

CHURCH HISTORY

The Reformation in England, part 1 (1625–1702)

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The Modern Church, part 3

I. RETARDATION UNDER CHARLES I (1625-1649)

- A. King Charles I ascended the throne of England and appointed his close friend Laud as Archbishop of Canterbury. He held to the Divine Right of Kings, and the Divine Right of Episcopacy in the Church of England. Laud turned the communion table into an altar, and began the practice of bowing to it. There had been no reference to an “altar” since the abolition of the sacrifice of the Mass.
- B. The Puritans and Separatists suffered unmercifully under the reign of Charles. Parliament sought to defend the Puritans and Separatists, and objected to High Church ceremonies and the erection of altars. Parliament and the Crown came into conflict and, for all practical purposes, Charles I reigned as absolute ruler without a Parliament for eleven years. Many members of Parliament were imprisoned.
- C. But in the “Long Parliament” which met in 1640, the Presbyterian Puritans finally found themselves in the majority. They immediately set themselves to the task of “cleaning house.” The two chief oppressors of the Puritans — the Earl of Strafford and Archbishop Laud — were brought to trial, condemned and executed by beheading. King Charles, in retaliation, brought charges of treason against five members of Parliament. Parliament (House of Commons) would not give them up, and Charles resolved to use military force to compel Parliament to submit. With this act, he plunged England into civil war. By August 22, 1642, the Civil War had begun. Those who fought for Parliament were called Roundheads because they wore their hair closely chopped so that it showed the shape of their head. At first the War went against the Parliamentary party. Eventually, they appealed to the Scottish people, who were already greatly incensed by the king’s interference in their own affairs, for help in the fight against royal absolutism.
- D. The great leader of the Parliamentary Army was Oliver Cromwell. He is one of the great characters of history. As colonel of a troop of cavalry, he showed

great skill and courage. His regiment became famous as Cromwell's Ironsides. It was never defeated. It was composed entirely of "men of religion"; they did not swear or drink and advanced in battle singing psalms. His army of 21,000 men was called the "New Model." It was a group of religious enthusiasts who, when they were not fighting, studied the Bible, prayed and sang hymns. Cromwell was a staunch Calvinist who believed strongly in the sovereignty of God. Macauley, in his work *The History of England*, writes,

"That which chiefly distinguished the army of Cromwell from other armies, was the austere morality and the fear of God which pervaded the ranks. It is acknowledged by the most zealous Royalists that, in that singular camp, no oath was heard, no drunkenness or gambling was seen, and that, during the long dominion of soldiery, the property of the peaceable citizens and the honor of woman were held sacred. No servant girl complained of the rough gallantry of the redcoats. Not an ounce of plate was taken from the shops of the goldsmiths.

- E. From 1643 to 1648, the Westminster Assembly was called by the Parliamentary Party to abolish the episcopal form of church government from England. This assembly contained a few Episcopalians and Congregationalists, but the overwhelming majority were Presbyterian Puritans. Since the Scots were giving aid in the war, a number of Scottish commissioners were given a seat in the Westminster Assembly. They had no vote, but they exercised a strong influence. It prepared a Directory of Worship to replace the Episcopal Prayer Book, and the Westminster Confession of Faith to replace the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. The Assembly also prepared a Larger Catechism for pulpit exposition, and a Shorter Catechism for the teaching of children. The work of the Westminster Assembly is an excellent presentation of Calvinistic or Reformed doctrine. The Westminster Confession was adopted by the Church of Scotland in 1647 and in part by the English Parliament in 1648.

II. THE REFORMATION UNDER THE COMMONWEALTH AND PROTECTORATE (1649-1659)

- A. The New Model army of the Parliamentary Party finally gained a crushing victory. The Independents and Separatists who figured so prominently in Cromwell's forces, were determined to bring the king to execution. The Presbyterians (Puritans) did not wish to go to this extreme, and were therefore

purged from the House of Commons by the military dictatorship. Charles I was condemned to death, and beheaded at Whitehall on January 30, 1649.

- B. England then became a Commonwealth, or republic, ruled by a committee of Parliament. Oliver Cromwell ended the Commonwealth in 1653 by dismissing the Long Parliament, which had been meeting since 1640. The country was called a Protectorate, and Cromwell was called Lord Protectorate, but actually he was a dictator. He ruled until his death in 1658, and his son Richard was chosen protector.
- C. Under the Commonwealth and Protectorate, the Separatists, namely the Congregationalists and Baptists, flourished. The Puritan Presbyterians were the largest group in England, and were not persecuted to any great degree under Cromwell. Cromwell himself was sympathetic toward Congregationalism. Parliament had decreed that the form of government of the Church of England should be presbyterian. But due to the pressure of the army, the full establishment of Presbyterianism in England was not possible.

