

in their proper maner considering the want of such meanes as wee have, they seeme ingenious. For although they have no such tooles, nor any such craftes, Sciences, and artes as wee, yet in those thinges they doe, they shewe excellencie of wit.<sup>19</sup>

Roughly twenty years later, John Smith described the Powhatan Indians as "craftie, timerous, quicke of apprehension, and very ingenuous."<sup>20</sup> The English missionary Alexander Whitaker clearly believed that the Indians were intellectually capable of understanding Christianity.

...if any of us should misdoubt that this barbarous people is incapable of such heavenly mysteries, let such men know they are farre mistaken in the nature of these men ... let us not thinke that these men are so simple as some have supposed them; for they are of bodie lusty, strong and very nimble: they are a very understanding generation, quick of apprehension, fuddiance in their dispatches, subtile in their dealings, exquisite in their inventions, and industrious in the labour.<sup>21</sup>

Elizabethans who had not traveled to Virginia also believed that the conversion of the natives would be a simple process, although for different reasons. Those reasons were grounded on an intense national pride, a belief that England existed as God's chosen nation, and a belief in the supremacy of the English way of life.<sup>22</sup> Throughout the reigns of Elizabeth I and her nephew James I, the English viewed themselves as God's chosen nation.

This belief showed clearly in the sermons preached to those adventuring to Virginia. Ministers often compared England to the ancient Israelites. America became the new land of milk and honey, occupied by Indians rather than Gentiles. A favorite biblical story proved to be the tale of Joshua. Historian Harry Culverwell Porter explained, "Joshua in the 1580s was an honorary adventurer in Virginia, and from 1606 an honorary member of the Virginia Company."<sup>23</sup> Unlike the forceful Joshua, the English hoped to live in peace with and convert the Indians of Virginia. Only if the Indians failed to cooperate with the English plan would they, like the Irish before them, have to be reformed and "reduced to civility".

In a 1609 sermon entitled A Good Speed to Virginia, the Reverend Robert Gray stressed the English need to attempt in good faith all other avenues before war. "Although the Children of Joseph [had] a[n] express commandment here in this place to destroy those Idolaters, and possesse their land, yet for as much as we have no precept but by example, we must first try all means before weapons...."<sup>24</sup>

Gray hoped that force would not be necessary. He believed that the Indians could and would be educated and

thereby converted, "for it is not the nature of men, but the education of men, which make them barbarous and uncivil and therefore change the education of men and you shall see their nature will be greatly rectified and corrected".<sup>25</sup> He stressed that the Indians could be saved and made over in an English model. This belief placed him in agreement with Captain John Smith and others who had met the Indians and knew of their intelligence.

The view that the Indians could be eliminated, like the Cannanites, and a colony in Virginia still survive could only be held by armchair adventurers who had never journeyed to Virginia. Both the colony at Roanoke and the colony at Jamestown benefited from the largess of the local Indian population. Alexander Whitaker, who lived and worked in Virginia, certainly knew that his colony needed the Indians. The basis of his 1613 sermon Good News from Virginia stressed the positive aspects of the English relationship with the Indians. Whitaker chose as his verse a passage from the book of Ecclesiastes, "Cast thy bread upon the water: for after many daies thou shalt finde it."<sup>26</sup> In this sermon, sent to the Virginia Company, Whitaker explained how the colony interacted with the Indians and the great possibility of both temporal and spiritual reward, but only if the colony were given enough time. Whitaker

never mentioned the possibility of eliminating the Indians; he knew how the English depended on the Powhatans to provide food.

Unlike the Israelites, who entered their promised land and started attacking cities, most English believed that they should give the Indians every opportunity to convert peacefully. In his sermon Virginia in 1609, the Reverend William Symonds stressed the "difference betwene a bloody invasion, and the planting of a peaceable Colony, in a waste country, where the people live but like deere."<sup>27</sup> While Symonds had the wrong impression of how the Indians in Virginia lived, he felt sure that the Indians and the colonists could coexist. "Let us be cheerefull to goe to the place, that God will shew us to possesse in peace and plentie, a land more like the garden of Eden: which the Lord planted, then any part else of al the earth".<sup>28</sup>

Symonds, who had not gone to Virginia, believed as did most who had that the Indians did not use or even need all of the land at their disposal.<sup>29</sup> Therefore, the English occupation and use of the land as God had commanded Noah in Genesis 9:7 "...be fruitful and multiply, bring forth abundantly on the earth and multiply in it." would not be a problem. Robert Gray expounded:

