

PARALLEL GUIDE 1

Denominations in North America

Summary

At the end of EfM Year Three we touched on the arrival of Christianity in the Americas. In this lesson we review in greater detail the period during which the colonists brought Christianity to North America, describing some of the many denominations that took root in the English colonies. Each one had its beginnings in the long history of Europe and showed its heritage accordingly, as children resemble parents. Transplanted, however, none found the climate in the New World quite the same as it was at home. For many, the new conditions brought about some drastic changes; all the denominations were altered in one way or another.

Learning Objectives

- Outline the rise of religious denominations in North America
- Define “halfway covenant”
- Describe the problem of third generation Massachusetts Congregationalism
- Cite the circumstances that led to the founding of Yale College
- Describe the function of vestries in colonial Anglican parishes
- Identify the S.P.G. and the S.P.C.K.
- Identify Henry Muhlenberg

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. What do you perceive to be the difference between a “sect” and a “church”?
2. Find a map of the English colonies in North America and locate the various areas of settlement and new religious groups. What factors did geography play in colonial developments?
3. What factors do you think help to produce religious divisions and the rise of new religious movements? Is there one spiritual experience that can be a standard for all?

Preparing for Your Seminar

Make yourself a list of some of the factors that arose during the colonial period that helped form your denomination, your diocese or regional ministry, and your parish or local church. Some parts of North America were settled much earlier than others. How did the development of denominational structures influence the spread of the church to other parts of the world? Bring this to your seminar as fruitful material for a larger discussion around the issues of colonization and the development of religion in a new world.

Additional Sources

Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

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Norman Knowles. *Stepping Stones: A Short History of Christianity in Canada*. (Kelowna: EfM Canada, 2001)

DENOMINATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

At this point we take a step back to pick up developments in the North American colonies that were not detailed in Year Three. These developments provided the background for the growth of denominations during the nineteenth century and the divisions which underlie the growth of religious movements through the first half of the twentieth century.

Norse explorers and settlers brought Christianity to North America around 1000 CE, but it was not until the 15th and 16th centuries that European rulers financed voyages to seek new lands rich in resources and in markets for trade. They declared sovereignty over the territories their explorers discovered. Religion followed exploration, with missionaries ready to minister to settlers and eager to spread the message of the gospel to new converts. In the Americas, Spain and Portugal divided up lands along a line of longitude. Henry VII of England sent Giovanni Caboto (John Cabot) to look for a northwest passage to Asia. In 1497-1498, Caboto claimed Newfoundland and Nova Scotia for England, and settlers followed by 1610. In 1578, Robert Wollfall, an Anglican priest traveling with Martin Frobisher's third Arctic expedition, celebrated the first record Anglican Communion service in North America. In 1534, a French expedition under Jacques Cartier landed at Gaspé on the Atlantic coast of North America, traveled to what are now Quebec and Montreal, and claimed the land for France. A French colony was set up in 1604 at Port Royale, and missionaries were sent to minister to colonists and to convert the aboriginal people.

The Puritans, arriving in 1620 to start the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies, have been hailed in popular American culture as advocates of religious freedom in the New World. They were indeed victims of intolerance in England, and they left in search of a haven where they would be free to practice the "purified" Christianity that was forbidden by an oppressive partnership of church and state. This did not mean, however, that they intended to provide such freedom in the new land. The *Cambridge Platform* drafted in 1648 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, stated principles for the Congregational Church of the Bay Colony that again melded church and state into a single theocratic government. Only the "elect" could occupy official positions.

Congregation- alists

Under this criterion a question immediately arose: who was among the elect and who was not? When Augustine of Hippo developed his doctrine of predestination (saying that God elects some people to receive his saving grace, while the rest are left to share the general lot of sinful humanity), he was arguing against the Donatists, who claimed they were a church made up only of the righteous—people without sin. He told them their attempts to weed sinners out of the church were misguided; the task of sifting wheat from tares would be done by God. In the meantime, the church is a mixed body in which only God knows those who have been predestined to glory.

The framers of the *Cambridge Platform* thought otherwise. God, they said, would give a recognizable sign of election to those chosen to be saved. They would undergo some kind of spiritual experience that would attest to it. Without such a sign, the community could not accept anyone considered to be “regenerate” to be counted among the elect people of the New Covenant.

