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Reformation
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Book Reviews

Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were

Leland Ryken

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House (1990).

281 pages, paperback, \$17.99.

When reading this book, I had two reactions about the author's dealing with the Puritans. First, I found his material extremely fascinating. I have been a lover of the Puritans and their writings from the earliest days of my conversion. I have especially appreciated the writings of Thomas Watson, John Flavel, John Owen, and Thomas Brooks. But *Worldly Saints* introduced a host of men to me that I was unaware of. Not only did I learn of new sources of Puritan writings that captured my interest, I also was introduced to a wide variety of topics, discussions, and subjects I was unfamiliar with. I found this book so readable and fascinating that I had a hard time putting it down.

Second, I found Ryken's treatment of the Puritans to be very fair. He reveals their strengths and points out their positive influences on the history of the Christian church, but also reveals their weaknesses and shortcomings as well. This work is not an attempt to make the Puritans something other than what they were. Ryken deals fairly and candidly with his subject.

In the preface, Ryken sets forth his reasons for writing this book:

My purpose in writing this book has been threefold: (1) To correct an almost universal misunderstanding of what the Puritans really stood for; (2) to bring together into a convenient synthesis the best that the Puritans thought and said on selected topics; and (3) to recover the Christian wisdom of the Puritans for today. Evangelical Protestants

are strangers to what is best in their own tradition; my hope is that this book will make a small contribution to remedying that situation (p.xvii).

This book is an excellent summary of Puritan thought and writing. The author begins with a chapter exploring the question, "What were the original Puritans like?" Ryken demolishes the contemporary myths that often surround the Puritans, such as they were against sex, they never laughed or had fun, they wore drab, unfashionable clothes, they opposed sports and recreation, they were hostile to the arts, etc.

The next nine chapters explore Puritan beliefs and teachings on such subjects as work, marriage and sex, money, family, Puritan preaching, church and worship, the Bible, education, and social action.

In chapter eleven, a very important section, Ryken discusses how we can learn from the negative example of "Puritan faults." When reading the histories and writings of those who have gone before us in the Lord's work, we can learn much from what they did right, as well as from their mistakes. Ryken wisely and graciously deals with Puritan excesses. Of course, some readers may not agree with Ryken's evaluation of Puritan faults. This much he admits by saying, "What I call Puritan faults will occasionally seem like virtues to others" (p. 187). I found this chapter very helpful and insightful. It was a reminder that all God's saints are, at best, men of clay.

The closing chapter summarizes the genius of Puritanism. Here Ryken gives us a summary of what the Puritans did best. The Puritans believed that life in its totality belongs to God, and that men, as God's creatures, are to live for His glory alone. This is desperately needed today in the evangelical church. Reading the Puritans will help us to develop a worldview that is truly theocentric. The writings of the Puritans will perhaps infuse into the worldly church of today

some spiritual life and values that are desperately needed. And finally, reading the Puritans will help us pastors, leaders, and Christians to be focused on the person and work of Jesus Christ. This is why I have profited so much from their writings. Puritan authors have held up before my eyes the glory and majesty of the Lord Jesus Christ. I have come away from their works with a new vision of Christ, and have had a deeper hunger created in my soul for Him. In this age of man-centered, need-oriented theology, how refreshing and exhilarating to read material that causes our souls to long for a more intimate knowledge of Christ. Ryken's book will definitely create an interest in Puritan literature which in turn will create a deeper interest in the person and work of Christ Himself.

The reader of *Worldly Saints* will find each chapter's format very helpful. Ryken gives an analysis of each topic and follows with a summary which distills and sets forth his main points. He then gives the reader a list of books for further reading on the topic discussed. And finally, he ends with a few choice Puritan quotes on the subject that drive his theme deeper into the heart.

This is a wonderful book that is very readable and instructive. I not only recommend it; I encourage you to pass it on to others to help create in their lives an appetite for Puritan literature. Perhaps the Lord will be pleased to rekindle the vision and spirituality of the Puritans in this day of shallow, superficial Christianity.

Robert Dickie
Grand Blanc, Michigan

Gospel Worship

Jeremiah Burroughs
Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria (1648, reprint 1990).
398 pages, cloth, \$24.95.

Jeremiah Burroughs (1599-1646) was a member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines who were responsible for the English Reformation. Burroughs was an independent Puritan preacher whose sermons were transcribed by faithful parishioners as they were preached, and published by his friends posthumously.

