

Before the founding of the term, Puritans or Separatists, the population within the now called United Kingdom (England, henceforth) were developing a new word for a diverse religious belief different from Catholicism, called Protestant. Bibles were smuggled into the country and read by those who found the readings life-changing. In the Early 16th century, new foundations of science were exploding across Europe and making their way to England. This new knowledge brought forth revolutionary ways of thinking. Oppression from the official religion, Catholicism, with its rules, was making groups of people disconsolate. One of those primarily was England's King Henry VIII wanted an annulment from his wife, Catharine of Aragon, and the Catholic Church denied the request. King Henry decided to break away from the Roman Catholic Church and formed his religious institution called The Church of England. This break from the Catholic Church had a profound impact in itself which created wars and affected Catholicism to its core.

As the years of the 1500s marched forward, English residents were becoming more brazen about reading contraband Bibles outside the confines of their private homes, and thus realizing that the Catholic rites were not based on what the now Puritans believed to be the "True Word of Christ". The Church of England and Catholic hierarchy began interrogating the Protestants over the native language used in "their" Bible.

"Christ never spoke in English" a Catholic official interrogating a Protestant pointed out, only to be told neither he spoke any Latin: but always in such a tongue as the people might be edified thereby." With Catholic assumptions about the authority of priests and tradition thrust aside, Scripture became the doorway to knowing God and the most important source of rules for Protestants to follow in organizing churches, ministry, and worship (Hall, 2021, pg 120).

Puritans were finding such zeal in the word of Christ that they formed places of worship. As a group, it was decided they would follow the teachings of Christ himself and not that of those that were priests. They collectively decided to cut all "..., according to their best endeavours,

whatsoever it should cost them, the Lord assisting them. And that it cost them something this ensewing historie will declare” (Bradford, 1898, pg 122,123). The Protestants from neighboring areas within England formed together to select learned and worthy men to preach the way of Christ, such as John Smith, Richard Clifton, John Robinson, and William Brewster. The Church of England received word of what these men were collectively doing and found ways to keep the discourse and the lack of any peaceful ways from occurring with the Separatists. The monarchy had control over the state-run Church of England and was seen by the Protestant Puritans in their “enlightenment” that this Church was also too political. The Puritans resented everything about the Church of England and wholly severed their relationship with the Church. Unrest within the population created war where the monarchy was eventually disbanded, King Charles I of England was beheaded, and Puritan Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector of England.

The Church of England hunted these Puritan leaders and persecuted them whenever possible. As the continued enlightenment of the Protestants grew, so the mockery did begin, and the ministers were to be silenced by any means possible from the Church of England. Their religious services were made illegal and were considered anti-Christian.

...so as their former afflictions were but as flea-bitings in comparison of these which now came upon them. For some were taken & clapt up in prison, others had their houses besett & watcht night and day, & hardly escaped their hands; and ye most were faine to flie & leave their howses & habitations, and the means of their livelehood. Yet these & many other sharper things which affterward befell them, were no other then they looked for, and therfore were ye better prepared to bear them by ye assistance of Gods grace & spirite. Yet seeing them selves thus molested, [7] and that ther was no hope of their continuance ther, by a joynte consente they resolved to goe into ye Low Countries, wher they heard was freedome of religion for all men; as also how sundrie from London, & other parts of ye land, had been exiled and persecuted for ye same cause, & were gone thither, and lived at Amsterdam, & in other places of ye land (Bradford, 1898, pgs 123,124).

The Puritans determined that they could no longer endure the torture that rained down upon them. They had heard that there was religious freedom in Holland. It was decided that they should set forth to move away from their homeland, family, friends, and all that they had known. The Separatists faced the reality of needing to learn a new language. Unbeknownst to them, their ways in their new life skills were to be unlike anything from their former more simple life in England.

Yet [8] this was not all, for though they could not stay, yet were ye not suffered to goe, but ye ports & havens were shut against them, so as they were faine to seeke secrete means of conveance, & to bribe & fee ye mariners, & give exterordinarie rates for their passages. And yet were they often times betrayed (many of them), and both they & their goods intercepted & surprisid, and therby put to great trouble & charge, ... (Bradford, 1898, pg 125).

The world was a completely different way of life, compared to today. Englanders were not granted the rights by the monarch that are afforded with the now United States Constitution. Decisions made by England's Kings were decreed and then carried out. There was little to no opportunity to reason with the court if one was that fortunate. Separatist leaders and their members were never afforded that luxury. It can only be pondered if there were any other options available in England as the monarchy always wins. Putting up with rules, being quiet, accept what one is told to do was the only way to survive the monarchy. Hence, the only viable solution was to relocate to Leiden, Holland where they heard the land was much more tolerant to different styles of living.

" In 1608, a community of English separatists decided to escape persecution by moving to Holland, an area long known for its toleration. Dutch society was so welcoming that the Pilgrims, as they had come to be known, eventually feared that they were losing control over their children" (Newlon et al., 2021).

The Separatists chose to remove to Leiden Holland to continue to live their religious beliefs.

Conclusion

The separation from Catholicism to the formation of the Church of England produced many conflicts for those who were known as the Separatists. The Puritans were hunted and tyrannized by the Church of England, due to their following of the new Protestant beliefs, which solidified the immediate urgency to relocate away from the English church rule. The Puritans were assured they could no longer endure the torture they were encountering from the Church of England. Holland allowed for toleration and welcomed the Separatists, which brought about a new set of problems while they became established there.

Resources

Bradford, G. (1898). *Bradford's history "of Plimoth Plantation."*. Wright and Potter.

Hall, D. D. (2021). *The Puritans a transatlantic history* (1st ed.). Princeton University Press.

Newlon, J., Spooner, R., & Spooner, A. (2021). *The Separatists*. The separatists. Retrieved December 22, 2021, from <https://www.u-s-history.com/pages/h575.html>