

ZBIGNIEW DROZDOWICZ

Adam Mickiewicz University
Center for Religious and Comparative Studies
e-mail: drozd@amu.edu.pl
ORCID: 0000-0001-9409-9029

Portrayals and Appraisals of Puritans and Puritanism

Abstract. *The aim of these deliberations is to introduce several substantially dissimilar portrayals of Puritans and Puritanism and assessments of their achievement, as well as point to at least some of the sources and circumstances from which the differences stemmed. A proportion of these discrepancies arise from a religious background, while others are rooted in non-religious factors. Still, these are not the only elements to shed light on the objectivity or its absence among the authors of those portrayals and appraisals, as interesting insights may also be obtained from the varied temporal perspectives they adopted and the references to such distinct locations where Puritans functioned as sixteenth- and seventeenth century England and America.*

Keywords: *Puritans, Puritanism, monumental figures, religious and non-religious perspectives*

Today, in the age of image culture, few—if any—are surprised that the portrayal of one and the same person depends so much on the point of view. If this gives rise to any objections, they are voiced primarily by those who find that their likenesses show them in less advantageous a light as they would wish or as their favourably disposed milieu would like. Some of them feel therefore prompted to draw a more agreeable image of themselves and their surroundings. Those who hold a different opinion of such persons are by no means idle and put forward a correction of that correction. This practice of mutual image adjustments has

a relatively long tradition, and may be pursued in a relatively “peaceful” manner, though only when it does not concern sensitive and delicate issues, such as beliefs and religious observances. Here, the portrayals of Puritans and Puritanism offer a cogent example.

1. Puritans: a portrait of their own

This very portrait may be found for instance in Joel R. Beeke’s and Randall J. Pederson’s *Meet the Puritans*, which contains biographies of some of the major Puritan figures of the sixteenth and seventeenth century. Its authors recall that “[t]he term Puritan was first used in the 1560s of those English Protestants who considered the reforms under Queen Elizabeth incomplete and called for further ‘purification’ (from the Greek word *katharos*, ‘pure’).” Further on, they add that “[t]he terms Puritan and Puritanism stuck, though what they mean has changed over the years. Twentieth-century scholars offer various opinions on what the terms actually intend to describe.”¹ In a separate foreword, the publisher of the Polish edition states that “the designation ‘Puritan’ is poorly known, erroneously understood and usually interpreted as a negative one, identified with hypocrisy, sanctimonious piety or extremely parochial mindset. The exception is a narrow group of people who may link Puritans with the Weberian speculations on the origins of capitalism or the ‘witch hunt’ in Salem. In fact, Puritans were first and foremost theologians and scholars who had received excellent education at the best universities of contemporary Europe, people well-versed in ancient languages, writings of the Church Fathers and the achievement of the Reformation. Their methods of inquiry combined the paradigms of medieval scholasticism with evangelical enthusiasm and humanism of their Protestant predecessors.”²

The authors of the work speak in a similar vein in their *Preface*. This they precede with a quote from George Whitefield, to whom “[t]he Puritans [were] burning and shining lights. When cast out by the black Bartholomew Act, and driven from their respective charges to preach in barns and fields, in the highways and hedges, they in a special manner wrote and preached as men having authority. [...] Their works still praise them in the gates; and without pretending to a spirit of prophecy, we may venture to affirm that they will live and flourish, when more modern performances of a contrary cast, notwithstanding their gaudy and tinsel trappings, will languish and die...” If anyone were in any doubt that the authors not only sympathize with the Puritans but also identify with their faith and tradi-

¹ Cf. J.R. Beeke, R.J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, Reformation Heritage Books, Kindle Edition.

² Cf. D.M. Bryćko, Foreword to the Polish edition, in J.R. Beeke, R.J. Pederson, *Purytanie. Biografie i dzieła*, Grand Rapids, Warszawa 2010, p. XI.

tion, it should be definitively dispelled by how they conclude the *Preface*: “[W]e acknowledge our God and Savior, who, by His grace, has fed us so richly through our Puritan-minded English, Scottish, and Dutch forebearers”, also quoting the words of James I. Packer: “In a time of failing vision and decaying values, [the Puritans are] a beacon of hope calling us to radical commitment and action when both are desperately needed.”

It may also be worthwhile to note that the authors enumerate the following five fundamental principles of Puritanism:

1. “The Puritans sought to search the Scriptures, collate their findings, and apply them to all areas of life. [...]

2. The Puritans were passionately committed to focusing on the Trinitarian character of theology. [...]

3. the Puritans believed in the significance of the church in the purposes of Christ. [...]

4. In the great questions of national life presented by the crises of their day, the Puritans looked to Scripture for light on the duties, power, and rights of king, Parliament, and citizen-subjects. [...].

