

THE TERROR AND THE POWER OF THE LIGHT: THE ROOTS OF QUAKER NONVIOLENCE WITHIN THE PURITAN REFORMATION

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A) The wider "puritan" setting of Quaker origins within the English Reformation

Since the general social history of England in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries is both very important in understanding the roots of American culture, and very under-represented in the educational background of most university students, including those at Notre Dame, it will be important to introduce our theme with a rather broad survey of British (mostly English) Reformation history.⁽¹⁾

In contrast to the continent of Europe, where the basic decisions concerning "the Reformation" as political and ecclesiastical transformation were decided by 1530, the movement which began in England with the 1534 Act of Supremacy, cutting the Church of England off from Rome without making any internal changes, was only the beginning of a long, sometimes rough and sometimes slow, slide to the "left." Especially during the long reign of Elizabeth, the policy was one of "holding the lid on" i.e., basically conservative repression of criticism yet seeking to avoid making martyrs or dividing the people. Thus the various themes being brought up for critical review were spread out over 150 years. The "puritans" were at the forefront of this process, constantly pushing to shine the spotlight of Reform on new questions, but without wanting to be schismatic or to relinquish the claim to be the main stream of the Church.

1534 broke the link with Rome, which was never firmly re-established, although it was attempted under Mary (1553-58) and still hoped-for much later. as late as the 1680's.

1547 the succession of Edward on the death of Henry VIII left maximum liberty for theologians and theologies from the continent to be heard, but with very little effect on the thought of most Anglican leaders and still less on the worship and life of the parishes. The concept that all of the life of the church should be purified by the standard of the Scriptures had however been introduced from the continental Reformation, and would never go away.

Yet the Crown was scared; after too much protestant pressure under Edward and too much re-catholicizing pressure under Mary (1553-58), the policy under Elizabeth had to be caution. Let there be reformation talk, but only slowly, with foot-dragging. The changes made should not be radical enough to provoke another catholic backlash.

Some of the changes being proposed by reform advocates had to do with the outward forms of worship (vestments, candles, bells, processions, holidays...) but what will matter more for our present purposes will be the formal debate which arose about church order. These developments may be reviewed very schematically, in the form of a widening spectrum of leftward-sliding structural issues:

A/1) Presbyterianism arose within Anglicanism, making the claim that the proper form of church order is a gathering (synod) of elders (presbyters) rather than a monarchical bishop. This view was supported by the Reformed or Calvinistic reformation on the continent, strong especially in Switzerland and the Netherlands, represented by some of the continental refugees who came to England and Scotland, and imbibed by British refugees who went to the Netherlands, Geneva or Germany. The Presbyterians did not want a division; they called the entire Church of England, with the support of the Crown, to be purified of the error of prelacy by deposing the bishops or making them mere moderators of synods.

A/2) Next in logical order Congregationalism arose, making the further claim that the proper church order should be local. In each place Christians should gather, and every local parish body should be empowered to make its decisions, call its ministers, define its doctrines, and structure its life and worship without any outside control from either bishop or synod (to say nothing of the Crown). This movement did not want a division either; they wanted the entire Church of England, with the authorization of the Crown, to be organized locally. This would permit some diversity, but since the Bible and the Holy Spirit are the same everywhere, the diversity would be tolerable. Central management either by bishops or by the Crown is not needed to keep Christians essentially united. It was assumed that this Church structure would work hand in hand with the state both national and local.⁽²⁾ The act of signing a local covenant created the congregation, and based the common discipline of the group on the voluntary adhesion of all its members.

A/3) Next in logical order Independentism arose, arguing that if the free congregation, locally constituted by the covenant of its members, is the form that God wants for the faithful church, then the way to set up such congregations would not be to have to take over and transform previous Church of England parishes, nor to need to wait for the authorization of the government to draft and sign local covenants. Thus the vision, described above within the earlier phases, that "the entire Church of England with the authority of the Crown" was still expected to be the agency of reform, came to be seen to be an inappropriate brake on reform, which should be free to proceed under local initiative "without tarrying for any." Anyone could start from scratch to be a local church, whenever enough like-minded individuals would gather to covenant to live their

Christian life together. The state should neither control nor support it.

