

BOOK REVIEW:**STEPHEN BASKERVILLE, *NOT PEACE BUT A SWORD:*
THE POLITICAL THEOLOGY OF THE ENGLISH REVOLUTION
(PICKWICK PUBLICATIONS, 2018)**

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Stephen K. Baskerville is a well-known American political scientist and is broadly recognised as a leading authority on divorce, child custody and the family court system.¹ He is currently a Professor of Government and Director of the International Politics & Policy program at Patrick Henry College. He is also the managing editor of the *International Journal for Religious Freedom*.

Baskerville's *Not Peace But a Sword* was originally published in 1993 when he was only in his late twenties. The present volume presents his argument in more complete form than the earlier one. According to Baskerville, the purpose of this expanded edition 'is not to engage in scholarly polemic but to make the words of the Puritans – words widely proclaimed and published in their own time – accessible to the modern reader'.² It is an attempt to expose Puritan ideas in as precise detail as possible, through the careful examination of the language Puritan ministers used to instigate revolution in seventeenth-century England.³

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¹ See, for instance, Stephen Baskerville, *Taken Into Custody: The War Against Fathers, Marriage and the Family* (Cumberland House, 2007).

² Stephen Baskerville, *Not Peace But a Sword: The Political Theology of the English Revolution* (Pickwick Publications, 2018), x.

³ In Baskerville's words: 'This study is an attempt to pin down Puritan ideas in as precise detail as possible, and not as they were formulated in abstract academic expositions or codified in official doctrinal manifestos,

Puritanism was an influential movement in Anglophone history. Its importance extend far beyond events of the 1640s and 1650s. Puritan theology provided the popular foundation for not only the English Revolution of the 1640s but also the American Revolution of 1776. While the importance of Puritanism extends far beyond the events of 1640s and 1650s in England, writes Baskerville, 'it was during that time that the Puritans' political agenda was most clearly articulated'.⁴

This book is therefore an academic effort by Professor Baskerville to explain Puritan ideas that created a religious commitment to fight and die for a revolutionary cause. The Puritans believed in 'covenant theology' between God and his 'elected people' throughout the ages.⁵ This variety of Calvinism, writes Mark A. Noll, 'held that the basis for individual salvation was God's covenant-promise that he would redeem those who placed their trust in Christ'.⁶

In the early seventeenth century life in England was especially difficult for the Puritans and other non-members of the established Church of England.⁷ The Puritans were under intense persecution. They were imprisoned, hanged, or burned at the stake. Their properties were often seized, and government agents watched them relentlessly. Despite these trials, Puritan theology remained profoundly hopeful and it aspired a final victory in the conquering work for Christ.

but through a careful examination of the actual words by which they were imparted to sympathetic listeners as agents of political change'. – Ibid, 5.

⁴ Baskerville, above n 2, ix.

⁵ Mark A. Noll, 'British and French North America to 1765', in Stewart J. Brown and Timothy Tackett (eds.), *Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815* (Cambridge University Press, 2006), 394.

⁶ Ibid., p 398.

⁷ 'In 1625, Charles I took the throne, and also took to himself a Roman Catholic queen; worse still, he showed marked favouritism to a new party in the church which was both 'Arminian' and dogmatically 'prelatical'. Charles made the leader of that party, Bishop William Laud of London, one of his most trusted advisers, and in 1633 appointed him archbishop of Canterbury. Coupled with the king's high-handed dealings with Parliament and his weak foreign policy in the face of the growing power of Roman Catholic France, these policies began to dim Puritan hopes for England's future. As a consequence, the more dogmatic and especially the more congregationally inclined among them began in ever larger numbers to despair of root and branch reform. Singly or in groups some fled to Holland. Then, during the decade of the 1630s, the great Puritan migration to America took place'. – Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (Yale University Press, 1927), 93.

