

American's Quasi Class System; Development of a Christian Heritage; the Grace Orientation of Protestant America; the Christian Mission Is Not to Acquire Governmental Power but to Empower Government with Changed People

From all this there developed a loose form of a class system, different from that in Europe in that it was informal. The distinctions among the people were based on their stations in life. Whereas in Europe one found great difficulty in climbing the social ladder, in America class rank was based on merit and personal attainments.

Upper class people were made up of men of wealth and standing in their communities, large landholders, and prosperous merchants. They had attained a fine lifestyle and were able to maintain it while at the same time being aware of duties and obligations.

Such a man was known as a gentleman: he did not have to perform physical labor for a living. Instead, he was free to develop his talents in many directions which he saw as a duty.

The middle class was made up of the farmers who had enough land to be independent; he made a good living and worked his own land. The lower class consisted of those who worked under the direction and supervision of others upon whom they depended for their living.

Almost all of the inhabitants of the colonies were Christians. They accepted God as Creator and provider. They understood the provision of salvation by grace through faith and recognized the hand of God in the affairs of men through Jesus Christ. They all generally agreed that the Bible was the basic revelation with regard to these things.

Almost all these Christians were Protestants. They all shared the heritage brought about by the Reformation, a heritage that they fused into their British culture.

They rejected the Catholic notion that the priesthood was to be separate from the world. They believed that all Christians should be involved with the affairs of the world, however dangerous that might be with regard to their spiritual well-being.

From this was developed the Puritan work ethic. They thought the things of the world to be a snare and a distraction, yet they were called of God to deal with them through doctrine. They were to conquer life's problems while keeping all things in perspective regarding the priorities in life.

Out of Puritanism came the doctrine of the calling which stated that believers are called of God to useful employment. That calling may be any useful undertaking by which he may support himself and his family. The doctrine supported the idea that the quality of a man's work reflected the character of his faith.

This approach included the attitude of piety which emphasized one's personal impact on those around him. In other words, whatever you do, do it as unto the Lord. This they did in the hope of reflecting Christ in their labors while influencing others to join them in living an honorable life.

Their attitude was that if something could be done to the glory of God, there was a good reason to assume that it should not be done at all. They understood that the human species was prone to carelessness and slothfulness and their work ethic provided a solution to these tendencies.

In the 1740s, the strict influence of the Puritans was tempered by the Great Awakening. Its leaders were Theodore Frelinghuysen \frē'-ling-hīz-an\, Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and George Whitfield.

Edwards's book *Religious Affectations*, published in 1746, taught that true spirituality was an overflow of the redeemed heart and not a product of emotional or willful exertion.

The Great Awakening also brought an end to the Puritan's close association between the church and the state. This doctrine brought about what became known as separatism, i.e., churches established themselves as totally and completely separate from any government.

The new emphasis was that improvement of society could be attained by the improvement of men. The mission of the church was not to acquire governmental power but to empower government with changed people. Thus the emphasis shifted to evangelism and inculcation of the printed Word of God.

The prevailing political view in the fifteen and sixteen hundreds was that all people should be brought under the power of one person—a monarch. The reason was a general fear of freedom. Each man was afraid of what another might do to him if allowed the freedom to pursue his own ends. To insure man's safety from one another, it was thought best that one man execute an enlightened despotism over the people.