

Puritans and Holier-Than-Thou Zealots

by [Kenneth Francis](#) (December 2024)



Luncheon of the Boating Party (Pierre-Auguste Renoir, 1881)

Back in the early-1980s, I heard a radio host read out an anonymous letter from an alleged listener who claimed her atheist husband was a heavy drinker but later turned into a moral monster when he gave up the booze (atheists cannot justify their righteous indignation on things they morally oppose, because if God does not exist, then *OBJECTIVE* moral values and duties do not exist. Without God, we would be animals, and animals are not moral agents. To put it

scientifically: Atoms [molecules in motions] are void of morality and free will).

The woman said that her husband (let's call him "Joe") drank too much at weekends and would sometimes fall asleep while watching TV and occasionally snored in bed after a night's drinking (a lot of male readers will probably identify with "Joe" –and think he's an amateur!).

At her wits' end, she eventually persuaded her husband to attend Alcoholics Anonymous, which he did, and finally he stopped drinking. But the years that followed were pure Hell, according to the woman.

She said he became a holier-than-thou tyrant, forever wagging his finger at anyone who innocuously "transgressed" at social gatherings whenever people got merry on wine and song. He went from a jovial, fun-loving man to a serious disgruntled bore with a perpetual scornful countenance.

He even regularly reprimanded his wife if she uttered the odd curse word when something annoyed her. He would point his finger at her and sternly say, *"Watch your language, woman! Do you lack the vocabulary for a cleaner word?"*

Ironically, he once said to her in a fit of temper: "Watch your f*****g language!" And when she occasionally smoked the odd cigarette with a glass of wine, he would scold her in the same manner with a long lecture on the health risks of nicotine and alcohol. He was like the reincarnation of Ebenezer Scrooge on acid.

Fed up with being morally reprimanded with this excessively judgmental curmudgeon, the long-suffering wife tried to persuade her husband to start drinking again but he said, "No!" Friends and family of the man used to say they wanted their "old Joe back" and missed the way he used to be, despite his odd, harmless *faux pas* at dinner parties or family get-togethers when he got a bit tipsy.

With his condescension, moral superiority complex, sanctimonious behaviour becoming more obnoxious by the day, with never-ending virtue-signalling, she eventually left him.

Whether or not this story is true, an urban legend, or a made-up letter written by a radio staff member is beside the point, as there is some truth in the nature of the story pertaining to particular social behaviours, even if I added a pinch of hyperbole to the narrative that I vaguely remember.

Many people suffering addictions who quit usually end up replacing one addiction for another. A recovering alcoholic might become a compulsive gambler. Some men who quit the booze spend their lives on the golf course, leaving their golf widows all alone at home.

We also sometimes see this in similar situations when an atheist is converted to Christianity, he/she becomes a zealot with a strong passion for spreading the Word, vice versa Christians who lose their faith and convert to atheism. Instead of voicing their new-found religion/worldview with a humble, gentle persuasion, it seems a sanctimonious, supercilious approach prevails.

When you think about it, Joe's holier-than-thou behaviour is quite similar and a microcosm of how the Puritans of yore used to behave, as well as the modern-day Woke Inquisition Thought Police of the Church of Latter-Day Social Justice Warriors.

In fairness, the Puritans had some admirable intentions, but my criticism of these law-abiding, industrious, hard-working folk in this essay focuses on their over-oppressive bleak behaviour and sanctimonious traits.

This Protestant denomination of early po-faced virtue-signallers were avid readers of the Old Testament, but relatively paid less attention to the four Gospels. They had a world view based on a religious Reform movement known as Puritanism that arose within the Church of England in the late

16th century (anytime I hear the word 'Reformed' in a theological context, I think of the word 'deformed' and reach for my New Testament to read St John's Gospel. Can Logos [logic] be reformed? For those interested in further reading of these people, a good insight to the characteristics of this movement is outlined in a historical fiction book called *The Scarlet Letter*, by Nathaniel Hawthorne).

Arriving in the New World, they migrated to Northern English colonies in the 1620s and 1630s, laying the foundation for the religious and social order of New England. Massachusetts was a hotbed for Puritans.

Looking like Salem witch-hunters dressed in dark costumes, both men and women wore Pilgrim showpieces on their heads, with the women looking like a depressed Florence Nightingale or Handmaidens, while the menfolk resembled Guy Fawkes having a bad day.

The Puritans did not like the "hedonistic pesky" Catholic sinners, who were no angels but a lot less overtly pious, and who liked to drink, sing, dance, and be merry. The austere Puritans saw these peasants as a bunch of immoral drunks (mostly Irish) fighting with one another.

The American journalist, H.L. Menken, said that Puritanism is "the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy." A lot like recovering alcoholic "Joe," don't you think?

A good satire of the holier-than-thou Protestants was published in *Mad* magazine in March 1978. Called, *Little House, Oh, So Dreary*, it lampooned the popular 1970s' TV show, *The Little House on the Prairie*. This popular show was about a Protestant American family in Minnesota during the 1870s-'90s. The protagonist of the show was a holier-than-thou bore called Charles Ingalls, who had a wife and three young daughters.

Such TV shows depicting wholesome values, like *The Waltons*, were tokenistic bait to get people to watch TV. The

protagonists of these shows, usually un-cool adult males, where the last thing a young male teenager would aspire to become (Charles Ingalls and *The Waltons*' square protagonist, 'John Boy,' were no Steve McQueen or James Dean).

The importance of TV to brainwash viewers is a real phenomenon. American magazine columnist and political commentator, Ben Shapiro, wrote about Leftist agendas in his 2011 book, *Primetime Propaganda*.

Also, in *The Devil's Notebook* (1992), the founder of the Church of Satan, Anton LaVey, said: "The birth of TV was a magical event foreshadowing its Satanic significance... Since [April 30, 1939] TV's infiltration has been so gradual, so complete, that no one even noticed." LaVey referred to a TV as a Satanic altar in a room.

But back to *The Little House on the Prairie*: In the *Mad* comic strip introducing the characters in a satirical way, the owner of the sawmill said this about Charles: "I own the sawmills where Charles Ingalls works. Charles is always on time for his job ... puts in a full eight hours ... and never takes any lumber without paying for it. Know something? I don't trust that weirdo."

Regarding moral superiority, the Bible has this to say: "Do not be excessively righteous and do not be overly wise. Why should you ruin yourself?" (Ecclesiastes 7:16) And: "Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!" (Isaiah 5:21).

The problem with excessive moralising and striving for perfection in one's character ("There is no one holy like Our Lord": Samuel 2:2), is that one loses one's sense of fun and what it is to be human. Trying to mentally survive in this crazy fallen world, a little bit of innocuous fun and laughter is good for the soul.

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