

Church History
Lesson 36 - Colonial Expansion and the Great Awakening
(Chapters 24-25)

Introduction

- The experience of Colonial expansion, especially in what became the United States, had a major impact on both Church and world history. Thus, it is important for us to understand this series of events to understand how they affect all subsequent history in the Church.
- The major event of the Great Awakening also had long-lasting consequences for the founding of America, the Church in America and England, and the Church around the world.
- What happened in these events? What are the major things we should understand about them?

1. Introduction to Colonial expansion

- 1.1. With the modern discovery of the 'new world' by Columbus in 1492, an era of exploration and colonial expansion began. This continued throughout the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries.
- 1.2. The majority of Central and South America (and initially Florida and the Southwest and California) were settled by Roman Catholic countries such as Spain and Portugal. France, which was also Roman Catholic, expanded into Canada and the Mississippi Valley, but these settlements were always of a more contested nature.
- 1.3. In the America's. The major Protestant country expanding into the America's was Great Britain. They set up colonies along the Eastern seaboard of what is now the US.

2. The British Colonies in America

2.1. Virginia

- 2.1.1. British expansion began in what is now known as Virginia. After a failed attempt led by Sir Walter Raleigh in 1584, the British created a permanent settlement at Jamestown (named after King James) in 1607. The group of 105 settlers did have an Anglican chaplain, and intended to offer services to both the English settlers as well as the natives. However, the main purposes were really economic. The thought was that through trade with the native Americans and also agriculture, the colony would create good profits for the stockholders of the Virginia Company.
- 2.1.2. This was a time of great Puritan influence in Britain, and that effect can be seen in the laws in Virginia. Initially, the laws in Virginia required attendance at worship two times each week, strict observance of the Lord's Day, and imposed penalties for profanity and immodest dress. Furthermore, initially the Church of England was the only church allowed. However, by the 1620's James exerted direct influence in the colony, and he reduced the influence of the Puritans, for he disliked them.
- 2.1.3. Another major event was the discovery of the profitability of growing tobacco. This became the most lucrative venture in Virginia. However, tobacco production was labor intensive, and this labor need was met with the introduction of African slaves. This was to become common through the

British colonies, especially in the South, and would have major consequences which last until today.

- 2.1.4. As time passed, the original Puritan zeal of the colonists in Virginia subsided. Even when Puritanism reached its high water mark of influence in the middle of the 17th century, it had little effect in Virginia. The colonists continued to be members of the Church of England, but theirs was a more aristocratic form of Anglicanism, which took a back seat to economic concerns.
- 2.1.5. One major area where this may be seen is in the lack of effort to convert slaves. Ancient Christian laws and tradition forbade one Christian from owning another as a slave, and many thought those laws still valid. This meant that if slaves became baptized Christians they would have to be set free. Thus, most owners did not have slaves baptized. By 1667, however, a law was passed that stated that if a slave converted and was baptized it did not require them to be set free. Simply put, economic concerns and zeal were greater than religious zeal and concerns.
- 2.1.6. Over time, the Church of England came to be associated with the more wealthy, aristocratic families. Many within the lower classes began looking to dissident movements such as the Baptists and Quakers. Initially, this was repressed, and many simply migrated to other colonies such as Maryland and the Carolina's which had greater religious freedom.