What drew me to his book, *Gospel Worship*, was its title. Modern praise music and church growth “theology” has changed the face of contemporary Christian worship in just a few short decades, and I was curious to learn from the past what I could about worship. Originally published in 1648, the book was reprinted for the first time in 1990. But Soli Deo Gloria didn’t just reprint it. The English of 1648 may as well be a foreign language. Don Kistler has carefully “translated” the book into the modern idiom.

Unknown for three centuries, the work is a star from the past upon which to measure the course of contemporary Christianity. It is not a difficult book to read. Far from boring, the work is amazingly subtle, rich, and deep. The book is a “how to grow in Christ” book, complete with enumerated steps of progression.

I expected to measure the form and content of seventeenth century worship against the contemporary, but found myself drawn into a deep discussion about the attitude of the worshiper. It is not a book about liturgy, but about the subjective act of worship.

It begins with a discussion of the profane fire of Nadab and Abihu, sons of Aaron, and priests by lineage. According to Scripture Nadab and Abihu apparently kindled the fire

in their firepans contrary to God’s instruction. God charged them with offering “strange fire before the Lord, which He had not commanded them.” And as they engaged in their worship duties, “fire came out from the Lord and consumed them, and they died before the Lord” (Lev. 10:1-2). From this story Burroughs suggests that how we approach the Lord in worship is important—if not to us, certainly to the Lord.

Burroughs writes,

The sin was offering strange fire, for the text says that they offered strange fire which God had not commanded them. But had God ever forbidden it? Where do we find that God had ever forbidden them to offer only one kind of fire? There is no text of Scripture you can find from the beginning of Genesis to this place where God had said in so many words expressly, “You shall offer no fire but one kind of fire.” And yet here they are consumed by fire from God for offering strange fire (p. 3).

The Lord then offers the following explanation for their deaths, “By those who come near Me I will be treated as holy, and before all the people I will be honored” (Lev. 10:3). Those who draw near to the Lord must be sanctified. The God of the Old and New Testaments is the same, so Burroughs thought it important to find out what tripped God’s trigger since God seems to be quite concerned about it.

The book may be of special interest to worship leaders, preachers, and liturgists because of its emphasis upon the subjective attitude required for worship. Directing those who lead worship Burroughs writes, “We must not come in the pride of our hearts because we have more abilities than others.... When you have done your best service of all, still you must conclude that you are an unprofitable servant” (pp. 136-37).

But Burroughs is just as beneficial for the person in the pew.

What behavior, then, is appropriate for me to show towards this living God? Oh, let me be afraid lest my soul depart from the living God. Let me bring a living service to Him. I must not bring a dead heart, let me take heed how I come before the living God with a dead heart and with dead service to sacrifice that which is dead before it comes. It's like carrion that lies dead in the ditch (p. 155).

Burroughs understands that worship renewal is as much the responsibility of those in the pews as those in leadership positions.

An architect of the Reformation, Burroughs was involved in worship renewal himself. He had a profound love of worship and preached that

those that sanctify God's name in worship will hold out because they will find the sweetness of worship. They will meet with God in holy duties and so come to be encouraged in worship. But as for others who worship God in a formal way, their worship will prove to be tedious to them, for they perform the duties, but do not find God in the duties in that spiritual way as the saints do (p. 170).

Worship renewal requires both the removal of the dead wood of simply going through the motions, and stoking the fires of personal holiness.

Because Burroughs feared the Lord more than he feared man, he was able to concentrate on the edification of his people with the stern application of God's truth. Can you imagine anyone today preaching,

Oh, what have you lost who have lived many years under

the ministry of the gospel and yet have not been acquainted with this mystery of godliness in sanctifying God's name in the Word. There are many thousands of souls who are and shall be blessing God to all eternity for what of God they have met with the Word, but you have sat under it stupid as a block, dead and barren, and no good has been done (p. 257).

And yet what preacher has not harbored such thoughts? His argument is that Christians must first be saved and then be sanctified. They must continue growing in faith. Much of the book provides practical ways to grow in faith. But Burroughs also speaks of those who do not grow, who do not sanctify God's name in worship.

The proper end that God has appointed His Word for is to save souls, but now, where God's name is not sanctified, it is turned quite contrary. If it does not work in the right way, it will work the other. The truth is, it hardens men's hearts if it does not bring them to God (pp. 264-65).

