

3. Foundations of the pre-revolutionary church bodies

In this material we want to consider the church bodies prior to or perhaps just including the revolutionary war. Our procedure is to look at the bodies and then look briefly at some of the major events that influenced their growth and development. We are treating the bodies as units (all the baptists as baptists, etc.) rather than looking to the particular individual churches. We will bring the foundational notes up to the revolutionary period or thereabouts. The danger in this part of the syllabus is to try to treat the groups in totality and that cannot well be done in a course of this sort. I will try to recommend fuller reading for those desiring to have more complete information on particular churches and organizations. Church growth and statistics on all the bodies discussed are given rather graphically in Gausted: HISTORICAL ATLAS OF RELIGION IN AMERICA. Students familiar with the ways of such syllabus as this will know that I tend towards over-simplification and have a desire for the broader picture more than the individual details. Sometimes this produces scenarios that could be more accurately portrayed with greater concentration on the details. But that is how it goes and with the aid of our texts, discussion, and collateral reading we would make it all right.

a. Congregational foundations

Congregationalism is rooted in the ideal of each church governing itself with only a fraternal relationship to other bodies. This eventually relates to all parts of its church life and order. Historically the ideals are associated with Robert Browne and his work REFORMATION WITHOUT TARRYING FOR ANY although in time, Browne, himself, left this position and returned to the established church. Our primary familiarity comes with the Scrooby congregation of England, their move to Holland, the teaching of John Robinson, and the eventual move to New England and the historical items of Gov. Bradford's JOURNAL. I have earlier mentioned that the separatist congregationalists came to Plymouth and the puritan-Anglicans came to Massachusetts (Salem). But in terms of viewing the church these bodies were very similar. An often given citation of Francis Higginson, "teacher" of the Salem congregation in 1629 puts it this way:

We will not say as the Separatists are wont to say at their leaving England, "Farewell Babylon, Farewell Rome"; but we will say, "Farewell dear England, Farewell thne Church of God in England and all the Christian friends there." We do not go to New England as Separatists from the Church of England, though we cannot but separate from the corruptions in it."

The citation is found in Cotton Mather, MAGNALIA, Vol. 1, 362.