2.2. New England

- 2.2.1. In the colonies of what became known as New England, Puritanism had a much greater foothold. This was especially true in Massachusetts, which was initially settled at Plymouth in 1620.
- 2.2.2. The Puritans who came to Plymouth had been very strict Puritans who had left England for Holland to escape persecution for their separatist tendencies. However, when they saw their children losing their English heritage, they decided risking the dangers of establishing a new colony in the seeming wilds of America to be worth it. They initially planned to settle just north of Virginia but were driven northward by a storm and thus ended up in what we now know as Massachusetts.
- 2.2.3. Because they were not in Virginia, they drew up a new compact (the Mayflower Compact) in which they committed themselves to obey "just and equal laws" passed by their own government, rather than the King. The group almost met with disaster the first winter, but those who survived learned quickly from the Natives, and established a permanent colony.
- 2.2.4. Eventually, a group of Puritans in England created the Massachusetts Bay Company. Through an omission in the original charter, the headquarters, and thus ruling authority, of the company did not have to be in England. By settling in Massachusetts they were able to avoid interference from the British government. This group were not strict separatists like the Pilgrims in Plymouth, but were rather Puritans who still wanted to be part of the Church of England.
- 2.2.5. Around the same time, Archbishop Laud began his repressive measures against Puritans, which led to over 10,000 of them heading for Massachusetts, and also founding the new colony of Connecticut. Most of these new settlers were thus coming for religious more than economic

reasons. This wave did not subside until the Puritans won the Civil War and thus ended persecution against Puritans in England.

2.2.6. Theological controversies and affairs in New England

2.2.6.1. Controversies over water baptism and covenant membership

2.2.6.1.1. The Puritans in New England intended to set up a holy commonwealth, ruled by the laws of God. To do this, one must be baptized as an infant, for one could not be a citizen of a holy commonwealth unless they were baptized.

2.2.6.1.2. However, the Puritans stressed the need for a true conversion experience. Over time this created the difficulty of people who had been baptized as infants and were therefore members of the commonwealth, but who had no testimony of conversion. What should be done with their children?

2.2.6.1.3. Out of this quandary arose the "half-way" covenant. This idea stipulated that the adults who had been baptized but never personally converted were half-way members in the covenant. This allowed their children to be baptized, even though the parents were not full-fledged members of the church. This idea was unique to the Puritans in New England.

2.2.6.1.4. Some people looked at the same quandary and decided that the Baptists were correct - water baptism should be reserved for those who had already professed faith. However, such groups were persecuted by the wider church in New England and often forced to flee.

2.2.6.2. The Salem witch trials

2.2.6.2.1. Witchcraft had long been a concern in Massachusetts and three people had been executed for being witches in the first 70 years of the colony.

2.2.6.2.2. In 1692 this concern arose to a fever pitch for a short period of time. Some young girls stated that witchcraft was being widely practiced in Salem. In the hysteria twenty people - fourteen women and six men - were hanged. Several others died in prison.

2.2.6.2.3. Eventually, however, accusations were leveled against respected members of the clergy, wealthy merchants, and even the governor's wife! At that point, the authorities decided the affair had gone too far, and stopped the investigations.

2.2.6.2.4. Twenty years after these events the government of Massachusetts decided the entire affair had been a travesty and great injustice, and ordered indemnifications to be paid to the families of the victims. However, the affair left a long-lasting impression of the inflexibility and superstitions of the Puritans.

2.2.6.3. The Mathers

2.2.6.3.1. The two greatest theologians in New England in these early years were Increase Mather, and his son Cotton Mather. They did write on witchcraft, and also how to conduct trials regarding the matter - and then condemned the miscarriage of justice in

the actual trials. But their main influence was in theology in general. Cotton himself wrote over 400 books and pamphlets. They were thus very influential in the development of New England Puritanism.

2.2.7. Missions to the Indians

2.2.7.1. Many of the settlers seemed to show little interest in reaching their Indian neighbors with the Gospel. Some did however.

2.2.7.2. The missionary work among the Indians included translating the Scripture into their languages, teaching them to read, and establishing new villages for Indian Christians.

2.2.7.3. Unfortunately, when a war broke out in 1675 over the mistreatment of the Indians by English settlers, the Indians in these villages were treated as enemies, even if they took no side in the war. When the settlers won the war, Indians were sold as slaves, and many were shipped away as far as possible. This entire affair effectively destroyed the missionary work done to that point among the Indians.

2.3. Rhode Island

2.3.1. Because the Puritans in New England did not allow other Christian groups to exist within their boundaries, many fled to other regions and began new settlements.

