THE PURITANS

Editorial In THE SEVENTH TRUMPET MAGAZINE...By Dr. Judith Ann Benner PH.D American History, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS.

Over the years, the Puritan settlers of the New England colonies have received a consistently bad press. From the seventeenth century to the present they have been portrayed as superstitious Bible-spouting bigots, hypocritical and cruel, happily hanging witches or flogging inoffensive Quakers out of their towns. With all these faults, historians tell us, they are, of course, fit only for objects of scorn, and adherence to their philosophy and faith is to be avoided at all costs.

This interpretation of the Puritan role in early American history is unfortunate. for the Puritans knew a number of things it would do well for their modern compatriots to consider and understand. Perhaps it is because we do not consider and understand them that our nation is in the difficulties it is experiencing at present.

In the first place, the Puritans understood the true unregenerate nature of man, and when they set up ruling bodies, they established their governments based on the laws of God with provisions to deal with fallen man. At the same time, they recognized that governments themselves were to be held in limitation, for government itself, being the creation of fallen man, could easily become corrupt. It was a philosophical legacy left to the Founding Fathers of these United States and one which is generally forgotten today.

Second, the Puritans had a vision of who they were and the part they were playing in history. They considered themselves to be the New Israel, a city set on a hill to be an example and a beacon to the rest of the world. They were the Church in the Wilderness, the Zion of God in the New World, and they believed in a glorious destiny for the land they were settling. We know now their vision was true, only it would be far longer in coming to fulfillment than they anticipated.

Third, the Puritans experienced the overshadowing providence of God time after time. Faced by calamity, they resorted to prayer, and God moved in behalf of His people. Because they knew where their help came from, they gave praise where it was due. As a people we have gotten so far from God we neither seek for or are grateful for His intervention in our national affairs. Who can calculate the cost of our neglect of united civic and national prayer?

Finally, the Puritans knew that the free enterprise system works over communism. When the Plymouth Colony was established, the rules of its sponsoring company decreed that each producer was to contribute the fruits of his labor to the common storehouse and draw out only according to his need. What amounted to a government dole regardless of production destroyed incentive and production plummeted. The colony was in danger of starving until the communist endeavor was scrapped and every family given individual plots to grow foodstuffs.

At this time of year when we remember the coming of the Pilgrims with their Puritan faith and lifestyle to America, may we never lose sight of what they knew about God and themselves. The legacy of their knowledge is too important for us not to appreciate it. JAB