1987

The Influence of the Church in Seventeenth-Century Virginia

James Homer Williams

College of William & Mary - Arts & Sciences

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wm.edu/etd

Part of the History of Religion Commons, and the United States History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://dx.doi.org/doi:10.21220/s2-fn5n-je49

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Theses, Dissertations, & Master Projects at W&M ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations, Theses, and Masters Projects by an authorized administrator of W&M ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@wm.edu.
THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA

A Thesis
Presented to
The Faculty of the Department of History
The College of William and Mary in Virginia

In Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts

by

James Homer Williams
1987
For My Parents

For Their Encouragement, Support, and Love
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table of Contents</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ACKNOWLEDGMENTS</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>vi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EPIGRAPH</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER I. TRADITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER II. TENDING THE FLOCK</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER III. OFFENDERS AND OFFICEHOLDERS ON TRIAL</td>
<td>78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER IV. UNITY AND HARMONY</td>
<td>98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>117</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

For his inspirational introduction to the history of colonial Virginia and for his directorship of this thesis, I owe my deepest gratitude to Professor Thad W. Tate. Professor James L. Axtell provided many helpful stylistic and organizational improvements. My interest in the impact of the church institution on society at large is due largely to the social history approach propounded by Professor James P. Whittenburg. My thanks to them all.

Phi Alpha Theta International Honor Society in History provided financial assistance for my first year of graduate work through the Dr. A. F. Zimmerman grant for 1986-1987. The Jamestowne Society of Richmond, Virginia, assured the completion of this work by kindly awarding me a fellowship for 1987. Both organizations played a significant part in the successful completion of my degree, and I thank them for their financial support.
The impact of the Church of England in seventeenth-century Virginia has never been totally assayed. By comparing the role of the church in England with that in Virginia, an understanding of the relative influence can be gained. The expectations and traditions that English settlers carried with them can be weighed against the reality of Virginia's first century to determine if the church was everything the colonists expected it to be.

The Church of England played seven major roles in its home country. Divided among three areas—spiritual, political, and social—the church influenced the lives of the English at every turn.

The Church of England in Virginia, the established church, influenced the people in the same three areas. The first was the obvious spiritual guidance. In this area, the church struggled throughout the century to provide a consistent and ubiquitous presence in the midst of its flock. Its success varied, but in this most fundamental of concerns for any church, the Anglican church was only partly successful. A shortage of ministers plagued congregations, and the ministers that did venture to the colony were sometimes inadequately qualified.

Without an ecclesiastical hierarchy, Virginians took control of most administrative church affairs. The trend toward secularization is most evident in the political and judicial institutions that defined canon law and behavioral standards, regulated parish development and the vestries, and attempted to satisfy the need for ministers. At the county level, secular county courts assumed the function of ecclesiastical courts. Vestries became self-perpetuating and controlled the business of the parish. The most significant difference between the church in England and in Virginia, then, was the virtual control of the church by the laity in Virginia.

Virginians valued their church for the strength it gave to communities, if they did not always appear to value it for spiritual reasons. Local churches were the social institution in Virginia; they united scattered settlers into communities and offered the only place where a neighborhood could gather to exercise human sociability. For these reasons, Virginians valued their church most for its social facet.

The church in Virginia did not affect the colonists at every turn, which is the way they wanted it to be.
THE INFLUENCE OF THE CHURCH
IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY VIRGINIA
INTRODUCTION

The impetus for this study came from my intrigue with a question about the church in early Virginia: If there was such a prolonged shortage of ministers and settlement was so scattered that daily contact with the church was impractical, what did Virginians do to compensate? Was there religion without a church? Did the colonists really care about the church?

My path to the answers has wound several different ways until I reached this point. I have never been satisfied by the existing historiography on the subject. This study seeks to measure the influence of the Church of England in seventeenth-century Virginia. Chapter I summarizes the situation in England, examines the three general areas--spiritual, political, and social--in which the church influenced the people, and offers the basis for comparing the expectations and the heritage of immigrants with the reality in the colony.

The second chapter discusses the general situation in Virginia from the dissolution of the London Company to the end of the century, then proceeds to an assessment of the success of the church in providing for the spiritual well-being of its flock. Chapter III looks at the church's
political influence, the shift to lay control, and the benefits officeholding had for residents. Finally, the last chapter investigates the church as a social institution and offers some general conclusions.

The evidence used is rarely new, but by asking questions from a different angle, I hope to put the church in Virginia in perspective with its parent in England. In so doing, the relative impact of the church in both societies becomes clearer. Only then can we understand the religious experience of Virginians as they themselves did.
If thou wilt hear, O then give ear,  
also receive true sight,  
Let nothing be, so dear to thee,  
as Christ's most glorious Light.  
........

Pure Doctrine there, is alway near,  
if thou in Truth abide,  
To walk therein, and cease from sin,  
and not from Christ to slide.

--[John Grave], 1662  
A Song of Sion . . .
CHAPTER I

TRADITIONS AND EXPECTATIONS: THE CHURCH IN ENGLAND

Any attempt to assess the strength, influence, or nature of the Anglican church in seventeenth-century Virginia must at one time or another turn to the events and to the people that determined the same characteristics of the church in its homeland--England. The development of religious life in Virginia during the colonial period was in large degree determined by the English government as it promoted and regulated the growth of its first American colony.

It is essential also to understand the piety and the faith of the average Englishman--if such a person can be identified among the turmoil that characterized English politics and religion during most of the century--because it was these English men and women who braved the transatlantic passage in hope of a better life in Virginia. The colonists looked to England for a variety of things, including new settlers, political leadership, military protection, commercial intercourse, and, in no less degree, religious instruction and guidance.

The plausibility of generalizations about the Church of
England and its relationship to the English people hangs on the historian's ability to compare conditions and events across the breadth and the length of the country. Despite considerable differences in local economy, agriculture, landscape, and religious persuasion, the Tudor centralization and standardization of government produced, by the seventeenth century, a body of records surprisingly uniform in nature. Taken together with the common law, a common language, and common political institutions, records produced in the county of Cornwall would have been understood by a justice of the peace in Lincolnshire. If the records are available, then, it is not difficult to draw comparisons between counties and across the whole country.¹

Our knowledge of religious life on the local level results largely from four types of records. At the most microcosmic level were the parish records penned by the parish incumbent or by lay parish officials. Next up the scale were the archdeacon's court and visitation records, which resembled closely the diocesan records, the third level. In the Church of England the macrocosm was the archbishop of Canterbury, whose authority rarely reached directly into the parishes. Even with this voluminous cache of church records, few parishes boast extant records for any extended period.²

---
² Ibid., 95.
A notable exception is Earls Colne Parish in Essex County. By a twist of fate the records covering six centuries of parish government have survived and are supplemented in the seventeenth century by the diary of Ralph Josselin, the parish incumbent for the forty years straddling midcentury. Nestled in the pastureland forty miles northeast of London, Earls Colne provides a basis for comparison with Virginia, for both clearly looked to the bishop of London for diocesan administration, even though the latter's connection was not confirmed until the Glorious Revolution. Community studies of other English counties provide the diversity necessary to encompass the areas from which emigrants to Virginia originated.3

It is possible, therefore, to generalize about religion in seventeenth-century England. To accomplish the same feat for politics is another matter altogether. There has been no century in the history of modern England with more political strife than the seventeenth. At a time when politics and religion were so tightly intertwined as to be virtually the same, political crises effected religious tensions, or more correctly, the opposite was true. The task of this century was to define orthodox Anglicanism as the church emerged from the Tudor Reformation.4

3. Ibid., 17.
The Stuart and Cromwellian wrestling matches with the faith are easy enough to follow, but we may never know precisely the nature or the degree of piety in the laity. As one historian has observed, "Orthodoxy, like happiness, has no history." The faithful were not prosecuted for attending church, nor did they protest adamantly changes in the liturgy or in the definition of the true faith. Through civil war, restoration, and a succession of monarchs and parish clergy, it appears that the greater number of parishioners continued to attend services quietly, some perhaps out of compulsion but others no doubt out of genuine faith.5

Expressions of piety oscillated with the changing political climate during the century. In all classes of society before the civil war there appeared to be many securely attached to the Church of England and opposed to the extremes of papism and Puritanism. They remained devoted to moderate Anglicanism and welcomed its return. The Interregnum brought serious changes to the church that were readily visible at the parish level. Clergy were deprived of their benefices in favor of Puritan ministers, the prayer book was no longer used, and ecclesiastical functions increasingly became secularized, as in the 1653 act of Parliament that declared marriages legal only if

5. Spufford, Contrasting Communities, 319.
solemnized before a justice of the peace. Still, the common parishioner probably noticed little radical change in the parish—perhaps a new rector who did not wear a surplice or use the prayer book (but many parishes managed to retain their former clergy and service) or a welcome respite from vigorous prosecutions in the ecclesiastical courts. If the Interregnum had any noticeable effect on lay piety, it may have produced an increase in the commoner's interest in the church as religious issues were popularized. Some unenthusiastic villagers may have attended services just to see what all the fuss was about.

The impulse of the Reformation in England peaked in the 1650s. Never again could the Anglican church contain the diversity and vitality of English religion, even within its indulgent walls of orthodoxy. Ralph Josselin, the Puritan-leaning rector of Earls Colne, separated his flock into three herds by their degrees of piety. "Our society," the deeply pious of the village drawn mostly from the upper strata, received most of his attention. The largest herd, the Sunday churchgoers, he called "my sleepy hearers." His judgment fell on the third group, probably about the same size as the first, which he described as "the families that seldom heare" or, less kindly, "the ruder sort."  

By most accounts the Puritan reinvigoration of English piety began to wear off after the return of the Stuarts in 1660 and continued through the end of the century. The 1662 Act of Uniformity was the first of several measures designed to return the church to its episcopalian heritage; specifically, it ordered the use of a revised prayer book and the deprivation of all clergy without episcopal orders.\(^8\)

Studies of religious enthusiasm in the last third of the century offer conflicting conclusions. The picture painted by one historian is gloomy: inferior ministers replaced nonjurors, the frequency of services declined, religious education slackened, and communion attracted fewer and fewer parishioners. In the village of Myddle, however, people regularly filled the parish church, forcing the churchwarden to sketch out a seating plan that included everyone from lord to servant. That everyone in this village, at least, was expected to attend services is confirmed by prosecutions of parishioners in 1665, 1668, 1679, and 1682 for "absenting themselves from their parish church on Sundayes and holydayes at divine service tyme."\(^9\)

Myddle appears to be an exception rather than the rule, especially as the end of the century neared. Apathy before the 1687 declaration of liberty of conscience turned into

---

9. Ibid., 321; David G. Hey, An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts (Leicester, Eng., 1974), 220.
active resistance against energetic ministers in the 1690s. The rector of Hoby complained in 1673 that all his efforts to persuade parents to send their children to him for catechizing had been fruitless and that he should not be expected to "bring them to church on his back." The incumbent of Congestone reported similar resistance, but his parishioners went so far as to lock him out of the church when he arrived to catechize. Parsons across the country lamented increasingly the heathen in their flocks who "either through lazyness, prophaneness, or both, worship God no way." To add to their troubles, clergy found that many of their obstinate parishioners no longer shrank under the threat of excommunication, which effectively ceased after the ascension of William and Mary in 1689. One parson at least did not shirk his duties. As the century ended in 1700 so did the incumbent of Blaston's ability to call his town to daily services. He reported, "Persecution cousened me of my Key, Then stole the Bell-Rope, then the Bell clapper, and then (to Top up the Sacrilegious climax) the very Bell itself, thus forcing us to a discontinuance of the daily sacrifice."10

Clearly, each generation in the seventeenth century reacted differently from place to place to the presence of the church in their lives. There was enthusiasm and outright resistance, but usually in the middle stood the

majority of the people plodding along contentedly. Despite the variety of reactions by the people, the church for the most part continued throughout the century to perform its roles, seven in all, in society.

The seven major roles of the church in English society can be divided into three more general areas: spiritual, political/legal, and social. Included in the spiritual category is the expected spiritual leadership of the church as an institution with extensive administrative machinery. At the bottom of the pyramid were the parish clergy. The church acting in its state functions had considerable impact on the people: it was an initiator of business, a court for others, and a registrar of probate. Its lay offices provided to the commoner and to the gentry the opportunity to become politically adept. Finally, the church acted as a cohesive and regulating element of society in its roles as registrar of baptisms, marriages, and burials, as licensing authority, and as poor law administrator.\(^{11}\)

To most people the church was their local minister. Except for the occasional visitation by the archdeacon or the bishop, the rector was the only man of orders seen by the people. The ideal rector settled in the community from which he came and lived out his life in one parish. If the benefice was a poor one (less than fifty pounds annually),

chances were the parson would keep his eyes open for a chance to move to a better living, but on the whole, only one-fifth of the clergy ever resigned a living to accept another. So it was not unusual for an old parson to live to baptize the children of the parishioners he had christened in his early years in the parish.\textsuperscript{12}

The ideal was upset in many parishes by the political turmoil from 1640 to 1665. After 1641 ordination was declared illegal, and royalist or Laudian sympathizers faced sequestration from their livings. Since about 30 percent of English clergy were deprived of their benefices in the tumultuous years from 1643 to 1660, many clergymen suffered economic hardship at midcentury. Charles II returned to their livings those who had held on until 1660, and the people once again could expect a degree of conformity in their parishes. The Restoration in turn forced close to two thousand nonconformists out of the pulpit. The remainder of the century proved tranquil, and parishes were well supplied with clergymen who, for the most part, could live comfortably.\textsuperscript{13}

In order to live, the rector extracted a salary and fees from his parishioners. The economic burden of retaining a minister varied from parish to parish and depended on the generosity of the local patron and on the 

\textsuperscript{12} Pruett, \textit{Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts}, 74.

