

PARALLEL GUIDE 1

Denominations in North America

Summary

At the end of EFM Year Three we touched on the arrival of Christianity in the Americas. In this lesson we review in greater detail the period during which the colonists brought Christianity to North America, describing some of the many denominations that took root in the English colonies. Each one had its beginnings in the long history of Europe and showed its heritage accordingly, as children resemble parents. Transplanted, however, none found the climate in the New World quite the same as it was at home. For many, the new conditions brought about some drastic changes; all the denominations were altered in one way or another.

Learning Objectives

- Outline the rise of religious denominations in North America
- Define “halfway covenant”
Describe the problem of third generation Massachusetts Congregationalism
- Cite the circumstances that led to the founding of Yale College
- Describe the function of vestries in colonial Anglican parishes
- Identify the S.P.G.
- Identify Henry Muhlenberg

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. What do you perceive to be the difference between a “sect” and a “church”?
2. Find a map of the English colonies and locate the various locations of settlement and new religious groups. What factors did geography play in colonial developments?
3. What factors do you think help to produce religious divisions and the rise of new religious movements?

Preparing for Your Seminar

Make yourself a list of some of the factors that arose during the colonial period that helped form your denomination, your diocese or regional ministry, and your parish or local church. If you live on the Eastern seaboard, this will be quite different from what it might be for those living in portions of America that were not settled until later. How might the American colonial period have influenced matters in other places, particularly throughout the Anglican communion? Bring this to your seminar as fruitful material for a larger discussion around the issues of colonization and the development of religion in a new world.

Additional Sources

Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

DENOMINATIONS IN NORTH AMERICA

At this point we take a step back to pick up developments in the American colonies that were not detailed in Year Three. These developments provided the background for the growth of denominations during the nineteenth century and the divisions which underlie the growth of religious movements through the first half of the twentieth century.

The Puritans who started the Plymouth and Massachusetts Bay colonies have been hailed in popular American culture as advocates of religious freedom in the New World. They were indeed victims of intolerance in England, and they left in search of a haven where they would be free to practice the “purified” Christianity that was forbidden by an oppressive partnership of church and state. This did not mean, however, that they intended to provide such freedom in the new land. The *Cambridge Platform* drafted in 1648 at Cambridge, Massachusetts, stated principles for the Congregational Church of the Bay Colony that again melded church and state into a single theocratic government. Only the “elect” could occupy official positions.

Congregationalists

Under this criterion a question immediately arose: who was among the elect and who was not? When Augustine of Hippo developed his doctrine of predestination (saying that God elects some people to receive his saving grace, while the rest were left to share the general lot of sinful humanity), he was arguing against the Donatists, who claimed they were a church made up only of the righteous—people without sin. He told them their attempts to weed sinners out of the church were misguided; the task of sifting wheat from tares would be done by God. In the meantime, the church is a mixed body in which only God knows those who have been predestined to glory.

The framers of the *Cambridge Platform* thought otherwise. God, they said, would give a recognizable sign of election to those chosen to be saved. They would undergo some kind of spiritual experience that would attest to it. Without such a sign, the community could not accept anyone considered to be “regenerate,” to be counted among the elect people of the New Covenant.

The first settlers had no difficulty meeting these requirements; they had been convinced of their own election before setting sail for the New World. But what about the next generation? Offspring of believing adults, they were “federally holy” holy by association with their parents—and so qualified for baptism as infants. On reaching adulthood, they were expected to pass the test of election by testifying to a spiritual experience of their own. Any who could not do so were considered members of a halfway covenant, eligible to remain within the community and participate in the

The Half-Way Covenant

worship of the church but not to receive communion at the Lord's Supper. They were not allowed to hold any religious or civil office.

In the third generation the problem became acute: were children of half-way covenanted parents to be regarded as "federally holy" and duly baptized? If not, the proportion of true believers would probably lessen—perhaps even dwindle to a remnant too small to administer the theocratic commonwealth. On the other hand, if the standards of election were lowered to permit the baptism of such children, would not the church itself lose its holiness?

There seemed no satisfactory way out of the dilemma, so they decided to take their chances on baptizing the dubious infants of the "halfway covenant." A synod called in 1662 settled the matter. Once the first step was taken to lower the standards, others inevitably followed. People discussed changing the rules about participation in the Lord's Supper; it should be available to everyone, not only to those who had received experiential signs of election. All children of the covenant, it was argued, have a germ of grace, however small it might be. None should be deprived of the spiritual food necessary to nourish this germ and allow it to grow to maturity.

