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Early Anglican Seeds in Colonial America

ALONZO THEODORE STEPHENS

The English North American colonists as they were called up to 1775 were children of two continents. Colonization could proceed only in terms of the patterns to which Englishmen were accustomed. Therefore, the permanent settlements begun under the English government were of the familiar corporate structure.

From early beginning in England the land had belonged to the King, a feudal concept brought to England from the Continent. English law specified that any land which fell into disuse or was otherwise unoccupied was repossessed by the King; that is to say, it was Crown Land, or *Terra Regis*, as the legal phrase ran.¹ The king could therefore dispose of this land in any way he saw fit.

In 1606, James I, King of England, 1603-1625, the first Stuart ruler of England and proposer and authorizer of the King James Bible of 1604, granted to two incorporated companies the exclusive right to colonize and trade in the vast area called Virginia. The Virginia Company of London had the southern part; the Plymouth Company of London had the northern part. Each company appointed the resident council vested with sole governing powers in its colony; but a royal council in London composed in good part of the members of both companies controlled these local councils as well as political matters in general.²

Some of the nation's most prominent men guided the destiny of these two companies. Chief among these were Sir Thomas Smith,³ leading merchant prince and executive of the East India Company; Puritan sympathizer Robert Rich (Second Earl of Warwick);⁴ Sir Edwyn Sandys,⁵ the scholar in religion and politics, and leader in the House of Commons against the royal prerogatives and monopolies. These and the other leaders not mentioned contributed relatively little to the actual growth of the settlements, but few men of importance in business, politics, religion and learning were absent from the list of subscribers.

Earlier attempts had been made to effect a settlement in the New World by the English. Three transports chartered for the purpose of establishing the Colony of Raleigh, in Virginia, set sail from Portsmouth on Friday, the 8th of May, 1587, the day follow-

¹John S. Bassett, "The Constitutional Beginning of North Carolina, 1663-1729," in *The Johns Hopkins Studies in Historical and Political Sciences* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1894), XII, 113.

²Joseph Dorfman, *The Economic Mind in American Civilization 1606-1865* (New York: The Viking Press, 1946), I, 14.

³*Ibid.*, 15.

⁴*Ibid.*

⁵*Ibid.*

ing the Feast of Ascension.⁶ Here it is shown that religion played a significant part in the undertaking. In the charter given by the Proprietor, Sir Walter Raleigh, to the adventurers, there is mention of a donation in the sum of "one hundred pounds sterling to be invested by them as they pleased, the profits of the venture to be applied in planting the Christian religion, and advancing the same."⁷ This is the first factual reference found of a gift for the evangelism of inhabitants found on American shores by Englishmen. This was the second venture to settle permanently in Virginia; the first ended in deep disappointment.

By the beginning of the seventeenth century it was quite evident to thoughtful men that England needed room for further growth. Colonization was thought by many to be the only means of obtaining permanent relief from the pressing political and economic dangers of pauperism and the pressure of religious domination.

The colonies established under the charters granted by the King were naturally under his control because it was an accepted idea that land in England and under the English flag was owned by the Crown. The royal instructions sent out with the first colonists to Virginia stipulated that the Church of England and the King's supremacy must be maintained, but the president of the council must not be in holy orders.

Therefore, the thesis that religion, or the belief in or the extension of a particular sect, was the chief cause for migrating to the new world is not tenable. However, the settlements which began with the colonization of Jamestown in Virginia were due in part to and in accordance with the religious beliefs and practices which were then in vogue in England.

On the first voyage to Virginia the adventurers left fifteen men to hold the claim which had been made for England. This charge was given in order to make a settlement and prepare for a larger group which was to come from England. An Indian, Chief Mantee, was taken to England in order to safeguard the lives of those left in Virginia, for he served as a hostage and also as the first ambassador from the New World to England. In spite of this action and the fact that "on the 13th of August the faithful Mantee was admitted to Christ's Church by holy baptism,"⁸ the bargain was not kept, for on the second voyage it was found that the first attempted settlement was destroyed.

The administration of the sacrament had been provided for by Raleigh and in accordance with the proprietor's will, Mantee, the neophyte, was made Lord Roanoke and Dasmonguepeck in recognition of his faithful and untiring service.⁹ This act of christening

⁶William Stephen Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church, 1587-1885* (Boston: James R. Osgood and Company, 1885), I, 18.

⁷Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church*, 18.

⁸Dood, *The Old South*, 16-26.

⁹*Ibid.*

took place on the ninth Sunday after Trinity.¹⁰ On the following Sunday, Virginia, daughter of Ananias and Eleanor Dare, and granddaughter of Governor White, was christened. She was the first Christian born in a part of Virginia Colony, now North Carolina.¹¹

The above examples conclusively show that the first permanent white settlers of Virginia having been members of the Established Church of England, naturally, brought their religious beliefs, practices and rites to America. The colony was not yet an established institution and yet the church had in fact been established.

The *Susan Constant*, the *Good-Speed* and the *Discovery*, on Friday, the 19th of December, 1606, under the command of Captain Christopher Newport sailed from Blackwall, England for Virginia in America. Captain Newport was a mariner well experienced and briefed on the geography of North America. Among those on board was one Robert Hunt who was coming to America on a church mission.