The Half-Way Covenant

The first settlers had no difficulty meeting these requirements; they had been convinced of their own election before setting sail for the New World. But what about the next generation? Offspring of believing adults, they were “federally holy” holy by association with their parents—and so qualified for baptism as infants. On reaching adulthood, they were expected to pass the test of election by testifying to a spiritual experience of their own. Any who could not do so were considered members of a halfway covenant, eligible to remain within the community and participate in the worship of the church but not to receive communion at the Lord’s Supper. They were not allowed to hold any religious or civil office.

In the third generation the problem became acute: were children of halfway covenanted parents to be regarded as “federally holy” and duly baptized? If not, the proportion of true believers would probably lessen—perhaps even dwindle to a remnant too small to administer the theocratic commonwealth. On the other hand, if the standards of election were lowered to permit the baptism of such children, would not the church itself lose its holiness?

There seemed no satisfactory way out of the dilemma, so they decided to take their chances on baptizing the dubious infants of the “halfway covenant.” A synod called in 1662 settled the matter. Once the first step was taken to lower the standards, others inevitably followed. People discussed changing the rules about participation in the Lord’s Supper; it should be available to everyone, not only to those who had received experiential signs of election. All children of the covenant, it was argued, have a germ of grace, however small it might be. None should be deprived of the spiritual food necessary to nourish this germ and allow it to grow to maturity.

Brattle and Leverett

The next step was taken in Cambridge in 1699 at Harvard College, the institution founded in 1636 to educate a continuing succession of learned clergy such as those the Puritans so greatly valued. Two Harvard tutors, William Brattle and William Leverett, stirred up a hornet’s nest with some unorthodox views about spiritual experience. Declaring it was too subjective a phenomenon to determine church membership, they started up a congregation that admitted anyone who wished to join. Such an action amounted to defiance of the fundamental principle the Massachusetts Bay theocracy rested on. It could not go unchallenged.

By this time, however, London had already revoked the colony’s original charter. Massachusetts had become a religious tyranny, and the crown intervened to put a stop to its errant intolerance. Authority rested now in the hands of the royal governor. Brattle and Leverett appealed to him when church officials attempted to discipline them; he sustained their plea. The church that had formerly governed the colony was now powerless to discipline its own members.

In Connecticut, conservative Puritans took steps to avoid a similar fate. They founded Yale College at New Haven in 1701, where the old standards were taught and clergy were trained to uphold them.

Connecticut-style Puritans needed to do more, however, than simply purify doctrine. They had to modify their strictly congregational polity for disciplining a congregation that chose to dissent. Accordingly, in 1708 they issued the *Saybrook Platform*. It provided for a “consociation” of all the congregations within each county, and a General Association made up of representatives from the entire colony. This marked a move toward a presbyterian type of polity, with synods of presbyters having oversight of the congregations. Yet each local congregation was kept autonomous by being allowed to discipline its own members. Membership in the county consociations and the General Association was to be entirely voluntary on the part of each congregation.

The Baptist movement, in the New England colonies as in England, was an offshoot of Puritanism. Some Puritans were not satisfied with the notion of “federal holiness,” adopted by the Congregationalists. The faith required for baptism, they reasoned, must be the candidate’s own, not that of the parents. Suggesting a “halfway covenant” for baptized people who cannot show signs of saving faith seemed a clumsy way of solving a problem that should not have arisen in the first place. Instead, they decided to hold off baptism until a mature affirmation of faith might be made.

Baptists

When Baptist sentiments first began to be expressed in Massachusetts, the theocracy was still in power; dissent was rigorously suppressed. Public whipping was not uncommon. Four Quakers were hanged in Boston for professing their unorthodox faith. One who dared challenge the Massachusetts establishment by embracing the Baptist “heresy” was Roger Williams. They banished him from the colony.

On a tract of land lying between the Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay colonies at the head of Narragansett Bay, Williams joined with some other refugees in 1639 to found the Providence Plantations and to form a Baptist congregation there. Williams was a quick-tempered man, with strong opinions and little talent for working with others. He soon dropped out of the Baptist congregation and announced himself a Seeker. Unrealistic ideals convinced him that no organized religious body was worthy to be called a true church. Not until God intervenes again in history, he said, will the true church appear on earth. He remained a leader of the new colony of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations, however, and he continued to insist that complete religious freedom was the only way to avoid religious tyranny.

