The Foundations of Puritanism

Understanding the Protestant Reformation
Foundations of Christian theology

• Christian theology was influenced by Greek philosophy, in particular Plato

• Plato: The soul is divided into three: **Reason**, **will** and the **appetites**
The chariot analogy
• St. Paul → St. Augustin
  Adam and Eve fall from Paradise by sinning against God’s law (Book of Genesis)
• After the Fall Adam ceases to be ruled by Reason. His Reason and Will become subjected to the Appetites
• This is the Human Condition after the Fall (Original Sin) and the consequence is Eternal Damnation
• Only the Saving Grace of Jesus Christ can restore the Divine Order
• There is one safe island in the raging ocean of the **Fallen World**: the **Church** (Catholic and Apostolic)

• The individual Christian obtains access to the saving grace of Jesus through **confession**, **prayer** and **holy communion**

• *Extra Eccesiam nulla salus* (outside the Church there is no salvation)
Catholic abuses in Medieval and Renaissance times

- Mass becomes an empty ritual, performed by illiterate and immoral priests
- A worldly church perceived to be more preoccupied with its own power than with the salvation of souls
- The catholic faith deteriorates into superstition (miracles, worship of relics...)
- Indulgences
The beginning of the Reformation

- A German monk and professor of theology, **Martin Luther**, opposed the idea that salvation could be purchased with money.
- Nailed his **Ninety-Five theses** to the door of All Saints' Church in Wittenberg in 1517, sparking the Reformation.
- Refusal to retract resulted in his excommunication by **Pope Leo X**.
St. Paul: Epistle to the Romans 3:20-24

• “For (again from Scripture) ‘no human being can be justified in the sight of God’ for having kept the Law: law brings only the consciousness of sin.

• But now, quite independently of law, God’s justice has been brought to light.

• The Law and the prophets both bear witness to it: it is God’s way of righting wrong, effective through faith in Christ for all who have such faith – all, without distinction.

• For all alike have sinned, and are deprived of the divine splendor, and all are justified by God’s free grace alone, through his act of liberation in the person of Christ Jesus.”
• **Sola Fides** (‘by faith alone’)

• **Sola Gratia** (‘by God’s grace alone’)

• **Sola Scripture** (‘by Scripture alone’): The Bible is the only source for Christian doctrine. It should be accessible to everybody (not just to priests).
• The **Bible** takes the place of the (Roman, Apostolic) **Church** as the necessary **link** between the individual and the **Grace of God**

• **Scripture** is the authoritative basis of **faith** and faith the only precondition of **God’s grace**

• **Printing** and **translations** into the **vernacular** makes the Bible accessible to all who can read

• The **pulpit** replaces the **altar** as the focal centre in the Reformed Church
Calvin (1509-1564)

• Principal figure in the development of Puritanism

• Advocated the **Doctrine of Predestination**:  
  • A) All events have been willed by God  
  • B) God foreknows whom he will save (the elect) and who will be dammed

• Preached in Geneva
The Puritans: Why were they dissatisfied with the Church of England?

• King James I retains the church hierarchy and the basic elements of the Catholic mass
• Royal attempts to impose liturgical uniformity on all subjects leads to confrontation with the Puritans
• Central question: What is to be at the centre of the church service, the pulpit or the communion table?
The Puritans

• God is angry with England for its tolerance of idolatry (worship of physical objects, rather than God’s Word)

• God punishes whole nations for tolerating sin

• A group of Puritans sailed to America to found a new society based on the Bible.

• They established a new covenant with God
The Puritan Mind

- Puritans see the **world** as a **wilderness** and the **church of the elect** as a **garden** in the middle of a wilderness of sin.
- The garden needs a **hedge** around it (discipline).
- The **devil** is ready to enter any hole made in the edge by sinful behavior. The wilderness always threatens to invade the garden.
• **Sin** must be rigorously suppressed
• The godly (the elect) suppress their own sins through **inner discipline** (reason governs the will and the appetites)
• The ungodly need to be controlled by **outward force**
Bibliography

• St Paul, *Letter to the Romans, New English Bible*, 1961


• Christopher Elwood, *Calvin for Armchair Theologians*, John Knox Press, 2002