

# Colonial Beginnings

## Reformation and European Expansion

---

Medieval Europe dreamed of Christendom—one civilization united by one faith. This ideal of Christendom was shattered in the sixteenth century when Protestant reformers broke with papal authority in Rome. Europe became a patchwork in which each territory was its own little Christendom with its ruler determining the religion of the people. Meanwhile, several European powers laid claim to huge tracts of land across the Atlantic Ocean. These territories were named New Spain, New France, New Netherlands, New Sweden, and New England.

Thus, two great dramas overlap in time: the Reformation and European expansion in the Americas. For example, Luther began the

Reformation in 1517, at about the same time Córdoba explored the Yucatan peninsula. William Tyndale prepared his English translation of the New Testament in 1524, the year that Verrazano probed the Atlantic coastline. In France, a young lawyer named John Calvin embraced the Reformation in 1534, the year Jacques Cartier first sailed into the St. Lawrence Gulf. By the close of the Reformation era in 1648, European settlements in North America included Jamestown, Quebec, Santa Fe, Boston, and New Amsterdam (New York).

The Reformation affected European exploration and settlement of America. Not only did Protestant and Catholic nations compete for territory; they also brought to America several assumptions and strategies forged in the Reformation. These concepts were the basis for colonial Christianity, at least in the early stages. One such concept was *territorialism*.



**Fig. 1.1** Territorial Claims over North America. Europeans attempted to apply the principle of territorialism (the ruler decides the religion of each region) to their spheres of influence in the New World as well as in Europe. The policy, though impossible to enforce, shaped the cultures of these regions for generations. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons..

Territorialism was a strategy for dealing with the religious differences set loose by the Protestant Reformation. By 1648, religious and political wars had failed to establish either Catholicism or any type of Protestantism as Europe's sole faith. War could not settle the matter. The slogan *cuius regio, eius religio* ("whose the region, his the religion") expressed the strategy by means of which rulers tried to assert religious unity within their own realms. The ruler decided the religion.

European rulers expected their religious authority to extend to their American territories as well. To this day, the religious footprint of territorialism can still be seen in French-Catholic Canada, in the heritage of Spanish Catholicism in Mexico and the Southwest, and

in the Anglo-Protestantism in much of the United States.

Another theme from the Reformation era was *freedom of conscience* to "obey God rather than men" (Acts 5:29). Here the individual is accountable to God alone in matters of faith. No human authority, not even a king or a bishop, has the right to gainsay God's claim on an individual. And if this does happen, the individual is bound by conscience to resist. These two views of religious authority—territorialism and individual conscience—clashed repeatedly in colonial America until religious freedom at last became the norm.

American Lutherans have sometimes been tempted to draw a straight line between Martin Luther and the rise of religious freedom in America. A crooked line would be better for two reasons. First, Calvinism (not Lutheranism) was the dominant influence in American Protestantism for generations. Second, Luther did not think that one person's beliefs were as good as any other person's, nor did he say that individuals should simply believe whatever appeals to them. Luther (and other reformers) did say that when *human* authority conflicts with the Word of God, then *God* must be obeyed. Martin Luther criticized the church of his day not because he was a free spirit but because his conscience was "captive to the Word of God." This and similar appeals to the Word of God continued to inspire dissent against religious territorialism in the colonies. With the Enlightenment came new forms of dissent. For those influenced by the Enlightenment, the conscience of the individual (rather than the Word of God) became the final court of appeal. In the story of Christianity in colonial America, territorial religion (in which the ruler sets religious policy) clashed

Fig. 1.2 Reformation, New World Settlement, and Cultural Events

Europeans in North America	Columbus lands in Caribbean 1492	Spanish Conquest begins in Mexico 1517	Verrazano explores Atlantic Coast 1524	Jacques Cartier in St. Lawrence Gulf 1534	Hernando de Soto explores American South 1539–43	Spanish settlement on Parris Island, South Carolina 1562	Spanish found San Augustine in Florida 1565
Reformation and Catholic response	1493–94 Pope assigns spheres of interest to Spain and Portugal in New World	1517 Martin Luther's protest against the sale of indulgences, begins the Reformation in Germany	1524 Tyndale translates New Testament into English	1534 Henry VIII becomes supreme head of Church of England	1536 John Calvin's <i>Institutes</i> published	1555 Peace of Augsburg: the ruler decides the religion of each region.	1563 The Church of England affirms The "Thirty-Nine Articles" defining its doctrines
			1531 Our Lady of Guadalupe in Mexico	1534 Jesuit Order founded	1530s Baptists suffer ongoing persecution	1545 Council of Trent begins (Rome's response to Reformation)	1563 Council of Trent ends
Other events 1450 Gutenberg invents moveable type	1503 Da-Vinci paints the <i>Mona Lisa</i>	1508 Michelangelo begins painting Sistine Chapel ceiling	1521 Magellan dies on voyage around the globe	1532 Machiavelli's <i>The Prince</i> published	1542 Jesuit missionaries arrive in Japan	1558 Elizabeth I crowned Queen of England	1564 William Shakespeare born
1572 2,000 Protestants killed in Paris in St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre	Spanish explore Northern New Mexico 1598	<b>James-town</b> is founded (English) 1607	<b>Quebec</b> is founded (French) 1608	<b>Santa Fe</b> is founded (Spanish) 1610	Henry Hudson sails into Hudson's Bay 1611	<b>Plymouth</b> Colony 1620 (English Pilgrim); <b>Nova Scotia</b> (Scottish) 1621; <b>New Amsterdam</b> (Dutch) 1626	<b>Massachusetts Bay</b> 1630 (English Puritan); <b>Fort Christina</b> (Swedish) 1638; <b>Montreal</b> (French) 1642
1572 John Knox, founder of Scottish Presbyterian Church, dies	1598 Edict of Nantes: toleration to French Protestants	1604 James 1 of England vows to make Puritans conform		1610 <b>Remonstrance</b> by Dutch "Arminians" asserts role of human will in salvation	1611 King James Bible authorized for use in Church of England	1618–19 Synod of Dort "5 point Calvinism" rejects Duch <i>Remonstrance</i> , asserts divine sovereignty	1618–48 Thirty Years War in Germany, ends with Peace of Westphalia
1588 Spanish Armada destroyed	1600 Pope Clement approves coffee	1603 Queen Elizabeth dies	1605 Cervantes <i>Don Quixote</i>	1608 Galileo constructs astronomical telescope	1609 Kepler's laws of planetary motion	1619 Wm. Harvey discovers circulation of blood	1642 English Civil War begins

