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Colonial America: A Quest for Spiritual Values

LECTURE I: WHO ARE THESE EARLY ARRIVALS?

The American saga is a strange and wonderful illustration of many streams of human history and experience: Yangtze, Niger, Duero, Thomas, Gota, Congo, Tiber, Seine, Danube—later there would be countless more—all flowing alongside each other to form a vast con-course of interwoven canals, tributaries, rivulets. Yet there was never a total merger into one boundless ocean—morass may be the proper symbol. These divergent rivers of history retained much, at the same time they shared bountifully. There is no National American Church, albeit several communions regarded themselves as such. Instead, there are countless church/religious/ethnic/national streams. This is my thesis: the appropriate American figure would be that of an enormous delta, rich and fertile, well watered by many rivers; all contributing life sustaining moisture, yet each retaining a character and identity. In short, the old “melting pot” theory is neither relevant nor realistic. That pot cracked years ago. There is no American prototype, either in a single spiritual idea or an individual person. Marked differences were present “as it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be, world without end.” But there is hope. I agree completely with George Whitefield, when, from the courthouse balcony in Philadelphia, he lifted his melodious voice and cried, “Father Abraham, whom have you in heaven?” The rhetorical question deserved an eloquent reply, as Whitefield inquired:

Any Episcopalians? No! Any Presbyterians? No! Any Independents or Methodists? No, no, no! Whom have you there? We don't know those names here. All who are here are Christians . . . Oh, is this the case? Then God help us to forget party names and to become Christians in deed and truth.¹

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¹ Quoted in Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America*, 3d ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981), pp. 80-81.

The year was 1789. The struggle had been long and arduous; the people of the thirteen states—formerly colonies—had concluded the Revolution, made their way through the vagueness of bankrupt Articles of Confederation, now, on March 4, 1789 a new federal Constitution was finally adopted. It represented the culmination of intense struggle, high aspiration, and sheer courage of a people to establish a new, independent nation. It was—for a large group—a dream come true in the midst of a diverse, pluralistic society, which, admittedly was far from unified. The Articles of Confederation of 1781 had proved to be far too weak, and the new Constitution, framed in 1787, was now ratified. It was an heroic attempt to provide a strong republic, capable of furnishing stability and continuity of government. The colonial period was now but a recent memory, and a fresh new nationalism was the dominant theme. This splendid document, the Constitution—for all its worth—and the heady nationalism of the time—for all its exuberance—both neglected to understand the full implications of diversity. It was diversity in religion, national, racial, and sex backgrounds of the American peoples (remember, women, as well as Africans and Indians, were second class citizens).

This young united States (only the word States was usually capitalized) was presently caught up in the pioneering spirit; the Daniel Boone era was at hand. Intrepid pioneers made their way through Cumberland Gap into the recently opened territory of Tennessee, Kentucky, and the Ohio. It was intoxication (in more than one sense) as traders and homemakers made their way on flatboats on the Mississippi, pushing ever farther north and west. There is enough truth to justify a certain romantic view of the national *élan vital*; it was manifestly part of the political, economic, intellectual, and geographical spheres. But what of that deep, underlying quest to establish the moral taste and tone of the American people? The note of faith/religion must be recognized as part of the entire scheme of things. The frontier spirit was, in large measure, a religious fervor. The *raison d'être* of 1789 can be said to be an attempt to define moral and spiritual values for a new nation. As the Methodists put it in 1784: "To reform the Continent, and to spread scriptural Holiness over these Lands." Standards which were to direct the conduct, outlook of Americans were largely conceived during the colonial period and as the 18th century merged into the 19th. These moral and ethical codes, and these concepts of organized religion, prevailed for over a hundred years, and in most cases, far into the 20th century. The colonial era represents that epoch in which a great many people were convinced that God had directed them in the whole enterprise—the opening of a new world. The problem was—and is—that in coming to such a consensus, not all streams were recognized.

The Original Americans

Europe looked upon it as an entirely new world: *America*, named by the German geographer Martin Waldseemüller in 1507—ironically—for a Florentine merchant, Americus Vesputius. This, of course, is representative of the very limited European view of things.

The Western Hemisphere's first settlers very likely came from Asia, crossing from what is now known as Siberia to Alaska (there had been the thousand-mile-wide land and ice bridge which had existed for millions of years but very likely these adventuresome people came by boats or rafts long after the bridge had been inundated). Dating the arrival of these original expeditionists is highly speculative, many authorities approximate the time as 40,000 B.C. Some have even suggested 100,000 B.C. and others put it as late as 25,000 B.C. when these, the progenitors of the original Americans, Native Americans—later designated Indians—arrived. The two huge continents remained theirs for thousands of years, as a wide variety of ingenious, spectacular cultures and life styles were subsequently developed. At the heart of Native American life was religion. Sometimes it was majestic in its simplicity, as from the red woman and man there emerged a deeply spiritual quality of life, "Oh great Spirit, do not let me judge another man until I have walked for ten days in his moccasins." (Is this not Ezekiel's "I sat where they sat.") Sometimes, as in the vast area of Mexico and in the Peruvian Andies, it was markedly sophisticated and highly institutionalized. The Aztecs sang a death song:

Where shall you go?
Where shall you go?
Is yours the road of the double gods,
Will your home be in the place of the undead?
Will it be inside Mictlan?
Or only here on this earth?²

Or the song of the liberated spirit:

I am like the quetzal bird,
I am created in the one and only God;
I sing sweet songs among the flowers;
I chant songs and rejoice in my heart.³

From North America we have:

. . . weave for us a garment of brightness;
May the warp be the white light of morning;

² Quoted in Victor W. von Hagen, *The Sun Kingdom of the Aztecs* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1958), p. 88.

³ Quoted in Ezra Jack Keats, *God Is In The Mountain* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1966), n.p.

May the weft be the red light of evening,
 May the fringes be the falling rain,
 May the border be the standing rainbow.
 Thus weave for us a garment of brightness,
 That we may walk fittingly where birds sing,
 That we may walk fittingly where grass is green,
 O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky.⁴

LaSalle reported the ancient Iroquois prayer which would drive away illness.

Partake of this sacred tobacco,
 Oh mighty Shagodjoweh,
 You who live at the rim of the earth
 Who stand towering
 You who travel everywhere on the earth,
 Caring for the people.

And you, too, whose faces are against the trees in the forest
 Whom we call the Company of faces,
 You also receive tobacco.⁵

There is the unrelenting war song of the Winnebago:

Sun and earth are everlasting
 Men must die!
 Old age is a thing of evil
 Charge and die!⁶

From the Cherokee we have this hymn:

God created the Heaven and Earth;
 He created the whole universe.

God thought of Day, and it was Day;
 And of the Moon, and it was Moon.

God thought of Stars and Sky, and all the Sea;
 He divided Water and Earth.

God thought of all the Beasts and crawling things;
 The fowls in the sky, and all under water.

And God created Man
 To be King of the earth.

God faced it and saw everything good;
 He created us; Praise to Him.⁷

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Quoted in Robert Silverberg, *Home of the Red Man* (Greenwich, Connecticut: New York Graphic Society, 1963), p. 81.

⁶ Ibid, p. 131.

⁷ Translated from an original Cherokee poem in *The Cherokee Phoenix*, March 13, 1828, quoted in Spencer B. King, Jr., *Georgia Voices: A Documentary History to 1872* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1966), p. 246.

Deplorably, this spiritual vitality was not permitted to become patent in the majority of American religious life. If recognized at all, it was kept latent. We are just now being made aware that it never disappeared; it was simply ignored by Europeans. This influence in American life is subtle, but it is there.

