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## Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life (Book Review)

Michael Williams  
*Dordt College*

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untouched. For example, at one point we are told that a business is not the same as a charity, but no clear attempt is made to delineate just how or why a business is different from a charity or an educational institution or, for that matter, any other non-profit organization. At another point, we are told that "natural resources should be treated as capital, not as consumable income," a wonderfully thought-provoking phrase, but the ultimate implications of carrying such a philosophy out are never really explored. Other issues, such as the legal implications of being an avowedly Christian company, the development of a framework for allocating the business's resources, an articulation of a Christian perspective on risk, corporate limited liability, or bankruptcy, or the importance of integrating prayer or the principle of Sabbath rest into business practice are left essentially untouched. In addition, by taking a completely non-quantitative approach to the issues, the authors sometimes miss opportunities to use the results of some research to enhance validity or credibility.

Each chapter of BTEF begins with a brief "Point for Discussion," and ends with some "Questions for

Reflection." These are important elements of the book, since questions raised in the narrative sections of the chapters have the potential to bear much fruit when discussed in the context of a class, Bible study, or other small group. In addition, the brief accounts of the experiences of businesses that are sincerely trying to be distinctive are both insightful and encouraging.

Some may find BTEF somewhat frustrating because it probably raises more questions than it answers. Others may feel that it does not speak clearly to the particular situation in which they find themselves because they neither work in Christian businesses nor are in positions of substantial authority in so-called secular businesses. Nevertheless, BTEF has something important to say to all Christians in business, and will be particularly useful to those Christians who are already sensitive to the comprehensive nature of their Christian worldview. It is a much needed book which will be a valuable resource for broadening student understanding of the complexities of "doing the right thing" in business, and helping experienced business persons re-think the relationship between their faith and business practice.

*A Quest for Godliness: The Puritan Vision of the Christian Life*, by J. I. Packer (Wheaton, IL: Crossway) 1990. 336 pages. No price. Reviewed by Michael Williams, Assistant Professor of Theology.

The last few years have seen the production of some truly substantive analyses of Puritan thought. Leland Ryken's helpful *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (1986) and Theodore Dwight Bozeman's superb *To Live Ancient Lives: The Primitivist Dimension in Puritanism* (1988) come quickly to mind. And J. I. Packer has written a worthy work on sanctification in his *Keep in Step with the Spirit* (1984). Being an avid reader of both Puritan literature and works on holiness, I was more than happy to find this book on my desk. Unfortunately, it did not live up to expectations.

The book is flawed in several respects. First, it is not put together very well. Some of the chapters seem as though they were written for other uses but are included within the work because they are about the Puritans. For example, chapter 8, which is entitled "'Saved by His Precious Blood': An Introduction to John Owen's *The Death of Death*," is not about John Owen *per se*, but is an apodictic affirmation of the Canons of Dort. Since Owen's work is a treatment of limited atonement, and that is Packer's theme in the chapter, it might serve as an introduction to a publication of Owen's treatise, but that treatise is not included. At other times the work is painfully repetitious.

One gets the feeling that the book was not composed as a whole but is in fact made up of occasional essays that have been merely collected, with no more to hold them together than the fact that they all concern Puritan themes.

Second, Packer's goal is to bring modern evangelicalism under the critique of Puritanism, and so expose it to a Neo-Puritanism vision. Thus he writes: "Churches and Christians today are sadly Laodicean: complacent, somnolent, shallow, stuffy. We need reviving. What to do? Opening the windows of our souls to let in a breath of fresh air from the seventeenth century would, I suggest, be the wisest possible course" (77).

The tone of the book is decidedly polemical and remedial, yet Packer is far too broad in his polemic. It is difficult to get a bead on just who he is directing his argument against. At times he does give hints. He says that "we today" are shaped by "irrational, emotional, romanticism disguised as super-spirituality" (25). Who is the "we" to whom he refers? His own Anglican tradition? The North American Evangelicalism in which he presently lives and works? Just a few pages earlier he speaks of a "man-centered, manipulative, success-oriented, self-indulgent and sen-

timental" Christianity, one that is characterized by spiritual dwarfism compared to the giants of Puritan spirituality (22). Here the culprit is identified as as North American Protestantism. Is that a universal indictment then, one that is as indiscriminate in its targeting and as broad in its field of fire as a 12-gauge shot gun?

Through all the fuzzy moralisms and generalizations that pervade the book, I sense that Packer is really railing against modernity—not modernism, modernity. Although Packer bills the book as a study in historical theology, it is not. Nowhere does Packer seek to place the Puritans within the world of their own experience, within their historical and cultural context. Instead, he often speaks of Owen or Baxter in terms of what they would say to us if they were alive today. Thus he speaks of the Puritans as though they are transportable into our world, into our time. An utter lack of temporal rootedness typifies the work. The Puritans are treated as though there is a functional contemporaneity between themselves and Packer's audience. The book displays a feeling of being unstuck in time. It is utterly devoid of any historical contextualization. As the Puritans are not related to their own time, so too the reader is not situated within his. While there is nothing about the book to suggest that it was actually written half a century ago, it easily could have been. All the scholarship cited within the text is at least fifty years old. There simply is no sense of historical consciousness in the book. I suspect that that is a problem endemic to the entire Neo-Puritan movement.

Packer also appears to have missed a large part of the Puritan genius here. As Ryken points out, the Puritans were biblical activists; they engaged the world about them. They were people of deeds as well as words, action energized and directed by faith. And they were people of the covenant. The kind of issues that gave rise to a Puritan personalist anxiety-psychology that looked for evidences of grace revealed were to some extent aberrational. Yet Packer interprets the entire Puritan experience through that psychology. In fact, he sees the entire Puritan movement as being essentially one with the revivalism of Edwards, Whitefield, and Wesley. Thus, Packer defines the Puritan idea of sanctification strictly in terms of vivification and mortification. There is no

discussion here of the relationship between Puritan notions of holiness and their use of the Jeremiad, no understanding of the Puritan idea of covenant, no treatment of the Puritan interpretation of the law. Such one-dimensional interpretations of a movement that was as varied and long-lived as English non-conformist religion cannot stand today.

His rather one-sided conception of sanctification, one which neglects holiness as the imitation of Christ and the glorification of God as a fruit of Christian gratitude, involves Packer in an amazingly strange correlation between activism and Arminianism. He boldly and baldly claims that a gospel that is concerned with being "helpful" to man (he calls it a "new gospel") is Semi-Pelagian, because it does not seek to glorify God first and foremost (126-7). What is Packer advocating, a gospel whose aim is nothing more than a beatific bubble in which no one exists except the religious subject and its divine object? It is difficult to draw anything other than fully pietistic conclusions here.

If it sounds as if the Puritans have been eclipsed by Packer, that is exactly the way the book reads. At no time did I sense that I was being introduced to the Puritans, that I was entering their world, appreciating them in the fullness of their reality. In the end, this book is not about the Puritans. It is about J. I. Packer. What the reader will find is his theology. The appropriate audience of this book is not those who have an interest in Puritanism, but those who have an historical interest in Packer. How the book actually corresponds to the thought of the Puritans is left uncertain.

This brings me to my final point of criticism. I wonder whether it is appropriate, or even possible, to seek seventeenth century answers to twentieth century questions. This is something that I think is endemic to, and problematic about, the entire Neo-Puritan movement. After reading Packer, I couldn't figure out the questions the answers were being given to anyway.

If you want to read a good book on the Puritans, get Bozeman's *To Live Ancient Lives*, one of the best books I have ever read. If you want a workmanlike treatment of holiness by Packer, see his *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. Let this one pass.'