CHURCH HISTORY SERIES • LESSON 26

Puritans, Quakers & Moravians

The English dissenting tradition, the Society of Friends, and the Herrnhut community that launched modern Protestant missions • c. 1560–1790

By Shane Gunn • Primary-source study

← Church History Archive

Where this fits: Lesson 26 of the Pleasant Springs *Church History* series. Three distinct movements growing out of the Reformation's long tail, none of them big enough for a Noll turning point, each of them large enough to have shaped modern evangelicalism more than Protestants usually acknowledge. See the full **Series Timeline**.

WHY THIS LESSON MATTERS

Three traditions this lesson covers have each left marks on modern Protestantism that far exceed their own membership:

> • **The Puritans** — the English Reformed movement that wanted to "purify" the Church of England. Their century-long struggle produced the Westminster Confession, the Pilgrim and Massachusetts Bay colonies, the intellectual backbone of colonial New England, a flood of devotional classics still in print (Bunyan, Owen, Baxter, Flavel, Burroughs), and the theological heritage of most modern conservative Presbyterians, Congregationalists, and a substantial part of Reformed Baptist life.

> • **The Quakers (Society of Friends)** — the radical movement of George Fox, James Nayler, and Margaret Fell from the 1640s. They gave modern Christianity its most thoroughgoing argument for the "inner light," pioneered the peace testimony, produced William Penn's colony at Pennsylvania (a genuine experiment in religious liberty), refused to swear oaths, and produced some of the first sustained Christian arguments against slavery — the Germantown Friends' 1688 petition was the earliest formal protest against slavery in the American colonies.

> • **The Moravians** — the refugee community gathered under Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf at Herrnhut, Saxony, beginning in 1722. They maintained a prayer meeting that continued uninterrupted for a hundred years, launched the first large-scale Protestant missionary movement, sent missionaries to the Caribbean, North America, Greenland, South Africa, and India, and provided the decisive influence on the Wesleys' conversions (see **Lesson 21**).

These three movements are, each in their different ways, the streams through which free-church Protestantism arrived in America and the evangelical pattern of cross-cultural missions arrived in the world.

PART 1 — ENGLISH PURITANISM

The Puritans were not a denomination but a movement within — and eventually, against — the Church of England. The word "Puritan," originally an insult, described the wing of English Protestants who believed Elizabeth's Settlement of 1559 (see **Lesson 18 Part 8**) had stopped short. They wanted to *purify* the church of remaining Catholic practices and structures.

Core Puritan concerns:

> • **Removing Catholic vestiges from worship** — clerical vestments, the sign of the cross at baptism, kneeling at communion, saints' days, organs in some cases, the wedding ring.

> • **Reforming the episcopacy** — some wanted bishops replaced by Presbyterian synods; others (Congregationalists) wanted bishops replaced by autonomous gathered congregations.

> • **A preaching ministry.** The Puritans were the most pulpit-centered Protestants of the 16th and 17th centuries. They produced a distinctive *plain-style sermon* (doctrine + reasons + uses) that became the template for English-speaking evangelical preaching for centuries.

> • **Sabbath observance.** Puritans observed Sunday with remarkable strictness — no work, no travel, no recreation, just worship and holy conversation.

> • **Personal and household piety.** Daily family prayer, Scripture reading, catechizing of children, self-examination, and spiritual journaling were the heart of Puritan devotional life.

> • **Experimental religion.** The Puritans pioneered the careful testing of conversion — walking through signs of saving faith, marks of indwelling sin, evidences of the Spirit's work. (Jonathan Edwards's *Religious Affections* stands in this tradition; see **Lesson 20 Part 9**.)

The Westminster Assembly (1643–1649). During the English Civil War, Parliament's Long Parliament summoned 121 English divines, 30 laymen, and 8 Scottish commissioners to an Assembly at Westminster to reform the Church of England. Meeting for six years in the Jerusalem Chamber of Westminster Abbey, the Assembly produced the foundational documents of English-speaking Reformed Christianity:

> • **The Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)** — 33 chapters of systematic Reformed theology. Still the doctrinal standard of Presbyterian churches worldwide.

