

D. Factors Influencing the American Churches

Various parts of these items will have greater or lesser significance to each phase of our study. Overall they are the items of considerable influence in the American churches: accounting for denominational development, sectarian posture and some doctrinal development as well. I will stress particulars from time to time and you, the student, will simply need to keep them generally in mind.

1. A Radical Spirit...not one of great revolutionary tendencies but a spirit towards the local segment more than the group--a willingness to be different in spite of contrary opinions.

a. A philosophy of self-sufficiency. Not always a good thing but a powerful influence in the colonies. Neither goods nor advice were deemed so necessary as to jeopardize one's sense of being.

b. An understanding of continuity without conformity. The colonials understood well how they stood in the light of their European heritage but they did not feel obligated to it. They took from it what was thought important but discarded what was thought otherwise.

c. A resentment of "overlordship". The commonality produced in the American culture made the high manners and paternalistic ideals of the old world civilization a nuisance.

2. The Population challenge...many persons of diverse background needing, depending, and yet not indulging one another.

a. An increasingly indigenous but not necessarily homogeneous population. The people belonged to the land and vice-versa but they continued to have sectional differences in most parts of their cultures--these being very pronounced. Thus, in a very short time, you will find all sorts of churches serving the same general territory due to the diverse needs of the population.

b. The frontier...a formidable area with challenge, opportunity and yet a continuous struggle for existence. What religion was needed to meet its reality?

c. The massive immigrations...just when you thought everything was worked to order...in came a bunch of somethings from some place and the whole society had to go through the phase of protection, resentment, adoption, and amalgamation.

d. Multiplied Minorities...not just one group but, in actuality several, that tended to undermine and threaten the control and security of the major bodies