2.3.2. One of the most important people in this situation was Roger Williams. He originally came to Massachusetts in 1631. He refused to become a pastor in Boston when offered, but began to criticize the practice of having the civil magistrate enforce commandments that had to do with an individual's relationship to God. Furthermore, he declared that the colonists had stolen land from the Indians, and thus their entire enterprise was unjust and illegal.

2.3.3. Williams eventually became a pastor in Salem, but when he tried to have his church secede from the official church, he was expelled from the colony.

2.3.4. Williams eventually settled with some others in Narragansett, where he purchased land from the Indians and began the colony of Providence. This colony was founded on the principle of freedom of religion. Williams said this freedom was central to true worship, which could not be forced by law. Thus, the colony had a strict separation of Church and state. This idea was well ahead of its time, but became an important idea for the founding of the United States.

2.3.5. Others soon came to the area, mainly drawn for religious freedom. However, the groups lacked legal recognition, so in 1644 Williams traveled to England and secured legal recognition for the Colony of Rhode Island and Providence Plantations, which were to be governed as a democracy.

2.3.6. Williams himself eventually became increasingly radical and unorthodox (embracing the idea that Indians could be saved without becoming Christians, and declaring all churches were corrupt). However, the Baptists in Rhode Island continued to grow and spread.

2.3.7. Among the Baptists, two groups developed. The General Baptists were Arminian in their beliefs, teaching that Christ died for all humans generally, while the Particular Baptists were Calvinistic, teaching that Christ's death was in particular for the elect. Overall, the General Baptists grew more quickly,

especially as democracy took hold, as the democratic spirit of equality viewed the Arminian theology as more egalitarian and in line with growing democratic ideals.

2.3.8. As religious tolerance took root in more and more colonies, the Baptist movement continued to grow and gain influence. At one time, even the President of Harvard became a Baptist! They eventually became more numerous and influential in America than in England or elsewhere in Europe.

2.4. Maryland

2.4.1. In 1632, Charles I, granted Cecil Calvert, Lord Baltimore, rights to create a colony that had earlier been part of Virginia. Lord Baltimore was Roman Catholic, and this move was part of Charles' policy of seeking Roman Catholic support. Since it was not politically feasible to have a Roman Catholic colony, it was decided that Maryland would allow religious freedom.

2.4.2. Initially, the upper class in Maryland were mainly Roman Catholic, while the servants and lower classes were mainly Protestant. This led to some problems, and when James II was overthrown as King, it was decreed that Anglicanism was the official religion in Maryland.

2.5. Mid-Atlantic States

2.5.1. The areas that became Pennsylvania, Delaware, New Jersey, and New York did not initially serve as refuges for any particular religious group. In Pennsylvania, Quakers were the initial group, but religious tolerance was granted to all groups. Since Delaware was originally part of Pennsylvania the same practice was found there.

2.5.2. New Jersey was more split, with eastern New Jersey being influenced by New England Puritanism, while western New Jersey was more influenced by the Quakers of Pennsylvania. This led to general religious tolerance. However, over time the tendency of many wealthy people in New Jersey to own slaves caused a rift with the Quakers in Pennsylvania who were strict abolitionists.

2.5.3. New York was originally founded by Dutch Reformed immigrants, but in time became an English colony. When this happened it eventually became more identified with Anglicanism.

2.6. Summary

2.6.1. From this brief overview it can be seen that the religious situation in the colonies was quite varied. Although many of the colonies originally had a specific favored Church, the drive for religious tolerance grew because of several clear factors.

2.6.1.1. First, it was virtually impossible to enforce religious dogma since people could simply move to a new area outside the control of religious and civil authorities. This was a new situation not experienced in Europe where no new territories existed.

2.6.1.2. Second, a growing sense of unity between the colonies fostered religious tolerance. As they worked with one another, it became more difficult to villainize the rival sect.

2.6.1.3. Third, the experience of the Thirty Years War and similar conflicts was causing many to become weary of religious intolerance.

