

## **The American Culture's Christian Foundation: The Protestant Break from Rome; Puritans Flee Religious Oppression for the New World; Communism Tried & Failed, Replaced by Individual Responsibility; the Issue of Church & State**

In England, the Reformation provided the opportunity of rulers to free themselves from Rome. Wherever Protestantism flourished it led to a rise of a nation-state, free from the control of the pope while both France and Spain remained shackled to the Vatican. Today both they and the colonies they established in the New World have never achieved the prosperity of Protestant America.

Every nation south of the Rio Grande is controlled by Catholicism and some have fallen under the insidious evil called Liberation Theology. Historically, wherever Romanism sinks its roots ignorance, poverty, fear, and guilt are sure to follow.

Those who settled the east coast of North America were predominantly English. They possessed a heritage that had been developed from the three great civilizations of ancient history: Jewish, Greek, and Roman. They were determined to perpetuate that culture in the West.

Over time the center of civilization had shifted from the Mediterranean to the North Atlantic. England ruled the world's oceans and therefore controlled the sea lanes of trade and commerce.

The English political system functioned under a set of documents such as the Magna Carta, the Petition of Right, and the Habeas Corpus Act.<sup>1</sup>

The island empire was led by a monarch who headed both the government and the Church of England. Bad monarchs led to oppression of the English people.

Prior to the Reformation, oppression was commonplace throughout the world. People were controlled by both the monarch and the pope. There was very little freedom and lots of ignorance. Thus the Middle Ages are sometimes called the Dark Ages.

The Church of England was a by-product of the Dark-Age mentality:

1. Everyone had to attend church in his parish church every Sunday under penalty of law.
2. He had to pay tithes (minimum of 10%) to the clergyman with whom he might not agree.
3. He was liable to church courts which could try and punish him for: (1) heresy, (2) nonattendance, (3) sexual immorality, (4) working on Sundays, (5) nonpayment of tithes, and (6) lending money at interest.
4. Books were strictly censored by the bishops.
5. Education was the monopoly of the church and no one was allowed to teach in schools or at home without licensed approval from his bishop.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Great Charter of English liberties granted by King John in 1215. In England the Petition of Right (1628) and the Habeas Corpus Act (1679) looked directly back to clause 39 of the charter of 1215, which stated that 'no freemen shall be ... imprisoned or dispossessed ... except by the lawful judgment of his peers or by the law of the land.' In the United States both the national and the state constitutions show ideas and even phrases directly traceable to Magna Carta. The final version of the charter was drafted at Runnymede and sealed by John on June 15, 1215" (*The New Encyclopaedia Britannica: Micropaedia*, 15th ed., s.v. "Magna Carta").

6. In 1581, an act was passed making it a crime to convert anyone to Catholicism and to attend a mass. (Under this act over 200 Catholics were put to death.)
7. An act in 1593 made it a crime for dissenting Protestants to conduct private Bible studies. Those found guilty were: (a) imprisoned, (b) banished from England, or (c) executed if they returned.

Finally, in the decade 1630–1640, thousands of Puritans migrated to the colonies.

In matters of trade and industry, England sought to control, regulate, and direct the economy. The intent was to maintain economic stability while at the same time inspire trade, manufacturing, and foreign commerce.

The result was the development of a system known as Mercantilism, an economic system designed to increase the power and monetary wealth of a nation by strict governmental regulation of the entire national economy.

The usual regulatory policies found in mercantilism are designed to:

1. Secure an accumulation of bullion.
2. Establish a favorable balance of trade.
3. Develop agriculture and manufacturing.
4. Establish foreign trading monopolies.

This religious and economic oppression caused many to seek refuge in the colonies. No one in Europe considered it possible for people to live in a community while holding different religious beliefs.

When settlers came to the colonies, they formed communities where this diversity was the objective. However, since all colonies were under the auspices of the Crown, the Church of England still held sway.

In the Colony of Virginia, the settlers were under virtual martial law. They could not own private property; their provisions came from a common storehouse. Swearing was punishable by death. All citizens were required to attend church services – the first offense meant loss of rations, the second, scourging, and the third a trip to the gallows.

The storehouse was a form of corporate communism. All colonies were owned by some private entrepreneurial concern. All goods produced by the colonists belonged to the company. When people were told they could draw daily necessities from the storehouse regardless of their efficiency in production, their work habits tended to falter. As a result, by the 1620s all land had come into private ownership.

During this period, Protestants in Europe were threatened with destruction by the Thirty Years' War. Victims identified with the Jews of old who were persecuted by the pharaoh. Understanding newly uncovered theology, they rightly identified themselves as the Church Age's elect and eagerly sought the promised land of the New World.

The Puritans' theology was orthodox with one major exception – they did not distinguish the separation of church and state. Having been allowed free reign they would have only been successful in duplicating in society what the Catholics had already accomplished: religious tyranny.

At any rate, the Puritans believed in a covenant relationship between the church and God. As man is under contract to God, so men may be under contract with each other. It is this covenant contract concept that was ultimately reflected in the Constitution.

The failure to discern the separation between church and state caused the Puritans of New England to seek governmental control over the people of the colony. Such an authoritarian approach was resented by some and led to the establishment of two new colonies: Connecticut and Rhode Island.

In an effort to install equality of worship, Pennsylvania law provided that "... all persons who confess and acknowledge the one Almighty eternal God and that hold themselves obliged in conscience to live peacefully and justly in civil society, shall, in no ways, be molested or prejudiced for their religious persuasion ..., nor shall they be compelled, at any time, to frequent or maintain any religious worship."

The colonies were not politically, economically, or religiously linked to one another. Although the colonies differed there were a couple of unifying themes: (1) the preservation of their English culture while at the same time (2) developing into Americans.

In Europe, farmers usually lived in villages and worked only a few acres of land. In the colonies, farmers lived in the center of giant land holdings. Consequently, outside of New England, farmers did not live in towns. Instead they lived on their land separate from one another. Such an arrangement promoted self-reliance, individualism, and family.