

Quakers are known as the society of friends religion essay



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The Quakers, also known as the Society of Friends, are a group of Christians that are tolerant of other religions. They do not believe in sexism, racism, or war. As a society they preach love, truth, and tolerance. They believe in treating every person as a best friend, yet this peaceful group of Christians was viewed as one of the largest threats to Christianity and the Puritan way of life during the mid-17th century. They were persecuted, whipped, and hung by the Puritans in the Early American Colonies. Why would the peaceful Society of Friends be so greatly feared that it would drive the Puritans to persecute them so? Were the Quakers that large of a threat, or was this just another example of antagonism that existed between other Christian bodies in the past? This paper will argue that the Quakers were feared only because they had a different religious view than the Puritans and that throughout history Christians, having a different view points on Christianity has led to persecutions. First I will cover a short history of how the Quakers and Puritans came to New England. Next I will cover some of the similarities and differences between the Quakers and Puritans. Then I will detail some of the persecutions that the Quakers endured from the Puritans in New England. Finally I will compare the hostility that the Puritans held towards the Quakers, with hostilities that other Christians and groups of Christians faced throughout history.

The Puritans started out as a group of Christians who sought to “purify” the Church of England, during the early 17th century. They felt that the Church should be separate from the rule of the King. The Puritans wanted to be free to worship God how they saw fit, without the King of England telling them how they should worship (Woodman 22). The Puritans also wanted to correct

certain practices and ceremonies of the Church of England, which they viewed as Anti-Christian. They wanted to return the Church back to how it was during the apostolic times, before the Church adopted practices that they felt strayed from God's glory. Unfortunately the Puritans did not have much luck in purifying the Church of England, instead they had stiff opposition to any changes and the Anglican Church ended up passing laws against them (Sweet 18).

Since the Puritans were persecuted and unable to change the Church of England, they instead went to the New World in order to create a "pure" Church that was not controlled by any kind of government (Abbott 232). They viewed New England as a place where they could create their perfect church. They wanted to build a Church that warned against pleasures of the flesh, one that was very plain so as not to detract from the glory of God, and one that promoted a very strict way in which to live. They also wanted to ensure that the government would not be able to control their Church. This would allow them to worship as they saw fit, without government interference. The Puritans thought by doing this that they would be able to live their simple life that was completely devoted to God in every aspect without the fear of persecution (Sweet 21).

The Quakers, like the Puritans, also saw the Church of England as being corrupt. They believed that the Anglican Church had strayed from the correct path of God and that it needed changes. They also felt that the church should not be controlled by the King. The Quakers also met stiff resistance, just like the Puritans, and were persecuted for standing up to the King and the Church of England. Laws were quickly passed to try and suppress them, <https://assignbuster.com/quakers-are-known-as-the-society-of-friends-religion-essay/>

their meeting houses (similar churches) were burned, and the jails were quickly filled with Quakers. Despite this opposition the Quakers were not deterred, instead they continued to preach in England despite the fact that they were constantly persecuted and the Church refused to change (Woodman 22).

The Quakers felt the urge to spread their religion around the world, so unlike the Puritans, they did not come to New England to start a new church nor to escape persecution. Instead they traveled to New England in order to spread their religious beliefs. They went to New England as missionaries, but instead of being accepted with open arms by the Puritans, they were immediately thrown in jail. The Puritans then burned the Quaker missionary's books and arranged for their deportation shortly after (Hamm 23).

A short time after the first two Quakers were deported, more Quakers began to arrive and the Puritans felt they must stop the Quaker invasion immediately. Soon the Puritans passed laws to fine the ship's captains that brought any Quakers to New England. The Quakers soon found it very hard to get a ship to take them to New England. Instead of being deterred, the Quakers simply built their own ship to take them to New England. The Puritans continued to persecute the Quakers as they would arrive. They would whip, brand, and sometimes even mutilate the Quakers who came to Massachusetts. Then the Quakers would be banished and all of their property confiscated by the Puritans. When the Quakers were departing New England, the Puritans would give them a strict warning that promised the Quakers death if they ever returned again. Despite these strict warnings and

punishments, the Quakers still continued to return to New England (Hamm 23).

