

## THE BAPTISTS, DISSENT, AND DIVERSITY

### I. The Place of Roger Williams in Colonial and American Church History

#### A. The Establishment in Church and State

By the middle of the seventeenth century, there were other individuals and groups (e.g., Anabaptists, Baptists, and Quakers) who shared some of the same convictions as the Puritans but who challenged the “New England Way” and the hegemony of the Congregational Establishment. These groups had many differences, but they were one in their desire to keep church and state separate and to sustain congregational life as a fellowship of true believers.

##### 1. Anabaptists

Anabaptists descend from Swiss and German radicals of the Protestant Reformation of the sixteenth century who not only insisted on adult baptism, but also rejected state control of the church and practiced nonresistance despite brutal persecution. Several Anabaptist groups that trace their roots to the Radical Reformation include the Swiss Brethren (Zurich), South German/Austrian Anabaptists such as the Hutterites (Austria), the Mennonites (Netherlands), and the Amish (Pennsylvania).

##### 2. English General Baptists (c.1612)

The English Baptist movement began in Holland where a group of Puritan Separatists from Lincolnshire took refuge (1608). A part of this group settled at Amsterdam under the leadership of John Smyth (d.1612). Soon Smyth came to the conclusion that the baptism of infants was unscriptural. At the time of his death Smyth was leaning towards the Dutch Mennonites. The Baptist group which he founded was led by Thomas Helwys (c.1550-c.1616) and John Murton (d. c.1625) in 1611 or 1612 back to England. These Baptists found attractive the theological position of Jacob Arminius (1560-1609) and became known as General Baptists.

##### 3. English Particular Baptists (c.1638)

Several years later, another Baptist group emerged out of English Congregationalism under the leadership of John Spilsbury (c.1593-c.1668). This group was Calvinistic (i.e., they held to the doctrine of limited atonement) and became known as Particular Baptists. They remained in amicable fellowship with the Congregationalist with whom they had once been associated. Churches of this persuasion committed themselves to immersion rather than pouring (affusion) or sprinkling (aspersion).

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## B. The Main Features of Roger Williams' Life

At the same time that the Baptists were emerging in England, they were also arriving in New England. For a brief but significant period, the founder of Rhode Island, Roger Williams (c.1603-1683), was a Baptist. Williams joined the Great Migration to New England, arriving in Boston in 1631. In Boston, he was offered a church teaching position, but refused it because it was not clearly separated from the Church of England. Williams was firmly committed to the principles of separatism, freedom of religion, and separation of church and state.

## C. The Theological Basis to Williams' Thought

Williams articulated his views forcefully, so strongly in fact that he was banished from Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1635. The colony's general court ruled:

Whereas Mr. Roger Williams . . . hath breached and divulged diverse new opinions against the authority of the magistrates and churches here . . . it is therefore ordered that the said Mr. Williams shall depart out of this jurisdiction.

The full-scale presentation of Williams' position, the famous *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* would later be published in London (1644), the same year as his friend John Milton's defense of free speech and freedom of the press, *Areopagitica*. Here is an excerpt from *The Bloody Tenent*:

In vain have English Parliaments permitted English Bibles in the poorest English houses, and the simplest man or woman to search the Scriptures, if yet against their soul's persuasion from the Scripture, they should be forced (as if they lived in Spain or Rome itself, without the sight of a Bible) to believe as the Church believes.

True it is, the Sword may make (as once the Lord complained, Isa. 10) a whole nation of hypocrites: But to recover a Soule from Satan by repentance, and to bring from Anti-Christian doctrine or worship, to the doctrine or worship Christian, in the least true internal or external submission, that only works the all-powerful God, by the sword of the spirit in the hand of Spiritual officers.

