A Puritan and his devil: religious conflict between William Prynne and William Laud, 1625-1645

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Abstract
In the period between 1625 and 1645, William Prynne "issued nearly a score of tracts," attacking English prelacy in general and William Laud in particular, twice suffered the severest of penalties next to death, endured lengthy imprisonment, and vanquished one of England's most powerful men, all in the name of militant Puritanism. During those twenty years, Prynne's savage but effective pen was directed almost solely to one holy end, the irrevocable defeat of the Laudian interpretation of worship by the English successors of Calvin. For Prynne there could be no thought of compromise. The forces of darkness were at work in the land, seeking to subvert the true doctrines of predestination and scripture with the idolatry of those lost years before the Reformation. The Devil had to be met and dispensed with once and for all, and to William Prynne, the Devil bore a striking resemblance to William Laud, Archbishop of Canterbury (1633--1645).

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William Laud (7 October 1573 – 10 January 1645) was an English archbishop and academic. He was Archbishop of Canterbury from 1633, during the personal rule of Charles I. Arrested in 1640, he was executed in 1645. In matters of church polity, Laud was autocratic. Laudianism refers to a collection of rules on matters of ritual, in particular, that were enforced by Laud in order to maintain uniform worship in England and Wales, in line with the king's preferences. They were precursors to later High Religious struggles between Protestants and Catholics (and among Protestants: Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, Independents, etc.). What Puritans favored: no bishops; stripped-down ritualism (altar, cross, holidays [including Christmas because it contains the word “mass”]), fewer sacraments, long sermons. Puritans considered Archbishop Laud to be the Anti-Christ. English society was now composed differently: gentry, middle class (bankers, shopkeepers), and Parliament vs. the king and the old nobility. (English society was no longer made up of nobility, clergy, and commoners.)