it is more accurate to refer to this group of English Protestants as “Nonconformists” or “Dissenters,” terms “which emphasize that they now formed a community apart from the Anglican majority.”¹⁶ This, it seems to me, is a very good argument. If accepted, it would cause us to view John Bunyan (1628-1688) *primarily* as a Nonconformist or Dissenter, rather than a Puritan, for *most* of Bunyan’s writing (as well as preaching and teaching) would have occurred *after* the early 1660s.

But some see this as problematic. Referring to this period of English history as that immediately following the restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II (which occurred in 1660), Johnson and Pastoor remind us that “John Bunyan, Richard Baxter, John Owen, John

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The relevant discussion can be found in Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 281-82. The two direct quotations occur on p. 282.

Milton, and other notables all made their most lasting contributions to Christian history after the Restoration, and it would be harder to justify their removal from Puritanism than their inclusion.”¹⁷ Of course, Bucholz and Key might ask why we could not refer to these “notables” as nonconformists or dissenters, rather than puritans. But this just brings us back to the problem of definition once again. If the puritan vision was broader, or more comprehensive, than *merely* bringing further reformation to the Church of England *from within*, then it might not be inappropriate to identify men like Bunyan as “puritans” even if they no longer felt that they could continue to participate in the national church. In light of this, and in full recognition of the fact that this is an issue about which good scholars can disagree, it does seem preferable to me to extend the date of Puritanism’s demise to include such important figures as those just mentioned.¹⁸ If we do this, however, then we are still left with the question of when English Puritanism breathed its last.¹⁹

Johnson and Pastoor suggest two possible ways of viewing the demise of English Puritanism. On the one hand, they suggest that if we wanted to look for a particular individual who might realistically qualify as the “last English Puritan,” we might do well to name Isaac Watts (1674-1748) as the most plausible person to bear such a distinction.²⁰ If we adopt this suggestion, we might say that English Puritanism died with Isaac Watts in 1748.²¹ However, they

¹⁷ Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, 4.

¹⁸ John Spurr offers an argument similar to that of Johnson and Pastoor in Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 47.

¹⁹ The story of American Puritanism would, of course, be different. But for the purposes of this paper, we are strictly concerned with English Puritanism.

²⁰ Johnson and Pastoor write, “Unlike Newton and Wesley, Watts dared to remain a Nonconformist, and he could not attend Oxford or Cambridge because of it. He was a significant influence on American Puritans like Cotton Mather and Jonathan Edwards. And he is buried in Bunhill Fields Dissenters’ cemetery in London, nearby the tombs of John Bunyan, John Owen, Thomas Goodwin, and relatives of Oliver Cromwell.” See Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, 5.

²¹ Of course, even here, it might be true to say that there were still a few living puritans after Watts. However, there may have been no more “notable” ones.

also suggest another way of looking at this issue. When William and Mary took the English throne from James II in 1689, the Act of Toleration was soon passed. Johnson and Pastoor argue that, ironically, this Act was a significant event in the demise of English Puritanism. Although this Act granted “freedom of worship” to English Puritans, it also signaled the beginning of Enlightenment rationalism in the English church. According to Johnson and Pastoor, “In a new era that valued reason over revelation, Puritanism became not only unappealing but actually disreputable.”²² Hence, we might see the beginning of the end of English Puritanism in the 1689 Act of Toleration. From this point on, Puritanism was on the wane, inevitably moving toward its eventual demise.

This date is also significant in light of our interest in John Bunyan. Since Bunyan died in 1688, it allows us to view Bunyan’s life and work within the context of English Puritanism. For our purposes in this paper, then, the period of English Puritanism will be viewed as originating in the mid-to-late 1550s and significantly in decline after the Act of Toleration in 1689, possibly breathing its last with the death of Isaac Watts in 1748. The next logical question, then, at least for our purposes in this essay, is what were some of the major events in English politics, which also have bearing upon both Puritanism (and, by extension, John Bunyan), during the period of English history lasting from 1558 to 1689?²³

English Politics and Puritanism: 1558-1689

The Elizabethan Puritans: 1558-1603

As a quick rule of thumb, the earliest Puritans wanted to “purify” the Church of England from any ways in which they judged her to be deficient in doctrine, morals, and

²² Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, 4.

²³ As anyone familiar with this period already knows, there are so many important events which one could mention that we will necessarily be forced to limit our discussion to only those events deemed most important for their specific bearing on both English Puritanism and John Bunyan.

appearance. Two of the major theological enemies of the Puritans were Roman Catholics and Arminians. The early Puritans were distressed to find what they perceived as evidence of both of these enemies in the Church of England, beginning with Roman Catholicism.

When Queen Elizabeth I ascended the throne in 1558, after the reign of her Catholic sister Mary, she sought to find a religious compromise between Protestants and Roman Catholics that “most people could mostly accept.” Wanting to unify a nation that could easily fragment over divisive religious issues, she sought a compromise for the Church of England that would consist of “Protestant beliefs and Catholic structures and practices.”²⁴ Admittedly, this compromise seems to have been sought, not only for the good of the nation, but also because it was what Elizabeth herself appears to have liked. Nevertheless, the remnants of Roman Catholicism in both ceremony and dress greatly displeased many of the newly returned Marian exiles. Although in many respects English Protestants seem to have supported the Queen, there were some who intensely desired to complete the Reformation of the Church of England. It was these latter, more zealous sorts of Protestants, who would become known as the Puritans.

Early in Elizabeth’s reign, a controversy erupted over how Anglican clergy were to dress. Known as the Vestiarian Controversy, with roots extending back into the reign of Edward VI, the dispute concerned whether clergy of the Church of England should be required to wear “vestments” as part of their preaching and ministerial duties.²⁵ In the minds of the more zealous Protestants, this sort of clerical dress reeked of Roman Catholicism. It had already become something of a contentious issue in 1560, as can be seen in a letter which Edwin Sandys, who would later become bishop of Worcester, wrote to Peter Martyr, “telling him . . . that ‘the popish

²⁴ This and the preceding quote both come from Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 122.

²⁵ According to Johnson and Pastoor, “These vestments typically included a gown, a square cap, a surplice (a white linen garment draped over the gown), a cope (a semicircular cloth mantle covering one’s back), and a tippet (a black scarf).” See Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Vestments”.

vestments remain in our Church, I mean the Copes, which, however, we hope will not last long.”²⁶

Unfortunately for these early Puritans, Elizabeth was quite attached to clerical vestments and refused to yield any ground on this issue. In 1565 she “provocatively and perhaps unwisely, issued an unequivocal defense of ornate vestments and demanded that the bishops enforce their use by suspending clergy who refused.”²⁷ In March of the following year, thirty-seven London clergymen *were* suspended for their refusal “to wear the prescribed vestments.”²⁸ Although to us the controversy over clerical vestments may seem relatively insignificant, Spurr reminds us that “it is commonly regarded as the origin of the puritan movement.”²⁹ While glad for the reforms which had occurred, these early puritans were nonetheless increasingly frustrated by their perception that the pace of continuing reform was moving either far too slowly—or even worse, had stalled out completely.

As they continued to agitate for further reform, Elizabethan puritans came under increasing pressure to conform and be quiet, especially once John Whitgift was appointed to the Archbishopric of Canterbury in 1583.³⁰ Of course, not everyone opposed the saints. Indeed, they had some very powerful supporters among the English aristocracy.³¹ Nevertheless, from the time that Whitgift was appointed Archbishop until the end of Elizabeth’s reign, overt puritan agitation for reform was largely muted. But the puritans had not disappeared; they were merely waiting for

²⁶ John Brown, *The English Puritans* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 26. Brown does not specify where this citation is from in his book.

²⁷ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 124.

²⁸ John Craig, “The Growth of English Puritanism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 38.

²⁹ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 49-50.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 55-58.

³¹ Craig makes this point quite well in “The Growth of English Puritanism,” 43-44.

a more propitious moment. And when Elizabeth died in 1603 and James I assumed the English throne, the puritans believed this moment may have come.³²

The Jacobean Puritans: 1603-1625

As the new king traveled from Scotland to England he was met by a group of Puritan ministers with a petition requesting some “moderate” reforms of the Church of England. Known as the Millenary Petition, as it was alleged to have the support of 1,000 clergymen, it “called for reforms of the clergy, ceremony and doctrine of the Elizabethan church.”³³ The king responded by calling for a conference, which met at Hampton Court in mid-January of 1604.

