

## CH506: American Church History Lecture 2

## THE PILGRIMS AND THE GREAT MIGRATION

## I. Various Groups Arrive in New World

## A. Catholics

The first Christians to arrive in large numbers to the “New World” were Spanish and French Catholics in the early sixteenth century.

## B. The Settlement at Jamestown

The first permanent English settlement was established at Jamestown in 1607. Associated with this settlement are famous individuals such as Captain John Smith, John Rolfe, and Pocahontas. Rolfe is credited with the first successful cultivation of tobacco as an export crop in the Colony of Virginia. The Church of England was made the established church of the colony. Dissenting Protestantism would not flourish in Virginia until well into the eighteenth century when the Virginia Statute of Religious Freedom (1785) disestablished the Episcopal Church and made religious toleration the norm in Virginia.

## C. African Americans

In 1619, around 20 Africans were off-loaded near Jamestown by a Dutch trader. They were not slaves; they may have been indentured servants. Their social status in Jamestown is ambiguous. The first African American of record to be born in the colonies was William Tucker (b. January 3, 1624). He was baptized in Jamestown and was born free. However, it would not be much longer before slavery was legal in the American colonies.

For an introduction to African-American scholarship, please see the works of W.E.B. DuBois (1868-1963), Carter G. Woodson (1875-1950), Howard Thurman (1899-1981), James Cone (b.1938), Henry Mitchell (b.1919), and Albert Raboteau (b.1943). Raboteau is the author of *Slave Religion: The Invisible Institution in the Antebellum South* (OUP: 1978). Our class has required readings in Milton C. Sernett, *African American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*.

The following chart gives a picture of Virginia’s dependence on the institution of slavery:

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Virginia Population Statistics (1625-1780)			
Year	Black Population	Total Population	Percentage of Total Population
1625	23	1,200	1.9
1640	150	10,442	1.4
1650	405	18,731	2.2
1660	950	27,020	3.5
1670	2,000	35,309	5.7
1680	3,000	43,596	6.9
1690	9,345	53,046	17.6
1700	16,390	58,560	28.0
1720	26,559	87,757	30.3
1740	60,000	180,440	33.3
1760	140,570	339,726	41.4
1780	220,582	538,004	41.0

Also, please refer to the PowerPoint slides for this lecture. There you will find a quotation from the Virginia Slave Codes of 1705.

#### D. Plymouth Colony

The second successful English settlement was at Plymouth, MA (1620). Unlike the settlers of Jamestown who had come to the New World largely (although not exclusively) for economic reasons, the settlers of Plymouth were Separatists who had grown weary of waiting for reform in the Church of England and who decided to carve out an independent life for themselves.

Small groups of Separatists began to meet in England. One group moved in 1608 from Scrooby in Nottinghamshire, England to Leiden, Holland. A small group of the Scrooby-Leiden exiles moved from Holland to America, where they established Plymouth Colony (1620). These are the so-called Pilgrim Fathers and Mothers who made that long voyage to America on the *Mayflower*. The trip was a perilous one, but as William Bradford (1590-1657) so eloquently stated, the sojourners “knew that they were pilgrims, and looked not much on those things, but lifted up their eyes to the heavens . . . .” Upon their arrival in America, the colonists signed the Mayflower Compact, which became the first governing document of the colony.

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## E. The Great Migration

Meanwhile, back in England, there was much turmoil. During the reigns of James and Charles, there was widespread discouragement among many Puritans who doubted that they would ever see the reforms to the Church of England for which they had hoped. The policies of these monarchs led to the Great Migration of the 1630s and the English Civil Wars (Puritan Revolution) of the 1640s. During that period in England, Oliver Cromwell served as leader and the creedal statement known as the Westminster Confession (1648) was created. There was also a lot of tension between Presbyterians and Congregationalists in Parliament.

The Great Migration (1630-1640) occurred during the reign of King Charles. During this period thousands of English Puritans migrated to America in order to establish a *new* England in a *new* country. Around 20,000 arrived and made extensive settlements around Massachusetts Bay. Famous names associated with the settlement are John Winthrop (1588-1649), John Cotton (1584-1652), etc.

