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"It Hath Been Found Inconsistent with the Safety and Welfare of this Protestant Kingdom"

Anti-Catholicism in Old England and New

John Winthrop had to work to convince his fellow Puritans to join him on a voyage that would lead to the founding of the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1630. Journeys across the Atlantic were extraordinarily dangerous in the seventeenth century, and many of the people who subscribed to the Calvinist theology that influenced Winthrop simply didn't think that such a journey was necessary. They shared the lawyer's disdain for the Church of England, believing that that Church's ministers failed to provide the kind of leadership that God demanded. But they were uncomfortable with the idea of moving to the New World, where they would have to occupy land that they knew had "of long time been possessed of others of Adam."[1] They also weren't convinced that the Church of England's problems had gotten so bad that true followers of Christ needed to leave.

Winthrop had the same response to both concerns: Remember that there are menacing Catholics on the horizon. With regard to the natives who'd been living on land in North America for centuries, he advised his fellow Calvinists that those natives were already being dispossessed of their lands by Europeans; the Europeans, however, were nasty Frenchmen – many of them priests. Migration to the New World under these circumstances would be a "service to the church of great consequence," as the Puritans would be able to "raise a bulwark against the kingdom of Antichrist, which the Jesuits labor to rear up in those parts."[2]

As far as English society and the condition of the Church of England were concerned, Calvinists needed to understand just how bad things really were. "The fountains of learning and religion are so corrupted," the future governor of Massachusetts maintained, that "most children (even the best wits and fairest hopes) are perverted, corrupted, and utterly

overthrown by the multitude of evil examples of the licentious government of those seminaries." The problem was that the leader of the Church of England, King Charles I, had expressed his admiration for some of the key elements of Catholic theology. He'd also taken a full-blown Catholic as his wife and tolerated all sorts of "popish ceremonies" within England's nominally Protestant church.[3] All good Puritans understood why this was a problem; John Winthrop wanted them to understand that it was not a problem that could be fixed by staying in England. To reform Christianity in their country, the "purifiers" needed to leave. They needed to go someplace new where they'd be able to build a model society for the people back home to witness, learn from, and eventually replicate.

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The idea that the Puritans came to the New World in the name of "religious freedom" is a myth. The truth is that in the seventeenth-century English-speaking world, no single group was more religiously intolerant than the Congregationalists who made up the bulk of the Puritan settlements in early colonial America. Nevertheless, there's a reason that the "religious freedom" story persists. The Puritans may have been religiously intolerant, but they also held it as an article of faith that every person had an obligation to "read and judge for himself" the meaning and import of the Word of God.[4] People needed to be free to recognize truth on their own, without any guidance or interference from a priest or bishop; this is why the idea of freedom is so strongly associated with the Puritans. The Puritan understanding of freedom, however, did not mean that it was acceptable for people to be wrong.

Outside the State House in Boston, there's a large statue that testifies to the real religious history of New England (Figure 1.1). For nearly sixty years now, Massachusetts lawmakers have been passing a bronze rendering of Mary Dyer as they walk to work each morning. Dyer was one of three Quakers who were hanged on Boston Common in the 1660s because they refused to leave Massachusetts Bay and take their crazy ideas about the "inner light" of God with them. Authorities in nearby Dorchester, Dedham, and Roxbury never went to the extreme of actually killing anyone for being a Quaker, but they did flog and run countless "Friends" out of town rather than tolerate Quakers' unorthodox ideas about God. Like their co-religionists in Boston, they also banished more than a few of their fellow Calvinists for expressing ideas about the governance of the church that were considered to be "new and dangerous."[5]

FIGURE 1.1 This statue of Mary Dyer was designed by the Quaker sculptor Sylvia Shaw Judson. It was placed outside the Massachusetts Statehouse in 1959 to commemorate the 300th anniversary of Dyer's execution.
Photo credit: Charles B. Simmons.

Native American Indians, too, experienced the religious intolerance of the Puritans. Indeed, one of the many "dangerous" ideas that got Roger Williams banished from Massachusetts was his belief that it was wrong for

his Calvinist neighbors to refer to the Narragansett and Wampanoag Indians as "heathens." The members of these local tribes, Williams insisted, were "intelligent, many very ingenuous, plain-hearted, inquisitive, and (as I said before) prepared with many convictions." They were not a people without faith, as the word "heathen" would imply. It was a distinction too subtle for many of the people living in Boston and Salem to compute, however. Williams' approach to the Indians seemed to them to be at odds with the mission of the Massachusetts Bay Company, which was "to win and incite the natives of the country to the knowledge and Obedience of the only true God and Savior of Mankind, and the Christian Faith."[6] The outspoken Baptist, therefore, had to go.

