

The Thirteen Colonies

Introduction

a. objectives

1. subject – The establishment of the thirteen colonies in North America and its religious realities
2. aim – To cause us to understand the state of Christianity in the New World after the Reformation

b. outline

1. The Early Conquests
2. The British Colonies
3. The Reality of the Colonies

c. overview

1. the **Post-Reformation** Church – the history of the W church *in the stream of Protestantism*
 - a. we continue in the movement of Christianity within the “stream” of Protestantism leading us *out of Europe* into the Thirteen American colonies, and **out of the medieval period into modernity**
 - b. **IOW**: the “church” that straddles the Reformation of the 16-17th C. and what will arise in the *modern era* (**i.e.** starting about the mid-1800’s [mid-19th C.] and continuing into the 20th C.)
 - c. **last week**: a discussion of the Age of Reason (the Enlightenment) – an age of intellectual pursuit of reason particularly in regards to the nature of the human person – its effects upon the church moving *out* of the medieval period into modernity
 - d. **this week**: a discussion of the movement of Christianity into N America while the Reformation is in “full-bloom” – **i.e.** a *geographical* movement of the Protestant Church out of England

I. The Early Conquests

Content

a. the early arrivals in N America

1. the 16th C. had seen the building of the Spanish and Portuguese empires
 - a. the Spanish arrived in N America with Columbus in 1492, and Cortes in 1519
 - b. the Spanish empire in N America dominated most of C America, Mexico, the lower half of the current area of the United States, and much of W America
 - c. the Spanish, being Catholic, brought their religion with them as they conquered the Incas and the Aztecs in Mexico
2. the French settled Quebec in 1608 – the territory was eventually ceded to the British after France’s defeat in the War of the Spanish Succession (1713)
 - a. in 1774, the British granted the French Catholics in Quebec freedom of religious practice, which ultimately became the reason why the French colonies to the N remained under the Crown
3. the British conquest of the New World was the most successful of the three main colonial powers in Europe – it began in the 17th C and reached its peak in the 19th
 - a. the **first** British colonial ventures in N America failed – Sir Walter Raleigh (under Elizabeth I) attempted a colonization in *Virginia* (which he named after his *virgin queen*) in 1585 and 1587 – both failed (**i.e.** the first settlers returned to England, the second simply disappeared)

b. the motivations of the early arrivals in N America

1. it is *customary* to contrast the Spanish with the British as though the Spanish came for *economic* reasons and the British for *religious ones*
 - a. however ... that is *far too simplistic* – the reality is more complex, for the British *did* come for economic motivations *with* elements of religious overtone not (necessarily) present in the Spanish
 1. **i.e.** the Spanish had *already* managed to conquer the richest empires in the New World
 2. and, the middle part of the continent did not support large populations that could be put to work for the colonizers (**i.e.** the natives were nomadic, and simply moved inland)
 3. thus, the British colonizers could not hope to become rich simply by conquest, nor by trade with the natives – they turned to *agriculture*, using British labor (first) and slave labor after 1619
 - b. yet ... there *was* an element of religious movement to the New World
 1. **remember**: the Puritan Reformation in England had begun in the *mid-16th C.*, and a great deal of opposition to Protestantism had arisen within the monarchs following Henry VIII
 2. therefore, *some* of the reason for escape to the New World was religious – hoping to find religious tolerance, even though the development of it *here* was long and complex ...

II. The British Colonies

Content

a. Virginia

1. the first *permanent* colony of Virginia occurred in 1607 – 105 settlers landed near the mouth of the James river (which they named after their new king) and founded *Jamestown*
2. it was established by the *Virginia Company*, which looked to bring the Church of England to America
 - a. the colony was an *economic* venture (not a religious one), and the Anglican church never established a settled bishop *anywhere* in the 13 colonies
3. however, since the settlement came at the *height* of the Puritan Reformation, many of the “owners” believed the colony should be governed by Puritan principles
 - a. **e.g.** twice-daily attendance at worship, strict Lord’s Day, punishments for profanity, etc.
4. but ... James hated Puritanism, he placed the colony under his *direct* control and Puritan influence waned – Charles I carved a great portion of Virginia into the colony of Maryland, and ceded it to a Catholic proprietor
 - a. Virginia found economic success in the exporting of tobacco, which was labor intensive – the importation of slaves to do this work began in 1619 and spread to the other colonies
 - b. in fact, Puritan influence *waned* in Virginia because of its *prosperity* – the Puritan valuation of labor had little meaning in a society based on slavery – the settlers remained members of the Church of England, but in an *aristocratic form* suited to plantation owners
 - c. the Church of England did little to convert slaves – the ancient principle of one Christian owning another still held, and slave masters preferred that their slaves not be baptized
 - d. the adaptation of the Church to the interests of the powerful had consequences amongst the white lower classes – they began turning to dissident movements
 1. many migrated to Maryland in search of religious freedom, the Quakers made inroads, and Methodism made great strides (although officially a part of Anglicanism)

b. the Carolinas

1. granted by the crown to a group of aristocrats and stockholders in 1663
2. to foment immigration to the territory, the proprietors decreed religious freedom, attracting many from Virginia – however, the *stratification* of Virginia quickly appeared in the Carolinas
 - a. the higher classes remaining loyal to the Church of England, lower classes embracing the Quakers or becoming a part of the nascent Baptist movement

c. Georgia

1. the colony was established for two reasons: a) to halt the northern expansion of the Spanish, headquartered at St. Augustine, and b) to serve as an alternative to *debtor’s prison*
 - a. James Oglethorpe suggested c. 1732 that a colony be established which would serve as a place where debtors could come and work off their debts *without having to go to prison*
 - b. the first convicts arrived in 1733, along with many religious refugees from other areas
 - c. but ... although Anglicanism was the *official* religion, it had little impact on the territory, and other Protestant movements also had little effect

d. the Puritan Colonies (New England)