Some affirme, and it is likely to be true, that these savages have no particular proprietie in any part or parcell of that Country, but only a genral recidence there, as wild beasts have in the forrest, for they range and wander up and down the country, without any law or government, but being led only by their own lusts and sensualitie, there is not meum + tuum amongst them: so that if the whole lande should bee taken from them, there is not a man that can complaine of any particular wrong done unto him.<sup>30</sup>

At both Roanoke and Jamestown, adventurers on the ground only discussed converting the natives; they never discussed the possibility of wiping them out.

In 1585 the younger Hakluyt thought that the English had not converted enough Indians to Protestant Christianity. In 1609 Symonds felt the same way. In his sermon Virginia, he preached that "the summe is, what blessing any nation had by Christ, must be communicated to all Nations: the office of his Prophecies to teach the ignorant; the office of his priesthood, to give remission of sinnes to the sinneful: the office of his kingdome, by word, and sacrament, and spirit to rule the inordinate."<sup>31</sup> Like his predecessor Hakluyt, Symonds knew that Roman Catholic missionaries were spreading around the world "corrupting" innocent native souls, while the English stayed at home and did nothing. "It is a shame that the Iesuits and friars, that accompany every ship, should be so diligent to destroy

souls, and wee not seeke the tender lambes, nor build up that which is broken."<sup>32</sup>

In his Discourse on Western Planting Hakluyt stressed to Elizabeth I that Spanish priests were making great headway among the natives while the English were not. "And this enterprize the Princes of the Relligion (amonge whome her Ma<sup>tie</sup> ys principall) oughte the rather to take in hande, because the papists confirme themselves and drawe others to their side, shewing that they are the true Catholicke Churche because they have bene the only converters of many millions of Infidells to Christianitie: Yea, I my selfe have bene demaunded of them howe many Infidells have bene by us converted?"<sup>33</sup> Hakluyt believed that the English monarch had a duty to join the fray: "Nowe the Kinges and Queenes of England have the name Defendors of the Faithe: By which title I thinke they are not onely chardged to mayneteyne and patronize the faithe of Christe, but also inlarge and advaunce the same."<sup>34</sup> Hakluyt went on to point out that, although the Spanish and the Portuguese had accomplished great things, the English could do better.

Now yf they, in their superstition, by meanes of their plantinge in those partes, have don so greate thinges in so shorte space, what may wee hope for in our true and syncere Relligion, proposinge unto ourselves in this action not filthie lucre nor vaine

ostentation as they in deed did, but principally the gayninge of the soules of millions of those wretched people, the reducinge of them from darkness to lighte, from falsehood to truthe, from dombe Idolls to the lyvinge god, from the depe pitt of hell to the highest heavens.<sup>35</sup>

While both Hakluyt and Symonds believed that only if ministers accompanied the planters could the native population be swayed, this never become an absolute requirement of early English expeditions. No minister accompanied the 1585 colony to Roanoke, where the responsibility of planting Christianity among the natives fell to Thomas Harriot. The list of colonists for John White's colony, the "lost colony", listed no minister either. The lack of a minister forced White, as governor, to baptize his own granddaughter Virginia Dare. In the three ships that traveled to Jamestown, only one carried a minister, Robert Hunt.<sup>36</sup>

Although the English had not actually tried to convert many natives by the time he spoke, the Reverend Gray believed that conversion would be easy. "Seeing therefore men by nature so easily yeelde to discipline and government upon any reasonable shewe of bettering their fortunes, it is everie mans dutie to travell both by sea and land, and to venture either with his person or with his purse

to bring the barbarous and savage people to a civill and christian kinde of government".<sup>37</sup> This belief in the ease of converting the natives to the English variety of Christianity came from the descriptions the adventurers who had met the Indians sent back. Barlowe, Lane, Harriot, and Smith all believed that the Indians were just waiting for somebody to come and convert them.