After a long and tedious voyage the ships entered the magnificent bay of the Chesapeake on the third Sunday after Easter, 26 April 1607.¹² On Wednesday, the 13th of May, the peninsula of Jamestown was determined as the place of settlement.¹³ The site chosen was about 50 miles above the mouth of the river. Here the settlers disembarked and selected Edward-Maria Wingfield as their first president.

These Englishmen did not fail to have religious service. On 24 May, Whit-Sunday, these Christians invited Powhatan to join them in service and in the evening they raised a cross upon the soil near the mouth of the falls with the inscription "LACO-BOSEREX, 1607,"¹⁴ with Newport's name inscribed below. The Reverend Mr. Robert Hunt accompanied these settlers as minister. Services were needed almost immediately, for he was called upon to appease the animosity of the president of the council and the celebrated Captain John Smith. His efforts proved successful. Smith was received into the Council and on 14 May partook, with his rival, of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper which was then administered for the first time in Virginia.¹⁵

The Virginia settlement was destined to be a lasting one, if religion had anything to do with such a permanent endowment, for under a canvas roof (ship sail) on the third Sunday after Trinity,

¹⁰*Ibid.*

¹¹Dodd, *The Old South*, 16-26.

¹²Susan Myra Kingsbury, ed., *The Records of the Virginia Company of London* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1935), I, 20. (See also William E. Dodd, *The Old South*, (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1937), 16-26.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴Perry, *The History of the American Episcopal Church, 1587-1885*, 18; Dodd, *op. cit.*, 22-23. Also see Arthur Lyon Cross, *The Anglican Episcopate and the American Colonies*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1924.

¹⁵Francis Lister Hawks, *Contributions to the Ecclesiastical History of the United States of America* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1836), I, 20.

21 June 1607, the first sacrament was administered.¹⁶ This was only five weeks after the landing.

On 10 June 1610 Lord De la War arrived in Virginia.¹⁷ With him came an English chaplain. In 1609 the company in England had obtained from the King another charter by which the form of government was in some manner altered and the affairs of the Colony placed under the direction of certain officers, to be elected and sent out by the Virginia Company of London.

Under the new Charter, Lord De la War was chosen to be the first governor of Virginia,¹⁸ an office not previously established in the colony. This change produced a government with a single executive. This change also meant that after 1610 the religious affairs were dictated by the company in England and later by the English government itself.¹⁹ This was the first revolutionary change which was to plague the Virginia Colony and the other colonies which were later established.

The hardships which began in 1607 and the change in the type of government which came in 1610 are important in this discussion. The events which are usually recorded in the years 1610 to 1621 are worth mentioning only with the motive of showing that the Church of England became an established institution in Virginia, a consideration to be understood when North Carolina was settled. Between 1619 when the first legislature of Virginia met and 1624, the Church of England became by law the established Church in Virginia. The legislature of 1621-22 enacted a law that each clergyman should receive from his parishioners 1,500 pounds of tobacco and 16 barrels of corn.²⁰ Virginia was the parent colony in America. North Carolina was governed or affected in the early years by the laws and customs of this parent colony.

The proprietary colony of Carolina was thus a result of the method of settlement that first suggested itself to the English Sovereign. This means that some individual or corporation received the land it was intending to populate, with the right to administer the government over the inhabitants who were to settle. The proprietors took the position of the King in reference to the colony.

¹⁶Kingsbury, *The Records of the Virginia Company of London*, III, 1-6.

¹⁷Haws, *op. cit.*, 23.

¹⁸Kingsbury, *op. cit.*, III, 24-26. The Commission to Lord De la War bears the date 28 February, 1609.

¹⁹Haws, *op. cit.*, 23.

²⁰William Waller Hening, *The Statutes at Large: Being a Collection of the Laws of Virginia*. (Richmond: Samuel Pleasants, 1809-23) I, 1-49. Also 139-161. Subsequent references to Hening's publication will be written as *Laws of Virginia*. For a detailed analysis of early laws and procedures in the Virginia Colony the following publications are recommended: J. P. Kennedy and H. R. McIlwaine, (eds.), *Journals of the House of Burgesses of Virginia, 1619-1776*, 13 vols. Richmond: The Colonial Press, 1906-1915. Also H. R. McIlwaine, (ed), *Legislature Journals of the Councils of Colonial Virginia*. 3 vols. Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1918-1919, and H. R. McIlwaine, (ed.), *Executive Journals of the Council of Colonial Virginia*, 4 vols. Richmond: Virginia Historical Society, 1925-1930.

The proprietors who were the authorized agents of the king were responsible only to him in the administration of the affairs of the colony.