with appeals to a higher authority—whether Scripture, conscience, or reason. These conflicts began in Europe during the Reformation and took on a life of their own in America.

## Native American Religions

The Reformation was still in the future when Columbus landed on the island he called San Salvador in 1492. There he saw no temples or robed priests, heard no prayers or liturgies. Columbus wrote that “Los indios . . . will easily be made Christians, for they appear to me to have no religion.”<sup>1</sup> Columbus was an explorer, not a sociologist of religion. Even if he had been able to see and describe the religion of the Taino people, this would have been one among hundreds of religions in North America at the time of European contact.

There is no separate word for “religion” in many Native American languages. Instead, there is a “whole complex of beliefs and actions that give meaning” to everyday life.<sup>2</sup> In Native American religion, spiritual forces helped people to carry out the central tasks of hunting, courtship, and warfare. Healing was especially important; shamans or holy people would use spiritual powers to remove the evils that caused pain and sickness, or to restore the good things that had been stolen by bad spirits.

Native American beliefs passed by word of mouth to each new generation. Stories told the people who they were in relation to the land and to other tribes and marked the rites of passage in life. In contrast to European Christians with their written scriptures and creeds, Native cultures relied on oral tradition.

Land was central to Native American religions. Land was not “private property” or “real estate.” It was sacred, the mother of all living

things. Land was revered not for its monetary value but for its beauty, for its abundance of game and fish, and as a reminder of great events and spirits of ancestors. But even before the Europeans came, native peoples could be displaced from their ancestral lands by tribal warfare or by changing patterns of climate, hunting, and trade. When the Europeans came with their relentless appetite for land, the conflicts had religious dimensions, not least because land was sacred to Native peoples.

From colonial times until well into the twentieth century, missionaries to Native American peoples seldom differentiated the Christian gospel from their own cultures. A common assumption was that Native converts must forsake all tribal ways in order to become Christian. Even so, missionaries tended to treat Native peoples more humanely than did most of their fellow Europeans. Missionaries were more likely to see Native people as human beings, with souls to be saved, than to see them as enemies to be killed or obstacles to be removed from the path to progress. Many missionaries learned the languages and customs of Native peoples. A few missionaries lived with Indian peoples and adapted to tribal ways. Missionaries sometimes became advocates for Native peoples, condemning white encroachment on Indian land or trying to stop the alcohol trade that all too soon blighted Native cultures. Some missionaries paid the ultimate price of martyrdom in their attempts to bring Christianity to Native peoples.

Even the best-intentioned Europeans, however, could unwittingly carry smallpox, measles, and other diseases against which tribal peoples had no immunities. The death toll from European diseases may never be fully known, but estimates run to the tens of millions of Native people. Hardest hit were those peoples who lived in larger, more settled communities.

For example, the Pueblos of New Mexico had roughly forty-eight thousand people in the sixteenth century. But by 1800 they were down to about eight thousand people.<sup>3</sup> The loss of entire peoples, with their cultures and religions, can scarcely be measured.

## Catholic Missions in North America: Spain and France

The first Catholic missionaries to America arrived with Columbus's second voyage in 1493,

### Box 1.1: Our Lady of Guadalupe

On December 9, 1531, a Native American man named Juan Diego saw a vision of a of the Virgin Mary. She appeared to him on Tepeyak hill near Mexico City, and spoke to him in Nahuatl, his native language. She told him to build a church for her on that very place. Juan Diego went to nearby Mexico City and reported his vision to the Spanish bishop. The bishop sent him back to Tepeyak hill to ask the lady for a sign that she was indeed the Virgin Mary. Once more she appeared and told Juan Diego to gather roses in his cloak (although the hillside was barren and it was not the season for roses to bloom). However, Juan Diego searched the hillside and found beautiful roses (the kind that grow in the Castilian region in Spain). He gathered the blooms in his cloak and carried them to the bishop. And when Juan Diego let the roses tumble gently from his cloak, an image of the Virgin Mary remained miraculously imprinted on that garment. On Tepeyak hill a shrine was built, replaced over time by more elaborate churches. Today pilgrims flock to the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, where the image said to be the original on Juan Diego's cloak is on display as a sacred relic. Millions visit this site every year, making it second only to Rome as a pilgrimage destination for Catholic Christians.

