Scripture: Psalm 71:17-19
Prayer
Hymn:  546 "God of Our Fathers"

In the original thirteen colonies of the United States, during the years before the American Revolution, the stage was set for the subsequent rank growth of denominationalism that ever since has characterized the national religious life. The religious movements of Europe were brought across the ocean and transplanted in the New World, where in spite of any professed loyalties to the parent body in the Old World, they have developed in the new environment quite distinctive features. The different circumstances of life in the new land made for change. Another influence for change was the closer exposure to the variety of traditions of Europe. Thirteen recalcitrant colonies with their different religions finally were bound together under one government with no one religion dominant and with toleration for all.

The English influence was dominant. More than three fourths of the people came from the British Isles. It could have been different. It could have been Spanish. Spain at the height of its glory sent explorers and missionaries to many parts of the new world who planted the first settlements. Spanish colonization declined with the decline of Spain. The Spanish were more interested in finding gold than in planting colonies. It could have been French. They explored the St. Lawrence, the Great Lakes, and the Mississippi and planted many settlements. With the French replacing the Spanish as the center of power and culture, it seemed impossible that the English could defeat the French and bring to an end the French colonial empire. The French failed to take sufficient interest in and to give sufficient support to the building of French colonies, and when war came the English commanders proved the bolder and more daring. There was a moment when the New World could have possibly become a great Dutch empire. Very early they planted New Amsterdam. The Dutch navy was a powerful force and Holland became a leading commercial power in that period. The Dutch spent their strength plundering and destroying Spanish power and wealth. They failed to see the importance of the land that would become the Thirteen Colonies. For all these powers the islands of the Caribbean seemed much more promising as a source of wealth. The Dutch gave little support to New Amsterdam. Many Englishmen came primarily to seek wealth and fortune but more Englishmen settled and built homes. When the wars came the Englishmen were fighting with the mother country against the other powers for their homes. Even England looked more to the Caribbean. The failure to see the importance of what became the Thirteen Colonies in a large part was responsible for the neglect, misunderstanding, and mismanagement that finally brought the Revolution.

Protestantism was the dominant religious force in the Thirteen Colonies. The possibility of Catholic dominance waned with the decline of Spanish and French empires. Even in the Catholic colony of Maryland so few English Catholics came to America that the Protestants outnumbered the Catholics and took control. The Catholic leaders did not supply enough clergy for Catholicism to prosper. The Catholics would wait a long time for an American bishop—long after the Revolution.
The majority of the colonists and their churches were Calvinist. In spite of the spread of Arminianism in England Anglicanism was still shot through with Calvinism. Congregationalism, Presbyterianism and the Baptists were strongly Calvinist. Among the colonists from the continent Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, and French Huguenots were Calvinists.

Puritanism was not confined to the Calvinistic Congregationalists of New England. There was a deep strain of Puritanism in most of the Englishmen with religious leanings who came to America and who were not Anglican. Even many Anglicans were not completely free from traces of Puritanism. Although Anglicans planted the first colony, Anglicans who came to America were far outnumbered by those who longed for freedom from Anglican domination and by criminals, debtors, radicals, and irreligious who stood outside Anglicanism.

Although the longing for freedom of religion was only one of the motivations that brought people to America—there was also the search for wealth and fortune, the love of adventure, the hope of escaping from failure and debts, the hope of escaping punishment for crimes—Calvinistic and Puritan ideas played a big part in colonial thinking. By and large the colonial mind was characterized by a belief in the depravity of the human race, salvation by the grace of God in Christ Jesus, the sovereignty, predestination, foreordination, and purposes of God. The idea grew that these Thirteen Colonies were a part of that purpose of God. The result was hope, optimism and pride. In spite of all the hardships, humble plantings had grown and prospered. Growth, prosperity, and freedom were the blessings of God on the unfolding of his purposes.