1. the *Plymouth Plantation*, established by a group of religious dissidents that had left England for the Netherlands, and then made an agreement with the Virginia Company to settle N
 - a. 101 settlers boarded the *Mayflower* in 1620, but landed much further N than anticipated (at Cape Cod, then Plymouth) – only 50 survived an epidemic, but the Indians taught them to grow corn and they survived the next winter
2. the Massachusetts Bay Company – a group of Anglican Puritans wishing less interference in religious matters from the crown
 - a. more than 1000 settlers began the new colony – they still considered themselves Anglicans, but wished to follow the NT more closely – coming to America (they believed) would offer this freedom
 - b. in fact, it was the *direct persecution* of Puritans under Archbishop Laud that forced more than 10,000 to flee to New England, establishing also the colonies of Connecticut and New Haven
3. the controversy: while still *paedobaptist*, many were beginning to see the importance of a “conversion experience” in order to be truly Christian (**i.e.** something *concrete* in the life of the convert which demonstrated that he or she had *truly embraced* the faith)
 - a. notice how the Baptists had *already addressed* this reality by eschewing infant baptism

- b. but ... if one is trying to establish a Christian commonwealth, one can only be a part of that if one is included *religiously* in that society (*i.e.* as in ancient Israel)
 - 1. *i.e.* how do you control purity of life and doctrine with unbaptized individuals?
- c. thus ... a “compromise” solution was attempted – all children of baptized parents were to be baptized, but only those who had a conversion experience were granted full membership

e. Rhode Island and the Baptists

1. the Puritan colonies (see above) were just as *religiously intolerant* as the Church of England was
 - a. *i.e.* they insisted on conformity to the defined practices of religion, albeit different from Anglicans
2. Roger Williams arrived in Massachusetts in 1631 – he initially refused to serve as a pastor in Boston
 - a. he believed the Puritans erred in granting the civil authorities power to enforce religious commands
 - b. he believed that magistrates should only enforce *societal order*, not issues of relationship with God
 - c. he believed that the colonial enterprise was unjust, having taken the land from the Indians
3. so, he moved to Plymouth and became a pastor in Salem – when he attempted the secession of his church, the authorities expelled him and he moved to Narragansett with a group of friends, establishing the colony of Providence on the principle of religious freedom
 - a. he bought the land from the Indians, and the colony was based on the complete separation of church and state – it grew quickly with additional dissidents
 - b. in 1644, he obtained from Parliament the legal recognition of the colony of Rhode Island, to be governed as a democracy
4. his church became Baptist – he was baptized by one of the other members of the church
 - a. but, Williams did not remain long – his ideas were becoming too radical: he eventually declared (because of his respect for the Indians) that perhaps their religion was as acceptable in the eyes of God as Christianity, and they didn’t have to become Christian to be saved
 - b. the Baptists of Providence (also) had religious controversies
 1. while some of the Baptists in England were exiled in the Netherlands, they were influenced by Arminianism, which they brought back to England when they were able to return
 2. thus, two *distinct forms* of Baptist belief appeared in England: the *Particular Baptists* (who believed that only *particular persons* were elect to salvation; Calvinistic) and the *General Baptists* (who believed that the work of atonement had a *general application* to all)
 3. in Providence, both groups appeared in the church – and the movement of Baptists *spread* throughout the colonies, most being *General Baptists* (by default)
 4. however, by the time of the Great Awakening, there was an upsurge of Calvinism, and in many areas Particular Baptists far surpassed the others

III. The Reality of the Colonies

Content

a. two truths from the American colonies

1. although these colonies began with the good intentions of forming places where Protestantism could grow, most of them became just as *intolerant* of dissent as the Church of England (and the monarchs after Henry VIII) had been
 - a. true ... much of the *reason* for the colonies was *economic* (particularly in Virginia and the Carolinas), but there was a sense of religious “relief” that was thought to be true here “away” from the crown and the official church
 - b. yet ... the Puritan influence *did* create a certain “new” form of intolerance, especially for those (like the Baptists) who were considered “less” than what the Anglican Puritans saw in themselves
 - c. fortunately ... with the passage of time, most of the American colonies followed the example of Rhode Island and embraced religious freedom as a viable option to the religious tensions in Europe
 - d. this would become a *hallmark* of the American Experiment, ensconced in the newly formed Bill of Rights shortly after the Revolution
2. the religious fervor and the hopes for a “holy commonwealth” in the New World dimmed quickly
 - a. slavery, social inequity based on the existence of vast plantations, the exploitation of the natives and the taking of their lands, and many similar factors (including massive new wealth) drained the colonies of any sense of becoming a “Christian” continent very quickly
 - b. this would become a *reality* within the American Experiment, whereby the new nation would certainly have *overtones* of Christian thinking (*i.e.* based on a Judeo-Christian worldview), but it would see that influence wane quickly as wealth and secular ideas (born out of a separation of church and state) would rise