What could have caused the Puritans to act so violently towards the Quakers? After all, there were many similarities between the Puritans and the Quakers. They both had suffered persecutions from the Anglican Church and the King of England. They both believed that the government should not control the church and they both thought that the Church of England was had become corrupt and needed to be fixed. Also both the Puritans and Quakers believed that people should avoid the natural pleasures of the world and the pleasures of the flesh, as well as any fashions or customs that could lead to pride and/or selfishness. They both believed in having a simple church so as not to detract from the glory of god and they both disliked the idea that a priest was needed to communicate with God (Jones xx).

Despite these similarities between the Puritans and Quakers, there were also many differences. The Puritans, like many religions, had a minister to lead the church services, whereas the Quakers had no ministers or priests (Abbott 232-233). The Quakers believed that every Christian could be a minister in his or her own way and that the Holy Spirit could move any person, whether man, woman, rich, poor, royalty, or peasant, to speak on God's behalf. For their church services, instead of a person leading the sermon, the Quakers would gather together and wait in silence until the Holy Spirit would move through a person. That person would then be compelled by God to speak for God and to reveal new revelations.

Another difference was that the Puritans believed that only a select few were selected by God, whereas the Quakers believed that every individual had an inner light in themselves. This inner light could show every person the way to salvation. It could illuminate sin and show how to avoid anything that was contrary to what God would want a person to do. This inner light also allowed each person to communicate directly with God, without the need for a minister or priest (Hamm 21).

The Puritans also believed that reading the Bible was the best way to understand what God wanted. The Puritans believed that the Bible was the inspired word of God and that it held all of God's truths (Sweet 98). They stressed that studying the Bible was of the utmost importance. The Quakers on the other hand, believed that following the "inner light" was of the utmost importance, with the Bible coming in second. The Quakers still believed that the Bible was God's word, but they also believed that God could reveal new things to each person through their individual "inner light" that may not have been revealed through the Bible (Jones xxi - xxii).

The Puritans also viewed the sacraments as outward signs of God's invisible grace, while the Quakers view of the sacraments is purely spiritual. For example, the Quakers do not have baptisms or take Holy Communion. Instead they believed that true communion was gathering together to worship Christ. Also, they believed that the only true baptism was when a person was baptized with the Holy Spirit moving through them. The Quakers then viewed God's grace not as a visible sign, but one that you could not see. It was a sign that went directly into a person's heart and only that person could sense that they had God's grace (Abbott 252 & Hamm 21).
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Another difference was equality. The Puritans had a very strict social order, but the Quakers, believing that all men and women were equal, did not have a social hierarchy. The Puritans believed that women should not have public roles, but the Quakers would often give women public roles and allow women to play important roles within their Church (Hamm 23). Also the Quakers viewed every person as if he was a beloved brother. They believe that all life is a sign of God's grace and every person should be treated as if they were your best friend. This meant that the Quakers did not view any person as outranking another person, even if that person happened to be a King or a Bishop (Woodman185).

Persecution of the Quakers in New England

Before the arrival of the first Quakers to New England, the Puritans had received anti-Quaker pamphlets. These pamphlets led the Puritans to believe that the Quakers may be a threat to their way of life. Because the Puritans believed that they had set up a perfect society and church in God's eyes, they did not want anyone to threaten their way of life. Therefore the Puritans viewed all other religions as a potential threat (Sweet 144). When the Quakers did arrive, they immediately viewed them as a potential threat for civil disorder. Because the Quakers did not believe in authority, but that every person was equal, the Puritans viewed this as contempt and disorder in their society. This in turn allowed the Puritans to use state laws to punish Quakers. When the first Quakers came to New England, the Puritans claimed that the Quakers were creating civil unrest and immediately had them arrested and thrown in jail (Chu 6-7).

