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# “Doubtfull beginnings”: Confronting Heterodoxy in Early Colonial Virginia, c.1607–1624

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## Abstract

Efforts among English Protestants to counter heterodox ideas and individuals in early colonial Virginia profoundly shaped the global trajectories of Reformed theology and identity. The authors of colonial sermons, legal documents, and reports channeled the priorities of reformation and evangelism into the religious politics of the Atlantic world, thereby reinforcing theological and structural connections between religion and empire. To do so, they deployed multifarious heterodox personae: atheists, Catholics, and sinners seemed poised to destabilize Christianity, while Indigenous “heathen” people could convert to Christianity and might be saved. Ultimately, these labels reveal more about the volatile origins of global Protestantism than the realities of heterodoxy. They fostered a trans-Atlantic Protestant identity preoccupied with mitigating uncertainty and disorder by intensifying the expansionist dimensions of providence, prophecy, sin, and salvation. This strengthened reciprocity between the Church of England and colonization, nurturing the perception that Virginia was a frontier of global expansion.

## Keywords

Virginia – Protestantism – Atheism – Heathenism – Catholicism – Colonization – Empire – Heterodoxy

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## Introduction

On May 7, 1609 the preacher George Benson delivered a sermon in London in which he invoked the historic fall of Julius Caesar to lament a contemporary tragedy:

When Caesar was wounded vnto death by the Senators of Rome, it grieved him much, but much more when hee perceiued himselfe to bee hurt by Brutus, whome he loued aboute the rest: therefore his dolefull tongue copied out of a more dolefull mind these words, Et tu fili? And thou my sonne also? So no doubt but it grieues God to bee pierced through with the sinnes of Atheists, and irreligious men: but it grieues mee more (may God say) when thou that art my childe rebelst against mee: thou whome as mine owne sonne I haue created, vvhome I haue redeemed, whome I haue iustified, whome I haue sanctified, whome I meane to glorifie ...<sup>1</sup>

While Protestants expected atheists to provoke God with their sinfulness, professing Christians themselves committed a more heinous and troubling betrayal when they turned away from the true religion or behaved contrary to its teachings. Just as his friend and ally had undone the Roman Emperor, rebellion from within the community of believers whom God had chosen to receive and spread the Gospel jeopardized political, ecclesiastical, and cosmic order.

While lamenting the presence of “atheists,” “irreligious men,” and rebels against God, Benson drew comfort from numerous examples that demonstrated the enduring vitality and ongoing expansion of Christianity. “One most pregnant, most fresh” case, he argued, “is that of Virginia which now (by God [sic] grace) through our English shal heare news of Christ,” adding, “the gospel of Christ shall be published” among “the naturall inhabitants” there.<sup>2</sup> In his sermon, Benson articulated a central theme in Protestant writing about Virginia: Reinforcing the beliefs and practices of the Church of England, securing a Protestant foothold in the Americas, and expanding Christianity involved suppressing atheism, irreligion, and rebellion within the English community, repudiating Catholicism, and facilitating the conversion of non-Christian people.

This article examines English Protestant attitudes towards different forms of heterodoxy in early colonial Virginia. It investigates the strategies that

1 George Benson, *A sermon preached at Paules Crosse the seauenth of May, M.DC.IX.* (London, 1609, STC 1886), 4.

2 *Ibid.*, 92.

writers in England and Virginia used to define and confront heterodox ideas and individuals. The article argues that heterodoxies such as popery, atheism, and heathenism were the focal points of Protestant efforts to reinforce the religious and political aspirations and boundaries of colonization in Virginia and beyond. While not a term that contemporaries would necessarily have deployed in the modern sense before the mid-seventeenth century, "heterodoxy" is a useful heuristic category of historical analysis.<sup>3</sup> In this article, "heterodoxy" encompasses concepts that writers deployed to describe that which deviated from the spiritual and political framework of Protestantism, itself a multifarious category that incorporated Puritans and non-Puritans who engaged with the structures of the Church of England and shaped colonial religious culture.<sup>4</sup> Principally, "heterodox" concepts include Catholicism and the "heathenism" of non-Christian Indigenous people, as well as atheism and irreligion. Characterizing Virginia as a vanguard of religious expansion, Protestant ministers sought to preserve "true religion" from the external threat of Catholicism and convert "heathen" peoples, while also rooting out the atheistic and irreligious behavior that seemed to lurk within the colonial community and threatened to undermine the authority and expansion of the Church. While it is important not to conflate these concepts, artificially separating them would obscure the ways in which Protestants conceived of them as interlinked. Interpreting them through the wide lens of "heterodoxy" captures the ways in which Protestants defined them in relation to one another. Suggesting the historically specific religious dimensions of colonization, Protestant efforts to secure the physical or spiritual elimination of atheism, Catholicism, and Indigenous "heathen" peoples in Virginia reveal a preoccupation with countering different manifestations of heterodoxy that threatened to destabilize the colonial community and obstruct religious expansion.<sup>5</sup> Writing about heterodoxy afforded Protestants an opportunity to articulate the providential significance of empire and reinforce connections between Virginia and England, thereby contributing to a vision of universal reformation and evangelism.

3 See "heterodox" and "heterodoxy," *Oxford English Dictionary*.

4 James B. Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution in Early Virginia, 1607–1786* (Basingstoke, 2013), 7 and ch. 7.

5 While countering atheism and Catholicism could involve suppression or punishment, Protestants believed that many among the "heathen" awaited spiritual elimination through conversion, which scholars have identified as a possible feature of "settler colonialism" in early America. See Patrick Wolfe, "Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native," *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8 (2006): 387–409, 388; Jeffrey Ostler and Nancy Shoemaker, "Settler Colonialism in Early American History: Introduction," *William and Mary Quarterly*, 76 (2019): 361–368.

Acutely focusing on the fledgling years of colonization in Virginia, the article is divided into two main sections. Beginning with the founding of Jamestown in 1607, the first section examines Protestant perceptions and experiences of heterodoxy up to 1610 as expressed in accounts of migration and settlement, sermons in support of the colony, and reports from the region. Taking the imposition of martial law in 1611 as a turning point, the second section uncovers ideas about heterodoxy that shaped the development of legal frameworks and prescribed prayers in Virginia as well as further reports on the condition of the colony. Unfolding chronologically, the article traces changing Protestant attitudes and strategies over time, demonstrating the ways in which religious discourse, political maneuvers, and nascent structures of authority in Virginia became increasingly intertwined during the embryonic years of the colony. From their inception, the colonial settlements of the Atlantic world were interlinked, shaping and responding to a sprawling global framework within which Europe, Africa, and Asia became increasingly connected to the Americas through migration and enslavement, cultural encounter and evangelism, commerce and correspondence.<sup>6</sup> In this context, confronting heterodoxy was a way of intervening in a range of political, religious, social, and economic debates that together informed the divergent trajectories of Protestantism overseas.

The entanglement of religion and politics in Virginia reaffirms the importance of studying the ways in which theology informed lived experience in the settlement. Since the seminal work of Edmund S. Morgan, a narrative has emerged that juxtaposes aspirational Protestant writing about the spiritual importance of the colony with the multiple crises that faced the Virginia Company leading up to its dissolution in 1624.<sup>7</sup> To a degree, Protestants marshalled scripture and doctrine in a propagandistic effort to reassert imperial ambition, encourage the migration of new settlers, repudiate critiques of the colonial project, and preserve its commercial viability. While acknowledging that rhetorical, strategic, and idealistic elements of colonial discourse could contrast with the practical realities of colonial life, this article joins with

6 For the global dimensions of the Atlantic world, see Alison Games, "Beyond the Atlantic: English Globetrotters and Transoceanic Connections," *William and Mary Quarterly* 63 (2006): 675–692, 675–676, 679–680; Alison Games, "Atlantic History: Definitions, Challenges, and Opportunities," *American Historical Review* 111 (2006): 741–757, 748–750, 754–755; Sebastian Conrad, *What Is Global History?* (Princeton, NJ., 2016), 6–11. See also, April Lee Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia: Intercolonial Relations in the Seventeenth Century* (Philadelphia, PA., 2004), 1–6, 226–227.