He speaks especially of those in the church who hear sermons but do not grow in truth and faith. "But you, having been exercised in the Word so much and God's name not sanctified, must not expect to have your soul comforted in the day of your affliction" (p. 267).

Burroughs presents a positive Gospel and a loving God to attract God's people into Sanctification. But he is not afraid of driving those who claim Christ but cling to their sins with the fear of hellfire and damnation, a preaching style that has fallen on hard times today. Reading Burroughs is an exercise in Sanctification. You won't be disappointed.

Phillip Ross
Bellefonte, Pennsylvania

Life in Jesus

Octavius Winslow

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria.

340 Pages, cloth, \$29.99.

Life in Jesus is a most appropriate title for this cherished volume. By God's grace, Mary Winslow was one of those unusually gifted and vibrant saints whose walk of life and correspondence leave us both humbled and aroused—humbled, because we fall so far short of her standard of godliness in and through Christ Jesus; and aroused, because every line she writes fervently proclaims the worthiness and the amiability of the God and Savior whom we are called to serve with heart, soul, mind, and strength.

Mary Forbes (b. 1774) was the only child of Dr. and Mrs. George Forbes. At age seventeen she married Lieutenant Winslow. Shortly thereafter, she came under spiritual convictions and was brought to gospel deliverance while pleading the promise, "Ask, and ye shall receive." Christ Himself spoke to her heart with power, "I am Thy salvation!" Her soul was saved and her burden of sin was gone.

Throughout her checkered life, Mary Winslow experienced much joy and sorrow. Shortly after emigrating to New York with ten children, she lost her infant daughter. Before the baby could be buried, she received word from overseas that her husband had died as well. Widowed at forty, responsible for nine children, and scarcely settled in America, her entire life was turned upside down. Worst of all, spiritual darkness and despondency overwhelmed her for some months.

Nevertheless, the Lord delivered her from all fears and darkness. He turned her darkness into light. Later, she could confess that affliction was for her welfare: "I think I have learned more of my dreadfully wicked heart and the pre-

sciousness of Jesus during this trial than I ever learned before." By gracious and seasoned experience, she learned how to habitually exemplify a spirit of unwavering faith in suffering. Moreover, God graciously granted her remarkable joys to balance her sorrows. He converted all of her children, fulfilling His promise to her that she should have an "undivided family" in heaven. Three of her sons became orthodox and able ministers of the Gospel; one of them, Octavius, would also become a well-known and prolific writer. It is he who skillfully interweaves comments about his mother's life throughout her numerous letters preserved in this volume.

In Mary Winslow's letters her heart is revealed and profound spiritual lessons are communicated. As I reread *Life in Jesus*, I made a list of her most salient spiritual traits, of which some of the most prominent may be summarized and illustrated as follows:

- 1) Her intimate, daily life of communion with Christ. "Keep close to Jesus," she advises, "and you have nothing to fear from within or without."
- 2) Her continual disappointment with herself, combined with her refusal to be disappointed with her God.

I cannot trace a single thing I ever did in my whole life that affords me any real pleasure to look back upon, [but] when I have a glimpse of God as He is in Himself, as well as what He is to my soul, I sink in all my nothingness, melted into love, at His feet.

- 3) Her patience in adversity and thankfulness in prosperity.

I believe that every doctrine, as well as every word of God, is only effectually profitable as it is worked out by the trying providence of God in the soul's deep experience. . . . A

thousand times have I thanked the Lord for all my trials and afflictions.

4) Her intense desire to observe spiritual exercises of faith in herself and in others, and her sorrow over the lack of such exercises. "Slumbering saints and dead sinners compose most of the congregations."

5) Her detestation for unbelief and exhortation to fervent wrestlings in prayer against it. "How much of needless care and anxiety does unbelief cut out for the tried believer in this wilderness world!"

6) Her determination to live by faith and not by sense. "They are two buckets—the life of sense, and the life of faith: when one goes up, the other goes down. . . . I am persuaded, the more we live by faith the holier and the happier we are."

7) Her uncompromising attachment to God's Word. Her son affirms that the "all-controlling principle of her life was the profound homage with which her whole soul bowed to the supreme authority of God's revealed Word."

