

### *No Cross, No Crown*, William Penn

- William Penn founded Pennsylvania on the basis of a form of mysticism. He sets forth his “social vision” in *No Cross, No Crown*.
- Though Penn claimed he and Quakers were “persecuted” for religion, mysticism is outside the normal bounds of religion.



In *No Cross, No Crown* William Penn lays out his "account of the fall of Christendom from primitive Christianity" and "the way of recovery." The structure of Penn's work is deceptive. It is written in two sections, the first section with the crux of Penn's "social vision" supported with Biblical interpretations, or what Penn calls a “Biblical inquiry”, lessons from history, and what looks like sound, tight legalistic reasoning. However, a close reading of *No Cross, No Crown* in context of Penn's circumstances, it is clear Penn is no traditionalist though he exhorts readers to practice what he calls an "apostolic" version of Christianity. "Religious toleration and freedom" though often paired with his name is not his goal. Further, manifestations of Penn's "organized chaos" wreaked havoc on order for the purpose of political promotion for dangerous ends.

This paper has several sections. Section I lays out the context of Penn's proselytizing, his "holy

experiment in the American colonies, and the means Penn and Quakers, known too as the "Society of Friends" used to spread Quakerism, held to be a religion though it is a form of mysticism with like characteristics found in faiths other than mainstream Christianity, if Penn's interpretation can be said to be Christianity. Section II and III provide summaries of chapters 1 through 9 and 10 through 18. Section IV examines the last section of *No Cross, No Crown* in which for the sake of Penn has gathered the sayings of men "eminent for greatness, learning, and virtue in divers periods of time and nations of the world."

The state of Pennsylvania, known as William Penn's "holy experiment" to found an 'ideal Christian commonwealth' is based on the principles set forth by George Fox. His admirers would further claim Penn wanted to "advance the American tradition of freedom of worship."

William Penn was born in Ruscombe, Berkshire, England on October 24, 1644. His father was Admiral Sir William Penn, and his mother Margaret Jasper van der Schuren. Though later central in supporting Charles II "restoration" to the English throne, Penn senior was awarded land in Ireland by Oliver Cromwell for fulfilling the terms of his admiraltyship for the Puritan Commonwealth. William Penn spent his adolescence on this land, Macroom, near Cork where Quaker Thomas Loe preached. Loe was a disciple of Quakerism's founder, George Fox.

Expelled from Oxford for "religious nonconformity," Penn was sent by his father to Europe. He spent a year and six months in a French Protestant, Huguenot university in Saumur, Anjou, France. From the contemporary account of Samuel Pepys, he came to be seen as a "dandy" "a modish person" with something of learning but a great deal, if not too much vanity of the French garb and affected manner of speech and gait." NOTE 1 Penn set out to start a legal career by studying at Lincoln Inn in London but did not complete his degree.

This conjunction of status and connections, a faulty, "iconoclastic" spiritual basis incongruous with his position as an admiral son, and an incomplete instruction in theology, law, and philosophy, traces of which can be read in *No Cross, No Crown* yield the incorrect conclusions Penn reaches in his book. Far from being an intellectual, his work exposes Penn as a reptilian "aggregator." Capable of reading popular sentiment, digesting theories and expeditiously passing these off in an acceptable, erudite form, Penn was a useful "bridge" of respectability for the Royalists and Quakers. Penn and the Quakers exacerbated tensions with a chaos clothed in respectable form. Penn and the Quakers claimed to be "persecuted" but had connections to royalty and rich. To bypass the existing forms of government, avoid vetting by men with integrity, for they had none, Penn and the Quakers directly addressed the people, disenchanted with conditions not easy to explain as Penn could manage to exploit.

George Fox, Penn's mentor, like Penn, had experienced what could be called spiritual sensitivity in adolescence. At age 19 Fox abandoned his apprenticeship with a shoemaker to wander around the

countryside and settle his spiritual doubts. Fox came to believe in the "Light Within" or "Inner Light", that Christ spoke within men and women not through outward forms, sacraments, or churches. Fox founded the "Seekers, and claimed to experience "personal visions" on Pendle Hill. Like Penn, though Fox recruited Quakers or Friends from lower classes, he moved in higher echelons too. Fox married Margaret Fell of Lancashire, the widow of Judge Thomas Fell with several of Fell's daughters marrying prominent Quakers.

The kind of spirituality expounded by Fox and the Quaker, later exhorting by Penn is called mysticism. It calls for "self-denial" or "abnegation", "mortification" and extreme forms of conduct like a "humiliation" seen with outlawed sects in the Middle Ages like the Flagellants. Certain scholars claim two forms of mysticism exist: extroverted and introverted.

