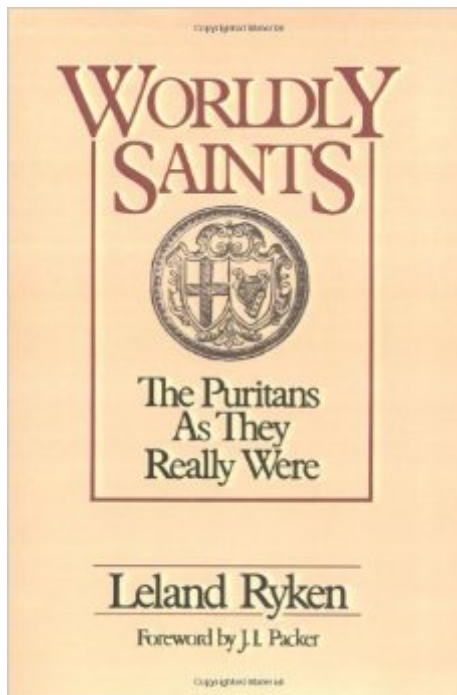


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# Worldly Saints: The Puritans As They Really Were



## Synopsis

"Ryken's *Worldly Saints* offers a fine introduction to seventeenth-century Puritanism in its English and American contexts. The work is rich in quotations from Puritan worthies and is ideally suited to general readers who have not delved widely into Puritan literature. It will also be a source of information and inspiration to those who seek a clearer understanding of the Puritan roots of American Christianity." -Harry Stout, Yale University "the typical Puritans were not wild men, fierce and freaky, religious fanatics and social extremists, but sober, conscientious, and cultured citizens, persons of principle, determined and disciplined excelling in the domestic virtues, and with no obvious shortcomings save a tendency to run to words when saying anything important, whether to God or to a man. At last the record has been put straight." -J.I. Packer, Regent College "Worldly Saints provides a revealing treasury of primary and secondary evidence for understanding the Puritans, who they were, what they believed, and how they acted. This is a book of value and interest for scholars and students, clergy and laity alike." -Roland Mushat Frye, University of Pennsylvania "A very persuasive...most interesting book...stuffed with quotations from Puritan sources, almost to the point of making it a mini-anthology." -Publishers Weekly "With *Worldly Saints*, Christians of all persuasions have a tool that provides ready access to the vast treasures of Puritan thought." -Christianity Today "Ryken writes with a vigor and enthusiasm that makes delightful reading-never a dull moment." -Fides et Historia "Worldly Saints provides a valuable picture of Puritan life and values. It should be useful for general readers as well as for students of history and literature." -Christianity and Literature

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I was most pleased to find this book. Though I am a believer in the Puritans being the pinnacle of christianity I knew that they couldn't be perfect. Mr. Ryken has written a most readable and enjoyable history of the Puritans. He does not shy away from clear problems that they had. What caught my interest most was his demonstration through his scholarship that society under the Puritan "Ideal" had problems, but was infinitely better off than most other areas in western Europe. John Calvin and his followers in Switzerland were clearly extreme in their use of scriptural discipline. The American Puritans were fanatics of control and discipline. The English Puritans were more well rounded in how they were to effect their society. With all that said, Mr. Ryken has shown that the Puritans were not only good people, but may have been the true moral fiber of their different cultures. There seems to be an underlying truth that where the Puritans had the most influence, the people were the most safe and taken care of by the clergy. Were there mistakes in the Puritan movement? Yes, and again I say YES. A mistakeless society or movement is the figment of a deranged imagination or science fiction. The Puritans were human. They did wrong. When they were shown the wrong, from a biblical perspective, they repented and made the change. Modern revisionist historians have made much of the Puritan intolerance's for many things. If these historians would just read Mr. Ryken's book they would see, if they are honest, that the Puritans were very honorable and did stick to what they truly believed to be true. I liked this book because it made me admire the Puritans afresh. I now believe that when someone insults me by alluding to my "Puritan" ethics that I am being complemented much more than I deserve. I would hope to live up to such a statement.

This book gives the reader an excellent introduction to ideals of the Puritan movement. It is packed full of quotations since the point of the book is to let the Puritans speak for themselves on selected topics. This book is an introduction to Puritan thought as a whole, so it does not touch on specific situations. It is very broad and deals with both English and American Puritanism. Though this book is excellent, it should be known by all of you potential buyers that it deals with historical Puritan thought and not with the hard history of facts and events. Another bonus of this book is that it presents the Puritans in clear light. Dr. Ryken celebrates the Puritan culture but at the same time recognizes that they had clear faults. He includes a whole chapter on things we can learn from the negative examples within Puritanism.

