Introduction

Alec Ryrie and Tom Schwanda

There was a time when the title ‘Puritanism and Emotion’ would have seemed like the set-up for a weak joke. Fortunately, the study both of Puritanism and of the history of the emotions has long ago passed that point. It no longer needs to be said that Puritans had emotions, nor indeed that their emotional range extended beyond lugubrious malice. The purpose of the essays in this volume is only incidentally to display the variety, complexity and vigour of Puritans’ emotional lives – although any readers who still doubt that will find ample evidence of it here. The reason for assembling a volume such as this is, rather, to raise a series of deeper and, we believe, more fruitful questions about Puritans and their emotions. What kinds of emotional patterns were characteristic of Puritanism? What did Puritans understand their emotions to be? What, indeed, did they desire them to be, and what work did those emotions do for them? How did they deal with, and discipline, emotions which did not sit neatly with their ideals? How did they cultivate emotions in relationships with their family and friends as well as with God?

The only sensible way to tackle such sweeping, general questions is, of course, with detailed and specific answers which do not pretend any sort of universal applicability. For all their common themes, the essays collected in this volume do not deal with ‘Puritanism’ or indeed with ‘emotion’ in the abstract, but concentrate on the specific emotional experiences or theories of particular Puritan or puritan-leaning individuals. Several of them, indeed, focus unashamedly on one or two of the big names of seventeenth-century Puritanism: Richard Baxter, John Bunyan, Thomas

Goodwin, Ralph Venning, Thomas Watson. Others venture beyond these commanding peaks of Puritanism into the more thickly populated foothills of everyday godly life in old and new England, in order to examine how a wider range of believers found assurance, dealt with affliction, understood the purpose of human friendship or celebrated the joys of experiencing God.

Naturally, therefore, the contributors do not share a single interpretative framework for understanding these issues. If there is an overall picture to be had, it can properly only emerge from collections such as this, rather than determining their shape in advance. However, and perhaps inevitably, the volume is grounded on two shared premises. First, Puritans did not merely have emotions, but their emotional life was rich and complex, and is indispensable if we are to understand their religion and its impact on the seventeenth-century world. Willem op't Hof's essay on the fruitful encounter between Anglophone Puritanism and the more emotionally cautious world of Dutch Reformed piety is an important reminder that Puritanism's emotional culture was in fact *unusually* rich by some contemporary standards. Second, all of these authors approach their Puritan subjects with a degree of sympathetic understanding. Some of us would see ourselves as, to one degree or another, following in the Puritans' own spiritual tradition; others of us would not. All of us are willing to be clear-eyed in our criticism when necessary. But, as will become apparent, we also share a certain humane appreciation of the authenticity and, at times, the costliness of the lived experiences this volume describes. This is no great achievement of empathy. The texts themselves often speak so vividly that such an appreciation is virtually unavoidable.

*

Even if we are not advancing a unified thesis, we have had the nerve to put two fiercely contested abstract nouns in our title. Some overview of what we mean by 'Puritanism' and by 'emotion' is unavoidable.

'Puritan' is a word both too useful to be abandoned, and almost too weighed down with dubious intellectual baggage to be useful.[1] It began as a term of abuse in Elizabethan England, a near-synonym to less enduring terms such as 'precisionist' or 'Novationist', all of which were applied to Protestants who were dissatisfied with the rigour, depth and authenticity of the Reformation of the English Church. The most visible of these Puritans pressed for further structural change, a campaign which was blocked at every turn by the Elizabethan regime and which ended in bitterness.[2] The label continued to be applied to, and, eventually, accepted by those in seventeenth-century England who chafed at the half-reformed state of the English Church and the almost unreformed state of many of their neighbours' lives. This was especially so once the regime of King Charles I began steadily to close down the space which remained for puritan consciences in the established church. A few had already chosen exile or separatism, but in the 1630s a larger exodus began. Many went to the Dutch Republic, where their influence on Reformed piety would be subtle but profound. Many more went to North America, and established a series of self-consciously Puritan colonies whose religious culture would become the keystone of Anglophone American identity. In the meantime, back home, the collapse of Charles I's rule into civil war in the 1640s stirred Puritan hopes (and indeed drew a great many of the exiles home).[3] But the 'Puritan revolution' that followed foundered in the end. The final result was that a restored Church of England did its best to drive Puritanism out,

and that Puritans endured a generation of persecution before finally securing a measure of grudging tolerance.