Later Arrivals

A Greek, Pytheas, in the 4th century B.C. sailed into an area "where the night lasted only two hours in the summer." He may have reached Greenland.

There is continued speculation—and debate—that other peoples may have come to the Western Hemisphere: Egyptians, crossing the Atlantic in great papyrus vessels, or possibly Polynesians sailing the Pacific in huge dugout canoes. Continued investigation may produce new evidence regarding possible ties and contributions from these lands and peoples.

Irish monks landed in Iceland by A.D. 790. In A.D. 850 these were expelled by Norsemen in their dragon ships, coming from the misty isles of the North Sea, remote Scandanavia, and even the Steppes of Russia. In late 10th century A.D. Norsemen (Normans, Vikings) again touched the outer rim of the immense land mass of North America. The leader was Eric the Red. It was his son Leif Ericson who in A.D. 1000 reached Newfoundland. The first European child born in the New World was named Snorro, the son of Thorfinn Karlsefni and Gudrid, widow of Thorstein Ericson, Leif Ericson's brother. Snorro was born in A.D. 1007 in the Norse settlement of Vineland—believed to have been on the coast of Maine or Nova Scotia. This child, Snorro, probably lived most of his life back in Iceland. Very little additional exploration or settlement came of these Norse expeditions, for soon those fair complexioned, blond Scandanavians returned to Greenland, thence to their native lands, taking with them their ties with the Vatican. A letter of Pope Alexander VI, at the time of Columbus' voyages, insisted that St. Peter's See had not heard from Greenland in some eighty years. In all likelihood about A.D. 1400 these Norwegian and Islandic traders admitted the climate in the Greenland area was too severe and trading no longer profitable. Others in Greenland died off or were killed by the Eskimo. Before these people from northern Europe departed North America they left their footprints on the beaches, and folk songs—enough to let us know they possessed all the deep human emotions. They sang of a long lost love;

I laid me down to rest, and the hour it was late,
I knew not of pain or aching sorrow;
Then word came to me from my sweetheart so dear
To hasten to her ere the morrow.

No one have I ever loved so dearly.

No one have I ever loved so dearly.

Then quickly I sped to her lofty bow'r
Where oft 'twas my wont to be faring;
A group of fair maidens surrounded my love,
Her form for the cold grave preparing.

No one have I ever loved so dearly.
No one have I ever loved so dearly.

I fled from the room to the meadow green,
The bells in the church 'tow'r were tolling;
But nothing I heard, naught but anguish did I know,
My heart's grief was far passed consoling.

No one have I ever loved so dearly.
No one have I ever loved so dearly.⁸

These are they who are part of the American story. Their tie with the Church of Rome was tenuous, but the bells tolling were sounding from a Roman Church and a Roman priest would have conducted the funeral of the lovely maiden.

Spanish

It was the Italian, Christopher Columbus, sailing under the Spanish flag of "Their Most Catholic Majesties" Ferdinand and Isabella, who departed Palos, Spain on August 3, 1492. He reached the Bahamian Islands on October 12th, calling the spot San Salvadore—Holy Savior. As he planted the Spanish flag, he likewise raised a Cross. He was convinced God had directed the whole venture; as he is supposed to have recorded in his *Book of Prophecies*:

It was the Lord who put into my mind (I could feel His hand upon me) the fact that it would be possible to sail from here to the Indes. All who heard of my project rejected it with laughter, ridiculing me. There is no question that the inspiration was from the Holy Spirit, because He comforted me with rays of marvelous inspiration from the Holy Scriptures . . . For the execution of the journey . . . I did not make use of intelligence, mathematics or maps

With him, to be sure, was Pedro Nino, a black. There were three subsequent, lengthy voyages of discovery by Columbus, this remarkable "Admiral of the Ocean Sea," whereby a fiercely active Roman Catholic Spain laid claim to an immeasurable empire of millions of square miles and millions of people, eventually including the West Indies, North, Central, and South America. Faithful Franciscans, Dominicans, and later the Jesuits accompanied the conquistadores, planting the Crucifix alongside the Spanish Lion, as in 1513 when Ponce de Leon established

⁸ Quoted in William Attaway, *Hear America Singing* (New York: The Lion Press, 1967), p. 33.

claim to Florida. Fifty-two years later, 1565, Pedro Menéndez de Avilés made St. Augustine—named for the Bishop of Hippo, on whose day, August 28th, the party arrived—the first permanent Spanish settlement north of Mexico. Enormous claims were likewise being made in the expanses of the Southwest as explorers made their way into what is now California, New Mexico, Arizona. Among the foremost scouts was the noted black, Estavanico, “Little Stephen,” who pressed for the fabled “Seven Cities of Gold”—some claim he went as far north as Kansas. Blacks were part of the retinue of most of these expeditions. Beautiful missions, in traditional Spanish architecture, bear testimony to the presence of the Church of Rome, as thousands of Indians became converts to a “pre-Reformation Spanish Catholicism” archly conservative after seven hundred years of contending with Islamic presence in Moorish Spain. Spanish brutality towards the Indians is, tragically, part of the story, just as in the emerging West Africa slave trade. It was all part of Spain’s development of her commercial, cultural, religious hegemony.

This is the Spanish mysticism so dramatically portrayed by El Greco; here is the strength of Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier, and the *Spiritual Exercises*. We must not forget that in 1992, only eleven years from the very month—October, 1981, this Lecture is given, America will observe the 500th anniversary of Columbus’ arrival. Five centuries have wrought dramatic changes, moving from a conservative, yea, reactionary Spanish Catholicism, to—for many—the Liberation Theology so much a part of contemporary dialogue, not only in Latin America, but throughout the world.

Portugal

Able Portugese sailors had navigated the northwest coast of Africa as early as A.D. 1415, then slowly made their way down western Africa, sailing eventually around the Cape of Good Hope. In 1498 Vasco da Gama reached his goal: India. In 1500, Pedro Cabral sailed west, reached and claimed the seemingly immeasurable territory, Brazil. Here a devoutly Portuguese Roman Catholic empire was established, the Portuguese language introduced, and thousands of Africans were subsequently brought here as slaves.

France

Another Italian, Giovanni Verrazano, in 1524 investigated the entire eastern coast, from Spanish Florida to Nova Scotia, sailing under the aegis of France. Some ten years later Jacques Cartier made his way up the St. Lawrence River, providing the French crown claim to North America. Samuel de Champlain, in 1608, followed up the initial discovery by securing a permanent foothold in recently founded Quebec.

French Catholic Orders were soon in the territory, making progress among Indians in Canada. Missions appeared along the Mississippi, with La Salle claiming Louisiana in 1682, and eventually New Orleans was built. Attempts by French Huguenots to find a home on the St. John's River in Florida in the 1560s had been brutally thwarted by Spanish arms.

France's American domain was enormous: to the north and west, Canada and the Great Lakes area, along the Ohio. It was French culture and French Catholicism that marked the life of the people. A black, Jean Baptiste Pointe De Sable built his log cabin in a foul smelling area on the edge of a huge lake in 1772; the odor had long been referred to by the Indians as Chicago.