Brattle and Leverett

The next step was taken in Cambridge in 1699 at Harvard College, the institution founded in 1636 to educate a continuing succession of learned clergy such as those the Puritans so greatly valued. Two Harvard tutors, William Brattle and William Leverett, stirred up a hornet's nest with some unorthodox views about spiritual experience. Declaring it was too subjective a phenomenon to determine church membership, they started up a congregation that admitted anyone who wished to join. Such an action amounted to defiance of the fundamental principle the Massachusetts Bay theocracy rested on. It could not go unchallenged.

By this time, however, London had already revoked the colony's original charter. Massachusetts had become a religious tyranny, and the crown intervened to put a stop to its errant intolerance. Authority rested now in the hands of the royal governor. Brattle and Leverett appealed to him when church officials attempted to discipline them; he sustained their plea. The church that had formerly governed the colony was now powerless to discipline its own members.

Connecticut Congregationalism

In Connecticut, conservative Puritans took steps to avoid a similar fate. They founded Yale College at New Haven in 1701, where the old standards were taught and clergy were trained to uphold them.

Connecticut-style Puritans needed to do more, however, than simply purify doctrine. They had to modify their strictly congregational polity for disciplining a congregation that chose to dissent. Accordingly, in 1708 they issued the *Saybrook Platform*. It provided for a "consociation" of all

the congregations within each county, and a General Association made up of representatives from the entire colony. This marked a move toward a presbyterian type of polity, with synods of presbyters having oversight of the congregations. Yet each local congregation was kept autonomous by being allowed to discipline its own members. Membership in the county consociations and the General Association was to be entirely voluntary on the part of each congregation.

The Baptist movement, in the New England colonies as in England, was an offshoot of Puritanism. Some Puritans were not satisfied with the notion of “federal holiness,” adopted by the Congregationalists. The faith required for baptism, they reasoned, must be the candidate’s own, not that of the parents. Suggesting a “halfway covenant” for baptized people who cannot show signs of saving faith seemed a clumsy way of solving a problem that should not have arisen in the first place. Instead, they decided to hold off baptism until a mature affirmation of faith might be made.

When Baptist sentiments first began to be expressed in Massachusetts, the theocracy was still in power; dissent was rigorously suppressed. Public whipping was not uncommon. Four Quakers were hanged in Boston for professing their unorthodox faith. One who dared challenge the Massachusetts establishment by embracing the Baptist “heresy” was Roger Williams. They banished him from the colony.

On a tract of land lying between the Connecticut and Massachusetts Bay colonies at the head of Narragansett Bay, Williams joined with some other refugees in 1639 to found the Providence Plantations and to form a Baptist congregation there. Williams was a quick-tempered man, with strong opinions and little talent for working with others. He soon dropped out of the Baptist congregation and announced himself a Seeker. Unrealistic ideals convinced him that no organized religious body was worthy to be called a true church. Not until God intervenes again in history, he said, will the true church appear on earth. He remained a leader of the new colony of Rhode Island and the Providence Plantations, however, and he continued to insist that complete religious freedom was the only way to avoid religious tyranny.

Meanwhile, other Baptists took advantage of the freedom he extended. John Clarke founded a Baptist congregation in Newport, a seaport on the island of Aquidneck at the southern end of Narragansett Bay. Clarke was a man of calmer disposition than Williams, and through writing and organizing capability he made Rhode Island a center of Baptist activity.

Rhode Island was not the only colony where Baptists flourished. They struck out from England and New England into New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. In 1707 the Philadelphia Baptist Association was formed; through its encouragement and support the Baptist form of

Baptists

The Church of England

Puritan congregational polity spread into Connecticut, New York, Maryland, and Virginia. In 1764, the Association established the College of Rhode Island, later called Brown University, as the principal school for the education of Baptist ministers.

The course of Anglicanism as the established church in the southern colonies was different from that of Congregationalist New England. The Congregationalist Puritans settled Massachusetts deliberately intending to make it a theocracy. The Virginia colonists, on the other hand, had no religious motivations. As the first of the colonies to be settled with express endorsement from the crown, they inherited the Anglican establishment as a matter of government policy. Chaplains were appointed by the Virginia Company to attend to the spiritual needs of the original settlers, but little was done to continue supplying priests from England while the colony grew.

In England, both the monarchs and the church hierarchy embraced the ideal that the Church of England would contain all the citizens of the realm. All England was divided into parishes. Each had its parish church, and everyone who lived within the parish boundaries was considered a member. The rise of dissenting groups had made this ideal more a fiction than a reality even in England, but when the parish system was installed in Virginia, it proved to be even more unrealistic.

The way of life in the colonies was agrarian; there were only a very few towns. Parishes were sparsely settled and their boundaries extended over large areas. Clergy were scarce, and often not of the highest quality. Anglicanism proved to have an almost fatal flaw built into its own political structure. It could not provide a suitable ordained ministry of its own. Because of its episcopal polity (an organization of the church requiring bishops to be its head), however, the Church of England in the colonies had to depend on the mother country to supply priests, for no bishops were sent to serve in the New World.