All of which is true, but it is now clear that there was much more to the story of Puritanism than that heroic tale of struggle. Ever since Peter Lake drew our attention to the 'moderate Puritans' of Elizabethan England, some of them bishops, who fought to change the system from within,[4] we have struggled to produce any clear definition of who was a Puritan and who was not – or, indeed, to decide whether that is a meaningful question. Perhaps we should instead talk of who had puritan characteristics, or replace the P-word altogether. Recent scholars often refer, sometimes unproblematically, to the 'godly', or use the sly term unearthed by the late Patrick Collinson, 'the hotter sort of Protestant',[5] to indicate that 'Puritanism' was at least as much a matter of mood and practice as of doctrine and polity. The blurring of Puritanism into the mainstream of English culture has become a regular theme of modern scholarship. As Collinson's most eminent student has put it, 'zealous Protestantism could . . . be a popular religion'.[6] If you squint at the early modern world hard enough, you begin to see Puritanism everywhere. Perhaps it is not only an English phenomenon: Scottish Puritanism, even German and Hungarian Puritanism begin to seem like useful categories.[7] Or, if you squint with the other eye, it disappears altogether. The most recent study of William Perkins, regularly seen as the prince of English Puritan theologians, makes a powerful argument that he should not be seen as a Puritan at all.[8] And we are all the time squinting at a moving target. As John Spurr has argued persuasively, a term such as 'Puritan' was too useful to contemporaries ever to have a single, stable meaning in such a fast-changing world.[9] This complexity and fluidity has led some scholars, for example Ann Hughes, to speak in terms of Puritanisms.[10]

For the purposes of this volume, fortunately, we do not need to pursue the will-o'-the-wisp of precise definition, but simply to note some parameters. The essays in this volume deal with seventeenth-century Puritanism inclusively, ranging from unmistakable separatists such as Bunyan through to the godly conformists described in Kate Narveson's essay. They also recognise Puritanism's porous boundaries, influencing and being influenced by other religious and national traditions. And they recognise that Puritanism was never simply a religio-political agenda, but a culture, a set of mind and a way of life. It is that which makes discussion of the Puritan emotions worthwhile.

The old stereotype of Puritan emotionlessness owes something to the way that certain Calvinist and post-Calvinist cultures have come to be seen in the modern world. American Puritans stereotypically became the 'frozen chosen' who assumed an effortless New England superiority, who found the emotionalism of revivalist religion distasteful, and who saw it as their religious duty to police, or at least to deplore, their society's morals. Hence the most famous modern definition of Puritanism, from the acerbic Baltimore journalist and sceptic H. L. Mencken: 'the haunting fear that someone, somewhere may be happy'. That was, of course, a satirical jibe at Mencken's contemporaries rather than any sort of historical assessment, and the monumental study of *The New England Mind* published by Mencken's younger contemporary Perry Miller in 1939 made it plain how much richer the seventeenth-century picture had in fact been. Three decades later, Eugene E. White's analysis of the rhetorical strategies of Jonathan Edwards and other eighteenth-century Puritans helped to question the simplistic opposition between reason and emotion beloved of that age's polemicists.[11]