The image of our Lady of Guadalupe has great significance in Latin America. It was used on a banner in the Mexican War for independence from Spain (1810–1821) and became a symbol of Latino self-determination. Most of all it is an icon of devotion for Hispanics in North and South America. The Virgin Mary's reported appearance to a Native American shortly after the Spanish conquest of Mexico is taken by many as a sign of God's love for the poor and oppressed.

Some scholars challenge the historicity of the story. What is certain is that millions of people identify with our Lady of Guadalupe as a symbol of religious faith and cultural identity.



**Fig. 1.3** Our Lady of Guadalupe, also known as the Virgin of Guadalupe, sixteenth century. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

making their landing on the island of Hispaniola (now Haiti and the Dominican Republic). By the early 1500s, Spanish priests were active in Mexico, a large area whose northern lands later became part of the United States. This area, in turn, was part of a much larger Spanish empire extending through Central and much of South America.

Conquistadors (explorer-soldiers) advanced Spain's empire by crushing Native resistance. Spanish settlers carried on trade and provided a permanent European presence, while missionaries converted the Native peoples to Catholicism and taught them European ways. Thus, "conquest, settlement and evangelization" brought about a new rule whose purpose "was to create Christian peoples out of those regarded by their conquerors as members of barbarous and pagan races."<sup>4</sup> The Spaniards had many internal conflicts between military, church, and trading interests; but there was general agreement that Native peoples who became Christian had to abandon tribal ways.

Spain could send very few European settlers to the far edges of its empire. It therefore sought to keep other European powers away by converting Native peoples and making them into loyal Spanish subjects and devout Catholics. Consequently, Spain established missions in Florida and along the northern rim of the Gulf of Mexico. In New Mexico, twenty-five missions were established by 1630. Another stage of mission planting was led by the Jesuit missionary Eusebio Kino (1645–1711), who was active in what we now know as the southwestern United States and northwestern Mexico. Later on, Spain built a string of missions in California between San Diego and San Francisco, with the dual purpose of converting Indians and securing Spain's claims against Russian and English interests along the Pacific

coast. The Franciscan missionary Junipero Serra (1713–1784) led in creating these California missions. Serra gathered Native peoples into the missions, where they were taught Christianity, European customs, and agriculture. He is said to have baptized six thousand persons and confirmed five thousand. In keeping with attitudes of his day, "Serra held that missionaries could and should treat their converts like small children. He instructed that baptized Indians who attempted to leave the missions should be forcibly returned, and he believed that corporal punishment—including the whip and the stocks—also had a place."<sup>5</sup>

Spanish missions often resembled medieval European villages. Inside the protective walls lay the church, school, and hospital as well as a dormitory and work areas for various trades. Outside the walls, the people grew crops and



**Fig 1.4** Map of Coast of California. Originally made for *Palou's Life of Padre*, published in Mexico in 1787. Project Gutenberg ([www.gutenberg.org](http://www.gutenberg.org)).



**Fig. 1.5** Old Mission Church, Zuni Pueblo, New Mexico. © Art Resource.

tended livestock; in some places, they worked in mines or quarries. Some of the most successful missions were located near Native villages that already had a settled, stable population. But Spanish success was short-lived. Native peoples commonly deserted the missions as soon as they had opportunity, taking elements of Christian belief and ritual to blend with their own traditions. From the Spanish side, the mission compounds were costly to maintain and difficult to staff. After Texas (and then the United States) gained control of these territories, many of the old missions crumbled into ruins.

Native responses to Spanish missions ranged from violent resistance to adaptation and cooperation. Take, for example, the Pueblo peoples of what is now New Mexico. Early on, the Spaniards exacted hard labor from the Pueblos and punished them for practicing Native religions. In 1680 Pueblos organized a revolt involving many villages. Four hundred Spaniards, including twenty-one missionaries,

were killed. Crops, churches, and other buildings were destroyed. The Pueblos drove the Spanish out, but later the Spanish returned and regained control. The two peoples learned to coexist; they intermarried and became allies against mutual enemies such as the Apaches.<sup>6</sup> Over many generations, the Spanish and Native cultures blended, producing a form of Catholicism distinctive to that region.

Far to the north and east of Mexico, French Catholic missionaries had similar goals: to convert Native peoples to Christianity and strengthen France's claims in the New World. But the territory called New France was a different world from that of New Spain. Colder climates meant that Native peoples depended much more on hunting and fishing than on agriculture and were less likely to form large permanent settlements. Conditions in Canada were not favorable to the mission-compound strategy that the Spanish had tried in the Southwest.

