CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this dissertation was to provide a detailed study of the Anglican Puritan clergy in order to gain insight and understanding from their ideas and methods as they related to the moral formation of their congregants. Though Puritans were not perfect, they continue to be recognized for their focus and success in outwardly conforming their lives to the dictates of Scripture. While there is no way to prove definitively that the work of the Puritan pastors was the reason for the purity with which the Puritans are characterized, multiple texts have revealed that the Puritans, themselves, viewed the pastorate as intimately tied to the moral living of their flocks. Therefore, a study of the way in which morality was understood and ethical training was embarked upon by the Anglican Puritan ministers is beneficial in that it provides a historical example of pastoral ministry which was viewed as being both integral and effective in bringing about changed behavior. It is hoped that such an analysis provides wisdom and appreciation for modern ministers in relation to how they might go about the task of educating and developing a strong desire for morality in those to whom they are ministering.

Summary

In order to grasp the mindset of the Puritans under study, the first chapter of this dissertation set about the task of providing a brief historical survey of who the
Anglican Puritans were. It was seen that those under study were a group of men and women who lived in England from 1559-1662 who sought the continued reform of the Anglican Church. These Puritans desired to conform their lives, and their church, to their interpretation of Scripture, free from what they perceived as residual effects of the papal tradition. While this meant change for the formal practices of the church, it also brought about a renewed desire for personal transformation of behavior. Thus, it should be understood that these Puritans were motivated to reform their church and their lives to be in line with the teachings of Scripture.

In chapter two, the goal was to establish the Anglican Puritan view of the pastorate. It was demonstrated that the Puritans placed great significance on the role of the minister. Partially motivated by their dissatisfaction with the state of the clergy at that time, the Puritans sought to recover the ideology of a pastorate which was congruent in faith and practice with the biblical mandates. Thus, they endeavored to educate the clergy and insisted upon localized ministry by men whose lives reflected the teaching of Christ. The result was a pastorate which was perceived as integral to the lives of the congregants. These Anglican Puritans maintained that it was the responsibility of the minister to lead churchgoers to pursue purity and that their own sense of morality was intimately tied to his work.

The purpose of chapter three was to provide a detailed analysis of the Anglican Puritan understanding of morality. It was shown that the idea of the conscience was central to the Puritan perception of morality. For the Anglican Puritan, the conscience was the moral faculty whereby they could judge actions. This functioned in both a reflective and instructive manner. In addition, it should be noted that there was liberty of
conscience for the Puritans, but that there was also a binding spiritual nature to the conscience. Therefore, the Anglican Puritans were insistent that the judgments of the conscience be based in Scripture, especially through the use of the syllogistic formula. It must also be noted that the conscience was not viewed as a static, unchanging influence; rather, it was understood that the conscience was dynamic, able to be changed, educated, and grown.

Because of the significant role in which the conscience played in the Puritan comprehension of morality, the Anglican Puritan pastors put great effort into investing in the development of this moral faculty. They believed that their labor in such an endeavor would help produce a transformation in the way their congregants lived. Thus, these men sought to find numerous methods in which they could personally minister in a manner that would affect the consciences, and therefore the morality, of those in their churches.

As the Puritan pastors worked to influence and educate their church members’ behavior, they developed approaches which were purposefully intended to impact their consciences. Chapter four details the public methods whereby ministers attempted to publicly influence their congregants’ consciences. The primary avenue in which this was pursued was through the preaching of practical, individualized sermons which were easily understood and memorable. In addition, a renewed focus on the proper administration of the sacraments and church discipline was also utilized to affect the consciences of those in the church. Lastly, the pastor’s own life was seen as playing a significant role in his efforts at morally developing those within his oversight.

While chapter four dealt with the public functions of the pastorate, chapter five was focused on the private pastoral functions of Anglican Puritan ministers. It should be
noted that these pastors took great pains to know and assess those under their care individually through the practices of catechizing and spiritual prodding. In addition, the Puritan clergy also played a significant role in helping guide those in their churches through difficult moral dilemmas. By means of comforting those experiencing troubled consciences and providing counsel for those facing cases of conscience, these ministers worked to influence and guide the moral behavior of their flocks.

Through the exploration of the Anglican Puritans and their pastoral ministry, it has been demonstrated that Anglican Puritan ministers sought to enhance the moral concern in the lives of church members by focusing on the development of the individual conscience through personal pastoral ministry. Through both public and private methods, these Puritan pastors endeavored to educate and strengthen the consciences of their congregants so that they might be better equipped and motivated to live morally. They believed this was a duty inherent in their calling and so they pursued it with fervency.