And yet suspicions persist. The association between Calvinist predestination and pervasive despair, for example, continues into contemporary scholarship, as in John Stachniewski's work. As real as Puritans' despair could be, however, there is now every reason to think that this part of their emotional landscape should not be exaggerated.[12] In this volume, Kate Narveson draws attention to the assured contentment which, it may well be, characterised puritanism's silent majority; and David Walker points out that, given the medical, political and other worldly crises which many seventeenth-century puritans faced, we do not need to seek deep theological or existential explanations for their emotional turmoil. When times were better, as Bruce C. Daniels' *Puritans at Play* (1995) has demonstrated in the North American context, Puritans' supposed pathologies are not nearly so visible, although their distinct religious culture certainly shaped their emotional self-expression. And even during the revolutionary turmoil, as S. Bryn Roberts' *Puritanism and the Pursuit of Happiness* (2015) has argued, Puritan theologians could and did set their emotional compasses by other stars than the gloomy stereotype might suggest. The theological turn in recent literary scholarship has also contributed. It is now, mercifully, impossible to confine Puritan writings to a subculture, or to read them through a secular filter in search of themes such as tolerance or the rise of the individual, as demonstrated by recent literary-historical works on broad Puritan culture by Andrew Cambers, Elizabeth Clarke and Narveson herself.[13] Both of the editors of this volume have contributed to this exploration of Puritanism's emotional palate. Tom Schwanda has written on the theme, explored further in his essay in the volume, of how Puritan piety drew on the emotional depth of the mystical tradition.[14] And Alec Ryrie has argued that the intensity and dynamism of the emotional culture of pre-Civil War British Protestantism are the keys to understanding Protestant religious practice.[15]

These longstanding questions have been energised in the last decade or more by the history of the emotions as scholarly theme in its own right. This arose partly out of new-historicist literary scholarship which needed urgently to find ways of handling inner experience in a historically sensitive way, a need which giving rise to programmatic works such as Jerome Kagan's *What is Emotion? History, Measures and Meanings* (2007), and pathbreaking collections of essays such as Gail Kern Paster et al. (eds), *Reading the Early Modern Passions* (2004). A parallel interest from anthropologists of religion such as John Corrigan and Douglas Davies has helped to provide a firm theoretical underpinning.[16] Early modern scholarship has embraced this new field eagerly, from tackling the thorny issue of just what emotions, passions, affections and feelings were understood to be in the period – all of them, of course, are moving targets – to bringing these new methods to bear on key texts, notably Thomas Burton, whose irresistibly rich work on melancholy crosses literary and scientific histories so promiscuously.[17] An exciting range of work continues on this fledgling field, not least thanks to a feast of projects gathered under the umbrella of the Australian Research Council. What unites this fledgling field as a whole, much like this volume, is not a particular interpretation but the conviction that no understanding of historical cultures can be convincing unless it is grounded in the inner experiences of which those cultures consisted.

Perhaps surprisingly – or perhaps not – amongst early modern scholars, the historians of religion have been slow to incorporate these insights into their work. There are exceptions, notably Susan Karant-Nunn's *The Reformation of Feeling: Shaping the Religious Emotions in Early Modern Germany* (2010). We conceived and assembled the present volume – much of which draws on the coal-face work of current and recent doctoral students – in the conviction both that the histories of early

modern religion and of the emotions need one another; and that this need is in fact being met by scholars, whether in history, theology or literary studies, whose work deserves a wider hearing.

*

If the depth and richness of the Puritan emotional life is unmistakable, the essays gathered here demonstrate that the old stereotypes are correct at least in one respect: Puritans were intensely self-conscious of, indeed fascinated by, their own emotions. One of the reasons it is possible to assemble a volume of this kind is that the fiercely focused attention which many Puritans paid to their emotional lives generated rich bodies of source material. Several of the essays here make use of those sources to watch Puritans' emotional experiences and aspirations, and their attempts to nurture the emotions they desired.

Keith Condie's essay uses the thought of Richard Baxter, to modern eyes the most humane of the Puritans, to survey approaches to the underlying problem of Puritan emotions: how do they relate to reason and the intellect? For Baxter, as indeed for any Puritan who gave the matter serious thought, the answer went far beyond the simplistic head/heart dichotomies which seem so natural to our own age. Intellect and the passions needed one another in order for either one to reach its true fruition. Indeed, as Jonathan Edwards would insist in the following century, there are circumstances in which intense emotion is the only rational response. Reason's role is not only to channel, manage, discipline, nurture and deepen that emotion. Sometimes, reason is required even to awaken it.