But it hath been thought, or said, Shall oppositions against Truth [that is, those who oppose the truth] escape unpunished? Will they not prove mischievous, Truth. I answer (as before) concerning the blind Guides (in case there be no civil offence committed) the Magistrates, & all men that by the mercy of God to themselves discern the misery of such Opposites, have cause to lament and bewail that fearful condition wherein such are entangled, to wit, in the snares & chains of Satan, with which they are so invincibly caught and held, that no power in Heaven and Earth, but the right hand of the Lord in the meek and gentle dispensing of the Word of Truth, can [alone] release and quit them.

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Fifthly, all civil states with their officers of justice in their respective constitutions and administrations are proved essentially civil, and therefore not judges, governors or defenders of the spiritual or Christian state and worship.

Sixthly, it is the will and command of God, that (since the coming of his son the Lord Jesus) a permission of the most paganish, Jewish, Turkish, or antichristian consciences and worships, be granted to all men in all nations and countries: and they are only to be fought against with that sword which is only (in soul matters) able to conquer, to wit, the sword of God's Spirit, the word of God.

Roger Williams, *The Bloody Tenent of Persecution*, (1644)

## II. The Founding of Rhode Island and its Contribution to the American Church

### A. Williams Retreats South

Fleeing into the wilderness, Roger Williams founded Providence on land purchased from the Native Americans in 1636. Said Williams:

I desired it might be for a shelter for persons distressed for conscience. I then, considering the conditions of diverse of my distressed countrymen, I communicated my said purchase unto my loving friends . . . who then desired to take shelter here with me.

The new plantation quickly became a refuge for those of diverse religious views.

### B. The First Baptists in America and their Slow Growth

The first Baptist Church in America was the First Baptist Church of Providence (1638). Roger Williams helped to found it, but was only a member for several months. This church was probably more inclined toward the Particular Baptist tradition, but Baptist churches in Rhode Island tended to be General. In New England, outside of Rhode Island, the Baptists often had a difficult time because of persecution. Baptist growth began in the Middle Colonies (New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, Maryland, and Delaware) later than in New England, but soon became much more significant, especially because of immigration.

### C. Quakers

Roger Williams' colony was open to other religious groups besides the Congregationalists and Baptists. The Society of Friends, or Quakers, shortly after their founding by George Fox in England in 1651, moved in large numbers to Rhode Island, settling especially near Newport.

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## D. The Denominational Complexion of America, 1660-1700

Number of Churches in Colonial North America:

	<b>1660</b>	<b>1700</b>
Congregational	75	146
Anglican	41	111
Dutch Reformed	13	26
Roman Catholic	12	22
Presbyterian	5	28
Lutheran	4	7
Baptist	4	33

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## THE COLONIAL CHURCH IN THE MIDDLE AND SOUTHERN COLONIES

## I. The Melting Pot of the Middle Colonies

## A. The Quakers in England and their Reception in the New World

The Founder of the Quakers was George Fox (1624-1691), a man of humble origin and Puritan upbringing. Fox believed in the notion of the Divine Inner Light. He rejected Puritan ideas of total depravity and the authority of the Bible, although he did believe the Scriptures to be a true word from God. He also rejected the sacraments and outward ceremonies. He was pacifistic. There were many reports of signs and wonders in early Quakerism. Fox and his early followers experienced persecution but it served only to heighten their zeal, especially for missionary work. By the end of the seventeenth century, the Quakers were the largest of the Nonconformist churches with perhaps as many as fifty thousand followers in the British Isles and another forty thousand more in the Western Hemisphere.

## B. William Penn and Pennsylvania

William Penn (1644-1718), a leading Quaker, inaugurated Pennsylvania in 1681 as a “holy experiment” and operating under a *Frame of Government* which, like Massachusetts and Connecticut, sought to lay the foundations of a Christian society. The *Frame of Government* granted religious liberty, but limited office-holding to “such as profess faith in Jesus Christ.”

