Colonial Religions Chart

This chart details the notable religious groups in each colony. Each colony had a diversity of religious beliefs, and the inclusion of one group is not to suggest that other groups were not present, nor that any particular group was present in only one colony.

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| Colony/ Group | Religion | Significance |
| Spanish Colonies | Catholicism | * Reconquest of Spain from Moors, 1492 * “Gold, God & Glory” * Jesuit Order (Society of Jesus)… education & missionaries… conversion of Indians * Missions became outposts for Spanish control… led to rebellions by Indians (Battle of Acoma, Popé’s Rebellion/Pueblo Revolt) * Catholics were more tolerant of religious syncretism (mixing of Catholic & Indian beliefs)… led to greater rate of conversions than English Protestants achieved with Indians |
| French Colonies | Catholicism & French Protestants (Huguenots) | * Edict of Nantes established religious toleration in France & French territories… Huguenots were able to live in relative peace * French Jesuits traded with, converted, and sometimes went to war with Indians * Catholicism was more tolerant of religious syncretism… mixture of cultures in New Orleans * Catholicism caused friction with English Protestantism… After French & Indian War, Quebec Act angered English colonists |
| Plymouth, Massachusetts  English | Separatists/Pilgrims | * Broke away from Anglican Church * Founded Plymouth * Quasi-theocracy * Strict conformity * Generally hostile to Anglicanism & (later) supported Revolution against England (Patriots in Massachusetts) |
| Massachusetts Bay Colony  English | Puritans | * Dissatisfied with Anglican Church * Founded Mass Bay colony * Indian “Praying Towns”… wars when Indians didn’t convert * Quasi-theocracy * Education important… public schools & Harvard College * Dissenters left colony – R. Williams & A. Hutchinson * “God vs. Cod” – religion vs. commerce * Protestant Work Ethic * Half-Way Covenant * Salem Witch Trials * Puritan church morphed into Congregational church * Officially established church (taxes supported the church) * Generally hostile to Anglicanism & (later) supported Revolution against England (Patriots in Massachusetts) |
| New Hampshire & Connecticut | Puritan | * Expansion of Mass. Bay colony |
| Rhode Island  English | Puritan dissenters | * Founded by Roger Williams * Religious tolerance & tolerance for Indians * Frowned upon by Massachusetts… “The Sewer”/”Rogue’s Island” |
| New York  Dutch & English | Dutch Reformed Church  (later, Anglican) | * Dutch protestants * Left-overs from early Dutch colonization even after English conquest * Strict, austere life * Industrious businessmen * Patroonship land system |
| Pennsylvania | Quakers | * English were glad to have Quakers emigrate b/c they were pacifists & didn’t support English war efforts * Belief in “inner light” of holy spirit in every human being… opposed slavery, supported women’s rights, more generous dealings with Indians * Tolerated other religious groups in Pennsylvania * Tolerance caused problems… immigration of Scots-Irish Presbyterians to frontier led to conflict with Indians |
| Maryland | Catholics | * Religious Toleration Act… haven for Catholics but still excluded Jews and other non-Christians * Act was soon overturned by James I * Toleration led to diversity |
| Virginia | Anglican | * Religion wasn’t as important in Chesapeake because it was founded by a joint-stock companies rather than a religious group * Anglican Church/Church of England was the established church (tax money supported the church) * Generally loyal to England |
| North Carolina | Anglican; Presbyterian | * Anglican: Same as Virginia (first permanent English settlers came by way of Virginia) * Presbyterians: Scottish/Scots-Irish settled in backcountry… somewhat hostile to England |
| South Carolina | Anglican; Jewish | * Anglicans… same as Virginia (came by way of Barbados) * Jewish… small numbers of merchants in Charleston |
| Georgia | Anglican | * James Oglethorpe founded Georgia partly to serve as a Christian charity colony for debtors * Generally loyal to England |
| Africans/African Americans | Melding of African beliefs and Protestantism | * Call & response * Spirituals * Emphasis on Exodus story * Coded messages in religious sermons * Women preachers |
| Native Americans | Animism & polytheism | * “Great Spirit” * Spirituality tied to nature led to differing views of land “ownership” * Sometimes converted to or adopted aspects of Christianity |