In these Roman Catholic territories claimed by Spain, Portugal, and France, powerful Orders of monks and nuns, groups of dedicated priests and humble friars set about evangelizing, planting missions and chapels, saying Mass and hearing Confessional, celebrating Sacramental grace, teaching in thousands of parochial schools, building colleges and universities. There was no fundamental difference in the Roman Church in America and in the land from which the missionaries came. Cardinal elements remained intact. All services were in Latin—even a debate by French missionaries before a large group of solemn Indians in tribal council was conducted in Latin—and the concept of Orders, ministry, and the Seven Sacraments was just as in Europe. True, there was a blending with traditional Indian and African cultures, as in Our Lady of Guadalupe, and the language of faith often became a patois of indigenuous and European speech and culture, but in terms of basic doctrine, structure, and ministry, nothing was changed. The Council of Trent in 1545-1563 had seen to that, and the pronouncements held until the 1960s and Vatican II.

Holland

Henry Hudson, in 1609, represented the Dutch East India Company when he sailed his ship the *Half Moon* up the river that now bears his name, thus enabling the United Provinces in 1624 to establish New Amsterdam and the presence of the staunchly Calvinistic Dutch Reformed Church.

It was an unrelenting Calvinism, clearly enunciated by the Synod of Dort in 1618-1619:

God had, after Adam's fall reserved a certain number of human beings from destruction, and, . . . destined them to salvation through Christ . . . In this election God does not consider belief or conversion, but acts simply according to his pleasure. God

sent his son Christ for the salvation of the elect, and of them alone.⁹

The first Dutch congregation was organized in 1628—a Protestant witness which has continued uninterrupted on Manhattan Island. This October, 1981, Norman Vincent Peale celebrated his fiftieth anniversary as pastor of that church. Who would have thought it: from Dutch Calvinism to *The Power of Positive Thinking!* It was only natural that in transporting Dutch culture, Dutch names should be employed, thus in 1658 when a small village was established farther north, they named it for one of the most picturesque towns in the Netherlands: Harlam. Of course, today this area is known as Harlem.

English

The beginnings of English presence in America date from the shrewd, parsimonious Henry VII who launched initial English exploration with his commissioning of John Cabot, who made a brief voyage in 1497, touching Newfoundland and adjunct points along the Canadian coast. Almost a century passed before further exploration was projected. We may safely say that “domestic” problems prevented Henry VIII from investigation into the American scene.

The first attempts at a permanent English settlement did not come until 1578 when Elizabeth I granted Sir Humphrey Gilbert Letters Patent “for the inhabiting and planting of our people in America.” He attempted a colony off Newfoundland in 1583-1584. Sir Walter Raleigh made continued use of royal permission to colonize America. His party reached Roanoke Island, off the coast of present North Carolina, in 1585. The territory was named Virginia, honoring the Virgin Queen who had sent the group. That project was shortly abandoned. In July of 1587, under the direction of Raleigh, another party, led by Governor John White landed on the island. On August 18th, White’s granddaughter, Virginia Dare, became the first English child to be born in America. Governor White went back to England, but upon his return to America in 1591, no trace was to be found of the famous Lost Colony, save for the word CROATOAN carved on a tree. The Lumbee Indians—originally called the Croatan—maintain that the colonists made their way west and intermarried with these people who continue to live this day in North Carolina.

It was May 13, 1607 that a group of 105 colonists landed at the marshy peninsula on the James River, and named the community James Towne, honoring the monarch who, the previous year, had chartered two companies for colonization. This same monarch is the “dread Sovereign”

⁹ Petrus J. Blok, *The People Of The Netherlands*, vol. III, trans. by O.A. Bierstadt and Ruth Putnam (New York: AMS Press, 1970), p. 413.

who in 1611 received the copy of the work he had commissioned earlier, which we call the King James Version of the Bible. The settlement managed to survive and then prosper, thanks in part to John Rolfe's discovery of the Indian's art of planting and growing tobacco.

Africans

It was August 20, 1619 that a Dutch vessel, the *Jesus*, brought twenty indentured servants, Africans, who were to be employed chiefly in the cultivation of this new crop, tobacco, on the plantations which were now rapidly coming into existence. Two members of this party were Antony and Isabella—the surname may have been Johnson. There is some confusion at this point. There was an Anthony Johnson in the party who in due time became wealthy and owned slaves. This may be the same person as the Antony who married Isabella. Their son, William Tucker, named for a local planter, was born January 1 or 2, 1624, and marks the first recorded African child born in America. He was baptized on January 3, 1624 by the Church of England at Jamestown.

With these twenty Africans came a long and noble tradition reaching back into the centuries; ancient cultures and religions, reflecting primarily west African life and thought and faith: Ghana, Mali, and Songhi. It was not limited to this area, for it also extended into the vast regions of central, southern, and eastern portions of this, the second largest continent. Here was an immense variety of languages, national and tribal groupings, cultures and religions. The place of Nature in the whole scheme of things, the ebb and flow of life, the importance of the family, the spiritual quality in every day living: these are all part and parcel of the customs and the very life blood of those aboard the good ship *Jesus*. The influence of Islam was likewise to be felt in the coming centuries and in the lives of untold thousands of Africans who came to America.

It was the tremendous influence of Nature that appeared as a dominant theme in faith, as in the Akamba legend of the origin of death:

And how did it happen?

It is God who created men. And since God had pity, He said, "I do not wish men to die altogether. I wish that men, having died, should rise again." But he stayed at home.

And then God saw the chameleon and the weaver-bird. After He had spent three days with the chameleon and the weaver-bird, He recognized that the weaver-bird was a great maker of words compounded of lies and truth. Now of the lies there were many, but of the words of truth there were few.

And the story went on, the weaver-bird flew to the new region and spread word to the newly created humans, "I was told . . ." and when people asked what he was told, the weaver-bird answered, "What was told to us? Truly, we were told that men, when they are dead, shall perish like the roots of the aloe." The truthful chameleon exclaimed,

"But we were told, we were told, we were told, that when men are dead, they shall rise again." It was the foolish magpie who insisted, "The first speech is the wise one." And thus people believed the weaver-bird, and sadly went to their homes. And the story—centuries old—concluded, "And so men became old and die; they do not rise again." And so it goes, in the Akamba legend—from Kenya—it was the weaver-bird, not the serpent, who beguiled humankind is thus responsible for it all.¹⁰

From the Suk people there comes a fascinating folktale:

In the olden days all cattle, sheep, and goats lived in the forests. Then, one day, Tororut called all the animals before him at a place in the jungle, and he lighted a large fire there. And when the animals saw the fire they were frightened and fled away back into the forests. There remained only the cattle, sheep, and goats who were not frightened. And Tororut was pleased with these animals and blessed them, and he decreed that henceforth they should always live with man who would eat their flesh and drink their milk.¹¹

Blessed are those with a sense of humor. Among the peoples who, in time, would make up America, the Africans are among the few who brought wit and tongue-in-cheek as part of life and faith itself. "Blacker the berry, sweeter the juice." As the Ekoi, of Nigeria and Cameroon, put it:

Mouse goes everywhere. Through rich men's houses she creeps, and she visits even the poorest. At night, with her bright little eyes, she watches the doings of secret things, and no treasure chamber is so safe but she can tunnel through and see what is hidden there.

In olden days she wove a story child from all that she saw, and to each of these she gave a gown of a different colour—white, red, blue, or black. The stories became her children and lived in her house and served her because she had no children of her own.¹²

And like Mouse, treasured stories, legends, myths, and prayers, hymns, and affirmations of faith, were fathered orally, and—often on slave ships—brought to America to become part of the culture.

Tragically, we have here the roots of slavery in the English colonies. Ironically, the American democratic form of government is said to date from July 30, 1619 when the Virginia House of Burgesses was established. Right to vote did not extend to the slave, and Christian Baptism did not render the slave free.