Harriot described what happened when he began to explain his religion to the Indians and showed them a Bible. "Yet would many be glad to touch it, to embrace it, to kisse it, to hold it to their breast and headess, and to stroke ouer all their bodie with it; to shew their hungrie desire of that knowledge which was spoken of."<sup>38</sup>

The more militant Ralph Lane showed his confidence in the conversion of the natives in his letter to Sir Francis Walsingham of August 12, 1585. Although living in arduous conditions, Lane felt "comforted cheefly hereunto with an assuerance of her Maiestes gretenes hereby to growe by ye Addycione of suche a kingdom as thys ys to ye reste of hir Domynyones, by meane whereof lykewyse ye Church of Chryste throughe Chrystendome."<sup>39</sup>

John Smith explained how the conversion of the



Powhatans proceeded.

To divert them from this blind Idolatry, we did our best endeavours, chiefly with the Werowance of Quiyoughcohanoch, whose devotion, apprehension, and good disposition, much exceeded any in those countries, who although we could not as yet prevaile, to forsake his false Gods, yet this he did beleve that our God as much exceeded theirs, as our Gunnes did their Bowes and Arrowes, and many times did send to me to Jamestown, intreating me to pray to my God for raine, for their Gods would not send them any.<sup>40</sup>

Like the werowance of Quiyoughcohanoch, the English knew that guns exceeded bows. Robert Gray knew that his countrymen could take land by force, but believed they would not have to, "for they [the Indians] are wiling to entertaine us, and have offered to yeelde into our hands on reasonable conditions, more lande then we shall bee able this long time to plant and manure".<sup>41</sup> Symonds stressed that the Indians proved much less a threat to the English than the Cannanites did the Israelites: "A mat is their strongest portcuilis, a naked brest their target [shield] of best prooffe: an arrow of reede, on which is no iron, their most feerful weapon of offence, heere is no team of nine hundreth iron charets".<sup>42</sup> Many felt there would be peace and an easy conversion of the Indians.

But Robert Gray, Thomas Harriot, and the rest failed to consider the importance of native religion in the Indian world. The Indians were more than willing to trade in their lithic technology for the Europeans' metal tools, but religion would prove to be another matter entirely.

The initial fascination with aspects of Christianity by the Indian population, the people rubbing the Bible over themselves and the werowance who added the English god to his pantheon for example, may have reflected the impact of mass death; which had hit the Indian populations of the Americas as a result of European contact. The arrival of the Europeans to North America introduced not only new religions and technology but a deadly variety of pathogens.<sup>43</sup> Thomas Harriot described the effect of European diseases on the Indian population at Roanoke. "There was no towne where we had any subtile devise practised against vs, we leauing it vnpunished or not reuenged because we sought by all meanes possible to win them by gentleness) but that within a few days after departure from euery such towne, the people began to die very fast, and many in a short space, in some townes about twentie, in some fortie, and in one six score, which in trueth was very many in respect of their numbers".<sup>44</sup> In the first quarter of the seventeenth century Powhatan told Captain John Smith of the number of deaths among his people.<sup>45</sup>

Even without the impact of massive death, American religions had a long tradition of adopting facets of other religions.<sup>46</sup> The English mistook Indians adopting some

aspects of their religion with a wholesale desire for Christianity. The English interested in Virginia had believed since the 1580s that the Indians were waiting for English religion.

When compared to the missionary practices of the Catholic clergy, those of the Anglican Church look minimal. The early voyages to Roanoke contained no minister, and the early complement at Jamestown had only enough clergymen for the needs of the English crew. It was not until the first decade of settlement that the English attempted to found a mission.<sup>47</sup>

The English in Virginia never developed the missionary style their Catholic opponents did in Mexico or Canada. The reason for this difference was that the English believed it would not be necessary, since they felt sure they could convert the Indians by example. In a broadside from 1620 the Virginia Company of London stated,

And to the end that the People, both present and to come, may be faithfully brought vp in the true knowledge and seruice of Almighty God ... but also by their good example, to allure the Heathen people to submit themselves to the Scepter of Gods most righteous and blessed Kingdome, and so finally to ioyn with them in the true Christian profession: We doe hereby ordaine and require, that in every Burrough there

be provided and placed at the least one  
godly and learned Minister...<sup>48</sup>

This belief that the laity could by example convert the Indians became personified in George Thorpe. A wealthy Londoner, Thorpe left his home and family to aid in the conversion of the Powhatans and had most likely received no training in missionary work. He hoped to convert the Powhatans by example and education. He was in charge of the colony's planned college for the education of Indian children, but that never really developed. The college had difficulty convincing Indians to enroll their children, and much of the money pledged to support the school was poorly invested and lost. Although Thorpe worked hard to improve relations with the Powhatans and to convert them to English-style living, he was killed when the Powhatans rose up against the English on the morning of March 22, 1622.<sup>49</sup>