> • **The Westminster Shorter Catechism (1647)** — 107 questions and answers for children and young converts. Its first Q&A is one of the most-quoted lines in Protestant history:

> *"Q1. What is the chief end of man? A. Man's chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him for ever."*
>
> **— Westminster Shorter Catechism, 1647**

> • **The Westminster Larger Catechism (1647)** — a fuller version for adults and ministers.

> • **The Directory for the Public Worship of God (1645)** — a guide rather than a prescribed liturgy, replacing the Book of Common Prayer for Scottish and English Puritan congregations.

Key Puritan writers and their books still read today:

John Bunyan (1628–1688)

BEDFORD TINKER, IMPRISONED TWELVE YEARS FOR UNLICENSED PREACHING • *THE PILGRIM'S PROGRESS* (1678)

The Pilgrim's Progress is the best-selling English book after the King James Bible for most of its publishing history — translated into over 200 languages, never out of print since 1678. Bunyan also wrote *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners* (his spiritual autobiography, 1666) and *The Holy War* (1682).

John Owen (1616–1683)

CHAPLAIN TO CROMWELL, DEAN OF CHRIST CHURCH OXFORD, VICE-CHANCELLOR OF OXFORD UNIVERSITY

Considered the greatest English Puritan theologian. His *Death of Death in the Death of Christ* (1647) is still the classic Reformed defense of definite atonement. His works on communion with God, mortification of sin, and the Holy Spirit (now 16 volumes) remain widely read.

Richard Baxter (1615–1691)

KIDDERMINSTER PASTOR • AUTHOR OF *THE SAINTS' EVERLASTING REST* (1650) AND *THE REFORMED PASTOR* (1656)

The Reformed Pastor is still considered one of the greatest books on pastoral ministry ever written. Baxter's Kidderminster congregation, under his catechizing of every household, became a 17th-century paradigm of systematic lay discipleship.

Other major Puritan voices

Thomas Goodwin, John Flavel, Thomas Watson, William Perkins, Richard Sibbes, Stephen Charnock, Jeremiah Burroughs. A reader who works seriously through a Puritan reading plan (the Banner of Truth reprint series is the classic entry point) is reading material that shaped John Newton, William Wilberforce, Charles Spurgeon, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, J. I. Packer, and most modern English-speaking Reformed evangelicals.

The Act of Uniformity and Great Ejection (1662). When the monarchy was restored in 1660, the Act of Uniformity (1662) required all ministers to swear allegiance to the restored Anglican Prayer Book. About 2,000 Puritan ministers refused and were ejected from their parishes on 24 August 1662 (the **Great Ejection**, also known as Black Bartholomew's Day in memory of the 1572 French Huguenot massacre). They founded what became **English Nonconformity** — the Presbyterians, Congregationalists (Independents), and Baptists who remained outside the established church through the 18th and 19th centuries. Susanna Wesley's father Samuel Annesley was one of the 2,000 ejected (see **Lesson 21 Part 2**).

New England Puritans. The Great Migration of 1629–1640 brought roughly 21,000 English Puritans to Massachusetts Bay. These became the Congregational churches of New England and the cultural DNA of much of American Protestantism — the Sabbath tradition, the town-meeting polity, the suspicion of establishment religion, the education-mindedness (Harvard founded 1636, Yale 1701), and the preaching tradition that produced Edwards. Their intellectual heritage still shapes how American Christians, even non-Reformed ones, tend to think about theology, education, public life, and conversion.

PART 2 — THE QUAKERS (RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS)

George Fox (1624–1691)

LEICESTERSHIRE SHOEMAKER'S APPRENTICE • ITINERANT PREACHER FROM 1647 • FOUNDER OF THE RELIGIOUS SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

Inner Light | Quaker founder | Peace testimony

Fox was a spiritually restless young man who, around 1647, experienced an inward encounter with Christ that he described as hearing the voice of "the living Lord." He began preaching that Christ was accessible directly to every soul — without priest, sacrament, or external church — through the **Inner Light**, *"that of God in every man."*

Fox's core teachings:

> • **The Inner Light.** Christ gives every human being enough inward light to be saved if they will obey it. The visible, audible, physical Christ in the gospels is the same Christ available now in silence to the waiting heart.

> • **No professional ministry.** Anyone led by the Spirit may speak in meeting. Quakers rejected ordination, seminary training, and salaried clergy. Meetings for worship were held in silence until someone felt moved to speak.