7 Edmund S. Morgan, *American Slavery, American Freedom: The Ordeal of Colonial Virginia* (New York, NY., 1975), 47–48, and ch. 4 passim.

scholarship in rejecting as anachronistic the sharp distinction between pragmatic or figurative appeals to religion and the earnest theological convictions that individuals held and expressed in the course of their everyday experiences.<sup>8</sup> It avoids reading contemporary accounts through the retrospective lens of success or failure, instead reassessing selected colonial sermons, reports, histories, and legal documents as emblematic of religious and political attitudes and responses to distinctive, yet entwined manifestations of heterodox identity. While many of these sources have been subject to concerted scholarly study, they await critical examination through the analytical lens of "heterodoxy." In doing so, the article can more clearly illuminate the earnestly held beliefs and experiences that shaped the wider Atlantic and global trajectories of English Protestantism.

Investigating efforts to repudiate heterodoxy in early colonial Virginia also further demonstrates the palpable sense of spiritual instability that accompanied the global ambitions of Protestantism. Writing about heterodox ideas and individuals signaled religious and political efforts to assert control over the Christian and non-Christian inhabitants of the region. The evidence suggests that Protestants perceived distinct categories of heterodoxy as manifestations of disorder that threatened to disrupt the unfamiliar and precarious, yet divinely ordained and imperative endeavor of colonization. Developments in Virginia demonstrate that Reformed theology and the early Stuart Church continually adapted to early America as Protestant settlers glimpsed the possibilities and challenges of empire against the backdrop of sacred history.

## I

Examining the cultural and intellectual reverberations of the English and European Reformations throughout the Atlantic world, historians have increasingly illuminated the crucial religious dimensions of colonization in seventeenth-century Virginia.<sup>9</sup> During the seventeenth century, Virginia occu-

8 See Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), ch. 4; John Parker, "Religion and the Virginia Colony 1609–10," in *The Westward Enterprise: English Activities in Ireland, the Atlantic, and America 1480–1650*, eds. K. R. Andrews, N. P. Canny, and P. E. H. Hair (Liverpool, 1978), 245–270; James Horn, *Adapting to a New World: English Society in the Seventeenth-Century Chesapeake* (Chapel Hill, NC., 1994), ch. 9; Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls In A Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, GA, 2000); Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution*, ch. 4.

9 For a ground-breaking example of this innovative approach, see Carla Gardina Pestana, *Protestant Empire: Religion and the Making of the British Atlantic World* (Philadelphia, PA,

pied a significant role in globalizing Protestantism. The translation, connection, and circulation of Reformed theology in Europe informed arguments about the spiritual significance of Virginia. The colony itself incubated religious and political ideas that shaped a global vision of reformation and evangelism. Increasingly, English Protestants saw Virginia as an important frontier of sacred history, unfolding providence, and imminent divine judgement.<sup>10</sup> As Karen Kupperman has emphasized, English Protestant attitudes towards Virginia were emblematic of the ways in which Christians in Europe saw their activities in the Americas “as one act in a huge world-historical drama,” wherein the expansion of Christianity and the propagation of the Gospel signaled the fulfilment of the apocalyptic expectations set out in the Book of Revelation.<sup>11</sup> The perceived position of Virginia at the forefront of an effort to “plant” and advance Christianity across the world reflected the unfolding sacred history of the true religion.<sup>12</sup> The experience of theological, ecclesiastical, legal, and social instability during the early years of colonization strengthened the godly connection between providentialism and imperialism.<sup>13</sup>

Reflecting the precepts of reformation and evangelism, English Protestant efforts to navigate the opportunities and challenges of the Americas during the early seventeenth century invoked pastoral theology, polemic, and the propagation of the Gospel. The ministers and laypeople who advocated the religious dimensions of colonization in Virginia represented one strand within the

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- 2009). See also, Douglas Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins of the English Empire,” in *Early Modern Virginia: Reconsidering the Old Dominion*, eds. Douglas Bradburn and John C. Coombs (Charlottesville, VA, 2011), 15–56.
- 10 See Polly Ha, “Godly Globalisation: Calvinism in Bermuda,” *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 66 (2015): 543–561, esp. 556–558; Edward L. Bond, “England’s Soteriology of Empire and the Roots of Colonial Identity in Early Virginia,” *Anglican and Episcopal History*, 66 (1997): 471–499.
- 11 Karen Ordahl Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, (Cambridge, MA., 2007), 12–16, quote at 12. See also, Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins,” 15–17; Bond, *Damned Souls*, ch. 1. Additionally, dramaturgical culture during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century suggests global dimensions of English imperial diplomacy that facilitated colonization in Virginia. See Susan Iwanisziw, “England, Morocco, and Global Geopolitical Upheaval,” in *Envisioning an English Empire: Jamestown and the Making of the North Atlantic World*, eds. Robert Appelbaum and John Wood Sweet (Philadelphia, PA, 2005), 152–171.
- 12 David Harris Sacks, “Discourses of Western Planting: Richard Hakluyt and the Making of the Atlantic World,” in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter C. Mancall (Chapel Hill, NC., 2007), 410–453.
- 13 Bond, *Damned Souls*, 27–34; Bond, “England’s Soteriology”; Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 73; Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins,” esp. 16 and note 6. C.f. David Armitage, *The Ideological Origins of the British Empire* (Cambridge, 2000), chapter 3.

broad "Protestant ecosystem" of divergent post-Reformation manifestations of Christianity that shared an essential emphasis on the discernment of divine grace through faith.<sup>14</sup> The religious culture of Virginia was shaped by ministers of a Calvinist persuasion associated with the Virginia Company, many of whom advocated godly reform as an essential aspect of colonial expansion while adhering to the liturgy and doctrines of the Church of England.<sup>15</sup> Historians have long warned against drawing a sharp distinction between the zeal of the godly settlers at Massachusetts Bay Colony and the crown-sponsored Church of England colony in Virginia.<sup>16</sup> The intensity of Protestantism in Virginia during the early Stuart period is apparent in the emergent Anglican structures of the colony, the language in which its supporters framed their endeavors, the formative, if fractious, role of puritanism within the Church, and inter-colonial connections with settlers in New England.<sup>17</sup>

Reflecting another element of this intensity, English Protestant writing about Virginia was vociferously hostile towards papal authority, idolatry, and the rituals of the Roman Church, reaffirming the enduring anti-Catholicism that had brewed in England during the sixteenth century and had further intensified amidst the Anglo-Spanish conflict of the 1580s and the gunpowder treason of 1605.<sup>18</sup> Countering the imperial threat of Spanish Catholicism was a formative catalyst of English expansion in the Atlantic world.<sup>19</sup> While polemical hostility against "popery" was a recurring rhetorical theme in Protestantism, it reflected genuine fears about the prospect that some English people continued to engage with Catholicism. Archaeological evidence of Catholic material culture at the site of Jamestown, including crucifixes and rosary medallions, suggests that the presence of Catholicism in the Chesapeake region was not merely a figment of the Protestant imagination, but rather a palpable reality with which godly ministers and their congregants had to contend.<sup>20</sup>

14 See Alec Ryrie, "'Protestantism' as a Historical Category," *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 26 (2016), 59–77.

15 Jon Butler, *Awash In A Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge, MA, 1990), 37–39; Bell, *Empire, Religion and Revolution*, 87–88.

16 Miller, *Errand*, 99, 101–106; Horn, *Adapting*, 381–382.

17 Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia*, 110–112, 115–123. See also, Kevin Butterfield, "Puritans and Religious Strife in the Early Chesapeake," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 109 (2001): 5–36; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 47; Horn, *Adapting*, 389–390; Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 73, 75.