The religious diversity and the freedom of religion had a strong economic motivation. Only the Baptists of Rhode Island and the Quakers of Pennsylvania from the beginning promised freedom of religion. The Congregationalists of New England did not intend to tolerate any other religious groups. The Dutch of New Amsterdam wished to tolerate only the Dutch Reformed, but the interest in business and profits dictated a measure of toleration. The profitable tobacco industry in Virginia dictated a measure of toleration distasteful to Anglicans—they needed workers. The proprietor of the Maryland colony from the first ordered his Catholics to be tolerant because he needed Protestant settlers since not enough Catholics came. The Puritans of New England clearly and forcefully declared that those who differed were free to leave and find a place of their own. The vastness of the New World offered space for differing groups. When the Thirteen Colonies came together the diversity made toleration necessary—no one group was powerful enough to dominate the rest.

The New World offered a great opportunity for the realization of the priesthood of all believers. The absence of sufficient clergy resulted in an increase in the importance of the laity. At first in New England the clergy were dominant but soon the laity demanded a decisive voice. In Virginia the lay vestry with the power of the purse became dominant. The lack of a bishop to support the clergy helped increase the growing power of the laity.

With the ocean between the colonies and the old home power bases of the churches, the very remoteness of the churches in the New World offered an opportunity for reform. The freedom from restraint opened the way for holy experiments.
THE RELIGIOUS MAKE-UP OF THE DIFFERENT COLONIES

The Anglicans planted the first colony but they did not become the largest group in the colonies as a whole. The Congregationalists were the largest numerically but they were largely confined to New England. Dutch Reformed and Swedish Lutherans came early but were soon dominated by the English. Catholics, Quakers and Baptists were feared and hated so that their numbers remained small in the early days. Presbyterians and most of the Baptists came late but by the end of the colonial period were numerous and widely scattered.

THE NEW ENGLAND COLONIES

The Congregationalists were the dominant religious group in the New England colonies of Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire. Rhode Island was the exception—all religions were granted toleration there. Plymouth was the first of the New England colonies, founded in 1620 by Separatist Congregationalists. Plymouth was soon overshadowed by the non-Separatist Massachusetts Bay Colony of 1629. In 1691 the Plymouth Colony was absorbed into the Massachusetts Bay Colony that had moved to a Separatist Congregationalist position. Dissatisfaction with the Puritan authorities of the Massachusetts Bay Colony led to the founding of Connecticut at Hartford in 1639 and New Haven in 1638. The two settlements united in 1662 as the colony of Connecticut which was Congregational. In 1708 in the Saybrook Platform the Connecticut Congregationalists instituted a more centralized control over the congregations than was the practice in Massachusetts.

When the charter of the Massachusetts Bay Colony was revoked in 1684 and Massachusetts was made a crown colony, the governor forced the Congregationalists to permit the Anglicans to worship in Old South meetinghouse. In 1688 the Anglicans built King's Chapel, the first of the Anglican churches. From this time the Congregationalists had to tolerate Anglicans.

The Congregationalists of Connecticut grew more tolerant of Anglicans and Presbyterians than the Congregationalists of Massachusetts and both of these groups grew in Connecticut.

When England took control of the New Netherlands in 1664 it was granted to the Duke of York and renamed New York. The Anglican Church became the established church but had to tolerate those already there. The Edict of Toleration of 1689 in England that followed the Glorious Revolution and the coronation of William and Mary insured toleration also in the colonies. New York became one of the most heterogeneous areas in religion in America. The economic motives for toleration reinforced the religious freedom. Methodists made some of their first plantings in America in New York. Jews also settled in New York.

