

MARYLAND COLONIAL ERA HISTORY 1607-1776

2. Religion in the Colony

The following largely verbatim excerpts are taken from Brugger, Robert J., *Maryland A Middle Temperament: 1634-1980* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1988) and cited as Brugger [page #]. Reprinted with permission of Johns Hopkins University Press.

Catholicism

Taking note of the problems plaguing Virginia during [the years of the Jamestown settlement], [George] Calvert [the first Lord Baltimore] in the 1620s made his own plans to settle Englishmen in America – on the shores of Newfoundland, where he expected farming and fishing to support a profitable colony. He acquired a royal grant or patent to the southeast coast of the island and called the place Avalon after the mythical point where Christianity entered Britain.

In 1625 Calvert resigned his secretaryship [as one of two secretaries of state under King James] and next, after soul-searching both temporal and spiritual, declared to his Protestant king that he had converted to Catholicism. Unable any longer to take the Oath of Supremacy (to recognize the ultimate authority of the king in English ecclesiastical affairs), he withdrew entirely from political strife. James nonetheless remained grateful to Calvert, who in leaving service received the title Baron of Baltimore.

Calvert redoubled his efforts to found a settlement in America. Twice he traveled to Newfoundland, taking new settlers with him, yet late in the summer of 1629, shivering in Avalon, he had decided that its cold climate and rocky soil would never support a thriving colony. He wrote James' successor, Charles I, and asked for another grant, this one in the northern Chesapeake within the now-royal colony of Virginia. He and Lady Baltimore then sailed southward and visited Jamestown, whose leaders greeted him with guarded politeness; besides being "Romish" in religion, Calvert threatened to reduce the original compass of Virginia. When the impatient Virginians asked him to take the Oath of Supremacy, the Lord of Avalon left and returned home to work levers in the office of the privy seal. *** In June 1632, two months after Calvert died, King Charles signed the final charter and established a new English colony in honor of Queen Henrietta Maria. The grant went to Calvert's oldest son and heir, Cecil, namesake of [George Calvert patron] Sir Robert Cecil.

The second Lord Baltimore [Cecil Calvert], who never entered public life, set about planning the Maryland settlement in a climate of stern political and religious orthodoxy. Having dismissed Parliament, Charles ruled according to the largest claims of royal prerogative. Puritans and Catholics suffered for failing to conform to the Church of England. Old shareholders in the Virginia Company cloaked their opposition to the Catholic's venture by circulating what Calvert called "monstrous charges" and spreading "scandalous reports to discourage men from it." In mid-September 1633 he had organized about seventeen gentlemen, most if not all of them the younger sons of Catholic gentry, to make the voyage and help finance it. More than a hundred ordinary folk, mostly Protestants who had some experience at farming, joined the expedition.

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[The Second Lord Baltimore's] most admirable purpose, mixed in with the others, was religious toleration. Calvert counseled Leonard [Calvert] and [Catholic commissioners Jerome] Hawley and [Thomas] Cornwallis above all to be "very carefull [sic] to preserve unity and peace" between Protestants and Catholics, both on the voyage and afterward. Protestants received guarantees of "mildness and favor" as justice permitted; Catholics on board ship he adjured to practice their faith as privately as possible." [fn omitted] Lord Baltimore's colony was indeed to locate a middle ground. Maryland settlers, like the Virginians, listed the pursuit of earthly gain high among their aims; like New England, though more discreetly, Maryland would provide religious asylum.

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For nearly twenty years in the middle of the [seventeenth] century, a period the settlers later referred to as a "time of troubles," Maryland suffered the full consequences of English political and religious warring and its own weak political structure. Lord Baltimore found the time personally difficult. His wife, Lady Anne Arundel, daughter of a leading Catholic member of Lords, died in 1639. In the next few years Calvert must have wished he himself were free to seek refuge in Maryland. Parliament convened in 1640, challenged royal absolutism, and charged some of King Charles' advisors with counseling tyranny and treason against the English people. The House of Commons executed a longtime Yorkshire friend of the Calverts, Thomas Wentworth, Earl of Stafford, in 1641. In August 1642, the king defied Parliament and took his cause to the battlefield. During the ensuing civil war Charles and his royalist or Cavalier friends enlisted the help of Scots Presbyterians and Irish Catholics in the struggle against Cromwell's forces, while the Puritan or "Roundhead" Parliament showed a willingness to deal with its enemies as it did Charles, who was beheaded in early 1649. Politics and conscience had so combined as to leave Calvert's every move suspect; in the Puritan order his tolerant province was more anomalous as ever.