18 Peter Lake, "Anti-Popery: The Structure of A Prejudice," in Richard Cust and Ann Hughes (eds.), *Conflict in Early Stuart England: Studies in Religion and Politics 1603–1642* (London, 1989), 72–106; Peter Marshall, *Reformation England, 1480–1642* (2nd ed., London, 2012), 141.

19 Pestana, *Protestant Empire*, 63–65, 73.

20 William M. Kelso, *Jamestown: The Buried Truth* (Charlottesville, VA, 2006), 187–188.

The supposed cosmic significance of Virginia also had implications for everyday colonial life, which settlers viewed as reflective of divine intervention and demonic manipulation. Manifestations of divine wrath and satanic malevolence threatened destruction, while mercy and deliverance facilitated prosperity. The conviction that God and the Devil could physically intervene in the world shaped colonial experience and guided imperial expansion.<sup>21</sup> Popular beliefs and practices gradually emerged and intermingled with this providential framework. The English religious and legal structures upon which Jamestown was founded in 1607 reflected the popular belief, long-held in Christian Europe, that witches carried out malevolent activities under the auspices of the Devil.<sup>22</sup> Archaeological evidence and contemporary accounts from the seventeenth century suggest that some settlers in Virginia used horseshoes, coins, and witch bottles as protective wards, consulted books about magic and mysticism, dabbled in astrology and alchemy, and levelled accusations of witchcraft against individuals thought to have brought diabolical harm upon the community.<sup>23</sup>

These beliefs and practices not only shaped views about colonial society, but also informed attitudes towards the Indigenous inhabitants of the region. Several colonial writers emphasized that the Algonquian-speaking people of Tsenacommacah, the Indigenous name for the area over which the Powhatan leader Wahunsenacawh ruled, were receptive to English instruction, exhibited

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- 21 Edward L. Bond, "Source of Knowledge, Source of Power: The Supernatural World of English Virginia, 1607–1624," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 108 (2000): 105–138. See also, Horn, *Adapting*, 411–418.
- 22 Richard Beale Davis, "The Devil in Virginia in the Seventeenth Century," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 65 (1957): 131–149, 136–137. See also, Bond, *Damned Souls*, 156–157, note 127; Horn, *Adapting*, 412–416; Monica Witkowski, "A Witch amongst All Them": Chesapeake Witchcraft as a Case Study for Colonial North American Witchcraft Beliefs," in *Order and Civility in the Early Modern Chesapeake*, eds. Debra Meyers and Melanie Perreault (Lanham, MD., 2014), 33–50.
- 23 Richard Godbeer, "Folk Magic in British North America," in *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West From Antiquity to the Present*, ed. David J. Collins, S. J. (Cambridge, 2015), 461–481, 463–464; M. Chris Manning, "The Material Culture of Ritual Concealments in the United States," *Historical Archaeology*, 48 (2014): 52–83, 73; Sara Rivers Cofield, "Keeping a Crooked Sixpence: Coin Magic and Religion in the Colonial Chesapeake," *Historical Archaeology*, 48 (2014): 84–105, 94–99; Michael T. Lucas, "Empowered Objects: Material Expressions of Spiritual Beliefs in the Colonial Chesapeake Region," *Historical Archaeology*, 48 (2014): 106–124; Witkowski, "A Witch amongst All Them," in Meyer and Perreault, *Order and Civility*, 33–50, 39–40; Bond, "Source of Knowledge," 122, note 28, and passim; Jon Butler, "Magic, Astrology, and the Early American Religious Heritage, 1600–1760," *American Historical Review*, 84 (1979): 317–346. See also, Lindsey M. Newman, "Under an Ill Tongue": Witchcraft and Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia," Unpublished PhD Thesis (Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, 2009).



the capacity for cooperation and compliance, and would eventually overcome their ignorance to embrace civilization and Christianity.<sup>24</sup> Expressing concern that Indigenous people were enthralled to Satan, however, English Protestants also drew upon the familiar categories of witchcraft and Catholicism to make sense of the diabolical activities they perceived among the native population.<sup>25</sup>

The process of confronting these challenges and refracting the upheavals of colonial endeavors through the lens of theology, sacred history, and reformation began in the immediate aftermath of the initial voyage to Virginia and continued over the subsequent decades as writers constructed narratives of these events. Descriptions of Christianity in the early years of colonial Virginia point towards the experience of perseverance through near-catastrophic struggle. Formed in 1606, the joint-stock Virginia Company in London supported the founding, in 1607, of a settlement called Jamestown.<sup>26</sup> The voyage dispatched to establish the colony in 1606/1607 reportedly endured spiritual malaise and confronted the prospect of atheism. One of many preachers associated with the Virginia Company, and the first minister dispatched to the colony, Robert Hunt (1568/1569–1608) suffered from sickness during the voyage.<sup>27</sup> A cartographic survey of the colony published in 1612 reported Hunt's illness in a narrative that captured the ongoing tension between Christianity and heterodoxy as conceived among English Protestants who sought to advance reformation and reassert godliness while also adhering to the framework of the Church of England as it developed in Virginia. The 1612 publication indicated that the account of the voyage had been "taken faithfully out of the writings of Thomas Studly Cape-marchant, Anas Todkill, Doctor Russell, Nathaniel Powell, William Phetiplace, and Richard Pot, with the laboures of other discreet observers, during their residences." Of these, Powell, Studley, and Todkill were identified among the "first planters," along with John Smith, Robert Hunt, and George Percy, but this list also alluded to "diverse others to the number of

24 Camilla Townsend, "Mutual Appraisals: The Shifting Paradigms of the English, Spanish, and Powhatans in Tsenacomoco, 1560–1622," in *Early Modern Virginia: Reconsidering the Old Dominion*, eds. Douglas Bradburn and John C. Coombs (Charlottesville, VA, 2011), 57–89, 73–76; Daniel K. Richter, "Tsenacommacah and the Atlantic World," in *The Atlantic World and Virginia, 1550–1624*, ed. Peter Mancall (Chapel Hill, NC., 2007), 29–65; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 7, 15, 245.

25 Bond, "Source of Knowledge," 116–126; Horn, *Adapting*, 412.

26 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 151–152, 188–194.

27 See the entry for Hunt in *ODNB*.

105” colonists.<sup>28</sup> The account was reproduced as a “historie” in 1624.<sup>29</sup> This multivocal narrative was thus filtered through colonial assumptions and ambitions that evolved in the years between the events it described and its successive appearances in print.

As well as providing a glimpse into the precarious conditions of religion in the fledgling colony at its inception, the account also indicates the enduring resonance of narratives in which God delivered believers from heterodoxy. Having departed in December 1606, the crew contended with “vnprosperous winds” that kept the ship off the English coast for six weeks. The preacher, Hunt, “was so weake and sicke, that few expected his recoverie.”<sup>30</sup> With admiration, the text recalled that even though Hunt was only “10 or 12 miles from his habitation” during this time, and despite the “stormie weather” as well as “the scandalous imputations (of some few, little better then Atheists, of the greatest ranke amongst vs) suggested against him,” the minister had displayed not even

a seeming desire to leaue the busines, but preferred the service of God, in so good a voyage, before any affection to contest with his godlesse foes, whose disasterous designes (could they haue prevailed) had even then overthrowne the businesse, so many discontents did then arise, had he not with the water of patience, and his godly exhortations (but chiefly by his true devoted examples) quenched those flames of envie, and dissention.<sup>31</sup>

Casting in sharp relief the association of atheism with scandal, discontentedness, envy, and dissent, this retrospective episode represented the culmination of long-standing fears that atheistic disruption could jeopardize colonization. In maritime microcosm, a report of imperiled religion aboard a stricken ship suggests the profound threat to political and spiritual order that heterodoxy represented. The narrative of a minister’s determination amidst spiritual instability was emblematic of a religious and political climate in which Protestant

28 “THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ENGLISH Colony in Virginia, taken faithfully out of the writings of Thomas Study Cape-marchant, Anas Todkill, Doctor Russell, Nathaniel Powell, William Phetiplace, and Richard Pot, with the laboures of other discreet observers, during their residences,” in John Smith, *A map of Virginia VVith a description of the countrey, the commodities, people, government and religion. VVritten by Captaine Smith, sometimes governour of the countrey* (London, 1612, STC 22791), 1–8.