**Implications**

The study of the pastoral efforts by the Anglican Puritans to affect the consciences of churchgoers is intended to be enlightening and thought-provoking. It is hoped that their understanding of morality and the ways in which it could be influenced through the development of the conscience will provide a beneficial example and guide for modern ministers. In particular, the ways in which the Puritans perceived the conscience, the way the conscience could be developed, and the role of the pastor in moral education are principally significant for this endeavor.
The Conscience in Christian Ethics

The centrality of the conscience in the ethical thought of Anglican Puritans provides an intriguing perspective on Christian morality. The idea of the conscience finds a base in scriptural teachings and so there is validity to embracing the general concept of the conscience.\(^1\) Furthermore, the Puritan understanding of the individuality of the conscience, as well as, the reflective and instructive manners in which it functioned, are helpful guides for understanding how this facet of morality can be understood. Finally, the insistence on adherence to Scripture for the conscience’s judicial functions is of utmost importance for an authoritative moral theory.

The idea of the conscience being the central moral authority within a person, representing God’s judgment on their life, is an interesting and worthwhile approach to consider. The way in which the Puritans understood the conscience to function and relate to the Holy Spirit, Scripture, and the individual provide a valid, if simplistic, approach of an ethical system. For the Anglican Puritans, the conscience became a broad category which ended up encompassing numerous aspects of morality, such as judgment, fortitude, and conviction. While this may be a somewhat crude moral theory, as compared to those which go to great lengths to provide a more detailed and specific concept of morality, this does not negate its validity. Rather, the concept put forth by the Puritans is an appropriate pastoral understanding of a general ethical theory. Detailed ethicists may

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require more intricacies to be explicated, but the Puritan idea of the conscience as explanatory of moral judgment can serve as a beneficial guide for ministers seeking a general concept for understanding of morality.

**The Development of the Conscience**

In First Corinthians 8, the Apostle Paul speaks of individuals possessing a weak conscience. In a similar vein, the Anglican Puritans perceived the conscience as something which could be weak or strong, informed or ignorant. This perspective is beneficial in that it helps provide a foundation for understanding moral education. If the conscience is, in fact, the center for ethical judgments, as the Puritans believed, then it should be the aim for training and informative activities. This perception of morality helps shape the approaches for such endeavors by revealing why people might make wrong choices and by placing an emphasis on educational and strengthening methods.

In regards to pastoral ministry, the notion of developing the conscience can be both convicting and encouraging. This concept should help the minister see that there is importance in purposefully informing and strengthening the consciences of those under care. When there are no efforts being performed to help develop the conscience or a person’s morality, the pastor’s ministry can be seen as deficient. Therefore, the concept of educating and strengthening the conscience should serve as an appropriate and beneficial reminder to ministers to seek means by which they can perform such tasks.

**The Role of the Pastor in Moral Education**

The primacy of the Puritan pastor for moral education and development is a great source of encouragement and instruction for modern ministers. Their focus on the
pure living of their congregants should be both convicting and inspiring. They understood that the minister had a responsibility for ensuring those under his care were living purely. This unwavering determination to develop a purposeful passion for biblical obedience in practical living serves as a worthy example for all ministers to follow.

As the Anglican Puritan pastors sought to develop the consciences of those to whom they were ministering, they endeavored to provide a pronounced level of personal pastoral ministry in both their public and private duties. This dedication transformed the ways they approached their leadership and made them effective in their work. As such, their efforts in relation to this aspect of church life are admirable and are appropriate for consideration for those in vocational ministry.

Each of the four public pastoral roles that the Puritans sought to utilize for personal conscience development are worthy means for church leadership today to follow. Preaching which is practical and understandable is of great advantage to any pastor who is hoping to influence the morality of his flock. Furthermore, the use of the sacraments to promote pure living, in addition to the theological implications of such functions, is a commendable approach. That, teamed with a renewed interest in church discipline, as maintained by the Puritans, reveals a strong sense of unwillingness to allow sinful behavior to continue within the church. Finally, in each of these activities, along with other ministerial duties, the importance of setting an example of purity and obedience by the pastor cannot be overstated. The Puritans were able to utilize these means to help train the conscience and they are worthy approaches today, as well.
While the public ministry of the Anglican Puritan pastors provides a good example to be followed for modern ministers, their private ministry does so as well. In particular, the emphasis that was placed on personally knowing and caring for each congregant in order to lead them effectively is significant. Though this aspect of ministry might be difficult today, it is no less a valid endeavor to be pursued. Additionally, the way in which Puritan pastors delved into the lives of the people through questioning their faith and practice is a worthy pursuit, demonstrating a desire to be deeply familiar with them. That, compounded with efforts to comfort and counsel in matters related to the conscience, speaks to the minister’s willingness to become involved in the lives of his church members at a level of great intimacy. While this is a difficult model to follow, it is surely one that is worthy and beneficial to one’s ministry and the moral development of those within the church.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The Anglican Puritans were a significant group of Christians who possessed a great desire for moral purity. Their understanding of morality and its development is significant in that it provides an insightful model to be assessed. Their ideas relating to the conscience and the means used to develop it by the pastorate offer a beneficial outline for those considering various methodologies of moral training within the church. While there can be no guarantee that similar efforts will produce purity in today’s church, there is surely some beneficial insight which can be gained from the example set by the Anglican Puritans. Therefore, it is hoped that the wisdom gained through the study of these Puritans will be advantageous to leaders within churches today.