## II. The Rise of New England Congregationalism

## A. Theocratic

The vision for government in New England during the mid-1630s was largely theocratic. Said John Cotton:

It is very suitable to God's all-sufficient wisdom, and to the fulness and perfection of Holy Scriptures, not only to prescribe perfect rules for the right ordering of a private man's soul to everlasting blessedness with himself, but also for the right ordering of a man's family, yea, of the commonwealth too, so far as both of them are subordinate to spiritual ends, and yet avoid both the church's usurpation upon civil jurisdictions, . . . and the commonwealth's invasion upon ecclesiastical administrations, . . . to civil peace, and conformity to the civil state.

It is better that the commonwealth be fashioned to the setting forth of God's house which is his church: than to accommodate the church frame to the civil state. **Democracy, I do not conceive that ever God did ordain as a fit government either for church or commonwealth.** If the people be governors, who shall be governed? As for monarchy, and aristocracy, they are both of them clearly approved, and directed in scripture, yet so as refers the sovereignty to himself, and sets up **theocracy** in both, as the best form of government in the commonwealth, as well as in the church. . . .

(John Cotton, Letter to Lord Say and Sele, 1636, p. 2)

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## B. Covenantal

New England churches were supported by public taxation, but churches did not consist of all the inhabitants of the state, only those who could narrate a conscious commitment experience. These were bound together by a covenant with Christ and with one another. Although Puritanism identified largely with the Protestant tradition of Calvinism, the Puritans interpreted traditional Calvinism through the lens of covenant theology. The Massachusetts clergyman Samuel Willard (1640-1707) wrote about the covenant of grace.

God and humanity “strike hands in an everlasting covenant” by the terms of which “God bindeth himself in a promise that eternity, which should have been spent in executing his wrath upon them, shall be employed with the entertainment of them with the highest expressions of infinite love.” Once one enters into this covenant with God, “nothing shall ever make a separation between them.” Since salvation is given by God, not earned by women or men, it is safe, secured, assured forever. Come what may, those among God’s elect will persevere; once within the covenant, once among the “elect,” there is no falling away. “God hath cast all their sins behind his back, blotted them out as a cloud.” Thus is the divine side of the agreement fulfilled. On the human side, all the redeemed find “their hearts are engaged to him, devoted to his praise, and so fixed in their love to him, that all waters of affliction cannot extinguish it.”<sup>1</sup>

## C. The New England Way

The concept of the covenant also provided a practical means of organizing churches. A church would be a self-governing group of people voluntarily covenanting themselves to each other and committing to obey the Word of God. Towns would be organized in pretty much the same way. This system came to be called Congregational or the “New England Way.”

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in Edwin Gaustad and Leigh Schmidt, *The Religious History of America* (HarperSanFrancisco, 2004), 56.

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## III. Features of New England Puritanism

## A. Puritan Worship

The Puritans valued simplicity (no kneeling during the Lord's Supper, no vestments, only two sacraments, no sports on Sundays, no Book of Common Prayer, logical sermons, Psalm-singing, plain church buildings).

## B. Puritan Literature

The Puritans typically valued simplicity in language. Yet, surprisingly, there arose a number of Puritan poets and other writers who produced some of the greatest literary works of their age (e.g., John Milton's *Paradise Lost*). In America, the diaries of Cotton Mather and John Winthrop help us to understand the world of the early colonies, in particular, its religious roots. The poetry of Anne Bradstreet and Edward Taylor reveal the centrality of the Bible to Puritan conceptions of reality. There are also a number of exceptional examples of prose among the Puritans. The histories of William Bradford and John Winthrop as well as the religious writings of Jonathan Edwards immediately come to mind. Finally, I will mention the *Bay Psalm Book*, which is the first book published in English in the New World (1640). This early American hymnal was a mainstay of Puritan worship in the colonies.

## C. Education (Harvard and Yale)

## D. Outsiders

## 1. Roger Williams

The purpose in the establishment of the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies was not religious freedom but freedom to worship God in the Puritan manner. Roger Williams (c.1603-c.1683) soon learned this lesson when he began to proclaim Baptist views. He was forced to leave Massachusetts Bay and later settled Rhode Island.