The conference lasted three days and, according to most of the accounts, James appeared willing to listen to moderate proposals expressed in moderate terms, but also made it clear that religious radicalism would meet firm resistance.³⁴ According to Kishlansky, the king made it clear that “he would give no quarter to radical reformers who wished to replace the episcopal hierarchy by a Presbyterian governance. ‘No bishop, no king,’ he twice proclaimed.”³⁵ Although he showed himself willing to make some minor alterations and to correct some abuses, the most important effect of the conference was his agreement that a new translation of the Bible be undertaken. Completed in 1611, this translation project resulted in the Authorized, or “King James,” Bible—one of the most influential translations into English ever made.³⁶

For the most part, James’ reign was characterized by a relative quiet on the religious front. Although Puritans experienced some “minor” persecution after the king appointed Richard

³² Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 57-59.

³³ Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 72.

³⁴ Tom Webster, “Early Stuart Puritanism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, ed. John Coffey and Paul C. H. Lim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 49.

³⁵ Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 73.

³⁶ See Alister McGrath, *In the Beginning: The Story of the King James Bible and How it Changed a Nation, a Language, and a Culture* (New York: Anchor Books, 2002).

Bancroft to succeed Whitgift as the Archbishop of Canterbury in December 1604, Coward tells us that there were likely “not more than ninety ministers (less than 1 per cent of the total beneficed clergy)” who were deprived of their livings for refusal to conform.³⁷ When Bancroft died near the end of 1610, James appointed George Abbot (in 1611) as his successor. Compared to Bancroft, Abbot was “fairly tolerant of moderate Puritans.”³⁸ During his tenure as archbishop (1611-1633), the Puritans remained relatively quiet.

One exception to this occurred in 1618 with James’ Declaration of Sports. This declaration, which offended Puritan sensibilities, allowed for certain activities on Sundays such as “leaping, vaulting . . . May-games, Whitsun-ales and Morris-dances, and the setting up of May-poles,” on condition that they “not conflict with regular Sabbath worship.”³⁹ According to Christopher Hill, James attempted to justify this declaration with the following reasons: “(i) men would associate the traditional sports with Popery, and become dissatisfied with the established Church if deprived of them; (ii) ‘the common and meaner sort’ would become unfit for military service; (iii) they would go in disgust to ale-houses and there indulge in ‘a number of idle and discontented speeches.’”⁴⁰ However, since Puritans believed that Sundays should be reserved only for such activities as preaching, prayer, and Bible study, they raised a significant outcry over this declaration. Indeed, the outcry was so significant that “James eventually withdrew his order that it should be read in the churches.”⁴¹ Apart from these rather exceptional incidents, however, the Puritans remained generally quiet during James’ reign. This would all change, however, when his son, Charles I, succeeded him as king in 1625.

³⁷ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 108.

³⁸ Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Archbishop of Canterbury.”

³⁹ *Ibid.*, s.v. “Book of Sports.”

⁴⁰ Christopher Hill, *The Century of Revolution, 1603-1714*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge Classics, 2002), 84.

⁴¹ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 110.

Puritanism before the Revolution: 1625-1640

Although Charles I was in some respects a very capable ruler, his consistent failure to consult with, or listen to, his people eventually got him into a lot of trouble. He was, in short, something of an autocrat. Of course, as Charles viewed things he was the sovereign of the English people, their king—and their king, first and foremost, by God’s decree. He was therefore to be listened to and obeyed as God’s chosen ruler.⁴² But English Parliamentarians (and particularly the Puritans among them) increasingly saw things in a different light. In their view, the king was violating the rights of his people—and it was time for this to change. How did things get in such a mess?

When Charles I inherited the English throne in 1625, England was already at war with Spain.⁴³ The following year, in 1626, the country would also become embroiled in a war with France. For the most part, England utterly failed to distinguish itself in either conflict. To make matters worse, the cost of the wars translated into higher taxes for the English people and sometimes led to English soldiers being forcibly lodged in civilian homes. All of this led many English people (including Parliamentarians) to feel frustrated and angry with all that these wars entailed.

When Parliament met in 1628 King Charles wanted more money to prosecute the war effort. Parliament, however, was not feeling particularly generous. Although they were willing to help the king with some of his monetary troubles, they wanted something from him in return.

⁴² Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Charles I (1600-1649).”

⁴³ Many helpful sources have been consulted in an effort to understand both the major events of this period, as well as possible interpretations of these events. Among these are the following: Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 230-49; Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 137-63; Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 9-106; Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 113-33; and Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 79-93. However, one of the most helpful sources in helping me to get a handle on some of the major events and issues of this time is the course guidebook by Robert Bucholz, *A History of England from the Tudors to the Stuarts* (Chantilly, VA: The Great Courses, 2003), 138-49. The narrative which follows is very much indebted to Bucholz in both its structure and interpretation of events.

They presented the king with The Petition of Right. According to Coward, the petition insisted on three points:⁴⁴

1. The king could not collect taxes without the consent of parliament.
2. The English people could not be jailed without due warrant or trial.
3. Soldiers could not be forcibly lodged in English homes without the owner's consent.

Although he did not like it, Charles agreed to the petition because of his dire need for money.⁴⁵ Even here, however, the king managed to annoy parliament because of his insistence that the document be interpreted in a way that enabled him to blunt its intended force, particularly where the collection of taxes was concerned.⁴⁶

Another, even more important, area in which Charles offended and irritated both parliament and the English people (particularly those with Puritan inclinations and sympathies) was the favoritism he showed to clergy who embraced Arminian theology. In the summer of 1628, Coward tells us, the king appointed some of these men to important positions in the Church of England. William Laud was appointed bishop of London and Richard Montague bishop of Chichester.⁴⁷ In 1633, Charles further promoted Laud to the position of Archbishop of Canterbury. Since many in the Church of England, and especially the Puritans, saw connections between Laud's Arminianism and Roman Catholicism, this was very worrisome.⁴⁸ What made things even worse, however, was the assassination of Charles' main advisor, the Duke of Buckingham, in the summer of 1628. People began to worry that now, with Buckingham gone,

⁴⁴ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 144.

⁴⁵ Bucholz, *A History of England*, 139.

⁴⁶ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 144-45.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ See Spurr's excellent discussion on "Archbishop Laud and Puritans," in *English Puritanism*, 86-93.

Charles would turn to his wife, Henrietta Maria, for advice.⁴⁹ Since she was a committed Catholic, it increasingly looked to some as if the king might end up leading England back in the direction of Rome—a thought which would have both terrified and angered Puritans.

All of this resulted in something of a parliamentary showdown on March 2, 1629. Kishlansky claims that “Charles hoped to cool things down by a brief adjournment” of parliament.⁵⁰ Before the speaker of the House of Commons could do this, however, some members of the House held him down in his seat so that three resolutions could be passed. According to Bucholz and Key the resolutions condemned as “a capital enemy to the kingdom and commonwealth” anyone who paid or collected taxes which parliament had not approved, along with “anyone intending innovation in religion.”⁵¹ But since it was Charles himself who “had initiated all of the measures that Parliament had just condemned,” it was evident that “the relationship between king and Parliament . . . had reached a crisis point.”⁵² Parliament went home and Charles began what has since become known as “the personal rule.” He would not call another parliament for eleven years.

By cutting his expenses and raising revenue, Charles was able to stay financially afloat over the next eleven years.⁵³ Nevertheless, his failure to call a parliament angered many of the English aristocracy. In addition, many English men and women, particularly those with Puritan inclinations, were grieved and outraged over the Arminian innovations introduced into the Church of England by the new Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud.⁵⁴ Finally, Charles

⁴⁹ Bucholz, *A History of England*, 139.

⁵⁰ Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 114-15.

⁵¹ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 239.

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Bucholz, *A History of England*, 143-44.

⁵⁴ According to Tom Webster, “The policies of the 1630s, particularly after Laud was chosen as archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, could have been written as an effective list to alienate, shock and anger Puritans.” See Tom Webster, “Early Stuart Puritanism,” 56. In part, these policies led to the development of New England Puritanism. As Francis Bremer reminds us, “Eventually these policies would lead many puritans to migrate to New

also managed to offend the National Church of Scotland by insisting that they use a version of the English Book of Common Prayer.⁵⁵ This initiated a series of events which culminated in the First and Second Bishop's Wars with Scotland.⁵⁶

In between these two wars Charles, in desperate need of both money and an army, called a parliament. He quickly dismissed it, however, when parliamentarians insisted that he must first address their complaints before they would supply him with money for an army.⁵⁷ This became known as the "Short Parliament." With the advent of the Second Bishop's War, however, Charles was forced to recall parliament (i.e. the "Long Parliament") and allow them to ultimately decide the immediate fate of both the nation—and Charles himself.

The English Revolution and its Aftermath: 1640-1660

The Long Parliament met in an angry mood beginning in November 1640. Frustrated by the previous eleven years of the king's "personal rule," parliamentarians began to assert their own authority and take a more active role in the leadership of the nation. According to Bucholz and Key, "one of their earliest bills addressed the sovereignty problem head on by stating that Parliament was not to be prorogued or dissolved but by its own consent. Charles's agreement to this act ensured their permanency during the headlong race to reform."⁵⁸

Although "reform" involved both political and financial concerns, the primary concerns—especially of those parliamentarians with Puritan sympathies—were religious in nature. Spurr reminds us that "when Parliament met, the puritan spokesmen set the agenda: Pym

England in the 1630s, where they would seek to advance God's kingdom in a number of new colonies." See Francis Bremer, *Puritanism*, 14.