## C. The Open Door for Germany

German and Dutch Mennonites began permanent settlement in 1683, first at Germantown, PA. Many of them worshipped with the Quakers, many of whom were of Mennonite background. The Dutch Reformed Church was organized somewhat earlier in New Amsterdam (now New York City) in 1628. The radical Pietists called Dunkers, or German Baptist Brethren came in 1719 and made Germantown their early stronghold. Schwenkfelders and Moravians arrived in 1734. Lutheran and Reformed bodies developed their strength only later.

## D. The Scots Irish and the Presbyterians

Presbyterians trace their beginnings in America to the founding of churches by New England Puritans on Long Island in the 1640's and in East Jersey somewhat later. In the 1680's and 1690's the Scotch-Irish founded Presbyterian churches in Delaware and on the Eastern shore of Maryland and Virginia. In 1706 seven ministers formed the first Presbytery, with its chief seat in Philadelphia and most of its constituents on the Eastern Shore. The leader in organizing this Presbytery and the chief figure among Presbyterians at that time was the Scotch-Irishman Francis Makemie (1658-1708) who would later win a landmark case for religious freedom.

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## II. The Southern Colonies

## A. Maryland and the Catholics (see Noll, 26-29)

Protestantism dominated the religious world of the Thirteen Colonies. Roman Catholics constituted only a very small fraction of the population. One of the Thirteen Colonies, Maryland, was founded by the English Roman Catholics George Calvert (c.1580-1632) and his son Cecil Calvert (1606-1675), successively Lords Baltimore.

The Calvert family who founded Maryland partly as a refuge for English Catholics was congenial to the policy of religious toleration and sought legal protection for both Catholics and Protestants. The Maryland Toleration Act was adopted in 1649. Later, Anglicanism became the established church of the colony and the Maryland Toleration Act was repealed permanently. However, Catholicism would remain strong for many years to come

## B. Virginia and the Anglicans

Anglicanism in the American colonies had its chief center in Virginia. At first, it struggled because it depended on England for clergy. However, following the Restoration of the Stuart kings in 1660, positive changes occurred, especially through the work of James Blair (1656-1743) and Thomas Bray (1656-1730). Blair brought great reform to the churches in Virginia and founded the College of William and Mary (chartered in 1693). Bray organized the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) in 1699 and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Affairs (S.P.G.) in 1701. As Anglicanism grew in Virginia, new challenges confronted it. With the revival movements of the eighteenth century and the arrival of increasing numbers of evangelicals and in light of the political climate surrounding the Revolutionary War, Anglicanism would never quite be the same.

## Number of Churches in Colonial America, 1750

Congregational	525
Anglican	300
Presbyterian	250
Baptist	150
Lutheran	150
German Reformed	90
Dutch Reformed	80
Roman Catholic	55

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### III. A Nation within a Nation

#### A. The demography of African Slaves

The size and depth of the American slave industry grew significantly. The number of slaves in the colonies at the beginning of the eighteenth century was around 50,000. By the beginning of the nineteenth century the number of Africans or African Americans had risen to 1,000,000. There were approximately 600,000 slaves imported to the American from 1620 to 1865.

#### B. Slavery and Religion

Virtually no individual or denomination condemned slavery in the seventeenth century. Cotton Mather, for example, taught that slaves should be treated well, but that slavery was ordained by God as a punishment. Mennonites and Quakers protested against slavery, but such voices were few in the seventeenth century.

African Americans were slow to accept the Christianity of the colonies. Language and cultural barriers were very real. Some slave owners also were reluctant to educate slaves about Christianity (or anything else) fearing that they might use Christianity (or their knowledge) to seek freedom. However, there were those like the Anglican Thomas Bray, who committed themselves to the evangelization and education of African Americans. Catholics in general also exhibited greater concern for the spiritual lives of blacks.

There were no predominantly African-American churches before the Revolutionary War. Until that time, slaves attended worship services with the majority culture under the supervision of slaveholders. It was not until the Great Awakening (c.1730-c.1780) that significant numbers of African Americans embraced Protestant Christianity for themselves.

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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	Congregationalist
			John Winthrop Thomas Hooker	
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