

## CHAPTER 40 : PROTESTANTISM IN NORTH AND SOUTH AMERICA

Spain, and later Portugal, led in the exploration and colonization of the Americas, starting with Columbus' voyage for Spain in 1492. The Treaty of Tordesillas of 1494, mediated by the Pope, had been created to divide the New Worlds in the Americas and Asia between the Catholic countries of Portugal and Spain. In effect they had carved up these New Worlds with Spain receiving a monopoly of power in most of South America and Portugal in the Indies. Working together, the two Roman Catholic countries were able to maintain an effective blockade of these new markets for the majority of the sixteenth century. They brought with them their ardent Roman Catholicism, which they imposed in the Americas primarily by force upon the natives they conquered. This corrupted form of Christianity, while nominally converting the natives, in reality left them spiritually enslaved.

Fairly representative is the conquest of Mexico. Before the Spaniards arrived, the heathen natives appeased their pantheon of gods by a combination of human and animal sacrifice. The Spanish adventurer Hernan Cortes sought to conquer this territory for Spain from the Aztec Indians who then ruled it. He would call the territory New Spain.

The conquest of New Spain begins in 1519 when Cortes landed in Veracruz, about 200 miles from the Aztec capital of Tenochtitlan (present day Mexico City). Cortes had a singular mission: defeat the Aztecs, take their gold, and convert the people to Romanism. To do so, he had less than 400 soldiers, 16 horses, 14 pieces of artillery, 11 ships, plenty of guns and ammunition, and cajones. His first act upon landing was to burn all but one of his ships - he wanted no turning back.

Working to Cortes' advantage, the Aztecs believed an ancient myth that a white-faced Quetzacuatl - their most important god - had long ago fled to the east, but would one day return. When the Aztec ruler, Moctezuma II, beheld Cortes and his light-skinned men upon their arrival in Tenochtitlan, he believed them to be emissaries of the great Quetzacuatl himself. The opportunistic Cortes, coached by Malinche - a Spanish-speaking Indian who had become his adulterous lover back at the coast - did not attempt to correct him. Cortes returned the emperor's hospitality by taking him hostage. A compliant Moctezuma ordered his people to stand down, and by the time the Aztecs began to resist Cortes had already brought in reinforcements from the coast. The Aztecs disowned their cooperative, captive emperor, who died a prisoner in his own palace. When the Aztecs finally laid siege to the palace, Cortes and his men snuck away in the middle of the night and ran for the coast. On the way, over half his force was killed by the pursuing army, but the survivors returned with thousands of Indian allies to conquer the city a year later.

Mexico, with its fertile plains and great mineral wealth, was the crown jewel of Spain's colonies. It was heavily taxed, ruled directly from Spain, and permitted no autonomy.

The Spanish monarchs distributed land to settlers in the form of *encomiendas* (the predecessor to the *hacienda*), which were worked by Indian slaves that the settlers were charged to protect and convert to Christianity. Spearheading the Christian evangelization of the Indians were the Franciscans, who Cortes requested be sent for that purpose. The Franciscan missionaries spread out across Mexico with this purpose, and then into Central America in 1525. Baja California in Mexico was evangelized by Jesuits and Dominicans, while Franciscans concentrated their efforts in Alta California. The indigenous people from north to south were rapidly incorporated into the Roman Catholic Church.

As the Spanish conquered most of South America, Franciscan and other Roman Catholic missionaries came with them. The reign of the Incas in Peru was destroyed by the ruthless violence of Spanish conquistador Pizarro, who betrayed the king Atahualpa. The Incas were ready to accept the new conquerors and even to hand over their gold to them. Once the Indians were conquered, the Roman Catholic religious orders quickly went to work. Thus, the Franciscans were soon solidly founded in Peru, especially in Lima, where they had friaries and colleges. From the north of South America, the Spanish, and in turn the Roman Catholic faith, became dominant to the southern tip of South America.

Meanwhile, the Portuguese were the first European settlers to arrive in the area of Brazil in South America, led by adventurous Pedro Cabral, who began the colonial period in 1500. The Portuguese reportedly found native Indians – among whom cannibalism was common - numbering around seven million, but over time most of these either died out or intermarried with the colonizing peoples. Other Portuguese explorers followed Cabral, in search of valuable goods for European trade but also for unsettled land and the opportunity to escape poverty in Portugal itself. Sugar soon came to Brazil, and with it came imported slaves.

The Jesuits were able to spearhead missions in Brazil, due in large measure to Jesuit influence back in Portugal. Formal evangelization began in Brazil in 1549 with the arrival of six Jesuits under Father Manuel de Nóbrega, who accompanied Tomé de Sousa, the first governor general of Brazil. They built a church at São Salvador da Baía, as well as schools at Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo. They evangelized northern and southern Brazil. In the south, Father José Anchieta opened a school for Indians and authored the first grammar in a native language. The Jesuits built churches, schools, and seminaries. And Brazil became almost wholly Roman Catholic. Indeed, as in the rest of Roman Catholic Latin America, Protestantism was not tolerated.