Leland Ryken's work, *Worldly Saints; The Puritans As They Really Were*, was definitely an eye opening experience. It seems that in being Canadian, and less familiar with the Puritans, I have been deceived by many common stereotypes that Ryken addresses in the book. I confess that I've gained as many beliefs about the Puritans from *The Simpsons* as I've gained from real history (and John Piper; the one pastor I've encountered who says the word "Puritan" in a positive sense). I've often thought of the Puritans as prudish, ornery, stupid old farmers who came to the 13 colonies wanting to escape England for the establishment of their own country where they could make 'fun' illegal. Dispelling many of my myths, Ryken brings out an admirable work of scholarship portraying the Puritans with a balanced and favorable treatment, drawing from a plethora of Puritan writers to establish his case and showing the Puritans as the life loving, God-fearing people that they were. The book is laid out in quite a straightforward manner, with 12 chapters giving quite a comprehensive overview of Puritanism. Ryken starts with a brief overview of some of the 'true' and 'false' statements about the Puritans and a quick glance at their historical context. In the next four chapters he analyzes their 'home life', tackling their attitudes and beliefs towards work, sex, money and family, with dozens of insightful comments and clarifications on many myths, especially regarding marriage and sex (one of the areas where I admittedly had severely misunderstood the views of the Puritans). The following three chapters deal more with specific 'church life', with chapters on preaching, church/worship and their views regarding the Bible. Here Ryken lays out some comments regarding their powerful sermons that drew people from surrounding churches, and their laudable high regard for the scriptures that permeated every facet of their church worship. The next two chapters take a look at the Puritans attitudes and contributions in the fields of education and social action, with some dispelling of the 'stupid farmers' myth, and the final two chapters analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the Puritans. One must admit that Ryken's work is in fact a scholarly work with several strengths and few weaknesses. One of the most notable strengths is his attempt to show, from the Puritans' own hand, the Puritan positions on various theological and social issues. There is no easier way to dispel a myth than to provide proof from the party in question that they neither believed nor practiced anything resembling the accusation at hand. Another strength of Ryken's work is his obvious effort to give the Puritans a fair hearing for their beliefs, as set against their cultural and socio-economic context. An evidence of an effort to give the Puritans a fair hearing is the many bibliographic resources provided in the book, many of which are at the end of each chapter. Another example of this is the careful explanation of the Puritan views regarding marriage and sex. Unless one would understand how their culture elevated

virginity and held marriage in low esteem, one would be tempted to judge the Puritans in the light of 21st century marital and sexual models. Only with observing the Puritans views in their historical and socio-economic context can one see the actual surprising challenges they set against the established norm of their day. In a day where Puritans are caricatured and misunderstood, once one sees the Puritans in their historic context it becomes increasingly clear that an ignorance of the historic context from which they emerged is likely to be the principal contributor to caricatures and misunderstanding. Though *Worldly Saints* offers a fair and balanced treatment of the Puritans, there are some weaknesses with the book. Though the book offers a few pages of history, it could be strongly argued that Ryken's work is meant for a person who is already substantially familiar with the Puritans. Ryken delivers quotes with no explanation as to who the referenced person is or why a quotation from them should bear any weight whatsoever. For an uninformed reader, Ryken could very well be quoting obscure and atypical Puritans that did not represent the mainstream of Puritan thought. The actual text of the book is around 200 pages (minus endnotes, bibliography, index and the many blank pages, and it would have been nice for Ryken to have added 25-50 pages of history so that the less informed reader could pick up the work and have some historic frames of reference regarding people and places. I would have liked to see an initial chapter on the historic roots of Puritanism, specifically (and in light detail) lining out the main people and a timeline of the movement, not just 2 pages. Due to this reason, I simply would not recommend the book to someone as an introduction to Puritanism, though it is definitely a worthy read for a person who has a little more familiarity with the Puritans. As for the actual contribution of the book to myself, I must admit that I thoroughly enjoyed learning what was taught in the chapters on "work", "money" and "education". At my current church there's no shortage of preaching, teaching on the supremacy of scripture and instruction on the God honoring family. I must admit that I find very little teaching on "work", even though it is something that everyone does. It was encouraging to see the Puritan removal of the sacred/secular dichotomy and also the strong emphasis on the purpose of work and money. In the modern materialistic culture of North America, people seem to see the purpose of work as attaining money and the purpose of money as simply being attained for the acquisition of goods. The Puritan challenges to my materialism, as well as my weak Protestant work ethic, are both enlightening and welcome. I also found it interesting how the Puritans started so many schools, showing that they valued both learning and education. One often equates Puritans with the Salem Witch Trials, along with pictures of unwashed lynch mobs and rampant superstition. Ryken helped remind me that this was most certainly not the case, though there always have been ignorant and frightened people all throughout history. All in all, *Worldly Saints* was a great book, with plenty of

great lessons to learn from the Puritans within its pages. Ryken dispels many of my myths regarding Puritans, writing a work that portrays the Puritans with a balanced and favorable treatment. He eliminates many of the common caricatures from The Simpsons that pervade modern ideas about the Puritans and establishes that the Puritans were life loving, God-fearing people.

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