New Jersey was a part of the grant to the Duke of York in 1664. He gave it to two friends who sold West Jersey to two Quakers in 1674. William Penn became one of the proprietors. New Jersey already had settlements established by New England Congregationalists, Dutch Reformed, Swedish Lutherans, and Baptists. In 1702 New Jersey was made a royal colony and East and West Jerseys were united. Penn's policy of toleration was continued. Quakers had settlements throughout New Jersey.
In 1680 William Penn was granted the territory that would become Pennsylvania and Delaware from Charles II in settlement of a debt that the English crown had owed Penn's father. Penn began his "Holy Experiment" of a colony that was not only a home for the persecuted Quakers but a colony that would grant full toleration and full religious freedom to all. In 1703 Delaware became a separate colony. Penn's new colony already had a few settlements of Swedish Lutherans, Finnish Lutherans, and Dutch Reformed. Quakers flocked to the new colony. Penn's policy of toleration in short order attracted Mennonites, Dunkers (German Baptists), German Reformed (especially from the Palatinate), Moravians, Schwenkfelders, German Lutherans, Catholics (especially from Maryland), Anglicans, Congregationalists, and Baptists. Later there was a great influx of Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. Both Quakers and Moravians carried on extensive mission work among the Indians.

THE SOUTHERN COLONIES:

Virginia was the first of the colonies and the only one where Anglicans were the clear majority. Anglicanism was the established religion from the beginning. Anglicans were quite determined to keep all others out—especially Catholics, Quakers, Congregationalists and Baptists. By 1660 Quakers had succeeded in establishing scattered communities. The Anglican failure to secure a bishop and the general neglect of the Anglicans in Virginia opened the way for the growth of irreligion and the influx of other religious groups. The English civil wars and Cromwell's regime interrupted Anglican control in Virginia and greatly weakened it. Baptists multiplied. Scotch-Irish Presbyterians settled in the Shenandoah. Toward the end of the colonial period Methodists began to settle in Virginia. Growing hatred of the Anglican planter aristocracy and the spread of other religious groups further weakened the Anglican control. The edict of Toleration of 1689 meant an end to intolerance in Virginia also.

Maryland was founded in 1634 by Lord Baltimore as a Catholic colony but he instructed the Catholics not to parade their religion and ordered toleration for Protestant colonists. When Jesuits tried to establish the same Catholic policies that prevailed in European countries where Catholics had the majority, the proprietor curbed the Jesuits. Catholics in Maryland were disfranchised in the 1650's by the English Parliament for recognizing Charles II. With the expulsion of James II the Anglicans were given control of Maryland and Catholics were subjected to disabilities that caused some to migrate to Pennsylvania. Catholicism continued an important influence in Maryland but the Edict of Toleration of 1689 opened the way for other religious groups to move into Maryland. Presbyterians, Congregationalists, Baptists, Mennonites, and Quakers soon outnumbered both Anglicans and Catholics.

The Anglican Church was the established church in North and South Carolina and in Georgia, but it was a nominal establishment. There was a measure of toleration and great heterogeneity from the beginning. Anglicans were strong only in South Carolina. Georgia as a colony for debtors and criminals was characterized by considerable lawlessness and irreligion. Quakers were one of the strong groups in North Carolina. Scotch-Irish Presbyterians from Virginia moved into both Carolinas and Georgia. They became especially strong in North Carolina. The Baptists grew rapidly in all three. Lutherans and Moravians established communities in both North Carolina and Georgia.
THE COMPARATIVE STRENGTH OF THE DIFFERENT CHURCHES IN COLONIAL AMERICA

NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN 1660

Anglican 41
Baptist 4
Congregational 75
Dutch Reformed 13
Lutheran 4
Presbyterian 5
Roman Catholic 12

NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN 1700

Anglican 111
Baptist 33
Congregational 146
Dutch Reformed 26
Lutheran 7
Presbyterian 28
Roman Catholic 22

NUMBER OF CHURCHES IN 1740

Anglican 406
Baptist 457
Congregational 749
Dutch Reformed 127
German Reformed 201
Lutheran 240
Presbyterian 495
Roman Catholic 56

It has been estimated that the number of Quaker churches was only a little less than the number of Anglicans, Baptists, and Presbyterians—somewhere in the neighborhood of 400.