After the first deportation of the very first two Quakers to arrive in New England, the Puritans thought they may have stopped the problem. However when more and more Quakers began to arrive, the Puritans felt threatened by the change the Quakers were trying to bring. The Puritans decided they had to put an immediate stop to anymore Quakers coming to New England. This led to the fines on ship's captains for bringing Quakers to New England, but the Quakers continued to arrive and spread their religion. This led to the Puritans fining anyone who even possessed any of the Quaker's books or pamphlets. In fact the Puritans were so protective of their society that these fines were not limited to only Quaker books, but to any material from a religion other than the Puritan religion (Wills 19). Despite these fines, the Quakers continued to come and spread their religious beliefs, even though it meant building their own ship to get from England to New England.

This constant influx of Quakers only helped to convince the Puritans that Quakerism was definitely one of the greatest threats to their society. They were revolted by the Quaker's views on the Bible, direct revelation, giving women public roles, the sacraments, their opposition to taking oaths, and the fact that the Quakers seemed compelled to go where they were not wanted. To the Puritans it seemed as if the Quakers must surely be possessed by demons and that they were out to destroy the Puritan's way of life (Hamm 23). They could not fathom anyone in their right mind who would keep going where they were not welcome. The Quakers however, were stubborn. They, like the Puritans, believed that their religion was the correct religion and that God was on their side.

At first the Puritans felt that the fines, jail time, and banishment would stop the Quakers from coming, but the Quakers continued to return again and again. When these punishments failed, the Puritans then set up stricter laws to try and keep the Quakers out. They declared that if a male Quaker returned after being banished, he would have his ear cropped. Then if he returned again, the other ear would be cropped. After a third return, the Quaker would have his tongue bored through with a hot iron. For women Quakers, they would be whipped for the first two times they returned and then they would have their tongue's bored through for the third offense. When these punishments proved to be ineffective, the Puritans felt that they must set up the death penalty to try and deter the Quakers from coming (Sweet 146).

Still the Quakers would kept coming back to try and spread their religion. They would claim that visions and dreams urged them to go to New England and to spread the good word of their religion. Because the Quakers were so persistent on going to New England, despite the punishments inflicted upon them, many more people converted to Quakerism. Once people would see how devoted the Quakers were to their religion and that they would willingly die for what they believed in, it end up drawing many more people to the Quaker religion. This led to the Quaker religion spreading fast and far (Fox 34).

Other Christian Persecutions

These hostilities between the Quakers and Puritans weren't just an isolated incident between these two religions. It has been going on for centuries between Christians and non-Christians, as well as between Christian groups <https://assignbuster.com/quakers-are-known-as-the-society-of-friends-religion-essay/>

that have different beliefs. Christianity's history is littered with persecutions and individuals who have died for their faith and beliefs.

When Christianity was first starting, the Roman Empire had persecuted Christians on and off over the first few centuries. Starting with Jesus who was viewed as a threat to the Empire and therefore was persecuted and eventually killed for his beliefs. Then his followers were also persecuted for following him. For example Paul the apostle, who was a big influence in spreading early Christianity, was persecuted, thrown in jail, tortured, and driven out of towns for spreading the Christian faith. Then in 64 C. E. the Roman Emperor, Nero, blamed Christians for burning the city of Rome, to which he ended up persecuting many more Christians. Many Christians were also persecuted for refusing to pay homage to the Roman Emperor's genius or divine spirit. These Christians had viewed paying homage to the emperor's genius as idol worship and refused to participate in the act. Christians were also persecuted by the Roman Empire for refusing to perform sacrifices. These Christians were often executed by fire, wild animals, or gladiators in public arenas, in order to send a message to other Christians that they should comply with the rules of the empire (Moore 58-59).

The early Christians were persecuted because they had different beliefs than many of the Romans and therefore were viewed as a threat even though they may have been peaceful. This however, did not keep them from persecuting others as time went on. Other groups of Christians that also faced opposition and hostilities, during the first couple of centuries that Christianity came into existence, were the Ebionites, Gnostics, and the <https://assignbuster.com/quakers-are-known-as-the-society-of-friends-religion-essay/>

Marcionites. These three groups were Christians that had different views on Christianity than the proto-orthodox Christians. For this they were persecuted and completely destroyed by the proto-orthodox Christianity. For example, the Ebionites believed that in order to be Christian a person must be Jewish and follow all of the Jewish traditions from eating a kosher diet to circumcisions. They also believed that Jesus was the adopted son of God and did not result from a virgin birth. Because of these beliefs the Ebionites were not popular with other Christians that wanted to get away from the Jewish traditions, which led to them being persecuted and eventually their religion was wiped out (Ehrman 100-102).

