

THE PURITANS

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BY

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## THESIS STATEMENT

The Puritan period was a time of roughly one hundred years when a significant part of the members of the Church of England felt it necessary to reform, or “purify” the Church of England from its practices which too much resembled Catholicism.

## OUTLINE

- I. The Puritans
  - A. Beginning of the “nonconformists”
  - B. Persecution of the Puritans
  - C. The Great Migration to America
  - D. The tide begins to turn
- II. Oliver Cromwell
  - A. Cromwell’s early life and conversion
  - B. Political conflict leads to religious civil war
  - C. Cromwell becomes the leader of the military
  - D. Cromwell named Lord Protector
- III. George Fox
  - A. Fox’s early life
  - B. Fox became a Quaker
- IV. William Penn
  - A. Penn’s early life
  - B. Penn becomes a Puritan
  - C. Penn’s turbulent life

## INTRODUCTION

The Era of the Puritans in England lasted roughly one hundred years from about 1560 to about 1660. Their goal was to see the church “purified”. This desire for purity had been building for centuries and seemed to be growing rapidly in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, as Ken Connelly notes.<sup>1</sup> Letters from William Tyndale aroused much discontent with the established church in England, and throughout Europe.

However, when “Bloody Mary” ascended the throne, she scattered the reformers and martyred many of them. The rest fled to the continent. There they mingled with fellow reformers and developed certain convictions.

As David Hall describes, “because the Puritan movement took a strong stand on the Bible as ‘law’ and insisted that the state churches in England and Scotland eliminate all aspects of Catholicism, it became intensely controversial.”<sup>2</sup>

## THE PURITANS

After Elizabeth ascended to the throne, a meeting was held with her and the refugees in 1562. They asked for further reforms of the Church of England. After a narrow defeat in the vote, they realized Elizabeth’s opposition to Rome did not mean support for the reformers. This caused a schism among the reformers. Some considered themselves still a part of the Church of England. Others completely refused to accept the Act of Uniformity of 1562 and became known as

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<sup>1</sup> Ken Connolly, *The Church in Transition*, Lin Wel: Shreveport, Louisiana, 1984, 95.

<sup>2</sup> David D. Hall, *The Puritans, a Transatlantic History*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019, 2.

“nonconformists”. According to the law, they were illegal, and could be arrested and imprisoned.<sup>3</sup>

Some 300 or so “threw off their surplices” in a single day and the Puritans became a significant movement in the religious climate of England. The queen, thoroughly outraged, demanded their suppression.<sup>4</sup> However, each measure taken by the queen only increased their membership.

In 1582, Thomas Cartwright led 60 ministers to draft a proposal for a merging of the Puritan movement with the Anglican Church. Eventually it was signed by some 500 men of God and shaped public opinion considerably. The Puritans responded with the printing press and published tracts. Some 300 ministers suffered imprisonment in one year.<sup>5</sup>

Elizabeth was succeeded by James I, a Scottish Presbyterian, in 1603. When Parliament questioned a redress of grievances, James dissolved the Parliament, calling it sedition.<sup>6</sup> Within a dozen years more than twenty thousand Puritans began a migration to the New World of New England. The king responded with a ban on migration. By this time Parliament was largely Puritan and civil war broke out with the new king, Charles.

The tide had begun to turn in favor of the Puritans as they focused on the government of the church. Puritanism gained control and ruled for a decade under Oliver Cromwell. In 1660, the “restoration” brought Charles II to the throne and Puritanism gradually began to fade away.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Connolly, 97.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 98-99.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 99-100.

## OLIVER CROMWELL

Oliver Cromwell proved to be an exceptional military leader. C. V. Wedgwood describes his genius as a soldier. His thoughts were sometimes slow and his movements often clumsy. But his natural ability and the uniqueness of the times made him, for a time, the greatest power in England.<sup>8</sup>

Cromwell was born in 1599. As a young man he loved horses and learned to ride early. At Cambridge he received a strong Puritan influence. He studied law and the art of war and became proficient in both.