> • **No sacraments.** The whole Christian life is sacramental; baptism is an inward baptism of the Spirit; communion is inward communion with Christ. Outward water baptism and the Lord's Supper were considered unnecessary. (This remains the distinctive Quaker position today, though some modern evangelical Friends have reintroduced the outward ordinances.)

> • **Simplicity.** Plain dress (the famous Quaker gray), plain speech ("thee" and "thou" to everyone regardless of rank), plain houses, plain worship.

> • **The peace testimony.** Christians do not bear arms, do not serve in the military, do not resort to violence. The **Declaration of 1660** (to Charles II) is one of the clearest Christian pacifist documents ever written: *"We utterly deny*

> *all outward wars and strife and fightings with outward weapons, for any end or under any pretence whatsoever."*

> • **Refusal of oaths.** Following Matt 5:33–37, Quakers refused to swear in court. This got them jailed regularly.

> • **Equality.** Women preached and led. Slave owning was ultimately incompatible with Quaker life. Class distinctions (removing one's hat to a superior, for instance) were refused.

Persecution and growth. Quakers were persecuted severely in England and the American colonies. Mary Dyer, Marmaduke Stephenson, and William Robinson were hanged on Boston Common between 1659 and 1661 for returning to Massachusetts after being banished as Quakers. George Fox himself spent a total of about six years in prison. **Margaret Fell** (1614–1702), the widow of Judge Thomas Fell who became Fox's wife in 1669, was a brilliant organizer, advocate, and theologian (*Women's Speaking Justified*, 1666, is a Quaker classic on women in ministry). By 1700, there were perhaps 50,000 Quakers in England and another 25,000 in the American colonies.

William Penn and Pennsylvania (1681). The aristocrat and Quaker convert **William Penn** (1644–1718) was granted a vast American colony in 1681 in payment of a royal debt owed his father. Penn's "Holy Experiment" in Pennsylvania guaranteed religious liberty to all who acknowledged one God, established good relations with the Lenape Indians (the famous 1682 treaty under the elm tree at Shackamaxon), and drew German Mennonites, Amish, Lutheran Pietists, French Huguenots, Scots-Irish Presbyterians, and Welsh Baptists along with Quakers from across Europe. Pennsylvania became the single most religiously pluralistic English colony in North America, prefiguring the American religious liberty that the **Founders** would later write into the Constitution.

The Germantown Protest (1688). On 18 February 1688, four Quaker and Mennonite immigrants in Germantown, Pennsylvania (Francis Daniel Pastorius, Garret Hendericks, Derick op de Graeff, and Abraham op de Graeff) signed and sent to their Quaker monthly meeting the first known formal protest against slavery in the American colonies. Their petition argued simply that Quakers who had themselves fled persecution could not hold slaves without

contradicting the gospel. The document was filed away; it was rediscovered in the 19th century and is now considered one of the foundational texts of the American abolition movement.

Later Quaker contributions. John Woolman (1720–1772, *Journal*), Anthony Benezet, Elizabeth Fry (prison reform in England), Lucretia Mott (abolition and women's rights, Seneca Falls 1848), the Grimké sisters, American Friends Service Committee (1917, Nobel Peace Prize 1947). The Quaker tradition has a far larger moral footprint than its numbers (~400,000 worldwide today) would suggest.

PART 3 — NIKOLAUS VON ZINZENDORF & THE MORAVIANS (1722–)

Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf (1700–1760)

LUTHERAN ARISTOCRAT, COUNT OF THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE • FOUNDED THE HERRNHUT MORAVIAN COMMUNITY IN SAXONY IN 1722 • PIONEERED THE MODERN PROTESTANT MISSIONARY MOVEMENT

Herrnhut | Protestant missions | Pietism

Zinzendorf was a German Pietist Lutheran nobleman raised by his Pietist grandmother Henriette Catharina von Gersdorff. A child of extraordinary spiritual intensity, he had been forming religious societies since his school days at Halle. In 1722 he granted asylum on his estate at Berthelsdorf in Saxony to a small group of Moravian refugees — descendants of the Bohemian Brethren founded 250 years earlier by followers of Jan Hus (see **Lesson 13 Part 3**, where Hus appears in connection with Wycliffe).