5. In regard to the individual, the Puritans focused on personal, comprehensive conversion.”³

These principles are echoed in those one can find on websites of religious communities which have upheld the Puritan traditions, such as Baptists or Quakers. The latter function currently under a number of appellations, e.g. Religious Society of Friends or Friends Church Britain Yearly Meeting, Friends United Meeting, Evangelical Friends International, Central Yearly Meeting of Friends, Conservative Friends, Friends General Conference, or Beanite Quakerism. Quaker numbers have fluctuated over time, though neither in the past nor presently has the community been so numerous as to be called a mass religious movement.⁴

2. The flawed image

It requires little effort indeed to find such opinions of the Puritans from which it follows that not everything about them was as “pure” as it should have been, or even that in more than one vital respect they were far from the religious purity which would have entitled them to call themselves legitimate members of that community. Such views are expressed for instance in *English Social History* by

³ Having enumerated these tenets, the authors add that in their book “the term *Puritan* is used as a combination of all the concerns presented above.” J.R. Beeke, R.J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*.

⁴ According to the data of the Society of Friends, it numbered 377,557 members in 2017, of which 49% lived in Africa. Cf. *Finding Quakers Around the World*. Friends World Committee for Consultation, Retrieved 14 March 2019.

George M. Trevelyan. The author, discussing their activities during the reign of Elisabeth I (1558–1603), writes that those Puritans who still remained members of the Church of England, “were working hard to overturn and remodel the Church establishment from within. They denounced the Bishops as ‘limbs of anti-Christ.’ They held lectures and prayer-meetings forbidden by the authorities. [...] Already the Puritans showed that gift for electioneering and Parliamentary lobbying and agitation which in the next century remodelled the English constitution. In 1594 they flooded Parliament with petitions from clergy, town corporations, Justices of the Peace and the leading gentry of whole counties. The House of Commons and even the Privy Council were half converted. But Elizabeth stood her ground. It was well that she was firm, for a Puritan Revolution in the Church, effected at that time, would almost certainly have resulted in a religious civil war of Catholic and Protestant from which Spain would not improbably have emerged as victor. In 1640 England was sufficiently strong and sufficiently Protestant to indulge safely in a course of ecclesiastical revolution and counter-revolution which would have been fatal to her half a century before.”⁵ Let us recall that it was the year in which Puritans (such as Oliver Cromwell, among others) achieved substantial military and political success, while quite a few prospered economically as well.⁶

In the chapter entitled *Restoration England* (which covers the latter half of the seventeenth century), Trevelyan observes that “[t]he dissenting congregations, on the other hand, alike in times of persecution and toleration, were made up of men who prided themselves on their independence, and who liked to feel that the chapel and its minister belonged to themselves. [...] Until the Wesleyan movement, dissenting congregations and meetings were almost confined to cities; market towns and industrial districts, though many villages had isolated families of Quakers and Baptists. Some of the Dissenters were poor artisans [...]; others, especially in London and Bristol, were wealthy merchants who could have bought up the squires who persecuted them. And often such merchants did in fact buy out needy gentlemen, after accumulating mortgages on their land. In the next generation the dissenting merchant’s son would be a squire and a churchman (loyal to the Church of England—author’s note). Yet another generation, and the ladies of the family would be talking with contempt of all who attended meeting-houses or engaged

⁵ G.M. Trevelyan, *English Social History. A Survey of Six Centuries from Chaucer to Queen Victoria*, Longmans, Green and Co., London – New York – Toronto 1946, p. 177 ff. More broadly on England during the reign of Elisabeth I, cf. E. Jenkins, *Elizabeth the Great*, G.P. Putnam’s and Sons, New York 1967.

⁶ The historian cited here writes that Cromwell “was a gentleman farmer, owning a small estate near Huntingdon which he worked himself until, in 1631, he sold his land to buy leases of rich river pastures near St. Ives. [...] Even the great landed magnates of the Puritan party, like the Earls of Bedford and Manchester, were deeply interested in increasing their fortunes and estates by modern capitalistic methods. The Puritan, high or low, was taught by his religion to idealize business, enterprise and hard work.” *Ibidem*, p. 242 ff.

in trade!” A little further on, Trevelyan adds: “[for] a generation after 1660 the Puritans were often bitterly persecuted, but more for political and social reasons than from genuinely religious motives. [...] The hard-drinking foxhunters of the manor-house hated the Presbyterians of the neighbouring Town not because they held the doctrines of Calvin, but because they talked through their noses, quoted scripture instead of swearing honest oaths, and voted Whig instead of Tory.” Trevelyan also notes that in the first half of the eighteenth century Quakers—similarly to the Jewish minority in England—“became a power in finance.”⁷