\textsuperscript{13} Hutton, \textit{The English Church}, 159, 181, 192, 324; Spufford, \textit{Contrasting Communities}, 272.
ability of the parishioners to contribute. Every rector received the tithe from goods and crops produced in the parish. He charged small fees for burials, marriages, and the churching of women, but baptisms were often free. Like other landowners and farmers, many rectors reaped the proceeds from agriculture, which supplemented their income as ministers. Some were also paid for teaching school.14

Judging from Josselin's diary, church duties were secondary for clergymen with substantial outside income. Or perhaps he felt it more important to record his business transactions rather than his mundane pastoral duties. In any event he was struggling at all times to provide for his family in the style that he expected. When in 1644 his parishioners had failed to live up to the agreed upon tithe of forty pounds, Josselin warned them "to be carefull to gather up my meanes for mee that I might not want; if they did not though I shall not cease to love them, yett I must of necessity then serve providence in another place."15

In return for the tithe and fees, parishioners expected a variety of services from their incumbents. As the best educated and sometimes most substantial person in the

14. Pruett, Parish Clergy under the Later Stuarts, 94; Alan Macfarlane, The Family Life of Ralph Josselin, A Seventeenth-Century Clergyman: An Essay in Historical Anthropology (Cambridge, 1970), 34. Churching was a ceremony in which women after childbirth were received into the church with prayers, blessings, and thanksgiving.

village, rectors spread their knowledge to the parishioners via sermons. Puritanism brought a mania for sermons that did not die at the Restoration, a mania so active that one writer complained that the English people seemed "to imagine that the main, if not the whole of a parish minister's business is to preach." An apologist for the Anglican service wrote in 1673, "Without a sermon 'the worship of God is counted lame.'" Some priests took this duty so seriously that they hired readers, the lowest level and worst paid of curates, to lead the service while the priests, presumably, prepared themselves for the great task of preaching.

The power of the pulpit gave clergymen significant political power, too. In the deferential seventeenth century, the people were still susceptible to religious appeals and political opinions thundered from the nation's pulpits. Religion and politics blended and supported each other, so much so that in 1690 clergymen led the voters in some parishes to the polls and Henry Compton, bishop of London, assured the victory of Anglican candidates over Presbyterians.

Mundane duties occupied most of the clergyman's time. Josselin led study meetings with the local gentry and

17. Ibid., 192.
18. Quoted ibid., 231.
presided at funerals, weddings, triannual communion services, and days of humiliation. He also arbitrated village disputes and matched available parishioners for marriage. He visited the sick and comforted the distressed, and he conscientiously dispensed charity and hospitality whenever needed, recognizing that there were "great occasions for a liberall releiving hand" and that if he did not reach out, "this then brings a scandall on the ministry."\textsuperscript{20}

Even a dedicated pastor like Josselin was rebuked on occasion. After services one day in 1671, he wrote that "not one person spake to mee, coming out of the church: Lord I am despised." Earlier he had feared there were those "that wait for my hurt."\textsuperscript{21} We have seen already the feelings expressed toward the clergy in other parishes. All in all, as long as the priest was neither too enthusiastic nor neglectful toward his duties in the pulpit and among the people, his village supported him with its tithes and elevated him to the upper strata of the community.

The church's intrusion in the lives of the English extended to legal and political as well as spiritual matters. The court system of England consisted of a civil branch and an ecclesiastical branch. Quarter Sessions of

\textsuperscript{20} Macfarlane, \textit{Family Life of Ralph Josselin}, 30-31; Diary of Ralph Josselin, ed. Macfarlane, 24, 135.
\textsuperscript{21} Macfarlane, \textit{Family Life of Ralph Josselin}, 31.
the county civil courts tried thieves, murderers, those
accused of assault, and other criminals, while the church
courts punished violators of the moral and the religious
codes.22

The lowest level of the ecclesiastical court system was
the archdeacon's court. Usually held twice a year in a
central church, it heard presentments from churchwardens
and sidesmen from the parishes in the archdeaconry. The
archdeacon inquired about the clergy, the church
buildings, the schoolmasters, the churchwardens, and the
parishioners in each parish under his authority. He then
adjudicated the variety of cases presented to him as
offenses against the canons, the monarchs' injunctions, the
bishop's monitions, the Act of Uniformity, or the moral
code.23

Cases could be brought in a variety of ways but were
most often presented by churchwardens and were made upon
fact, upon "fame" or rumor, or merely upon "vehement
suspicion." The accused was acquitted if he or she could
find four or five neighbors who swore that they believed
the accused was innocent. No matter what the verdict
delivered was, the accused had to pay court costs. The
church could not fine or imprison, so it resorted to
excommunication or to public humiliation to punish

22. Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, 112.
23. Macfarlane, Guide to English Records, 98-104;
Eleanor Trotter, Seventeenth Century Life in the Country
Parish, with Special Reference to Local Government
(Cambridge, 1919), 31.
offenders. Rectors were required to certify that punishments had been carried out. Absolution was granted only after the payment of more court fees.24

Immorality was the most serious offense punished by the church courts, a broad category that included bastardy, adultery, incontinency, prenuptial sex, and lewd behavior. A "great bellie" gave away the most common offender, and neighbors tattled on others they suspected of less visible offenses. Lax attention to piety was the other broad category of offenses, which included nonattendance at services, misbehavior or loquacity during services, or failure to pay the church tax.25

A study of the village of Terling in central Essex has revealed a shifting concern of the ecclesiastical courts. Between 1570 and 1641 about four hundred cases were heard from Terling, many for erratic church attendance, but after the revival of the church courts at the Restoration, the one hundred cases up to 1690 concentrated on dissenters rather than the disinterested. In any given decade of the century, between twenty and one hundred residents of Terling found themselves accused in the civil or the church courts, the latter generally being the busier of the two.26

Ecclesiastical courts were essentially a defensive

mechanism used by a village to force its mores on the recalcitrant or on blatant dissenters in the community. Courts protected property, preserved the peace, and enforced acceptable standards of sexual behavior. They could also be used offensively for the promotion of new community standards of behavior or of order. Villagers resorted to the courts only against the most notorious offenders who were so dangerous to local harmony that they justified the conflict produced by accusations. Caught in the middle were the churchwardens, the jurymen, and the constables who had to weigh the interests of the village against the possibility of alienating themselves from their community by pursuing offenders too vigorously.\textsuperscript{27}

An assortment of parish officials kept the church business in order. The church provided an opportunity for men to serve their community and their church, to gain practical political experience, and perhaps to attract the attention of a county noble. Parish offices also allowed the local gentry to impose their standards on the community, for the holding of the most prestigious offices was dominated by the wealthier members of village society. In Terling the yeomanry and wealthier tradesmen held the posts of churchwarden, juryman, vestryman, and overseer of the poor. The lesser offices of constable and sidesman were controlled by the more important officers and went to craftsmen and husbandmen. Common laborers and the poor

\textsuperscript{27} I\textit{bid.}, 139-140.
were almost totally excluded from officeholding.  

There is no reason to doubt that this same distribution existed in the rest of England.

The duties of church officers extended into secular matters (highway maintenance, for instance), and village officers helped with church matters. It is difficult, therefore, to distinguish absolutely between sacred and secular officers. Select vestries comprised of twelve or twenty-four members wielded extensive powers in the seventeenth-century parish. They appointed the churchwardens and reviewed the church account books. They set the rate of the church tax and signed warrants for the seizure of goods for nonpayment. They oversaw the rector's behavior, minor officers, and affairs of the parish in general.

Churchwardens were primarily ecclesiastical officers but were considered secular officers by the justices of the peace because they were custodians of the parish property. Besides presenting offenders to the ecclesiastical courts, churchwardens kept an account of the funds received and paid out in the operation of the parish, and saw to the repair of church structures, the provision of all supplies necessary for services, and the care of church furnishings. An efficient churchwarden was clearly visible to parishioners; a negligent churchwarden had no

28. Ibid., 104.
30. Ibid., 23.
place to hide.

A fourth of the tax the churchwardens collected was assigned for poor relief. The overseers of the poor numbered from two to four in each parish and were appointed annually by the justices of the peace. In addition to the poor rate the overseers used lands or money bequeathed by charitable people for the use of the poor and income from fines for specific legal offenses. It usually amounted to a considerable sum that was entrusted only to "substantial householders." The overseers distributed weekly relief to poor, lame, elderly, and blind parishioners. They built houses on the commons for use by the destitute. They took charge of the children of the poor, provided for their education, and bound them out as apprentices. Finally, the overseers kept a stock of raw material to provide work for the unemployed and the unskilled.31

The minor parish officers of clerk, sexton, and beadle affected parishioners only occasionally. The clerk rang the bell for services, prepared the Bible and the church for services, christenings, and communion, and led the congregation through the services. The sexton acted as a caretaker for the church and churchyard. The beadle's duties were most curious: he assisted the constable in the apprehension of rogues; dressed in a special garment complete with a whip or a wand, he drove dogs out of the

church; he impounded stray cattle and inspected hedges and fences. Parishioners, then, saw church officers frequently and expected them to perform a variety of sacred and secular duties.

The highest county official was the sheriff; with the possible exception of apprehending criminals, his duties were secular. The local justice of the peace linked the parish with the county and was integral to efficient local government. Always a man of wealth and influence, the justice was an important factor in his neighborhood even without his governmental power. He supervised constables, churchwardens, and overseers of the poor, granted licenses to beg and warrants to allow presentations in the ecclesiastical courts, equalized tax rates between townships, and inspected the work of the parish crews in charge of maintaining highways and bridges. It is most difficult to label the justice as primarily a state officer or a church officer because of his interest in everything to do with the parishes in his jurisdiction.

The mingling of church and state in political and legal areas meant a similar conjunction in the mind of the parishioner. County officials worked on behalf of the church, and parish officials performed secular duties. In the end, order and standards of behavior were enforced in each community.

32. Trotter, Seventeenth Century Life, 6-8.
33. Ibid., 201, 207, 209-211, 222.
The term "social" is used to describe the third general area in which the church influenced the people, partly to include roles that do not fit the other two areas but, more important, because of the church's influence as a social institution on the people outside of the spiritual or the political realms.

An argument could be posited for the inclusion of baptisms, marriages, and burials within the spiritual concern of the church. While it is true that each of these three ceremonies carried religious meaning, they were seldom performed privately. They were social events that brought family and friends together in celebration or in mourning. Through these rites, therefore, the church was a community gathering place and regulator of social relationships.

Baptism was a public event witnessed by neighbors, friends, and immediate relations. The ceremony gave a child an identity within society (its name) and signified the entrance of another person into the community. The parents provided a feast for the godparents and the neighbors, which is evident in Josselin's frequent attendance at such banquets. He paid more than six pounds for the baptismal feast for his first child, an amount that would have purchased a considerable quantity of food and drink. Baptisms obviously were important events in a
Marriages were also important to the community. On most occasions the uniting of man and woman connected two families of the village and provided hope for the future vitality of the community. By the seventeenth century, marriages were regulated heavily. The ceremony could only be performed during daylight hours in the parish of the bride. The community was given a chance to raise objections to the marriage through the requirement that banns (a declaration of intent to marry) be announced in the church on three consecutive Sundays before the ceremony. It is clear that, in addition to the church's interest in uniting only suitable people with the holy bonds, the village wanted the chance to veto marriages it deemed inappropriate.

The church's influence followed its parishioners to their graves. It appears from Josselin's diary that the dead and the living were held apart and that funerals provided another occasion for a community to reaffirm its solidarity in the celebration of the life of a dead loved one as well as an opportunity to release grief. Death was a community event. At Josselin's son's funeral "the gravest matrons in our towne, layde his tombe into the earth . . . Mrs King and Mr Harlakenden of the priory [the patron of Josselin's living] closed up each of them one of 

his eyes when it dyed." Attendance at funerals signified the quality of friendships and served as a "testimonie of their love" to the family of the deceased. In return, mourners were feasted and given small gifts such as gloves and ribbons.36

One of the reforms of Henry VIII is responsible for much of what we know about English communities. An order of the king's vicegerent in spirituals required every parish vicar to keep a register of "every wedding, christening and burying made within your parish."37 By the seventeenth century, the church was established as the recorder of vital statistics that became a major factor in regularizing social relationships and in the use of statistics by the central government. Inheritance disputes could now be settled by a survey of the parish register. Marriages questioned because of kinship between bride and groom could be prevented. The London government was able to compile population figures for use in taxation and in policymaking.

If a town had a school, chances were it was taught by a clergyman. Young men lacking benefices would often offer their university training to the benefit of children in a parish with a school until a more lucrative position opened up elsewhere. Sometimes the rector supplemented his living by teaching school, as Josselin did. Pleas to

parents to send their children for catechism also indicates another role the church played in education of the people, even if it was a religious education that was offered.  

The parish promoted the economic health of its community by maintaining highways and bridges within the parish. Parishioners elected two surveyors each year and charged them with the upkeep of roads leading to market towns. Practically every parishioner was obligated to work on the roads during the year: landowners provided carts and oxen, and householders and laborers worked for six days out of the year for the surveyors. Through the local church the community banded together and assured itself access to the nearest markets.

Canon law gave the church licensing authority in three general areas. Couples not willing to be married through the usual banns had to apply for a special marriage license. The bishop also issued licenses to practice medicine or to teach. With this power the bishop could regulate the number and the quality of physicians and teachers within his diocese, which in turn determined the availability of medical care and education to the people.

In an age in which every person had a place on the social ladder and largely stayed in that place, the church affirmed social demarcation in two ways. Church offices were dominated by the local gentry, who could use the power

---

38. Spufford, Contrasting Communities, 191.
of these positions to shape the community in the image they desired. Parishioners were reminded of their social place each week as they attended church services. The wealthy of the parish had a right to their own pews, and the other villagers were assigned benches according to their status in the community.\footnote{41}

All its roles in society established the church as a unifying institution in each community and in the country at large. For the people of the seventeenth century, their world was still their county, a collection of small parishes, which were themselves tightly knit communities of individuals living together in relative harmony. The church and local landlord gave a parish its identity. The building gave the parish a sense of continuity with the past: here their ancestors had worshiped together, here their descendants would gather in praise of God, and within its walls or within its yard lay buried family and neighbors. The church provided a meeting place for the parish. In special parish assemblies and in regular worship services the community was never more united--rich and poor, male and female, old and young all had a place in the parish church.\footnote{42}

Privacy was largely unknown in seventeenth-century England, and the church led the invasion into the lives of the people. The churchwarden, the overseer of the poor, or

the justice of the peace could delve into the most intimate family relationships for the sake of social harmony. Men were responsible for their wives' indiscretions and for their children's misbehavior. No one was allowed to squander his property and become a burden on the parish through gambling or debauchery. The village expected quiet after nine o'clock at night and employed a watch to keep it. In short, the interests of the community, expressed always through the parish government, were always superior to the interests of individuals.43

The influence of the church extended to the faithful, to the unenthusiastic, and to dissenters. Dissenters must not be excluded from surveys of parish life. While it is difficult to say with certainty the extent of dissent from county to county, one can still place nonconformists in their place within the parish. The majority of dissenters presented to the courts after the Reformation still maintained a relationship to the church. Even if they did not attend Sunday services, to the parish church dissenters brought their children for baptism and their dead for burial. They did not seem as willing to marry in the Anglican church.44

Surprisingly, nonconformists continued to play their part in parish government. Since dissent was most common among the wealthy, the fact that they were not excluded

43. Trotter, Seventeenth Century Life, 178.
44. Wrightson and Levine, Poverty and Piety, 167-168.
from parish affairs again indicates the importance of wealth as a qualification for officeholding. In the village of Terling dissenters served as churchwardens, jurymen, constables, overseers of the poor, and vestrymen. During the reigns of Charles II and James II over one-third of the churchwardens were men who had been brought before the courts for their nonconformity. 45

In the religious sense it is startling that dissenters held the top offices of parish government. But when one realizes the deeply interconnected relationship between church and state, it should come as less of a surprise that dissenters continued to exercise a share of power. By holding office, nonconformists were not in a position to affect the spiritual life of a parish. But in the areas of legal and social concerns, conformists and dissenters were united in their interests for prosperity, order, and social harmony. The church did not deny to anyone with the proper social status the chance through its offices to improve the community. In so doing, it pervaded the lives of the English at every turn.