The Jesuits, in fact, came to dominate Indian missions of the Roman Catholics throughout the Americas, although the Franciscan and Dominican monks were already established in the New World before them. The influence of the Jesuit Order was especially great among the indigenous peoples of Brazil, Ecuador, Colombia, Paraguay, Chile, Mexico, Peru, Guatemala and Haiti. By the seventeenth century the Jesuit Order was the foremost cultural organization and one of the strongest economic and political forces in the entire colonial world.

The Jesuits were inspired to establish their own social order by English Romanist Thomas More, who published his *Utopia* in 1516. The Jesuit Fathers set up “model” communities of indigenous peoples in the wilderness of Brazil, Colombia and Paraguay. These communities reflected the Jesuits’ sense of organization and self-discipline. These “reductions”, as they were called, were actually communal farms. In Paraguay the Jesuits gathered up to one hundred thousand Guarani into the reductions. By 1607 the number had grown to one hundred and five thousand. The Jesuits by necessity felt that they had to isolate their community from the neighboring Spanish and Portuguese colonies, who would have otherwise employed the Indians as slaves on their plantations. As long as the Crown sponsored them, the Jesuits avoided interference from the authorities. The success of the communal reductions resulted from tight organization. Each mission was under the rule of two priests who were responsible for discipline, development and welfare. There was no capital punishment, although flogging was inflicted for such offenses as drunkenness. The worst punishment at these missions was life imprisonment, meted out only in the severest cases. The reductions were divided into the Fields of God and the Fields of Man. The Fields of God were worked by all of the Indians together, whereas the Fields of Man were parceled out for individual use by the Indians. The crops produced in the Fields of God were owned by the commune, whereas the crops gathered in the Fields of Man were kept by the individual farmers. Once the Jesuits gathered the Indians into the relative security and isolation of the reductions, the process of conversion and reinforcement of Christian doctrine took place. Sometimes the Jesuits resorted to trickery and appealed to the Indians’ idolatry to reinforce Christianity. For example, in Paraguay the priests exploited the Indian’s idolatry by standing inside of a wooden statue and shouting orders to them. The Jesuits also used the theater, already developed by Franciscan and Dominican monks. At that time the theater was an integral part of Romish European religious festivals, although generally rejected by reformed Protestants and the early Christian church. Theater was used to attract and amuse the Indians. Dances of Indian and African origins were blended into the mysteries of the new religion. The purely African communities instantly accepted the school of the Jesuit theater and learned from it. In this and other ways Roman Catholicism was firmly planted.

Although late out of the starting block, Protestants made their own efforts to colonize and evangelize the Americas during the era of Protestant Reformation. The initial efforts, however, were generally short-lived.

One of the most notable of these early efforts was spearheaded by the illustrious Admiral Gaspard de Coligny, the leader of the French Huguenots, whose career we had studied in a previous chapter. When Philip II issued a proclamation ceasing Spanish colonization efforts in Florida, Coligny sensed the opportunity this void in Florida opened to the French. As the trusted maritime advisor to French King Charles IX, he was able to persuade Charles IX to compete with Spanish and Portuguese colonization in the Americas, by allowing a French Huguenot settlement in Florida.

Accordingly, in 1562, Jean Ribault was sent by France to explore the New World, and on May 1 his ships entered the River of May, now known as the St. Johns River. His men erected a column near the river's mouth claiming Florida for France. In 1564, when the

French civil war subsided, three vessels left France under the leadership of Huguenot Rene de Laudonniere to settle in northeast Florida. The ships arrived at the River of May in June, where they were welcomed by the native population, the Timucuan. A triangular fort was constructed near the river shore and small thatch buildings were constructed to house the settlers. The area was named "la Caroline" in honor of France's 14 year-old king, Charles IX. Life in the colony turned out to be difficult. The French colonists were unskilled in growing crops or gathering their own food and instead relied upon the Timucuan. The climate was very different from that of France and the people began to suffer from disease and starvation. The people began to complain and some even mutinied, stealing a vessel and sailing south. However, much to the colonists' relief, Jean Ribault returned to Florida in September 1565 with more soldiers, settlers and much needed supplies.

But it wasn't long before Spain reacted to the French presence in Florida. Pedro Menendez de Aviles received orders to drive the French out of Florida. He scouted the mouth of the River of May and attempted to capture French ships. When that failed he sailed south and established St. Augustine as his base. Ribault tried to sail after the Spanish, but a large storm drove his ships too far south. Menendez decided to take advantage of Ribault's troubles and marched 500 men overland towards Fort Caroline.