Sometime around 1628, Cromwell became so overwhelmed by conviction for his personal sin that he went through a period of severe depressions. He was relieved from that by a life-changing personal conversion, causing him to be dedicated to the truths of Scripture.<sup>9</sup>

Soon after, Cromwell was elected to the British Parliament. In 1636, he inherited from a maternal uncle an estate rich enough to make him very comfortable. In 1640, Cromwell was elected a burgess for Cambridge. To Cromwell, as to many of his colleagues, the "religious question was of far greater importance than any theory of constitutional reform." The issues of political toleration and freedom of speech were of great concern.<sup>10</sup>

The growing conflict between the king and Parliament erupted into civil war by the end of 1641. Cromwell became commander of a troop of 60 horse soldiers, which he had organized. The first battle was not far from Oxford in October 1642. The next year Cromwell requested a

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<sup>8</sup> C. V. Wedgwood, *Oliver Cromwell*, New York: The Macmillan Company, 1939, 27.

<sup>9</sup> Connolly, 101.

<sup>10</sup> Wedgwood, 34-35.

transfer to Cambridge and the Eastern Association Army to train more troops of calvary to his high exacting standards.<sup>11</sup>

By January of 1644 Cromwell was promoted to Lieutenant General and given command of all calvary units in the Eastern Association Army. His troops were invaluable at the Battle of Marston Moor on July 2, 1644, giving the Parliamentarians a great victory.<sup>12</sup> When the New Model Army was formed in April 1645, the commander-in-chief, Sir Thomas Fairfax, insisted on Cromwell as his Lieutenant General. In a battle at Leicester, the Parliamentarians were initially successful, but when the tide turned against them, Cromwell's calvary won the day. Ultimately the first Civil War ended on June 24, 1646.<sup>13</sup>

However, political intrigue and multiple plots by Charles I and others eventually led to a Second Civil War. Cromwell and his calvary were especially effective in this war and by 1648 it was effectively over, but the antagonism persisted. Ultimately, the Puritan majority in Parliament and the Council of the Army decided Charles I must be executed. This was carried out on January 30, 1649. Parliament then established England as a commonwealth.<sup>14</sup>

According to Wedgwood, "all that he [Cromwell] wanted in 1649, as in 1640, was security of government and liberty for tender consciences."<sup>15</sup> He goes on to say that "it is hardly fair to accuse Cromwell of insincerity because he so patently failed to carry the Civil War to a logical

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<sup>11</sup> Connolly, 102.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 102-103.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid, 104.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 106-107.

<sup>15</sup> Wedgwood, 83.

and revolutionary conclusion.”<sup>16</sup> What he really wanted was peace to live according to conscience.

Frederic Harrison adds, “for all his mighty brain and great soul, Oliver Cromwell was no perfect hero, or spotless saint.”<sup>17</sup> “Nor was Cromwell without the defects of his qualities.”<sup>18</sup>

For another three years royalist uprisings were battled and put down. Ultimately, Oliver Cromwell was made commander-in-chief of the army and invaded Scotland. He won a great victory at Dunbar. However, not long after, Cromwell fell ill and was unable to participate in military campaigning for about six months. He returned to the field and won a great victory at Perth in 1651.<sup>19</sup>

Charles II led his army south into England. Cromwell caught up with him at Worcester and utterly destroyed the Scottish army. Cromwell returned to London as a hero. After some difficult negotiations between army and Parliament, Cromwell was named Lord Protector, much the same as a regent. The internal discord among the various religious and political factions continued, but war did not break out again during these years. Little was accomplished politically.

Cromwell led England with two principles in mind, principles that were “not always reconcilable. He wanted to increase the trade of the country by strengthening its maritime power, and he wanted to uphold the cause of God in Europe by the formation of a great

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Frederic Harrison, *Oliver Cromwell*, London: MacMillan and Company, 1895, 103.

<sup>18</sup> Harrison, 104.

<sup>19</sup> Connolly, 107-108.