⁵⁵ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 243.

⁵⁶ These conflicts took place in 1639 and 1640, respectively.

⁵⁷ Johnson and Pastoor discuss these matters in *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. "Bishops' Wars." See also Bucholz, *A History of England*, 146-47.

⁵⁸ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 245.

claimed there was a ‘design to alter the kingdom both in religion and government’; and Sir John Wray agreed that it was Parliament’s duty to achieve ‘true reformation of all disorders and innovations in church and religion.’”⁵⁹ As one might expect, their ire was particularly directed against the religious “innovations” that had been introduced by Archbishop of Canterbury, William Laud. Such innovations, combined with Laud’s persecution of the Puritans, led to his immediate arrest (in 1640) and subsequent execution (in 1645).

In December 1640, some 15,000 London citizens signed the Root and Branch Petition, requesting of Parliament that “episcopacy, ‘with all its dependencies, roots and branches, be abolished.’”⁶⁰ Although a “Root and Branch” bill was later introduced (in 1641) and passed in Commons, it was defeated in the Lords. However, John Pym later helped draft the Grand Remonstrance, which Brown described as “practically a long indictment of the King’s conduct ever since his accession.”⁶¹ This measure eventually gained parliamentary approval, but just barely. It split the House of Commons almost right down the middle, with 159 voting for the measure and 148 voting against it.⁶²

Increasingly irritated with Pym and his (largely) Puritan supporters in Parliament, Charles tried to have him arrested in early 1642. Having received advanced warning, however, Pym evaded arrest. Later that year, in August, Charles, realizing that things were spiraling out of control, raised the royal standard at Nottingham, “and called upon all loyal subjects to come to his aid against a rebellious Parliament.”⁶³ The English Civil Wars had begun.

⁵⁹ Spurr, *English Puritanism*, 96.

⁶⁰ Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Root and Branch Petition.”

⁶¹ Brown, *The English Puritans*, 131.

⁶² Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 247.

⁶³ Brown, *The English Puritans*, 132. According to Francis Bremer, “it was puritans who were foremost in promoting the parliamentary cause.” See Bremer, *Puritanism*, 24.

The first Civil War lasted from 1642-1646; the second from 1647-1649.⁶⁴ Parliament won both. Initially Parliament was split between Presbyterians, who favored negotiating with the king, and Independents, who no longer thought this was possible.⁶⁵ However, after Colonel Thomas Pride “purged” Parliament of a hundred or so Presbyterians (an event known as “Pride’s Purge”), the newly-formed “Rump Parliament” (now controlled by Independents) charged the king with treason against his people. Found guilty, the king “was executed as a traitor” on January 30, 1649.⁶⁶ Shortly thereafter “Parliament abolished the kingly office” and the House of Lords and “England was declared a commonwealth, that is, a republic.”⁶⁷

The Commonwealth endured from 1649 to 1653. During this time, England was largely governed by the Rump Parliament.⁶⁸ However, by the end of 1653, the New Model Army presented Oliver Cromwell with a new constitution, the “Instrument of Government,” “giving him the title ‘Lord Protector.’”⁶⁹ According to Bremer, “Cromwell’s Protectorate represented England’s experiment in puritan rule.”⁷⁰ Cromwell served in this capacity until his death in 1658. His government is widely considered to have been a success. Bremer claims that Cromwell

⁶⁴ It was during this time, from 1643 to 1649, that the Westminster Assembly was meeting. In addition to other documents, the Assembly produced the Westminster Confession, as well as “a Larger and a Shorter Catechism that remain influential within Presbyterian and Reformed churches.” See Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Westminster Assembly.” In addition to this, Leith tells us that the Westminster Confession (1646) “was adopted with modifications by Congregationalists in England and New England, and it was the basis of the Baptist creeds, the London Confession . . . and the Philadelphia Confession of Faith.” See John H. Leith, ed. *Creeds of the Churches: A Reader in Christian Doctrine from the Bible to the Present*, 3rd ed. (Louisville: John Knox Press, 1982), 192-3.

⁶⁵ According to Brown, it was this tendency among Parliamentary Presbyterians that resulted in something of “an alliance” between them and “the royalists which thirteen years later was to bring about the Restoration of the Monarchy and the Church.” See Brown, *The English Puritans*, 140.

⁶⁶ Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 112. See also Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Pride’s Purge.”

⁶⁷ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 262.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 267.

⁶⁹ Bucholz, *A History of England*, 161.

⁷⁰ Bremer, *Puritanism*, 27.

“provided England with a stable government and made the country one of the foremost European powers.”⁷¹ And according to Bucholz, “The Protectorate provided efficient government with a minimum of corruption.” In addition to pursuing “legal reform” and seeking “to make education more widely available,” Cromwell also “enforced religious toleration: Individual Puritan congregations were allowed to worship as they saw fit. Anglicans and Catholics were mostly left alone.”⁷²

After Cromwell’s death there followed a brief period in which, first, his son Richard, and then the Rump Parliament, briefly ruled England. However, due to increasing social unrest and disorder, a new Parliament was elected, “Presbyterian’-Royalist in composition,” which “accepted the Declaration which Charles II had issued from Breda,” brought him back to England, and restored the English Monarchy.⁷³ The “rule of the puritan” had come to an end.⁷⁴

The Restored Monarchy and the Decline of Puritanism: 1660-1689

The restoration of the monarchy under King Charles II provided England with yet another opportunity to extend religious toleration to all English men and women.⁷⁵ Although the new king (for a variety of reasons) seems to have genuinely favored a policy of religious toleration for all, “he could only accomplish religious change by act of parliament.”⁷⁶ This, in fact, was consistent with several new parliamentary-imposed limitations on the king’s power. As Kishlansky observes, “Charles II reclaimed his crown without condition, but it was a different

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Bucholz, *A History of England*, 162.

⁷³ Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 116.

⁷⁴ According to Brown, “When Cromwell fell the rule of the puritan fell with him.” See *The English Puritans*, 149.

⁷⁵ This had already been tried, to one degree or another, during the “Interregnum” and, particularly, under Cromwell’s Protectorate.

⁷⁶ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 280.

crown from [that of] . . . 1649. Parliament, church and king were now inextricably tied together.”⁷⁷ The king was still the king, but parliament would now also retain a good bit of power in its own hands.

The Convention Parliament, which had welcomed back the king and attempted to solve several of the perplexing issues associated with his return, held its last meeting on December 29, 1660.⁷⁸ The following May, 1661, the Cavalier Parliament met for the first time. Although this parliament had some men in the House of Commons who were “sympathetic to protestant dissenters,” nevertheless, the majority were strongly committed Anglicans and Royalists.⁷⁹ According to Bucholz and Key, “the Cavalier Parliament sought to exclude the sects from public life by passing a sweeping program of anti-Puritan legislation.”⁸⁰ Between 1661 and 1665 this parliament passed five acts that have come to be known as the Clarendon Code. Included in this Code were the Corporation Act (1661), the Act of Uniformity (1662), the Conventicle Act (1664), and the Five Mile Act (1665). As Hill observes, these Acts were intended “to exclude nonconformists from any share in central or local government,” as well as from leadership in the Church of England.⁸¹ Even though Presbyterians had played a major role in the restoration of the monarchy, “they found themselves excluded from the eventual religious settlement. Between 1660 and . . . 1662 about 1,900 of these Puritan clergymen were ejected from their parishes in England and Wales.”⁸² Indeed, notes Spurr, these policies were effective enough that “by the end of the century, those who had been called puritans were referred to as

⁷⁷ Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed*, 225.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 224-25. See also Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Parliament.”

⁷⁹ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 300.

⁸⁰ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 281.

⁸¹ Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 194.

⁸² John Spurr, “Later Stuart Puritanism,” in *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 91.

‘dissenters’, a term which principally denoted their new legal status as dissidents from the re-established Church of England.”⁸³

Although Declarations of Indulgence were repeatedly issued, both under Charles II (1660, 1662, 1672) and, after Charles’ death, James II (1687, 1688), opposition was so severe that very little came of them.⁸⁴ Indeed, along with numerous other grievances aroused by policies introduced by James II, it was opposition to his final Declaration of Indulgence that “helped foment the Glorious Revolution.”⁸⁵ On June 7, 1688, seven high-ranking aristocratic Englishmen wrote a letter to William of Orange inviting him to invade England!⁸⁶

William set to work at once drumming up money, support, soldiers and supplies for a successful cross-channel invasion. Although invading England has often proved ruinous for those who have attempted it, almost everything seemed to go William’s way. According to Bucholz, “As in 1588, even the weather cooperated with the Protestant side, the prevailing winds blowing William’s fleet to England and keeping James’s in port.”⁸⁷ In addition, within weeks of landing, “important noblemen” (and their militias) “began to gravitate to William’s camp.”⁸⁸

In the following weeks there was much debate in parliament regarding the succession. However, on February 6, 1689, it was finally “agreed to offer the throne jointly to William and

⁸³ John Spurr, “From Puritanism to Dissent, 1660-1700,” in *The Culture of English Puritanism, 1560-1700*, ed. Christopher Durston and Jacqueline Eales (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1996), 234.