Meanwhile, other Baptists took advantage of the freedom he extended. John Clarke founded a Baptist congregation in Newport, a seaport on the island of Aquidneck at the southern end of Narragansett Bay. Clarke was a man of calmer disposition than Williams, and through writing and organizing capability he made Rhode Island a center of Baptist activity.

Rhode Island was not the only colony where Baptists flourished. They struck out from England and New England into New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. In 1707 the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed; through its encouragement and support the Baptist form of Puritan congregational polity spread into Connecticut, New York, Maryland, and Virginia. In 1764, the Association established the College of Rhode Island, later called Brown University, as the principal school for the education of Baptist ministers.

The Church of England

The course of Anglicanism as the established church in the southern colonies was different from that of Congregationalist New England. The Congregationalist Puritans settled Massachusetts deliberately intending to make it a theocracy. The Virginia colonists, on the other hand, had no religious motivations. As the first of the colonies to be settled with express endorsement from the crown, they inherited the Anglican establishment as a matter of government policy. Chaplains were appointed by the Virginia Company to attend to the spiritual needs of the original settlers, but little was done to continue supplying priests from England while the colony grew.

In England, both the monarchs and the church hierarchy embraced the ideal that the Church of England would contain all the citizens of the realm. All England was divided into parishes. Each had its parish church, and everyone who lived within the parish boundaries was considered a member. The rise of dissenting groups had made this ideal more a fiction than a reality even in England, but when the parish system was installed in Virginia, it proved to be even more unrealistic.

The way of life in the colonies was agrarian; there were only a very few towns. Parishes were sparsely settled and their boundaries extended over large areas. Clergy were scarce, and often not of the highest quality. Anglicanism proved to have an almost fatal flaw built into its own political structure. It could not provide a suitable ordained ministry of its own. Because of its episcopal polity (an organization of the church requiring bishops to be its head), however, the Church of England in the colonies had to depend on the mother country to supply priests, for no bishops were sent to serve in the New World.

The colonies remained without bishops because of the organizational system in England. Bishops were appointed for dioceses that already existed. To think of ordaining a bishop as a missionary to a remote outpost where the church did not yet exist was beyond imagining. It would have seemed like sending a prince into exile. The bishop of London was given nominal episcopal oversight of the churches in the colonies, but no way was provided for him to exercise it. The vacuum of leadership prompted struggling Anglican parishes in America to borrow the congregationalist practice of placing local authority in the hands of a lay board of directors they called a vestry. Such lay authority had been unheard of in England. In spite of the Protestant influence, the Church of England sustained its polity and remained as hierarchical after the Reformation as it had been before. Authority resided in the bishops, to be delegated in part to parish priests but never to the laity. Lay persons could exert considerable influence on the church through their theological and spiritual qualities, as well as the power of the purse, which was felt on many occasions. But the authority to govern rested elsewhere.

The task of procuring clergy for the church fell to the vestries. They sent countless appeals to England—even sometimes offering special bonuses to priests who would come to the colonies. Often, however, those who would leave a comfortable post in England for the uncertainties of the New World turned out to be incompetent. Although some were inspired with a missionary vocation and served faithfully under the trying conditions overseas, most fell far below the expectations of the congregations who called them. Rather than turn their authority in the parish over to them, many vestries made use of a legal technicality to keep it in their own hands.

Under Virginia colonial law, the legislative assembly installed a priest as rector of a parish when the vestry sent them official notification that they had called him to that office. Once installed, the priest could not be removed as rector except for the gravest of charges, and then only by a long and difficult process. Many vestries simply refused to send the official notification, keeping the priest on a temporary basis indefinitely. A priest could hardly look with enthusiasm at the prospect of being a hired employee of the vestry, subject to dismissal at any time. Under such circumstances a call to the American mission field sounded even less attractive.