In Jamestown we see a microcosm of the future English colonies, especially those of the south: two streams, the English and the African.

¹⁰ Quoted in *African Folktales and Sculpture*, Bollingen Series XXXII (New York: Pantheon Books, 1966), p. 62.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 143.

¹² *Ibid.*, Prologue, n.p.

Anglicans

The English in Virginia were steadfastly Anglican—with a sprinkling of Puritan influence. The official spiritual institution was the Church of England, and the members brought Thomas Cranmer's *Book of Common Prayer*, officially known as *The Prayer Book of Edward VI*; along with it they had their stately liturgy, their neatly arranged concept of ministerial orders, quite in line with Apostolic Succession. Above all, it was a divinely inspired mission, and the Royal Charter of April 10, 1606 said so:

We greatly commending, and graciously accepting of, their desires for the furtherance of so noble a work, which may, by the providence of Almighty God, hereafter tend to the glory of his divine Majesty, in propagating of Christian religion to such people, as yet live in darkness and miserable ignorance of the true knowledge and worship of God, and may in time bring the infidels and savages, living in those parts, to human civility, and to a settled and quiet government: Do by these our letters patents, graciously accept of and agree to, their humble and well intended desires.¹³

The document says far more than it ever intended to say: it reveals the outlook both from the point of view of the Church as well as the State.

The Anglican Church was to play an important role in the future of the English colonies. For the southern colonies especially it represented the aristocracy, the Establishment. From the outset there was one significant problem: orders. America was under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of London. The Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) and the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (S.P.G.) were both instruments designed to meet a specific need, as the Charter of the S.P.G. stated "the Provision for ministers is very mean; and many others . . . are wholly destitute and unprovided of a maintenance for ministers and the public worship of God; and for lack of support and maintenance of such, many of our loving subjects do want the administration of God's Word and Sacraments, and seem abandoned to atheism and infidelity . . ." ¹⁴ Supply of ordained clergy continued to worry the Establishment throughout the colonial period. An Anglican bishop was never sent to America, and it was not until 1789 that the Protestant Episcopal Church in America was established after bishops had been elected and then consecrated in Great Britain.

¹³ Quoted in Edwin Scott Gaustad, *A Religious History of America* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974), 38.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 77.

LECTURE II: THE COLONIAL SPIRIT: FROM PLYMOUTH TO YORKTOWN
TO 1789*Puritans*

The second English colony came into being December 21, 1620 when some one-hundred Separatists splashed ashore from the *Mayflower* at Plymouth, having earlier signed their famous *Compact*, "In ye name of God, Amen." It spelled out the purpose in glorious 17th century orthography:

. . . for ye glorie of God, and advancemente of ye Christian faith, and honour of our king & countrie, a voyage to plant ye first colonie in ye Northerne parts of Virginia, doe by these presents . . . covenant & combine our selves together into a civill body politick, for our better ordering & preservation & furtherance of ye ends aforesaid; and by vertue hearof to enacte, constitute, and frame such just & equall lawes, ordinances, acts, constitutions, & offices, from time to time, as shall be though most meete & convenient for ye generall good of ye Colonie, . . .¹⁵

These were folk of modest economic and social stations in English life, but fervent in their belief in the God of the Old and New Testaments, as interpreted by a strict Calvinism. They despaired of reforming the Church of England and their coming to America demonstrated their conviction a fresh, new order must be established. These are the Pilgrim Fathers and Mothers who made an indellible impression on the romantic as well as factual religious history of America.

Further settlements by staunch, aristocratic Puritans were established in 1628 by John Endicott in Salem, and in 1629 the Massachusetts Bay Colony, with Boston named its capital in 1632. It was here that Main Line Puritan Congregationalism established deep roots, and New England was to remain ardently so for years, famous for outstanding divines, from the Mathers to the Edwards, all representing rock-ribbed Calvinistic theology.

Cotton Mather summed up the whole Puritan enterprise when he preached before the General Court of Massachusetts in the early 1689's and raised the question, "What want ye into the wilderness to see?" Having asked, he proceeded to tell the Court:

And the answer to it is not only too excellent but also too notorious to be dissembled. Let all mankind know that we came into the wilderness because we would worship God without that Episcopacy, that Common Prayer, and those unwarranted ceremonies with which the "land of our forefathers' sepulchures" had been defiled. We came hither because we would have our posterity settled under pure and full dispensation of the gospel, defended by rulers that should be ourselves.¹⁶

¹⁵ Quoted in Daniel L. Marsh, *The American Canon* (New York: The Abingdon Press, 1939), p. 126.

¹⁶ See Hudson, *Religion in America*, p. 100.

It was the noted Ezra Stiles, who, some seventy years later, in 1760, added the finishing touches on the Puritan interpretation of America's *raison d'être*:

The right of conscience and private judgment is unalienable; and it is truly the interest of all mankind to unite themselves into one body for the liberty, free exercise, and unmolested enjoyment of this right . . . And being possessed of the precious jewel of religious liberty, a jewel of inestimable worth, let us prize it highly and esteem it too dear to be parted with on any terms lest we be again entangled with that yoke of bondage which our fathers could not, would not, and God grant that we may never, submit to bear . . . Let the grand errand into America never be forgotten.¹⁷

Indeed, that "errand into the wilderness" prompted it all, a mission to establish a holy commonwealth. Calvin's Geneva was transplanted to American soil.

Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* is a 19th century, romantic view of what he thought 17th century New England ought to have been. In *The Minister's Wooing*, Harriett Beecher Stowe, another 19th century romantic, gives a more realistic portrait of the 18th century New England divine, a Harvard or Yale graduate, a man of enormous influence and outright power in the community, marching about with his "full-bottomed, powered wig, full, flowing coat, with ample cuffs, silver knee-and shoe-buckles." There was more than ministerial dress. Clutching *The Institutes of the Christian Religion* in one hand and the *Westminster Confession* in the other, the Puritan minister—now known as a Congregationalist—ruled almost unchallenged, interpreting moral standards for his people. The youthful Jonathan Edwards' lament about the licentiousness of young people in the community is a good example:

Many of them very much addicted to night walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices . . . It was their manner very frequently to get together in conventions of both sexes for mirth and jollity, which they called frolics, and they would often spend the greater part of the night in them.¹⁸

For these Congregationalists, the church was composed of those who were baptized, faithful in attendance, and absolutely loyal to the doctrines of the Reformed faith. The congregation governed. Therefore ministry, and selection of ministerial candidates, posed no problem. Harvard and Yale had been established to provide the education, and from the ranks of New England Congregationalism came the young clergy; a formidable army it was, and the church grew.

From Massachusetts, the Puritans had early moved out. Settlements were made in New Hampshire as early as 1623. In 1636 Thomas Hooker of Cambridge, Massachusetts moved his congregation to the site of

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 101.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 65.

Hartford in what was to become Connecticut. These were all Congregationalists.

