

Biographical Briefing on William Laud

Directions: The following information will help your group prepare for the press conference in which one of you has been assigned to read a section of the handout and the rest of you have other roles to play. To prepare for the press conference, each group member reads a section of the handout and leads a discussion of the questions following the section.

William Laud was born in 1573 in Reading, England, where his father worked as a cloth merchant. At an early age, he was known for his hard work and outstanding achievement in school. He went on to St. John's College, Oxford, and later was named chaplain of Devonshire and then bishop of Exeter and Lichfield. During this time he became known for his strong support of the Church of England. He was then named bishop of St. David's, where he met and became friends with the Prince of Wales, later to become King Charles I.

Stop here and discuss



- Where was William Laud born?
- What was his occupation?
- How did he feel about the Church of England?

When Charles I took over the Kingdom of England after his father's death in 1625, he wanted to rule England without the interference of Parliament. Charles I believed in the idea of "Divine Right." This was the idea that rulers were chosen by God to rule and were accountable only to God, not to the subjects they ruled. Laud agreed completely with Charles I. Laud argued that the King and the Church of England were like husband and wife, working together to govern the nation. In a sermon, Laud said, "The Church can have no being but in the [government] and the [government] can have no blessed and happy being but in the Church." Laud had complete faith in the royal family's ability to rule—they were, to him, chosen by God to rule. Conversely, he had little faith in the common citizens and their ability to govern. Laud preached in 1621, "But God can rule the raging of the sea and madness of the people."

Stop here and discuss



- Were the beliefs of Charles I and Laud similar or different? Explain.
- According to Laud, what is the relationship between the Church and the government?
- Did Laud believe the people should have the right to govern themselves? Why or why not?

In return for his support, Charles I appointed Laud to the prestigious position of bishop of Bath and Wells in 1626. In addition, he was also appointed chancellor of Oxford University in that same year. After serving Charles I faithfully for two years, Laud was rewarded with the powerful post of Bishop of London. While serving as Bishop of London, Laud expected the people working with him to strictly obey the regulations of the Church of England. In fact, Laud prosecuted more clergymen for nonconformity and neglect of duty in his first year

as bishop than the previous bishop of London had done in his seven years at the post. He demonstrated fierce loyalty to Charles I, and believed citizens of England should strictly follow the orders the Church of England and Charles I. In 1633 Charles I appointed Laud as the Archbishop of Canterbury, the leader of the Church of England.

Stop here
and discuss



- What positions did Laud hold from 1626 to 1633?
- What did Laud think about the Church of England?
- Why do you think Charles I made Laud head of the Church of England?

In church affairs, Laud did not tolerate any differences from the official teachings of the Church of England. Because some people in England, called Puritans, wanted to make changes in the Church of England, Laud attempted to discourage the Puritans from participating in all aspects of church life. Laud placed a heavy emphasis on formal instructions and rituals that punished anyone who did not conform. Puritan preachers were harassed and silenced. Puritan writers were beaten, tied to wooden crosses, and jailed. As a result, many Puritans chose to go to the New World. However, Laud had no sympathy for those who chose to emigrate. Laud commented, "They have thrust themselves out and cut themselves off, and run madding [crazily] to New England and I know some went out fools."

Stop here
and discuss



- Who were the Puritans?
- What did Laud do to those who did not follow the rules of the Church of England?
- How did Laud feel about those Puritans who left England?

While serving as Archbishop of Canterbury, Laud attempted to solidify his control over the Church of England. However, many church members were unhappy with the strict way in which Laud was running the church and his outspoken criticisms of Parliament. In 1640 the Archbishop made all church members take an oath that they would never try to change the way the church was run. This action was intended to silence any complaints against him. Instead, it made tensions worse between Laud and those who were critical of the Church of England and Charles I. In 1642 a civil war broke out in England between people who were loyal to Laud and Charles I and those who supported giving Parliament more power. Laud's side did not fare well. The Archbishop was thrown in jail and then placed on trial for his attempts to "overturn" the church and the laws. The Archbishop was beheaded on January 10, 1645. Four years later, Charles I was executed, too.

Stop here
and discuss



- Did all the people of England support Laud's beliefs? Explain.
- What did Laud do in 1640 that created tension in England?
- Why was Laud beheaded?