Some fifteen years ago Professor Leonard Trinterud wrote an important essay on The Origins of Puritanism. He began with the observation that historians have searched too long for the origins of Puritanism in John Calvin’s Geneva. He contended on the one hand, that Puritanism is more indigenous to English soil than many have been willing to admit, and on the other, that what foreign elements were absorbed into Puritanism were taken up not primarily from John Calvin of Geneva, but from the Reformers of the Rhineland: Zwingli, Jud, Bullinger, Oecolampadius, Capito, Bucer, Martyr, and a host of other leaders in the Reformation movement in Zurich, Basel, Strassburg, and other Rhineland cities. The Genevan influences came late, after the essential patterns of Puritanism had been established.

Trinterud then moves on to his central thesis: that the Rhineland element that was most enthusiastically exploited and eagerly imported by the early forerunners of Puritanism was the Rhineland conception of authority, grounded in the divine law and a covenant between God and man. Indeed, Trinterud finds this concept of authority, rooted in a conditional covenant idea, to be the essential genius of Puritanism.

In this essay I wish to focus on Trinterud’s thesis: that the early Puritan forerunners, under the influence of Rhineland theology, had recourse to an authority grounded in the divine law and covenant between God and man. I will attempt to illustrate the thesis by taking a close look at one of the early English Puritan forerunners who did spend several years in the Rhineland, John Hooper.
Available information on Hooper's early life is very sketchy. It is known that he was born near the end of the fifteenth century in Somersetshire, and that he was apparently the beneficiary of both an Oxford education and subsequently, of the strict discipline of a Cistercian monastery. Sometime after the dissolution of the monasteries under Henry VIII, Hooper moved to London where he came into contact with the writings of two Rhineland reformers: Zwingli and Bullinger, the Zurich Reformation leaders. By 1540 Hooper was thoroughly committed to Protestantism.

After the passage of Henry VIII's Act of the six articles which, among other things, made denial of transubstantiation punishable by death, Hooper's Protestant convictions became increasingly difficult and dangerous to maintain. Late in 1545 he fled to the continent, resided for a few months in Bucer's Strassburg, returned briefly to England, and then spent two significant years in Zurich where he was enthralled by the thoroughness of reform. In 1549, after the death of Henry the VIII and the accession of Edward VI, Hooper returned to England where he became one of the most prominent Reformation leaders until his martyrdom under Mary in 1555.

Hooper was one of the early forerunners of Puritanism in England. His Puritan spirit surfaced especially during the vestments controversy in which he quickly became embroiled after his return to England. And in his writings his Puritanism is apparent in his zeal for thorough liturgical reform, his emphasis on the good life and on the sin-experience in the Christian life, in his somewhat anti-theological, anti-historical biblicism, and in his inclination toward Sabbatarianism.