Since the French fleet had gone south to try to attack the Spanish, la Caroline was left with only a few able-bodied soldiers. Due to poor weather, the captain sent his guards to their houses, leaving the fort defenseless. Very early that next morning, September 20, 1565, the Spanish attacked. When the Spanish burst into the fort, Laudonniere and his men fought as hard as they could but were overwhelmed. The battle only took one hour. Over 140 Frenchmen had been killed, the women and children spared at Menendez' orders. The fort was renamed San Mateo and some Spanish soldiers remained behind, while the Spanish and their prisoners returned to St. Augustine.

A few days later Menendez found the survivors of the French fleet, which had been largely destroyed by the storm. The French soldiers and sailors, helpless and hungry, were trapped at an inlet. Ribault and those who had escaped the shipwreck, about 350 in all, asked for terms of surrender. Menendez said they must trust themselves to his mercy. It appears he swore an oath to spare them. Two hundred who distrusted him fled into the wilderness. The rest surrendered. Ribault reminded Menendez that Spain and France were at peace. That mattered little to the cruel Spaniard. Menendez wrote the king: "I had their hands tied behind their backs and themselves put to the sword. It appeared to me that by thus chastising them, God our Lord and your Majesty were served. Whereby this evil sect will in future leave us more free to plant the gospel in these parts." The massacre site still bears the name Matanzas, which means "slaughters." Soon after France abandoned its interests in Florida, leaving the land in Spanish hands.

Another short-lived Huguenot colony was founded in Brazil. There, French Huguenots established themselves (1555) on an island in Rio de Janeiro harbor. But they were routed in 1567 by a force under Mem de Sá, who then founded the city of Rio de Janeiro.

At this same time British geographer Richard Hakluyt was encouraging Britain to colonize the Americas. The first reason he offered in his "Discourse of Western Planting" was the proclamation of the reformed Christian gospel among the indigenous peoples. His second reason was the protection of English traders, who were forced by the Spanish to remove their Bibles when traveling in these territories. Sir Humphrey Gilbert and Sir Walter Raleigh sought to establish English colonies in North America, with those objectives, as well as commercial interests, in mind.

But the first British venture to establish a permanent colony in North America was undertaken by the Virginia Company. In 1607 they started a colony in Jamestown, Virginia under Captain John Smith. Despite many hardships, this colony survived. And one of the early Indian conversions to Protestant Christianity was the princess Pocahontas, who married John Rolfe. The reformed Church of England became the established church of the colony.

In 1620 another English settlement was established in Massachusetts. It was even more reformed than the settlement in Virginia. Indeed, the Pilgrims who settled in this Plymouth Plantation in Massachusetts did so precisely because they sought to establish a church more thoroughly reformed than the Church of England. They agreed with the Church of England concerning the doctrines of grace, but wanted the worship to be more closely regulated by scripture. King James had consented to their colonial effort, under the sovereignty of the English Crown. Their Mayflower Compact recognized the reformed Christian character of the colony from the outset.

Joining the Pilgrims of Massachusetts in 1630, the Puritans greatly added to their numbers. Theirs was called the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Like the Pilgrims, they wanted a more thoroughly reformed church than the English monarch would permit in England. So with their charter from the Crown, they established a reformed and puritan colony. It was formed as a Bible Commonwealth, where the Ten Commandments would be applied and enforced. Reformed Christian education was important to them, so they established Harvard College and other schools for their youth. The first book they published was the Bay Psalm Book. This psalter was the hymnal for their public worship.

From these outposts in Massachusetts, the Puritans spread out across New England and beyond, exercising significant influence over the English colonies in America. New Puritan colonies in Connecticut, Maine, and elsewhere rapidly formed. And the population of the Protestant English-speaking colonies rose rapidly in comparison with the French Roman Catholic colony based in Quebec, which was begun by Champlain in 1608. French colonists more typically consisted of fur traders and Roman Catholic missionaries, whereas the English came as families wanting to settle and farm the land.

Nor did the Puritans forget that one of their primary missions was the evangelization of the Indians in the Biblical gospel. Puritan Governor John Winthrop, along with the other puritan leaders, had a vision for the puritan colony as a "shining city upon a hill". It was Rev. John Eliot who especially led in the missions effort to the Indians.

John Eliot preached the gospel to the Indians, and he helped organize churches of those who converted to the Christian faith. He prepared scriptural rules of conduct for the Christian Indians to follow. He wrote tracts explaining the mission enterprise among the Indians. One tract, *The Day-breaking, if not Sun-rising, of the Gospel with the Indians in New England* (1647), notes some of the points of public and private conduct drawn up by Eliot: monogamy to be the rule, the Lord's Day to be strictly observed, no more lying with a beast in fornication, etc. He translated the Bible into the language of the native Americans where he ministered.