3. Voltaire’s image of Puritans and Puritanism

Admittedly, Voltaire (actually François-Marie Arouet, 1694–1778) is not the most credible source of information on Puritans and Puritanism, but he was and still remains an influential philosopher, man of letters and publicist, who shaped the opinions of those who read what his pen had produced—and plenty of it there was, to be sure: various treatises and essays, stories short and long, letters and notes as well as other kinds of written “produce.”⁸ I have no intention of introducing them all, nor will I attempt to evaluate the quantitatively vast and qualitatively diversified oeuvre of Voltaire’s. I shall refer only to his *Letters Concerning the English Nation*, written during his sojourn in England (1728–1731) and published in France in 1733.⁹

It must be admitted that Voltaire did not waste any time during that stay. Not only did he improve his command of English, but also made acquaintance with such significant philosophers as Alexander Pope, and such writers as Jonathan Swift. He also saw some of the plays of Shakespeare—who enjoyed much acclaim in England—though he was not particularly impressed (noting in *Letter XVIII* that “the great merit of this dramatic poet has been the ruin of the English stage”), as well as comedies by Thomas Shadwell (who, according to *Letter XIX*, “was had in pretty great contempt in Mr. de Muralt’s time, and was not the poet of the polite part of the nation”). Still, he enthused over the philosophical output of John Locke (asserting in *Letter XIII* that “no man ever had a more judicious or more methodical genius, or was a more acute logician than Mr. Locke”), and, even more so, over the scientific achievement of Isaac Newton, to which he refers in several successive letters, stating in the fifteenth that Newton won universal renown thanks to discov-

⁷ “They took to Banking [...], honest, quiet, liberal and peace-loving they had a steadying effect on the excitable violences and Jingoisms of the financial world.” Ibidem, p. 395.

⁸ Cf. R. Pearson, *Voltaire Almighty: A Life in Pursuit of Freedom*, Bloomsbury 2005.

⁹ The author of the monograph dedicated to the life and achievements of Voltaire writes that *Letters* were published without the consent of the royal censor and caused a tremendous scandal, for it followed from them that the British monarchy was superior to the French crown, whereas England was a more tolerant country than France. Cf. ibidem, p. 49 ff.

eries which “relate to the system of the world, to light, to geometrical infinities; and, lastly, to chronology.” Those philosophers and scholars feature in the letters not only as the main but also positive protagonists.

One could not say the same about Quakers, with whom the letters are concerned as well. Voltaire became acquainted with their beliefs and religious practices “first-hand” as he claims, i.e. visiting “one of the most eminent Quakers in England.”¹⁰ Quakers actually play the starring roles in the first four *Letters*, each of which invariably finds some fault with their main object of interest. In the first *Letter*, the “eminent” Quaker presents an agreeable appearance (being “a hale, ruddy-complexioned old man, who had never been afflicted with sickness”, “dressed like those of his persuasion, in a plain coat without pleats in the sides, or buttons on the pockets and sleeves; and had on a beaver, the brims of which were horizontal”), but when Voltaire begins to inquire about the former’s beliefs and religious practices, the situation becomes increasingly equivocal. It turns out that the Quaker—just as his co-religionists—had not been baptized and furthermore asserts that “we are not of opinion that the sprinkling water on a child’s head makes him a Christian.” What is worse, he finds such practices to be Jewish and recommends that one should “abstain to the utmost of their power from the Jewish ceremonies”, supporting his arguments with quotes from *The Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians* and “very specious application of four or five texts of Scripture which seemed to favour the tenets of his sect; but at the same time forgot very sincerely an hundred texts which made directly against them.” The Quaker also invokes the authority of Robert Barclay, author of “one of the best pieces that ever was penned by man.” Voltaire does not provide its title, but it may be surmised that the work is none other than *Theologiae vere christianae Apologia (An Apology for the True Christian Divinity)*¹¹. According to the Quaker, given that “our adversaries confess it to be of dangerous tendency, the arguments in it must necessarily be very convincing.” Voltaire promised his interlocutor that he would read it, but there is nothing to indicate that he kept his promise.

The rites of Quakers astonished Voltaire even more that their views. This is at least what one could infer from the description conveyed in *Letter II*, for as he

¹⁰ Cf. Voltaire, *Letters on England*, The Pennsylvania State University Electronic Classics Series Publication, 2002, p. 6 ff. The Quaker in question was Andrew Pitt, originally a cloth merchant who became an itinerant preacher. Voltaire continued to correspond with Pitt until the latter’s death in 1736. However, he was not a sufficiently significant figure among the Puritans to merit a mention in the book by J.R. Beeke and R.J. Pederson.