The refugees built a village they called **Herrnhut** ("under the Lord's watch"). Over the next five years they grew to about 300, drawn from Moravian, German Lutheran, Reformed, and Anabaptist backgrounds. By 1727 the community was fracturing over doctrinal and personality disputes. Zinzendorf, now living permanently at Herrnhut, intervened; he wrote a covenant (the "Brotherly Agreement") that all adult members accepted in May 1727.

13 August 1727 • The Moravian Pentecost. At a communion service at the Berthelsdorf parish church, the community experienced what they considered an outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Sustained reconciliation, corporate prayer, and a

new missionary zeal followed. Moravians describe 13 August 1727 as their spiritual birthday.

27 August 1727 • The Hourly Intercession. Two weeks after the Pentecost, the community instituted a 24-hour prayer watch — teams of two Moravians praying one hour each, rotating continuously around the clock. The watch continued, uninterrupted by any night, for **100 years** (1727–1827).

The Moravian missionary revolution. In August 1732, Zinzendorf encountered a Caribbean Black man named Anthony Ulrich in Copenhagen who described the desperate condition of the enslaved Africans on the Danish sugar island of St. Thomas. On 21 August 1732, two young Moravian craftsmen — Leonard Dober (potter) and David Nitschmann (carpenter) — sailed from Copenhagen for St. Thomas. Their plan, if the Danish planters would not allow them to preach to the slaves, was to sell themselves into slavery to do so. They were the first Protestant missionaries of what would become a global movement.

Within the next eight years Moravians went to St. Croix, St. John, Suriname, Greenland (Hans Egede's station joined by Moravians 1733), Georgia (the Wesleys met them here), South Africa (Georg Schmidt 1737), Ceylon, Labrador, and Cape Coast on the African Gold Coast. By 1760, when Zinzendorf died, the community of about 600 Moravians at Herrnhut had sent out over 225 missionaries — more in 30 years than all of Protestantism had sent out in the 200 years between the Reformation and the Moravian movement.

Moravian theology and worship:

> • **"Heart religion" centered on the blood and wounds of Christ.** The *Blüt und Wunden* piety became the emotional core of Moravian devotion. Some critics thought it went to unhealthy extremes (the "Sifting Time" of the 1740s); most Moravian theology since has moderated the imagery.

> • **Communal living.** Herrnhut and later Moravian settlements organized residents into "choirs" by age and sex (children, older boys, older girls, single brothers, single sisters, married people, widowers, widows) that met daily.

> • **Daily prayer and daily Bible reading** through a set of verses called the *Losungen* ("Watchwords"), selected by lot annually. The Moravian *Daily Texts*, in print since 1731, is one of the longest continuously published devotional tools in Protestant history.

> • **Hymn singing.** Zinzendorf himself wrote over 2,000 hymns; John Wesley translated many of them (including "Jesus, Thy Blood and Righteousness" and others still in English-language hymnals).

Influence on the Wesleys. John Wesley's 1735–1738 encounter with Moravians on the *Simmonds* and later Peter Böhler's London discipleship were decisive for his Aldersgate conversion (see **Lesson 21 Parts 4–5**). Wesley's three-month visit to Herrnhut in the summer of 1738 shaped his Methodist structural instincts. It is no exaggeration to say that without the Moravians there is no Methodism — and without Methodism much of modern Anglo-American evangelicalism is unthinkable.

Zinzendorf's legacy. Zinzendorf died at Herrnhut on 9 May 1760 at age 59. His last recorded words: *"I am going to my Saviour. I am ready… I did but ask for first fruits among the heathen, and thousands have been given me… Now I am ready to go to him."* The Moravian Church today numbers about 1.1 million members in 30 countries, with its strongest presence in Tanzania, the United States, Jamaica, and Suriname.

WHY THIS MATTERS FOR US

> • **Dissent is expensive.** The 2,000 English ministers ejected in 1662, the Quakers hanged in Boston, the Moravian refugees sheltered by Zinzendorf — each had to pay some price for their convictions. American religious liberty did not appear out of thin air; it was won by people who had already paid for it in England, Germany, and Moravia.