45. Ibid., 168.
CHAPTER II

TENDING THE FLOCK: THE SPIRITUAL FACET

Expectations are seldom fully met; people often believe what they wish to believe. But an understanding of the expectations of immigrants to Virginia in the seventeenth century is a key to our judgment of the impact of the Anglican church on the spiritual lives of its flock. Coming from the tumultuous atmosphere of England to relative religious tranquillity in Virginia was a noticeable change. Did the colonists expect a difference or were they hoping to find their familiar English society replicated along the Chesapeake Bay?

Unless they had firsthand information from a relative or friend already settled in Virginia, potential colonists in all likelihood were not sure what to expect when they landed in America. Pamphlet battles over the "present state" of Virginia raged in England for much of the century. Apologists such as John Hammond attempted to dispel the "odiums and cruell slanders" that others heaped on the colony. Travelers wrote of their sojourns through the colonies; as could be expected, some proved favorable, others not. Throughout the war of words, however, Virginia
remained a popular destination.  

After the dissolution of the London Company in 1624, the colony had to rest on its merits. There was no longer an organization in England promoting it actively. For the upper strata of immigrants, Virginia was the small pond in which they could be big fish. Emigration to the colony indicated one's inability to meet the challenges of an ordered, established society. Virginia provided an escape from the obscurity of the English lower elite or an alternative to scrapes with the law. Whatever the reality was, the English continued to think of the colony as full of base persons cultivating a base crop, tobacco. Virginians' single-minded interest in trade was condemned as money grubbing, and the social pretensions of the creole elite brought only laughter and scorn from the English gentry.  

During most of the century Virginia was not the first choice of those wishing to set up a plantation in the colonies. West Indies sugar growers were the gentlemen to emulate. Virginia offered neither culture nor climate,  

political glory nor military challenge. But most immigrants were not interested in any of these things. They wanted a better life, and to most, this meant economic opportunity.

Nearly three-fourths of the "sober, modest persons" Hammond described at midcentury arrived in Virginia as indentured servants. For them colonization was hope—hope to escape poverty, to own huge amounts of land compared to England, and even to avoid jail terms. It was also a great risk. Servants arriving with no connections and little capital were at a distinct disadvantage to free immigrants, who most likely came with enough capital and personal connections to establish themselves in society immediately.4

Young single men and women just starting out probably placed religious zeal below their more immediate concern to emerge from their indentures alive and with enough acreage and capital to survive independently. After migration from the English countryside to cities such as London, Liverpool, and Bristol in search of work, many immigrants apparently saw their only hope in the colonies. Their economic helplessness is revealed further in the directly proportional correlation between tobacco prices and immigration. Merchants recruited servants when they knew a

3. Ibid., 278.
healthy economy in Virginia would produce an even greater demand for labor than usual.\textsuperscript{5}

To speak of the majority of immigrants choosing the best from a set of options, then, is not very meaningful. But the servant class was not in a position to shape the development of the Anglican church in Virginia anyway. This task fell to the plantation owners and freeholders, a minority significant enough to dominate political and religious officeholding in the colony.

Jamestown was the first outpost in America from which England could launch its attacks on the advance of rival Spain and the spread of papism, all the while professing an evangelical mission to the Indians. The men of the London Company of Virginia and the Puritans of New England shared a theological leaning toward Calvinism. The intensity of puritanism in Virginia never became strong enough to effect separation from the Church of England, but the puritan presence did affect the institutional development of the church in Virginia, where a system of strong parishes resembling congregationalism compensated for the absence of a traditional ecclesiastical hierarchy.\textsuperscript{6}

\textsuperscript{5} Horn, "Servant Emigration," in Tate and Ammerman, eds., Chesapeake in the Seventeenth Century, 74, 92.

The London Company leaders were determined to maintain an outward appearance of piety in the colony. It was just another way to make Virginia seem like an extension of England. The Council ordered daily services. Everyone was expected to drop his hoe or leave the comfort of the fire at the sound of the church bell at ten every morning and to gather in the small church for prayer. Full service with sermon once on Thursdays and twice on Sundays consumed a large part of the colonists' leisure time. The commander of the guard read a long invocation at the setting of the watch, praying especially for the light of salvation to shine on the Indians the soldiers were guarding against.  

The transformation to a royal colony in 1624 changed Virginia from a holy venture much like Massachusetts Bay to an unabashed commercial plantation. Though the church remained an integral part of the colony, the emphasis the government placed upon it had peaked. In the words of Perry Miller, Virginians became reconciled to a "world in which making a living was the ultimate reality." Those accustomed to a prosperous lifestyle in England naturally used their new-found influence to replicate the country gentry society that had contributed to their success.  

integral part of that English society was the church.

The company era was anomalous in the history of the colonial church. The church was never as strong again during the seventeenth century: One element that lingered after the company failed was a puritan bent. Unlike the Puritans of New England, Virginia puritans never attempted formal political control or intrusion in colonists' personal religious lives. They reflected the Calvinist influence of the times but represented the milder Puritanism of a significant segment of the Church of England until the 1640s. The absence of a bishop in Virginia allowed no target for the anti-episcopal crusade that led to extremism in England.9

Even with puritan sentiment in their midst, Virginians' chief end of life was never the soul searching and tract writing that characterized their more industrious and introspective countrymen in early New England. Survival and the prospect of easy riches occupied the attention of colonists and continued to attract a flood of immigrants from England. Despite a devastating death rate, Virginia's population doubled between 1625 and 1629 and again by 1634, making it the decade of highest percentage population growth after the dissolution of the company.10

is all the more remarkable considering the Indian attack of 1622 and the controversy over the London Company, neither of which served to promote Virginia as a healthy, peaceful place.

Without company direction and with the influx of new colonists, settlement spread farther from Jamestown and taxed the ability of the church to meet the spiritual needs of the people. Community structure changed from the familiar thickly populated village to sprawling thinly settled counties. By choosing the familiar county and parish organization for their political and ecclesiastical governments, Virginians intentionally strove to recreate the security of the English society they had left. Even when it became clear that the parish system of church government was not suited to the demography of Virginia, they chose only to tinker with the structure instead of adopting another form.11

The earliest parishes were small, encompassing the bounds of the first towns. As the settlement pattern changed to one of scattered family farms, parishes swelled to include the new area. Some neighborhoods sought their own parish that could compare in size with an English village parish. The two decades straddling midcentury witnessed the largest period of parish creation; the colonial assembly created thirty-three parishes in these

---

twenty years. Only seventeen more were added to the list during the rest of the century. The settlers soon found that parishes on the English model were impractical because twenty, fifty, or even one hundred families could not support a full-time minister. The solution usually adopted was to combine parishes until there were only one or two per county. Still, parishes ranged from ten square miles (Bruton Parish) to two thousand (Southwark); in the settled tidewater counties, parishes were 5 to 10 miles wide and 20 to 40 miles long. Churches on the fringe became chapels. The most central church, if one existed, became the main house of worship for the parish; if necessary, one was built.12

Middlesex County illustrates the trend in Virginia frontier development. As settlers moved north and west, the assembly carved up the huge fringe counties into more manageable ones whose population was closer to that of the older counties. Counties divided while parishes united. Along the Rappahannock River, Lancaster and Piankatank parishes united in 1667 and pushed the assembly to divide Lancaster County officially into what had become in practicality two counties, one north and the other south of the Rappahannock. The result by 1669 was Middlesex County and Christ Church Parish, coterminous civil and ecclesiastical units. By uniting, the two communities

pooled resources to build a new central church and to support one minister, but each retained its chapel and neighborhood identity.\textsuperscript{13}

Counties and parishes without the foresight of the Middlesex residents were not as fortunate in attracting ministers to serve their communities. Christ Church was rarely without a pastor, making it an oddity in seventeenth-century Virginia. The clergy that did venture to the colony found not only that they were expected to ride a circuit but that they worked without any episcopal supervision. Colonial Virginia never had a bishop. Ministers trained to work within a hierarchical diocesan organization were suddenly cast into the uncertainty of a congregational system. For some the change was disorienting; perhaps others welcomed the freedom. The effect upon the spiritual strength of the church was devastating. Ministers could not be ordained, children could not be confirmed, and for the first eighty years there was no champion of the church's interests in the colonial government.\textsuperscript{14}

Neither of the two alternatives to make the Virginia church truly episcopal was ever adopted. Both depended on action by the crown, which for most of the century was too preoccupied with its own survival and the economic health

\textsuperscript{13} Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, \textit{A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750} (New York, 1984), 52-59.

\textsuperscript{14} Brydon, \textit{Virginia's Mother Church}, I, 86.
of its colonies to fret over ecclesiastical affairs. Virginia never warranted designation as a diocese in itself until the Revolutionary era, and the king chose not to grant authority over Virginia's spiritual care to an English bishop. Left without traditional ecclesiastical authority, Virginians filled the void by placing their church under civil control.15

The General Assembly assumed canonical duties when Virginia became a royal colony. Through the years it enacted a series of ecclesiastical laws that attempted to control colonists' behavior and to provide institutional vigor for the church. "Constitutions and Canons Ecclesiastical," adopted in 1603-1604 by the Church of England, provided a guide for the assembly and for the clergy and laity in their efforts to maintain extradiocesan conformity.16

Episcopal duties fell to the highest royal official in the colony, the governor. The crown in its instructions always admonished governors and their lieutenants to supervise ecclesiastical as well as political affairs. Governors were well equipped to perform administrative tasks for the church (just as bishops served in political places in England), but they seldom took more than a casual interest in the spiritual side of the job. Indians, tobacco, taxes, and land grants inspired their passions;

15. Ibid., 87.
16. Ibid., 68.
the church came well down the list for most.

The king granted governors the "ordinary" powers of an English bishop. This included the probate of wills, the appointment of notaries, and the issuance of marriage licenses. The governor exercised ecclesiastical duties as well in his role as quasi bishop. He inducted ministers as rectors of parishes and heard judicial appeals under the benefit of clergy. He managed the clerical employment service for the colony: a bishop would recommend an immigrating minister to the governor, who in turn recommended the pastor to a vacant parish. 17

The General Assembly endorsed gubernatorial powers in ecclesiastical matters, one of the few areas over which the governor and assembly did not collide during the century. In 1683 the Council decided an appeal in a suit against the churchwardens of Hungars Parish in Northampton County for continuing in office longer than the canons allowed. The defendants argued that the governor's decision was not sufficient, to which the Council replied that the governor's authority was "in this Colony in Ecclesiastical Affairs as any Bishop in England hath in his Diocese" and that the governor was the "only head of the Church and therefore sole Judge in all Ecclesiastical parochial Affairs and that the Council have nothing to do in it." 18

17. Ibid., 67, 68, 228.
Unfortunately for the colonists, governors were usually so preoccupied with maintaining their reputation with the crown, jockeying for a better office (Virginia was low on the list), or padding their own fortunes that they had little time for routine church matters. Even if they had had the time, many lacked the interest. Besides, governors saw themselves primarily as civil and military officials. Even the occasional governor who displayed an interest in the colonists' spiritual life brought only temporary invigoration because turnover among governors was high and there were often periods of years between the departure of one and the arrival of another. In the meantime no one in the colony could assume his episcopal role. In general, then, the designation of governors as quasi bishops was only mildly effective and may have disguised the need for a separate representative of the church, someone with the authority of a bishop who could devote all his energy to the church. That day would come too late for most seventeenth-century Virginians.19

Most colonists probably never caught more than a glimpse of their governor, and his actions on behalf of the church affected them indirectly if at all. Every colonist recognized his parish priest as the Anglican church personified. The minister was in the position to make the

most profound impact on the spiritual lives of his flock. But sheep without a shepherd may go astray. At one time or another almost all Virginians lived unattended by an ordained clergyman in their neighborhood flocks. Did they stray from the flock? Before this important question is considered, it is necessary to consider the influence of ministers and the effects of their absence.

Clerical shortages plagued Virginia during the seventeenth century. The early years of Jamestown were the only time the supply of ministers approached the demand. The London Company offered a variety of incentives to clergy in order to meet the spiritual needs of the early settlers. After its dissolution no organization existed in England to recruit able ministers for Virginia. The next such group, the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel, was founded in 1700 in time to help only eighteenth-century colonists. In the intervening years religious turmoil in England coupled with healthy population growth in Virginia to produce an acute shortage of ministers. Royalist clergy ousted from their livings during the English Civil War did not stream to the colonies in search of milk and honey (or the surplice). No institution existed in the colony to train young men for the ministry. And while on paper the salary and benefits granted by law to Virginia's clergy rivaled the better livings in England, it was no secret that falling tobacco prices and obstinate parishioners
could mean an even smaller real income.  

Contemporaries pinpointed several reasons for the shortage. Henry Hartwell blamed the governors' "conniving" in not inducting ministers. "Precarious Circumstances" resulted for ministers serving at the pleasure of the vestries. Not compelled to maintain a properly-induced rector, many parishes chose not to employ a minister at all, Hartwell believed, "for by that Means they save all the Minister's Dues in their own Pockets." In England John Eachard guessed that men in orders in 1671 outnumbered benefices by about two to one, and he lamented clerical unemployment as a plague on the church that would remain until England found "some vent for our Learned ones beyond the Sea, and could transport so many Tunn of Divines yearly as we do other commodities with which the Nation is overstocked."  