"The extrovertive mystic perceives physical objects as 'all One' and as permeated by the One or the Divine. Thus the medieval philosopher Meister Eckhart said: 'All blades of grass, wood, and stone, are one.' And Jakob Böhme in the 16th century said: 'In this light my spirit saw through all things and I recognized God in grass and plants.' This type of experience tends to philosophical pantheism." NOTE 2

The "introvertive type of mystical experience" according to Stace is achieved by:

"turning the mind in upon itself and plunging down below all layers of superficial experience to the very foundations of the mystic's own mind. All sensations, images, thoughts, desires, and volitions -the entire empirical content of consciousness- have to be suppressed. *What is then left is not, as one might expect, unconsciousness, but rather the bare unity of the self, empty of all content, the pure ego.*" (emphasis added) NOTE 3

This "emptying of all content" is called "breaking down" a man's "defenses" to render the man vulnerable and easily manipulated. This is the practice of certain churches, cults, and communes to force a "child-like" trust and obedience; after the "demolition", the debris of a man's content is cleared away, and he is then "built-up." The word "hazing" does not exactly connote this process.

The ostensible goal of mysticism is to achieve "unity with the God head", to experience a possible "ecstatic" or "other worldly state." Jan van Rysbroeck, the 14th century Flemish Christian mystic wrote of 'the God-seeing man' that his spirit "is undifferentiated and without distinction, and therefore it feels nothing but the unity." Stace claims in his entry on mysticism this is "the same undifferentiated unity of the *Upanishad*," that mysticism is a broad sense religious phenomenon" which does not favor one religion over the other but he, like others set on performing *yoga*, Eastern kinds of meditation and the like ignore the context of these practices. Stace is correct to claim mysticism "transcends" the formal set of rituals a religion possesses but it is the context in which those rituals should be performed in he does not explicate. For example, an exceptionally rigid 'caste system' is the context or 'hierarchy' in which Buddhists and Hindus perform rituals. Taken out of context, it is disrespectful to these faiths, and possibly dangerous for those "seeking enlightenment" from exotic Eastern creeds, or mysticism within Westernized religions. NOTE 4

Stace cites Dionysius the Areopagite as a 5th century mystic stressing the *via negativa*: the undifferentiated Godhead, being empty, can have no positive characters and can be spoken of only in negatives; later Christian mystics stress the negative divine through metaphors like “darkness” and “silence”. “Union” with God is a threat to order: mysticism is a form of anarchy for in “rejecting the world” “denying the self” and “mortification” it undermines what otherwise would be a normal reaction - safety, maintaining boundaries, concern for basic bodily functions, acceptance from others within bounds, cleanliness, and propriety. Mysticism obliterates formal customs and expectations. Forms of mysticism inevitably call for a total obliteration of the self”; hence martyrdom is the fate of many mystics.

For these reasons, mysticism is discouraged by religious orthodoxy; historically practitioners of mysticism were killed for fomenting mayhem. Except to determine intent and context in law cases (for example in criminal law, a man is presumed or it must be determined as to whether he has or has not committed a crime), the traditional bounds of state authority extend to a man's physical body, not to his private thoughts, emotions, possessions, or “emanations” of these which is what mysticism attempts to use to circumvent state, church, academic, or cultural authorities. Mystics exhort practitioners to eschew “formality,” manners, including manner of dress.

Penn wrote prodigiously: in 1668 he wrote, *The Truth Exalted, and The Sandy Foundations Shaken*; in 1669 *Innocency with Her Open Face and No Cross, No Crown*; in 1670 *The Great Case of Liberty of Conscience and The People's Ancient and Just Liberties*. Thereafter, he authored 40 controversial pamphlets in the “pamphleteer wars” of the 1670s, with he and his ilk no doubt “quickening the pace” of sentiment for controversial (now called “hot”) “topics”: *The Christian Quaker*, “collaborating” with George Whitehead; and *A Treatise of Oaths*. Later he wrote a pamphlet, *A Letter to the Free Society of Traders* (1683), *An Essay Toward the Present and Future Peace of Europe* (1693) and *Some Fruits of Solitude; and A Brief Account of the Rise and Progress of the People Called Quakers*. (1694).

*No Cross, No Crown* is written in a breathless manner, not the product of a deliberating, thoughtful mind. Rather, it is an “outpouring”, a “stream of consciousness” though it takes the form of a considered, reasoned setting forth of premises and drawing sound conclusions. Without the integrity, diligence, and intelligence of a scholar, the breeding of a gentleman, and goodness of an ordinary man, Penn directs his invective toward credentialed intellectuals to deflect his restlessness and his inability to complete his studies though he uses an intellectual form to cheat trust. Penn and writers of his hagiographies fashion Penn as an intellectual, a “genius.” From *No Cross, No Crown* Penn thought he could be a prophet or something greater than this, a martyr with “divine guidance.” The preamble to Penn's *Frame of Government* expresses “Penn's Quaker faith in the relevance of religion to all aspects of life. These aspects included politics.” “Government seems to me a part of religion itself, a thing sacred in its institutions and end.” NOTE 5