29 John Smith, *The generall historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles with the names of the adventurers, planters, and governours from their first beginning. ano: 1584. to this present 1624* (London, 1624, STC 22790), 41–44.

30 “THE PROCEEDINGS OF THE ENGLISH Colony in Virginia,” in Smith, *A map of Virginia*, 2.

31 *Ibid.*, 2.

colonists perpetually braced themselves for inevitable confrontations with "godless foes." The absence of belief was itself a constant and intimate presence that lurked among the crews of colonial ships and the congregations of fledgling churches, gnawing at the Christian conscience itself. Inevitably, the earnest believer had always to contend inwardly and outwardly with moments of spiritual listlessness, the threat of irreligious corruption, and the specter of atheism, waiting for the divine winds to pick up again and carry them forth into the western light.

This spiritual instability was compounded by the precarious nature of the first religious structures and practices in the colony itself. From 1607, the earliest Christian observances in Jamestown took place under an old ship's sail, which sheltered a makeshift pulpit constructed out of wood and affixed to trees. Before long, the colonists had built a rudimentary church alongside the guardhouse at the middle of the fort they had established, which facilitated liturgical devotion, including common prayer, sermons, and the Eucharist. However, concerns about nearby Indigenous people prompted settlers not only to move Sunday morning services to later times of day, but also to jettison the sermon to save time. Amidst struggles with malnutrition and illness, rising fatalities led colonists to bury their dead during the night to conceal the number of settlers from native observers. In early 1608, a serious fire destroyed the church and numerous homes. When the minister, Hunt, died later the same year, the colonists went without a formal ministered service, instead sharing in regular prayers and performed psalms.<sup>32</sup>

Contending with ongoing hardship in the colony, which culminated in a particularly harsh winter during 1609–1610, the Virginia Company worked to combat insufficient supplies and laborers, the persistence of illness and malnutrition, as well as decentralized political leadership, conflict with Indigenous peoples, and the protracted process of transportation from England to North America. In 1609, a new governor, Sir Thomas Gates (d. 1622), was appointed to the colony, new settlements were built away from environmental hazards, and a new fleet of ships was dispatched to facilitate shorter Atlantic crossings.<sup>33</sup> The Virginia Council had instructed Gates to make provision for preaching, the liturgy, and the structures of the Church of England, while also ensuring "that all Atheisme Prophanes Popery or Schisme be exemplarily punished to

32 Lewis Wright and Brenda Gardner, "Robert Hunt, Vicar of Jamestown," *Anglican and Episcopal History* 66 (1997): 500–519, 506–512.

33 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 245–247.

the honor of god and to the peace and safety of his Church ...”<sup>34</sup> This directive signaled the perception that multiple kinds of heterodoxy presented acute threats to spiritual order, demanding a renewed commitment to reformation and evangelism through legal as well as pastoral interventions.<sup>35</sup> A new minister accompanied Gates and others on a large-scale resupply mission to the colony at the end of May 1609, but their ship ran aground in Bermuda following a storm, leaving them stranded for nearly ten months, and they finally reached Virginia in May 1610 aboard two newly built vessels.<sup>36</sup>

While the authorities reckoned with the spiritual lethargy of parishioners in the colony itself, advocates of colonization repeatedly emphasized the sacred significance of Virginia to a wary populace in England. Supported by the Virginia Company, ministers in the Church of England preached a campaign of sermons that were reproduced as printed texts. These sermons sought to persuade English people that the colony was at the forefront of a divine imperial effort to reinforce and expand the boundaries of Christianity in anticipation of the apocalypse.<sup>37</sup> They reveal the theological precepts and pastoral strategies that informed English Protestant responses to heterodoxy. Preachers accentuated the dangers of atheism and Catholicism at home to reinforce the spiritual appeal of trans-Atlantic migration. In a sermon delivered on April 25, 1609, the minister William Symonds (b. 1556, d. in or after 1616) invoked the scriptural narrative surrounding God’s command to Abraham to “Get thee out of thy Countrey” (Genesis 12: 1–3) in order to argue that English support for the colony was a divine imperative with apocalyptic implications.<sup>38</sup> The sermon

34 Virginia Council, “Instruccions orders and constitucions \* \* \* to Sr Thomas Gates knight Governor of Virginia,” May 1609, in *Records of the Virginia Company of London*, 4 vols., ed. Susan Myra Kingsbury (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1906–34), III, 14.

35 Rebecca Anne Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia: How Christianity Created Race* (Baltimore, MD, 2016), 47–48.

36 Wright and Gardner, “Robert Hunt,” 513; James Stuart Murray Anderson, *The History of the Church of England in the Colonies and Foreign Dependencies of the British Empire*, 3 vols. (2nd ed., London, 1856), I, 208–209.

37 The sermons reflect intertwined Protestant approaches to theology, religious practice, economic development, and evangelism. See Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 244–245, and note 6, 7; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 1–4, 26–30; Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 45–47. See also, Andrew Fitzmaurice, *Humanism and America: An Intellectual History of English Colonisation, 1500–1625* (Cambridge, 2003), 63–67.

38 William Symonds, *Virginia. A sermon preached at White-Chappel, in the presence of many, honourable and worshipfull, the aduenturers and planters for Virginia. 25. April. 1609 Published for the benefit and vse of the colony, planted, and to bee planted there, and for the aduancement of their Christian purpose* (London, 1609, STC 23594), 1. See the discussions in Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 244–245; Parker, “Religion and the Virginia Colony 1609–10”, 257–260. See also, the entry for Symonds in *ODNB*.

addressed the arguments of people who were “not willing to goe abroade and spread the gospell, in this most honorable and christian voyage of the Plantation of Virginia.”<sup>39</sup> Seeking to prioritize the sacred purpose of Virginia, Symonds emphasized the vulnerability of believers in England to different kinds of irreligious corruption from within their own households and communities. He observed that:

for any thing that I can see, since ATHEISTS and PAPISTS, haue gotten out of their serpents holes, and conuersed with men, they haue sowed such cockell among our wheate, that in many places a man is in no such perill to be cheated and cosoned, if not murdered & poisoned, as among his own kindred that are affected that way.<sup>40</sup>

This was a strikingly blunt assessment of the extent to which the specters of atheism and Catholicism could supposedly infiltrate English communities. Symonds chose to textually capitalize the heterodox categories of “ATHEISTS” and “PAPISTS,” surely to accentuate the alarming implications of these phenomena and to jolt his audience into a state of high alert with the warning that their own kin and neighbors might indulge in the deceit and violence of heterodoxy.

If Virginia was to represent an escape from these heterodox individuals and offer a new frontier of Protestant expansion, those who settled in the region would have to recognize their own susceptibility to sin, embrace the salvific power of Christ, discern the grace of God, and eradicate the heterodoxy of any fellow colonists found to have been ensnared by the Devil. In February 1610, the godly minister William Crashaw (bap. 1572, d. 1625/1626) preached a sermon in London on the occasion of Lord De La Warr’s departure for the colony as the newly appointed governor, succeeding Thomas Gates.<sup>41</sup> Alluding to intertwined imperial and spiritual ambitions on a global scale, the sermon situated Virginia within a sacred historical framework that encompassed

39 Symonds, *Virginia*, 17–18.

40 *Ibid.*, 19. See Matthew 10:37, KJV: “He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.”