Protestant alliance against what he believed to be the aggressive Papacy,” according to Samuel Rawson Gardiner.<sup>20</sup>

By 1658, Cromwell had lost several friends and family to death. In addition, the strain of all he had been through the previous fifteen years had taken a very heavy toll. When George Fox saw him in August, he said he “looked like a dead man.”<sup>21</sup> Cromwell would die on September 3, 1658.<sup>22</sup> In those last hours he uttered broken words of prayer.<sup>23</sup>

## GEORGE FOX

George Fox was born in 1624 into a pious Anglican home. He was both serious and sensitive as a youth. As he grew older, he was disappointed in the actions of the adults he knew. He resolved within himself to walk in the fear of God and with integrity. How he dressed and behaved attested to his seriousness.<sup>24</sup>

At 19, George left home. Three years later he “heard a voice” that called him to Christ. He resolved to no longer listen to the Anglican priests, for they were no help to him. As a result, he started public ministry.<sup>25</sup>

In the year 1649, he stated that he had come to the conclusion that “it is not the scriptures, but the Holy Spirit, by which opinions and religions are to be tried.”<sup>26</sup> Although his dress and

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<sup>20</sup> Samuel Rawson Gardiner, *Oliver Cromwell*, New York: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1901, 265.

<sup>21</sup> Wedgewood, 137.

<sup>22</sup> Connolly, 108-109.

<sup>23</sup> Wedgewood, 137.

<sup>24</sup> Connolly, 110.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 111.

manner were unusual, many people were attracted to his teaching. By 1650, his followers became known as Quakers because of an admonition he gave to the court at a trial in which he appeared.<sup>27</sup>

Though Fox was lacking the intellectual abilities to develop his doctrines fully, he attracted strong men among his converts such as Robert Barclay and William Penn. They were an enormous benefit to his ministry. But because of his religious uniqueness, he was repeatedly before the authorities and often in prison. In 1655, he stood before Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell, who was rather tolerant in religious matters, but most of the others were not so tolerant. The imprisonment of 1666, however, affected his strong frame dramatically and his health began to decline.

At age 45, in 1669, he married a widow, and then spent two years in America proclaiming his views. The rest of his life was a kind of retirement working on his “Great Journal” and visiting Quaker settlements, dying in London in 1691.<sup>28</sup>

#### WILLIAM PENN

William Penn was born in 1644 in London. He was the son of an Admiral. While at school, William gained a strong Puritan mindset. His father had served under Oliver Cromwell, but when Charles II was restored, his father favored him.<sup>29</sup>

At Christ College of Cambridge, young William became close friends with the Puritan scholar John Owen. George Hodges tells us, that while there, Cambridge was actively replacing Puritans with Anglicans. It was here that Penn came into the influence of Thomas Loe, a

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid. 112.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

Quaker.<sup>30</sup> George Fox had brought his teaching to Oxford in 1656. Loe had become one of the “ministers” of the Quakers

soon after. Penn was profoundly impressed by what he heard.<sup>31</sup>

Penn had an interest in religion, probably from his mother, and a natural political mind, probably from his father, and what Loe had to say touched both sides. The Quakers had already begun to dream of a colony across the sea. George Fox was already writing to contacts in America, discussing a location west of New Jersey.<sup>32</sup>

When William rebelled at the change at Cambridge, he was fined and banished in 1662. When he arrived home, he was beaten and turned out of the house by his father.<sup>33</sup> Eventually there was a reconciliation and he was sent to the court of Louis XIV. He also traveled throughout Europe. He returned home in 1664 completely unimpressed with the French.

Soon William joined his father’s staff and was assigned to be a messenger for Charles II. When William’s father returned home from after a naval victory and found William still favoring the Quakers, William was sent to Ireland.

By 1667, William was in prison for defending a Quaker meeting from disturbance. He began to write on the rights to liberty of conscience. He was released and sent back to his father in London.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> George Hodges, *William Penn*, Boston: Houghton, Mifflin, and Company, 1901, 11.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 16-17.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 18.