- 2.6.1.4. Fourth, over time, the religious fervor of many began to cool over time as economic concerns, rather than religious ones, became the driving force.
- 2.6.1.5. Fifth, there was a growing idea of religious freedom in its own right. This was initially seen especially among the Baptists and Quakers, but began to spread to others as well.
- 2.6.1.6. Sixth, the Great Awakening served to bring a sense of unity among the many different groups who experienced this mighty outpouring of the Spirit.

3. The Great Awakening

3.1. Introduction

- 3.1.1. The Great Awakening refers to a series of revivals and awakenings throughout the English colonies and in Great Britain. During this time, many Christians saw their faith set on fire, and many lost were brought into the kingdom.
- 3.1.2. This movement renewed and strengthened the church, fostered unity among various groups and the colonies themselves, catapulted several leaders into international fame, and ultimately led to the founding of new denominations and schools. It also had a profound shaping effect on the English colonies in America.
- 3.1.3. However, the Awakening also created controversy, as some rejected it as mere “enthusiasm” while others saw it as a clear move of God.

3.2. Jonathan Edwards

- 3.2.1. In many ways the Great Awakening began through the teaching and ministry of Jonathan Edwards. He was the pastor of a Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts. Edwards was a man of massive intellect, great personal piety, and rigorous discipline. In 1734 the first signs of revival and awakening swept into his parish at Northampton. This new move of the Spirit was accompanied by great emotion and even unusual physical reactions by many people - even though Edwards himself was not an emotional preacher and did not encourage such responses. The fires of revival spread throughout the region and spread into Connecticut. Some did not approve of these reactions and spoke against this new revival and awakening.
- 3.2.2. The initial revival and awakening lasted about three years and then seemed to subside. However Edwards wrote about the event in 1737 in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*. This work helped spread the zeal for awakening to other places, including England where leaders such as John Wesley would begin to seek God for revival and awakening in their own ministries.
- 3.2.3. Furthermore, Edwards began to speak in other locations. In fact, his famous (though not typical for him) sermon *Sinners In the Hands of An Angry God* was preached at Enfield Connecticut on July 8, 1741. Through these writings and travels Edwards was a major force in spreading the fires of the Great Awakening.
- 3.2.4. We will cover Jonathan Edwards life, ministry, and writings in the next lesson.

3.3. John Wesley

- 3.3.1. John Wesley was born in 1703, the fifteenth of nineteen children of Samuel and Susannah Wesley. His father was an Anglican minister, and his remarkable mother was the daughter of a nonconformist minister. Susannah was very dedicated to teaching her children the faith and raising them in a strict but loving manner.
- 3.3.2. When John was six their home burned down, and he was trapped inside. However, he went to a window and was rescued by neighbors who stood on one another's shoulders to form a human ladder. From that point on, he thought of himself as "a brand plucked from the burning" (Zechariah 3:2). He always believed God had a firm hand on his life.
- 3.3.3. At 17 John went to Oxford, where he learned by reading early Greek Church Fathers and other writers that the goal of the Christian life was "perfection" - a process of growing more like Christ, rather than a static religious state. He understood that the Christian life was one of total commitment to Christ.
- 3.3.4. In 1726 Wesley returned to Oxford as an Anglican minister. He and his brother Charles formed a club of serious-minded students who wanted to grow in their faith. John became the leader, and guided the group. They all agreed to a strict form of life, including study, prayer, and frequent attendance at communion. Others noticed the club and derisively called them the "Holy Club" or "Methodists" - and the latter name stuck. During this time George Whitefield joined their group.
- 3.3.5. Wesley and the others devoted themselves to ministering to the poor, visiting the imprisoned, and devoting themselves to holiness. However, Wesley still lacked the inward peace of a true Christian. As a result, it was recommended that John and Charles should travel as missionaries to the new colony of Georgia. On the way, they shared their ship with a group of Moravians, whose manner of life and especially their calm demeanor in a life-threatening storm had a deep impact on John. Furthermore, their stress on personal conversion left John with even deeper questions regarding the state of his own soul.
- 3.3.6. The trip to Georgia was a disaster, however. John was disillusioned when he found the Native Americans to be much less glorious the "noble savages" he had imagined. Charles became disillusioned and returned to England. Then, John fell in love with a young woman named Sophy Hopkey, the niece of the chief magistrate of Savannah. When Sophey married another man, John childishly refused to serve them communion, and was forced to leave the colony.
- 3.3.7. John landed back in England on February 1, 1738. He was utterly disillusioned. He met with a Moravian, Peter Bohler, in London, who continued to stress the need for the new birth. But the experience still eluded Wesley.
- 3.3.8. On May 24, 1738, Wesley went to a meeting on Aldersgate Street. Someone was reading aloud from Martin Luther's preface to his commentary on Romans. Wesley recounts that about a quarter until 9 he felt his heart "strangely warmed". For the first time, Wesley felt that he personally trusted in Christ, and that his sins were truly forgiven.