¹¹ Robert Barclay (1648–1690) was Puritan theologian, minister and politician (who e.g., acted as absentee governor of East New Jersey). Although the aforementioned monograph concerning the most prominent Puritans omits Barclay, his significant role in the movement is noted by M. Weber in *The Protestant Ethic...* as well as other researchers of that religious community; cf. e.g.: P.O. Wacker, *Land and People*, Rutgers University Press, New Brunswick, New Jersey 1975, p. 305 ff.

entered their meeting with his guide, he saw “about four hundred men and three hundred women in the meeting. [...] I passed through them, but did not perceive so much as one lift up his eyes to look at me. This silence lasted a quarter of an hour, when at last one of them rose up, took off his hat, and, after making a variety of wry faces and groaning in a most lamentable manner, he, partly from his nose and partly from his mouth, threw out a strange, confused jumble of words (borrowed, as he imagined, from the Gospel) which neither himself nor any of his hearers understood. When this distorter had ended his beautiful soliloquy, and that the stupid, but greatly edified, congregation were separated, I asked my friend how it was possible for the judicious part of their assembly to suffer such a babbling? ‘We are obliged,’ says he, ‘to suffer it, because no one knows when a man rises up to hold forth whether he will be moved by the Spirit or by folly. In this doubt and uncertainty we listen patiently to everyone; we even allow our women to hold forth. Two or three of these are often inspired at one and the same time, and it is then that a most charming noise is heard in the Lord’s house.’”¹²

In *Letter III*, Voltaire introduces “one George Fox, born in Leicestershire, and son to a silk weaver, took it into his head to preach, and, as he pretended, with all the requisites of a true apostle—that is, without being able either to read or write.” Nevertheless, he had the courage to “exclaim against war and the clergy”, and speak using second-person terms to those holding judicial office (which prompted an infuriated judge to “send him to the House of Correction, in Derby, with orders that he should be whipped there.”)¹³ Subsequently, *Letter IV* speaks of “the illustrious William Penn, who established the power of the Quakers in America, and would have made them appear venerable in the eyes of the Europeans, were it possible for mankind to respect virtue when revealed in a ridiculous light.” However, he failed to win there the recognition he enjoyed in America, specifically in Pennsylvania, where his governance began with a “treaty between those people [indigenous peoples] and the Christians that was not ratified by an oath, and was never infringed.”¹⁴ Voltaire concludes these remarks and reflections on Quakers with the observation that the faith “dwindles away daily in England”, and that “their children [...] are quite ashamed of being called Quakers”, as they “are desirous of enjoying honours, of wearing buttons and ruffles.”

¹² Cf. Voltaire, *Letters on England*, p. 10 ff.

¹³ George Fox was the founder of the Society of Friends (ca. 1652) and its members consider him to have been the person with whom the community originated. Cf. R.M. Jones (ed.), *George Fox – An Autobiography*, an annotated and slightly abridged text, is also available in print (e.g. Friends United Press), 2006.

¹⁴ Voltaire, *Letters on England*, p. 17 ff. Cf. H. Fantel, *William Penn: Apostle of Dissent*, William Morrow & Co., New York 1974.

4. The image of Puritans and Puritanism in Weber

The fact that such an image functions in social circulation is mentioned by the publisher of the work on Puritans quoted at the outset, but to say that there is little enthusiasm behind it would be an understatement, as they distance themselves from it quite conspicuously. It must be admitted that what Max Weber presented as the greatest achievement of Puritanism has never been particularly valued by the Puritans themselves, at least not by those who decidedly cherish that which belongs to that more remote, divine world rather than this earthly one, whilst treating the latter as a “necessary evil” as opposed to—as *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* would have it—a good which may contribute to achieving salvation provided that certain conditions are met. However, that Weberian image of Puritans and Puritanism deserves to be studied in greater detail because it constitutes not only a singular apology of that religious movement but also demonstrates how traditional religiousness may combine with modern secularity to provide a driving force of the “spirit of capitalism.”¹⁵

The very fact that in his characterization of that spirit Weber does not avail himself in the first place of the declaration of faith of a Puritan theologian or preacher, may provide sufficient grounds for the Puritans to voice their dissenting opinion. These grounds can be found in the words excerpted from Benjamin Franklin’s autobiography and addressed to his compatriots. These words speak not so much of God and the goods of that world beyond, but about the human and such goods of this world as time which, used to the best advantage, enables one to multiply financial capital, which in turn fosters “proliferation and generation of a new one” (in accordance with the principle “Money can beget money, and its offspring can beget more, and so on.”)¹⁶. A little further on one encounters such Puritan virtues as “punctuality and justice”, which nevertheless should apply “in [...] dealings.” Rigorous Puritans are also unlikely to be appreciative of Weber’s explanation that Franklin’s moral strictures “are coloured with utilitarianism. Honesty is useful, because it assures credit; so are punctuality, industry, frugality, and that is the rea-