Baptists

Roger Williams' flight from Massachusetts in 1636 saw the establishment of Providence, Rhode Island. Williams had landed in Boston in 1631, convinced there had to be a complete break with the Church of England. His unconventional manner, his attack on civil government resulted in his celebrated trial and subsequent banishment. His *The Bloody Tenents of Persecution for Cause of Conscience* appeared later, July 15, 1644, outlining an appeal for fundamental religious liberty. Religion could not, must not be coerced. It was a landmark in the quest for American freedom of conscience, and it is all the more ironic that it was a trenchant reply to John Cotton, the noted Boston pulpiteer who had no small part in dismissing Anne Hutchinson from Massachusetts. Said Williams, "That the blood of so many hundred thousand soules of Protestants and Papists, split in the Wars of present and former Ages, for their respective Consciences, is not required nor accepted by Jesus Christ the Prince of Peace."¹⁹

Williams—in many respects—becomes a paradigm of the Baptist ideal of freedom for and in faith. We likewise see the concept of the Free Church clearly demonstrated. In 1639 Ezekiel Holliman had baptized Williams, and Williams in turn baptized Holliman and ten others. This took place in Providence, and thus becomes the first Baptist Church in America, demonstrating the right of a local assemblage to establish a church, ordain a clergy, and administer the sacraments.

Lutherans

Delaware was settled by Swedish people in 1638 in the area now known as Wilmington. The Reverend Reorus Torkillus, first Lutheran minister in America, came the following year. John Campanius came in 1653 and engaged in missionary work among the Indians, and built the first Lutheran house of worship in 1646.

Lutherans were also found in New Amsterdam. Lutheran strength in America, however, really came from German Lutherans who settled in eastern Pennsylvania. Here there were sufficient numbers, and the roots were deeply planted in the *Augsburg Confession*, German hymns, down-to-earth Lutheran piety, and a Bible centered—sola scripture—theology. These became components of Pennsylvania culture.

With passing years, the beautiful rolling hills of eastern Pennsylvania

¹⁹ Quoted in H. Shelton Smith, Robert T. Handy, and Lefferts A. Loetscher, *American Christianity: 1607-1820*, vol. I (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960), I, p. 152.

invited other German Reformed bodies, such as the sturdy Moravians whose roots go back to John Hus, martyr-hero of Bohemia, and the 1457 *Unitas Fratrum*. Communities such as Bethlehem, Nazareth, and Lititz came into being. Farther south, in North Carolina, Salem (now Winston Salem) was established, and in Georgia the Moravians came to know the Wesley brothers.

Pennsylvania also saw the descendents of the courageous Anabaptists: the Mennonites—spiritual children of Conrad Grebel and Menno Simons. There were also the strict, simply dressed members of the Old Order Amish, extreme traditionalists alongside their brother and sister Mennonites. These Amish brought their broad brimmed hats, their expertise in farming, and their resolute, conservative faith in the open Bible.

There were also the Dunkers—Church of the Brethren—who had known such heavy persecution in Europe. More German Pietists came, and eventually men such as Philip Williams Otterbein, Martin Boehm, and Jacob Albright moved out across the American scene.

It was from the gentle, undulating countryside of Pennsylvania that the Peace Churches would speak out firmly, and they would live out their belief in passivism, in nonviolence, in resistance to war.

Presbyterians

By 1664 the English had acquired the territory formerly occupied by the Swedes; as was the case with Dutch holdings, that colony now renamed New York. Where the English settled, there the Anglican Church was established. New Jersey, however, settled primarily by English Presbyterians and Quakers in 1664. Presbyterians frequently speak of their church as occupying a median position within Protestantism. Very soon there appeared two schools of these spiritual descendents of John Calvin. Those of English Puritan background, having strong ties with New England, tended toward a “low church” more subjective, less authoritarian “New Side” or “New School” position. Presbyterians of Scottish background had heard the blast of John Knox’s trumpet and they tended toward a “high church” authoritarian view, the “Old Side” or “Old School” position. These insisted on all ministers and ministerial candidates subscribing to the *Westminster Confession*. A church without a confession is “too much like the people of Laish (Judges 18:7, 27), in a careless defenceless condition, as a city without walls.”²⁰

Jonathan Dickinson, future first president of the College of New Jersey (Princeton) championed the “New Side” view. Happily, by the 1720’s the two groups composed their differences and the Adopting Act

²⁰ Ibid, p. 263.

of the Synod of 1729 provided a qualifying subscription to the confessional "as being in all the essential and necessary articles good forms of sound words and systems of Christian doctrine." Dickinson put it:

It's the unquestionable Duty of every Christian according to his Station, to subscribe to the Westminster Confession, &c. For it is their unquestionable Duty (as you observe) to maintain and defend the Truths of the Gospel against all Opposition.²¹

Gospel Ministers and all Gospel Churches were enjoined, not only to defend the Truths of the Gospel, but to perpetrate and propagate them, pure and uncorrupt, to Posterity. So the Presbyterians came, sharp of mind, quick of tongue, shouldering the weight of theological responsibility, and demanding a highly trained clergy.

It was from the Calvinists of New Jersey, Pennsylvania, New York, and New England that the Great Awakening, that powerful revival beginning in 1726, that had many phases and lasted over half a century, swept the eastern seaboard.

Quakers

It was the kindly Quaker influence that produced Penn's Woods—Pennsylvania—, the Charter having been granted by Charles II in 1682 in payment for debts to Admiral Sir William Penn. Young Penn, son of the Admiral, was converted and joined George Fox's movement, the Society of Friends, to the consternation of the father. "Any government," insisted young William Penn, "is free to the people under it . . . where the laws rule, and the people are party to those laws." In his Frame of Government for Pennsylvania he maintained:

When the great and wise God had made the world, of all his creatures, it pleased him to chuse man his Deputy to rule it: and to fit him for so great a charge and trust, he did not only qualify him with skill and power, but with integrity to use them justly. This native goodness was equally his honour and his happiness; and whilst he stood here, all went well; there was no need of coercive or compulsive means; the precept of divine love and truth, in his bosom, was the guide and keeper of his innocency.

Alas, if only it had lasted, for,

. . . lust prevailing against duty, made a lamentable breach upon it; and the law, that before had no power over him, took place upon him, and his disobedient posterity, that such as would not live conformable to the holy law within, should fall under the reproof and correction of the just law without, in a judicial administration.²²

Southern Colonies

The Carolina territory was first settled in 1653 by English and Scotch-Irish. In 1663 Charles II issued a grant to eight Proprietors. By 1670 the

²¹ Ibid, p. 264.

²² Ibid, vol. II, p. 237.

Church of England was firmly planted in the area. It was not until 1729 that North and South Carolina became separate Royal Colonies. By that time there was an increased number of nonconformist English people in the area, Presbyterians and Baptists, Scotch-Irish indeed, along with a growing African population, especially in South Carolina.

Maryland's liberal views made it the first colony to grant freedom of worship to all Christians—a colony established by Roman Catholics. On November 13, 1633, as the first expedition was ready to sail from the Isle of Wight, Lord Baltimore instructed the governor "that in their voyage to Mary Land they be very carefull to preserve unity and peace amongst all the passengers on Shippboard, and that they suffer scandall not offence to be given to any of the Protestants, whereby any just complaint may heerafter be made, by them, in Virginea or in England, . . ." ²³ And Protestants soon outnumbered the Catholics in Maryland.

We see a liberal, English Roman Catholicism established on the seaboard and the good John Carroll was made Bishop of Baltimore in 1790, the first in the United States. By 1808 as Archbishop he saw bishoprics stationed in New York, Boston, Philadelphia, and Kentucky (Bardstown). It was more tolerant than conservative Spanish, Portuguese, and French interpretation—in outlook and general life style—but in terms of doctrine and ministry it was as firmly Roman as any sister branch of the church.

Georgia, last of Great Britain's thirteen colonies to be established, was settled in 1733 by James Oglethorpe. John and Charles Wesley came with the second shipload of colonists in 1736, witnessing to and for the Church of England. Georgia was also home for a small settlement of German Pietists—Moravians—, and for Scottish Presbyterians and German Lutherans.