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Presbyterians

The patchwork quilt of Maryland religious life had been growing colorful for years, and it soon became more so. Presbyterians, attacked in England and Scotland under the Puritans, had begun to make their mark on Maryland at mid-century, when refugees and captives (whom the English sent to be sold as servants) first arrived in the Chesapeake. In about 1657 Francis Doughty, an unordained Presbyterian who earlier had run afoul of authorities in Massachusetts and New Netherland, sought refuge in Charles County; there another English dissenter, Matthew Hill, also preached until his death in 1679. On occasion both may have journeyed to the Eastern Shore, where, in Somerset County (created in 1666) and Accomack, Virginia, Scottish Presbyterians grew in number. In that sparsely settled region loneliness brought a deep thirst for religious community. Late in 1680 William Stevens – a Rehoboth landowner, militia colonel, and Anglican member of Baltimore's council – wrote on behalf of local Presbyterians requesting the Laggan Presbytery in Ireland to send a minister.

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Soon afterward the Reverend Francis Makemie settled near Onancock, on the Virginia side, and began preaching to all on the lower Eastern Shore. Makemie labored in a vineyard composed of "poor, desolate people" whose ignorance, remoteness, and spiritual carelessness he called a "melancholy consideration." His appearance answered many prayers; his powerful sermons helped to strengthen or

form churches at Rehoboth and Snow Hill on the Pocomoke River and others on the Manokin and Wicomico. Involved in the Caribbean trade and married to the daughter of a large landowner, Makemie knew the world. But he dedicated his life to building Presbyterianism and identifying its enemies. He traveled in the colonies to inspect possible sites for more congregations and wrote theological tracts. Makemie condemned Anglicans for subordinating spiritual life to outward forms and official trifles. Like a sentry he fixed his eye on the “deep projects” of the “Jesuitical Party” in Maryland.

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The Society of Friends

Presbyterian minister Francis Makemie had no higher regard for the Society of Friends, which in his view neglected sacred Scripture in favor of the mysterious Inner Light. While seeking to withdraw from profane strife, the Quakers (as they called themselves) suffered in old and New England alike during much of the seventeenth century. Under Puritan rule in Maryland, especially in 1658-59, they were also fined, whipped, jailed, and banished in Baltimore’s province; the Indians, they said, treated them with more love and mercy than “the mad, rash rulers of Maryland.” Afterward Calvert’s tolerance – and his steady hope of thwarting Protestant opposition by settling non-Catholics – beckoned once again to dissenters. Fleeing the hostility of Virginia Anglicans, Quakers after 1661 moved into the Patapsco River region, into Talbot County (created in 1660), and the lower Eastern Shore. *** Within a decade the Quakers had four meeting houses in Talbot County. In 1672 the founder of Quakerism himself, George Fox, left England to preach in Maryland. His meetings, by his own admission, attracted not only the converted but “many of the world, both Protestants of divers sorts, and some Papists;” in all it was “wonderful glorious.” By the late 1670s the number of Quaker meetings in the province had grown to about fifteen, most of them in Anne Arundel (where the Friends gained converts among Puritans), Talbot and Somerset counties.

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Puritans

In August 1648, Lord Baltimore removed Thomas Greene (a Catholic planter) as governor and named as William Stone, a Virginian and Protestant, as his replacement.

One of Stone’s first public acts, offering refuge to a band of persecuted Virginia Puritans, both confirmed Baltimore’s ideal of tolerance and helped to safeguard his provinces if Puritans ruled in England. It also complicated the already difficult social situation in Maryland. Richard Bennett, the Puritan leader, settled his flock of 300 at the mouth of the Severn River, calling the settlement Providence. At the 1649 assembly session legislators in An Act Concerning Religion fulfilled the promise of toleration Stone had made to the Puritans before they removed to the Severn. The law recognized the informal free exercise of religion that had marked the province since Cecil Calvert’s instructions to the first settlers.