III. THE RETARDATION UNDER CHARLES II (1660-1685)

- A. On September 3, 1658, Cromwell died. His son Richard could not fill his father's shoes. The great mass of the English people were dissatisfied under the yoke of rigid Puritanism, and the son of Charles I was brought back to England and crowned king as Charles II. This is known as the Restoration of 1660. The Puritan Presbyterians, then very numerous in England, took a leading part in bringing back Charles II. They met, however, with nothing but hostility from the new regime.
- B. Charles II invoked the Act of Uniformity in 1662, which demanded complete acceptance of the Anglican Prayer Book in every jot and tittle. No less than 2,000 Presbyterian, Independent and Baptist ministers heroically resigned their livings. The Church of England was again in full control.
- C. Charles II made a secret treaty with Louis XIV of France that, when the time should be opportune, he would declare himself openly a Roman Catholic. Then, with Louis' help, he would establish absolute government and the Roman Catholic faith in Britain. However, Parliament would have none of Charles' thinking. They would make no concession of any kind to either Roman Catholics or Nonconformists.

- D. Needless to say, the Separatists now came under much persecution. For example, John Bunyan, a Baptist, was imprisoned for twelve years in Bedford jail and there wrote *The Pilgrims Progress*. Of a somewhat different type was George Fox, who in the same period founded the Society of Friends, known as the Quakers. He, too, suffered much for his convictions. Also another Puritan, John Milton, wrote *Paradise Lost* during this period of persecution. During these persecutions many Nonconformists emigrated to North America.
- E. Under Charles II, the nation of England was slowly being brought back under the yoke of Rome. During his entire life Charles: swayed between unbelief and superstitious Roman Catholicism. On his deathbed in 1685 he professed the Roman Catholic faith.

IV. THE RETARDATION UNDER JAMES II (1685-1688)

- A. Charles II was succeeded by his brother James II who was a professed and earnest Roman Catholic. The new king's great object was to restore England to Roman Catholicism.
- B. Not only Scottish Covenanters, but English bishops also refused to bend the knee before King James II and to be brought under the tyranny of the pope. Just when it looked like the Protestant cause might lose England forever, the English Parliament appealed to William III, or William of Orange, of the Netherlands for help. William's wife, Mary, was the daughter of James II. Accompanied by an army, he crossed the sea in 1688 and deposed his father-in-law James II, who was forced to flee England.

V. THE REFORMATION UNDER WILLIAM AND MARY (1689-1702)

- A. Upon defeating James II, William and Mary were crowned king and queen of England. A year later, James tried to regain his throne but was not successful, for William was a strong and courageous leader.
- B. During this time the Toleration Act was passed in 1689, which alleviated the position of Nonconformists, but inequalities continued for many years. In a short period they grew up so rapidly in numbers that one thousand new places of worship were built for Baptists and Congregationalists.

- C. By this time, three parties were distinguishable in the Anglican Church: High, Evangelical, and Broad (or Latitudinarian).
- D. As a result of his brave and determined stand, William had saved Holland, England, and America for Protestantism and liberty, and from the Roman Catholicism and despotism of Louis XIV of France and James II of England. After this there were no more wars in which the religious differences between Protestants and Catholics were the main issue.
- E. McFetridge, in his splendid little book *Calvinism in History*, makes this interesting observation about William III:

“If we ask again, Who brought the final great deliverance to English liberty? we are answered by history, The Illustrious Calvinist, William, Prince of Orange, who found in the strong and sharp logic of the Geneva school something that suited his intellect and his temper; the keystone of whose religion was the doctrine of Predestination; and who, with his keen logical vision, declared that if he were to abandon the doctrine of Predestination he must abandon with it all belief in a superintending Providence, and must become a mere Epicurean. And he was right, for Predestination and an overruling Providence are one and the same thing. If we accept the one, we are in consistency bound to accept the other.”

- F. William and Mary became Episcopalians, but the Toleration Act allowed the Dissenters or Nonconformists (Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptist and Quakers) to exist alongside the established Church of England. The Dissenters made up about one tenth of the population of England at this time. The Toleration Act did not cover the Roman Catholics or those who denied the Trinity.