In addition to dealing with a cold climate, France also had to contend with Protestant rivals along the Atlantic coast. In this age of territorial religion, conflicts between Protestants and Catholics were common. For example, in Acadia (present-day Maine and the Canadian Maritimes), English and Dutch Protestants and their Iroquois allies expelled the French Catholics. France had better luck establishing mission stations in areas now known as Northern Ontario, Wisconsin, Michigan, and

Illinois—along the rivers and lakes where the French were the only Europeans. French priests were great explorers of North America, mapping waterways of a vast region while searching for the fabled Northwest Passage to the Pacific Ocean. They also founded settlements as far south as Mobile and New Orleans.

Early French missionaries learned Native ways and adapted to a lifestyle of extreme hardship and danger. Several religious orders and “secular priests” (those not attached to an

### Box 1.2: Kateri Tekakwitha, “The Lily of the Mohawks”

Kateri Tekakwitha (1656–1680) was born in a Mohawk village in what is now central New York State. A smallpox epidemic swept her village, killing members of her family and leaving her with a scarred face and impaired vision. In 1666, the French attacked Mohawk villages as part of the ongoing conflict between the French (allied with the Huron) and the Dutch (allied with the Mohawks) over the fur trade. Although a young girl at the time, Kateri helped nurse the wounded. The French sent Jesuit missionaries to the Mohawks; Kateri received instruction and was baptized at the age of twenty. She refused to marry and moved to a Jesuit mission, south of Montreal, for Native American women of several tribes. There she became known for her extremely pious life, praying for the conversion of her people and practicing extreme forms of asceticism, which may have led to her death. Miracles of healing were attributed to her, and her story inspired devotion. In 2012 she was made a saint by the Roman Catholic Church, the first Native American to be canonized.



**Fig. 1.6** Statue of Kateri Tekakwitha at Cathedral Basilica of St. Francis of Assisi in Santa Fe, New Mexico. Photo: Jim McInsoth/Flickr (CC-by-2.0 license).

### Box 1.3: Jesuit Missionaries

**Source:** The Jesuit Relations and Allied Documents Travels and Explorations of the Jesuit Missionaries in New France 1610–1791, [http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations\\_11.html](http://puffin.creighton.edu/jesuit/relations/relations_11.html).

*Letter of Father Jean de Brébeuf to the Very Reverend Father Mutius Vitelleschi, General of the Society of Jesus, at Rome, ca. 1636.*

The Hurons live in towns, not wandering about after the manner of wild animals. . . . They have in all twenty towns . . . they cultivate the fields, from which they gather Indian corn . . . excellent pumpkins, and also tobacco. All this region abounds in game and fish; and so the Hurons have at hand the means of supplying a living, if not luxurious, yet adequate and healthful; and they sell to others. They are . . . endowed with excellent sense and judgment. . . . As for the mysteries of our faith, although these are entirely new to their ears, they yet do not gainsay them, or mock or scorn them; nay, rather they wonder, praise, and approve, though without keeping them long before their minds. They all have but one answer—"Such is not our custom; your world is different from ours; the God who created yours," they say, "did not create ours." . . . Many, it is true, gladly worship the God whom we preach; but when opportunity for their old superstitions again arises, they scarcely abstain therefrom. Among other things that move them, they are frightened by the torment of hell; and, enticed by the joys of paradise, they open their eyes to the light of truth. Since we came here, 2 years ago, we have baptized [many]. Only three fathers of our [Jesuit] Society were here last year, but this year there are five. We have enjoyed great peace with all men, and health so complete that it is almost a miracle to the [Huron] and convinces them that the God whom we worship, and who exercises so great care over his own, is the best—especially since hardly one of [them] escaped last year the infection of a certain plague, by which very many were destroyed. . . . Among the other jewels with which the [Jesuit] laborer in this mission ought to shine, gentleness and patience must hold the first rank; and never will this field produce fruit except through mildness and patience; for one should never expect to force it by violent and arbitrary action. . . . From the residence of St. Joseph, among the Hurons, Canadian peoples, at the village of Ihonatiria.

Your Paternity's most humble servant, and obedient son in Christ,  
J. DE BREBEUF.

order) evangelized in New France, but none surpassed the Jesuit order. The Jesuits (also known as the Society of Jesus) were founded by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556), one of the most important Catholic leaders in the Reformation era. An ex-soldier, Loyola combined military ideals with a life of holiness. Pope Paul III approved the new order in 1540. Like "special ops" troops, Jesuit priests were trained to go anywhere, endure anything, and adapt to local conditions.

An early Jesuit missionary to New France was Jean de Brébeuf (1593–1649), who worked

among the Huron peoples. In 1636 he wrote to would-be missionaries back in France, warning them to expect extreme heat and cold, dangerous travel through rapids and around waterfalls, and nights of torment from mosquitoes, fleas, and sand flies. Food was scanty; there was no medical care and little or no shelter. Hardest of all was learning the Huron language, a task to humble even the most learned priest. Brébeuf advised his colleagues to stay home unless they were prepared to die. Some thirteen years later, the Iroquois—sworn foes of the Huron—tortured and killed Brébeuf. In 1930 Brébeuf and



**Fig. 1.7** From an expedition to the colony of Virginia by William Strachey as secretary of state. © Art Resource.

several other Jesuit martyrs were elevated to sainthood by the Roman Catholic Church.