Methodists

It was the period of the 1760's that saw the arrival of Methodists, last of the religious fellowships to appear in colonial America. Their coming highlights a major feature of American witness: activity of lay-people. Not until the Christmas Conference of 1784 was there an ordained Methodist clergyman in America. The Methodist advance was entirely lay witness. The preachers were laypreachers, licensed, but not ordained. They could not administer the sacraments. Nathaniel Gilbert—and two blacks baptized by John Wesley in England—started Methodist work in Antigua in 1758. Lawrence Coughlan began preaching in Newfoundland in 1765. It was Robert Strawbridge, a farmer who neglected farm and family—neighbors came to the rescue and tilled the land to provide

²³ Ibid, vol. I, p. 35.

bread for the wife and children—, who spent his time preaching on Sam's Creek in Maryland in the early 1760's. In New York, the intrepid Barbara Heck and her cousin Philip Embury held the first Methodist service of worship in September of 1766, with five people present. One of these was a black, Betty, Barbara Heck's servant. Gradually missionaries were sent by Wesley to America, Francis Asbury among them. "Whither am I going?" asked Young Asbury. "To the New World. What to do? To gain honour? No, if I know my own heart . . . I am going to live to God, and to bring others so to do." So they came, and they were all local preachers, essentially laymen who had been examined in matters of faith and doctrine and then licensed.

Jews

Magnificent Touro Synagogue, built in 1763 in Newport, Rhode Island, stands today as the oldest Jewish house of worship in America. Jews were few in number and tended to locate in the cities; their synagogues attested their presence and their considerable influence in the life of the community.

The Emerging Cry for Independence

The year 1763 saw the Treaty of Paris settle many issues in America. England was now in possession of Quebec. French power was broken in North America. Spain had temporarily surrendered her claim to Florida, giving the territory to England, which now held sway over eastern Canada and the entire area east of the Mississippi.

It might have been regarded as a time of British peace and tranquility in the thirteen colonies. The reverse was the case. Relations with the Crown were rapidly deteriorating. There was a new and determined spirit in America. John Lock's philosophy was abroad in the land, as he advocated limiting the power of Parliament and the King. Government, he insisted, came through a "social compact" agreed to by free, equal, independent men (he ought to have added women)—government by consent of the governed. Basic to all Lock's philosophy was the concept of Natural Law, backed and enforced by human reason. Deism had become the wave of new thought in England and France, permeating the American colonies. Many of the most outspoken advocates of national freedom for the colonies were individuals deeply imbued with deistic thought. Even though they retained membership in various churches—Anglican, Congregational, Presbyterian—at heart they were Deists.

This was the era of Thomas Paine's *Common Sense*. Benjamin Franklin's view: "When a religion is good, I conceive that it will support itself; and, when it cannot support itself and . . . is obliged to call for the help

of the civil power, it is a sign, I apprehend, of its being a bad one."²⁴ Thomas Jefferson was soon to write, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness."

Among the great fears in America was that of religious oppression. The lack of Anglican bishops in the colonies was a clear indication of the democratic spirit burning in many hearts. Bishops were not wanted! In the 18th century, Anglican bishops represented political and religious authority. They were members of the House of Lords and their style of living reflected wealth, opulence, and above all, power. Anglicans in America, particularly those in the south—which was the stronghold of the Church of England—were vocal in their rejection of a bishop in the colonies. In 1771 Virginia's House of Burgesses voted unanimously against "the expediency of an American Episcopate." Richard Bland commented, "I profess myself a sincere son of the established church, but I can embrace her doctrines without approving of her hierarchy."²⁵

Jonathan Mayhew of Boston's prestigious Congregational West Church championed the fight against "all imperious bishops." He insisted the Anglican Church would be a threat to both civil and religious liberties. William Livingston, of New York, insisted he was "opposing oppression and vindicating the liberty of man" when he spoke of "her unreasonable encroachments" and that he was against "all tyrants civil and ecclesiastical"²⁶ all of which was directed against the Church of England. Ezra Stiles of Yale admitted that such objections were "much founded in the anticipation of futurity," nonetheless he gave this caveat, "I have so thoroughly studied the views and ultimate designs of American Episcopalians that I know I am not deceived."²⁷ Those who were not of the Anglican communion feared that bishops would mean the loss of their colonial charters as well as taxes imposed for support of the Church of England and its clergy, its "bishop's palace" and the detested rule that all public offices be held only by Anglicans.

Almost as strong as anti-episcopal feeling was anti-popery fear. Anti-Spanish and anti-French feelings swept the Atlantic seaboard. In 1774 Parliament passed the Quebec Act, guaranteeing Roman Catholics free exercise of their faith, and this included legal collection of tithes in all of Quebec and in the territory known as the "Old Northwest" in America—Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, Michigan, Wisconsin. Alexander Hamilton regarded this legislation as a Roman Catholic establishment.

²⁴ See Gaustad, *A Religious History of America*, p. 120.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

The Pennsylvania Packet warned of the possible carnage of another St. Bartholemew's Day Massacre. William Henry Drayton, a South Carolina judge cautioned that America's whole religious heritage was in danger and might have to be fought for; America must not fall before that "tyranny under which all Europe groaned for many ages." In Massachusetts, Suffolk County in 1774 resolved that the Quebec Act "is dangerous in an extreme degree to the Protestant religion, and to the civil rights of all Americans; and therefore as men and as Protestant Christians, we are indispensably obliged to take all proper measures for our security."²⁸ The Continental Congress, in Philadelphia in 1774 condemned the Quebec Act. The Quebec Act was one of the "Intolerable Acts" alluded to in the Declaration of Independence. American colonists had learned too much from the many religious struggles, wars, and persecutions of Europe. One of the major aims of the thirteen colonies was freedom from any form of religious oppression.

Cry as they might against a state church, at the beginning of the American Revolution, nine of the thirteen colonies had an established, tax-supported church. The Church of England was firmly lodged in Virginia, North and South Carolina, Georgia, and in certain sections of New York. The Congregational Church was maintained in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. These Congregationalists were able to maintain tax support for their church in New Hampshire until 1817; in Connecticut until 1818; and in Massachusetts well into 1833. Of the original thirteen, only four colonies were fully committed to a policy of religious liberty: Rhode Island, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Maryland, though liberal, and still regarded as Roman Catholic, was officially Anglican.

The Black Presence

One of the marked changes in American life was the steady increase in the black population. In 1690 there were approximately 250,000 people in the English colonies. By 1776 there was a total population in excess of 2,500,000. Yet one-fourth of these people were not free: either white or black indentured servants or black slaves. Slavery was proving to be economically sound, and the horrors of Middle Passage and Seasoning in the Islands before coming to the thirteen colonies: all a grim reality!

It was during this pre-Revolutionary period that the Invisible Church, with deep African traditions of worship, song, prayer, and spiritual vitality, grew both in numbers and in power. Here the Spirituals were born, sign and symbol of an oppressed people, caught in the dehumanizing

²⁸ Ibid, p. 117.

shackles of slavery, yet determined to be fully human in spite of an intolerable situation. The Invisible Church did not lend itself to statistics, nor to the European format of church structure and worship. Preaching was likewise of another genre: it was the task of the preacher to call forth the spirit of the people, to let the congregation respond to the movement of the Holy Spirit, usually in Pentestocal fashion, rather than the traditional two to three hour Puritan sermon *at* or *to* the people.