In 1693 the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg opened its doors to train local students for the Anglican ministry. This venture proved a less satisfactory solution to the problem of raising up an indigenous Anglican clergy than Harvard and Yale had provided for the Congregationalists. Graduates still had to make the long and expensive voyage to England for ordination. By the time the college began to operate, vestries and the clergy alike had begun to have second thoughts about an American episcopate. Membership on a vestry had become the prerogative of a newly-emerging American aristocracy which was reluctant to see its position of authority and prestige weakened by the presence of a bishop. Priests who had become accustomed to complete freedom from supervision were in no hurry to place themselves under such authority again. Under such conditions the Anglican Church fared poorly. Even in New England the tight control the Congregational Church exercised was unable to prevent groups from dissenting. In the southern colonies, where official establishment carried little weight and no attempts were made to prohibit other groups from founding congregations, non-Anglican churches attracted more members than the Church of England.

It was the low condition of spiritual life, however, more than small membership rolls, that most upset devout members of the church. When the royal couple, William and Mary, took the throne and tried to foster the Anglican establishment in the colonies, the bishop of London asserted his jurisdiction more firmly. He appointed certain resident American priests his commissaries and delegated authority to them. James Blair in Virginia and Thomas Bray in Maryland served well in this capacity. Their authority was always limited, however, and they could not ordain clergy.

Lay people were seeking opportunities to educate themselves for mission and Christian service. In 1698, Thomas Bray founded the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge (S.P.C.K.) for “promoting Religion and Learning in any part of His Majesty’s Plantations abroad, and to provide catechetical Libraries and free

schools in the parishes at home.” In 1701, as a result of Thomas Bray’s persistent urging, the archbishop of Canterbury lent his support to the foundation in England of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, soon to be universally recognized in the colonies by the initials S.P.G. To the S.P.G. goes the credit for pulling the Anglican church in America out of its low estate. The Society recruited able priests in England and provided them with adequate stipends.

The extent of the S.P.G.’s work was impressive. The missionaries were not content simply to supply the already existing parishes in Virginia or those that had been established in the Carolinas and Georgia under the new policy of William and Mary’s reign. They invaded the hostile territory of New England and successfully challenged the Congregationalist monopoly there. In New York the token assertion of Anglican establishment took on a new life. Even in Quaker Pennsylvania and the largely Dutch Reformed territory of New Jersey, the Church of England’s presence became noticeable. While its appeal was usually limited to the landed aristocracy, and its numbers were still small, Anglicanism recovered from the immediate danger of dying for want of clerical leadership. The S. P. G. began work in Newfoundland in 1703, and sent out missionaries to Nova Scotia and later to other parts of British North America (now Canada.)

The Presbyterian Church

The Calvinist form of the Reformed tradition had taken root in Scotland in the sixteenth century under John Knox’s leadership. The Church of Scotland, the Kirk, was presbyterian in polity. The presbyters of local congregations within an area comprised a presbytery to govern ecclesiastical affairs within the region, and the presbyteries sent representatives to the synod, which had oversight over the larger region it covered.

Calvinism was not always presbyterian in its polity, however. The Congregationalists of New England were Calvinist in their theology, even though they chose to resist any polity that removed ultimate authority from the local congregation.

In the American colonies, the presbyterian movement contained three major strains:

- 1) former New England Congregationalists who decided they preferred a presbyterian discipline to what they were experiencing there;
- 2) new immigrants from Scotland or northern Ireland; and
- 3) the Dutch Reformed Church that had brought Presbyterianism to the New Netherlands before the English acquired it.

Of these, the Scotch-Irish immigration was the largest.

One of the earliest workers in the Presbyterian Church was Francis Makemie, whose Scottish ancestors had settled in northern Ireland. Joining the migration to the New World, Makemie landed in New England, and soon devoted himself to spreading Presbyterian Calvinism throughout the northern colonies under the sponsorship of the United Brethren, a London-based society. He was instrumental in forming the first American presbytery at Philadelphia in 1706. By the time of his death in 1708 he had founded several Presbyterian churches in the middle colonies.

It was not until after 1720, however, that the Scotch-Irish immigration began in earnest. As the new settlers spread along the Appalachian range from New York through the Shenandoah valley into the southern mountains, the Presbyterian Church grew with them. By 1716, only ten years after the formation of the Philadelphia Presbytery, Philadelphia became the site of the Philadelphia Synod, comprised of the presbyteries of Philadelphia, Long Island, and New Castle, Delaware.