After the martyrs, another generation built more lasting Catholic settlements. A great leader in this effort was Francois Xavier de Montmorency Laval (1623–1708), a Jesuit who became the first Catholic bishop in Canada. Laval established a seminary in Quebec in 1663, supported the work of women’s orders in New France, and secured land grants for the church. He strove to protect Native peoples from exploitation at the hands of white trappers and rum traders. After Laval’s time, the Jesuit mission was cut off—not only in New France but throughout the world. For largely political reasons, France suppressed the Jesuit order in 1763, and the pope abolished it completely in 1773. Jesuit missionaries were recalled to Europe, reassigned to other orders, or pensioned off. Although the Society of Jesus was

restored in 1801, Catholic mission suffered a major setback. This is but one example of how decisions made far away in Europe affected Christianity in the Americas.

Around the time the Jesuits were suppressed, French and English hostilities came to a head in North America. When the British captured Montreal in 1760, the Governor of Canada surrendered to the British. In 1763 the Peace of Paris ended both the Seven Years’ War in Europe and the French and Indian War in North America. England now formally controlled Canada, together with all its territories east of the Mississippi. But French Catholic heritage was laid deep in the foundations of Canada. French Catholicism had a lesser, though significant, impact in the United States, first through settlements such as Duluth and New Orleans, and later through the French priests imported to serve American Catholic parishes.

## Protestant Settlements in North America

Many types of Protestants were active in early colonial America. The so-called magisterial groups, Reformed, Lutheran, and Anglican, represented state or “established” churches back in Europe. These groups were soon joined by radical Protestants such as Baptists and Quakers, which had known persecution in Europe. One may also describe the various Protestants in terms of nationality. There were Dutch and Swedish and German settlements as well as English; but because the English colonies had the greatest long-term influence on North American Christianity, they will receive greater attention.

England’s thirteen colonies in North America differed sharply from each other in matters of religion. Though founded by England, the colonies did not all adhere to the Church of England. Indeed, New Englanders tried to keep the Church of England out. In an era of territorialism, one may ask how England ended up with more than one “established” church in its colonies, and with some colonies that openly welcomed dissent. At a practical level, this happened because England needed settlers and could not afford to be too selective. But a deeper reason for the religious patchwork in its colonies lies with England’s own history.

During the Reformation and its aftermath—which overlapped with the early European settlements in America—England careened through several religious and political upheavals. These began in 1554 when King Henry VIII declared himself (and not the pope) to be the supreme head of the church. After Henry died, each of his successors became the head of the church, and they had



**Fig. 1.8** Elizabeth I brought stability to the Church of England, but the Puritan movement arose to demand a more definite form of Protestantism. Courtesy of Wikimedia Commons.

authority over England’s religion. What was legal under one monarch could bring exile or death under the next. Therefore, dissenters left England or returned, depending on who was in power. At last, the third monarch after Henry—Elizabeth I—achieved some religious stability for her country. The “Elizabethan Settlement” provided a moderate Protestant theology, set forth in *The Thirty-Nine Articles*, and a revised *Book of Common Prayer* as the basis for worship. The Church of England continued a “threefold ministry of bishops, priests and deacons and claimed to have kept the apostolic succession.”<sup>7</sup> The church was firmly tied to the state because the Crown retained control over bishops.

Not everyone was satisfied with the Elizabethan Settlement. A coalition of zealous reformers wanted to free the Church of England from royal control and “purify” it from all remnants of Catholicism. These reformers were called Puritans. After enduring suppression and persecution, the Puritans executed King Charles in 1649 and briefly ruled England through the Lord Protector Oliver Cromwell. But after Cromwell died in 1658, the Puritans lost political power. The monarchy was restored, renewing the prospect for a Catholic king. But when Protestant monarchs William and Mary were crowned in 1688, England’s Protestant identity seemed secure.

Because this period of turmoil overlapped with England’s early claims and settlements in America, England could not secure a firm establishment of the Church of England in all of its American colonies. The Church of England was established in Virginia and other southern colonies and in some parts of New York. But Puritans had already set up their own establishment in New England, while Protestant dissenters and Catholics were settling in several other colonies. Thus, England’s history played a large role in shaping colonial Christianity (as did African slavery, immigration from continental Europe, religious awakenings, and the Enlightenment, which are described in due course). With this background in mind, the balance of this chapter will survey the story of Christianity in the early colonial period by region—from the southern colonies to New England to the middle colonies.

## The Southern Colonies

The first permanent English settlement on the Atlantic seaboard was Jamestown, Virginia. It

was founded in 1607 by the Virginia Company, a group of private investors who sought profits through trade. Jamestown had a Church of England minister to hold worship services for the colonists and to evangelize Native peoples. But the Jamestown venture won few converts, lost money, and cost hundreds of lives.<sup>8</sup> Few of these early settlers knew how to raise crops; some may have refused to do menial labor, regarding it as below their class as gentlemen of trade. Soon starvation and disease took a heavy toll. The colony was saved by new recruits from England and by a regimen of strict rules for work, worship, and community discipline. In 1619, as Jamestown was beginning to stabilize, a Dutch trading ship arrived with captured Africans who were put to work in the tobacco fields.