The fundamental rationality of emotion is likewise a theme of Karl Jones' exploration of Thomas Goodwin's theories on the nature and functions of joy. The striking feature of Goodwin's view is that joy is not, primarily, a human emotion. True joy is derived from God's nature. It is dependent both upon who God is and upon what God does in the created world. Therefore, any joy that can be experienced by humanity is only possible to the degree to which God reveals it to the believer. For Goodwin, this involves a lifelong journey that moves the saint from the initial position of rebellion progressively through faith by grace into ever increasing clarity of vision that beholds the presence of Christ and ultimately of God himself. This, as Puritans invariably believed, was the supreme happiness of humanity, whose purpose, the Westminster Confession insists, is to 'enjoy' God forever.

It is a beautiful theory. The problem is not, chiefly, that 'joy' has here acquired a rarefied meaning some way from its vernacular sense. More troublingly, as Baxter recognised, Puritans' lived reality did not always reflect these ideals. Puritans tended to aspire to emotional states which were settled and enduring, often even seeing these traits as a measure of those states' reality. And indeed, they might often, albeit fleetingly, attain emotional states which *felt* as if they were settled for as long as they in fact endured. In practice, however, they often lived with instability, perhaps not even as regular as an ebb and flow.[18] Puritan pastors were regularly concerned with how to help their people to overcome or, more realistically, to live with this instability. One response, of which Perkins was the doyen, was to cast doubt on the spiritual reliability of emotional experiences, insisting that human emotion was not an index of God's grace. Another, entirely compatible response was to focus attention on the 'peak' experiences themselves. Tom Schwanda's essay looks at the mystical experiences pursued ardently by Thomas Watson and certain other mid-seventeenth-

century English Puritans. Watson's experience was that the great hope of all Christian saints – the beatific vision of the glory of God – could truly be glimpsed in this life. The Heaven-focused spiritual disciplines, most notably contemplation, which Watson cultivated were built around attaining such glimpses. They could be used to feed the believer's quotidian life, but, more importantly, they constituted a foretaste of the deeper reality of enjoyment of God, for which even the highest earthly religious passions are merely signposts.

S. Bryn Roberts' essay turns from these dizzying heights to the daily reality of the Puritan life, and from the sharp pangs of heavenly joy to the this-worldly ideal of happiness. To guide his treatment he draws upon Francis Rous, John Norden and Robert Bolton to consider the Puritan awareness of the nature of happiness, the means towards attaining it and the warning not to substitute short-term sensual pleasures for the enduring happiness of focusing on God. Puritans taught that happiness, often understood in terms of blessedness or delight, could be experienced across a broad range of emotions: not only spiritual joy and ravishment, but also contentment, freedom from the fear of eternal death and ultimately, the fullest expression of the foretaste of heavenly delight. For all of these Puritans, as indeed also for Goodwin and Watson, the joys of heaven were fundamental, but their experience was also that a very real earthly happiness could be build on that foundation.

But the Puritans were also realists, and experienced pastors, who fully grasped the fragile nature of spiritual happiness. A more pressing pastoral difficulty was presented by affliction, a subject which Adrian Chastein Weimer explores through the lives of New England ministers and lay people. It is all very well to preach happiness, but the reality of life in the seventeenth century, or indeed any age, is that it is filled with hardship. It was necessary to learn how to discipline the dangerous passions of

anger, fear and resentment through bearing one's cross in meekness and cheerfulness. The challenge was addressed in both numerous devotional manuals and the correspondence of ministers and laity to mature in sanctification of one's affliction. Careful attention to ascetical practices could refine one's condition and usher one into divine comfort and even joy, while a faulty engagement would continue the spiral of distress and spiritual deadness.

