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## Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were (Book Review)

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somewhat glosses over the mystery of human will as well as the related matter of human choice which God sovereignly controls while the individual is accountable, whether he or she conforms to or transgresses God's revealed will. It is, however, understandable that Storms touches this issue only lightly, for the mystery is so great that even the inspired prophets (Isaiah 40:12-28) and the apostles (Paul in Romans 9:19-24) groped for symbols and imagery to communicate God's ineffable power and majesty.

Although the brevity of Storms' book necessarily

*Worldly Saints: The Puritians as They Really Were.* Leland Ryken. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 1986, 281 pp., \$14.95. Reviewed by Helen Petter Westra, Associate Professor of English.

Although overt Puritan-bashing is no longer in style, the negative stereotypes of Puritans as fanatic, guilt-ridden, religiously regimented folk remain part of our received tradition. A long line of writers as varied as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Mark Twain, H. L. Mencken, and Robert Lowell have offered portraits of the Puritans, generally stressing their somber and unattractive side. Leland Ryken attempts to enlighten and correct this view, not apologetically but with zest and delight that makes this book a pleasure to read.

Indeed, as he attempts to set straight the record on Puritanism, Ryken finds much to praise in the Puritans' robust godliness. His celebrative study of "the Puritans as they really were" presents a people and movement whose strengths and virtues included many remarkably positive, balanced attitudes toward such things as money, child-rearing, sex, education, and social action. To Ryken's credit, he steps aside often "to let the Puritans speak for themselves and to allow readers to draw their own conclusions" (xvii). In fact, one of the most attractive ingredients of this volume -- in addition to its very appealing format and illustrations -- is its graceful inclusion of a wealth of revealing and notable passages from Puritan writers whose volumes are not readily accessible to the general reader.

In examining Puritan morals, values, and theology, the author includes chapters ranging from marriage, family, and work to worship, preaching, and the Scriptures, and finds in the Puritan views a reforming biblicism and piety which he suggests twentieth century Christians would do well to emulate. But this study is not simply an uncritical glorification of the Puritans. As it corrects distorted notions about the Puritans and reflects the complexities in Puritanism as a movement, Ryken's work also tests the Puritan reputation, surveying its weaknesses as well as its strengths.

Ryken deals candidly with the negative stereotypes held about Puritans. His initial chapter ("What Were the First Puritans Really Like?") unblinkingly lists, analyzes, and counters many of the charges commonly directed against Puritans—they were opposed to sex, fun, sports, recreation, art, and physicality; they were self-abasing, moralistic, overly strict, overly emotional, and obsessed with work. Following his disarming introduction, Ryken examines Puritan attitudes (documented in the works of

restricts the depth and range of his discussion, his little volume with its "plain talk" (10) is both valuable and timely. History reveals that churches which permit the gospel of divine election and God's absolute sovereignty to slide toward Arminianism with its emphasis on human freewill suffer grave risks of erosions by an effete social gospel and by cultural and spiritual delusion. Hence Storms' modest paperback is a worthy effort to buttress the gospel of sovereign grace and unconditional election, a gospel we must hold faithfully even as it most assuredly holds us.

writers and leaders such as William Perkins, William Ames, Richard Baxter, Eleazar Mather, Anne Bradstreet, John Eliot, Samuel Williard, and a host of others) toward labor, reproduction, finances, and family relationships. In the chapters on these various topics, we see that many of the positive, constructive approaches Puritans developed toward family, sexuality, work, and money grew out of a reformatory response to Roman Catholic views which minimized sex and family life (in the decrees of celibacy) and minimized industry and enterprise (in the doctrine of monasticism and the oath of poverty).

To conclude his survey of Puritan values, the author turns his attention to education and social action. He underscores the Puritan emphasis on God's Word and an unshakeable view of God's sovereignty as the inspiration for the Puritan's determined quest for knowledge and a society founded on biblical justice, piety, and obedience to God's authority and injunctions.

In his last two chapters, Ryken summarizes Puritanism at its worst and best. In his penultimate chapter titled "Learning from Negative Examples: Some Puritan Faults," Ryken exposes the Puritan tendency to legalism, verbosity, and too much moralizing. He also criticizes their male chauvinism and the partisan spirit in which they overreacted to many positions held by the Catholics and Anglicans. The final chapter, "What the Puritans Did Best: the Genius of Puritanism," forcefully highlights the Puritan principle of "putting God first and valuing everything else in relation to him" (206).

One of the author's stated goals for this book is to help contemporary readers discover "how on many crucial issues the Puritans remain a guide for Christians today" (xviii). On a similar note, theologian James I. Packer's "Forward" to Ryken's book lauds the Puritans for their heroic courage and perseverance as "great souls [in whom] clear-headed passion and warm-hearted compassion combined" (x).

In our present era of spiritual confusion, decay, and lethargy, we do well to recall the vigorous Puritan efforts to integrate faith and action, to struggle for biblical justice, to view the miracle of each human life against the backdrop of eternity, to labor ardently for the greater glory of God. Ryken is to be commended for his compelling reminder of the often neglected and maligned but nevertheless important position of Puritanism in our religious and national heritage.