41 William Crashaw, *A sermon preached in London before the right honorable the Lord Lavarre, Lord Gouvernour and Captaine Generall of Virginea, and others of his Maiesties Counsell for that kingdome, and the rest of the aduenturers in that plantation At the said Lord Generall his leaue taking of England his natiue countrey, and departure for Virginea, Febr. 21. 1609* (London, 1610, STC 6029). Here, “1609” reflects the Julian Calendar. See also, the entry in *ODNB* for William Crashaw; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 250.

scriptural and classical geography, specifically likening the embryonic potential of the fledgling colony to the origins and rise of Israel or Rome.<sup>42</sup>

The sermon emphasized the sacred significance of Virginia by characterizing the presence of Indigenous non-Christian peoples in North America as a divine invitation to expand English Protestantism through propagation and conversion.<sup>43</sup> However, this objective was underpinned by a fundamental preoccupation with exposing and eradicating the heterodox ideas and tendencies that might lurk within the spiritual community as well as within the very body and soul of the individual believer. Articulating these vulnerabilities, Crashaw accentuated the redemptive power of Christ and the inner experience of faith. As “our true and spirituall physitian,” Christ would bestow “all the spirituall physicke that can cure and saue our sinfull soules.”<sup>44</sup> The soul had to be “purged from the corruption of sinne,” “restored to life and strength,” and “preserved in that state vnto the end.”<sup>45</sup> While the crucifixion, death, and burial of Christ had enabled believers “to purge our soules from the corrupt humours and the infectious staine of sinne,” the resurrection “restored” believers “to the life of grace, and fauour of God,” and the ascension “preserved” them “in the state of grace, and fauour of God ...”<sup>46</sup> The experience of Christ’s divinely sanctioned remedy offered comfort to believers who perceived a world susceptible to physical and spiritual corruption.

While potentially inviting anxiety and despair, personal vulnerability to spiritual failure was unavoidable given the universal conflict between the forces of heaven and hell. As Satan sought to undermine Christianity, Crashaw offered “strong consolation to a distressed soule and terrified conscience” by reminding believers “that they haue a Sauior more mighty in his mercy, then the diuell can be in his malice, and more willing to saue then the diuell can be to destroy.”<sup>47</sup> Comfort was also offered to “the penitent sinner, who may hereupon be assured that though he haue to grapple with many and mighty corruptions, yet Christ will be ready with continuall supply of grace, that so where

42 An observation made in Parker, “Religion and the Virginia Colony 1609–10,” 266. Invoking and visualizing the geography of the Bible was integral to the development of the sacred historical imagination that framed the global aspirations of English Protestantism. See Justine Walden, “Global Calvinism: The Maps in the English Geneva Bible,” in *Shaping the Bible in the Reformation: Books, Scholars and Their Readers in the Sixteenth Century*, eds. Bruce Gordon and Matthew McLean (Boston, MA., 2012), 187–215.

43 Crashaw, *A sermon preached in London*, sig. \*2r; Bond, *Damned Souls*, 1–4.

44 Crashaw, *A sermon preached in London*, sig. A1v.

45 *Ibid.*, sig. A2r.

46 *Ibid.*, sigs. A2r–A2v.

47 *Ibid.*, sig. A3v.

sinne abounds grace may abound much more [Romans 5:20].<sup>48</sup> This language emphasized the inevitable triumph of God over the Devil, but made clear that this eventual cosmic conclusion did not preclude corruption in the meantime. Sinfulness and diabolical malice remained tangible forces with which colonial settlers would have to contend. Responsibility for protecting the vulnerable colony by administering the purgative and restorative power of Christ upon afflicted souls fell upon colonial authorities, for whom Crashaw had a clear message:

Suffer no Papists; let them not nestle there; nay let the name of the Pope for Poperie be neuer heard of in Virginea. Take heed of Atheists the Diuels champions: and if thou discover any, make them exemplarie. And (if I may be so bold as to aduise) make Atheisme and other blasphemie capitall, and let that bee the first law made in Virginea. Suffer no Brownists, nor factious Separatists [...] Especially suffer no sinfull, no leaud, no licentious men, none that liue not vnder the obedience of good lawes: and let your lawes be strict, especially against swearing and other prophanesne. And though vaine swearing by Gods name be the common and crying sinne of England, and no mortall, but a veniall sinne in Popish doctrine, yet know that it is a sinne vnder which the earth mournes: and your land will flourish if this be repressed.<sup>49</sup>

With these remarks, Crashaw distinguished between several categories of heterodoxy.<sup>50</sup> As well as urging the colony to repudiate and reject co-existence with Catholics, divisive Separatists, and profane, irreligious sinners, the sermon characterized atheists as agents of Satan whose exposure and punishment could serve as warnings to any others who might contemplate rejecting God. Indeed, atheism was so singularly appalling and dangerous a crime that, in Crashaw’s eyes, the first legal priority of colonial Virginia was to impose the death penalty upon those found to have harbored atheistic proclivities.

These sermons reveal the Protestant perception that nascent colonial endeavors were beset by heterodoxy on multiple fronts. Identifying, describing, and responding to different kinds of heterodoxy was part of an effort to equip believers in England and North America with the means to ensure Protestant

48 Ibid., sigs. A3v–A4r.

49 Ibid., sig. Lr.

50 This sermon suggests the trans-Atlantic dimensions of English Protestant attitudes towards religious division and the pursuit of Christian unity. See Bond, *Damned Souls*, 61–64.

expansion. Along with Catholicism, the absence or rejection of belief in God presented a grave threat to colonial existence. Atheism, by definition, was an existential challenge to religion, reflecting satanic efforts to undermine the spiritual community. Devoted Protestants had a divinely mandated duty to uncover and punish atheism through perpetual vigilance.

Resonating with these arguments, colonial reports demonstrate that confronting heterodoxy reflected and shaped lived religion among English settlers. Amidst intertwined physical and spiritual upheaval, atheism could invite divine retribution. Describing “the diversety of miseries mutenies and famishmentts” visited upon Virginia in 1609–1610, a period in which a harsh winter of starvation and illness had left many English settlers dead, the gentry colonist and ex-soldier George Percy reported that the pain of hunger had driven some people to steal from the store, while others consumed horses, vermin, and critters, as well as the corpses of their fellow countrymen.<sup>51</sup> In addition to precipitating these disturbing sins, starvation had incubated irreligious thoughts. With “miseries now beinge att the hygheste,” as colonists were faced with famine, the “mallice of the Salvages,” and death, Percy recalled a “very remarkable” occurrence at Jamestown, “wherein god sheowd his iuste Judgment for one Hugh PRYSE”, who:

being pinched with extreme famin In A furious distracted moode did come openly into the markt place Blaspheminge exlameinge and cryeing owtt thatt there was noe god. Alledgeinge that if there were A god he wolde nott suffer his creatures whom he had made and framed to indure those miseries And to Perishe for wante of foods and sustenance ...<sup>52</sup>

Indicating that the absence of God was closely associated with bodily and sensory experience, this text reflects the Protestant preoccupation with the anatomy of atheism in the Atlantic world as both a heuristic framework and a component of lived experience. The offending individual, Hugh Pryse, had

51 George Percy, “A Trewe Relacyon of the Proceedinges and Ocurrentes of Momente which have hapned in Virginia from the Tyme Sir Thomas Gates was shippwrackte uppon the Bermudes anno 1609 untill my deptime outt of the Country which was in anno Domini 1612,” *Tyler’s Quarterly Historical and Genealogical Magazine*, 3 (1922): 260–282, 260, 266–267, quote at 260. For Percy, see Bond, *Damned Souls*, 40; Horn, *Adapting*, 27. For the Protestant interpretation of nature, food, and the body during this “Starving Time,” see Rachel B. Herrmann, “The ‘tragicall historie’: Cannibalism and Abundance in Colonial Jamestown,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 68 (2011): 47–74; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 251; Bond, “England’s Soteriology,” 477–478.

52 Percy, “A Trewe Relacyon,” 268–269.



staggered onto the scene at the marketplace in a state of starvation and heightened emotion, apparently distraught and perhaps even delirious. Without physical nourishment or inner spiritual edification, and faced with the prospect of death through starvation, his publicly vocalized heterodoxy represented a desperate surrender to corporeality that undermined the Protestant focus on faith and violated the ordered Christian community with blasphemous impiety. The narrative implied that a physical affliction, such as malnourishment, could have profoundly adverse spiritual consequences, such as denying the existence of God.

