

Volume 10

Number 041

Mayflower Compact - II

Lead: The Mayflower Compact of 1620 committed the Pilgrims to a just and equal government in their new colony on Massachusetts Bay. Its roots can be traced in surprising directions, but its legacy probably did not lead to increased democracy.

Intro. : *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: One of the fascinating characteristics of democracy as it developed in England and the United States is that democratic institutions resist ideology and tend to promote

consensus. Among the early proponents of freer representative government were religious ideologues such as the Puritans. They championed the parliamentary cause in two civil wars against King Charles I in the 1640s and many fled to the colonies of Massachusetts Bay after 1620. Their purpose was to secure the right to worship as they chose and to create a godly commonwealth.

Ironically, they found that democracy tended to diminish their ability to force their Christian ideology on the English people or maintain the ideological purity of the colonies they founded in America. Democracy by definition implies government by majority rule, creates

an environment in which the largest number of the governed, govern themselves. Despite their support for democratic institutions, the puritans, a distinct minority, soon found themselves losing power to influence events on both sides of the Atlantic.

In 1620, freshly arrived in North America, the Pilgrims of Plymouth formulated the Mayflower Compact. This covenant which called for just and equal laws, traces its roots to traditional English concepts of local government, the Separatists' own experience in Holland, the Calvinist interpretation of the Apostle Paul's Letter to the Romans commitment to governmental order, and an intention to form a government that would

enforce the Pilgrim's ability to create a perfect Christian society. At first they needed the help of everyone, including non-pilgrims, to carve a home out of the wilderness and extended the franchise or voting rights to most of the male settlers. Later they would not be so generous. What happens when democracy works against religion? Next time: the freeman's choice.

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

Adler, Mortimer J., Ed., *The Annals of America*, vol. 1. Chicago, IL: Encyclopedia Britannica, Inc., 1968.

Bainton, Roland H. *The Reformation of the Sixteenth Century*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1956.

Baym, Nina, Ed., *Norton Anthology of American Literature, 6th Edition, Volume A*. New York, NY: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003.

Bradford, William. *Of Plymouth Plantation*, Samuel Eliot Morrison, ed. New York, NY: Alfred A. Knopf, 1952.

Brinton, Crane, John B. Christopher, Robert Lee Wolff, *A History of Civilization*, 3^d ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1967.

Clarke, John J. *A History of Local Government of the United Kingdom*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978.

Knox, John. "Exegesis of The Epistle to the Romans," in George Arthur Buttrick et. al., Eds., *The Interpreter's Bible, Volume IX*. New York, NY: Abingdon Press, 1954.

Langdon, George D., Jr. "The Franchise and Political Democracy in Plymouth Colony," *The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series* 20 (4, October 1963): 513-526

Marsh, Daniel L. *The American Canon*. New York, NY: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1939.

Morison, Samuel Eliot. "New Light Wanted on the Old Colony," *The William and Mary Quarterly, 3rd Series* 15 (2, July, 1958):359-364.

Osgood, Herbert L. *The American Colonies in the Seventeenth Century*. London, UK: Macmillan & Co., Ltd, 1904.

Sargent, Mark L. "The Conservative Covenant: The Rise of the Mayflower Compact in American Myth," *The New England Quarterly* 61 (2, June, 1988): 233-251.

Smith, Lacy Baldwin. *This Realm of England 1399-1688*, 8th ed. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001.

"The Mayflower Compact," n.d.,
<<http://www.pilgrimhall.org/compact.htm>> (1 October 2003)

"The Seven Articles of Leyden," n.d.,
<<http://www.apuritansmind.com/Creeds/SevenArticlesLeyden.htm>> (12 October 2003)

"First Charter of Virginia," n.d.,
<<http://www.freedomcommittee.org/1/freedom/books/usbrit/colony7.html>> (10 October 2003)