Puritans were convinced of God's ultimate victory over the forces of evil and darkness operating in the world. In the 17th century, during the constitutional struggle of parliamentary forces against absolute monarchy, a civil war was waged in England against the incumbent monarch, King Charles, ultimately deposing and executing him in 1649. 'it was here', writes Baskerville, 'that the Protestant Reformation created not only a new kind of piety but also new kind of politics, and English Puritanism created a new kind of person: the citizen, the activist, the ideologically committed radical'.⁸

Puritan revolutionary ideas, reminds us Baskerville, 'laid the foundations for the English and American law of civil rights and civil liberties as expressed in the respective constitutions of these two countries: freedom of speech and press, free exercise of religion, the privilege against self-incrimination, the independence of the jury from judicial dictation, the right not to be imprisoned without cause, and many other such rights and freedoms'.⁹

The Puritans viewed their political cause as an expression of God's sovereign plan for their nation, seeking to apply God's law as impeccably as they could. The Puritan concept of Providence was closely connected with the emphasis on law as a means of reformation. According to the late Harold Berman, 'the belief that God has providentially revealed himself in the ongoing history of the English common law is the Puritan ... legacy of the seventeenth century English Revolution to Western jurisprudence'.¹⁰

Not Peace But a Sword provides an important case study in the Puritanism of the English Revolution. Based on sermons preached to the Long Parliament and other political bodies, this book demonstrates how Puritan religious and political ideas transformed the English Civil War into the world's first great modern revolution. It offers a detailed analysis of the language of Puritan ministers used 'to instigate revolution in seventeenth-century Puritan ministers used to instigate revolution in seventeenth-century England. It is based largely on sermons preached in the Long Parliament and other political assemblies on days of public fasting'.¹¹

⁸ Baskerville, above n 2, 9.

⁹ Ibid, p 31.

¹⁰ Harold J. Berman, 'Law and Belief in Three Revolutions' (1984) 18 (3) *Valparaiso University Law Review* 569, 613.

¹¹ Baskerville, above n 2, 1.

The introduction is particularly enlightening as it highlights the social conditions which underpinned the Puritan Revolution in England: rapid demographic and economic change and an increasing polarisation between the rich and the poor. This led to various social and psychic disorders (such as alienation, anxiety, depression, and despair). This book then explores the social psychology behind the rise of Puritanism. It explains the ideas of revolutionary Puritanism much as it was presented to popular audiences in its own day.

Baskerville then analyses the underlying social changes that gave rise to Puritan radicalism. The Puritan preachers developed a sophisticated political sociology that articulated a new social and political consciousness. In the process, they challenged the traditional political order by appealing to the needs and concerns of a people caught up in the problems of rapid social and economic change.

Throughout the many pages of this book the manifold aspects of Puritan theology are meticulously examined, including the Puritan theological position on providence, sin, the covenant, faith and the church. The author seeks to demonstrate how this contributed to the erosion of traditional hierarchies and encouraged people to question the exercise of public office. As noted by Baskerville, ‘the Puritans provided the popular foundation for not only the English Revolution of the 1640s but such later events as the American Revolution of 1776, and it left a style and method of popular agitation that was passed down to movements for the abolition of slavery, the struggles of the working class, and many others’.¹²

Baskerville also explains that ‘virtually every major social and political movement in the English-speaking world has asserted itself on the popular level largely in the language of evangelical Protestantism. This is so not only of obviously religious revivals such as Methodism and the Great Awakening, but such seemingly “secular” episodes as the American Revolution and the abolitionist and labour movements. Behind a similar language too one might expect to find similar discontents, though scholars of these eras have found the persistence of Calvinism easier to observe than to explain.’¹³

¹² Baskerville, above n 2, ix.

¹³ *Ibid*, 351.

In Baskerville's own words, his ultimate goal was 'to allow the prophets of the English Revolution as opportunity to express to the modern world their own ideas in their own words, wants and all'.¹⁴ He undoubtedly succeeded in his attempt to demonstrate how Puritan religious and political ideas transformed the English Revolution into the world's first great modern revolution. I therefore recommend *Not Peace and a Sword* to everyone who wishes to obtain an understanding of the historical link between religious ideas and revolutionary politics.

¹⁴ Ibid, 349.