But Roger Williams was not a religious relativist. The committee that banished him may not have understood it, but he definitely wanted the Indians to convert to Christianity – and because of that, he didn't hesitate in some of his personal correspondences to refer to them as "wild, barbarous wretches." The future founder of Rhode Island firmly believed that "the followers of Jesus are now the only people of God." He simply didn't think that the Puritans would be able to convert anyone to their faith so long as they failed to take native religious beliefs seriously.[7]

Such patience and understanding, however, were not something Williams was willing to extend to people who worshipped within the Church of Rome. Like all the other Calvinists in New England, Williams had come to North America to get away from the "popish relics" within the Church of England's theology and liturgy. Granted, he didn't want to see papists hanged – in part because he believed that persecution only caused Catholics to "tumble into the ditch of hell after their blind leaders with more inflamed zeal."[8] He also didn't think it was ever the job of a civil magistrate to enforce matters of religious belief (another of the "new and dangerous" ideas that got him kicked out of Massachusetts).

But Roger Williams had no patience for Catholics, and he certainly wasn't willing to accord them any intelligence, inquisitiveness, or legitimate "convictions." The Indians may have been "wretches," but Williams reserved the word "*Antichristian*" for the "worship in life and death" that had characterized his native country "when *England* was all *Popish* under Henry the seventh." He praised the turn toward "absolute Protestantism" that England had taken "under Queen Elizabeth," even if that turn had retained too much of the pomp and hierarchy of the Church of Rome. And he insisted – almost immediately after praising the religious convictions of the Narragansett – that "if Antichrist be [Catholics'] false head (as most true it is), their body, faith, baptism & hope are all false also."[9]

The Puritans came to North America in the name of *their* religious freedom, and in many of the communities they established – not just in modern-day Massachusetts, but in New York, Maryland, and Virginia, as well – they proved to be more than capable of exhibiting a vast degree of intolerance when it came to ideas about God and humanity's duties to God that conflicted with those of the sixteenth-century Protestant theologian, John Calvin. Of all of the people who got under the Puritans' collars, however, no one got under there more than a Catholic, as the observations of even unusually tolerant Calvinists like Roger Williams proved.

Opposition to Catholicism was the primary reason English Calvinists came to the New World in the 1620s and 1630s. As time marched on, however, and the seventeenth century gradually became the eighteenth century, anti-Catholic sentiment became more than just a motive for emigration; it became a tool that settlers in North America used to maintain their sense of "English" identity, even as they lived 3,000 miles away from England and a growing number of them were living their entire lives never once having set foot on the British isle.

Maintaining their English identity was important to America's early British colonists. It's a reality that we forget sometimes, knowing as we do that the colonies ultimately broke away from England and became their own country. But the Puritans did not travel to the New World so that they could become Americans. They saw themselves as Englishmen and women who happened to be living in North America. For several generations after the initial founding of those settlements along Massachusetts and Cape Cod Bays, the colonists worked hard to teach their children (and remind themselves) that they were English. They read English books, drank English tea, wore English cloth, built English houses, and furnished those houses with English cabinets, tables, and chairs.[10] After 1689, when an anti-Catholic coup in England known as the "Glorious Revolution" firmly established that to be "English" was to be "Protestant," the Puritans in North America also used their long-standing animosity toward the Catholic Church to assert their English identity to each other and to their countrymen on the other side of the Atlantic.

This association between "English" and "Protestant" identity that solidified after the Glorious Revolution actually took a long time to develop. King Henry VIII had broken with the Catholic Church and formed the Church of England (also known as the Anglican Church) more than 150 years earlier, in 1534; that did not mean, however, that England immediately became a Protestant nation. For many years, there

were few theological differences between the Anglican and Catholic Churches, and Henry was not very good about forcing people to adhere to the new Anglican faith. Roger Williams himself noted in 1644 that England had moved from "half-Protestantism, half-Popery under *Henry* the eighth to absolute Protestantism under *Edward* the sixth . . . to absolute Popery under *Queen Mary*," before Elizabeth I finally assumed the throne in 1558.[11]

Good Queen Bess quickly issued the Acts of Uniformity and Supremacy and the Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, which did create some solid theological distinctions between the Church of England and the Church of Rome (Puritans never felt those distinctions went far enough. . .). The Acts and Articles required all of England's residents to attend Anglican church services, redefined the Sacraments to exclude several that were important to the Catholic Church (such as Marriage and Confession), switched the liturgy from Latin to English, and made the Book of Common Prayer (which was written by an English theologian named Thomas Cranmer) the official source of liturgical worship in all of England.[12]