Equally inescapable, as many scholars have recognised and as the thinkers of the period were acutely aware, was the reality of melancholy or, as we might call it, depression. David Walker's essay turns to two of the more prominent nonconformist ministers of the seventeenth century, Richard Baxter and John Bunyan, to probe the nature of their spiritual and mental health, using their spiritual autobiographies as windows into their souls. This spiritual practice of writing functioned therapeutically to guide Baxter and Bunyan to process the psychological torments of their stress and anxiety as well as the despondency that could arise from their mental and spiritual crises. No person lives in a vacuum and that context functions in a formative way in complicating how a person navigates life. If post-1660 English Puritanism was emotionally troubled, this evidence suggests that was an entirely rational and appropriate response to the worldly travails it was enduring.

Since Max Weber, or even since eighteenth-century anti-Calvinism, those travails have stereotypically included agonising despair occasioned by the doctrine of predestination. Over against the logic of that argument, the much-preached, heart-centred doctrine of assurance has received relatively little attention. This is the focus of Kate Narveson's essay. She traces the experience of assurance in the writings of three pre-Civil War Puritan laypeople: Nehemiah Wallington, Richard Willis and Grace Mildmay. For all their diversity, she argues that their cases suggest that

assurance was a disposition that was birthed out of the same doctrinal matrix that prompted anxiety. It therefore served as an essential counter–balance to the demanding Puritan process of salvation. Significantly, assurance was experienced by ministers and lay people alike and was the product of what might often seem, at least to our own age, to be unforgiving systems of ascetical and devotional practices.

These struggles over salvation were, for Puritans, always profoundly individual. Yet Nathaniel Warne's essay signals the importance attached to community in the formation of emotions and virtue – in two senses. First, experientially: the Puritans' experience and belief was not only that the passions could and should support the development of virtues, but that that process was made possible by the Christian community, by the individual believer's place in the web of hierarchies and friendships which comprised the divinely-ordained social order. The dynamic interaction between emotions and virtue fostered moral development, and this in turn reinforced the concept of friendship and the communal role of moral development that was fulfilled in friendship with God. Second, intellectually: for while Puritans and other Protestants disowned much of their medieval inheritance as corrupt, they were nevertheless its heirs, and worked shrewdly, selectively and creatively to draw what resources they could from it. As Warne demonstrates, the Puritans' *eudaimonistic* understanding of human flourishing drew deeply not only on Aristotle, but on Aristotle as mediated through Thomas Aquinas. As in Schwanda's reading of Watson's contemplative piety, Puritans could find the medieval tradition to be a rich resource.

A further set of conversations across the supposed boundaries of Puritanism are on display in the final essay here, Willem op't Hof's examination of the affective devotional writings of the Dutch Reformed Pietists. The linguistic boundary between

the English- and Dutch-speaking worlds is rarely crossed by modern scholars, but in the early modern period the two were woven together by intermingling waves of migrants and exiles, who carried their religious cultures with them. Initial interest in the Puritans' emotion-rich literature inspired, first translation efforts, and eventually the creation of indigenous writings for the Dutch. For some Dutch ministers the Scottish expressions of this writing became more sought after than the English. The popularity of this devotional diet, heavily heart-centered and often (in the fullest sense of the word) mystical, is easily measured by tracing the record of translations and successive republication of what became classics of piety for both clergy and laity. This essay is only an important first foray into a much-neglected field: not only how the emotional culture of Puritanism related to those of its Continental Protestant brethren, but how both fed into the pietism and revivalism of the succeeding age.

Although that last question is beyond the scope both of this volume and of our expertise, we would wish to argue that, at least across the seventeenth century, the nature of Puritan piety did not experience a major evolution. As Charles Hambrick–Stowe argued over thirty years ago: 'As the movement adapted in response to changing political and social pressures over the course of the seventeenth century, the themes of Puritan spirituality and practical divinity remained remarkably constant.'[19] While some scholars suggest post-Restoration piety became more fascinated with 'heavenly mindedness',[20] there were numerous earlier writers such as Francis Rous, John Preston, Richard Sibbes, Richard Baxter and Isaac Ambrose, to name only a brief selection, who wrote passionately on heavenly meditation. Nor is there any evidence that the sharp changes in many Puritans' ecclesiology across the seventeenth century were matched by any similar changes in their pious emotions. Although more research is clearly needed, our suggestion would be that the themes of piety remained

remarkably consistent across the period, but that there was some shift in the actual practices. In particular, the popularity of Puritan devotional manuals of the first half of the century waned in comparison to the later half. Additionally the earlier almost total resistance to singing hymns of human creation began to weaken, with the emergence of psalm paraphrases of Benjamin Keach and reaching full development with Isaac Watts.