A/4) Some Independents began to doubt the propriety of baptizing infants, since that practice, carried over from the medieval mix of church and world, led to counting persons as Christians who had had no choice in the matter, and had not personally gone through the inward experiences which would make their participation in the congregational covenant authentic. Once they thought through the matter, it seemed to these people that the proper alternative would be for each individual who wants to be counted as a Christian, on the grounds of his/her own personal religious insight and experience, voluntarily to request and receive baptism on confession of faith, i.e. as adult. Thus the "Baptist" movement arose; it had parallels and contacts with similar earlier movements on the continent, especially in the Netherlands, but in its most important form, the "particular Baptists"⁽³⁾ it was authentically English, not an import.

This gradual slide to the left took generations. By the early 1600's the entire spectrum described above was present. For the next half-century the left edge of the spectrum remained open, with the rise of Levellers, Diggers, Ranters, Seekers, and finally Quakers, all of them representing differing ways for the purgative intent of puritanism to become still more radical.

B) The Puritan religious experience as background to its radicalization in Quakerism.

The Puritan is a literate Christian reading the Bible and a lot of other spiritual literature, with a desire for ever more faithful personal conformity to the Will of God, as that holy Will stands in judgment on the inadequacies of ordinary Christianity. Puritans published many argumentative tracts and supported an army of roving booksellers, and of local "lecturers,"⁽⁴⁾ but the particularly puritan genre of communication was the journal.⁽⁵⁾ The typical puritan journal author was very aware of the dynamics of his/her spiritual inwardness, recounting in her/his journal the struggle with sin and pride, under the benevolent pressure of God the Spirit, until finally God wins out and the person is a believer. Sometimes this struggle could take years. It was assisted and illuminated by the reading of other people's journals, and by the very didactic content of the puritan pastors' preaching, but each person had to find his/her own way.

For this to be able to happen there has to be freedom of assembly, preaching, and the press. Thus the first public impact of the puritan movement, reaching beyond issues of the inner form of the church, was the polemic against the control of all three by the government.⁽⁶⁾ God's freedom sovereignly to speak to His people as they gather together to hear preaching and to admonish one another must not be hindered by any restrictions on communication.⁽⁷⁾ Later political thought will link these freedoms to the rights of the sovereign individual; but at the outset the grounds for the claim was theological. These freedoms are not favors conceded to individual subjects by a sovereign; they are God's demands, to which the human sovereign must yield.

In the person and public career of George Fox all of these strands of radical redefinition come together. Although young (born 1624, founding his movement 1651/2) he had been through a long time of wandering among Baptists, Seekers, Levellers, Ranters, until his own message became clear. His conviction of a new immediacy of revelation ("Christ has come to teach his people himself"⁽⁸⁾) was his mode of being led by the Holy Spirit to a breakthrough insight of such power and clarity as to found a movement. Our concern here is not a full narrative⁽⁹⁾ but a schematic focus on the unique way in which the radicalization of the puritan experience cast a new light on the grounds for enemy love and nonviolence.

The title of this summary "chapter" is taken from a section of Hugh Barbour's account. "The Light" is the power of God in one's life. It is a power for good but before that it is a terror for one's sinfulness. Only because I know myself to be hopefully sinful can I adequately yield to forgiveness and restoration. I am sinful not only in that I have done concrete bad deeds but even more perniciously in the specific puritan vices of self-righteousness and complacency. What God did, in order to lead me to conversion, was relentlessly to shine into me the terrible light of His holiness, finally bringing me to yield to his healing purpose.

The essence of pain was to know one's sins and self-will, but the source of the pain was the Light itself. To modern Friends it is startlin to find the inward Light described in terms of such fierce judgment. The Light that ultimately gave joy, peace, and guidance gave at first only terror,⁽¹⁰⁾

If that is the way God conquered me, by shining through me the truth that first judged and then restore, then that same power of the truth ought to be the way I should seek to conquer ignorance and ill will in my fellow humans. No threat or coercion can convince, only truth, which takes its own time to penetrate.