### Notes for Chapter Three

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- 26) Whitaker, Good New From Virginia, 1.
- 27) William Symonds, Virginia: A Sermon Preached at White-Chapel (1609; reprint New York: Da Capo Press, 1968), 15.
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### **Conclusion:**

Like the Irish before them, the Powhatan Indians, did not want to see their home turned into England. So on the morning of March 22, 1622 they attacked the English in Virginia. The attack, led by Powhatan's brother and successor Opechancanough, killed 347 English. Instead of convincing the English to go home, it gave them more reason to stay.

As the Reverend Symonds pointed out, the English were sure that they were only occupying those parts of Virginia that the Indians did not use and were acting in the best interest of the Powhatans. Besides, the English felt sure that the benefits they brought -- Christianity and English-style living -- were so great that they outweighed any minor difficulties for the Powhatans. These expectations changed when the Powhatans attacked.

The attack gave the English reason to step up their activities in Virginia. In his report to the Virginia Company, Edward Waterhouse hunted for positive outcomes from the attack. He came up with seven reasons the attack might be beneficial for the colony. The first was that

the "betraying of innocency never rests vnpunished": basically, God would punish the Powhatans.<sup>1</sup> But the second reason was most compelling.

Because our hands which before were tied with gentleness and faire vsage, are now set at liberty by the treacherous violence of the Sausages, not vntying the Knot, but cutting it: So that we, who hitherto haue had possession of no more ground then their waste, and purchase at valuable consideration to their owne contentment, gained; may now by right of Warre, and law of Nations, inuade the Country, and destroy them who sought to destroy vs: whereby wee shall enioy their cultiuated places, turning the laborious Mattocke into the victorious Sword (wherin there is more both ease, benefit and glory) and possessing the fruits of others labours. Now their cleared grounds in all their villages (which are situate in the fruitfullest places of the land) shall be inhabited by vs, whereas heretofore the grubbing of woods was the greatest labour.<sup>2</sup>

Another benefit Waterhouse saw was "the way of conquering them is much more easie then of ciuilizing them by faire meanes, for they are a rude, barbarous, and naked people, scattered in small companies, which are helps to Victory, but hinderances to Ciuilitie."<sup>3</sup> Arthur Barlowe would have been sorely disappointed.

The English now felt free to attack the Powhatans at will, but how would they go about this? Waterhouse had some ideas:

victorie of them may bee gained many waies; by force, by surprize, by famine in burning

their corne, by destroying and burning their Boats, Canoes, and Houses, by breaking their fishing Weares, by assailing them in their huntings, whereby they get the greatest part of their sustenance in Winter, by pursuing and chaseing them with our horses, and blood-Hounds to draw after them, and Mastiues to teare them, which take this naked, tanned, deformed Sausage, for no other then wild beasts.<sup>4</sup>

This idea of how to fight the Powhatans was similar, if not identical, to the techniques used to destroy the resistance of the Old English lords in Munster and the O'Neill and his supporters. Edmund Spenser put it succinctly in his A Brief Note on Ireland: if Ireland was to be subdued, "Great force must be the instrument but famine must be the meanes for till Ireland be famished it cannot be subdued."<sup>5</sup>

In just forty-two years the native population of Virginia had gone from being a "civil", although "heathen", group, who only needed a little guidance to enter both the house of God and the English nation, to "savage beasts" who should be removed. To give the Elizabethans some credit, they did wait before trying to utterly destroy the Indians until they had in their own minds a real and legal justification for attacking the Powhatans with total warfare. Before 1622 the English were not sure of the legality of their ever-expanding colony. They had tried to buy

land, but as with surrender and regrant there were problems with those transactions, mainly their not being acceptable under traditional land holding systems. After 1622 the English could easily justify conquest in Virginia as easily as in Ireland.

In Ireland it took several hundred years before the English adopted "extra-legal" methods to subdue the Irish. In Virginia it took fewer than fifty years to adopt similar methods. Perhaps the lesson in all this is that the first time you declare your enemy to be less than human is the hardest, the next easier and the next easier still. The decision by the Elizabethans to consider the Irish and then the Indians as sub-human has had major and lasting effects on the modern world. One need only look at Belfast or any Indian reservation for proof.