- 3.3.9. Wesley soon visited the Moravian community in Herrnhut. He was impressed by much that he saw, but also decided that being a Moravian was not for him. He thus returned to England where he began to preach again. His message stressed the need for personal conversion, but without great results. During this time, Wesley read the writings of Jonathan Edwards about the awakening in Northampton, and his zeal was stoked.
- 3.3.10. Wesley renewed acquaintance with George Whitefield, who had by this time become a famous preacher. Whitefield had begun preaching in open fields (because many pulpits refused him), which caused quite a scandal. Wesley did not want to do this at first, but when he began to see great results, his initial qualms were conquered. Wesley was also bothered by the physical reactions of some who were listening to him, but once again he was willing to allow it because so many were responding to the Gospel message and being brought into the Kingdom. The Great Awakening had spread from Northampton Massachusetts to England!
- 3.3.11. Wesley and Whitefield worked together closely for some time. Wesley was the greater administrator and thus he became the main leader. However, Whitefield was a Calvinist, and thus began a Calvinist Methodist movement, while Wesley was an Arminian and thus the movement he led was Arminian in theology. They had several debates over the topic, but could not come to a resolution. This theological difference eventually caused a rift in their work, though they remained friends. They were careful to not speak ill of one another - though the same could not always be said of their followers.
- 3.3.12. Wesley was a tireless preacher. He travelled from city to city, often preaching several times a day. He also preached in jails to prisoners, in inns, and even on vessels to Ireland. At Cornwall, it is estimated that he preached to 30,000 people at once. At Epworth he was refused admission to preach in the church, so he stood on his father's tombstone to preach! It is estimated that Wesley traveled over 250,000 miles in these preaching circuits. Most of his travels were on horseback, and he would read or prepare a sermon as he rode. This schedule was so rigorous that Wesley wore out many younger companions.
- 3.3.13. It is also worth noting that crowds were not always friendly. Sometimes crowds threw rocks at him, and in some places the local clergy incited mobs to attack him! But Wesley feared no man and continued preaching - and seeing thousands converted, especially among the poor.
- 3.3.14. In 1751, Wesley married Molly Vazeille, a widow of a wealthy London merchant. She had nursed Wesley back to health after a fall on the ice, but their marriage was difficult. She tried to travel with him for a time, but could not bear the strain. In fact, they eventually barely saw one another, and when she died in 1781 Wesley was unaware of her death and did not even attend the funeral.
- 3.3.15. Throughout his life Wesley maintained that he and his followers were faithful Anglicans. Wesley always encouraged converts to attend the local church, but the center of their spiritual life was really the Methodist clubs of which they were a part. These clubs were increasingly united in practice, life, and

theology. The almost 7,000 hymns penned by Charles Wesley were a major unifying factor in teaching the theology of the new movement.