Despite their reformed/augustinian seriousness about the evil in the human heart, the Puritans were also confident that the light of conscience was God (or Christ) active within the person, so that the testimony of another person could awaken an echo from within. Fox's statement which became popular among Friends was that he "spoke to that of God in every man." Thus the renunciation of violence in conflictive social relationships was not the result of scruples about shedding blood, or of sensitive scruples about wielding power. It followed rather from understanding the way in which authentic moral insight, and consequent personal change, can take place. I must (and can) conquer my own adversaries the way God conquered me when I was his enemy; namely by the power of the Light.

George Fox had begun in the middle of the puritan revolution (1642--) to preach that "Christ has come to teach his people." The renunciation of violence did not immediately become a clear conviction of all Quakers. There were Quaker soldiers in Oliver Cromwell's army in the first years. But the "testimony"⁽¹¹⁾ against war soon became clear.⁽¹²⁾ In his later Journal Fox recounts his response to recruiters who in 1650 offered to let him out of jail if he would accept a

commission in Cromwell's army:

I told them I knew from whence all wars arose, even from the lusts, according to James' doctrine;⁽¹³⁾ and that I lived in the virtue of that life and power that took away the occasion of all wars... I told them I was come into the covenant of peace, which was before wars and strifes were.⁽¹⁴⁾

In addition to the rejection of war, Friends took to its logical conclusion the puritan purging of other pagan vestiges in "Christian" life. These negations came to be called "testimonies":

- rejecting the verbal ceremonies of formal politeness;
- replacing the polite second person plural "you" with the familiar "thou";
- not using honorific titles ("Master," "Sir"...);
- not removing the hat in the presence of an authority;
- treating women and children as persons in their own right;
- rejecting the pagan names of the months and of the days of the week,⁽¹⁵⁾
- rejecting the "keeping of days" i.e. special saints' and holy days;
- "plain" clothing with no decoration;
- rejection of the oath;
- instead of the oath of asseveration, simply telling the truth (Matt. 5:33ff. "Plain 'Yes' or 'No' is all you need to say; anything beyond that comes from the devil.")
- instead of the oath of loyalty, the subject should be only as obedient to a given regime as the ruler merits, obeying only just laws;⁽¹⁶⁾
- instead of haggling in the marketplace, fixing a fair price for a product.⁽¹⁷⁾

The special term "testimonies" indicates that beyond their immediate meanings in social and ethical terms, these nonconformist behavior patterns are understood to be pointing beyond themselves, i.e., to "testify," to the awareness of God's holiness in all of life.

APPENDIX I: BIBLIOGRAPHY

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William C. BRAITHWAITE The Beginnings of Quakerism Cambridge U Press 1955

Howard H. Brinton (ed) Children of Light New York Macmillan 1938

Peter BROCK The Quaker Peace Testimony 1660 to 1914 Syracuse University Press 1990 pp. 1-46

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APPENDIX II: Chronology of Two Centuries of the British Reformation⁽¹⁸⁾

1509 Accession of Henry VIII to the throne

1529 Fall of Cardinal Wolsey; convening of Reformation Parliament

1534 Act of Supremacy; the King, not the pope, is head of the Church of England

1536 Pilgrimage of Grace; peasant revolt against tithes, nobility, clergy

1547 Edward VI succeeds Henry VIII: the most protestant period; welcoming refugee theologians from Europe

1553 Mary I succeeds Edward; again Catholic: persecution

1558 Elisabeth becomes queen at death of Mary; moderation;

- Fall of Calais to France; last British holdings on continent

1559 Acts of Supremacy and Uniformity; reversal of the reversal (by Mary) of the reformation of Henry VIII; All nonAnglican (i.e.Roman) worship is illegal

1563 Thirty-Nine Articles (confession-Latin edition; English version not until 1571 - below)

1570 Pope Pius V issues bull: Regnans in Excelsis; declares that Elisabeth is no longer queen and obligates Catholics to leave the Church of England: "recusants" (cf 1610)

1571 Final edition of the THIRTY NINE ARTICLES (English),

- Ministers must subscribe

Northhampton: first regular local Bible study group: called "prophesying"