It is a paradox of Virginia religious history that a society so conscious of supply and demand when it came time to ship the tobacco harvest to Europe was so ill-served by the economic law in the spiritual realm. It is not as if Virginia officials did not try to attract competent clergymen from across the Atlantic. The General Assembly passed several acts throughout the century to reverse the

---

"impairment and decay" that set in when parishes were destitute of ministers. In 1656 it offered a bounty of twenty pounds sterling or two thousand pounds of tobacco to anyone who bore the charge of transporting a minister to the colony. An act in 1696 was intended to prevent the fluctuations in the clergy's income by setting a uniform base salary for all ministers, by allowing vestries to appoint collectors to make distress for nonpayment of levies, and by ordering the consolidation of small parishes. Gov. Francis, Lord Howard of Effingham, did his part in 1688 by recommending the Reverend Samuel Eburne to Bruton Parish, York County, for "his ability and true qualification in all points."22

Real responsibility for luring ministers lay with the parish vestry, twelve men who served as the executive body of the parish. Depending of their eagerness to fill a vacancy, vestries could try to steal a minister away from another parish, empower one of their members planning a trip to England to bring back a rector, or request their agents in England to recruit an able fellow for the parish. In the same vein pamphleteers paraded the virtues of Virginia before prospective English clergymen and

campaign for more legislative action from the assembly.\textsuperscript{23}

Despite the acts of assembly and exertions by vestries, in 1680 there were only thirty-one ministers to serve forty-eight parishes. Decades of action by the colonists had produced only moderate success in providing clerical leadership for Virginia. Increasingly, cries went across the Atlantic for succor from the bishop of London, who by the 1660s had become a surrogate bishop for Virginia. Because the colony was "yett unfitt ... by reason of the fewness of our Numbers and other inconveniences," Philip Ludwell, secretary of the colony, wrote in 1666, it had by default been "subjected to the Sea of London." A census of ministers in 1680 provoked the Council to ask the bishop to "take effectuall Care that they may be supplyed with able godly and orthodox Ministers" at the rate of two per year.\textsuperscript{24}

The same request more than five years earlier would not have produced any fruit, but in 1675 Henry Compton was

\begin{footnotes}

\end{footnotes}
consecrated bishop of London. As a member of the king's council, Compton became aware of Virginia's plight and set out on his own to reform ecclesiastical matters in the colony. He denounced the Virginians' "profane custom of burying in their gardens and orchards" and marriages performed by laymen in the absence of ordained ministers. Clearly he needed a representative in the colony to ensure obedience and conformity to the canons and to bring Virginia one step closer to true episcopalianism.\(^{25}\)

His solution was a commissary, a clergyman appointed as his official representative and charged with oversight of church affairs, especially the clergy. The first, James Blair, served for fifty-four years after his appointment in 1689. He concentrated his first efforts on reforming his band of clerical misfits, drunkards, and libertines, apparently the brand Virginia most often attracted. In the long range, he knew, the colony would have to supply a significant part of its ministers if some degree of quality was to be achieved. Thus he persuaded the crown to charter the College of William and Mary in 1693.\(^{26}\)

In the years before Blair kept his watchful eyes on the colony, some of the clergy clearly strayed from the middle ground of Anglican conformity. The wide variety of topics, Puritan to Laudian, covered by the theological works owned


by ministers displays the range of views within the established church. All ministers were required by law to conform to the canons, of course, but in their isolation ministers were virtually free to adopt whatever stance they chose as long as they were not so extreme as to arouse the suspicion or hostility of influential traditionalists, such as Council members. Hugh Jones warned against such "heterodox, libertine, or fantastical" customs that were "often occasionally" practiced in the colony. But little could be done. If the choice came down to an able Presbyterian or no minister at all, some parishes at least chose the former. The last Presbyterian to serve an Anglican parish in Virginia died in 1710.27

To prevent nonconformity in the last quarter of the century especially, the governor and the Council issued proclamations that required all ministers and schoolmasters serving in the colony to present a license from the bishop of London. The licenses would also testify to the applicants' "good Life and conversation." There is some evidence that the restriction was enforced. In 1695 George Hudson answered the Council's charge of entering the colony without a license. It was true, he admitted, but it is a

sign of the colony's dire need for clergy that after Blair certified Hudson's ordination, he was permitted "the Exercise of his Ministerial Function" without any further proceedings.28

The licensing restriction may have eliminated a few candidates considering immigration to Virginia, but it does not explain why so few "Tunn of Divines" ventured to the colony. Contemporary observers cited the practice of hiring ministers from year to year as a major discouragement. Vestries decided early to protect their parishes from downsliding clergymen by employing ministers at pleasure, usually for a year at a time. Normally a rector would expect to be inducted by the bishop (the governor in Virginia) and was then secure in his benefice until he chose to leave. A minister coming from England probably was young and without a reputation, so vestries were understandably reluctant to commit themselves for any length of time in case, as was apparently not unusual, a minister soured in character or devotion to duty.29

This probationary system produced heated disputes between minister and parish. The Council heard several cases in 1695 dealing with ministers either being dismissed or locked out of their churches. The churchwardens and vestry from the accused parishes always claimed a

misunderstanding and offered to keep the ministers, thus settling the dispute, but one detects deeper hostility than anyone would admit to the Council. In at least one case the refusal of a vestry to present a minister for induction led to the minister's return to England. In Petsworth Parish, Gloucester County, the vestry offered an extension to the Reverend Thomas Vicaris only "until ye next Shipping" with "hopes of his future amendment," without which he declared his willingness to leave peacefully. Then there were the parishes that did not present their clergy to the governor for induction. The Reverend Jacob Ware was so popular that both St. John's Parish in King and Queen County and St. Peter's Parish in New Kent County petitioned for his induction. The former tried to coax him away from the latter, but facing his certain departure, St. Peter's succumbed to his demand to be inducted.30

The effect of all the wrangling between vestries and clergy was a moderately high turnover rate. To the parishioners this meant long periods without an ordained minister conducting services in their parish. In St. Peter's near century's end, the wait lasted eighteen months. More often than not, neighboring parishes shared a

minister, believing that half a loaf was better than none. They also shared his salary, so the tax burden was significantly less than what it would have been with a full-time rector. Consequently, however, the parishioners received only minimal clerical services. In Bruton Parish in 1688 the Reverend James Sclater, a part-time interim minister, preached every other Sunday afternoon, weather permitting, and administered the sacrament twice during his original six-month contract. St. Peter's Parish tendered a similar offer to the Reverend Jonathan Ball in 1686, but since the parish had two churches, he was seen only once a month in each church. Ten years later the same vestry hired a minister from a neighboring parish to "officiate Some certaine Sundayes" and ordered the wardens to provide him passage on such occasions over the river between the parishes.31

The reluctance of vestries to make long-term commitments to the clergy has been offered as the cause for the reluctance of English ministers to emigrate. This was probably true from their partially uninformed viewpoint. In reality, though, the appearance of insecurity was ill-founded. As Robert Beverley wrote in 1705, even if sacked by one vestry, as long as ministers had not been "abominably Scandalous, they immediately get other parishes" because of the steady demand for their services.

31. Chamberlayne, comp., Vestry Book of St. Peter's, 8-9, 49, 58; Goodwin, Record of Bruton Parish, ed. Goodwin, 127.
Commissary Blair pointed out more plausible negative effects of probationary hiring. First, ministers were reluctant to make any improvements to their glebes. Second, and most important to his effectiveness as a spiritual leader, probation meant a minister could not speak his mind openly, "because any reflection upon vices which members of his vestry might be addicted to might raise up a faction opposed to continuing him in his place." Instead of worrying about the character of his parishioners, therefore, a minister looked out for himself and developed a "mean, base, and mercenary spirit."\(^{32}\)

Still, the clergy need never have worried about receiving a healthy income as long as tobacco prices did not plummet. As in England, clergy lived in a glebe house and on glebe lands, at least one hundred acres, provided by the parish. In some cases servants and slaves were furnished. The minister in Virginia received fees for burials, marriages, and churching comparable to those enjoyed by his colleagues in England. The assembly exempted the clergy and six of his servants from all public levies and ordered part of the proceeds from a tax on furs and from fines for misbehavior to be used for the further support of the ministers. One significant difference from

---

the English system of tithes was the Virginia practice of paying the minister a set quantity of tobacco collected from a parish poll tax on all adult men and black women. The cash equivalent depended, of course, on the price of tobacco. This method of payment was the source of much friction in the colonial era, especially when everyone was feeling the effects of a depressed tobacco market, but the same situation occurred in England during bad harvests—the rector suffered with everyone else.33

Even with fluctuating salaries, ministers in Virginia stood a better chance of reaching the higher strata of society than their colleagues at home, for several reasons. First, the clergy's university training gave them an educational advantage over practically all of their neighbors. Second, competition among ministers was almost insignificant in Virginia because of the clerical shortage and the absence of ecclesiastical authority that created stratification. All ministers were roughly on the same social plane in Virginia. Third, unless their behavior did not warrant, ministers were respected as men of God. The clergy of Virginia were caught somewhere between the vast majority of small planters and the minority of large planters, both economically and socially.34

In return for the salary, benefits, and respect bestowed on them by parishioners, ministers in Virginia were expected to perform duties expected of their English brethren. A relatively zealous assembly in 1632 passed a law requiring a sermon every Sunday by every minister in the colony. Throughout the century vestries expected ministers to ride the circuit around the parishes so that every congregation could hear a sermon, not just a homily read by a layman, at least once a month. In addition ministers performed pastoral duties significant to the spiritual health of their flock. He catechized all the children and servants in his parish, administered the Eucharist three times a year, and baptized, married, and buried. The assembly recognized the importance of spiritual comfort in a colony in which so many suffered illnesses, and it passed an act in 1632 requiring ministers, upon hearing of the "dangerouslie sicke," to "resort unto him or her to instruct and comfort them in their distresse." It is impossible to know how eagerly ministers responded to calls from the sick, but there are cases in which ministers were present in the last days and hours of their parishioners' lives. The Reverend Samuel Eburne, for example, deposed in York County Court in 1695 that Katherine Thorpe had declared unto him "some very few dayes before shee dyed" her intention to marry James
The extent of Virginia parishes prohibited frequent house visits by the clergy and regular attendance at services by those farthest from the parish church. The frequency with which minister and parishioner came in contact varied directly with the distance between house and church. Especially to those on the frontier with no easily navigable creek or river to carry them to church, religion was by necessity more personal and less institutional. In all probability the church in the form of the nearest minister came to them when it was time to baptize a newborn, marry a child, or bury a family member. Trips to the church itself were made in conjunction with another journey or in observance of the three highest Sundays of the liturgical year.

So even residents of a parish with a full-time minister were not guaranteed the daily visibility of the English country rector. If a parish had a less-than-ideal incumbent, the quality and frequency of spiritual attention was even less. A debate has raged for decades over the quality of the clergy in seventeenth-century Virginia. It appears as if the ministry attracted its share of drunks, sloths, and sexual miscreants as well as the dedicated, pious, and well behaved. Oft-quoted is John Hammond's assessment of the "Gospel Ministers" of the first half of

35. Hening, ed., Statutes at Large, I, 157-158; Bruce, Institutional History, I, 186-187; Deeds, Orders, Wills, 1694-1697, York County Records No. 10, 182.
the century: "few of good conversation" who "wore Black Coats, and could babble in a Pulpet, roare in a Tavern, exact from their Parishioners, and rather by their dissolutenesse destroy than feed their Flocks." But, he continued, "Then began the Gospel to flourish."\(^{36}\)

Hugh Jones's later assessment pointed to the difficulty many ministers had adjusting to Virginia upon their arrival "when many things seem very odd to them." The result was friction between some clergymen who were unable to reconcile "their own interest and duty with the humour and advantage of the people." After acclimation to Virginia ministers soon proved their worth, which ranged from gold to dirt. In Christ Church Parish, for instance, night followed shortly after day. The Reverend Deuel Pead was the day, a man so scrupulous that he offered to preach a sermon on the first Saturday of each month to better prepare and encourage parishioners to attend the Sunday service at which he would administer communion (monthly instead of just thrice yearly). Pead's seven-year stint in the parish ended in 1690. The night that followed was the Reverend Samuel Gray, who served for the five years after 1693 but courted scandal and was ultimately dismissed.\(^{37}\)

---

37. Jones, Present State of Virginia, ed. Morton, 100; Rutman, Place in Time, 124; C. G. Chamberlayne, comp., The Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1663-1767 (Richmond, Va., 1927), 43-44. Pead even left 4 cows, 4 sows, a mare, and a colt behind in Virginia for his successor when he returned to England. Chamberlayne, comp., Vestry Book of Christ Church, 69-70.
Clergy venturing to Virginia who expected to find a model of conformity and strict observance of the canons were soon disappointed. The Reverend Nicholas Moreau, obviously not pleased to be anywhere outside England, whined to the bishop of Lichfield and Coventry in 1697 that "your clergy in these parts are of a very ill example," mostly because of their Scotch heritage, which deprived them of a proper education and religious example to follow. Despite his being in the "very worst" and "most troublesome" parish in the colony, Moreau complimented his ability to stir the latent willingness of an "abundance of good people" to serve God, even to the point of convincing two Quaker families to return to the Anglican church. He contrasted his ministerial skill with the rest of the Virginia clergy: "If ministers were such as they ought to be, I dare say there would be no Quakers nor Dissenters."38

Moreau's ulterior motive to impress the bishop enough to ensure his quick return to England does not discount his basic observations. That there was dissent in the colony cannot be denied, and his blame of the ministers for much of it is plausible. He certainly resorted to hyperbole in order to make himself look all the better, but the negligence of some clergy is confirmed by acts of the General Assembly passed in the early decades and continued throughout the century. In 1624 the assembly ordered

38. Chamberlayne, comp., Vestry Book of St. Peter's, 620-621.
ministers not to be absent from their cures for more than four months in a year, which was not asking a great deal of a "full-time" employee. At the nadir of clerical quality in the 1630s the assembly by statute encouraged the ministers to do "the thinges which shall apperteyne to honesty, and endeavour to profitt the church of God," rather than to participate in such vices as drinking, rioting, playing at dice or cards, or "spending theire tyme idellye by day or night." The 1640s brought a period of laziness that the assembly attempted to correct by imposing a fine of five hundred pounds of tobacco for failing to preach and catechize. The next year in 1647 the assembly acted again on "divers informations" that several ministers had refused to read common prayer or the divine service on the Sabbath; it permitted parishioners to withhold tithes and levies from refractory clergymen.39

Such concerns about the quality and the performance of ministers were academic to the significant number of parishes that lacked an incumbent. These parishes all too often made do with a lay reader, a practice established in law in 1633. The reader was usually the parish clerk, an office occupied with or without a parish priest. He had no qualifications other than enough reading ability to lead the congregation through the morning prayers and to read a prepared homily in lieu of a sermon. The clerk assumed the

duty to catechize and to teach local children in the absence of a minister, and he was in charge of the parish register.40

As time passed and it became painfully obvious that the shortage of ministers would be a persistent problem, clerks increasingly became surrogate clergymen. Jones reported that clerks performed all the offices of the church except marriage, the Eucharist, and baptism, in some cases even when the minister was available. In one case, at least, a clerk did perform a baptism. At the time of Bacon's Rebellion a captive Indian boy thought bewitched was baptized by a clerk because "no minister cou'd be had in many miles." The importance of the clerk to the continuing viability of a parish is apparent in the elaborate tryouts for the job conducted by the vestry of Petsworth Parish in 1700. Samuel Hope, though poor, refused a one-month continuance of his trial period, upon which the vestry auditioned a Mr. Underwood and Daniel Poole in "Reading and Singing Psalms," neither of whom apparently outshone Hugh Macktyer, whom the vestry hired for the job.41

Given the wide variety of situations a parish could find itself in terms of spiritual leadership, it is difficult to make a general assessment of ministerial

influence on the lives of the people. The existing ministers were not the cream of the crop; Virginia attracted the same sort of minister as it did small planter and servant--mostly young men with little or no experience and no immediate hope of advancing in the English system. Virginia for most was a chance, however slight, to make a better life and a hope to establish oneself well enough to be able to return to England. It is no surprise, then, that the ministers who ventured to the Old Dominion seldom stayed in a parish for years upon end. They kept one eye on England, and without a watchful eye on them, they found it even easier to modify or ignore parts of the *Book of Common Prayer* they disagreed with. Virginians could not rely on their clergy to set a spiritual example.