Sadly, this is perhaps the most neglected area of American history: the Invisible Church. There has been extensive research on *African* history, but American historians do not pick up the black story—usually—until well into the 19th century. Even such eminent scholars—to whom this author is deeply indebted, and whose works are all used in these lectures—as Samuel Eliot Morison's 1965 *The Oxford History of the American People*; Edwin Scott Gaustad's 1974 *A Religious History of America*; and undoubtedly the most celebrated Sydney E. Ahlstrom's 1975 *A Religious History of the American People*; and then Winthrop S. Hudson's 1981 *Religion in America* all fail to mention the Invisible Church. It is as though blacks did not enter the scene until the Civil War. Ah, here is an untapped source for future Ph.D. dissertations. There is a story to tell. And the Spirituals say it best.

These were the words; here were the melodies of faith and hope. Here was the message, from black to black, and the white overseer would be none the wiser:

Steal away, steal away,
Steal away to Jesus!
Steal away, steal away home,
I ain't got long to stay here.

My Lord, He calls me,
He calls me by the thunder,
The trumpet sounds within-a my soul,
I ain't got long to stay here.²⁹

Then there were tears set to music, but it was not a hopeless cause:

Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
Sometimes I feel like a motherless child,
A long ways from home, a long ways from home,
O—Lawdy, a long ways from home.

Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
Sometimes I feel like I'm almost gone,
And a long ways from home, a long ways from home,

²⁹ Quoted in Attaway, *Hear America Singing*, p. 162.

O—Lawdy, a long ways from home.³⁰

Patience was often the only means of survival:

Mary wore three links of chain,
Every link was Jesus name.
Keep your hand on the plow,
Hold on.

Hold on,
Hold on,
Keep your hand on the plow,
Hold on.

Got my hands on the gospel plow,
Wouldn't take nothin' for my journey now,
Keep your hands on the plow,
Hold on.³¹

This is not to say that blacks were not part of the several predominately white denominations. They were indeed, and the numbers increased. In what is reportedly the earliest baptism of a black in Georgia, on Saturday, July 7, 1750, Bartholomew Zouberbuhler, rector of Christ Church (Episcopal) in Savannah, dedicated his newly built church and baptized a black woman.

Two Baptist preachers, David George and George Liele, gathered a congregation in 1775 at Silver Bluff, South Carolina. Three years later there was a black congregation in Savannah. David George went with the British to Nova Scotia where he established a church in 1784. Liele went to Jamaica and continued Baptist work there.

In 1776 a black church was established at Williamsburg, and in 1780 another black Baptist Church was formed in Petersburg, Virginia. By 1788 Andrew Bryan established the first permanent African Baptist Church in Savannah. In the 1790's a black Baptist Church was founded in Lexington, Kentucky.³²

Slavery

In 1776 there were approximately 501,949 slaves in the colonies. By 1790, the date of the first census, the number had increased to 697,897. The breakdown must be scrutinized:

³⁰ Ibid, p. 163.

³¹ Ibid.

³² See Hudson, *Religion In America*, p. 22.

<i>State</i>	<i>1776</i>	<i>1790</i>
Vermont	?	17
New Hampshire	700	158
Rhode Island	4,000	952
Connecticut	6,000	2,759
Massachusetts	5,249	0
New York	20,000	21,324
New Jersey	10,000	11,423
Pennsylvania	6,000	3,737
Delaware	?	8,887
Maryland	70,000	103,036
Virginia	200,000	293,427
North Carolina	70,000	100,572
South Carolina	100,000	107,094
Georgia	10,000	29,264
Kentucky	?	11,830
Northwest Territory	?	3,417
	<u>501,949</u>	<u>697,897</u> ³³

Slavery remains the great anomaly. How was it possible that the American people espousing freedom, liberty, and the basic equality of humankind, could fail to understand why slavery was completely inconsistent with the fundamental philosophy of the day? In spite of slavery, blacks rose to places of importance in the national life during the period of the Revolution. Benjamin Banneker, free born, was an essayist, inventor, mathematician, astronomer. Prince Hall established "the oldest social order among Negroes in America," the Prince Hall Masonic Order. Phillis Wheatley became a major literary figure. Paul Cuffe, a free Negro, became an outstanding shipbuilder and businessman. James Forten became an early opponent of slavery. Later Denmark Vesey was to become another champion of freedom for slaves, as was David Walker with his famous "Appeal to the Slaves." As we attempt to explore the quest for spiritual values in colonial America, slavery is a brutal fact which must be seen as part of the *Zeitgeist*. It cannot be dismissed and it cannot be covered up.

The War for Independence

It is easy to romanticize the American Revolution. Not all people wanted to sever ties with Britain; a large number, in fact, were outright

³³ See George W. Williams, *History of the Negro Race in America: 1619-1880*, vol. 1 (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1883), p. 436. Also see *Reference Library of Black America*, vol. V (New York: Bellwether Publishing Company, 1971), p. 4.

Tories and let their loyalty to the Crown be known. Yet the evidence is clear: for the most part, the colonists were celebrating the cause of freedom. Blacks were much in evidence, obviously taking the term freedom at face value. Some five thousand blacks participated in the war. Crispus Attucks was the first to shed blood at the Boston Massacre "first to defy; first to die." Deborah Garrett was the first black woman to take part in the Revolution. We have only to read Phillis Wheatley to discover a true patriot, her poem in praise of George Washington is but one example.

A number of blacks served in the navy: George, from Connecticut served aboard the brig *Defense Colony Service*, in 1776. Peter, Brittain, and Daniel were on the *Trumbull*. David Porter was captain of the *Aurora*. Cato Blackney served on the *Hazard*, the *Deane*, and the *Prespect*, all Massachusetts brigs, during 1778 and 1779. On July 26, 1779 Washington wrote, "I have granted a Warrant of 1,000 dollars promised the Negro pilots." Many blacks were skilled pilots. Caesar, a slave, was set free by the Virginia legislature—his freedom having been purchased by that body—as a reward for his contribution; he had "entered early into the service of his country, and continued to pilot the armed vessels of this state during the late war."³⁴

At the battles of Lexington and Concord, April of 1775, we find Caesar Ferrit and John, his son, also Samuel Craft, Peter Salem, Pomp Blackman, and Lemuel Haynes, the noted preacher. Caesar Brown lost his life at the battle of Bunker Hill; again Peter Salem was on hand—shooting Major Pitcairn the British commander. At the battle of Ticonderoga we find Epheram Blackman, Primus Black, and once more the Reverend Lemuel Haynes. Prince Whipple was with Washington crossing the Delaware on that cold Christmas day, 1776. When the British General, Richard Prescott was captured at New port, Rhode Island, July 9, 1777, Tack Sissons was one of the raiders.³⁵

Blacks were in the thick of the fight at Brandywine, Boonesborough, White Plains, Saratoga, Trenton, Monmouth, and the concluding battle, so called, at Yorktown. Thus it runs: from the first shot to the traditional surrender, Africans were in the ranks. The American Revolution is another phase of a search for meaning and values in the life of a people.