The Virginia colony came under royal control in 1624, with the Church of England as its established church. Laws and punishments were devised to keep out dissenters—Congregationalists, Baptists, Puritans, and Quakers.<sup>9</sup> But the Anglican Church in Virginia still faced daunting challenges. Clergy had to serve large, sparsely settled parishes, where roads were poor or nonexistent. In Virginia and other areas in the south, well-to-do laypersons organized “vestries” that ran parish affairs and resisted clergy control.

Similar conditions prevailed in North and South Carolina. Except for towns like Charleston (founded in 1670), the colonists were spread so far apart that gathering for regular worship seemed nearly impossible. Anglican clergy reported a very low interest in religion among these colonists. Despite its status as the official religion, the Church of England was relatively weak in much of the South during the early colonial period. With a sparse population and so much backcountry, religious nonconformists

### Box 1.4: “Virginia’s Cure: The Church’s Unhappiness and the True Remedy,” 1661

**Source:** First Hand Accounts of Virginia, 1575–1705 *The Virtual Jamestown Project*, <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/jamestown-browsemod?id=J1077>.

This document was presented to the bishop of London, September 2, 1661, and published in pamphlet form. The author, “R.G.” has been variously identified as Robert Gray or Robert Greene. R.G. laments that the English, far from bringing civilization to the Indians, have gone wild in the backwoods. No wonder the Indians are not impressed with Christianity. Perhaps some English settlers preferred to live beyond the range of the church’s influence.

R.G. explains that, in Virginia, settlers followed the rivers deep into the interior. Anglican clergy found it impossible to reach those who were “very remote from the House of God.” Even “the most faithful and vigilant Pastors . . . cannot possibly take notice of the Vices that reign in [remote settler’s] Families, of the spiritual defects in their Conversations . . . and provide Spiritual Remedies in their public Ministry. . . .” And so “through the licentious lives of many of [the settlers] the Christian Religion is like[ly] to be dishonoured, and the Name of God to be blasphemed among the Heathen, who are near them, and oft among them, and consequently their Conversion hindered.”

Schools were as scarce as churches in remote areas. Thus “a very numerous generation of Christian Children born in *Virginia* (who naturally are of beautiful and comely Persons, and generally of more ingenious Spirits than these in *England*) [are rendered] unserviceable for any great Employments either in Church or State.” Ignorant settlers cannot show the Indians a better way of life. There is no incentive for conversion and no opportunity for [Indian] children “to be taught and instructed in our Schools, together with the Children of the Christians. For . . . the Beauty and Glory of Christian Graces, shining in the lives of Christians” . . . might attract Indians to “the Christian Religion.” Only love can “persuade them to bring in their Children to be taught and instructed in it.” But it is “unlikely that such love” is being shown by the English settlers who are “for the most part destitute of the ordinary means of Grace.” Why should “any rational Heathen . . . be persuaded to commit their Children to the teaching and education of such Christians” who lack “Schools of learning . . . for their own”? Since the English settlers cared so little for religion and education, why should “a sober discreet Heathen” care for these things either?

To remedy these ills, each Virginia county should establish a town with a church, a school, and a marketplace. More clergy were needed; not just short-term missionaries, but dedicated ministers committed to many years of service. If the English were serious about bringing Christianity to the Indians, they needed to model Christian community in Virginia.

could often avoid the reach of the established church. Religious diversity in the southern colonies increased when certain groups from continental Europe—such as French Huguenots and German Lutherans—received permission to settle in the Carolinas. This religious toleration was a privilege, however, not a right.

Maryland was a brief exception to the Anglican establishment. In 1634 a powerful

English Catholic family, the Calverts, began the settlement of Maryland. The new colony was both a successful business venture and a place of refuge for English Catholics (the first settlers were a mix of Catholics and Protestants). Maryland’s early Catholic colonists had large land grants and were active in colonial government. Their future looked bright in 1649, when the Maryland Assembly passed an

Act of Toleration. This meant that the Church of England tolerated the presence of Catholics in the colony. But if toleration can be given, it can also be taken away. The Act of Toleration was repealed when Puritans briefly took power in Maryland. Years later and an ocean away, England's "Glorious Revolution" of 1688–89 rejected James II (a Catholic) as king and instead crowned William and Mary (Protestants). After that, Maryland Catholics could not vote, hold public office, or worship freely in Maryland until the American Revolution.

The last British colony, Georgia, was chartered in 1732. Some of Georgia's colonists came

from overcrowded debtors' prisons in England. Others were religious exiles, like the Lutherans who were expelled from their home in Salzburg, Austria, by order of a Catholic ruler. Protestants across Europe raised money to pay for ships' passage to America for these exiles. Arriving in Georgia, the Salzburger Lutherans founded a community that they called Ebenezer, a biblical word meaning "rock of hope." By 1741 the Ebenezer settlement had twelve hundred people. Historian Abdel Ross Wentz describes these Lutherans, in the prime of their settlement, as living in peace with their neighbors, rejecting slavery, and evangelizing Indians. The Salzburger Lutherans grew cash crops and built churches, schools, and an orphanage. Their pastors had great authority and required no outside help to keep order in the Lutheran settlements. Wentz further notes that "the famed evangelist George Whitefield and the founders of Methodism, John and Charles Wesley, who visited Ebenezer, were deeply impressed with the faith and piety of these Lutherans."<sup>10</sup>



**Fig. 1.9** Lutheran Refugees from Salzburg. The man carries two books: the Augsburg Confession (1530) and *True Christianity* by Johann Arndt; the woman carries the Bible. The legend between them translates: "We are driven into exile for the Gospel's sake; we leave our homeland and are now in God's hands." Along the top runs a biblical quotation "but pray that your flight does not occur in the winter or on the Sabbath" (Matt. 24:20).