## 2. Anne Hutchinson

Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) also got into hot water in Massachusetts Bay when she began to challenge the preaching of some of the Congregationalists, accusing them of preaching "a covenant of works." Hutchinson was charged with antinomianism. She was persuaded by Roger Williams to go to Rhode Island where she could experience its inchoate pluralism.

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## IV. Thomas Hooker Summarizes the New England Way

By the middle of the seventeenth century, the “New England Way” was in full force. Two classic treatises representing it are John Cotton’s *The Way of the Congregational Churches Cleared* (1648) and Thomas Hooker’s *A Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline* (1648). Below is an excerpt from this latter document:

1. That the people hath right to call their own officers and that none must be imposed upon them by Patrons and Prelates. . . .
2. That the faithful Congregations in England are true Churches: and therefore it is sinful to separate from them as no Churches. . . .
3. Visible Saints are the only true and meet matter, whereof a visible Church should be gathered, and confoederation is the form.
4. The Church as Totum essential, is, and may be, before Officers. . . .
5. A Church Congregational is the first subject of the keys.
6. Each Congregation completely constituted of all Officers, hath sufficient power in her self, to exercise the power of the keys, and all Church discipline, in all the censures thereof.
7. Ordination is not before election.
8. There ought to be no ordination of a Minister at large, Namely, such as should make him Pastour without a People.
9. The election of the people hath an instrumental causal virtue under Christ, to give an outward call unto an Officer.
10. Ordination is only a solemn installing of an Officer into the Office, unto which he was formerly called.
11. Children of such, who are members of congregations, ought only to be baptized. . .
12. Consociation of Churches should be used, as occasion doth require.
13. Such consociations and Synods have allowance to counsel and admonish other Churches, as the case may require.
14. And if they grow obstinate in error or sinful miscarriages, they should renounce the right hand of fellowship with them.
15. But they have no power to excommunicate. . . .

(Thomas Hooker, from the preface to his *Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline*, 1648)

For more understanding of the “New England Way,” see the optional article by Richard J. Bauckham: “Adding to the Church During the Early American Period.”

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### V. Further Developments

#### A. The Cambridge Platform

New England Puritanism united around the Cambridge Platform and the Synod of 1646, although the document was not published until 1649. It was basically the Westminster Confession of Faith. To read the full text of the Cambridge Platform, visit:

[http://www.americanphilosophy.net/cambridge\\_platform.htm](http://www.americanphilosophy.net/cambridge_platform.htm)

#### B. Half-Way Covenant

As time passed, church membership declined as fewer people were able to offer proof of a conversion experience, which would convince themselves and others of their inclusion among the elect. This troublesome situation was remedied by the adoption of the Half-Way Covenant by many New England congregations. It proposed that second-generation members be allowed baptism, but not communion until they provided evidence of conversion. Voting was also withheld until this evidence was supplied.

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<b>Religion in the Thirteen Colonies</b>				
<b>Colony Name</b>	<b>First Settled</b>	<b>Settled By</b>	<b>Notable People</b>	<b>Religious Orientation</b>
Virginia	1607	English	John Smith	Anglican
Massachusetts	1620	Pilgrims	William Bradford	Separatist
		Puritans	John Winthrop	Congregationalist
New Hampshire	1623	Puritans	John Wheelwright	Congregationalist
Maryland	1634	English	George Calvert Cecil Calvert	Roman Catholic and others
Connecticut	1634	Puritans	John Oldham John Winthrop Thomas Hooker	Congregationalist
Rhode Island	1636	English	Roger Williams	Congregationalist and Baptist
Delaware	1638	Swedish	Peter Minuit	Lutheran
		Dutch		Dutch Reformed
		English		Anglican
North Carolina	1653	English	8 aristocrats	Anglican
South Carolina	1670	English	8 aristocrats	Anglican
		French		Huguenots
New Jersey	1638	Swedish	John Berkeley/Sir	Lutheran
		Dutch	George Carteret	Dutch Reformed
		English		Quaker
New York	1624	Dutch	Duke of York	Dutch Reformed
Pennsylvania	1681	English	William Penn	Quaker
		German		Lutheran, Mennonite, Brethren, Amish, Schwenkfelder, Moravian
Georgia	1732	English	James Oglethorpe	Anglican
		German		Moravian