The colonies remained without bishops because of the organizational system in England. Bishops were appointed for dioceses that already existed. To think of ordaining a bishop as a missionary to a remote outpost where the church did not yet exist was beyond imagining. It would have seemed like sending a prince into exile. The bishop of London was given nominal episcopal oversight of the churches in the colonies, but no way was provided for him to exercise it. The vacuum of leadership prompted struggling Anglican parishes in America to borrow the congregationalist practice of placing local authority in the hands of a lay board of directors they called a vestry. Such lay authority had been unheard of in England. In spite of the Protestant influence, the Church of England sustained its polity and remained as hierarchical after the Reformation as it had been before. Authority resided in the bishops, to be delegated in

part to parish priests but never to the laity. Lay persons could exert considerable influence on the church through their theological and spiritual qualities, as well as the power of the purse, which was felt on many occasions. But the authority to govern rested elsewhere.

The task of procuring clergy for the church fell to the vestries. They sent countless appeals to England—even sometimes offering special bonuses to priests who would come to the colonies. Often, however, those who would leave a comfortable post in England for the uncertainties of the New World turned out to be incompetent. Although some were inspired with a missionary vocation and served faithfully under the trying conditions overseas, most fell far below the expectations of the congregations who called them. Rather than turn their authority in the parish over to them, many vestries made use of a legal technicality to keep it in their own hands.

Under Virginia colonial law, the legislative assembly installed a priest as rector of a parish when the vestry sent them official notification that they had called him to that office. Once installed, the priest could not be removed as rector except for the gravest of charges, and then only by a long and difficult process. Many vestries simply refused to send the official notification, keeping the priest on a temporary basis indefinitely. A priest could hardly look with enthusiasm at the prospect of being a hired employee of the vestry, subject to dismissal at any time. Under such circumstances a call to the American mission field sounded even less attractive.

In 1693 the College of William and Mary at Williamsburg opened its doors to train local students for the Anglican ministry. This venture proved a less satisfactory solution to the problem of raising up an indigenous Anglican clergy than Harvard and Yale had provided for the Congregationalists. Graduates still had to make the long and expensive voyage to England for ordination. By the time the college began to operate, vestries and the clergy alike had begun to have second thoughts about an American episcopate. Membership on a vestry had become the prerogative of a newly-emerging American aristocracy which was reluctant to see its position of authority and prestige weakened by the presence of a bishop. Priests who had become accustomed to complete freedom from supervision were in no hurry to place themselves under such authority again. Under such conditions the Anglican Church fared poorly. Even in New England the tight control the Congregational Church exercised was unable to prevent groups from dissenting. In the southern colonies, where official establishment carried little weight and no attempts were made to prohibit other groups from founding congregations, non-Anglican churches attracted more members than the Church of England.

It was the low condition of spiritual life, however, more than small membership rolls, that most upset devout members of the church. When the

royal couple, William and Mary, took the throne and tried to foster the Anglican establishment in the colonies, the bishop of London asserted his jurisdiction more firmly. He appointed certain resident American priests his commissaries and delegated authority to them. James Blair in Virginia and Thomas Bray in Maryland served well in this capacity. Their authority was always limited, however, and they could not ordain clergy.

In 1701, as a result of Thomas Bray's persistent urging, the archbishop of Canterbury lent his support to the foundation in England of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts, soon to be universally recognized in the colonies by the initials S.P.G. To the S.P.G. goes the credit for pulling the Anglican church in America out of its low estate. The Society recruited able priests in England and provided them with adequate stipends.

The extent of the S.P.G.'s work was impressive. The missionaries were not content simply to supply the already existing parishes in Virginia or those that had been established in the Carolinas and Georgia under the new policy of William and Mary's reign. They invaded the hostile territory of New England and successfully challenged the Congregationalist monopoly there. In New York the token assertion of Anglican establishment took on a new life. Even in Quaker Pennsylvania and the largely Dutch Reformed territory of New Jersey, the Church of England's presence became noticeable. While its appeal was usually limited to the landed aristocracy, and its numbers were still small, Anglicanism recovered from the immediate danger of dying for want of clerical leadership.

The Presbyterian Church

The Calvinist form of the Reformed tradition had taken root in Scotland in the sixteenth century under John Knox's leadership. The Church of Scotland, the Kirk, was presbyterian in polity. The presbyters of local congregations within an area comprised a presbytery to govern ecclesiastical affairs within the region, and the presbyteries sent representatives to the synod, which had oversight over the larger region it covered.

Calvinism was not always presbyterian in its polity, however. The Congregationalists of New England were Calvinist in their theology, even though they chose to resist any polity that removed ultimate authority from the local congregation.