By and large the men and women of seventeenth-century Virginia did not expect or desire an evangelical church. The irony of the church's struggle to provide a minister for every parish is that the people proved they could get by without one. The episcopal prayer book for the most part could be used by a lay body. Some parishes were evidently content with their interim worship, especially during the lean years, as long as they could employ a reader and have access to an ordained minister in an adjacent parish to mark the occasional milestones in a Christian's life.

The task of measuring the piety of these quasi-
episcopalian colonists depends on observations from extrareligious sources. Attendance records were not kept during the century, and few personal accounts remain to help measure the outward expressions of a pious people. We will never have more than a feeling of the Virginians' inner commitment to God and his church. The evidence supports the division of Virginia society into three groups similar to Ralph Josselin's—the small group of intensely pious, the large middle group of moderately enthusiastic believers, and the third group of dissenters, nonbelievers, or nonpracticing believers.

While official attendance records were not kept, the frequency with which the assembly felt the need to pass acts for the encouragement of Sabbath keeping indicates a persistent problem with at least a part of the community large enough to worry about. The fine levied for nonattendance varied from one pound to fifty pounds of tobacco, and the assembly reminded the churchwardens to enforce this statute or "they will answere before God for such evills and plagues wherewith Almighty God may iustlie punish his people for neglectinge this good and wholesome lawe." The problem extended to persons not content to sit at home on Sunday who went hunting, worked in the fields, or traveled instead of attending church.  

The laws were probably more preventive than punitive, for few were ever convicted of nonattendance. The General

42. Hening, ed., Statutes at Large, I, 144, 155, 261.
Court convicted two men in 1629, and the York County Court did the same in 1648. Indeed, the cases are few and far between. Habitually negligent parishioners were either ignored or pressured by county and parish officials to mend their ways lest they face punishment. Time and again the churchwardens were reminded to present offenders, indicating an unwillingness to force attendance, especially after midcentury. And it is clear that a healthy body of the parish were usually in attendance, as is testified by an account in 1675 that "people in their way to church" on a Sunday morning discovered the bodies of a settler and an Indian left from an attack earlier that morning.43

A 50-percent attendance record would have been outstanding for those more than a few miles from the parish church. Several factors discouraged or prohibited regular attendance. First, the distance from the outer fringes of the parish did not allow a convenient one-day journey to and from church. Second, travel was precarious especially over long distances; Roger Green explained that many were "discouraged, by the length or tediousnesse of the way, through extremities of heat in Summer, frost and Snow in Winter, and tempestuous weather in both." Third, parishes newly settled or divided from another were without churches for years while a vestry was organized and a church built.

Worship services, if any, had to be held in private homes. Last, the absence of a minister hardly attracted a large crowd to bother with church services.44

While it is a place to begin, church attendance is hardly a conclusive judgment of a society's piety. The people's willingness to support the church financially provides another clue. In 1656 the inattention of many communities to supply themselves with churches and glebes, the first steps toward attracting ministers, forced the assembly to pass an act requiring all counties not yet divided into parishes to be so divided. Then all tithables were levied a yearly tax of fifteen pounds of tobacco to accumulate toward the construction of a church and the purchase of a glebe. Bruton Parish upgraded its wooden structure in 1678 to a brick edifice paid for by "free donations" collected from every parishioner. Wealthy residents often pledged amounts out of proportion even to their wealth, as John Page did when he gave Bruton land for a church and churchyard in addition to twenty pounds sterling. By century's end the deficiency had been alleviated, by legislative authority if necessary.45

Ministers commanded the respect due their station, but Virginians were known to lash out on occasion at ministers just as they might at any neighbor. An early act required

44. G[reen], Virginia's Cure, in Force, ed., Tracts and Other Papers, 4; Hening, ed., Statutes at Large, I, 250-251, 400.
45. Hening, ed., Statutes at Large, I, 400; Goodwin, Record of Bruton Parish, ed. Goodwin, 123.
those who disparaged a minister to have "sufficient profe" so that "the mindes of his parishioners may [not] be alienated from him, and his ministry prove the less effectual by their prejudication." York County Court prosecuted Thomas Waldoe in 1645 for "abusing the Church and Minister" in New Poquoson Parish. Later, in 1680, the assembly again found it necessary to discourage boisterous interruptions of ministers "by words, or any other manner or meanes whatsoever" and set a fine also for those who offered a minister "any unseemly or undecent gesture." Virginians dissatisfied with their clergy did not cower to etiquette requiring respect for men of the cloth.

If they sometimes verbally abused their clergy, colonists seldom failed to show their respect to the Almighty when death was near and they drafted their wills. Certainly only the wealthiest strata of society left wills that were recorded in York County, so wills alone only add more credence to the conclusion that wealthy, powerholding families were the mainstay of the church. Practically all wills began with the salutory "In the name of God Amen," and most contained a variation on the decedent bequeathing his soul unto God and his body to the earth. In basic form the wills followed "the Constitution of the Church of England," as Armiger Wade declared in 1676. But there are differences significant enough in the statements of

resurrection theology to indicate the existence of free thinking and diverse views of Christianity throughout the century. The only will in York County not to begin with some statement of faith still provides a hogshead of tobacco for a funeral sermon. Other testators left instructions for their burials, often desiring a "Christian burial" at the discretion of wife or overseer. Thomas Bushrod, though obviously a dedicated Christian, scorned the burial customs popular in England and Virginia at the time of his death in 1677 and ordered a plain burial "in my old Garden by the side of my wife Mary without morner prayers or other Customes used at funeralls."47

Besides offering a chance for theological commentary, wills allowed the well-off to make gifts to the church and the poor. The church received a variety of silver and pewter service pieces that were sometimes engraved with the donor's name. Nathaniel Bacon gave twenty pounds each to his native parish in England and to Hampton Parish in York County at his death in 1692. York County parishes also received land grants. Richard Elrington remembered the "poore of St Martins of the fields" with ten pounds "to be

distributed to the severall oldest men as farr as it shall extend."48 In whatever form, gifts to religious and charitable causes are another indication of the devotion to Christian principles shared by the elite of Virginia society.

The governor could act at his discretion to impose religious observances on the colony. It was common practice to observe as days of thanksgiving the anniversaries of particularly devastating Indian attacks (March 22, for instance), the accession of a monarch, and victories of English forces in European conflicts. On such occasions ministers were ordered to hold a public service and to preach, and all were expected to attend or else "answer ye Contrary att yr utmost peril." As common as days of thanksgiving were days of humiliation. It was widely believed that God punished man for misbehavior and impiety by plagues, Indian troubles, or poor harvests. In 1645 the assembly felt that the colony was at a low point generally, and despite the "scarcity of pastors" it ordered a day "wholy dedicated to prayers and preaching" so that "God might avert his heavie judgments that are now upon

us." Gov. Edmund Andros declared a day of fasting in 1693 in the hope of ending an outbreak of the measles. A "great and visible Plague of Caterpillars" prompted Gov. Francis Nicholson to proclaim a holy day on which "all Persons whatsoever [would] refrain from all servile work and business and apply themselves to the dutys of fasting, humiliation, repentance for and reformation of their several vices and immoralitys."\(^{49}\) Colony-wide days of thanksgiving and humiliation further pressed the piety of the gentry on the masses. If the people at large did not share a sense of the blame for the colony's misfortunes, they may have welcomed an occasional midweek holiday. There is no evidence of any resistance to these holidays, which were probably observed quietly by a majority of the people.

To what extent the public piety of the colony's leadership penetrated the rest of Virginia society is uncertain. Those who could afford books practiced their own personal forms of piety. Few estate inventories are without a Bible and other devotional books including prayer books, collections of sermons, and guides to Christian living. Those without books could borrow; Robert Baldrey lent the works of St. Augustine to young Edward Johnson in 1658. The most popular manual was The Practice of Piety, despite the description of it by one historian as a book

that "no wayfaring man, be he ever so wise, could by any chance understand." Sitting next to it on one's shelf could have been a book of "physick," of witchcraft and the occult, or of astrology. Literate Virginians, at least, struggled with all sorts of tools to better understand their world, of which Christianity was but a part.50

The best picture of religious devotion can be drawn, therefore, of the upper strata of society--the lawmakers, the book readers, the will writers. How well the rest of white society fits this picture can only be determined by examining in the next chapter the political and legal influence of the church. As for the other segments of seventeenth-century Virginia society, blacks and Indians, the church's influence was certainly exponentially less. As blacks became a more significant part of the population in the last quarter of the century, fear and racism prompted the passage of an act that made blacks second-class members of the Anglican church. Though they could still be baptized, the act declared that their spiritual freedom was not transferable to earthly freedom. Another act in 1687 prohibited large gatherings of blacks during the weekends and outlawed "any Solemnity or Funeralls for any deced Negroes." At least one clergyman called for more attention to the spiritual health of "domestick Slaves and Vassals . . . together with the other numerous Heathen,"

but the Church of England failed in its ministry to nonwhites until the eighteenth century and the establishment of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel.51

Tidbits from contemporary observers and other writings of Virginia offer a general view of the importance most Virginians placed on spiritual health. A pamphlet lauding fifty-eight characteristics of the colony that immigrants would find attractive in 1649 reflects the priorities of the society. Listed eleventh was the availability of "Six publike Brewhouses, and most brew their owne Beere, strong and good." Considerably further down, the author first mentioned political and ecclesiatical institutions. The church came in at item forty-seven, and in a typical public relations hyperbole was said to have an abundance of ministers, all conformists making at least one hundred pounds per annum, and a harmonious communion, the people living "all in peace and love."52

Promoters knew the lure of Virginia was its economic opportunity; the presence, form, and strength of social institutions was only a secondary concern. Even after


establishing themselves in the colony, the smaller planters and craftmen were criticized for their lack of genuine piety. Roger Green sympathized with the occasional "faithfull and vigiland Pastors" who might try to remedy the vices of their flock at a "hazard" to themselves. The general ineffectiveness of the church meant "the Christian Religion is like still to be dishonoured, and the Name of God to be blasphemed among the Heathen." Decades later Hugh Jones painted a similar picture. Ministers were forced to omit or alter the liturgy and "deviate from the strict discipline and ceremonies of the Church" for fear of "giving offence" or driving away the people because "any thing tedious soon tired them." Surplices were long out of use, and the people had adopted the Presbyterian style of receiving communion seated. Efforts to return to tradition were largely unsuccessful; "it is not an easy matter to bring them to the Lord's Table decently upon their knees."53

That the middling and lower sorts did not meet the spiritual expectations of uppercrust commentators such as Green and Jones is seen further in actions of the governor and the Council. By 1670 the executive elite was disturbed enough about immigration trends to prohibit the future landing of "great numbers of fellons and other desperate villaines sent hither from the several prisons in England."

Later in the year the perceived effects of the undoubtedly impious English "jaile birds" was evident in Gov. William Berkeley's replies to inquiries from the Lords of Trade and Plantations. He condemned the "disobedience, and heresy, and sects" that had crept into the world and wished the ministers would not succumb to the whimsical likes of the people. "Pray oftener and preach less" was his advice.54 But to keep colonists within the Church of England, ministers would have to bow more, not less, to popular pressure. When they did not, the people left the flock.

In an age when the only good atheist was a quiet one, the best measure of the Anglican church's effectiveness is the degree to which people dissented. The assembly always expected uniformity in "substance and circumstance" to the canons of the Church of England, and even during the commonwealth and protectorate the colony adhered largely to the Book of Common Prayer. Virginians welcomed the 1662 Act of Uniformity and then could practice openly the Anglicanism that they had observed quietly in the previous decade. The turmoil of seventeenth-century England never transferred to Virginia because of the colonists' united antipapism, which meant they could ally themselves with whoever was head of the church as long as it did not return to Vatican control, and because of their loyalty to church and state (one in the same) bred by their isolation and

general disinterestedness in splitting theological hairs.55

The number of dissenters in Virginia has usually been underestimated by contemporaries and by present-day historians alike. Robert Beverley in 1705 declared that there were still "very few Dissenters," and John Woolverton recently characterized the established church as "simply a part of the scenery, acknowledged, accepted, and, without undue hysteria, attended." Only Babette M. Levy has recognized the extent and variety of dissent, all of which she links to the Genevan influence that lingered from the first decades. Nonconformity ranged from nominal acceptance of Anglican practices to Quakerism to Presbyterianism near the end of the century. Virginians never tolerated Catholics, though, and French traveler Durand of Dauphine observed in the 1680s that the few Catholics in Virginia attended Protestant services. It is another sign of the desperate need for clergy along the frontier that Lord Howard of Effingham urged Durand to return with French settlers and Catholic ministers, who would be allowed to minister to the French as they pleased "provided that from time to time they preached in English and baptized and married the other [Protestant] Christians

who might be among the French settlers."56

By far the most numerous group, though still not a threat during the seventeenth century, was the Quakers. Persecuted by Governor Berkeley in the 1650s and generally ignored at other times, Quakers received liberty of conscience in 1690. As long as they paid their parish levies to the established church, Quakers were usually tolerated, if not accepted, during the last decade of the century. Still, the Council in 1699 condemned their "evill and Seditious practices" and recommended that Commissary Blair consider "the most proper methods for preventing the like for the future."57

Quakerism in Virginia had its roots in the early puritan element. While most settlers were later satisfied with the Church of England, the radical Calvinists adopted Quakerism to satisfy their spiritual zeal. Indeed, William Byrd, on his trip to survey the Virginia-North Carolina border, acutely identified the appeal of Quakerism when he noticed that the two Quaker meeting houses he passed were nowhere near a competing Anglican church. Quakerism lured pious colonists from the "neglected vineyard" of


