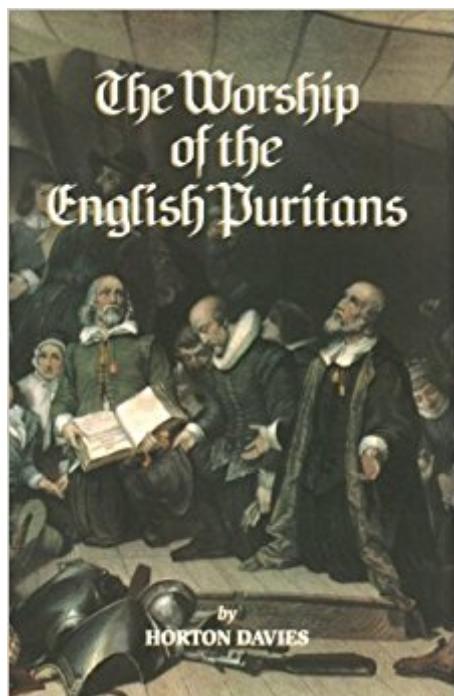


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The Worship Of The English Puritans (Puritanism)



Synopsis

This book, written by Princeton professor Horton Davies as a doctoral thesis in the 1940s explains the crux of Reformed worship, focusing on the Christ-centered, Scripture-based, reverential worship of the 17th century Puritans.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Summary: A largely academic approach in examining the history of Puritan worship, but very thorough and informative on several critical issues surrounding worship and the Word of God. This is a much needed work in our day. On the back cover of this book is written: "There has, arguably, been no more pure worship since the days of the Apostles than that of the English Puritans of the 17th century. It was Christ-centered, Scripture-based, and reverential. God was the focus of all the elements of worship. He was the focus of the preaching, the praying, and the praises. This book explains the crux of Reformed worship." Indeed, in The Worship of the English Puritans, the foundational elements of Puritan worship -included how it was first formed and then defended- are explained in great detail, and Horton Davies gives a detailed, historical analysis of the disagreements and debates between the Puritans and the Church of England. The first thing that struck me about this work was how academic it was. On the surface, the author doesn't seem to have much of an agenda. And throughout the work, it is more of a recounting of history -plentiful in quotes and sources- than it is an examining of the Puritan's claims in light of scripture.

Nevertheless, it was a book that I simply couldn't put down. **Regulative Principle of Worship** The importance of the book clearly lies in how the Puritans go back and forth with the Church of England, the Episcopalians, the Roman Catholic Church, and the separatists on the issues of public worship. Here we see the very beginnings of the Regulative Principle of Worship, where God's word is our sole guide in determining what is and is not necessary and acceptable in the public worship of the church. On Page 64 the author candidly says: "...the authentic puritan note: If God does not ordain these things in His worship, how can they either please Him, or be edifying to His people?" Ultimately, this sola scriptura logic is used by the Puritans from beginning to end. For this book discusses in detail the debates in the church over Liturgy, specifically the orders and sets of worship, such as the Book of Common Prayer, set forms of prayer versus extemporary prayer, song and praise in worship, the preaching, the sacraments, as well as ordinations, services of marriage, funerals, and church discipline. Furthermore, I found it refreshing that the author recognized how the issue of the total depravity of man's will played such a significant role in these debates. Clearly, he understood that the Puritans, working off of Calvin's doctrine of sin and its effect on man, stood against the Anglicans at this very foundational level. Given this, it almost seemed impossible that they would agree on anything. Thus, it was clear that the inability of man to scheme, to invent forms of worship himself, and indeed, to decide what was appropriate for worship, that played a pivotal role in the debate just below the surface. Regarding the Puritan's stance: "If they stood for the pure word of God, they stood out against all impurities which, by hypothesis, were the admixture of human traditions in doctrine and discipline. Their platform was based upon two tenets inherited from John Calvin...his doctrine of scripture...his reaffirmation of the doctrine of original sin in its most sombre colours." (P49)

Elaborate Show in Worship/Reverence Just a quick note here, for this subject is barely dealt with in this work, but the Puritans "objected only to elaborate church music which did not edify the congregations..." (P271). Furthermore, regarding elaborate shows in worship, art, elaborate choirs and musical arrangements, I found this quote fitting in light of the casual, indifferent attitude that is prevalent today: "To call on the name of God, to claim the presence of the Son of God, if men truly know and mean what they are doing, is in itself an act so tremendous and so full of comfort that any sensuous or artistic heightening of the effect is not so much painting of the lily as varnishing of sunlight." (P270), B.L. Manning

Needed in our day Without a doubt, we live in an age where the public worship of God is largely seen as an indifferent thing, an entertainment, or a means primarily aimed at healing our own emotional wounds. Not only have we lost the order, reverence, and devotion that the Puritans found fought so hard for, but we've lost the grasp on scripture that teaches us that Christ is the Head of the Church, and that God's word is the sole

guide to how we worship Him. Consider, "...that God's worship hath no accidentals, that all that is in it and belonging to it, and the manner of it, is false worship, and if it have not a divine institution in particular; that all liturgies, as such, are such false worship...used to defeat Christ's promise of gifts and God's spirit." (John Owen, quoted on P113) And, "The end wherefore God granted his word unto the church was, that thereby it might be instructed in his mind and will as to what concerns the worship and obedience that he requireth of us, and which is accepted with Him. This is the whole scripture itself everywhere declares and speaks out until all that do receive it; as 2 Tim 3:15-17;...it supposeth, it declareth, that of ourselves we are ignorant how God is, how he might be worshiped, Isa 8:20. Moreover, it manifests him to be a 'jealous God', exercising that holy property of his nature in an especial manner about his worship, rejecting and despising every thing that is not according to his will, that is not of his institution, Exod 20:4-6." (John Owen, quoted on P257) Are not reminders like these sorely needed in our churches today? Don't we likewise need a resurgence, by God's grace, of the firm old doctrines of Sola Scriptura, Total Depravity, and the Regulative Principle of Worship? Conclusion: I must also say, however, that with all that I agreed with in reading this book, I found myself challenged at times by the presentations of the Anglicans/Church of England in opposition to the Puritan's Regulative Principle. This book certainly made me stop and think on just why it is that I believe what I believe about the instructions God has given us in the area of public worship. But what an edifying look back that this turned out to be. How refreshing it is to see God's truth shine as pure gold through all the disagreements and debates that sometimes cloud our understanding. This book was not exactly what I expected. It isn't devotional or warm; rather, I found it very academic and didactic. But given the importance of the issues at stake, then as much as now, I mark this work down as a vital contribution to the reformation of today's churches. We MUST know where Protestantism came from, and how we got to where we are today. We not only need a recovery of the precious truths the Puritans fought for, but we need bold men like them as well. Men confident in the scriptures, bold to declare what God's word says, and not swayed by public opinion or political pressure when it comes to the truth of God's word.

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