A New Nation

For some Americans the course was clear. They saw the new, sovereign state moving in one direction: toward God, and they also knew which churches would show the way. Ezra Stiles asserted that America's

³⁴ See Russell L. Adams, *Great Negroes Past and Present* (Chicago: Afro-Am Publishing Company, 1969), p. 14.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

religious future, as of 1783, belonged to four denominations: Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Anglicans, and Dutch Reformed.³⁶ John Henry Livingston, a leader in New York Dutch Reformed circles noted, "the Churches in America are all assuming a new complexion. From being the appendages of national churches in Europe, they have become national churches themselves in this new Empire."³⁷

For others, this period immediately following the Revolution posed both opportunities and problems aplenty. Within the several denominations the concept of ministry took on new and important meaning. Ministry, after all, was very much a part of an understanding of values moral and spiritual. Ties with Great Britain—political and religious—has been severed. For the Free Churches this was not a problem. In New England the Congregational Church was firmly planted. Colleges were producing ministers; congregations were carefully scrutinizing the young candidates as to doctrine, "Would you be willing to be damned for the glory of God?" Ministry, orders, sacraments, preaching—these posed no problem for the highly educated descendants of the Puritans.

Presbyterians, who looked to their Synods and Presbyteries for direction and guidance—but never surrendering local autonomy—were well established in the Middle States and moving into the south. For them, education was mandatory if an individual would be permitted to stand in the pulpit, and Princeton was producing a bumper crop of young seminarians to fill the Presbyterian ranks. Ordination was no problem; presbyters—elders—placed their hands on the heads of ordinands and it was done.

Baptists, insisting on the sovereignty of each congregation, had no obstacle in selecting and ordaining ministers. It was the responsibility of the local Baptist Church, and no outside group or organization would presume to give direction. True, there was a theological division among the churches. General Baptists were Arminian, or free will; Particular Baptists were steadfast Calvinists. Nonetheless, as to orders and ordination, there was absolute agreement: it came from the grass roots. Hence, there was no shortage of Baptist ministers who now moved out, often as *farmer-preachers* who lived and ministered on the frontier. Educational qualifications depended entirely on the local situation. Brown (University) in Providence, Rhode Island was now giving splendid academic training for those who wished it, but the small town and frontier Baptist preacher was usually unencumbered by the niceties of higher education. Marked gains were being made in the south and in the recently opened

³⁶ Ezra Stiles, *The United States Elevated to Glory and Honor* (New Haven: Thomas and Samuel Green, 1783).

³⁷ Letter to Dirk Romeyn, March 1, 1788, quoted in Alexander Gunn, *Memoirs of the Rev. John Henry Livingston* (New York: W. A. Mercein Printer, 1829), pp. 298-299.

territories to the west, gains among whites and blacks.

Pietists, ranging from English Quakers to the several German Pietist bodies, worked through their ecclesiastical, theological structures and resolved the problem of ministry. The same was true of Lutheran and Dutch Reformed people. There were sufficient ties with the mother countries in Europe and the parent denominations to supply a ministry. These denominations were not known for size and they tended to restrict themselves to certain locales, either in a particular state, or in the cities.

The Roman Catholics proceeded along traditional lines. Strong ties with the Vatican, the authority of the bishops, the steadfastness of the many Orders: all worked to provide a priesthood for American Catholics.

In brief: these many and diverse religious bodies—whatever their local problems—were not faced with the vexing and frustrating situation of an episcopacy relating to the Church of England. Two groups were caught up in the dilemma: Episcopalians and Methodists.

There was no Anglican bishop in America—there never had been. For years, Americans who wanted episcopal ordination had been required to make the long, expensive, and sometimes dangerous trip to England. Anglicans in America had suffered for want of clergy, and many who came from England were far from suitable. It was not until Samuel Seabury secured consecration from nonjuring bishops of the proscribed Scottish Episcopal Church, in Aberdeen on November 14, 1784 and William White together with Samuel Provoost were consecrated in London on February 4, 1787 by the Archbishops of Canterbury, York and two other English bishops, that Episcopalians in the United States were able to ordain and further an American clergy.

For the Methodists it was another story. John Wesley remained faithful to the rubrics of the Church of England, and sent to America faithful lay-preachers, men qualified to preach, but not enabled to administer the sacraments. For American Methodists the problem was acute. Here was a religious fellowship extremely evangelistic, moving with the pioneers into new territory, symbolized by the *circuit rider* whose fiery preaching was converting sinners with reckless abandon, but these same itinerant preachers were unable to baptize the converts nor were they able to administer the Lord's Supper to the faithful. The Bishop of London refused to ordain a single clergyman to come to the aid of American Methodists.

Methodists were part of the episcopal tradition. They were not of the Free Church line. Ordination came from a bishop. This struggle went on from the mid 1760's until 1784, at which time John Wesley took matters into his own hands and set apart Dr. Thomas Coke, an Oxford graduate and an ordained priest of the Church of England, as Superintendent, to come to America with power to ordain Francis Asbury and others. It was at the Christmas Conference of 1784 that the Methodist Episcopal Church was born, and American Methodists claimed their own clergy.

Blacks play an interesting, and integral, part in the entire religious scheme of things in America as denominations worked through structure and discipline and vision of ministry. As blacks were related to the several communions, they shared in the struggle to achieve and understand a concept of ministerial orders. Jacques Eliza Jean Captein was a graduate of the University of Leyden, and part of the Dutch Reformed Church; Martin de Porres, canonized in May of 1962 by Pope John XXIII represents blacks in the Roman tradition. Augustus Tolson would become the first Negro priest in America—but this would not come until 1886 and James Augustus Healy would become the first Negro Catholic Bishop, but not until mid-19th century.³⁸ These were all part of Roman tradition in piety and ministry.

Lemuel Haynes was licensed to preach in 1780, and then ordained in the Congregational Church where he served with distinction. Thomas Paul organized the Abyssinian Baptist Church of New York City. Riahard Allen, Daniel Alexander Payne, and Henry McNeal Turner all represent the dramatic emergency of the African Methodist Episcopal Church—and there would be more black Methodist denominations to follow. In these Methodist bodies it was the episcopal tradition, and episcopal ordination. Many more blacks could be named, men and women associated with particular communions. Absalom Jones became the first black priest in the Episcopal Church. In the Methodist Episcopal Church Harry Hosier, "Black Harry," stands as *circuit rider* and preacher par excellence!

There were the individual congregations, without denominational affiliation. Many of these were in Pentecostal tradition, and often it was a church without roof, or floor, but it was a church, and the gospel was preached, and souls were saved. The names of many of these laypeople and preachers are unknown to us, but they are recorded in the Lamb's Book of Life.

Our Values

As Americans red, white, and black received their new Constitution in 1789 they might well have asked themselves, "Have we come to a general agreement as to what it means to be a spiritual person? Or, "Do we have one set of American moral standards?" Not really. The values, and the criteria for values, remained as divergent as the people, the languages, and the broad cultural backgrounds. Values, yes, there were spiritual values, but they were not all the same.

Is this a problem? Not for the one giving the lecture. Let us return to the original request to deliver these Faculty Lectures, something "sim-

³⁸ See Adams, *Great Negroes Past and Present*, p. 14.

mering on the back burner." Soon we will be celebrating the great American institution: Thanksgiving. We will enjoy a feast, the kind my own mother would prepare: turkey (an American bird), oyster dressing, candied yams, Indian maize (corn), cranberry sauce, fresh salad, hot rolls so light they float off the plate, relishes, and of course pumpkin pie and also a generous slice of mince pie. Now, let us put it all in the blender in order to create a real American, ecumenical Thanksgiving dinner. What would we have? Garbage!

Is it not better to have all us come, from the east and the West, the north and the south, and sit at the welcome table, and enjoy the fellowship and the food in true Thanksgiving? Do we not rejoice in the diversity which prevents dullness and in the wide variety of contributions which avoids monotony? Are we not grateful for the hunger—both physical and spiritual—which calls us together? And we are still questing for values!

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