Anglicanism and revivified their spirituality.58

Itinerant Quaker William Edmundson best illuminates the receptivity of Virginians to his faith. During his first trip to the colony in 1671, he conducted "several powerful Meetings . . . so that Truth had got some Hold." He later organized a meeting near Green Spring and described the Friends afterward as "Sheep that had been astray, and returned again to the Shepherd, Christ Jesus." He even met with Gov. Berkeley, who was "very peevish and brittle." His meetings attracted mostly "mean Men" but also men of "great Estate" such as Major Richard Bennet and a justice of the county court and his wife. Several weeks in Virginia produced "many sweet serviceable Meetings" and a new-found order among the colony's Friends.59

Edmundson portrayed a segment of communities unfulfilled by the established Anglican church in settled areas, not on the frontier as we most often presume. No matter where they were located, "people uninstructed in any religion are ready to embrace the first that offers," as Byrd observed. "'Tis natural for helpless man to adore his Maker in some form or other." Christian men and women from time to time feel the need to revive their faith, to commit

themselves anew. The absence of an established church meant only that they had to turn to a variation for their spiritual rejuvenation. Thus Quakerism satisfied a thirst Anglicanism had not been able to quench; had there been no void to fill, meetings of Friends would probably have been rare in the seventeenth century.60

Judging the success of the Church of England in ministering to the spiritual needs of its communicants requires consideration of the function of religion in the seventeenth century, as well as the expectations of the people considered earlier. Europeans of this era sought to systematize the unknown, "to explain or control the natural world by bridging to a transcendent world." Christianity was only a part of the tools they used to build the bridge. In the cultural baggage of immigrants were beliefs in witchcraft, the occult, astrology, natural science, and phenomenology, none of which was considered incompatible with the beliefs of an average Western Christian. Thus Virginians believed that three signs in 1675 had portended the tension and bloodshed of Bacon's Rebellion. A comet had streaked across the southwest sky, flocks of pigeons had blackened the skies (as they had done before the last Indian uprising), and swarms of flies emerged from the ground only to disappear within a month. All were "look'd

upon as ominous presages."61

By accepting the view of Christianity as one part of a complex system with which to understand the world and the indications that some people accepted other parts above Christianity, we may go far to explain the "dumbness" of many hearers of the evangelical Puritan message and the disinterestedness of a significant portion of Virginia society in religious affairs. Keith Thomas has suggested that rather than deafness, the hearers were simply essentially ignorant of Christianity. In its place they accepted magic, witchcraft, or other transcendental bridges. Nineteen Virginians were prosecuted for or otherwise accused of witchcraft between 1626 and 1705. Gov. Nicholson in 1691 strictly enjoined justices of the peace to inquire into cases of felony, trespass, and witchery.62

Evidence of witchcraft and white magic in Virginia reveals the competitiveness of these systems, as well as Quakerism, with the established church for a dominant place in the mind of Virginians. The persistent attempts of the gentry and orthodox ministers to impose the appearance of Anglican form upon the churches in the colony served only to encourage denominationalism and pluralism in reaction. Leaders emphasized the form of religion while the people

thirsted for the function of religion. Perhaps historians have followed the leaders and should instead follow the people who, as Darrett B. Rutman has suggested, did not consider themselves Anglicans, Puritans, Presbyterians, or Quakers, but instead as "merely responding to any man who offered a systematic bridge to the transcendental." In the end "they drank regardless of the size or shape of the container bearing the water."63

Taking the leap with Rutman ignores the heritage of English society that came to Virginia with the colonists, in whose social experience the Church of England was deeply seated. It is reasonable to assume they expected a similar experience with the church in Virginia. As the colonists gradually mastered their environment over the course of the century, they valued the church more for the security it offered in affirming their place in the cosmic scheme. The church's social role overshadowed its spiritual. This trend toward secularization was most prominent in the class most in control of its destiny--the gentry--and least felt near the bottom of society in the people with little or no control over their future. Contrary to the trend in England for dissenters to be mostly from the gentry, in Virginia it was the souls at the bottom of the ladder who, increasingly ignored by the established church, would turn to more responsive and fulfilling faiths in the eighteenth

63. Ibid., 196-197, 202, 205-206.
century. 64

The Anglican cup, though one of many available to thirsty Virginians, was the largest, the most satisfying, and the preferred for most. The Virginia cup, however, was able to quench everyone's thirst only in the eighteenth century. By then, Virginians had decided to look elsewhere for spiritual satisfaction. Thus was the church's failure to tend the flock in seventeenth-century Virginia.

64. Ibid., 202, 206.
CHAPTER III
OFFENDERS AND OFFICEHOLDERS ON TRIAL: THE POLITICAL FACET

The secularization of the church in Virginia is most evident in the political and judicial institutions that took control of church affairs. In the absence of diocesan authority the governor, the Council, and the General Assembly defined canon law and behavioral standards, regulated parish development and the vestries, and attempted to satisfy the need for ministers. At the county level, secular county courts assumed the function of ecclesiastical courts. Vestries became self-perpetuating and controlled the business of the parish. The most significant difference between the church in England and in Virginia, then, was the virtual control of the church by the laity in Virginia.

Ecclesiastical courts were only possible when a clergyman above the parish level was available to try offenders. In Virginia there was no such person until the appointment of Commissary James Blair in 1689. In the meantime the county court took the place of the English church court and, in general, the other principal courts of England, including the Chancery, King's Bench, Common Pleas, Exchequer, and Admiralty. The General Court,
presided over by the governor and councillors, heard appeals from the county courts and cases involving substantial sums of property.¹

Even when Blair was in residence and available for general visitations, the colonists resisted the institution of an ecclesiastical court so vigorously that he was forced to abandon the idea and never tried it again. Hugh Jones reported three decades later that the notion "so terrified the people, that they hate almost the very name, and seem more inclinable to be ruled by any other method, rather than the present spiritual courts." The support of Gov. Francis Nicholson had prompted Blair to pursue the idea, and Nicholson hoped his endorsement would prod the counties to "be found in Such order yt [Blair] will have no reason to punish any."²

Blair's unsuccessful attempt could not have been due to the inefficiency or absolute unwillingness of county courts to punish offenders of the moral laws. Prosecutions were fairly steady throughout the century. The system worked much the same as in England. The assembly directed

churchwardens to present to the county courts "all such persons as shall lead a prophayne or ungodlie life, of such as shall be common swearers, drunkards or blasphemers, that shall ordinarielie profane the saboth dayes or contemne Gods holy word or sacraments." Churchwardens were to be on the lookout also for "all adulterers or fornicators, or such as shall abuse theire neighbors by slanderinge tale carryinge or back bitinge" as well as those indolent parishioners who did not behave themselves "orderlie and soberlie in the church duringe devyne service." Finally, parents and masters were not to be allowed to become delinquent in catechizing "the youth and ignorant persons."  

After looking at the duties to which all churchwardens were required to swear an oath, it is clear that the justices of Virginia were as interested in their constituents' lives as were their colleagues in England. The difference was that in Virginia the job was made much more difficult because the scattered settlements allowed for some degree of privacy, though still not much. From the depositions taken in the courts it seems as if neighbors were forever passing by on the nearest road and popping their heads in the door to say hello. And even on the frontier, rumors spread almost magically, about

Indians, political events, or the latest indiscretion of a neighbor.

The county courts stood guard against breaches of community standards, but it prosecuted always with a sacred purpose on behalf of the church. Punishments were usually carried out at the church, and fines were levied for the benefit of the parish. Thus the church was the institution used to "heal the wounds" of society. The means to heal were prescribed by the assembly, which defined offenses and set the penalties. It passed laws against all the "sinnes" listed in the wardens' oath and also prohibited work on the Sabbath, such as loading boats, traveling, or shooting guns. The body of behavioral laws were frequently revised and affirmed and proclamations issued reminding Virginians that obedience would prevent the judgment of God Almighty from being "drawn upon Our heads." The many "good and wholesome" laws touched also the slaves of Virginia. In a typical mixture of church and state, the assembly ordered that slaves convicted of capital crimes forfeit their livestock to the use of the poor of the appropriate parish. In its legislative zeal to rid the colony of "wicked blasphemus [sic], dissolute and vitious persons," the assembly still realized when efforts to prosecute were backfiring. In 1658 it blamed the laziness of sheriffs for discouraging attendance at church; parishioners became reluctant to appear at services on the Sabbath for fear of being ambushed by the sheriff with a warrant or writ of the
court. The assembly prohibited sheriffs from serving papers during church or militia musters.\(^4\)

The proper observance of the Anglican faith was of course a primary concern of the courts. Offenses ranged from nonattendance to misbehavior in church. In a rare instance of excommunication by the General Court, Henry Coleman faced the penalty for forty days in 1634 for "scornful speeches and putting on his hat in church" when he should have been asking forgiveness for a prior offense. The most frequent charge in this category was Sabbath breaking, which was prosecuted decidedly more before midcentury than after. The penalty usually included a modest fine and some sort of public humiliation, such as lying with heels in the stocks outside the church on Sunday. In 1648 the churchwardens of New Poquoson Parish presented a string of parishioners for refusing to receive instruction and communion. The antagonist was the Reverend Charles Grimes, an apparently strict orthodox pastor. Occasionally nonconformists were presented for judgment, as in Lower Norfolk County in 1649, when the sheriff supplied the court with the names of eight who had not attended services for three months and had refused to hear the Book of Common Prayer. Those who attended services could still find themselves in front on the court if they misbehaved.

In about 1680 a grand juryman of Accomac County accused John Stokely of "talking and making a noise when the minister was in divine service." Stokely, in a fit of honesty, answered that he had come to church "to do business."5

By far the most numerous category of offenses was crimes of sexual misbehavior—fornication, adultery, bastardy, or a combination of these. Prosecutions for fornication occurred at a spotty rate throughout the century. The early records of the General Court reveal a case of miscegenation in 1630. The offender, Hugh Davis, was "soundly whipped, before an assembly of Negroes and others." Sex crimes were regularly referred to as an abuse of oneself, an act shameful to the community of Christians, and a dishonor of God. Punishments for fornication before midcentury concentrated on public penance, such as whipping or confessions in church, but after 1650 usually only the women received lashes on the back while the men paid a fine without any other punishment. Premarital cohabitation or sex was prosecuted frequently, especially if it resulted in a honeymoon baby. Most often men had to present security for the appearance

and future behavior of their female partners. On at least one occasion (late in the century in York County) an overanxious bride and groom were let off when the husband paid his new wife's fine of five hundred pounds of tobacco. Sometimes the court ordered an offender to build a ferry or a bridge in parish, as in the case of John Pope and Olive Eaton in 1638, instead of a more traditional sentence.6

Punishments for adultery, and a few cases of cohabitation, frequently consisted of a court ordered separation of the offending couple. York County Court ordered Martin Becker to leave Sarah Holgatt's house, but only after he had "made and finished his Croppe." Nine years later in 1657 the same court ordered Robert Taylor "to refraine (by all possible meanes) the company" of his adulteress. William Burg was sentenced to prison for living with a prominent widow, who was prohibited from visiting him.7

Social distinctions were maintained in the levying of punishments. Free men and women received monetary and physical punishments. By statute, though, masters of offending servants paid a fine, for which the servant compensated him by serving an extra six months, or if the master refused to pay, the servant was whipped. If the

offense produced a child—and thus a loss of work and an added financial burden—the servant served an extra year, and the father provided security to the parish so the child would not become a burden on the parish poor-relief system. Frequently the courts added two years to the length of service instead of one.  

Ministers were not immune to sexual urges, but if they succumbed to such urges, they were also not immune from prosecution. The General Court in 1654 convicted an anonymous clergyman of having sex with his servant but recorded no punishment. In 1695 the churchwardens of Abingdon Parish, Gloucester County, appeared before the Council with two vestry orders removing a minister named Gregg for "Severall misdemeanours." Gregg refused to accept the general charge, though he was willing to leave the parish. By opening his mouth when he should have left well enough alone, he ended up with a charge of sodomy and an investigation and prosecution by the attorney general.  

With all the fornicating going on, it comes as no surprise that children were regularly conceived out of wedlock. At least nineteen cases of bastardy were prosecuted in York County from the 1640s to the end of the century. The largest number involved servant women. In

1632 the Council sent "two maids got with child at sea" back to England. Most often the mother declared who the father was, then the mother was fined and the father was made responsible for the expense of the child's rearing. In the case of Elizabeth Hambleton's baby boy born in 1688, York County Court ordered the child taken to the father, who lived in James City County. Some settlements curiously included fourth parties. If the father did not pay the woman's fine, her master usually did, but in 1690, Mary, a servant of Thomas Loe, was rescued not by her co-conspirator, Thomas Hobson, but by Thomas Wootten, who appeared "att the Barr" offering to pay her fine of five hundred pounds of tobacco to the parish.10

The courts ordered penance more in cases of bastardy than in fornication. One of the most serious cases of fornication, between Francis Penrice and his sister-in-law, resulted in a bastard child in 1689. York County Court called the act a "most heighnious sinn" and ordered Penrice to stand in church during the prayers and divine service for three consecutive Sundays dressed "in a white sheete bare legg and bare foote" and to acknowledge his sin to the congregation. In cases of bastardy, though, the courts were usually more concerned with who would assume the financial burden of the child. Since servants were not in a position to care for their children, this may explain why

cases brought to court involved mostly servants. (Servants also may have been more vulnerable to sexual advances from lusty masters.) Part of a parish's poor relief went to the care of bastard children, so free women able to care for their bastards were less of a risk to the parish in which the birth occurred. By 1662 the burden on some parishes was so onerous that the assembly passed an act to help them provide for bastard children. The act, later revised, charged the servant fathers of bastards with the reimbursement of expenses borne by the parish once the father's indenture was over and he was able to pay. Similarly, the mothers could be sold by the churchwardens for a two-year term after their original term had expired, the money for the use of the parish.11

County courts concerned themselves with domestic relations besides sex. Occasionally a husband would abuse or neglect his wife so severely that the court stepped in and separated the couple. Mary Savory petitioned York County Court in 1692 for relief against her husband Henry, whose "inhumane usage of her" was indangering her "life as well as her bodily health." The court ordered the sheriff to take Henry into custody until he provided security for his good behavior and also granted Mary a bed, pot, frying pan, some spoones, two trays, a gridiron, and two chests for her support after the separation. A similar case in

1697 involved abuse by neglect. A warden of Hampton Parish reported that Jane Hide, wife of Robert, was lying "in a very weak and despicable condition" because Robert refused to allow her sustenance. The court summoned him, he refused to appear, the sheriff brought him in forcibly, and the case was settled when he promised to provide Jane nourishment and the care of their children and "to live peaceably and quietly with her without molestation." The cause of the dispute or the reason for the quick reconciliation was not recorded.12

Less disturbing offenses considered by county courts included swearing and drunkenness. As the Puritan element in Virginia subsided through the 1640s, so also did the prosecutions for these two crimes. It is dubious that the decline was due to a decrease in actual drinking and swearing. A more likely explanation was greater tolerance in society at large. The assembly never removed the acts from the books, but prosecutions after 1640 were rare, if not nonexistent. Two men were fined a few shillings each in 1634 for swearing in Accomac County, and the same court ordered John Parramoure to sit by the heels in the stocks during worship services for being drunk at court in 1638. Another drunk stood at the church door with a pot tied about his neck. All in all, justices looked on drinking as a social practice acquainting man with neighbor and

turned their heads from an occasional tavern brawl. The extent of drinking in the colony is suggested by the accounts owed to tavernkeeper William Shipp of Norfolk County. In 1648 eighty men from Elizabeth River Parish owed Shipp money, when the whole county contained only 334 adult men.\textsuperscript{13}

A final category of offenses, defamations, though behavioral, are not necessarily religious crimes. They are included here because the punishments prescribed were often church-related. The church returns as wound healer for society, and defamations certainly inflicted deep wounds at times. The most common punishment was a small fine and a requirement of asking forgiveness from the defamed party. A less common punishment was given in the case of John Waltham v. Anne Williamson and Anne Stephens (1637), in which Accomac County Court ordered the defendants to be ducked for slandering the plaintiff's wife and then to ask forgiveness in front of the local congregation. The same court sentenced Daniel Cugley to the task of "daubinge the Church" after the roof was repaired. A defamation case in York County in 1692 ended in a sentence of asking forgiveness and of ducking. Fines were levied often for the use of the parish.\textsuperscript{14}

Two other defamation cases are particularly intriguing

\textsuperscript{13} Ames, ed., \textit{Court Records of Accomack-Northampton}, 13-14, 114; Morgan, \textit{American Slavery, American Freedom}, 151.