<sup>33</sup> Connolly, 113.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

In 1668 Penn wrote a tract, “The Sandy Foundation Shaken”. In it he attacked orthodox views so offensively that he was sent to the Tower of London. While he was there, he wrote a defense of Quaker doctrine and practice. It was the beginning of a prolific writing career.<sup>35</sup>

Penn refused to recant and asked for help on the grounds of religious freedom. He was again set at liberty, and once more reconciled with his father. Then he went back to Ireland on family business, but within a year, the failing health of his father brought Penn back to London. Finding the Quaker church closed by the soldiers, Penn preached in the street. He was arrested and fined. Eventually the jury acquitted him and declared the imprisonment illegal. It became a landmark case in English legal jurisprudence.<sup>36</sup>

Penn’s father died in 1670. The next few years saw Penn in dispute after dispute and off and on in prison, where he wrote more tracts. In 1672, Penn married a young lady with religious convictions as strong as his own. For a period, Penn settled down and continued to write controversial religious pamphlets.<sup>37</sup> Then in 1673, Penn was able to secure the release of George Fox from prison. He also addressed Quakers in Holland and Germany, wrote many more tracts, and engaged in several debates.

Religious persecution increased in England, leading some Quakers to think about establishing a colony in the Americas. Penn helped write a proposed constitution for such a colony in 1675. He included much about religious freedom within it.<sup>38</sup> In addition, the Germans who went to

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 114-115.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 116.

America through his influence were the first to affirm that it was wrong for Christians to hold slaves.<sup>39</sup>

In 1677, Penn inherited an estate in Sussex through his wife. In July, he began a second missionary trip throughout Europe with George Fox and Robert Barclay. The trip took three months. The next two years, Penn took special interest in writing on political issues, including toleration for religious dissenters.

During 1680, Penn negotiated with the Crown for the repayment of its debt to him. He wanted land in America, land north of Maryland and west of the Delaware River. It took over a year to finalize the agreement. The land would become known as “Pennsylvania” and Penn would be the governor.<sup>40</sup> In September 1682, Penn sailed for America with 100 people. The city of Philadelphia was founded by them. Within two years the city had 300 houses and a population of some 2,500. The next year Penn made a treaty with the local Indians, endearing himself to them.<sup>41</sup>

By 1684, Penn was back in England. Five months later, Charles II died. James II became the king, and Penn became quite close to the Crown. He managed a pardon for John Locke and got 1200 Quakers released from prison. His efforts for religious toleration were as strong as ever.<sup>42</sup>

James II was deposed in 1688 and the new Queen Mary considered Penn as dangerous. There were attempts to arrest him, though they were not successful for lack of evidence. He did lose

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 117.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 118.

the governorship of Pennsylvania in 1692 for several reasons, including his own closeness to the deposed James II.

In 1694 he wrote his most important work on the Quakers and became the accepted leader. Later that year he also regained governorship of Pennsylvania. He returned to Pennsylvania in 1698. The king, in 1701, urged Pennsylvania to form a union with the other colonies for mutual defense. The ensuing political maneuverings cost Penn leadership of Pennsylvania.<sup>43</sup>

Penn wrote so much during his long life that his works make five large volumes. Many pages are devoted to Quaker theology, but he also wrote about his colonial possessions and about counsels and conclusions drawn from experience and dealing with human life in general. Throughout his writings one idea shows up repeatedly, that is, the right of liberty of conscience. “It was for this that he worked, and chiefly lived, most of his life.”<sup>44</sup>

Beginning about 1706, Penn was involved in several disputes about the government of Pennsylvania and his health began to fail. His memory failed and he died in 1718.<sup>45</sup>

## CONCLUSION

Hall concludes that “puritanism as a movement within the Church of England came to an end in 1662, when some 1,600 ministers who refused to conform were ‘ejected’ and, thereafter became known as Dissenters (or Dissent) . . . Conformity also required scrupulous adherence to the *Book of Common Prayer*.”<sup>46</sup> He goes on to say that, “dissenters remained on the outside for another century and a half—unable to attend the two universities, denied any role in a nascent

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>44</sup> Hodges, 34.

<sup>45</sup> Connolly, 119-120.

<sup>46</sup> Hall, 342.

system of public education, and required to pay taxes to support the state church.”<sup>47</sup> Yet, in spite of those burdens, the dissenters continued to play a significant role in English society and culture for many years. These stories are but a few of the many whose lives were affected by Puritanism.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

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