The Marcionites were also considered heretics and persecuted for having different beliefs than the proto-orthodox Christians. They were seen as a significant threat and even had five volumes of books written against them in order to attack their beliefs. Their beliefs differed because they believed in two Gods, one was the “evil” Old Testament God and one was the “good” New Testament God. They also believed that Jesus was not actually human, which greatly contrasted with proto-orthodox Christianity. (Ehrman 103-108).

The Gnostics also had different views than the proto-orthodox Christians, which led to them being harassed and persecuted. The Gnostics believed that Jesus wasn't actually human, that the material world was completely evil and the spirit world was good, that there were multiple Gods, and that only certain people had a divine spark in them that would allow them to go to heaven. These ideas caused the Gnostics to be considered heretics and another threat to Christianity. Christians were even warned on how to spot

possible Gnostics in order to try and drive them out of the proto-orthodox Christian churches (Ehrman, *The New Testament* 197-201).

Persecutions among different Christian orders continued, but persecutions even occurred within the same Christian order. Whenever there was a split in beliefs, Christians would often argue over who was right and who was wrong. This would often lead to more persecutions. One such example was around the 8th century when there was a huge conflict over icons of Christ, the Virgin Mary, and the saints. Christianity split into two groups, each of who thought their views were correct. One group was the iconoclasts, who believed that all icons should be destroyed, and the other group was the iconodules, who believed that icons were just simple glimpses of what heaven may be like. This difference in beliefs led to violent conflicts over who was right and who was wrong. Constantine V, Emperor Leo III's son, had some of the greatest and harshest persecutions of this time. He had hundreds of iconodule monks tortured by gouging out their eyes, cutting off their tongues and noses, setting their beards on fire, and even executing those that stood against his iconoclast view. These hostilities between the iconoclasts and iconodules lasted from 726 until 787 C. E. (Nystrom 134-235).

Another example of hostilities between Christian orders was between the Protestants and the Catholic Church. The Protestants were persecuted because they interpreted the Bible differently than the Catholics. The Protestants then used these new interpretations of the Bible to try and change the Catholic Church. Some of the changes they wanted were to eliminate indulgences, reduce the sacraments from the seven to only
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baptisms and communion, and to use scripture alone as the primary guide for faith. The Catholic Church on the other hand wanted to keep indulgences, all seven sacraments, and to continue using scripture in conjunction with church teachings as the ultimate authority for faith (Moore 182-183). These differences led to an irreparable split between the two Christianities, with the Catholic Church declaring that the Protestants were.

Conclusion

In conclusion, these hostilities between Christian groups and between Christians and Non-Christians were very similar to the hostilities between the Puritans and Quakers. All of the hostilities had to do with different views on Christianity resulting in persecution of one of the Christian groups. These persecutions ranged from imprisonment, to excommunication, to banishment, or even to death. The Quakers had very different views on Christianity than the Puritans. Because the Puritans felt threatened by these differences, they persecuted the Quakers. This was very similar to many other persecutions throughout the history of Christianity. Christians when they were first forming had different viewpoints than non-Christians. Then as Christianity grew, factions of Christians separated because they had different viewpoints on how Christianity should be. This in turn led to the new groups of Christians, with the new viewpoints, who were often persecuted by the original group of Christians.

While it may seem that the Puritans were especially harsh on the Quakers, it is obvious that they were not the only ones to use death and punishment to deter what they viewed as a threat to their way of life. When two groups of

Christians have opposing viewpoints, and they both believe very strongly
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that they are right and the other group is wrong, this inevitably leads to hostilities between the two groups. If the hostilities are strong enough, there were likely to be punishments and maybe even death to deter and stop the spread of the opposing group's beliefs. These hostilities are likely to continue in the future as new revelations come about over what Christianity should be and what practices should be followed. Only time will tell what new Christianities will branch off of the vast array of Christian orders that are already established, but it is almost certain that new branches of Christianity will meet opposition and persecution from one or another of the already established branches of Christianity.