Partly predicated upon bodily malaise, Pryse’s repudiation of God’s existence invited divine judgement upon the body in turn. Later the same day, Pryse had accompanied “A Butcher A corpulent fatt man into the woods” in search of “some Reliefe,” when they had been “slaine by the Salvages.”<sup>53</sup> When they were discovered, the bodies of the two men were in conditions that attested to providential intervention:

gods Indignacyon was showed upon PRYSES Corpes which was Rente in pieces with wolves or other wylde Beasts And his Bowles Torne outt of his boddy beinge A Leane spare man And the fatt Butcher nott lyenge Above sixe yardes from him was fownd altogether untoiuched onely by the Salvages Arrowes whereby he Receiaved his deathe ...<sup>54</sup>

Read in the context of the universal providential framework within with English Protestants interpreted their lives and the world around them, this grisly end signaled the concentration of divine retribution on Pryse as a consequence of his blasphemous outburst.<sup>55</sup> The account also reveals the religious preoccupation with “remarkable” episodes of heterodoxy, the ways in which believers perceived and understood the phenomenon, and the discursive strategies they used to confront it. In this instance, heterodoxy had not only emerged from the physical trauma of starvation, but had also been punished physically. As Kathleen Donegan has argued, the narrative of Hugh Pryse suggests an effort to find spiritual meaning in catastrophe by emphasizing the physical body as a symbol of the instability and disorder that afflicted the colony and incubated

53 Ibid., 269.

54 Ibid.

55 Bond, “Source of Knowledge,” 107–108; Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 44. For the history of providential punishments in English Protestant culture, see Alexandra Walsham, *Providence in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1999), esp. ch 2.

heterodoxy, which in turn invited providential wrath.<sup>56</sup> Appearing in a report on the early development of the settlement up to 1612, the narrative referred to the heterodox declaration of Hugh Pryse as a way of crystallizing the serious physical and spiritual limitations of the colony.<sup>57</sup> At the same time, this emphasis on the deviation of one individual from God and religion amidst catastrophe alluded to spiritual steadfastness that had spared other settlers from annihilation.

Recording heterodox speech in Jamestown provided a striking opportunity to reaffirm the providential underpinnings of physical experience in the colony. While the sermons of Symonds and Crashaw had been produced at a distance, they shared with the colonial account of Hugh Pryse an effort to define and confront heterodox ideas and activities in Virginia in terms of Reformed theology. Crucially, this endeavor helped to explain how a project on the verge of physical collapse could remain a divine imperative. Viewed through a providential lens, heterodoxy that emerged from bodily experience and played out in the natural world invited readers to reckon with – and overcome – the physical and spiritual upheaval inherent in the unfolding of sacred history.

## II

The winter of 1609–1610 almost destroyed Jamestown. In 1610, those who had been shipwrecked in Bermuda arrived in the colony, but no longer possessed sufficient supplies to lend necessary aid. Shortly thereafter, as the remaining colonists made to abandon the settlement, a fleet intercepted them along the James River. Bringing with it an abundance of supplies, this fleet was led by Lord de la Warre, who assumed control of the colony as governor. Even as Virginia gradually experienced increasing economic and societal development, the formalization of legal structures, and the organizing of legislative representation through the 1610s, the specter of disorder continued to shape Protestant perceptions of the heterodox threats that faced religion in the settlement.<sup>58</sup> Amidst ongoing religious, social, and environmental challenges, Protestant writers constructed intertwined ecclesiastical, liturgical, and legal discourses that sought to repudiate heterodoxy, renew spiritual and political

56 Kathleen Donegan, *Seasons of Misery: Catastrophe and Colonial Settlement in Early America* (Philadelphia, PA, 2014), 105–106.

57 For the fate of Pryse as an expression of Protestant fears about divine retribution in response to atheists, Catholics, and “heathen” people, see Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 44.

58 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 2, 241–242, 250–258.

order in Virginia, and thus reassert the role of the colony as a sacred frontier of global reformation, colonization, and evangelism.

Following Lord de la Warre's arrival, authorities enhanced the tangible, visible, and audible presence of religion through the installation of a new chapel and bells along with the introduction of devotional processions and a renewed emphasis on church attendance. The Virginia Company oversaw the implementation of martial law to enshrine these principles.<sup>59</sup> The *Lavves diuine, morall and martiall* (1612) prescribed structures for colonial Virginia from 1611 to 1618 and reflected “the harsh and discretionary application of criminal justice” that characterized English law in its domestic and colonial application during the first half of the seventeenth century.<sup>60</sup> The scriptural law of the Old Testament underpinned regulations in the text against insubordination, blasphemous speech, gambling, stealing from churches, and failure to attend church services. The document also reasserted the beliefs and practices of the Church of England, placing an emphasis on catechizing, preaching sermons, observing the Sabbath, and educating Indigenous peoples as potential converts to Christianity.<sup>61</sup>

Two of the key contributors to the work were the marshal and occasional acting governor in Virginia, Sir Thomas Dale (d. 1619), and the Virginia Company's secretary to the colony, William Strachey (1572–1621), who undertook historical writing about the region.<sup>62</sup> The framework they produced reflected English concerns that the absence of legal authority and pastoral guidance had resulted in a spiritual deficit that could encourage heterodoxy in Virginia. As Strachey explained, the text outlined “duties” that would regulate the colony, serving as a “due checke” on those “who maliciously and desperately heretofore haue censured of it ...”<sup>63</sup> He hoped that consulting the document would lead such people to “be right sorie so to haue defaulted from vs as if we liued there lawlesse, without obedience to our Countrey, or obseruancie of Religion to God.”<sup>64</sup> Conceived as a simultaneously spiritual and legal document, the

59 Butler, *Awash In A Sea of Faith*, 39; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 256–257; Darrett B. Rutman, “The Historian and the Marshal: A Note on the Background of Sir Thomas Dale,” *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 68 (1960): 284–294, 292–293.

60 David Thomas Konig, “Dale's Laws' and the Non-Common Law Origins of Criminal Justice in Virginia,” *American Journal of Legal History* 26 (1982): 354–375, 354.

61 Bond, *Damned Souls*, 83–92; Horn, *Adapting*, 383–384; Butler, *Awash In A Sea of Faith*, 39–40.

62 See the entries for Strachey and Dale in *ODNB* and *ANB*. For Dale, see also Rutman, “The Historian and the Marshal.”

63 William Strachey, *For the colony in Virginea Britannia. Lavves diuine, morall and martiall* (London, 1612, STC 23350), sig. A2v.

64 *Ibid.*

text reflected an effort to mitigate the disorder and neglect of religion that was obstructing the colony.<sup>65</sup>

As well as demonstrating the underlying theological precepts that guided colonization, the text reveals the evolving polemical and pastoral preoccupations of English Protestantism as the Church of England sought to establish a foothold in the emerging political and social structures of colonial Virginia, an endeavor that depended on confronting and eradicating heterodoxy.<sup>66</sup> The text included a prayer for England and Virginia that was to be “duly said Morning and Eueing vpon the Court of Guard, either by the Captaine of the watch himselfe, or by some one of his principall officers.”<sup>67</sup> Set in the cosmological context of Protestant salvation and judgement, the prayer called upon God to deliver the people of England and Virginia from heterodoxy:

Lord blesse England our sweet natiue countrey, saue it from Popery, this land from heathenisme, & both from Atheisme. And Lord heare their praiers for vs, and vs for them, and Christ Iesus our glorious Mediator for vs all.<sup>68</sup>

This language expressed an intertwined legal and spiritual effort to counter the multiple heterodox threats that faced Protestantism in Virginia and England. Seeking to strengthen bonds of belief between distant, yet kindred people, this appeal for providential protection asked God to rescue England from the corruptions of “Popery,” eliminate the “heathenism” of Indigenous peoples in Virginia through evangelism, and deliver both England and Virginia from “Atheisme.” The prayer characterized these categories of heterodoxy as distinct, yet related phenomena against which Protestants had to conduct a unified spiritual campaign on multiple fronts. Exchanging these prayers served as a reminder of the ongoing struggle between the true religion and the false church of Catholicism in Europe, the significance of propagating the Gospel among non-Christians in the Americas, and the pervasive, yet intimate

65 To “defalk” was to “defalcate; subtract; deduct.” See William Dwight Whitney and Benjamin Eli Smith (eds.), *The Century Dictionary and Cyclopedia, The Century Dictionary: An Encyclopedic Lexicon of the English Language*, II, (New York, NY: The Century Co., 1899), 1498. It could also mean, “To diminish by cutting off a part, to reduce by deductions,” see “defalk, v.,” *OED*.