It is interesting to note that this institution was analogous to the old county Palatine, by which early Germanic emperors had held their turbulent frontiers.²¹ From the beginning of the colonization in North Carolina there was the authority of the lord of the manor, exercised either in person or through his steward, who stood for the land and the land's owner, the lord. The lord had jurisdiction of the courts and the leet. In this manorial organization the lord of the land was constituted the lord of the civil affairs of those who lived on the land.²²

Earlier attempts were made to settle that section in America now called North Carolina, but none was successful. Years after Sir Walter Raleigh's expedition failed, the first charter for Carolina was issued to Sir Robert Heath on 30 October 1629. By this grant Charles I of England conveyed to this Attorney-General, Heath, the land between 31 degrees and 36 degrees of North latitude "to have, exercise, use and enjoy in like manner as any Bishop of Durham within the Bishopric or County Palatine of Durham in our kingdom."²³ Sir Robert Heath did not set up his colony and so the affairs of the south part of Virginia were left to the supervision of the Governor of Virginia.

In 1650 a description of the fertile Carolina was given by E. W. Gent, who produced a letter in Parliament written by Edward Williams. Williams urged the leaders in England to parallel or transcend that Roman greatness by dispersing colonies in all angles of the Empire. His reasons stated briefly are as follows:

Rid England of undesirable persons who economically could not provide for themselves; provide employment for men who were not protected by practice of primogeniture; Rid the state of England of surplus men thus equalizing the ratio of men and women; Help to build up Navy and Navy personnel; Supply England with raw materials and make her an export nation; Supply England with needed foodstuffs, fish and minerals; Provide England with land to pay discharged soldiers and sailors; Provide additional revenue for England and the members of Parliament.²⁴

Meanwhile a civil war was raging in England. The government in Virginia remained faithful to the Crown and won by its loyalty the name of the "Old Dominion." After the death of his father,

²¹Hening, *Laws of Virginia*, I, 113-114. Also see R. F. Walker, *Colonial Record of Virginia*. Richmond: Clemmitt and Jones Printers, 1874.

²²*Ibid.*, 116.

²³Samuel A'Court Ashe, *History of North Carolina* (Greensboro: Charles L. Van Hatten 1925), I, 50.

²⁴Edward Williams, "Virginia! More Especially the South Part Thereof, Latitude fr 31 to 27 Degrees," *Tracts and Other Papers* (Collected by Peter Force) III, (New York: Peter Smith 1947), 17. (This document is subsequently referred to as *Peter Force Tracts*.)

Charles II, then in exile, transmitted to Sir William Berkeley, who had been the royal governor of Virginia for a decade, a new commission confirming his authority.

A formal treaty between the English government and the Colony of Virginia was agreed to in 1652 and it secured to Virginia almost complete independence. The assembly obtained the right of selecting all the officers of the colony, including the governor, who had formally been appointed by the Crown.²⁵ Thus between 1652 and the Restoration in 1660, Virginia enjoyed a republican form of government.

Ashe in writing about the Virginia situation reports:

Indeed Virginia has the distinction of having been the first community in the World whose government was organized on the principles of manhood suffrage, where all freeman, without exception, had an equal voice in government. . . .²⁶

During this decade immediately preceding the granting of the charters for North Carolina in 1663 and 1665, the population increased in the territory north of the Albemarle Sound and tenants were charged the same quit-rent as those who lived in the Virginia colony. William Berkeley was now serving as governor at the will of the Virginians, having been elected governor by the general assembly.

The Civil War resulted in many changes in England. Oliver Cromwell at first was proclaimed head of the government to be later succeeded by his son, Richard Cromwell. The fact to be noted here is that the Civil War ended in 1660 and Charles II then became the true and recognized ruler of the State. Meanwhile, the Church of England was becoming a fixed institution in Virginia.²⁷

On 23 March 1661-62 the Grand Assembly held at James City (Jamestown) proclaimed, from the Act of 19 March 1660-61 the 29th day of May, a holy day to commemorate the restoration of Charles II.²⁸ This proclamation was given with the assumption that the majority ruled in Virginia.

Since God of his mercy hath bin (*sic*) pleased to restore our late distracted kingdomes (*sic*) to peace and unity and his late distressed majestie (*sic*) to the throne of his royall (*sic*) ancestors. Be it enacted that in testimony of our thankfulness and joy, the twenty-ninth of May the day of his majesties' birth and happy restoration be annually celebrated as an holy day.²⁹

²⁵Ashe, *op. cit.*, 56.

²⁶*Ibid.*

²⁷For a vivid description of the problems in instituting and establishing the Anglican Church in Colonial America and the influence of the Civil War of England on the American peoples the following publication is suggested. W. D. McCray, (ed.), *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641* by Edward, Earl of Clarendon, 4 vols, Oxford: At the Clarendon Press, 1937.

²⁸Hening, *Laws of Virginia*, II, 41. (See also pp. 24, 25).

²⁹*Ibid.*

The above statement was an acknowledgment of the fact that the Church of England was the Established Church. There were already dissenters in Virginia, but they were in the minority. After 1665 Quakers, Presbyterians and other dissenting groups migrating to the colonies in ever increasing numbers threatened the rule and dominance of the Anglican Church. By 1750 the hegemony of the autocratic Anglican Church was broken and the colonies gradually grew stronger and democratic, but the English colonies realized full religious freedom only after the end of the American Revolution.