1572 Thomas CARTWRIGHT, Admonition to Parliament condemns prelacy on biblical grounds:

- Wandsworth, constitution of the first presbyterian order

1580 Norwich; first "separatist" congregation; Robert BROWNE

1588 Defeat of The Spanish Armada

1593 Act against Seditious and Sectaries

1603 Death of Elizabeth, James VI of Scotland (after 36 years there) becomes James I of England; claims but does not insist on "divine right" against Parliament

1604 Birth of Roger Williams

1605 Gunpowder Plot; Jesuit theories of tyrannicide

1609 congregationalist "pilgrims" emigrate to Leyden

1609 Birth of Gerard Winstanley, who became a radical "Leveller" or "Digger"

1610 Loyalty oath to the Crown imposed on Catholics; those who refuse are called recusants.

1611 Authorized ("King James") Bible version published

1612 John Smythe returns from Netherlands as "Baptist"

1615 Birth of Richard Baxter

1623 Charles I marries Spanish princess

1620 "pilgrims" from Plymouth reach Massachusetts

1624 Charles I succeeds as king. Birth of George Fox

1628 Petition of Right: no taxation without consent of Parliament and no imprisonment without charge

- Birth of John Bunyan

1629 Charles I dissolves Parliament because of its rejection of unlawful taxation,

- Charles initiates "personal rule"

1633 Laud becomes Archbishop of Canterbury

1639 War with Scotland obliges Charles I to raise funds

1640 Charles has to convene Parliament to authorize taxes

- April: Short Parliament;
October: "Long parliament" coalition of Scots, Puritans and Parliament against the Crown

1641 Irish rebellion

1642 War between Charles and Parliament

1643 Westminster Assembly convened by Parliament to reconstitute the church along presbyterian lines; includes Scottish representation.

1644 Solemn League and Covenant; confirms anti-roman puritanism and parliamentary supremacy

- Birth of William Penn

1645 Battle of Naseby 14 June; Hostilities end

- Oliver Cromwell governs in the name of Parliament

1646 Cromwell captures Charles I

1648 Peace of Westphalia ends Thirty Years' War on the continent

- Westminster Assembly produces a Confession and two Catechisms

1649 Charles I beheaded

- Massacre of Drogheda ends Irish rebellion

1653 Oliver Cromwell dissolves "Long Parliament", rules henceforth as "Protector"

1658 Oliver Cromwell dies, succeeded by son Richard

- Savoy Conference representing 120 Congregationalist congregations adopts the Westminster Confession

1660 Richard Cromwell resigns; the Army convenes a new Parliament which invites Charles II to return to take the throne

1660-72 John BUNYAN in Reading Gaol

1661 "Fifth Monarchy" failed uprising

1661 Savoy Conference

THE FOLLOWING LAWS 1661-73 KNOWN COLLECTIVELY AS "CLARENDON CODE" in the name of the Earl who was Lord Chancellor at the time

1661 Corporation Act; only Anglicans may hold civil office.

1662 Act of Uniformity; all worship must be Anglican.

- No groups of more than five may meet to worship any other way.

All ministers must swear:

- (a) assent and consent to the Prayer Book;
- (b) denial of the right of resistance to authority

1664 Conventicle Act; forbids non-Anglican meetings

- Refusal to take the oath, or repeating the offense of attending nonconformist meetings may be punished by deportation.

1666 Five Mile Act; a former Puritan pastor may not live near his former parish

All of the above, especially 1662, adds up to "The Great Ejection"; 1,000 puritan clergy leave parishes, the beginning of "Non Conformity"

1670 (Secret) Treaty of Dover between Charles II and Louis XIV (France) promising to return to Catholicism in response for Louis' assistance.

- Second conventicle act replaces deportation with fines.

1672 Declaration of Indulgence; nonconformists or Catholics may be licensed for private worship.

1673 Test Act; no "papists" in public office

1679 Habeas Corpus Act

1684 Death of Roger Williams

1685 Monmouth failed uprising

1685 On his deathbed Charles II declares himself Roman Catholic.

- His son James II (pro-roman) succeeds to the throne

1687, 88 Declarations of Indulgence and Liberty of Conscience;

- James II restores liberties of both Catholics and nonconformists (freeing the nonconformists in order to free the Catholics).

James condemns seven (Anglican) bishops for resisting the restoration of catholic clergy;

The courts refuse to sustain the condemnation, marking the beginning of James' loss of power.