Eliot, along with Puritan New England and reformed Christians in general in this era, were not only concerned that individuals be converted and joined to sound churches. He was also interested in the formation of Christian civil society, ordered according to God's word. Accordingly, he helped organize the Indians into reformed Christian "praying towns". The political blueprint for the Indian towns was spelled out in his book *Christian Commonwealth*. Many such towns formed, becoming beacons of Christian light.

The Puritan Parliament back in old England (called the Long Parliament at this time) was quite interested in this evangelistic work among the North American Indians. Consequently, they published an Act for "The encouragement and advancement of learning and piety in that quarter". The Act created a benevolent corporation called "the President and Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in New-England". It collected and disbursed funds for the evangelistic work among the Indians.

Other English colonies besides these formed in the Americas, serving as venues for the Protestant gospel to run and have free course. For instance, Bermuda was first settled in 1609 by shipwrecked English colonists headed for Virginia. The group of colonists was led by Sir George Somers, and stranded on the islands for 10 months. Their reports aroused great interest about the islands in England; initially, the Charter of the Virginia Company was extended to include them, but in 1615 King James granted a charter to a new organization, known as the Bermuda Company, which ran the island until 1684. About 60 British colonists arrived in 1612 and founded the town of St. George, the oldest continuously inhabited English-speaking settlement in the Western Hemisphere. Representative government was introduced to Bermuda in 1620, and it became a self-governing colony.

Another promising colony was located in the Caribbean: Barbados. The first British settlers arrived in 1627. The Puritans had even considered settling in this region, but eventually decided upon Massachusetts instead. While yet under British sovereignty, Barbados obtained its own House of Assembly in 1639, making it the third-oldest legislative body in the Western Hemisphere, preceded only by Bermuda's legislature and the Virginia House of Burgesses. Here, like Bermuda, Protestantism was the established faith, and the civil authorities sought to enforce both tables of the Ten Commandments.

Other English colonies founded in this era in the Americas included Tobago, Montserrat and Antigua, British Honduras, as well as others.

At the same time, Dutch Protestants were also establishing colonies in the Americas, spearheaded mainly by the Dutch West India Company. These were typically more commercial ventures than religiously motivated endeavors. Nevertheless, they too provided opportunity for the spread of the Protestant gospel, as Protestant settlers brought the gospel with them.

The Dutch West India Company was chartered by the States-General of the Dutch republic in 1621 and organized in 1623. Through its agency New Netherland was founded. The phenomenal success of the Dutch East India Company was an influential factor in its establishment. The United New Netherland Company, which had been trading around the mouth of the Hudson River for several years, was absorbed into the new company. By the terms of the charter no citizen of the Netherlands could trade with any point on the African coast between the Tropic of Cancer and the Cape of Good Hope or on the American coast between Newfoundland and the Straits of Magellan without the company's permission. The company was responsible to the States-General in larger matters, such as declaring war, but otherwise had almost complete administrative and judicial power in its territory.

The Company built Fort Orange (1624) on the site of Albany, N.Y., Fort Nassau (1624) on the Delaware River, Fort Good Hope on the site of Hartford on the Connecticut River, and finally Fort Amsterdam (1626), on the southern tip of Manhattan Island, which was the nucleus of the settlement called New Amsterdam, now New York City. England could not then afford to antagonize the Dutch because of wars with France and Spain and so permitted the Dutch settlement to be made on lands that England claimed. Dutch settlers poured into these settlements, and the Dutch reformed church became the established church in them.

The company was also interested in taking Brazil from the Portuguese. This it successfully did to a great degree through the end of the era of Protestant Reformation, but soon thereafter the project was abandoned. The territory which the Dutch captured and controlled was in the northeast of Brazil. John Maurice of Nassau, a prince of the house of Nassau-Siegen and grandnephew of William the Silent, administered the territory as its governor-general. Regrettably, he continued the practice of slave labor which had been established in Brazil by the Portuguese. In order to insure the supply of slave labor, he seized several Portuguese strongholds on the Guinea coast of Africa. An able administrator, John Maurice consolidated Dutch rule in Brazil. He built up the state of Pernambuco and rebuilt the city of Recife. He supported science and arts in the colony: pioneering studies on the botany, zoology, and diseases of Brazil were published by his court physician and a German naturalist, while artists including Frans Post painted Brazilian scenes. But rising Portuguese hostility and Dutch criticism of his expenses led him to request he be recalled in 1643. But the Dutch continued their effort in South America.

Overall, the rising power in the Americas by 1648 was with the Protestants and not the Roman Catholics, despite the many setbacks along the way.

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