¹⁵ “[...] it is by no means necessary to understand by the spirit of capitalism only what it will come to mean to us for the purposes of our analysis. [...] Thus, if we try to determine the object, the analysis and historical explanation of which we are attempting, it cannot be in the form of a conceptual definition, but at least in the beginning only a provisional description of what is here meant by the spirit of capitalism. Such a description is, however, indispensable in order clearly to understand the object of the investigation. For this purpose we turn to a document of that spirit which contains what we are looking for in almost classical purity, and at the same time has the advantage of being free from all direct relationship to religion, being thus, for our purposes, free of preconceptions.” Cf. M. Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Routledge, London and New York 2005, p. 14 ff.

¹⁶ Cf. *Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin*, Macmillan, New York 2011.

son they are virtues. [...] the story in his autobiography of his conversion to those virtues, or the discussion of the value of a strict maintenance of the appearance of modesty, the assiduous belittlement of one's own deserts in order to gain general recognition later, confirms this impression. According to Franklin, those virtues, like all others, are only in so far virtues as they are actually useful to the individual [...]."¹⁷ The fact that Benjamin Franklin was a deist rather than a theist, is beyond any doubt not only to Weber but also to the authors of the aforementioned work on Puritans. At any rate, his name does not appear on its pages, while his *Autobiography* is not cited among the "secondary sources on the Puritans."

It is questionable whether they would accept or object to what Weber wrote about Richard Baxter (1615–1691), Puritan theologian and preacher, who is elevated in *The Protestant Ethic* to one of the most significant figures of the Puritan world. According to the author, *Christian Directory* by R. Baxter is "the most complete compendium of Puritan ethics, and is continually adjusted to the practical experiences of his own ministerial activity", in which "the emphasis [is] placed, in the discussion of wealth and its acquisition, on the ebionitic elements of the New Testament. [...] Here asceticism seems to have turned much more sharply against the acquisition of earthly goods [...]. Examples of the condemnation of the pursuit of money and goods may be gathered without end from Puritan writings [...]", but "[t]he real moral objection is to relaxation in the security of possession, the enjoyment of wealth with the consequence of idleness and the temptations of the flesh, above all of distraction from the pursuit of a righteous life."¹⁸ All these and similar assertions are supported by Weber with excerpts from Baxter's *Christian Directory*.

What do J.R. Beeke and R.J. Pederson have to say regarding that theologian and preacher? Admittedly, he does feature in their gallery of eminent Puritans, but his life, activity as a preacher or achievement as a writer is not shown to surpass other representatives of that community. On the contrary, everything he did seems to be fairly typical of their functioning in the seventeenth century. With respect to Baxter's education, the authors noted that it "was largely informal" ("he had four teachers in six years, all of whom were ignorant and two led immoral lives.")¹⁹. During his

¹⁷ "Benjamin Franklin's own character, as it appears in the really unusual candidness of his autobiography, belies that suspicion. The circumstance that he ascribes his recognition of the utility of virtue to a divine revelation which was intended to lead him in the path of righteousness, shows that something more than mere garnishing for purely egocentric motives is involved. [...] If we thus ask, why should 'money be made out of men', Benjamin Franklin himself, although he was a colourless deist, answers in his autobiography with a quotation from the Bible, which his strict Calvinistic father drummed into him again and again in his youth: 'Seest thou a man diligent in his business? He shall stand before kings.'" Ibidem, p. 18 ff.

¹⁸ "Thus inactive contemplation is also valueless, or even directly reprehensible if it is at the expense of one's daily work." Ibidem, p. 104.

¹⁹ Cf. J.R. Beeke, R.J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*.

stay in London (from 1633 to 1635), Baxter showed interest in non-conformism (influenced by the sermons of “Joseph Symonds and Walter Cradock, two godly Puritan ministers in London”). He then “spent the next four years privately studying theology, particularly that of the scholastics, including Aquinas, Scotus, and Ockham. At the age of twenty-three, having as yet “no scruple at all against subscription”, he became a curate at Kidderminster in 164, a duty he continued to perform (with occasional hiatus) for 17 years; his sermons caused offence in some but also induced others to convert. “During the early days of the Civil War, Baxter supported, and on occasion accompanied, the Parliamentary Army. He preached before Cromwell, but he was uncomfortable with the Protector’s toleration of separatists.” In 1649, Baxter wrote *Aphorisms of Justification*, and in 1647—whilst recovering from a serious illness—the first part of the treatise entitled *The Saints’ Everlastings*, in which he confessed that he was “looking death full in the face and yet experiencing the sufficient grace of God.” His pastoral and preaching activity at Kidderminster (1647–1661) apparently swelled the numbers of active parishioners in a town of several hundred souls, but in 1662 it ultimately resulted in his being “ejected from the Church of England by the Act of Uniformity. He continued to preach for the rest of his life where he could, but never gathered a congregation of his own.”²⁰