⁸⁴ According to Johnson and Pastoor, “the aim of these declarations was to provide greater religious freedom by suspending Parliamentary legislation aimed at those who refused to worship according to the established practices of the Church of England.” See *The A to Z of the Puritans*, s.v. “Declaration of Indulgence.”

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Hill, *The Century of Revolution*, 199. See also Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 305-06. However, Coward says that William had sent an emissary to England, supposedly for the purpose of congratulating James on the birth of his son, but in reality “to procure a letter of invitation from leading figures in England.” At any rate, a letter of invitation was written to William and the rest (as they say) is history. See Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 355.

⁸⁷ Bucholz, *A History of England*, 184.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 185.

Mary.”⁸⁹ For Puritans, who were now widely known as “Nonconformists” or “Dissenters,” the most important immediate result of this “Glorious Revolution” was Parliament’s passage of the Act of Toleration (1689). Although they would still be subject to the Test Act, most of the penalties associated with the Clarendon Code were completely abolished.⁹⁰ Of course, such toleration did not extend to Catholics, but “virtually all Trinitarian Protestant Churches were [now] to be tolerated.”⁹¹

One might think that the Act of Toleration would breathe new life into Puritan Dissenters—and, for a short time, it did appear to do so.⁹² Nevertheless (and not a bit ironically), “it was when the remnants of Puritanism finally secured their religious liberty . . . in 1689 that the glue that had given them cohesion finally dissolved.”⁹³ In the opinion of scholars like Johnson and Pastoor, then, the Act of Toleration marks the beginning of the end of English Puritanism. And since 1689 takes us just a bit past the death of John Bunyan in 1688, this provides a very good place to bring our narrative of English politics and Puritanism to an end.

The Life and Thought of John Bunyan

John Bunyan was born in Elstow, near Bedford, in 1628.⁹⁴ He thus grew to manhood during the reign of King Charles I (1625-1649). In *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography, he tells us that he was descended from “a low and

⁸⁹ Coward, *The Stuart Age*, 370.

⁹⁰ Bucholz and Key, *Early Modern England*, 310.

⁹¹ Ibid.

⁹² Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, 4.

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ The literature on Bunyan is vast, but a few good biographical sources (which also discuss Bunyan’s literary work in some detail) include the following: Richard L. Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory: John Bunyan and English Dissent* (Stanford University Press, 2002); Christopher Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man: John Bunyan and His Church, 1628-1688* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1988); Michael Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context* (Keele University Press, 1996).

inconsiderable generation” and that his father’s house was “of that rank that is meanest, and most despised of all the families in the land.”⁹⁵ According to Hill, in 1644, during the first English Civil War, he either “joined or was conscripted into the Parliamentary army.” Although he served in this capacity “for nearly three years . . . he seems to have seen little military action.”⁹⁶ In *Grace Abounding*, however, he does tell us about an incident that occurred while he was a soldier. He had been ordered, along with others, to go besiege a town. But when he was ready to go, another soldier wanted to go in his place. Bunyan consented and tells us that at the siege, as this man “stood sentinel, he was shot into the head with a musket bullet and died.”⁹⁷ In 1647, having been demobilized, he returned back home to Elstow.

In 1649, the same year in which Charles I was executed, Bunyan married his first wife. Although he was to have four children with her, he never even tells us her name. She is significant, however, for as her dowry she brought into her marriage two books: Arthur Dent’s, *The Plain Man’s Pathway to Heaven*, and Lewis Bayly’s, *The Practice of Piety*. Bunyan tells us that he would sometimes read these books with his wife and that, while he “met with no conviction,” they nevertheless began to create in him “some desires to religion,” which resulted in his decision to step-up his attendance (and participation) at the local parish church.⁹⁸ Of particular interest, he says that at this time he was “so overrun with the spirit of superstition” that he “adored . . . with great devotion” virtually everything associated with the church, its ministers, and its services (e.g. vestments, etc.).⁹⁹

⁹⁵ John Bunyan, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, ed. W. R. Owens (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1987), 7. However, most scholars think that Bunyan is probably exaggerating a bit here. Owens, for example, says that Bunyan’s father “had descended from yeoman stock and owned his own cottage, so that Bunyan is exaggerating the lowliness of his social position.” See Owens’ “Notes” at the end of the text, p. 122.

⁹⁶ Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 8.

⁹⁷ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 9.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 9-10. At this point Bunyan would have been attending the Church of England. It was only later that he identified himself with Puritan Separatists.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

Although Bunyan may have “met with no conviction” in the books by Dent and Bayly, he soon encountered it in a sermon which he heard about the evils of violating the Sabbath. Struck in his conscience, he tells us that he went home “with a great burden” on his spirit (because he loved to play games on this day).¹⁰⁰ Nevertheless, by the time he had dined, his spirit had revived. So, he says, “I shook the sermon out of my mind, and to my old custom of sports and gaming I returned with great delight.”¹⁰¹

This is important because it was later that day, while playing “a game of cat,”¹⁰² that Bunyan had an experience which (in certain respects) becomes rather typical of many of his other experiences recorded in *Grace Abounding*. He tells us that while playing his game, “a voice did suddenly dart from heaven into my soul, which said, *Wilt thou leave thy sins, and go to heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to hell?*”¹⁰³ Although initially stunned by the forcefulness of this experience, Bunyan quickly concluded that he was far too great a sinner for Christ to pardon. “I can but be damned,” he thought, “and if it must be so, I had as good be damned for many sins, as to be damned for few.”¹⁰⁴ He threw himself back into playing his game and, for a time at least, sought to satisfy himself with all the sin he could before death should overtake him.

It was not long, however, before Bunyan again began reading the Bible and (this time) experienced a fairly impressive “outward reformation” in his character and speech.¹⁰⁵ So noticeable was this reformation that Bunyan’s neighbors began to speak of him as “a very godly man” and Bunyan himself tells us that “then I thought I pleased God as well as any man in

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 10-11.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 11.

¹⁰² Owens’ description of this game in his “Notes” gives one the impression of a game of ice hockey without the ice. See “Notes,” in *Grace Abounding*, 122n12.

¹⁰³ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 11.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 13.

England.”¹⁰⁶ Although he continued in this way for about a year, it was not to last. The slow, gradual—even agonizing—change that would culminate in Bunyan’s conversion began one day when “the good providence of God” directed Bunyan to Bedford to work on his calling as a tinker.¹⁰⁷ It was here that Bunyan overheard “three or four poor women sitting at a door in the sun, and talking about the things of God.”¹⁰⁸ Although at this time he had become “a brisk talker . . . in the matters of religion,” he quickly realized that these women were “far above” him spiritually, for “their talk was about a new birth” and “the work of God on their hearts.”¹⁰⁹ Bunyan realized that he knew nothing of these things and soon found himself “going again and again” into their company.¹¹⁰

As it turned out, these women were members of a newly-formed separatist congregation there in Bedford, which was then being led by Pastor John Gifford.¹¹¹ In 1650 Bunyan began meeting with this congregation, learning from Pastor Gifford, and seeking their counsel about all the doubts, fears, and temptations with which he was afflicted.¹¹² During this period of time, which lasted a few years, he often saw himself as so wicked and depraved that he felt sure that he had been “forsaken of God” and given over “to the devil, and to a reprobate mind.”¹¹³ Although he experienced some spiritual refreshment from time to time, sometimes

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 15.

¹¹¹ This would have been, of course, shortly after the execution of Charles I, when there was greater religious freedom in the land.

¹¹² Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 23. See also Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 43.