As he and the Quakers were rightfully imprisoned, beaten, tortured and killed for this scheme, they would claim they were hounded for “being different”, for the authorities' “lack of religious toleration.” Outrage of people, awed by Penn's gleam of gentility and erudition paired with a passion in

speech and penchant for orchestrating distractions, provided Penn and the Quakers with a dynamic to undermine an order founded on a culture Penn and the Quakers did not want to assimilate to. To escape "persecution" Penn and his "Friends" bought proprietary rights in East New Jersey in 1681. Also in 1681, he supposedly canceled a debt to his father from Charles II of England by accepting land in North America. This land formed what is now Pennsylvania where he drafted a *Frame of Government*. In 1682 Penn incorporated three lower counties, now Delaware, into his colony. In 1683, Francis (Frantz) Daniel Pastorius, a land-purchasing agent from Frankfurt am Main came to Pennsylvania with German Quakers. He founded Germantown near Penn's new city, Philadelphia.

Penn "advertised widely his offer of religious freedom, liberal government and inexpensive land." By 1700, his colony had 30,000 colonists with 300,000 by 1776. NOTE 6 These "refugees" or "asylum seekers" disruptive in the lands from whence they came, comprised the main cohort of Pennsylvania's "plain people": Quakers, River Brethern and United Brethern known too as Dunkards or Dunkers, Mennonites with Amish and Hutterite strains, Schwenkfelders, and Moravians, outcasts from Germany and England. These colonists populated the southeastern counties of Pennsylvania, Lehigh, Berks, Lebanon, Lancaster, and York. These sects with Lutheran and Reformed German immigrants to Pennsylvania known as "the Pennsylvania Dutch", "Pennsylvania Germans", "Penn Dutch", and "Pennsy Dutch" spoke *Pennyslfawnish Deutsch*. The Lutheran and Reformed immigrants to Pennsylvania, called "the fancy" Pennsylvania Dutch were indistinguishable from other Americans except for certain speech patterns. NOTE 7

Though Penn is credited with his *Frame of Government* and laws safeguarding religious freedom, the lack of cohesion in Pennsylvania and Pennsylvania's lack of cohesion with the rest of the colonies meant Penn had to explicitly lay out functions of government whereas if this had not been the case, from the context of English culture these would be implicitly understood. Penn's mismanagement of Pennsylvania forced royal authorities to put it under control of New York's governor. NOTE 8

## NOTES

1. "Penn, William". *Encyclopedia Americana* (1986) 634.
2. "Mysticism," *Encyclopedia Americana*, (1986) 697.
3. "Mysticism," *Encyclopedia Americana*, (1986) 697.
4. Juxtaposing distinct religions for what purpose is not known, but Stace and others undermine the attributes of the distinct religions with this exercise. It is the attempt at "universality" which is confusing. Mysticism is integral to Hinduism and Buddhism. This is not the case for other religions.
5. "Penn, William," *Encyclopedia Americana*, (1986) 636.
6. "Pennsylvania," *Encyclopedia Americana* (1986), 660.
7. Ibid.
8. Note for two years, (1692-1694). Sources consulted list years 1692 to 1694 as the time Pennsylvania was under New York governance. Elsewhere 1699 is noted as the year proprietorship is "restored" to Penn.

## GLOSSARY

*abnegation* renunciation, to deny oneself

*ecstasy* n. 1. The state of being besides oneself through some overpowering emotion: in an ecstasy of anticipation. 2. Intense delight; rapture: dissolved in ecstasy. 3. A trance or frenzy thought to attend prophetic, mystic, or poetic inspiration.

*mortification* n. 1. A feeling of loss of self-esteem through failure, disappointment, or embarrassment; humiliation; shame. 2. That which causes such humiliation. 3. The ascetic practice of subduing the appetites and strengthening the will against sin by fasting or other disciplines.

*Pietism* a reform movement in Lutheranism that stressed personal religious feeling. Pietism stressed personal, interior religious experience rather than outward conformity to church dogma or practice. Four characteristics distinguish a “true pietist”

- sensed a “regeneration” to a new life in Christ after a specific “experience of conversion”;
- held sacraments to be symbols rather than the means of grace; maintained a “religion of the heart” rather than “the mind” with a devotion to Christ instead of doctrine;
- expressed “total commitment to Christ” through acts of love toward others, prioritizing this instead of ritual worship or academic study;
- regarded the Bible as central to his faith; maintaining precedence of his interpretation, excluding clerical or academic exegesis. (From *Encyclopedia Americana*, 1986, “Pietism”)

*rapture*: n. 1. The state of being rapt or transported; ecstatic joy; ecstasy. 2. *Rare* The act of transferring a person from one place to another. 3. *Often plural* An act or expression of excessive delight. 4. *Obsolete* A snatching away; violent seizure. Syn: PLEASURE *Poetic* To enrapture; transport with ecstasy.

Except where noted, meanings for these words were found in *The Standard College Dictionary*, 1968 Edition.