In Connecticut, the voluntary associations of Congregationalist churches—formed to preserve the orthodoxy that seemed to be losing ground in Massachusetts—looked more like Presbyterian polity than the earlier independence of New England congregationalism. Scotch-Irish immigrants to that colony found it easy to establish their Presbyterian congregations virtually unnoticed. Connecticut Congregationalists and their new neighbors shared the same Reformed theology and considered themselves members of the same communion. Not until they found themselves sufficiently numerous to form presbyteries did it seem necessary to identify themselves as Presbyterians distinct from the Congregationalist General Association.

Of all the Christian groups that came to the colonies from England, the Quakers found the least hospitable welcome. When the first Quaker missionaries arrived in 1656, Rhode Island alone let them set up their meeting houses—so named to show they rejected all religious buildings or institutions. Convinced that through the gift of the Holy Spirit they possessed the inner light of Christ in their souls, they dispensed with all versions of formal worship, meeting together in silence until one of their members was moved by the Spirit to speak words of truth to the congregation. Although this simple faith made their spiritual lives joyful and instilled a degree of honesty and simplicity many other Christians lacked, their missionary zeal struck members of other churches as excessive and irritating. Quakers criticized the hypocrisy and idolatry they saw in others, and even interrupted people at worship in non-Quaker churches, thundering their denunciations and pronouncements from outside. It is not surprising that they met with reprisals—including the penalty Mary Clark suffered in Boston—twenty stripes with a three corded whip laid on with fury. Even in colonies less oppressive than the early Massachusetts theocracy, they were frequently physically abused. As time went by, however, their teaching earned them a little more tolerance from the other churches. By 1674 the Friends, as they called themselves, had been accepted as odd but harmless. With the founding of Pennsylvania as a Quaker colony in 1681, immigrants from England swelled their numbers. At the close of the seventeenth century, they ranked as the fifth largest denomination in the American colonies.

The Quakers

Large numbers could not ensure lasting success, however. Without a formal liturgy to carry their expression of worship, second-generation Quakers found it hard to sustain the enthusiasm and commitment of their Spirit-filled parents. Some grew unwilling to accept the plain style of life and dress and the strong pacifist stand their doctrine required. It marked them off from their neighbors too much. Members started to dwindle and lessen their commitment. By mid-century the movement had

The Roman Catholic Church

subsided into a quiet, sedate group much diminished in size and fervor. Nonetheless, as “the friendly persuasion,” Quakers continue to exert a beneficial moral influence on American society, even to the present day.

Throughout the early colonial period in British North America, Roman Catholicism was a minority religion. The old antipathies lingering from conflicts between English monarchs and the papacy crossed the ocean with the colonists. Few English Catholics could be persuaded to emigrate even when Lord Baltimore founded his Maryland colony and sponsored a ship to the New World in 1633. By 1700, Roman Catholics could be found only in Maryland, and among a few individuals and families in Pennsylvania and New York.

To the north of the Thirteen Colonies, New France established settlements with French Roman Catholic missionaries and nuns building churches and ministering to the needs of the settlers and the aboriginal peoples. In 1713 the Treaty of Utrecht between Britain and France gave Britain control of Acadia, a colony of French-speaking Roman Catholics. Tensions increased between the Acadians and the British, as by mid-century, the British were again at war in Europe with France. When the war ended, the British increased immigration to Nova Scotia of English settlers, and German and French Protestant settlers. Some German settlers became Anglicans, but some founded Lutheran congregations. In 1755, the British expelled the Acadians from Nova Scotia. They were taken to the territory of Louisiana, which remained in French hands until 1803. The word “Cajun” is an adaptation of “Acadian.” Settlers from New England, mainly Old Light Congregationalists, took up the land vacated by the Acadians. In 1758, Quebec fell and control of New France passed to Britain. British settlement increased the strength of non-Roman Catholic numbers in this part of Britain’s colonies. But, to this day, almost half of all Canadians are Roman Catholic, either of French Canadian origin or of later immigration from Europe and other parts of the world.

Roman Catholics in the new colonies found themselves with many of the same problems that beset Anglicans. For several years they had no bishops, and some parishes adopted the “vestry” system for their governance. Although this movement was rapidly quelled, the general tone of egalitarianism and antiauthoritarianism that characterized the colonies influenced the Catholics, most of whom were from relatively well-to-do backgrounds. In 1789, Rome even permitted the first American bishop, John Carroll (1735-1815), to be elected by the clergy, a practice that did not continue. It was not until well after the colonial period that the Catholic countries of Europe yielded immigrants to swell their numbers.