¹¹³ Ibid., 24.

lasting several days or possibly even months, these were merely occasional flashes of light in an otherwise dark, dreary—and even terrifying—existence.¹¹⁴

Help came to Bunyan through reading the Bible (though at times this also resulted in increased anxiety, guilt, and fear), the ministry of Mr. Gifford, and reading (among other things he could get his hands on) a copy of Luther’s Commentary on Galatians. This last book had a tremendous influence on Bunyan, so much so that he even tells us that he prefers it above all other books (the Bible alone excepted) “as most fit for a wounded conscience.”¹¹⁵

Interestingly, the help which Bunyan received from Luther was quickly followed by the worst period of temptation recorded for us in *Grace Abounding*. The temptation was to “sell and part with . . . Christ”—a temptation, Bunyan tells us, which hounded him “so continually” that he was often only rid of it while asleep.¹¹⁶ After enduring this temptation for about a year, he says, he was again assaulted one morning while lying in bed. After resisting the temptation (which repeated itself over and over in his head) for some time, the thought entered his mind concerning Christ, “Let him go if he will.” Feeling himself also to have consented to this thought, Bunyan was utterly crushed, believing that he had committed the unpardonable sin and that there was now no hope left for him at all.¹¹⁷ In this regard, he was particularly troubled by the passage about Esau selling his birthright (Heb 12:16-17). Since Bunyan believed himself to have done much the same thing as Esau, he thought repentance was no longer available to him. For

¹¹⁴ Richard Greaves suggests that Bunyan’s rough chronology in *Grace Abounding* may be off by a couple of years during this period. He thinks that Bunyan may have unintentionally lengthened the amount of time that he spent in mental and spiritual agony. If this is correct, Greaves thinks it is likely due to Bunyan’s depression: “people suffering from this mood disorder typically have an altered sense of the passage of time, which appears to move more slowly than it does for most people.” See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 34-41. The direct citation occurs on p. 35. Either way, however, Bunyan endured a lengthy period of spiritual and emotional turmoil. It should also be observed that the contrast between “light” and “darkness” is one that occurs repeatedly in Bunyan’s writings, often with spiritual and psychological connotations, a fact also noted and discussed in some depth by Greaves throughout his book.

¹¹⁵ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 35.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-7.

the next two years, “save some few moments for relief,” Bunyan tells us that he experienced almost nothing but the continual “expectation of damnation.”¹¹⁸

Eventually, after much spiritual anguish, fear, prayer and study, Bunyan gradually became convinced that he had not, in fact, committed the unpardonable sin.¹¹⁹ God’s mercy in Christ was still available to him and he still had good reason to hope (and trust) in the gracious promises of the gospel. Before reaching this conclusion, however, Bunyan had already become a member of the Bedford Church in 1655.¹²⁰ It was not long before the other members of the congregation recognized Bunyan’s giftedness for preaching and teaching the Word of God.¹²¹ For this reason, then (and quite incredibly, given his own spiritual and psychological condition at the time), Bunyan began exercising these gifts for the benefit of others even before he himself had been set free from all his own fears and doubts.¹²²

For the next four years, then, Bunyan devoted whatever time he could afford to preaching and writing. He must have been a gifted preacher, for once word got out people flocked to his sermons by the “hundreds, and that from all parts.”¹²³ In addition to his preaching, however, he also began to write. Between 1656 and 1660 (when he was arrested) he published the following works¹²⁴: *Some Gospel-truths Opened* (1656), *A Vindication . . . of Some Gospel-*

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 37.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 56-60.

¹²⁰ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 54. Others, however, offer alternative dates for this event. For example, Owens believes Bunyan joined the Bedford Church in 1653. See Owens’ “Notes” in *Grace Abounding*, 126n109.

¹²¹ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 67-8.

¹²² Bunyan confesses, for example, that “at that time I was most sorely afflicted with the fiery darts of the devil, concerning my eternal state.” See *Grace Abounding*, 68. According to Owens, Bunyan began preaching in 1656. See “Notes” in *Grace Abounding*, 126n112.

¹²³ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 69.

¹²⁴ Greaves has a helpful Appendix in which he offers provisional dates for the writing of all of Bunyan’s published works. See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 637-41.

truths Opened (1657), *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658),¹²⁵ and *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded* (1659).¹²⁶

The first two works were directed against the doctrinal errors of the Quakers.¹²⁷ The last, dealing with the doctrines of law and grace, is often regarded as “Bunyan’s most substantive theological exposition of covenant theology.”¹²⁸ But it was his third book, *A Few Sighs from Hell*, in large part an exposition of the story of Dives and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31, which may have carried with it the most immediately significant consequences for Bunyan. Although some see in this work Bunyan holding out “the wonderful hope of salvation through the covenant of grace,”¹²⁹ others see little more than “a hellfire-and-brimstone piece that used the biblical parable of Lazarus and the rich man as an object lesson for sinners.”¹³⁰ Perhaps the most intriguing suggestion, however, concerning the importance of this book (which was actually quite popular with the masses) comes from Michael Mullett. Mullett speculates that the radical social criticism of this book, in which (he says) “Bunyan unmistakably attacked the rich,” may have been at least partly responsible for Bunyan’s arrest and imprisonment just a couple years later.¹³¹

¹²⁵ In 1658 Bunyan’s first wife died. Of course, this was also the year in which Oliver Cromwell died.

¹²⁶ In 1659 Bunyan married his second wife, Elizabeth.

¹²⁷ Helpful discussions of Bunyan’s books can be found in a variety of works. To mention just a few, one might consult Anne Dunan-Page, ed. *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*; Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*; Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context*; and Henri Talon, *John Bunyan: The Man and His Works*, trans., Barbara Wall (London: Rockliff, 1951).

¹²⁸ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 103.

¹²⁹ David B. Calhoun, *Grace Abounding: The Life, Books and Influence of John Bunyan* (Scotland: Christian Focus, 2005), 25.

¹³⁰ Lynn V. Sadler, *John Bunyan*, Twayne’s English Authors Series (Boston: Twayne Publishing, 1979), 19.

¹³¹ See Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context*, 70-73. As Mullett later notes, Francis Wingate, the person primarily responsible for Bunyan’s arrest, was a man whose family had suffered much for royalist sympathies during the Civil Wars and Interregnum. According to Mullett, then, “it would be hard to believe that Wingate did not harbour a grievance against the whole Puritan fraternity that seemed to have been responsible for his family’s misfortunes” (73). Hence, with the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II in 1660, Wingate may have been thirsting for a little revenge.

Bunyan was arrested in November 1660, just a few months after the restoration of Charles II to the English throne. He was charged with violating the Elizabethan Conventicle Act of 1593.¹³² He could have had his freedom had he been willing to swear off preaching to assemblies or conventicles, but he was unwilling to do this (believing that God had called and gifted him for this ministry).¹³³ Although some have suggested that Bunyan's arrest and imprisonment were unjust, Mullett argues that Bunyan was, in fact, in violation of the 1593 Elizabethan Act.¹³⁴ Additionally, several scholars remind us that, after the Restoration, the ruling elite were for some time in a state of fear and tension regarding plots of rebellion and violence. Bunyan's arrest and imprisonment, they say, must be understood within this context of increased fear and anxiety.¹³⁵

Although Bunyan could hardly have known it at the time, he would spend the next twelve years (until 1672) in prison. As one might expect, this was a very great hardship to both Bunyan and his family. Nevertheless, compared to many other dissenters who were imprisoned at this time, Bunyan's time in jail seems to have been relatively mild. It even appears that there were a few occasions in which he was permitted "to visit with his family and to preach in Bedford and the surrounding area—even as far afield as London."¹³⁶ In addition, even in prison Bunyan was given the freedom to study and write. As Greaves observes, "The state could still his

¹³² Owens, "Notes," in *Grace Abounding*, 127n137.

¹³³ Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context*, 75.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹³⁵ "Indeed," says Mullett, "such fears were surely justified by the violent attempts of radical Puritan activists in the early 1660s to reverse the Restoration." See Mullett, *John Bunyan in Context*, 73. See also Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 129-30 and Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 115.

¹³⁶ Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 31.

voice but not suppress his pen.”¹³⁷ Hence, he continued to produce a steady stream of books even from the Bedford jail.¹³⁸

In March 1672, Bunyan was released from jail, coincident with the Declaration of Indulgence issued by Charles II.¹³⁹ Shortly before this, in January, Bunyan was chosen to be the new pastor of the Bedford congregation. Hence, upon his release, “he secured a license to preach, under the heading *Congregational*, on May 9, 1672.”¹⁴⁰ He immediately assumed all the ministerial duties of a pastor, including preaching, teaching, counseling, and so forth. In addition, he continued to write, churning out books at a fairly fast and furious pace right up until the time of his death in 1688.¹⁴¹

The years between Bunyan’s release from his first imprisonment (in 1672), to the time of his death, were in many respects, surely some of the best years of his life. In the first place, the harrowing years of doubt, fear, and anxiety about the state of his soul, chronicled so poignantly for us in *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, were now largely a thing of the past. In addition, he was now a respected pastor, one who had suffered years of imprisonment for the cause of Christ. Further, he was regarded by many as a great preacher, regularly drawing

¹³⁷ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 146.