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The Toleration Act, as it came to be known, represented a high achievement in provincial government, the result of a balance of forces that worked for the general good. It was a precarious balance, as became evident a short time later. Congregationalists on the Severn began to doubt that they could submit in conscience to the oath of allegiance to Lord Baltimore – it seemed to contain royalist

implications and required sworn commitment to officials whose spiritual head was the “Antichrist,” the pope himself. While the Puritans entertained these scruples, word reached the Chesapeake of [King Charles I’s] execution and of a Parliament act declaring it treasonous to speak of an heir to the throne, to support the claims of Charles’ exiled son [Charles II]. Like Virginia under William Berkeley, Maryland in November 1649 – while Stone visited his Virginia lands and Thomas Greene acted as governor – pronounced Prince Charles rightful king of England. Though Stone quickly retracted the endorsement, Baltimore’s enemies in England plotted to lump Virginia and Maryland together as mainland governments in need of chastisement. Parliament named commissioners to obtain the submission of Berkeley and Virginia, and in 1652, two of them, Richard Bennett and William Claiborne, sailed to St. Mary’s to accept the deference of Maryland. After two confusing years, during which a council appointed by Bennett and Claiborne vied with the proprietary governor for authority, the Puritans finally succeeded in portraying Stone as rebellious to Cromwell and persuading Bennett and Claiborne – who were serving as governor and secretary of Virginia – to place Maryland government in the hands of a ten-man Puritan Council.

The Toleration Act became one of the first victims of Puritan rule – a new law passed in October 1654 forbade Catholics openly to practice their faith. No longer were Marylanders required to take an oath of loyalty to the Lord Proprietor upon receiving land grants. Other statutes outlawed sin, vice, and sabbath breaking. William Fuller, now leading the three hundred or more Providence Puritans, scoffed at Stone’s word that [Lord Protector Oliver] Cromwell himself had agreed to a restoration of Lord Baltimore’s Maryland rights. Governor Stone bravely mounted a counterattack. He retrieved the provincial records from a private dwelling at Patuxent, where the Puritans had met, and then in the spring of 1655 assembled a small force that embarked in boats and proceeded toward the Severn River. On 25 March, the proprietary troops landed and met a murderous fire both from the large number of infantrymen under Fuller’s command and from an armed vessel, *Golden Lion*, whose guns supported the Puritans. Stone’s heavy losses and surrender only produced an uneasy quiet in Maryland. *** [F]inally, in 1657, Bennett and Claiborne signed a peace agreement with Lord Baltimore. In exchange for Calvert’s amnesty, Puritans in the province recognized his Lordship’s proprietorship and restored religious toleration. *** Claiborne at last bowed to the Maryland patent.

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Labbadists

Besides religious minorities like Catholics and Puritans and growing congregations of Presbyterians and Friends, odder nonconformists found a home in Maryland. In 1680 a small group of Labbadists, a Dutch independent sect, sent Jaspar Danckaerts and Peter Sluyter to America in search of a refuge from religious persecution. The two agents landed at Manhattan, where apparently by happenstance they met and converted the eldest son [Ephraim] of a large Maryland landholder, Augustine Herrman. *** Ephraim brought the two Dutchmen home to Bohemia Manor, where the elder Herrman greeted them sympathetically. Much to their delight *** Herman invited them to take up land on his manor. In 1683 a hundred or so Labbadists settled there. *** Eventually the community dispersed.

Brugger 30-31

[I]n 1704 Queen Anne ordered the royal governor, at that time John Seymour, to continue to demand the oath of allegiance from all Maryland officeholders. [fn omitted]

Catholics swore that oath but refused to take others that repudiated papal authority and denied the doctrine of transubstantiation. If tested, they thus could hold no public office or serve on juries after the revolution of 1689. Concentrated in the oldest Western Shore counties, Catholics numbered almost three thousand persons at the beginning of the eighteenth century; eight priests and three brothers administered to the several parishes. Protestant leaders, never doubting that Catholics abhorred Anglican establishment, believed that these few papists bore watching.

Brugger 54-55

The end of religious toleration in the Colony

The plight of Quakers and Catholics did not improve, as they thought it might, when in 1715 old Lord Charles [Calvert, Third Lord Baltimore] died and King George I suddenly returned full proprietary privileges to Benedict Leonard Calvert, fourth Lord Baltimore and an Anglican convert. He died soon thereafter, and the guardians of his eldest son and successor, Charles (a sixteen-year-old) spurned the Friends' recommendation that he restore their political freedom. Governor Seymour's successor, John Hart, remained in office for five years after the Calverts' restoration and, like Seymour, believed Catholic plots pervasive in the colony. It infuriated him that [Charles] Carroll ["the Settler"] retained authority under the new proprietor. Indeed [Henry] Darnall having died, Carroll had fallen heir to Baltimore's chief offices in the colony. Carroll's dispatch in collecting proprietary fees, fines, and taxes – and his refusal to take the Oath of Supremacy – pushed Hart over the edge. In 1718 the governor asked for, and the assembly readily passed, an act depriving all unsworn Catholics of the vote. The ideal of toleration lay in ruins.

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