\textsuperscript{14} Ames, ed., \textit{Court Records of Accomack-Northampton}, 15, 88; Yk. Cty. Recs. No. 9, 92.
because of the circumstances and the sentences. In September 1634 Edward Drew sued Joane Butler in Accomac County for calling his wife a "common Carted hoare." The court found Butler guilty and offered her two alternative sentences. She could either be "drawen over the kings Creeke at the starne of a boate or Canew," or she could present herself to the minister at the next Sunday service and ask for the forgiveness of the people and that they "praye with me, that God may forgive me." Exactly one week later, Drew's wife Mary was convicted of exactly the same crime against Joane Butler and offered the same sentence. In the second case a churchwarden of Marston Parish, York County, presented three women to the county court for "several written lybells dropt in ye sd. Par. Church, tending to scandal." What the libelous statements were was not recorded, but the husbands of the three were ordered to give bond for their wives' future good behavior.¹⁵

Most cases of theft were considered civil crimes, but in the 1630s a petty theft resulted in an imaginative sentence. The court of Accomac County ordered Samuel Powell, who "purloyned" a pair of breeches from the house of a county gentleman, to sit in the stocks on the next Sabbath "from the beginninge of morninge prayer untill the end of the Sermon with a pair of breeches about his

necke. One suspects that the minister, to drive the point home, chose the Eighth Commandment as the day's sermon text.

There must have been more for parish officials to do than tattle on their friends and neighbors for misbehavior. Indeed, the judicial aspect of the churchwardens' duties was probably the least attractive, except to the nosier sort, and does not seem to be very important to us today. But parish offices, along with county justiceships, offered the gentry the opportunity to control virtually all activity within the parish. Men valued these positions for their power and for the political experience they gained while serving.

The vestry was the governing body in the temporal affairs of a parish church. The practice of electing twelve men from each parish to serve as the vestry was confirmed by the assembly in the 1630s. Parishioners deferentially chose the most substantial landowners of the parish, a class of yeoman farmers described by one historian as "tough, unsentimental, quick tempered, crudely ambitious men concerned with profits and increased landholdings, not with the grace of life." They recognized the English society that had allowed them to thrive owed much of its stability to the church as an institution. At

the creation of a parish the vestry worked to establish a parish church, to recreate those features of English society that lay within their control.17

At first the vestries were charged only with the setting of the parish levy as necessary to maintain the churches and with the selection of two churchwardens yearly. In 1658, however, faced with a growing colony and growing demands on its attention, the assembly conferred on the vestries the powers to deal with "all matters," including ministers, churchwardens, and the poor, "from time to time as they shall think fitt." The next step was to grant the vestries the right of self-perpetuation, taking away the people's power to elect men to fill vacancies. To the assembly the vestry was the only permanent political body in the colony and appeared to offer some hope of stability and continuity in the otherwise tumultuous political and social climate of the colony. In the absence of ministers in several parishes, vestries were desirable; in the absence of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, vestries were essential.18

The vestry book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex


County, illustrates the primary concerns of Virginia vestries. Hiring, keeping, and paying a minister topped the list. This vestry showed that diligence paid off with a steady supply of clergy. Part of the attraction of Christ Church Parish was its generous glebe house and lands. The main church and two chapels in the parish required constant maintenance, on which the vestry spent considerable time and money. The vestry took an active role in directing the presentment of parishioners for fornication and bastardy. It dispensed money regularly for the relief of the parish indigent, often spending one-third to one-half the amount of the minister's salary. Finally, to pay for its various other responsibilities, the vestry assessed and directed collection of the parish levy.¹⁹

In a more general sense, the vestry brought a semblance of order to the lives of families and individuals scattered across the parish. The sometimes dangerous novelty of the Virginia environment would have been unlivable without some recognizable institutions and sense of control over it. The vestry played its part by providing a church, some sort of worship, and if necessary, bridges, ferries, and roads for the ease of travel in the parish. For the gentlemen who sat on the vestries, "disorder was anathema, even sinful," as Darrett B. Rutman has said. Vestries by their nature so in tune with the local interests of their

¹⁹. C. G. Chamberlayne, comp., The Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1663-1767 (Richmond, Va., 1927), 1-92, passim.
parishes became the firm and persistent defenders of the welfare of their communities against outside interference.20

A vestry as diligent as Christ Church's required capable churchwardens if its diligence was to be felt in the parish. Besides the unpleasant task of presenting moral offenders to the county courts, churchwardens performed a host of duties necessary for the day-to-day operation of the parish. The wardens were the eyes, ears, arms, and legs of the vestry, for they kept accounts of the collection and the disbursement of the parish levies, purchased the books necessary for worship and the keeping of a register, supplied the communion cloth and napkins and the cushions for the pulpit, and reported maintenance problems to the vestry. In more established parishes, the wardens could select sidesmen or questmen to assist them, especially in looking out for moral offenses and for the condition of the parish poor.21

Just as in England, churchwardens in Virginia lapsed occasionally in the performance of their duties, and it was obvious to the parish. The assembly, after concluding that "the church-wardens have been very negligent" in 1646, ordered the county courts to examine and to punish wardens

---

if necessary. Another act by the same assembly indicates the reluctance of most local officials to prosecute vigorously offenders against the moral laws; if county justices failed to discipline reluctant wardens, then the justices could be disciplined by the governor and the Council. In 1682 York County Court reported that the wardens of Poquoson Parish had been "very remis" in making presentments. The ultimate resistance (or sloth) came from Lawne's Creek Parish, Surry County, which in 1699 had no vestry and had not had one "for some years last past." Such a parish offers a contrast to Christ Church Parish and makes generalizations about the church in Virginia all the more difficult.22

Some have argued that the grant of self-perpetuation made the vestries an artificial, almost hereditary elite within a parish. It seems likely, judging from the elections for county justices in which the people always elected a substantial farmer or businessman to the court, that they would have done the same thing in vestry elections if they had had the chance. The vestry became the companion of the county court and was often composed of the same gentlemen. It is true that this elite represented the "most distinguished families of Virginia," and its members also served as sheriffs, burgesses, and even councillors. A seat on a vestry signalled one's

arrival in Virginia society and offered the opportunity to make oneself known outside the county. Thus the vestry was a "school of government," a "stepping stone to politics," but it was also a chance to exercise noblesse oblige. The same can be said for the churchwardens, who were sometimes from the social class a step below the vestry and sometimes members of the vestry class. Seventeenth-century deference allowed families to rule their counties. It was expected in 1677, not a clandestine elitist conspiracy, that Ralph Greene, Jr., replaced his father on the vestry of Petsworth Parish in Gloucester County. And so it was across Virginia.23

Necessity elevated the vestry to its powerful role in Virginia communities. The absence of church administrative machinery shifted the responsibility to the laity. In the performance of their new-found obligations, the governor, the Council, and the General Assembly shaped the institution as they wished it—as close an image to the English church as possible. But they recognized the necessity of change and greater local control if the church was to be planted along with new communities. The burden then fell on vestrymen and wardens who served their church

almost always without pay and were rewarded with a respected place in the community and practical political experience that might mean a step up to the colonial government. The system worked reasonably well.
CHAPTER IV
COMMUNITY AND HARMONY: THE SOCIAL SIDE

Virginians in the seventeenth century recognized the benefits churches provided to a community, if they did not always frequent them for spiritual reasons. Roger Green, propounding his "cure" for what ailed the colony, encouraged the colonists to attend worship services regularly, so that they would obtain the benefits of "frequent civil commerce"—"mutual confidence, trust, and friendship." The local church also provided the "vertuous Examples" of the pious parish families to those less so and an education for children and servants, so that eventually young and old alike would be "enlightened with true saving knowledge" and "serviceable both in Church and State."¹

Churches have always been social institutions. In early Virginia, they were the social institution. Only the county court rivaled them as a hub of activity, and then only once a month at most. While only modestly successful in satisfying the spiritual needs of its communion, the

Anglican church united scattered settlers into communities and offered the only place where a neighborhood could gather to exercise human sociability. For these reasons, Virginians valued their church most for its social facet.

Green emphasized the benefits of a Christian community because of his support for the establishment of towns in the colony, by law if necessary. Indeed, towns were the only cure for the troubles in the struggling church, he believed. He condemned Virginia planters for being the first Christians ever to violate Christ's order to live together "in visible united Societies, in Cities, Towns or Villages." Green was not alone in his advocacy of towns, but most others cited economic rather than social benefits. Virginians chose not to follow his ideal, however, and were never "like a garden enclosed, like a Vineyard fenced." To the contrary, they rejected the self-conscious communal life of New England. They were individualists and opportunists and appear to have avoided consciously the tight-knit village life of England in favor of a bit of privacy and isolation. Their only covenants were with themselves.2

The settlement pattern that developed from the economic and agricultural necessities of tobacco cultivation did not mean that Virginians turned their back on their neighbors.

2. Ibid., 8, 14, 17; Darrett B. and Anita H. Rutman, A Place in Time: Middlesex County, Virginia, 1650-1750 (New York, 1984), 47.
Less frequent interpersonal contact demanded in compensation a greater sense of communal identity and more intense social experiences when they did occur. The parish provided both. The occasional petitions to county courts and the governor-in-Council to settle boundary disputes between parishes testify to the jealousy with which parishioners guarded their territory, and hence their neighborhoods. In 1691 the vestry of Bruton Parish even accused James City Parish of a conspiracy "to augment their Parish, by lessening ours." In parishes with more than one church, parishioners identified with their own distinct "precinct" surrounding the nearest chapel. Thus a person from Middlesex County would be either from the upper, middle, or lower precinct of Christ Church Parish. 3

In addition to the identity one's church provided, the people expected the church to perform a social function that had no relationship to the brand of Christianity practiced in the community. It did not matter if the church was in name Anglican, Presbyterian, or Puritan; they all served as the focal point, the gathering place, for everyone in a parish. A secular by-product of compulsory attendance was relief from the isolation of the farm. The church and the clearings around it became a weekly neighborhood nexus. Worship almost seemed secondary to a

3. Deeds, Orders, Wills, 1633-1694, York County Records No. 1, 203; William Archer Rutherfoord Goodwin, The Record of Bruton Parish Church, ed. Mary Frances Goodwin (Richmond, Va., 1941), 128; Rutman, Place in Time, 123.
chance to chat with neighbors, exchange news, and transact business. Perhaps the General Assembly realized that in mandating church attendance it also was preserving at least a sense of English society for which colonists from time to time yearned and was preventing widespread alienation from society. Through plagues, Indian attacks, depressions, and even hiatuses between ministers, the people knew there would be another Sunday and the opportunity to renew their strength through fellowship with their neighbors.  