- 3.3.16. Wesley initially declined to ordain his associates or call them ministers, nor did he allow them to administer the sacraments. Eventually, however, there were so many of them that he had to begin an annual conference. The first one was held in 1744. It was becoming increasingly clear that the “Methodists” were a church within a church.
- 3.3.17. This was further exacerbated by the needs in America. Even prior to the revolution, Wesley had sent Francis Asbury to America, and the movement had flourished. By 1773, the first American Methodist conference was held in Philadelphia. When the Bishop of London did not listen to Wesley’s pleas to send ordained ministers, Wesley eventually took matters into his own hands. He appointed two lay ministers, Richard Whatcost and Thomas Vasey for the American ministry, and to appoint Dr. Thomas Coke as superintendent of the American Methodists. This group officially became a new denomination shortly after the American Revolution.
- 3.3.18. Wesley continued to preach almost until his death in 1791. By that point, there were 79,000 Methodists in England and another 40,000 in North America. Soon after his death, the Methodists in England officially split from the Anglicans and formed their own church. But Wesley’s influence spread far beyond Methodism, and is felt to this day.

3.4. George Whitefield

- 3.4.1. Much of the story of Whitefield can be gleaned from what is said above. Only a few comments will be added here.
- 3.4.2. Whitefield was the great friend and younger compatriot of John Wesley. However, there were certain differences.
 - 3.4.2.1. As noted above, Whitefield, like Edwards, was a Calvinist, while Wesley stood alone among the leaders of the Great Awakening as an Arminian.
 - 3.4.2.2. Whitefield had great success in both England and America. In fact, he was a major figure in unifying the various parts of the Great Awakening. In fact, he preached in the congregation led by Jonathan Edwards, even though he was an Anglican and Edwards a Puritan Congregationalist! In many ways Whitefield was the person who united the disparate revivals and awakenings into a single Great Awakening.
 - 3.4.2.3. Unlike Edwards and Wesley, Whitefield was an emotive speaker. He possessed a booming voice and a flair for the dramatic. He had desired to be an actor when younger, and used great dramatic skills in delivering the message. His booming voice could be heard by thousands, and his delivery held them spellbound. Even Benjamin Franklin, who was not a Christian, admitted how much he respected and enjoyed Whitefield. Franklin was also astonished to see the effects of the preaching, one time stating that he had never thought he would hear so many hymns being sung by everyone going about their business in Philadelphia.

- 3.4.3. Many consider Whitefield to be the prototype and forerunner of all later mass evangelistic crusades. He was the first person to employ this strategy, moving from major city to major city, preaching both in and out of churches, and seeing large numbers of conversions.
- 3.5. The legacy of the Great Awakening
 - 3.5.1. The Great Awakening originally began in Congregational and Presbyterian churches, and was often resisted by Baptists. In the end, however, the Baptists and Methodists benefitted as much or more than any other groups. One reason the Baptists benefitted so much was that the emphasis on personal conversion led some to question infant baptism, and led many from Congregationalism into the Baptist fold.
 - 3.5.2. The Great Awakening caused a rift among many within the Congregational and Presbyterian churches. These were often referred to as “Old Side” and “New Side”. Eventually, however, many churches who rejected the renewing movement of the Great Awakening became increasingly lifeless and many older Congregational churches became unorthodox, embracing unitarianism.
 - 3.5.3. The Great Awakening increased missionary zeal, both in the immediate days and into the future. In particular, Baptist and Methodist preachers headed West to the frontiers to reach the settlers in those regions. For this reason, the Baptists and Methodists became more numerous in the frontiers, and eventually in the whole of the United States. Furthermore, through the writing of Jonathan Edwards on the life of David Brainerd and his work to reach the Indians, as well as Edwards own time as a missionary to the Indians, many in the future felt a call to the mission field.
 - 3.5.4. The Great Awakening also served to unify the Thirteen Colonies. It was the first mass movement affecting all of the colonies. Furthermore, when this combined with new ideas on human rights and democratic government, it helped foment the events leading to the American Revolution.

Next Class: Jonathan Edwards

Reading: Selected readings

Date: July 28 or August 4