Even then, though, the issue of England's Protestant identity was still far from settled. Elizabeth's successor, King James I, issued a number of harsh laws in the early seventeenth century that required England's minority Catholics to swear their allegiance to him and pay heavy fines whenever they failed to attend Anglican worship services. Those fines, however, were implemented only sporadically; James' wife, Anne, was a secret Catholic convert (a fact that her husband knew – and tolerated – so long as she practiced her faith quietly); and James was himself friendly enough with some of the country's leading Catholics to elevate several of them to the peerage, more than doubling the number of Catholic noblemen in England during his reign.[13]

King James' son proved to be even more accepting of Catholicism than his father had been. Charles I became England's king in 1625, five years before the Puritans sailed to Massachusetts. He was married to a Catholic – Queen Henrietta Maria, who'd been born and raised in France. Her older brother, Louis XIII, was the king of that Catholic country, and her mother, Marie de Medici, belonged to one of the wealthiest and most politically powerful Catholic families in all of Europe. Several popes, in fact, had been members of the Medici family, including Pope Leo X, whose abuses had launched the Protestant Reformation roughly one hundred years before Charles and Henrietta Maria were married.

During his reign, King Charles I worked to reconcile the Anglican and Roman Catholic Churches. He publicly expressed regret that the Reformation had ever happened, and, at one point, he outlined a "middle way" between Anglicanism and Catholicism that included having the Catholic Mass said in English and allowing priests to marry, provided they did not become bishops. Charles I also appointed William Laud as the Archbishop of Canterbury. Puritans hated Bishop Laud, and following his appointment in 1633, many Calvinists who'd been unwilling to join John Winthrop three years earlier hopped on ships and eagerly traveled to the New World. Laud used the word "heretical" to describe many of the beliefs embraced by England's Calvinists, and his efforts to install stained-glass windows in several Anglican churches seemed to the Puritans to smack of popery.[14]

The cozy relationship that Charles I had with Catholicism made even some Anglicans uncomfortable; it goes without saying, therefore, that Calvinists were nearly apoplectic. They rose up against their king in the 1640s and launched a civil war that led to a dour but solidly Protestant period in England's history known as the *Interregnum* – in Latin, "the period between the kings." From 1649 to 1660, England had no ruling monarch because the Puritans in Parliament had executed King Charles I. His two teenaged sons, Charles and James, had fled to France.

During the Interregnum, the country was led by what was known as a "Lord Protector" – an intensely religious Calvinist military commander named Oliver Cromwell. Together with Parliament, Cromwell implemented dozens of policies that reflected his Calvinist understanding of piety and government – among them the banning of Christmas and Easter, which Calvinists considered to be "heathenish customs and pagan rites" that the Catholic Church had co-opted as part of its effort to convert people to a perverted form of Christianity. Cromwell also sent his army into Ireland, which had a predominantly Catholic population, and launched a war there that killed more than 40 percent of the civilian population in just four years through conflict, disease, and artificial famine, brought on by the army's policy of burning crops and slaughtering livestock.[15]

Cromwell's laws during the Interregnum did not always sit well with Anglicans, who shared his dislike of Catholicism, but also enjoyed yule logs and mince pies and believed that regardless of what the Catholic Church may have done with the Christmas holiday, Christians were still obliged to "keep diligently the feast days, and truly in the first place the day of Christ's birth."[16] Anglicans were not the only Protestants in

England who found Cromwell's rules to be a bit problematic. Even some of the Presbyterians who'd helped to launch the English Civil War had some concerns.

As Calvinists, Britain's Presbyterian leaders shared Cromwell's theological outlook and his attitude toward Catholicism; they were disappointed, however, in his failure to turn the Church of England into solidly Calvinist Church. Cromwell had a zero-tolerance policy on Catholicism, but he proved to be surprisingly ecumenical when it came to the numerous Protestant theologies that flourished in England – including theologies that seemed to suggest people might have more control over their salvation than John Calvin and his Congregationalist and Presbyterian followers allowed.

Presbyterians wanted the country to be far more uniform in its approach to religion, and they felt that a monarchy – especially one where the king had been humbled by the execution of his father – would be the best way to achieve that uniformity. When Cromwell died, therefore, they joined with the more traditional Anglicans in Parliament and issued an invitation in 1660 to King Charles I's older son, Charles, to return to England and assume the throne.

This invitation, however, soon put Catholicism front and center in the country again. Charles II died with no legitimate children after twenty-five years on the throne; this meant that his younger brother, James, became the King of England in 1685, and James was a Catholic. He'd converted in 1668, at the age of 34, after spending his teens and twenties in exile in Catholic France following his father's execution at the hands of fanatical Calvinists.

James II did enjoy a loyal following among some people – especially in Scotland, where rebels worked to defend his legacy for many years after he was deposed in 1689. But no one in Parliament wanted a king who was Catholic. When James' Catholic wife, Mary of Modena, gave birth to a baby boy in 1688, therefore, many members of Parliament felt that they had to act fast, or else be subject to another lifetime's worth of Catholic rule.