66 Bradburn, “The Eschatological Origins,” 15–16; Bond, “Source of Knowledge,” 116, 132, 134–136; Bond, “England’s Soteriology,” 492–497; Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 47–48.

67 Strachey, *For the colony in Virginea Britannia*, sig. N1v.

68 *Ibid.*, sig. N4v.

danger of atheism at home and overseas. In calibrating Christianity and heterodoxy in this way, the text invited Protestants to position Christ himself as a trans-Atlantic intermediary, facilitating the reaffirmation of a spiritual bond between believers separated by an ocean.<sup>69</sup>

As the colonial authorities reinforced the structures of the settlement, discourse about Virginia continued to emphasize the importance of eliminating heterodoxy. As Robert Johnson, a prominent merchant and alderman of London, as well as Deputy Treasurer of the Virginia Company, acknowledged in 1612, the early development of the settlement had witnessed the physical deterioration of religion, health, and vitality:

Ambition, sloth and idlenes had deuoured the fruits of former labours, planting and sowing were cleane giuen ouer, the houses decayed, the Church fell to ruine, the store was spent, the cattell consumed, our people starued, and the poore Indians by wrongs & iniuries were made our enemies, two of the ships returning home perished ...<sup>70</sup>

For Johnson, agricultural failure, environmental hazards, physical ailments, and spiritual decline had characterized the early development of the colony. However, martial law promised renewed commitment to religious observance, making provision “for daily frequenting the Church, the house of prayer, at the toling of the bell, for preaching, catechizing, and the religious obseruation of the Sabbath day, for due reuerence to the Ministers of the Word, and to all superiours, for peace and loue among themselues,” while also “enforcing the idle to paines and honest labours, against blasphemie, contempt and dishonour of God, against breach of the Sabbath by gaming; and otherwise against adulterie, sacriledge and felonie; and in a word, against all wrongfull dealing amongst themselues, or iniurious violence against the Indians.”<sup>71</sup> Reconstituting the beliefs, practices, liturgy and ministry of the Church of England would establish a new bulwark against heterodoxy.

69 For the vitality of trans-Atlantic cultural, political, and commercial connections between English society and colonial Virginia, see Misha Ewen, *The Virginia Venture: American Colonization and English Society, 1580–1660* (Philadelphia, PA., 2022).

70 Robert Johnson, *The new life of Virginea declaring the former successe and present estate of that plantation, being the second part of Noua Britannia* (London, 1612, STC 14700), sig. CIV. For Johnson, see Andrew Fitzmaurice, “The Commercial Ideology of Colonization in Jacobean England: Robert Johnson, Giovanni Botero, and the Pursuit of Greatness,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, 64 (2007): 791–820.

71 Johnson, *The new life of Virginea*, sigs. D1r–D1v.

While the situation that Johnson described suggested a marked improvement on the initial precariousness of the settlement, he recognized that the colony was still comprised of “the common sort of English,” and urged colonial authorities to “discourage them not in growing religious, nor in gathering riches,” since “without the first they are prophane, without the second desperate ...”<sup>72</sup> Such individuals would be like “the beggarly, ignorant and superstitious sort of Irish, & no better were we our English (and Scottish nation too),” who had been prone to insurrection, murder, or rebellion.<sup>73</sup> This observation drew upon deep-seated pastoral concerns among Elizabethan and Stuart ministers about the supposedly ignorant inhabitants of remote regions in England, Ireland, Wales, and Scotland.<sup>74</sup> Whether the common sort of English settlers in Virginia were really ignorant of religion or not, this text reflected the colonial implications of an enduring Protestant perception that heterodoxy, emerging among those who did not have access to effective preaching, could jeopardize reformation and evangelism.

Compounding the unreformed ignorance of settlers in Virginia were the sinister efforts of Catholics and other malevolent individuals to undermine colonization by spreading misinformation at the behest of Satan. In the preface to a text authored by the minister Alexander Whitaker (1585–1617), published in 1613, Crashaw lamented attempts to undermine the settlement in Virginia, criticizing “the calumnies and slanders, raised vpon our Colonies,” which had been “deuised by the Diuell, and set abroach by idle and base companions” and were now “blowen abroad by Papists, Players and such like, till they haue filled the vulgar eares ...”<sup>75</sup> Spreading “like wilde fire” among English men, “these idle tales” helped “the Diuell and his associates (of all sorts)...”<sup>76</sup> For Crashaw, the diabolical derision and erroneous rumors levelled against Virginia worked to weaken the credibility of colonization and the very principles of reformation. Backed by divine will, it fell to “men of honourable minds, and ingenuous dispositions, and all that are godly-wise,” to “check and controule these idle and slanderous surmises,” so that “the naked and plaine truth may giue a iust affront to the cunning and coloured falshoods deuised by the enemies of

72 Ibid., sigs. E2v–E3r.

73 Ibid, sig. E3r.

74 Christopher Hill, “Puritans and the Dark Corners of the Land,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 13 (1963): 77–102.

75 Alexander Whitaker, *Good newes from Virginia Sent to the Counsell and Company of Virginia, resident in England. From Alexander Whitaker, the minister of Henrico in Virginia* (London, 1613, STC 25354), sig. A2r.

76 Ibid., sigs. A2r–A2v.

this Plantation."<sup>77</sup> Extinguishing the flames of falsehood demanded a robust response that could reinvigorate English enthusiasm for Atlantic expansion as a sacred duty involving the propagation of the Gospel. While settlers in Virginia had to contend with Satan, who "visibly and palpably raignes there, more then in any other knowne place of the world," they could draw encouragement from the knowledge that "God will treade Satan vnder your feet shortly [Romans 16:20], and the ages to come will eternize your names, as the Apostles of Virginia."<sup>78</sup> Those who migrated to North America were continuing the apostolic work of evangelism that had started in the New Testament.

These endeavors demanded spiritual tenacity in the face of worldly hostility, an unavoidable aspect of godly experience that believers had to endure until the end of days.<sup>79</sup> In the main body of the text, Whitaker recognized that the very uncertainties and instabilities of colonization could provide the foundations for triumph over Satan, reflecting a sense in which divine purpose in the face of doubt and danger epitomized religious culture in Virginia. He explained that "the noblest attempts haue alwaies had the most doubtfull beginnings, most dangerous enemies," adding that "wheresoeuer any goodnesse shall begin to bud forth, the Diuell will labour by all meanes to nip it in the head."<sup>80</sup> Triumph over these satanic machinations demanded an effort to confront the corrupt and sinful behavior of "popish" enemies and worldly miscreants who either embraced the error and falsehood of Catholicism or else openly flouted the divine will of God. Moreover, it was possible that such heterodox individuals were so resistant to Christianity that God had already abandoned them. The text highlighted the sinful qualities of "our Aduenturers in London," some of whom "haue been most miserable couetous men, sold ouer to Vsurie, Extortion and Oppression," as well as many of those sent to Virginia, who were "Murtherers, Theeues, Adulterers, idle persons, and what not besides, all which persons God hateth euen from his very soule ..."<sup>81</sup> Indeed, "Such mens prayers are abominable in the sight of God."<sup>82</sup> In the predestinarian framework of Reformed religion, these remarks indicated that the colonial endeavor was at risk from the corruption of reprobates, whose transgressions signaled spiritual distance from the edification of devotion and the

77 Ibid, sig. A2v.

78 Ibid., sig. C2r.

79 For Whitaker's commitment to Reformed religion and the Church of England intertwined with his advocacy of colonial expansion and evangelism in Virginia, see Butler, *Awash In A Sea of Faith*, 38; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 245.

