

AMERICAN PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HISTORY

Introduction

Marsden's (*Reformed Theology in America*) three strains in American Reformed tradition:

I. Doctrinalists

Groups

Scotch-Irish

Protestant Reformed (Dutch)

Reformed Baptists

Essence: "Scottish Realism" philosophy; precision of epistemological categories with no gray areas

II. Culturalists

Groups

Dutch: Christian Reformed Church and Reformed Church in America

Francis Schaeffer's influence

Essence: Emphasis on the corporate identity of the church. Church not divorced from social context, but engaged in society and culture.

III. Pietists

Roots in America: New School Theology's growing emphasis on the self-determination of man in the context of individual frontier responsibility

Essence: Emphasis on the individual's spirituality. Revivalism stressing individual holiness.

1600's

I. Ethnic Sources for Reformed Settlements in America

English

“Barrowists” were Puritan Presbyterians, while Brownists became the new world Pilgrims (Plymouth Colony). Salem Colony, 1625, originally was planned by a Westminster Assemblyman as a Presbyterian sanctuary.

Some New England Puritans (Congregationalists) migrate to Connecticut. They establish Presbygational churches in consociations in an attempt to find relief from the tyranny of democratic congregationalism.

Virginia Anglicans with Presbyterian leanings

Jamestown founded in 1607. The “Apostle of Virginia,” Alexander Whitaker, arrives in 1611 and calls for non-conformist Christian workers to join him in the fields of VA. At his death in 1616 he was replaced by a Scotch non-conformist with Presbyterian sympathies who introduced church rule by elders.

The CoE governors of the 1630s clamped down on the non-conformist ministers in VA; they ultimately were expelled in 1642 and found a measure of refuge in Lord Baltimore's MD. There were still Presbyterian interests in the DelMarVa Peninsula when Francis Makemie arrived from Ulster in 1683.

Scotch-Irish of Ulster

Ulster colonized by Scotch under James I and Cromwell

“Throughout the religious persecutions of the seventeenth century, few Scots emigrated to America. Unwelcome in English projects of colonization, they came slowly to the new world. Most of those who did leave Scotland emigrated to the North of Ireland, among whom there were a few Cameronians who adhered to the Covenanted Reformation. Many of these in turn left Ireland for the new world.” —Hutchinson, p. 39

Desire for economic and religious freedom

Laggan Presbytery of North Ireland sends newly ordained Francis Makemie to organize the Presbyterians in the Middle Colonies, 1683

Dutch

settlement of New Amsterdam at approx. same time as Synod of Dort, 1619

commercial motivations were primary. An English Presbyterian Church was not organized in NYC until 1717.

Germans

many destitute Germans drawn to Penn's "Holy Experiment" in early 1700's by the offer of cheap land, low taxes, and freedom of religion

early close relation to Dutch Reformed in old and new worlds

French

Basically, religious refugees (Huguenots) after the Revocation of the Edict of Nantes (1685)

Scattered settlements from the Carolinas to Nova Scotia. Huguenots established a church on Staten Island, NY in 1685.

II. Virginia developments

evangelical vision of Puritan clergy

“...cast aside all cogitation of profit...”

- convert the heathen

- enlarge Christ's kingdom

Rev. Alexander Whitaker, Apostle of Virginia, (1611-1616), son of famous Cambridge divine, William Whitaker.

Puritan laws under enlightened rule (ca. 1620-24) of Sir Edwin Sandys

House of Burgesses established for self-rule

Puritan influence in society

Puritans largely kept in check after the VA Co. becomes a royal colony in 1624. Non-conformist ministers expelled in 1642.

Reformed Revolts in Maryland

During the commonwealth, Puritans attempt to roll back the 1649 Act of Toleration and make Puritanism the sole “religio licita”

1688 power grab to squeeze out RC's

III. Dutch establishment in the middle colonies

Dutch West Indies Co. declared Reformed Religion established in all its colonies

Classis of Amsterdam maintains oversight from Holland for years

Early pastors

Jonas Michaelius, 1628

Everardus Bogardus, 1633

(note Sweet, p. 86, for insights to successful fund-raising)

John Van Mekelenburg: first Protestant missionary to the Indians

end of Dutch independence, 1664

IV. New England

Cotton Mather, who showed [millennial] Presbyterian sympathies later in life, estimated that of the 21,000 Puritan immigrants to New England between 1620 and 1640, 4,000 were Presbyterian.

As Congregationalism became entrenched in Mass., Presbyterians fled the tyranny of theocratic congregationalism. Many Presbyterian Puritans from New England moved south into Connecticut or Long Island. These “southern” Presbyterians then established Presbyterian Churches in Long Island and New Jersey in the late 1600s (e.g., Elizabethtown, New Ark)

by 1700 there were 10-15 Presbyterian Congregations in NJ started by Connecticut Presbyterians

An entire congregation relocated from Mass. to Long Island in 1644 under Richard Denton. Cotton Mather wrote of him, “Though he was little man, yet he had a great soul. His well accomplished mind in his lesser body was an Iliad in a nut-shell. I think he was blind of one eye—nevertheless he was not the least among the seers of Israel.” —Hays, p 64.

After a shaky start, land was purchased from the Indians at Jamaica, NY, where is the oldest extant Presbyterian Church in America. (See Hays, p. 65, for a picture of the building.)

Conservative Massachusetts Proposals, 1705

Instigated by the Mathers who felt Congregationalism, without any checks, had a propensity toward liberalism

decline of Harvard

Brattle Street Church in Boston became anabaptist

A call for Presbygationalism; the est. of regular ministerial conventions or “consociations”

Examine ministerial candidates

Oversight (with teeth) of local congregations

Adopted in Connecticut as Saybrook Platform, 1708

Influence of NY

Always more conservative than Mass.

Set stage for 1801 Plan of Union

4. Indian missions

a. Intentions revealed

1) Charters

- Plymouth: Called for “. . . The conversion of such savages as yet remain wandering in desolation and distress to civil society and the Christian religion”
- Massachusetts Bay: To win the savages “. . . to the knowledge and obedience of the only true God and Savior of mankind”
- Massachusetts Great Seal: An Indian saying “come over and help us”

2) Laws

Plymouth: 1636 laws in support of gospel missions

Massachusetts: 1646 law calling for annual selection of 2 ministers from among their number as missionaries

b. Significant missionaries

1) John Eliot (1604-90)

a) Cambridge graduate with Presbyterian sympathies

b) 1631 - arrived in Boston as a “teacher.” Studied dialects for 15 years before 1st sermon

c) Organized Christian Indian villages along lines of Ex. 18: courts of appeal

d) Translations

– 1663= 1st Bible translation in America

– certain Mather treatises and Cambridge Platform

2) The Mayhews of Martha's Vineyard Island