> • **The Puritan reading list is still the best starter library in English-speaking Christianity.** If you read Bunyan, Owen, Baxter, Flavel, and Watson over a ten-year

span, you have received a theological and pastoral formation that no modern evangelical curriculum replicates.

• **The Quaker peace testimony is a live option.** Most evangelical Protestants are not pacifists. But the Quaker tradition's refusal of violence, oaths, and slavery is a serious Christian reading of the Sermon on the Mount that every non-pacifist has to engage rather than dismiss.

• **A small community can change the world.** Herrnhut in 1732 had about 300 residents. They launched the modern Protestant missionary movement and sparked the Wesleyan revival. Numbers are not always the measure. A prayerful, unified, sent community of the right kind will move continents.

Greek NT (Matt 28:19–20): πορευθέντες οὖν μαθητεύσατε πάντα τα ̀ ἔθνη… διδάσκοντες αὐτου ̀ ς τηρεῖν πάντα ὅσα ἐνετειλάμην ὑμῖν.

Matthew 28:19–20 (ESV): "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations… teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you."

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. The Westminster Shorter Catechism answers "What is the chief end of man?" with two verbs: glorify and enjoy. Which of the two comes more naturally to you, and why?

2. The 2,000 ministers ejected in 1662 lost their livelihoods overnight for a point of conscience. What would be the equivalent today — and who in our own day is paying an equivalent price?

3. Fox preached that Christ speaks directly to every heart through the Inner Light. Is that a recovery of New Testament teaching or a dangerous subjectivism? Where does

Scripture place the boundary?

4. The 1688 Germantown Protest against slavery was written by Quakers and Mennonites 175 years before the Emancipation Proclamation. What are we tolerating today that our grandchildren will find obvious?

5. The Moravians kept an hourly prayer watch for 100 years. What would it look like for our own congregation to build a prayer infrastructure on that scale?

6. Dober and Nitschmann were prepared to sell themselves into slavery to preach the gospel. That is a different kind of missionary calling than most of us have considered. What does it press on us?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, we thank you for the Puritans in their meeting houses, for Bunyan in Bedford jail writing *Pilgrim's Progress* on paper smuggled by his wife, for Owen and Baxter at their desks, for Fox and Margaret Fell in Lancashire, for Mary Dyer on Boston Common, for William Penn writing his laws of religious liberty, for Anthony Ulrich telling his story in Copenhagen, for Dober and Nitschmann sailing for St. Thomas, for the Herrnhut watchmen keeping their hours through a hundred years of nights. Each of them did what you gave them to do in their season. Show us what you have given us, and give us grace to do it. Amen.

FURTHER READING

Primary sources:

- The Westminster Confession of Faith, Shorter Catechism, Larger Catechism (1646–1647).
- John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress* (1678); *Grace Abounding* (1666).
- John Owen, *Communion with God* (1657); *The Mortification of Sin* (1656).
- Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656); *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650).
- George Fox, *Journal* (1694).
- Margaret Fell, *Women's Speaking Justified* (1666).
- Robert Barclay, *An Apology for the True Christian Divinity* (1678) — the definitive early Quaker theology.
- John Woolman, *Journal* (1774).
- Zinzendorf, *Nine Public Lectures on Important Subjects*; the Moravian *Daily Texts* (1731–present).

Modern studies:

- J. I. Packer, *A Quest for Godliness* (1990) — the single best modern introduction to the Puritans.
- Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (1986).
- Joel Beeke and Randall Pederson, *Meet the Puritans* (2006) — biographical essays on 150 Puritan authors.
- Rosemary Moore, *The Light in Their Consciences: Early Quakers in Britain 1646–1666* (2000).
- Hugh Barbour and J. William Frost, *The Quakers* (1988).
- John R. Weinlick, *Count Zinzendorf: The Story of His Life and Leadership in the Renewed Moravian Church* (1956).
- J. Taylor Hamilton and Kenneth Hamilton, *History of the Moravian Church: The Renewed Unitas Fratrum 1722–1957* (1967).

Pleasant Springs Church — Church History Series

Archive | ← French Revolution (Lesson 25) | Series Timeline

↓ Download PDF

Remaining Noll turning points: Edinburgh Missionary Conference 1910 (TP 11) and Vatican II 1962–65 (TP 12)