## The Beginnings of Slavery

There were many forms of labor in England's American colonies. Indentured servants sailed to America on credit, working off their debt over a period of several years. There were also free laborers and debtors transported from English prisons. African slaves soon became the bottom layer of this diverse labor system.

When the first Africans and Creoles (persons of mixed descent) arrived in Virginia as captives, their long-term future was unclear. Perhaps, like the white indentured servants, they could be released after several years. Indeed, some Africans were able to negotiate their freedom and become landowners.<sup>11</sup> But loopholes

### Box 1.5: The Misfortune of Indentured Servants

**Source:** University of Groningen, "Gottlieb Mittelberger on the Misfortune of Indentured Servants," in *American History from Revolution to Reconstruction and Beyond: A Hypertext on the History of the United States from the Colonial Period until Modern Times*, <http://www.let.rug.nl/usa/documents/1600-1650/gottlieb-mittelberger-on-the-misfortune-indentured-servants.php>.

*In 1750 Gottlieb Mittelberger left Germany for Pennsylvania. He described conditions on the voyage, and how, upon reaching America, passengers who could not afford to pay their fare sold themselves into servitude. Mittelberger himself was not an indentured servant; he became a schoolmaster and an organist in Philadelphia before returning to Germany in 1754.*

"Both in Rotterdam and in Amsterdam the people are packed densely, like herrings so to say, in the large sea-vessels. One person receives a place of scarcely 2 feet width and 6 feet length in the bedstead, while many a ship carries four to six hundred souls; not to mention the innumerable implements, tools, provisions, water-barrels and other things. . . .

When the wind is good, they get [to London] in 8 days or even sooner. . . . Ships ride [in London] 8, 10 to 14 days and even longer at anchor, till they have taken in their full cargoes. During that time every one is compelled to spend his last remaining money and to consume his little stock of provisions which had been reserved for the sea.

[But] the real misery begins with the long voyage [of 7 to 12] weeks before they reach Philadelphia. . . . There is on board these ships terrible misery, stench, fumes, horror, vomiting, many kinds of sea-sickness, fever, dysentery, headache, heat, constipation, boils, scurvy, cancer, mouth-rot, and the like, all of which come from old and sharply salted food and meat, also from very bad and foul water, so that many die miserably . . . the lice abound so frightfully, especially on sick people, that they can be scraped off the body. The misery reaches the climax when a gale rages for 2 or 3 nights and days, so that every one believes that the ship will go to the bottom with all human beings on board. In such a visitation the people cry and pray most piteously.

. . . I myself had to pass through a severe illness at sea, and I best know how I felt at the time. These poor people often long for consolation, and I often entertained and comforted them with singing, praying and exhorting; and whenever it was possible and the winds and waves permitted it, I kept daily prayer-meetings with them on deck. Besides, I baptized five children in distress, because we had no ordained minister on board. I also held divine service every Sunday by reading sermons to the people; and when the dead were sunk in the water, I commended them and our souls to the mercy of God. . . .

No one can have an idea of the sufferings which women in confinement have to bear with their innocent children on board these ships. . . . Children from 1 to 7 years rarely survive the voyage. I witnessed misery in no less than 32 children in our ship, all of whom were thrown into the sea. The parents grieve all the more since their children find no resting-place in the earth, but are devoured by the monsters of the sea. . . .

After a long and tedious voyage, the ships come in sight of land. . . . [Passengers] creep from below on deck . . . and they weep for joy, and pray and sing, thanking and praising God. The sight of the land makes the people on board the ship, especially the sick and the half dead, alive again, so that their hearts leap within them; they shout and rejoice, and are content to bear their misery in patience, in the hope that they may soon reach the land in safety. But alas!

When the ships have landed at Philadelphia after their long voyage, no one is permitted to leave them except those who pay for their passage or can give good security; the others, who cannot pay, must remain on board the ships till they are purchased, and are released from the ships by their purchasers. . . .

The sale of human beings in the market on board the ship is carried on thus: Every day Englishmen, Dutchmen and High-German people come from the city of Philadelphia and other places, in part from a great distance, say 20, 30, or 40 hours away, and go on board the newly arrived ship that has brought and offers for sale passengers from Europe, and select among the healthy persons such as they deem suitable for their business, and bargain with them how long they will serve for their passage money, which most of them are still in debt for. When they have come to an agreement, it happens that adult persons bind themselves in writing to serve 3, 4, 5 or 6 years for the amount due by them, according to their age and strength. But very young people, from 10 to 15 years, must serve till they are 21 years old.