The authors of this portrayal of Baxter’s admit that his *Christian Directory* “offers keen insights into the life of the believer”, and even that “[n]o Puritan work on applied theology has approached the popularity, scope, or depth of this treatise.” And yet they do not consider that guidebook to have been his greatest writing achievement (“Baxter authored about 150 books.”). What is more, they do not classify his theology as representative for Puritan sciences.²¹ However one looks at it, it is evident that the image outlined by Weber and the characterization supplied by the authors of *Meet the Puritans* do not differ in details, but in the most crucial respects.

5. The monumental figures

Practically every portrayal of Puritans and Puritanism involves such figures who, in one aspect or another, stand out prominently among other members of that reli-

²⁰ “Baxter was a reluctant Nonconformist who favored monarchy, national churches, liturgy and episcopacy, and could accept the unsympathetically revised 1662 Prayer Book.” Ibidem.

²¹ “Baxter’s writings are a strange theological mix. He was one of a few Puritans whose doctrines of God’s decrees, atonement, and justification were anything but Reformed. Though he generally structured his theology along Reformed lines of thought, he frequently leaned towards Arminian thinking. [...] He rejected reprobation. He was greatly influenced by the Amyraldians and incorporated much of their thinking, including hypothetical universalism, which teaches that Christ hypothetically died for all men, but His death only has real benefit to those who believe.” Ibidem.

gious community, while some even appear to reach monumental proportions. The problem is that various depictions highlight different persons and their considerably distinct achievements, whereby some of the latter continue to enjoy due recognition among the fellow believers until the present day, whereas certain endeavours are either passed over in silence or spoken of with substantial circumspection. This is the case with one of the pioneers of the Puritan success in America, John Winthrop (1588–1649). J.R. Beeke and R.J. Pederson provide information on his family (married three times and had six children), education (graduated from the Trinity College at Cambridge), and note that “[s]ometime in the early years, Winthrop caught the fire of Puritanism.” Feeling unsafe in his native country (“Puritan beliefs, which Winthrop strongly embraced, were also repressed.”), Winthrop emigrated to America, where he held the office of governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony for twelve years. He governed “with a firm hand, believing that liberty requires authority. [...] He believed in representative rule, but those elected should rule primarily by Scripture and their consciences. [...] Winthrop had an outstanding influence on American ideals. He lived to see Boston, which he had founded, become a thriving and prosperous capital [...].”²² Based on such a portrayal, one could conclude that J. Winthrop achieved more on the political rather than the religious plane. In recognition of his merits, grateful Americans erected a monument in his honour (now at the National Statuary Hall Collection in Washington).

One can also find such descriptions of Winthrop’s life from which it follows that he had earned that monument through achievements of a different kind. For instance, it is remembered that he effectively opposed freemasons in their attempts to seize control of the elections to the legislative and executive bodies of the Massachusetts Colony.²³ He also contributed substantially to the constitutional determination of the scope of rights and obligations of judges.²⁴ Furthermore, it is recalled that Winthrop combined his commitment to political affairs with profound religious involvement, propagating Puritan ideals of life and coexistence with others. This is eloquently evinced in *A Model of Christian Charity* published in 1630. Piotr Stawiński writes that it conveys the author’s conviction of “the tremendous role of ‘aristocracy of spirit’—pious, enlightened and well-born individuals—in leading communities of people. [...] A fair number of paragraphs is devoted to mutual love, which ensures concord and pursuit of God’s plan with respect to the celestial

²² “Other colonies had planted themselves around Massachusetts, and a New England confederation, of which he was the first president, had been formed under his sponsorship. Free schools had been established and a college incorporated and organized (the authors failed to add that the college is today’s Harvard University—author’s note). Above all, religion had taken deep root in all the settlements, and churches were gathered wherever there was an adequate population. Cf. J.R. Beeke, R. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*.

²³ Cf. F. Bremmer, *Winthrop, John. Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press 2014, p. 305.

²⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 361.

residents. Conclusions from these reflections are encapsulated in four points: first, love among Christians is real, not imaginary; second, it is indispensable for their being of the body of Christ [...]; third, that love is a divine, spiritual, nature; free, active, strong, courageous, permanent; fourth, it does not seek its own, but gives itself wholly to what is beloved.”²⁵

William Penn (1644–1718) is another monumental figure, though not for the authors of the aforementioned work on the Puritans (where not the least reference to him is made) but for those Americans who put a statue of his at the very top of the Philadelphia city hall (Penn was the founder of the city), and made him a patron of various educational institutions, including the University in Oskaloosa, Iowa.²⁶ He was an educated (studied e.g. at Oxford) and an affluent person. His father, Sir William Penn, was an English admiral who lent money to the Royal Navy. By way of settlement of the Navy’s debt, Penn received land in America (located on the border of today’s Pennsylvania and Delaware).²⁷ He was introduced to Puritan religion around 1660 during his studies at Oxford by theologian and university dean John Owen.²⁸ Initially, it did not impress him so deeply as to formulate his life’s plans around it; he was thinking of taking up medicine as a profession, even attended classes in surgery. However, when the university’s authorities decided to dismiss Owen (under allegations of preaching heresy), Penn defended him (for which he was fined and reprimanded).²⁹ In later years, Penn travelled to France (also staying at the court of Louis XIV).

The year 1667 saw the watershed moment in his spiritual life: the meeting with Thomas Loe, a Quaker who is said to have been instrumental in Penn’s “religious conversion”³⁰, an act which caused him to be shunned by his immediate family (Penn lived for a spell with the Quaker families in Cork). During that period, he became personally acquainted with the founder of the community, George Fox, and chose the path of a Quaker theologian and preacher. It was in defence of Quakers that in 1668 Penn published a pamphlet entitled *Truth Exalted: To Princes, Priests and People*, in which he called the Catholic Church a “whore of Babylon”, while

²⁵ “In this sermon, one finds elements which are a lasting component of the Puritan spirituality...” Cf. P. Stawiński, *Boży eksperyment*, Polihymnia, Lublin 2012, p. 49 ff.

²⁶ Cf. H. Fantel, *William Penn...*

²⁷ “The ledgers of the Royal Navy of 1661–1667 show that Sir William Penn (father) advanced the fleet a loan of 7,500 pounds. However, regardless of the amount of Charles II’s debt, its recovery could have improved financial standing of the Quaker gentleman. Still, the latter did not want money but a grant of American property.” Cf. P. Robak, *William Penn*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Semper, Warszawa 2000, p. 187 ff.

²⁸ John Owen (1616 – 1683) was called “‘the leading figure among the Congregationalist divines’, ‘a genius with learning second only to Calvin’s’, and ‘indisputably the leading proponent of high Calvinism in England in the late seventeenth century’...” Cf. J.R. Beeke, R.J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*.

²⁹ Cf. H. Fantel, *William Penn...*, p. 54.

³⁰ Cf. *ibidem*, p. 69.

other Puritan communities were branded as “hypocrites and revelers in God”, and their leaders as “false prophets.” The same year, following the publication of another pamphlet with similar accusations, i.e. *The Sandy Foundation Shaken*, Penn was brought before the court and sentenced to imprisonment in the Tower of London (from which he was released 8 months later). From 1669 to 1670 Penn conducted missionary work in Ireland and in 1671–1677 he travelled to preach in the German countries.³¹ Having returned to England, he would speak out against the intolerant policy of the then authorities, and censured the forms of religious life practiced by some of the Puritan communities.³²

The American chapter of Penn’s life, which began in 1680, was associated not only with the land he was awarded in North America, but also with the designs of the Society of Friends to establish “an extensive area of Quaker settlement on either bank of the Delaware river.”³³ Such plans could also be pursued owing to “the favourable political situation which developed between England and its colonies. [...] As Whigs gave their support to the parliamentary opposition, Charles II was forced on 3 November 1680 to recognize the rights of their provincial assembly in return for their consent to pay taxes to the English treasury. [...] The temporary crisis of the centralist overseas policy of Charles II was exploited by Penn, who on 8 November submitted the draft of the colonial charter drawn up with the aid of lawyer John Darnell to the Commission. It provided for absolute power of Sir William’s descendant over the province that was being established.”³⁴ The corrections made by the representatives of the Commission and the attorney general limited the authority of W. Penn to a substantial degree.³⁵

³¹ “William visited Quaker congregations and chastised the moral collapse of the society in his sermons. He would also give advice on how to lead a pious, diligent life, which Lady Mary Springett Penington, herself a Quaker, found naive.” Cf. P. Robak, *William Penn*, p. 86 ff.

³² “The religious disputations in which William Penn engaged with both the opponents of Quakers and the separatists within the community, made his biographers espouse the conviction that he was more of a polemicist, author of over 50 religious treatises written in 1668–1680, as opposed to a theologian who sought to systematize faith.” Ibidem, p. 148.