¹³⁸ These included: *A Relation of the Imprisonment of Mr. John Bunyan* (not published until 1765), *Profitable Meditations* (1661), *I Will Pray with the Spirit* (1662?), *Prison Meditations* (1663), *Christian Behaviour* (1663), *A Mapp Shewing the Order & Causes of Salvation & Damnation* (1663-64?), *The Holy City* (1665), *One Thing is Needful* (1665?), *The Resurrection of the Dead* (1665?), *Ebal and Gerizzim* (1665?), *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), and possibly *A Pocket Concordance* (that may never have been published). In addition, he also wrote *A Confession of My Faith* (1671) and *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification, by Faith in Jesus Christ*, shortly before being released in 1672. And many believe that he probably began writing *The Pilgrim’s Progress* during this period of time (e.g. 1668?). Information on the dating of these publications can be found in such places as Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 637-41, and the “Chronology” at the beginning of *The Cambridge Companion to John Bunyan*, xiii-xix.

¹³⁹ Hill, *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 123.

¹⁴⁰ Sadler, *John Bunyan*, 25.

¹⁴¹ In addition to this, as Hill reminds us, Bunyan also “left a dozen treatises unpublished at his death.” He discusses these, as well as possible reasons for their remaining unpublished, in *A Tinker and a Poor Man*, 323-34. The citation above is from p. 323.

crowds in the hundreds who had come far and wide just to hear him expound the Word of God.¹⁴² And finally, he was increasingly recognized as a great writer, particularly after the publication of *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1678.¹⁴³ For all of these reasons, it is not terribly surprising that Bunyan (by his own admission) sometimes had to fight against temptations toward pride and the lifting up of his spirit.¹⁴⁴

If we briefly direct our attention to the content of Bunyan's writings, then what might we say about his theology? Compared to other aspects of Bunyan studies (e.g. examining Bunyan as a literary artist, psychological and biographical studies, etc.), relatively little has been written about Bunyan's theology. The best book-length study may still be that by Richard Greaves, first published in 1969.¹⁴⁵ David Calhoun devotes a chapter to Bunyan's theology in his

¹⁴² A story sometimes found in works on Bunyan tells of how John Owen, the learned Puritan divine and friend of Bunyan, once told King Charles II that he would gladly "sacrifice all his learning" in order to reach men's hearts in his preaching like Bunyan. See, for example, Gordon S. Wakefield, *John Bunyan: The Christian* (London: Harper Collins, 1992), 34.

¹⁴³ The books that Bunyan is best remembered for include the following: *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (1666), *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Part I in 1678; Part II in 1684), *The Life and Death of Mr Badman* (1680), *The Holy War* (1682), and sometimes, *A Book for Boys and Girls* (1686). However, between 1672 and 1688 he also published: *Differences in Judgment upon Water-Baptism, no Bar to Communion* (1673), *The Barren Fig-Tree* (1673), *Peaceable Principles and True* (1673), *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness* (1675), *Instruction for the Ignorant* (1675), *The Strait Gate* (1676), *Saved by Grace* (1676), *Come, & Welcome, to Jesus Christ* (1678), *A Treatise of the Fear of God* (1679), *The Greatness of the Soul* (1682), *A Case of Conscience Resolved* (1683), *Seasonable Counsel* (1684), *A Holy Life* (1684), *A Caution to Stir Up Against Sin* (1684), *Questions about the Nature and Perpetuity of the Seventh-Day-Sabbath* (1685), *A Discourse upon the Pharisee and the Publican* (1685), *Solomon's Temple Spiritualiz'd* (1688), *A Discourse of . . . the House of God* (1688), *The Water of Life* (1688), *The Advocateship of Jesus Christ* (1688), and *Good News for the Vilest of Men* (1688). After Bunyan's death, the following works were published posthumously (for the first time) by his friend Charles Doe in 1692: *An Exposition on . . . Genesis, Of Justification by an Imputed Righteousness, Paul's Departure and Crown, Of the Trinity and a Christian, Of the Law and a Christian, Israel's Hope Encouraged, The Desire of the Righteous Granted, The Saints Privilege and Profit, Christ a Compleat Saviour, The Saints Knowledge of Christ's Love, A Discourse of the House of the Forest of Lebanon, and Of Antichrist, and His Ruine*. Finally, in 1698 Charles Doe also published Bunyan's *The Heavenly Foot-man*, which was likely composed in the latter part of 1667 or the early part of 1668. Again, these works and their dates can be found, among other places, in the "Chronology" to *The Cambridge Companion to John Bunyan*, xiii-xix.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, Bunyan's comments in "A Brief Account of the Author's Call to the Work of the Ministry," in *Grace Abounding*, 74. There he writes, "I have also, while found in this blessed work of Christ, been often tempted to pride and liftings up of heart." He goes on to say, however, that for the most part he has been delivered of such temptations by daily being "let into the evil of my own heart" with all its "corruptions and infirmities."

¹⁴⁵ Richard L. Greaves, *John Bunyan*, Courtenay Studies in Reformation Theology (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969).

book.¹⁴⁶ And Galen Johnson offers several significant insights into Bunyan's theology in his book, *Prisoner of Conscience*.¹⁴⁷ Finally, there are also at least a few dissertations and more specialized studies which have delved into particular aspects of Bunyan's theology.¹⁴⁸ Here, of course, we can only present a brief outline of some of Bunyan's primary theological emphases and concerns, as well as noting a few of the major influences on his thinking.

To begin, it's important to take note of those books and authors that we are aware of which influenced Bunyan's theology. In this regard, it is important to begin by placing the Bible front and center as by far the most important influence on Bunyan's thinking. Bunyan loved the Bible and firmly believed it to be God's revealed word and wisdom for mankind. Although he could not read Greek and Hebrew, Bunyan knew his English Bible exceedingly well. According to W. R. Owens, "Although Bunyan generally quotes the Authorised Version, it is clear that he knew the Geneva Bible well, and he also refers to the work of Tyndale."¹⁴⁹

Next, Bunyan specifically mentions the important early influence of Arthur Dent's, *The Plain Man's Pathway to Heaven*, and Lewis Bayly's, *The Practice of Piety*. These books, he says, "did beget within me some desires to religion," and were largely responsible for Bunyan's decision to begin regularly attending the local parish church.¹⁵⁰ In addition, not long after his conversion Bunyan tells us about reading a copy of Martin Luther's *Commentary on the Galatians*. This book was extremely significant for Bunyan's life and theology and, while he

¹⁴⁶ See Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 166-87.

¹⁴⁷ Galen K. Johnson, *Prisoner of Conscience: John Bunyan on Self, Community and Christian Faith* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2003).

¹⁴⁸ See, for example, Anjov Ahenakaa, "Justification and the Christian Life in John Bunyan: A Vindication of Bunyan from the Charge of Antinomianism" (Ph.D. diss., Westminster Theological Seminary, 1997). See also, Pieter de Vries, *John Bunyan on the Order of Salvation*, trans., C. van Haaften, *Theology and Religion* 176 (Bern: Peter Lang, 1994).

¹⁴⁹ W. R. Owens, "John Bunyan and the Bible," in *The Cambridge Companion to Bunyan*, ed. Anne Dunan-Page (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 41.

¹⁵⁰ Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 9-10.

does not go into details, he does tell us explicitly that he prefers “this book of Mr Luther upon the Galatians, (excepting the Holy Bible) before all the books that ever I have seen, as most fit for a wounded conscience.”¹⁵¹ Also noteworthy was the substantial influence of John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*, or *Book of Martyrs*, on Bunyan’s theology. In describing his zeal and perseverance for exercising his ministerial gifts in the service of Christ, Bunyan tells us that he has often been encouraged by the teaching and examples provided in the Scriptures, as well as “other ancient histories.” He then goes on to cite specific Scriptural references as well as Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*.¹⁵² Finally, we must also note the influence of the book, *A Relation of the Fearful Estate of Francis Spira, in the Year 1548*, on Bunyan. During one of his intense periods of fear and despair, Bunyan tells us, he “did light on that dreadful story of that miserable mortal, Francis Spira, a book that was to my troubled spirit as salt, when rubbed into a fresh wound.”¹⁵³

In addition, of course, Bunyan had also read works by Quakers,¹⁵⁴ Ranters,¹⁵⁵ Baptists,¹⁵⁶ Latitudinarians,¹⁵⁷ and doubtless many others as well.¹⁵⁸ Finally, significant personal

¹⁵¹ Ibid., 35.

¹⁵² Ibid., 68-9.

¹⁵³ Ibid., 41. It is interesting to compare Bunyan’s description of the effect of Spira’s book on his troubled conscience with that of Luther’s Commentary on Galatians.

¹⁵⁴ Bunyan’s first two published works, as previously noted, were directed against the doctrinal errors of the Quakers. The second book, *A Vindication . . . of Some Gospel-Truths Opened* (1657), specifically responds to the criticisms of Bunyan’s first book, *Some Gospel-truths Opened* (1656), by the Quaker Edward Burrough. Burrough had replied to Bunyan’s first book with *The True Faith of the Gospel of Peace Contended for, in the Spirit of Meekness* (1656). Hence, in responding to Burrough’s criticisms, Bunyan had to carefully read Burrough’s book.