Many parents must sell and trade away their children like so many head of cattle; for if their children take the debt upon themselves, the parents can leave the ship free and unrestrained; but as the parents often do not know where and to what people their children are going, it often happens that such parents and children, after leaving the ship, do not see each other again for many years, perhaps no more in all their lives.

It often happens that whole families, husband, wife, and children, are separated by being sold to different purchasers, especially when they have not paid any part of their passage money. When a husband or wife has died at sea, when the ship has made more than half of her trip, the survivor must pay or serve not only for himself or herself, but also for the deceased.

When both parents have died over half-way at sea, their children, especially when they are young and have nothing to pawn or to pay, must stand for their own and their parents' passage, and serve till they are 21 years old. When one has served his or her term, he or she is entitled to a new suit of clothes at parting; and if it has been so stipulated, a man gets in addition a horse, a woman, a cow."

began to close as the slave labor system developed. Historian Ira Berlin notes the essential characteristics of slavery: Africans became legally "chattel" (property) until they died; their children were born into a system that bound them for life to white masters, who could use irresistible force to back up their demands. In contrast to indentured servitude, which was based on economic status, slavery was based on race. This was the most important characteristic of all in the American context. To be sure, the circumstances of slavery could vary greatly from one generation to another, from one part of the country to another, and even from one plantation to another. But beneath all this variety, slavery had the same basis everywhere: race, chattel property, and the use (or threat) of force.

African slavery was present in all of the colonies, even in the North; but the slave system struck deepest root in the South, where labor-intensive crops—tobacco, rice, and finally cotton—made it profitable. Ambitious colonists, aspiring to be like the landed, titled nobility of Europe, found that slave labor increased the wealth and enhanced the social status of slave owners. Slavery quickly became embedded in colonial economies and social structures, so that everyone was affected by slavery, even those who did not own slaves.

Slavery had deeply religious dimensions. The Africans brought with them many tribal religions and probably some forms of Islam. But the slave trade disrupted African religions; it tore families apart, destroyed entire villages,

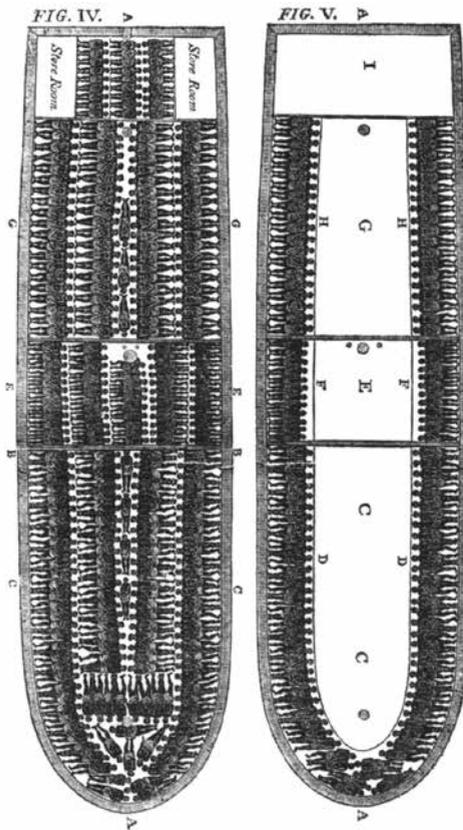
and removed people from sacred places. Slave trade patterns often threw together Africans of diverse languages and beliefs. And slave owners suppressed African religions, fearing, above all else, a slave revolt. Any religious practice that might subvert the slave owner's power was forbidden. This meant, for example, that blacks were seldom if ever allowed to meet together without white supervision, even for religious ceremonies. Drumming was integral to African worship, but drums were banned lest they be used to send messages or inspire rebellion.

Nevertheless, many African beliefs and customs persisted. The spirit world remained vivid

to most Africans. Spirits of ancestors might give help or do harm, and therefore needed tending. People wore amulets or charms to ward off evil spirits or attract good ones. Courtship rituals, tribal lore, and burial customs were carried to North America and adapted to new situations.

At first the English showed little interest in Christianizing the Africans; it seemed more prudent to withhold Christianity from the slaves. Baptism was problematic, since it declared people to be children of God rather than the property of this or that owner. To address this problem, several local laws were passed, such as the 1667 Virginia statute declaring that "Baptisme doth not alter the condition of the person as to his bondage or freedom."<sup>12</sup> Early in the eighteenth century, Anglican missionaries sought to evangelize the African slaves. To gain access to slaves on plantations, missionaries had to convince slave owners that Christianity would not subvert slavery. The bishop of London helped their cause by declaring in 1727 that baptism in no way changed a slave's status as property.

Armed with guarantees that Christianity would not harm slavery, Anglican missionaries could often obtain permission to preach to slaves on a plantation. Gaining access to plantation slaves was only the first hurdle; next came the problem of language. In the early years, there might be several African languages on any plantation, all in various stages of blending with English. Even if the language barriers could be breached, the message problem remained. The doctrinal instruction offered by early missionaries did not connect with the experience of slaves. Moreover, Africans had little reason to trust what a white person said to them. It is not surprising, then, that relatively few African Americans embraced Christianity in early colonial times.



**Fig. 1.10** This diagram of a slave ship from the Atlantic slave trade shows the miserable conditions for transported slaves.