They invited James' daughter from his first marriage, Mary – who'd been raised as an Anglican – and her Dutch Calvinist husband, William of Orange, to take the throne. In what became known as the "Glorious Revolution," Parliament officially declared that "it hath been found inconsistent with the safety and welfare of this Protestant kingdom to be governed by a popish prince." James II was summarily overthrown, and thanks to the Act of Settlement passed by Parliament a little more than a decade after the Glorious Revolution, England hasn't had a Catholic ruler

since. Indeed, the Act of Settlement still bars Roman Catholics from assuming the throne in England; since 2015, however, future monarchs have been permitted to marry people who subscribe to the Roman Catholic faith.[17]

Because the cementing of "English" and "Protestant" identity that was accomplished by the Glorious Revolution involved a deliberate denial of Catholicism's religious and political legitimacy, anti-Catholicism became an expression of "Englishness" in the decades that followed William and Mary's coup. This reality helps to explain why New England became such a hotbed of anti-Catholic sentiment in the eighteenth century, even though Catholics in the region – according to native son, John Adams – were "as rare as a comet or an earthquake."[18]

That's not to say that New Englanders' fears about Catholics and Catholicism were entirely unfounded. Their region bordered Quebec, after all, which was a French and Catholic colony. Between 1688 and 1763, England and France went to war with one another four different times, and during the intervening years, the countries' New World colonists often skirmished over territory and trade, frequently using native Indians as their proxies.

But when they railed against the "tyranny" and "abominable superstitions" of the Catholic Church, New Englanders were not making statements about any actual Catholics among them. Rather, they were telling the world – and more particularly, themselves and their countrymen on the other side of the Atlantic – that they were just as "English" as anyone who'd been born and raised in London or Leeds. And, as Englishmen, the residents of Massachusetts, Rhode Island, Connecticut, and New Hampshire believed they were entitled to a host of individual rights – rights that would one day launch a revolution and lead to the creation of a whole new country in North America.[19]

THE REFORMATION, BRIEFLY CONSIDERED

Protestantism was a reaction against the Catholic Church, a theological "protest" against doctrines and hierarchies that – certainly in the sixteenth century – had become tools of political and economic intrigue, rather than expressions of genuine piety or the fulfillment of God's wishes for humanity. Dozens of theologians wrote treatises that criticized the Catholic Church's pollution of Christ's message. Martin Luther was by no means the only one, and indeed he was not even the first. Thanks to the invention

of the printing press, however – and the support of some very powerful secular authorities, such as Frederick III, the Elector of Saxony – Luther was able to succeed where others before him had failed.[20]

Among the practices that Luther questioned was the Church's distribution of "indulgences," which were intercessions that living Christians could make – *only* with the help of the Church – on behalf of themselves or anyone, really, who had died with the stain of venial sin on his or her soul. According to Church teaching, just about everyone died in a state of venial sin.*

A "venial" sin was one that God had already forgiven out of love. That did not mean it was a sin that had not engendered a penalty, however. Unlike mortal sins, venial sins didn't condemn a soul to Hell, but they did prevent that soul from immediately entering Heaven, requiring the soul instead to spend time in a kind of middling realm known as "purgatory." There, souls would contemplate the damage that sins such as lying, cheating, and laziness did to one's relationship with God, doing penance in purgatory for that damage before moving on to Heaven.[21]

According to Catholic doctrine, an indulgence could shorten the amount of time that a soul spent in purgatory by drawing upon a "treasury of merits" that had been created, sustained, and made available to sinners by the prayers and sacrifices of Jesus and the saints. The Church granted – and indeed still grants – indulgences to Catholics who have engaged in certain prayer exercises, such as the Rosary Novena or the Stations of the Cross, or performed good works for humanity, the Church, and God with devotion and sincerity. The Church no longer grants indulgences in exchange for cash payments, however, which is what many bishops were doing in the sixteenth century when a young Augustinian friar from Wittenberg, Germany, started questioning the doctrine of indulgences – and then many other teachings of the Roman Catholic Church.[22]

In 1513, Giovani de Medici became Pope Leo X. In just a few years, he managed to bring the Vatican to the brink of bankruptcy, hosting elaborate parties that included musicians, dwarves, elephants, and – according to Martin Luther, at least (whose authority on the subject is admittedly

* Mary, the mother of Jesus, was the one exception to this rule. She was thought to have been conceived without sin and to have spent her entire life free of sin – though this belief did not have dogmatic distinction at the time of the Protestant Reformation. It was not until 1854 that Mary's "Immaculate Conception" became dogma (i.e., something all Catholics must believe in order to be Catholic).