1688 Death of John Bunyan

1689 Parliament invites William II of Orange to take the throne: his "invasion" meets no resistance:

- "The Glorious Revolution" the beginning of "constitutional monarchy".

Bill of Rights commits William and Mary to respect the rights of subjects and of parliament;

Toleration Act removes the penalties imposed upon non-Anglicans by the Clarendon Code.

Declaration of Rights:

- no laws without Parliament,
- no raising armies without Parliament,
- Parliament elections free,
- parliamentary debate free.

1691 Death of George Fox

1. Cf. in appendix below p. 00: "Chronology of the two- century-long Reformation."

2. This is of course what was worked out successfully in New England. Every parish organization was autonomous but church and state were still a unity.
3. The movement was thus called because, in line with the Reformed background of the Congregationalism from which it sprang, it confessed that divine election is particular; each individual is or is not predestined to salvation. The earlier "general Baptist" movement, with some links to the earlier "anabaptist" movement on the continent, had been less Calvinist.
4. The creation of an endowed "lectureship" was one way in which businessmen or local patricians could support Reformation endeavors without interfering directly with diocese and parish structures. A pro-reform preacher could be engaged to preach and teach the new understanding of the Gospel without waiting for the old priest to be convinced or to die.
5. Cf. Howard Brinton, "Stages in Spiritual Development as Recorded in Quaker Journals" in H. Brinton (ed), Children of Light New York, Macmillan, 1938, pp. 383-406.
6. Ever since the beginnings of the continental reformation, the "proof text" to justify this freedom was I Cor. 14, where the Apostle Paul instructs the churches to let everyone speak.
7. As early as the 1520's, the reformation call for individual freedom of speech and local congregational authority was based in an appeal to I Corinthians 14, where the Apostle Paul calls for each local community to let every member speak, as the Spirit might move them.
8. "...as people come into subjection to the spirit of God and grow up in the image and power of the Almighty, they may receive the word of wisdom that opens all things, and come to know the hidden unity in the Eternal Being. (Journal 1831/1957 p.85, from 1648)"
9. Excellent full accounts are in Peter Brock 1990 and Hugh Barbour 1964.
10. Barbour (1964) p. 98. Barbour cites powerful statements from "journals" of the time, e.g. Richard Hubberthorne: "Judgment shall come forth to victory...In the midst of his terrible judgments there was a mercy hid wch I saw not,... his compassions failed not, though at that time I could see neither mercy nor compassion...Man must dye & know his own wayes no more, but must be led in a way wch he knoweth not..." Of the several "stages" described in Brinton's survey (note 5 above), his descriptions of the third ("search and conflict"), fourth ("convincement"), and fifth ("conversion") parallel the above statement with many other quotations.
11. Friends came to use the term "testimony" to designate the beliefs which distinguished them from other Puritans. To "testify" is a noncoercive way to stand for the truth. Cf. Barbour's chapter title: "Customs as Witness to the Unconverted."
12. Peter Brock (1990) pp 15-25 recounts how this was sorted out. Coming to reject war did not include rejecting civil office nor disavowing partisanship for the puritan political cause.

13. James 4:1. The reason for Fox' freedom from violence is a "life and power" i.e. a spiritual experience, rather than a proof from the teachings of Jesus; yet it is formulated in a wording from the New Testament.

14. Journal Phila/Jew York 1831 p. 115. So they put him back in jail for six more months. Historians are not sure that Fox does not read back into 1650 a position which became clear only later.

15. It is still possible to obtain calendars printed for Quakers, where the days of the week and the months of the year are named simply "First, Second, Third..."

16. "For Conscience sake to God, we are bound ... to yeeld obeidence ... in all matters actively or passively; that is to say, in al just and good laws of the land, we must be obedient... but... if anything be commanded of us by the present Authority, which is not according to equity, justice, and a good conscience towards God ... we must in such cases obey God only..." Ed. Burrough in Barbour 1964 p. 222.

17. This notion of a fair price is considered to have been one of the important steps toward the development of a grassroots market economy.

18. Draft of June 1989, updated as background for the backgrounds of Quaker origins within the Puritan movement