¹⁵⁵ Shortly after meeting some of the good Christian people of Bedford, Bunyan tells us how he came into possession of, and read, “some Ranters’ books.” The Ranters were briefly active in mid-seventeenth century England. They were reputed to engage in all sorts of immoral behavior, declaring that “to the pure all things are pure” (Titus 1:15). Although he was not sure what to make of these books, after asking the Lord for wisdom in prayer, he soon decided to utterly reject their “cursed principles.” See Bunyan, *Grace Abounding*, 15-16.

¹⁵⁶ According to Greaves, Bunyan was an “open-communion, open-membership Baptist.” Essentially, he believed that water baptism “must not be a door to or bar against communion with visible saints.” See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 275, 299. After publishing his book, *A Confession of My Faith, and a Reason of My Practice*, in 1672, Bunyan soon found himself engaged in a nasty conflict with some ‘closed-communion’ Baptists who attacked his views in print. For example, the Particular Baptist Thomas Paul responded to Bunyan’s book with *Some Serious Reflections on That Part of Mr. Bunion’s Confession of Faith: Touching Church Communion with Unbaptized Persons* (1673). Without going into the details of this debate, suffice it to say that Bunyan read the replies to his

influences could be found in people like Pastor John Gifford, John Owen, and many other like-minded non-conformist pastors and laymen with whom Bunyan would have personally conversed and discussed important theological issues. Of course, these remarks do not cover all of the influences on Bunyan's theology, but they do remind us of some of the most significant.¹⁵⁹

What, then, are some of Bunyan's primary theological emphases and concerns? We have seen that Bunyan was much better read than people sometimes assume. Nevertheless, it remains true that, for Bunyan, there was no book more important than the Bible. Bunyan regarded the Bible as the word of God and our primary source of knowledge about God. It is primarily through the Bible that God "revealeth his attributes, his decrees, his promises, his way of worship, and how he is to be pleased by us."¹⁶⁰ The Bible, then, because it is the word of God, is to be the Christian's final authority in all that pertains to faith and practice. Although Bunyan read quite broadly in a variety of works, he was always concerned that his theology be properly

book and responded to them in turn. First, he responded with his book, *Differences in Judgment upon Water-Baptism, no Bar to Communion* (1672), and later, after even more books attacking Bunyan had been written, he concluded his part in the debate with his book, *Peaceable Principles and True* (1673).

¹⁵⁷ Here one thinks of Bunyan's controversy with the Latitudinarian Anglican Edward Fowler over the doctrine of justification. Bunyan read Fowler's, *The Design of Christianity*, while still in prison and responded to it almost immediately with *A Defence of the Doctrine of Justification by Faith in Jesus Christ*. The debate continued with the publication of Fowler's, or possibly his curate's, response entitled *Dirt Wip't Off; A manifest Discovery of the gross Ignorance, erroneousness and most UnChristian and Wicked Spirit of one John Bunyan*. A brief discussion of this debate can be found in Wakefield, *John Bunyan*, 63-65.

¹⁵⁸ Several Bunyan scholars maintain that Bunyan was much better read than he often lets on. See, for example, Greaves discussion in *Glimpses of Glory*, 603-07. There he discusses Bunyan's pre-conversion reading of such things as "ballads, newspapers, and medieval romances" (604). He observes that Bunyan read a variety of religious works, including commentaries and other works of divinity. He may also have read books dealing with such subjects as typology, preaching, poetry, and history. In short, as Greaves observes, "Bunyan's pattern of reading and writing necessitates a re-evaluation of assertions that he was unlearned" (606). In fact, Greaves views this as "One of the most enduring myths about Bunyan," bolstered, at least in part, by Bunyan himself (603).

¹⁵⁹ Greaves reminds us that we should also not neglect to mention the influence of Bunyan's first wife on his theology. "She deserves more credit than she customarily receives for helping him understand fundamental religious concepts, particularly through their shared reading of Dent and Bayly." See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 607.

¹⁶⁰ John Bunyan, *Instruction for the Ignorant*, in George Offor, ed. *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2 (London: Blackie and Son, 1861), 676.

grounded in a correct interpretation of the Bible—for this is the revealed Word of God to mankind and is thus of ultimate authority in all matters theological.

As one might readily guess, Bunyan’s primary theological concerns gravitate around the various aspects of the doctrine of salvation. His reading of Luther’s Commentary on Galatians led him to make the important Lutheran distinction between law and grace. Although the law is “holy, righteous, and good,” its purpose is not to save, but to condemn, the sinner. It terrifies the sinner’s conscience in order that the sinner might flee to Christ for salvation. According to Calhoun, “This became the thesis of Bunyan’s main theological book, *The Doctrine of the Law and Grace Unfolded*, and the underlying theme of all his works.”¹⁶¹

But Bunyan was not only influenced by Luther, as a Puritan separatist he was also strongly influenced by the Calvinist theology held by most other Puritans of his day. In his discussion of Bunyan’s book, *A Confession of My Faith, and a Reason of My Practice*, Greaves observes that the “confessional portion” of Bunyan’s text “embodies a relatively straightforward articulation of Calvinist principles.”¹⁶² He goes on to point out that Bunyan held an infralapsarian view of predestination, and embraced such traditional Calvinist tenets as unconditional election, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the saints.¹⁶³ The salvation of God’s elect is thus entirely of His grace from first to last.¹⁶⁴ “At the same time,” notes Calhoun, “Bunyan insists that the responsibility for eternal damnation is entirely man’s. The reprobate is damned because of his sin.”¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 169.

¹⁶² Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 272.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Everything necessary for the salvation of God’s elect is graciously provided by God Himself. The elect sinner contributes absolutely nothing to his salvation.

¹⁶⁵ Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 172.

It is because of our sin, and the condemnation of God's holy law, that we must flee to Christ for salvation and take refuge under the covenant of grace.¹⁶⁶ There is no salvation apart from Christ and the covenant of grace. We are saved by God's grace, through faith in the person and work of Christ alone.

Bunyan held an essentially Anselmic, or satisfaction, theory of the atonement.¹⁶⁷ Since God is completely just, all sin must be punished—and, of course, all men are sinners. However, because God is also gracious, merciful and loving, He desires to show mercy toward His wayward creatures—at least those whom He has predestined to salvation. The Father's solution is to send His Son to become incarnate as a man.¹⁶⁸ As a man, He can identify with the guilty human race and be justly punished in their place.¹⁶⁹ As God, He can bear the full punishment which is justly due to mankind for their sin and rebellion against God. In this way, Jesus Christ, the God-Man, makes full atonement for the sins of man so that we (i.e. the elect) may be justified by an imputed righteousness through faith in the person and work of Christ alone.¹⁷⁰ Bunyan was absolutely uncompromising on this doctrine.

¹⁶⁶ Bunyan, as many have observed, held to a form of covenant theology. See, for example, Wakefield's discussion in *John Bunyan*, 45-52.

¹⁶⁷ See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 319.

¹⁶⁸ Bunyan fully accepted the orthodox doctrines of both the Trinity and Incarnation. Here one might take a look at Bunyan's brief treatise, *Of the Trinity and a Christian* (1692), as well as statements concerning the deity and humanity of Christ in *Grace Abounding*, 33.

¹⁶⁹ Bunyan is a bit ambivalent about the extent of the atonement, although he tends toward the "limited" view. See the discussions in both Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 83 and Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 174-75. In his book, *The Work of Jesus Christ as an Advocate*, Bunyan notes that Christ is a propitiation "for the sins of the whole world." He then comments, ". . . to be sure, for the elect throughout the world, and they that will extend it further, let them" See George Offor, ed. *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1 (London: Blackie and Son, 1850), 170.

¹⁷⁰ Two of Bunyan's works which address this in some detail are *Light for Them that Sit in Darkness* (1675) and *Of Justification by an Imputed Righteousness* (1692). According to Calhoun, Bunyan's views on the relationship of faith to justification changed over time. Initially, he says, "Bunyan regarded faith as the instrumental cause of justification." But later, he claims, Bunyan "argued that justification precedes faith." See Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 176.