What is clear, however, is that Puritan piety, whose emotions were subtle and self-aware as well as profound, was sought after and influential well beyond its English heartland, whether in the European mainland, the American colonies, and, as Reformed Protestantism slowly became a global religion, in the world beyond. This volume argues, simply, that that emotionalism was a vital component of Puritanism's religious life. Much more could be said on the subject. We have little to say here, for example, on the emotions associated with the stages of the life-course, from the sorrow of losing children at birth or of deathbed experiences, to the heightened and sometimes startlingly un-'Puritan' joys of marriage that many Puritan manuals, tracts and diaries describe. It is our hope that there is enough here to spark such further scholarship, and in the meantime to demonstrate the humanity of Puritan culture; and, even, to suggest that there are continuities between the seventeenth century and the challenges of living in today's world.

---

[1] J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim, 'Introduction' in J. Coffey and P. C. H. Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

[2] For the classic account of this struggle, see Patrick Collinson, *The Elizabethan Puritan Movement* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1967). On the 'Novationist' tag and its implications for the earliest origins of Puritanism, see Robert Harkins, 'Elizabethan Puritanism and the Politics of Memory in Post-Marian England', *Historical Journal* 57 (2014): 899-919.

[3] Susan Hardman Moore, *Pilgrims: New World Settlers and the Call of Home* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2007).

[4] Peter Lake, *Moderate Puritans and the Elizabethan Church* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

[5] Collinson, *Elizabethan Puritan Movement*, 27.

[6] Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 325.

[7] David George Mullan, *Scottish Puritanism 1590-1638* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000); W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992); Graeme Murdock, *Calvinism on the Frontier 1600–1660: International Calvinism and the Reformed Church in Hungry and Transylvania* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), esp. ch 6.

[8] W. B. Patterson, *William Perkins and the Making of a Protestant England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

[9] John Spurr, *English Puritanism 1603–1689* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), esp. 7-8.

[10] Ann Hughes, 'Anglo–American Puritanisms', *Journal of British Studies* 39 (January 2000): 1–7.

[11] Eugene E. White, *Puritan Rhetoric: the Issue of Emotion in Religion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1972).

[12] John Stachniewski, *The Persecutory Imagination: English Puritanism and the Literature of Religious Despair* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991); cf. Alec Ryrie, *Being Protestant in Reformation Britain* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 27-39.

[13] Andrew Cambers, *Godly Reading: Print, Manuscript and Puritanism in England, 1580-1720* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Elizabeth Clarke, *Politics, Religion and the Song of Songs in Seventeenth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011); Kate Narveson, *Bible Readers and Lay Writers in Early Modern England* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2012).

[14] Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

[15] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, esp. part I.

[16] Douglas Davies, *Emotion, Identity, and Religion: Hope, Reciprocity, and Otherness* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011); John Corrigan (ed.), *Religion and Emotion: Approaches and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[17] Susan James, *Passion and Action: The Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); Brian Cummings and Freya Sierhuis (eds.), *Passions and Subjectivity in Early Modern Culture* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); Angus Gowland, *The Worlds of Renaissance Melancholy: Robert Burton in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Mary Lund, *Melancholy, Medicine, and Religion in Early Modern England: Reading the Anatomy of Melancholy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[18] Ryrie, *Being Protestant*, 82-3.

[19] Charles Hambrick–Stowe, 'Practical divinity and spirituality' in Coffey and Lim (eds), *The Cambridge Companion to Puritanism*, 204, cf. Charles E. Hambrick–Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth–Century New England* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1982), ix.

[20] Dewey D. Wallace, Jr., *The Spirituality for the Later English Puritans: An Anthology* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1987), xvii.