80 Whitaker, *Good newes*, sig. D2r.

81 Ibid., 11.

82 Ibid.

inability to discern grace, thereby suggesting that God had consigned them to eternal damnation.

Exacerbating the problem, these seemingly irreligious men were entering into an environment already marked by heterodoxy. The “barbarous Countrey of Virginia, where the name of God hath beene yet scarce heard of,” seemed to invite the planting of Christianity and the propagation of religion among the Indigenous non-Christian peoples there.<sup>83</sup> However, the apparent absence of God among native peoples in the ambiguous and unfamiliar wilderness of North America dovetailed with the Protestant perception that profane, worldly, wayward, and sinful English settlers threatened the stability of colonial religion. The failure of efforts to propagate the Gospel and convert the Indigenous inhabitants of the region reinforced long-held concerns that a lack of adequate ministers risked leaving colonists themselves vulnerable to corruption and the adoption of non-Christian beliefs and practices.<sup>84</sup>

Both in England and Virginia, this situation was an existential threat to establishing the Church and propagating Christianity, but it could also offer solace to believers when properly interpreted in a providential framework. As Whitaker explained:

if there were nothing else to encourage vs, yet this one thing may stirre vs vp to go on chearefully with it: that the Diuell is a capitall enemy against it, and continually seeketh which way to hinder the prosperitie and good proceedings of it. Yea, hath heretofore so farre preuailed, by his Instruments, the couetous hearts of many back sliding Aduenturers at home, and also by his seruants here: some striuing for superioritie, others by murmurings, mutinies, & plaine treasons; & others by fornication, prophanenes, idlenes, and such monstrous sinnes; that he had almost thrust vs out of this kingdome, and had indeed quitted this Land of vs, if God had not then (as one awaked out of sleepe) stood vp and sent vs meanes of great helpe, when we needed most, and expected least reliefe ...<sup>85</sup>

Later in the text, Whitaker urged his readers to “be not discouraged with those many lamentable assaults that the diuell hath made against vs: he now rageth most, because he knoweth his kingdome is to haue a short end.”<sup>86</sup> While the prevalence of irreligion, sinfulness, treachery, rebellion, and the profane

83 Ibid., 15.

84 Horn, *Adapting*, 385; Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 42–44.

85 Whitaker, *Good newes*, 22.

86 Ibid., 33.



signaled satanic manipulation and threatened colonial life, it also prefigured the providential deliverance of believers from corruption, the expansion of Christianity, and the final judgement of God.

As colonists gained a firmer foothold in Virginia, they developed a legal, political, and religious framework that prioritized the repudiation of heterodoxy and the reassertion of reformation. These objectives were embedded in the language of martial law, prayers, pastoral literature, and reports that provided news from the colony. This language was a bridge between theology and culture, providing audiences with a providential and apocalyptic reading of the physical world and its inhabitants. Integral to this perspective was the idea that the Protestant inhabitants of England and Virginia were joint participants in a global struggle against multifarious manifestations of heterodoxy, including atheism, Catholicism, and heathenism.

### Conclusion

The theological precepts that underpinned nascent religious, political, and legal responses to heterodoxy in Virginia continued to inform the development of the settlement throughout the seventeenth century. During the 1610s and early 1620s, colonial investors, settlers, and ministers vociferously advocated the conversion of Indigenous peoples in Virginia, setting out ambitious strategies of preaching and education to facilitate this objective. However, growing animosity and violence between colonists and Indigenous people jeopardized these efforts following the Powhatan massacre of over three hundred and fifty English settlers in 1622.<sup>87</sup> Meanwhile, the Virginia Company, increasingly associated with corruption and disarray, was dissolved in 1624 and a royal governor was appointed.<sup>88</sup> The Virginia Assembly sought to reinforce colonial religious structures in the 1620s, pushing anew for ecclesiastical organization and liturgical structures that conformed to the Church of England. Despite fresh waves of migration to Virginia in the 1620s and 1630s, including English clergy and Puritans from the Netherlands, the struggle to bolster the number of ministers and improve the preaching ministry persisted. Few ministers were drawn to the colony from the 1620s through the 1670s and observers continued to

87 Goetz, *The Baptism of Early Virginia*, 57.

88 Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 295–299, 321–322.

raise concerns about the irreligious behavior and spiritual negligence of those who were.<sup>89</sup>

Prefiguring ambitions and tensions that would persist throughout the seventeenth century, the Protestant preoccupation with heterodoxy in the first decade of colonization directly motivated efforts to impose religious and political order in Virginia. The entwined objectives of reformation, evangelism, and imperialism depended on redeploying a robust and dynamic, yet concerted and sophisticated language of heterodoxy, identifying “atheism,” “popery,” and “heathenism” as concepts targeted for physical or spiritual elimination. Writing about these different, yet related forms of heterodoxy served numerous purposes: repudiating external threats to the true religion; exposing and responding to spiritual transgressions and sinfulness within; demonstrating and interpreting manifestations of divine will in the world; emphasizing the spiritual significance of colonization and rebutting its detractors; propagating Christianity among Indigenous peoples. Confronting heterodoxy was an integral component in articulating the intertwined religious and political priorities of colonization, which Protestants conceived as a simultaneously physical and spiritual struggle for religion.

Examining attitudes towards heterodoxy in early colonial Virginia thus helps to contextualize the Protestant conviction that the region retained a significant place in an unfolding sacred history of global proportions. Tracing English attitudes towards heterodoxy in the Atlantic world demonstrates the Protestant view of the colony as an ambitious and promising, yet unstable and precarious religious and political environment, in which settlers had continually to assert and reconfigure their beliefs and practices in pursuit of Christian expansion. Recent scholarship has emphasized that the debates, tensions, and contingencies of the Long Reformation in continental Europe and the British Isles profoundly shaped the religious culture of New England, especially in the colonies of Plymouth and Massachusetts.<sup>90</sup> Offering emblematic glimpses into a long and complicated history, this article has pointed towards similar circumstances in early colonial Virginia, while also suggesting striking differences.

89 Hatfield, *Atlantic Virginia*, 110–111; Butler, *Awash In A Sea of Faith*, 38, 40–46; Horn, *Adapting*, 384–385, 400–406; Kupperman, *The Jamestown Project*, 291–293. For the eighteenth century, see Joan R. Gundersen, “The Search For Good Men: Recruiting Ministers In Colonial Virginia,” *Historical Magazine of the Protestant Episcopal Church* 48 (1979): 453–464.

90 See Carla Gardina Pestana, “Reworking Reformation in the Early English Atlantic,” in *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations* ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge, 2020), 30–55; David D. Hall, “Puritanism in a Local Context: Ministry, People, and Church in 1630s Massachusetts,” in *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge, 2020), 56–81.

The evidence reveals the enduring cultural impact of the Protestant association of heterodoxy with physical and spiritual disorder. The concern that heterodox thought and behavior threatened to undermine colonial society invigorated efforts to impose religious, political, social, and legal hegemony. As well as seeking to expose atheism and irreligious behavior that seemed to lurk within the colonial community and the very bodies of believers, Protestants also sought to dispatch the external threat of Catholicism and characterized Virginia as a vanguard of evangelism extending to Indigenous peoples. From the founding of Jamestown in 1607 onwards, eradicating heterodoxy was integral to articulating the intertwined theological and imperial purpose of Virginia as a harbinger of global reformation, colonization, and evangelism.

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