In the same way that Bunyan views the justification of God's elect as a completely gracious work of God, so also does he seem to view their sanctification.¹⁷¹ An interesting example of this can be seen in *The Pilgrim's Progress* (Part 1). At the House of the Interpreter, Christian is shown "a fire burning against a wall." Although he sees one standing beside the fire, "always casting much water upon it, to quench it; yet did the fire burn higher and hotter." When Christian asks the Interpreter about the meaning of the sight, he explains that the fire "is the work of grace . . . in the heart" and that the one casting water upon it is the devil. In spite of this, however, the fire burns "higher and hotter" because (as Christian is then shown) behind the wall there is a man continually casting oil upon the fire. The Interpreter then explains to him that the man "is Christ, who continually, with the oil of his grace, maintains the work already begun in the heart; by the means of which, notwithstanding what the devil can do, the souls of His people prove gracious still."¹⁷²

In his ecclesiological views, Bunyan rejected conformity with the Church of England and was a committed Puritan Separatist or Non-conformist. We have seen that Greaves characterizes Bunyan as "an open-communion, open-membership Baptist."¹⁷³ In *The Heavenly Footman*, Bunyan warns his readers against keeping company with Quakers, Ranters, Freewillers, and some Anabaptists, but then adds (concerning the Anabaptists), that he goes under that name himself.¹⁷⁴ We have also seen that, after Bunyan was released from prison in 1672, "he secured a license to preach, under the heading *Congregational*"—which would be

¹⁷¹ Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 178-79.

¹⁷² See John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (New Jersey: Spire Books, 1987), 33-34. Obviously, this is consistent with Bunyan's belief in the perseverance of the saints to final glory with Christ in the Celestial City. As Bunyan says in *Saved by Grace*, "He that goeth to sea with a purpose to arrive at Spain, cannot arrive there if he be drowned by the way; wherefore perseverance is absolutely necessary to the saving of the soul, and therefore it is included in the complete saving of us." See Offor, ed. *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 1, 341.

¹⁷³ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 275.

¹⁷⁴ See George Offor, ed. *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 3 (London: Blackie and Son, 1859), 383. Of course, this is not to say that Anabaptists were historically identical with Baptists, but merely to point out that Bunyan once described himself along these lines.

consistent with describing him as a Baptist.¹⁷⁵ All things considered, then, it is probably best to see Bunyan as a type of Baptist. According to Calhoun, “Although Bunyan was uneasy with the label ‘Baptist’ (because of his concern for evangelical unity and, no doubt in part, because of his unhappiness about the rigidity of the Baptists concerning Baptism), he is rightly described in his seventeenth-century context as a Baptist, or an Independent, because of his views of church polity.”¹⁷⁶

Bunyan accepted both baptism and the Lord’s Supper as the only two ordinances having biblical support.¹⁷⁷ However, he completely rejected any idea that either of these ordinances might be efficacious for salvation. For this reason, he had no qualms about communing with Christians who, while able to give appropriate evidence of their conversion and faith in Christ, had not submitted to water baptism. Although he believed that all true Christians *should* be baptized, he did not insist on this as a requirement for membership in the Bedford Church.

As Bunyan tells us in his book, *A Confession of My Faith and a Reason of My Practice in Worship*, these ordinances “are of excellent use to the church in this world; they being to us representations of the death and resurrection of Christ; and are, as God shall make them, helps to our faith therein. But I count them not the fundamentals of our Christianity, nor grounds or rule to communion with saints.”¹⁷⁸

Finally, Bunyan’s eschatology could be described as traditional and broadly postmillennial. Although in one sense Bunyan deals with eschatological issues to some degree in *A Few Sighs from Hell* (1658), his most prominent treatment of such issues can be found in *The*

¹⁷⁵ Sadler, *John Bunyan*, 25.

¹⁷⁶ Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 181.

¹⁷⁷ For more in-depth discussion of Bunyan’s views on the sacraments, or ordinances, please see Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 183-85 and Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 273-75, 291-301, and 507-09.

¹⁷⁸ Offor, ed. *The Works of John Bunyan*, vol. 2, 604.

Holy City (1665), *One Thing is Needful* (1665?), *The Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Judgment* (1665?), and *Of Antichrist and His Ruine* (1692).

A Few Sighs from Hell is an extended meditation upon the story of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16:19-31. *One Thing is Needful* is a poetic work which meditates (as we read in the subtitle to this work) “upon the Four Last Things—Death, Judgment, Heaven and Hell.” *The Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Judgment* deals with the resurrection of both the righteous and the wicked, the last judgment, and heaven and hell. *Of Antichrist and His Ruine*, probably written in 1682, but not published until after Bunyan’s death, contains much that could have been regarded as politically subversive (which is probably why Bunyan chose not to publish it).¹⁷⁹ As Greaves’ observes, “Bunyan, like most English Protestants, left no doubt that Catholicism was the religion of Antichrist, and in this context the possibility of James’ succession can only have been forboding.”¹⁸⁰ Although Bunyan was always very careful to avoid date-setting and speculating about when, exactly, these things might happen, he believed that Antichrist (i.e. the papacy) would be destroyed “just before the millennium.”¹⁸¹

In Bunyan’s view, the millennium would be a time in which the church’s “doctrine and worship will be restored to their apostolic purity.”¹⁸² This is largely the topic of Bunyan’s book, *The Holy City*. Although there will be a brief period of Satanic rebellion at the end of this period, the Lord will destroy the rebels, Christ will return, and the last judgment will occur (topics dealt with by Bunyan in *One Thing is Needful* and *The Resurrection of the Dead, and Eternal Judgment*).¹⁸³ Although some see Bunyan’s millenarianism as bordering on the seditious,

¹⁷⁹ See the discussion in Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 443-51.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 447. As we have already seen, the Roman Catholic James II did indeed briefly succeed Charles II in 1685.

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 448.

¹⁸² Calhoun, *Grace Abounding*, 180-81.

¹⁸³ Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 187-89.

Aileen Ross contends that “far from being a political or social revolutionary,” Bunyan “was essentially a conservative, orthodox Christian, and his millenarianism a progressive, hopeful, peaceable view of human history.”¹⁸⁴

Conclusion

This paper has attempted to situate John Bunyan in his social and historical context, as a means of better understanding both him and his theology. In order to do this, we looked first at English politics and history, and the close and inter-connected relationship which they had to the rise and fall of English Puritanism. This is important because, as we argued earlier in this paper, Bunyan himself is best identified and understood as an English Puritan pastor and author. Following Johnson and Pastoor we argued, first, that English Puritanism arose in the late 1550s, with the return of the Marian exiles at the beginning of Queen Elizabeth’s reign, and second, that English Puritanism began to steadily decline in influence and importance following the Act of Toleration of 1689.¹⁸⁵ Since Bunyan’s life spanned the years from 1628 to 1688, this allows us to see his life and work within the context of English Puritanism, as well as within a very turbulent period of English history. As Greaves reminds us, “Bunyan’s life spanned that tumultuous period of English history extending from the Petition of Right of 1628 to the Glorious Revolution of 1688.”¹⁸⁶

Initially the Puritans were interested in “purifying” the Church of England from all doctrinal, ceremonial, and moral impurity (particularly, the perceived remnants of Roman Catholicism). However, by the time Bunyan becomes influential, those Puritans (like Bunyan) who we might identify as “Independents” or “Baptists” were no longer associating with the

¹⁸⁴ Aileen M. Ross, “Paradise Regained: The Development of John Bunyan’s Millenarianism,” in *Bunyan in England and Abroad*, ed. M. van Os and G. J. Schutte (Amsterdam: VU University Press, 1990), 73.

¹⁸⁵ Johnson and Pastoor, *The A to Z of the Puritans*, 3-4.

¹⁸⁶ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, 15.

Church of England. With the restoration of the monarchy under Charles II, these Puritans (and others, like the Presbyterians) became known as “Dissenters,” “Separatists,” and “Nonconformists.” Hence, Bunyan is best understood as a Puritan Nonconformist pastor and writer of the Particular Baptist variety. His theology is generally in line with seventeenth-century English Puritanism. However, while Bunyan is very much indebted to the prevailing Calvinist theology of the Puritans, there are also very strong Lutheran and Baptist elements in his thinking as well.¹⁸⁷ Richard Greaves sums up his study of Bunyan’s theology with these words: “No single theological label without careful qualification will fit Bunyan. . . . His foundation principles were basically Lutheran, but much of his theology was in full accord with the orthodox Calvinism of his period. His doctrine of the church and sacraments was neither Calvinist nor Lutheran but a heritage from the Independent-Baptist tradition.”¹⁸⁸

John Bunyan was a fascinating and extraordinary individual. Born in relatively humble circumstances, without much formal education, hounded for years by obsessive thoughts, fears, anxiety and depression, and then jailed for twelve years for his refusal to quit preaching the word of God, he nonetheless rose to become (by God’s grace, no doubt) one of the most important voices of seventeenth-century English Puritanism—a voice which is still widely heard (and often highly regarded) even in our own day.

¹⁸⁷ Bunyan could be described as a Particular (i.e. Calvinistic) Baptist with “open-communion, open-membership” views regarding the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper. See Greaves, *Glimpses of Glory*, 23, 275, 299.

¹⁸⁸ Greaves, *John Bunyan*, 159.

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