Huguenot traveler Durand of Dauphine was amazed at the amount of time Virginians spent socializing. A typical modest planter (a few slaves, cattle, and fifty acres) was so carefree, he thought, that "neither he nor his wife do anything but visit among their neighbors." When he attended services, Durand observed that everyone smoked together before going inside for the service and before leaving for home after the service. Everyone lingered and smoked, "men, women, girls and boys from the age of seven years." He thought it fair if a man squandered his family's property because women contributed little: "they were foremost in drinking and smoking." Gossiping was also a popular pasttime, so popular that Gov. Francis, Lord

Howard of Effingham, issued a proclamation against the relation of "imaginations' and conceites, which being once on foot . . . is esteemed as News, and as such infused into ye Giddy headed multitude." To present the further disturbance of the peace by "false, seditious and factious discourse and rumours," he ordered the arrest of seditious gossipers.5

The authorities knew that the most likely place a citizen would see an order or proclamation was at their church, so most legislation carried a clause requiring a copy posted on the doors of every church in the colony or read by all ministers during services. Sundays were also the most practical occasions for militia musters. To ensure the colony was well defended and to prevent the ambush of churchgoers by Indians, the assembly ordered all men to bring a gun with them to church every Sunday for drills and protection. Churchwardens were responsible for enforcing this secular statute.6

The church did not provide an egalitarian atmosphere for socializing. While planter elite might mingle with


small planter, social distinctions were maintained and strengthened by the church. As in England, wardens drew seating plans, and the gentry provided private pews for themselves, leaving the middling planter on benches and the servants and slaves in a balcony or outside. In Christ Church Parish in 1689 a complaint was registered against a warden for displacing a woman from her seat because she was sitting "above her degree." The warden testified that he had received "hard Words" for his "just and honest Action," then the vestry confirmed the validity of his action and promised to stand by him in future actions against "Disorder and Rudenesses."7

The gentry ruled the vestry, and the vestry ruled the parish. Vestrymen felt obliged to set themselves up as leaders, and the people let them do it because the people felt prosperity came from greater wisdom and more training. When each class remembered its distinct duties--the gentry to serve the public and the public to tend their trades and farms--a harmonious society resulted. Vestrymen were not necessarily entitled to their positions from remarkable displays of piety, but as a rule they promoted religion as a necessary element to a decent life and a well-ordered society. The example the gentry set was not of ascetic monastic life but the Aristotelian mean; hence, moderation was most appropriate in all aspects of life, including

7. C. G. Chamberlayne, comp., The Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1663-1767 (Richmond, Va., 1927), 63.
religion. As communicator, gatherer, status indicator, and binder of communities, the church sorted out the people of Virginia while confirming the social being in everyone.8

Churches provided opportunities for social interaction. The church also participated in those interactions at one's birth, marriage, and death. Baptism in Virginia resembled closely the practice in England. The only noticeable difference was the location of the ceremony. Symbolically, the sacrament signalled one's entrance and acceptance into the Christian family. The symbolism was partially lost, therefore, when parents were unable to bring their newborn to the church for all the community to witness. In Virginia it was common for the minister or reader to travel to the child's home, probably in conjunction with other visits or ceremonies in the remote areas. Hugh Jones complained of the practice of home baptisms, which were usually from necessity but from "humour, custom sometimes," but realized that some would go without if required to rough the roads to the church with a baby. A sampling of the Christ Church register from the 1680s is not conclusive since the location of the baptism was often omitted. In 1681 one child was baptized at home, two in the church, and twenty-two were not specified. In 1688 one child was again baptized outside the church,

8. Louis B. Wright, The First Gentlemen of Virginia: Intellectual Qualities of the Early Colonial Ruling Class (San Marino, Calif., 1940), 6, 9, 66; Rutman, Place in Time, 53.
seventeen in the church, and eight unknown. In this parish, not on the frontier by this time, traditional baptisms were the rule, though there is no evidence of the feasting that occurred after some baptisms in England.9

The willingness of Virginians to baptize slaves and Indians indicates the felt importance of the practice. Some objected because they said it made blacks and Indians "proud, and not so good servants," but many saw the ceremony as confirmation of their escape from heathenism. The escape after 1667 did not include freedom for slaves, as some whites had feared, once the assembly had so declared in that year. Thus while professing a mission to rescue the heathen, Anglican granted them only an inferior position in the church.10

Weddings were another happy occasion for a community. Since society had its future at stake in who married whom, the assembly and courts closely regulated marriages in the colony. In general the laws were similar to those in England. Banns or a license from the governor were required. Despite a law in 1632 setting the only acceptable hours for the ceremony between eight and noon, Jones complained that "in houses also they most commonly

9. Hugh Jones, The Present State of Virginia, from Whence Is Inferred a Short View of Maryland and North Carolina (1724), ed. Richard L. Morton (Chapel Hill, N.C., 1956), 97; The Parish Register of Christ Church, Middlesex County, Va., from 1653 to 1812 (Richmond, Va., 1897), passim.

marry, without regard to the time of the day or season of the year." Laws forbidding secret marriages of servants were also ignored. In 1696 the assembly lamented frequent clandestine marriages that occurred to "the utter ruin of many heirs and heiresses and to the great greif [sic] of all their relations." Often throughout the century ministers were warned not to marry a couple without a license or proper banns. The assembly finally raised the penalty to one year imprisonment and a fine of five hundred pounds sterling, a severe penalty, indeed, but one made necessary by the unregulated marriages of teenagers, servants, and relatives. Two incestuous marriages in Charles City County in 1694 served as cases in point for the regulation of marriage.11

Marriages properly conducted offered another opportunity for a neighborhood to gather and to celebrate the hope for its future symbolized in the union of man and woman. The wedding of Elizabeth Montague and Doodles Minor in 1671 was conducted in the morning according to law but at her home by the parish rector, who traveled from his house in the parish's middle precinct and received 250 pounds of tobacco for his trouble. That substantial travel was often involved in weddings is seen in a ceremony in 1658. A planter in York County deposed that his overseer

had left the tobacco crop at the critical topping time in order to attend a wedding some distance away in Lancaster County. The overseer was gone eight or ten days, indicating his friendship with the groom and the difficulty of attending ceremonies of any sort more than a few miles away.\textsuperscript{12}

Durand describes in vivid detail a boisterous wedding he attended in Gloucester County in the 1670s. The groom invited him to attend and sent his father-in-law's slaves to transport him to the ceremony by boat. Virginians made a "great festival of a wedding," Durand reported. "There were at least a hundred guests, many of social standing, and handsome, well-dressed ladies." The guests feasted outside on the lawn after the wedding, then for the rest of the day and night "they did nothing afterwards . . . but drink, smoke, sing and dance." The host provided beds for the women, but men were not so lucky, "so that about midnight, after much carousing, when some were already lying on the floor, I fell asleep in a chair close by the fire." This wedding was obviously in a wealthy family, but it illustrates the general celebratory mood with which Virginians greeted all weddings.\textsuperscript{13}

Funerals were more somber occasions for the community but still contained a festive air. Some decedents

\textsuperscript{12} Rutman, \textit{Place in Time}, 94-95; Deeds, Orders, Wills, 1657-1662, Yk. Cty. Recs. No. 3, 47A.
\textsuperscript{13} Durand, \textit{Huguenot Exile in Virginia}, ed. Chinard, 137-139.
requested only that they be "buryed like a man," but others specifically chose a plot in the parish churchyard. Burial within the church was reserved for prominent residents of the parish, the only ones who could afford the special fees for interment in the chancel (at least five pounds sterling). Graves in the yard required a digging fee for the clerk or sexton, usually a few shillings worth of tobacco. Other colonists, including gentry members such as Frances Wormeley of Middlesex County, preferred burial near their homes "in the garden." This practice began in the first decades of the century after the colonists discovered the impracticality of transporting corpses long distances to the nearest church. The vestry of Accomac-Northampton County set aside a parcel of land in a remote part of the parish as a satellite burial ground but still wanted the minister to conduct the service and the clerk to dig the grave for any funeral there. The assembly and others (including Commissary James Blair) occasionally condemned the practice of burials in unhallowed ground, for the religious significance and for the protection of corpses buried in unfenced areas from "the prey of hoggs and other vermine." Again, Jones objected to convenience chosen over ritual except in cases in which ministers could not be summoned for a funeral before "the corpse would corrupt in hot weather." He allowed that family burial plots were "generally handsomely enclosed, planted with evergreens, and the graves kept decently," but by allowing the colonists to
slide in one area, he thought they would inevitably slide in others until they had "no right notions of the office, respect, and dignity of a clergyman."\textsuperscript{14}

According to Jones, "a great congregation of neighbors and friends" assembled for funerals, perhaps more so than in England as recorded by Ralph Josselin. Supporting his statement are expense records from funerals. Spending was often incredibly disproportionate to the value of the decedent's estate. The property of Walter Blake of Lower Norfolk County, for example, was valued at fifty-four pounds sterling, eight pounds of which was spent for his funeral. The mourners at Elizabeth Eppes's funeral in Henrico County consumed five gallons of wine, two gallons of brandy, a steer, and three sheep. A York County funeral in 1667 required twenty-four gallons of beer, twenty-two of cider, and five of brandy, all sweetened by twelve pounds of sugar, to drown the mourners' tears. Some wills demanded modest services and limited funeral expenses. John Michael summed up the sentiment of these sober folks when he ordered that there should be "no drinking immoderately nor shooting suffered" at his wake. Such expenses, he said, "were very unseasonable and

inconsistent with the occasion." Besides filling themselves with food and liquor at the expense of the deceased's estate, mourners were sometimes treated to volleys fired over the grave. Thomas Smallcombe's funeral expenses in 1646 included charges for two pounds of powder. Also practiced by the wealthy was the English custom of gift giving at funerals. Everyone present at Colonel Richard Cole's burial were given gloves and ribbons to wear, and Francis Page left twenty pounds sterling for funeral rings to be distributed to loved ones.15

Part of the ceremonies of baptism, marriage, and burial was the registering of these events in the parish register. By a law in 1660 the assembly ordered each parish to maintain a register for the stated purpose of settling disputes about orphans' ages, when persons entered the colony, and other legal questions. The need for a register is less clear in Virginia than in England. Registers could conceivably have been used to determine the number of tithables in a parish or county, but yearly surveys by wardens and sheriffs were more accurate. The question of need probably contributed to the neglect of some parishes in keeping a complete register. Despite their occasional use in a legal matter, registers were not important practical resources during the century.16

The church regulated social relations more significantly in the prosecution of offenders against the moral code. In this area (discussed in the previous chapter), the church healed the wounds inflicted by drunks, adulterers, dissenters, and the like, against Virginia society. It set the standards of behavior, and its members codified them in the civil law.

Parishes bore the burden of poor relief in Virginia, following a long tradition in England. A colonist struggling to make ends meet or physically impaired in some way could appeal to the church for help. Relief came in many forms from an exemption from taxation to an outright payment of money. Parishioners were paid to care for and to keep in their homes certain sick persons lacking any other means to survive. The elderly sometimes turned over all their property to the parish in exchange for a guaranteed subsistence annuity. Although county courts held orphans' courts and oversaw the guardians of orphans, the parishes also contributed to the care of bastard and orphaned children. Sometimes poor but able-bodied parishioners, such as John Blake, a "poore Decriped man" in Lancaster Parish in 1666, cleaned the church or the churchyard. Thus their salary, a disguised welfare payment, got the parish something in return. If an indigent person died, the parish was there to pay for a
decent burial.  

The burden of poor relief on the parishes in Virginia was only a fraction of that in England. In the early years, law and custom expected families to care for their own members, so poor relief most often went to those without family—single men and women and illegitimate or orphaned children. As slavery was introduced in the colony, the responsibility for the unproductive elements of society shifted largely from the parish to the planter. Slaveowners fed and clothed their slaves from birth to death, whether able to work or not. Laws against manumission had a dual purpose: they limited the free black population and prevented slaveowners from dumping their old and lame slaves on the parish's charge. Parishes were sensitive to their responsibility but also were careful not to bear the burden of other parishes. In York County in 1688, for instance, Poquoson and York parishes squabbled over who should care for the child of a man who lived in York County but left the child at the house of a Poquoson resident. The court decided the parish of birth (York) was responsible for the "keepeing and cloathing of the child." Still, the total burden was relatively light. In Middlesex County in the last decades of the century,

17. C. G. Chamberlayne, comp., The Vestry Book of Petsworth Parish, Gloucester County, Virginia, 1677-1793 (Richmond, Va., 1933), 19, 59; and The Vestry Book of St. Peter's Parish, New Kent and James City Counties, Virginia, 1684-1786 (Richmond, Va., 1937), 36-37, 52; Rutman, Place in Time, 196.
only 2 to 5 percent of all public levies (county and parish) were dispersed on the poor. 18

Parishes influenced the economic life of their communities in other ways. The vestry sometimes ordered parishioners to turn out on appointed days to help the surveyors of highways clear the ways and repair bridges, thus allowing better economic as well as religious intercourse in the colony. The custom of processioning not only confirmed the community boundaries within a parish but also prevented frequent and costly disputes between neighbors over property lines. A variety of parish offices provided employment in colony, and the salaries infused money into the economy. In Petsworth Parish in 1681, for example, the vestry disbursed thousands of pounds of tobacco to a minister, clerk, and sexton, to the clerk of the vestry, to five persons for charitable services, and to four others for keeping bastard and orphaned children. The vestry's power to tax could also have a significant impact on every tithable parishioner, especially if the individual was suffering a lean year or the parish required extra funds for a building project. Since the levy could conceivably take away a planter's profit in some years, it is not remarkable that several through the years tried to conceal their tithables. Whether out of economic necessity

---

or avarice, others were delinquent in paying their dues or the minister's salary. Clearly, the economic influence was felt by almost all Virginians, young and old, rich and poor, healthy and sick.19

Colonial Virginians proved that they could live without the religion of the Church of England if absolutely necessary, but they never indicated a desire or a willingness to live without the church's socializing effects. It is dubious whether Virginia would have been livable during its first century if it had not been for the little churches scattered here and there in the forests. At stake were community, friendships, social identity, and for some even life. For everyone of English heritage the church was their tie to the life they had known before. Indeed, without it, Virginians may not have survived to establish ties with a more promising future in the centuries ahead.

What, then, can one conclude about the influence of the church in seventeenth-century Virginia? First, the church as an institution failed to provide spiritual care for its Virginia flock. In large part the failure was the colonists' because the colonial conditions forced the shift of church administration from bishops and archdeacons

to governors, burgesses, and justices of the courts. If the people had had a genuine interest in providing a church above all else, they could have. Too many parishes did so provide to excuse totally those that did not.

The church was certainly not in the forefront of most Virginians' minds. After reading through the records from the century, one is struck by the superficiality of religious exercise in the colony. The church was a part of English society, so it had to be there in some form even when the colonists made little spiritual use of it. Many did not willingly support the church, especially those living on the economic margin. Eating had to take precedence, of course, but Virginians displayed an obsession with tobacco to the ultimate detriment of their church.

Was the church a welcome presence, an unnoticed part of society, or an annoying intruder in the quest to raise the most tobacco? Probably a bit of all three. Virginians welcomed the church for the community gathering place it provided, but they would have welcomed equally a tavern or market at which to gather. It could not be ignored altogether, or they would find themselves before the county justices. To many, it seems, the church sapped their income in return for services (sometimes scant) that they could just as well do without.

The church in Virginia did not affect the colonists at every turn as it did in England. Nor did the majority of
society want it to. Once under their control, the church became what the colonists wanted it to be. An institution of community, a behavioral watchdog, but not an intrusive spiritual guide. John Grave's admonition to Virginians to "Let nothing be, so dear to thee, / as Christ's most glorious Light," fell on deaf ears. Tobacco was the idol of Virginia; religion would have to wait for the next century.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

England


Virginia


______. The Vestry Book of Christ Church Parish, Middlesex County, Virginia, 1663-1767. Richmond, Va., 1927.

______. The Vestry Book of Petsworth Parish, Gloucester County, Virginia, 1677-1793. Richmond, Va., 1933.


Hening, William Waller, ed. The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia, from the First Session of the Legislature, in the Year 1619. 2d ed., 13 vols. New York, 1823.


______. Minutes of the Council and General Court of Colonial Virginia. 2d ed. Richmond, Va., 1979.
Secondary Sources

England


Virginia


VITA

James Homer Williams


Summer research intern in 1984 with the National Park Service at Harry S Truman National Historic Site, Independence, Missouri, and interpretive park ranger, summers of 1985 and 1987.

In July 1986, the author entered the College of William and Mary as a candidate for the master's degree in the Department of History, with a concentration in pre-1815 American history. He has completed the apprenticeship in editing of historical books and magazines at the Institute of Early American History and Culture.