8) Her longing to hear Christ richly and fully preached in every sermon. To her son Octavius, she writes:

The more your sermons are filled with Christ, from first to last, the more will Christ honour your ministry. . . . The whole Bible points to Christ, and you must make it all bear upon the subject—Christ the sum and substance of the whole. In Him, God and the sinner meet, and they can meet nowhere else. All the promises are in Christ Jesus, and we must get into Christ before we can get at the promises; and then they are all yea and amen to us.

9) Finally, and perhaps the gift in which the Holy Spirit enabled her to excel—her wrestling at the throne of grace, pleading the promises of God in prayer. "All night I contin-

ued in prayer, until, just before the dawn of day."

Mary Winslow's letters are a veritable treasure of experimental and practical divinity. Living, vital Christianity is here set before us as an undeniable reality, flowing out of the resurrected Christ. In these pages we learn in her own words and by her example, how "to deal unceasingly with God as God deals unweariedly with us." The last chapter alone, covering the final days of her earthly pilgrimage, is well worth the price of the book.

We are grateful to Soli Deo Gloria for making this precious memoir available once more. For more than twenty years, I have longed to see this scarce work reprinted. The few used copies still in circulation have often been passed from one child of God to another in recent decades, but happily, *Life in Jesus* will now reach the hands and hearts of many more.

Read this volume prayerfully. Use it as a daily devotional. Savor its godliness. As Mary Winslow advises, "Let us try to be more like Christ and less like ourselves." Let us pray that God may grant us more of that conformity to His Son which Mary Winslow so abundantly and graciously exemplified!

Joel Beeke

Grand Rapids, Michigan

The Almost Christian Discovered

Matthew Mead

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Soli Deo Gloria.

166 pages, cloth, \$16.95.

Soli Deo Gloria Publications has shown great wisdom in reprinting this book that was first printed in 1661.

We live in a day when many consider themselves Christians because they once (or more than once) responded to an

altar call, or their names are on a church roll, or perhaps they were married in a church or attend church once or twice a year, or perhaps they are so ignorant as to think their “good” works are sufficient to gain them entry into heaven.

False assurance of salvation is nothing new. It existed in Mead’s day. Concerned for his own generation he penned these words: “That the formal sleepy professor may be awakened, and the close hypocrite discovered” (p. 15). In successive, brief, yet pointed chapters, this Puritan author lays open the false assurance of the “almost Christian” and minutely answers twenty of their statements. In his well-reasoned scriptural arguments he shows that the hypocrite’s security, treasured as gold, is nothing more than fool’s gold, without value before a holy God. Chapter headings include the following: “A man may hate sin, and yet be but almost a Christian.” “A man may be much in prayer, and yet be but almost a Christian.” And “A man may have a love to the people of God, and yet be but almost a Christian.” Mead rightly points out that we must accept Christ on His terms, not ours.

The terms upon which God in the gospel offers Christ, are that we shall accept of a broken Christ with a broken heart, and yet a whole Christ with the whole heart. A broken Christ with a broken heart, as a witness of our humility; a whole Christ with a whole heart as a witness of our sincerity. A broken Christ respects His suffering for sin; a broken heart respects our sense of sin; a whole Christ includes all His offices; a whole heart includes all our faculties (p. 169).

Mead is aware that his book may crush a weak Christian; thus he describes the altogether Christian. The book closes with a section that points the unsaved to Jesus Christ.

Pastors and other church officers would do well to

obtain this book and study it. It is important that those who teach God’s Word not offer their hearers false comfort. This book can be used to examine sermons and lessons to see if hearers may inadvertently be given a false sense of security. Mead is right. “Praying ground, hearing ground, professing ground, and conviction ground, is of all the worst ground to perish upon” (p. 188).

Your desire and mine is to point individuals to Christ as the only Savior while also destroying any false grounds upon which the hypocrite may use to pat himself on the back while he goes to hell in peace.

The individual can examine his own life in light of Scripture to help his standing before God. Satan often deceives us by being an angel of light. In other words our very actions we think please God may well be heaping greater judgment on us, because we have never repented of our sins and trusted in Christ alone for Salvation. It is far better to realize our self-deception on this side of the grave. This book is not just to take up space on our bookshelf. Instead its truths need to penetrate the hearts of this generation, waking up “almost Christians” so that under the regenerating power of the Holy Spirit they become “altogether Christians.”

Byron Snapp
Hampton, Virginia