Church & Sect

Some sociologists of religion use the words “church” and “sect” to distinguish between two types of religious institutions. Church refers to a religious body that tries, so far as possible, to include all members of society within its ranks. To do this, it makes its requirements for membership as broad as it can, within the limits of its essential self-understanding. A sect, on the other hand, is more exclusive. It accepts members only from those who adhere to particular beliefs and practices that mark it off—often in protest—from the prevailing church. Applying these meanings of the words, the groups that comprised the radical reformation were sects.

The distinction between sect and church is a relative one. Some of the Puritans, for example, withdrew from the Anglican establishment and became dissenters. Under the circumstances prevailing in England, they displayed the characteristics of a sect. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on the other hand, the same Puritans were a church; in relation to them the Baptists were sectarian. As the New England Puritans discovered, when a sect becomes a church, the features that set it apart from society grow less distinct.

In Germany after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) living conditions were difficult for almost everyone. The land had been laid waste, the economy all but destroyed. Among those most bitterly affected by bad times were the small radical sects. Isolated from the mainstream of German society by their sectarian exclusiveness, they were allowed little share in the meager resources that society was able to muster. When William Penn issued urgent appeals for settlers, three German sects responded to his invitation: the Mennonites, the Dunkers, and the Schwenkfelders.

German Sects

The Mennonites were followers of Menno Simons, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist. They espoused pacifism, lived a life of austere morality, and practiced believers' baptism. Accustomed to living apart from society's worldly temptations, they had no desire to settle in the midst of the growing population along the American coastline. They trekked deep into the interior of Pennsylvania and established a self-sufficient community in what is now Lancaster County.

The Dunkers were German Baptists. An offshoot of the seventeenth-century Pietist movement in German Lutheranism, they adopted Anabaptist views about believers' baptism and insisted on immersion as the only proper method of administering it—hence their nickname, Dunkers. They settled with other German immigrants at Germantown, near Philadelphia, “the city of brotherly love”.

The Schwenkfelders were Spiritualists. They emphasized the Holy Spirit's inspiration rather than the written word of the scriptures. Hounded from place to place in Germany for generations, they found refuge, like the Moravians, on Count von Zinzendorf's Saxon estate in 1720. In 1734 they came to Philadelphia. The Quakers invited them to join their English brand of Spiritualism, but the Schwenkfelders preferred to retain their ethnic identity. You can find further information on the Moravians in chapter 29.

Unlike these smaller sects, who migrated to the New World as entire communities, most of the German immigrants of pre-revolutionary America came alone or as families. Most were refugees, made homeless by the economic depression in Germany and torn from their ancestral roots. Some signed themselves into indentured service, contracting to work in the new country as servants or apprentices to a tradesman. Under such conditions few felt any close ties to the Lutheran faith of their homeland, and even fewer could have aspired to found or lead new Lutheran congregations. While shiploads of Germans were coming to America, only a few German Lutheran congregations existed to serve them. To remedy this, Lutheran Pietists at the University of Halle subsidized the first active missionary enterprise among the German-American Lutheran population. They sent Henry Melchior Muhlenberg to Philadelphia in 1742.

Under his leadership, seven Lutheran congregations were founded, staffed with ministers sent from Halle in response to Muhlenberg's pleas. In 1748 he formed the first Lutheran Synod in America, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania.

Even the most successful denominational enterprises failed to reach most of the settlers' lives. Except for the few groups that made the pilgrimage to the New World for explicitly religious motives, most of the settlers were independent-minded, self-sufficient adventurers seeking either to make their fortunes from the opportunities of the new American society, or at least to survive within broader economic limits than at home. Religion was not a very important aspect of most colonials' lives. According to some estimates, no more than ten percent of the colonists were active in the affairs of any church. The contrast was striking between the hopes for a new and vigorous Christian commonwealth that had inspired the Plymouth Pilgrims and the reality that had emerged a century and a half later in the American colonies. It offered little encouragement for the future of Christianity in the New World.