³³ “Soliciting the right to establish new community on the virgin American land, Penn wanted to offer the oppressed dissenters the possibility of purchasing land and acquiring wealth, in addition to finding haven from persecution.” Ibidem, p. 186). At first, Penn called his land “New Wales” and subsequently referred to it as “Sylvania” (derived from Latin, it denoted “forests”). The name *Pennsylvania* was introduced under a decree of Charles II, who thus wished to honour Penn senior. Cf. B. Dobrée, *William Penn: Quaker and Pioneer*, Houghton Mifflin Co., New York 1932, p. 120.

³⁴ “As a feudal landowner, he would be entitled to sign acts passed by the colonial assembly, appoint officials, grant titles, and issue judicial rulings.” Cf. P. Robak, *William Penn*, p. 190.

³⁵ “The colonial charter of Pennsylvania invested its owner with the right to govern the province together with the local assembly which represented the settlers. However, they were unable to enact laws which would have been contrary to English legislation.” Ibidem, p. 193.

6. Some general observations

The first observation concerns the credibility of the portrayals of Puritans and Puritanism discussed here. In the case of works created by artists, their credibility may be less important than the ability to render the state of their mind, or the state of mind of persons represented in the paintings. Things are different with those depictions whose authors aim for an objective illustration of not only individual but also collective experiences, and seek to convince the viewer that the goal has largely been accomplished. Such a conviction is shared by virtually each of the cited authors of portrayals of Puritans and Puritanism. Nonetheless, the portrayals do differ, in details and in fundamental issues alike. Even when the very same persons become the protagonists of said depictions, their achievements are presented and evaluated in different ways; not infrequently one omits those pages of their lives which could cast a shadow on their image. These “techniques” of image creation are by no means new, as they had already been used by those prehistoric artists whose paintings of animals and people have survived on cave walls. Later on, they were perfected to such a degree that it was and still remains difficult to distinguish between what constitutes objective knowledge and what serves sublime notions or persuade one of sanctity. Naturally, the use of such techniques by authors who take up the “quill” to broaden and legitimize knowledge should be assessed differently than the endeavours of those who employ them to confirm others in their belief. However, even evangelists were and are expected to demonstrate consonance at least with respect to essentials, while the discrepancies in the evangelical accounts put not only biblists in an awkward position, but many of the ordinary Christians as well. It is obvious that neither the accounts written by the Puritans themselves nor those composed by the outside observers of their lives and achievements possess the cultural power that the Gospels have always had. Still, I would not downplay their significance for the social functioning of that religious community and its social perception of the latter.

Further remarks concern those authors who are unlikely to have meant to confirm their readers in the Puritan faith. Their portrayals vary quite considerably as well, while the intention behind both apologetic and critical appraisals is not always apparent. However, certain conjectures and suggestions may be ventured in that respect. Relatively speaking, the situation is clearest in Voltaire’s case, who after all often articulated his conviction that it would have been best if Christianity had not existed at all, but since it had already happened to humankind, the Puritan version was a lesser evil than the Catholic one; however, given that the former was at odds with the enlightened reason, reason would ultimately surmount it. The critical observations formulated by G.M. Trevelyan in *English Social History* are more puzzling. They may be interpreted as an attempt at defending the Church of

England, but they may equally well be considered an effort to defend the entire English society, which faced the threat of minority religious communities functioning in the metropole and those which emerged in the colonies. Incidentally, the fact that in time the colonies became independent of the British Crown was also due to a major contribution of those communities. One may also wonder at Weber's critical remarks relating to the varieties of Protestantism which, being non-ascetic or not sufficiently ascetic, could not have become the driving force of the capitalist spirit. Although Catholicism provides a negative point of reference in this case, it is not the only denomination mentioned in this sense, as the author also names Lutheranism and those strains of Calvinism which either supported the Anglican church or at least strove for a peaceful coexistence with it. The fact that Weber cites such monumental figures as Benjamin Franklin as well as the political and legal solutions which were adopted in eighteenth-century America may offer a hint in this matter. Still, the problem is that his *Protestant Ethic* aims to show the rise of the spirit of capitalism in the entire Western world, whereas America of that period was nowhere near the advanced stage of capitalist economy witnessed in Great Britain or the Netherlands, for instance. It may of course be presumed that in his treatise Weber did not seek to present the realities of the then societies but a certain vision of social life which anticipated its future development. This would account both for his fairly liberal juxtapositions of places where that spirit was in evidence, as well as for highlighting the achievement of such theologians and preachers whom their fellow believers did not consider greatly eminent, whether during their life or posthumously. It would be even more difficult to determine the rationale which motivated other authors of the portrayals of Puritans and Puritanism quoted in this paper. However, I will refrain from advancing any suggestions in their case.

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