In the American colonies, the presbyterian movement contained three major strains:

- 1) former New England Congregationalists who decided they preferred a presbyterian discipline to what they were experiencing there;
- 2) new immigrants from Scotland or northern Ireland; and
- 3) the Dutch Reformed Church that had brought Presbyterianism to the New Netherlands before the English acquired it.

Of these, the Scottish-Irish immigration was the largest.

One of the earliest workers in the Presbyterian Church was Francis Makemie, whose Scottish ancestors had settled in northern Ireland. Joining the migration to the New World, Makemie landed in New England, and soon devoted himself to spreading Presbyterian Calvinism throughout the northern colonies under the sponsorship of the United Brethren, a London-based society. He was instrumental in forming the first American presbytery at Philadelphia in 1706. By the time of his death in 1708 he had founded several Presbyterian churches in the middle colonies.

It was not until after 1720, however, that the Scotch-Irish immigration began in earnest. As the new settlers spread along the Appalachian range from New York through the Shenandoah valley into the southern mountains, the Presbyterian Church grew with them. By 1716, only ten years after the formation of the Philadelphia Presbytery, Philadelphia became the site of the Philadelphia Synod, comprised of the presbyteries of Philadelphia, Long Island, and New Castle, Delaware.

In Connecticut, the voluntary associations of Congregationalist churches—formed to preserve the orthodoxy that seemed to be losing ground in Massachusetts—looked more like Presbyterian polity than the earlier independence of New England congregationalism. Scotch-Irish immigrants to that colony found it easy to establish their Presbyterian congregations virtually unnoticed. Connecticut Congregationalists and their new neighbors shared the same Reformed theology and considered themselves members of the same communion. Not until they found themselves sufficiently numerous to form presbyteries did it seem necessary to identify themselves as Presbyterians distinct from the Congregationalist General Association.

Of all the Christian groups that came to the colonies from England, the Quakers found the least hospitable welcome. When the first Quaker missionaries arrived in 1656, Rhode Island alone let them set up their meeting houses—so named to show they rejected all religious buildings or institutions. Convinced that through the gift of the Holy Spirit they possessed the inner light of Christ in their souls, they dispensed with all versions of formal worship, meeting together in silence until one of their members was moved by the Spirit to speak words of truth to the congregation. Although this simple faith made their spiritual lives joyful and instilled a degree of honesty and simplicity many other Christians lacked, their missionary zeal struck members of other churches as excessive and irritating. Quakers criticized the hypocrisy and idolatry they saw in others, and even interrupted people at worship in non-Quaker churches, thundering their denunciations and pronouncements from outside. It is not surprising that they met with reprisals—including the penalty Mary Clark suffered in Boston—twenty stripes with a three corded whip laid on with fury. Even in colonies less oppressive than the early Massachusetts theocracy, they were frequently physically abused. As time went by,

The Quakers

however, their teaching earned them a little more tolerance from the other churches. By 1674 the Friends, as they called themselves, had been accepted as odd but harmless. With the founding of Pennsylvania as a Quaker colony in 1681, immigrants from England swelled their numbers. At the close of the seventeenth century, they ranked as the fifth largest denomination in the colonies.

Large numbers could not ensure lasting success, however. Without a formal liturgy to carry their expression of worship, second-generation Quakers found it hard to sustain the enthusiasm and commitment of their Spirit-filled parents. Some grew unwilling to accept the plain style of life and dress and the strong pacifist stand their doctrine required. It marked them off from their neighbors too much. Members started to dwindle and lessen their commitment. By mid-century the movement had subsided into a quiet, sedate group much diminished in size and fervor. Nonetheless, as “the friendly persuasion,” Quakers continue to exert a beneficial moral influence on American society, even to the present day.

The Roman Catholic Church

Throughout the colonial period Roman Catholicism was a minority religion in America. The old antipathies lingering from conflicts between English monarchs and the papacy crossed the ocean with the colonists; few English Catholics could be persuaded to emigrate even when Lord Baltimore founded his Maryland colony and sponsored a ship to the New World in 1633. By 1700 Roman Catholics could be found only in Maryland, among a few scattered families in Pennsylvania, and a few individuals in New York. Roman Catholics in the new colonies found themselves with many of the same problems that beset Anglicans. For several years they had no bishops, and some parishes adopted the “vestry” system for their governance. Although this movement was rapidly quelled, the general tone of egalitarianism and antiauthoritarianism that characterized the colonies influenced the Catholics, most of whom were from relatively well-to-do backgrounds. In 1789, Rome even permitted the first American bishop, John Carroll (1735-1815), to be elected by the clergy, a practice that did not continue. It was not until well after the colonial period that the Catholic countries of Europe yielded immigrants to swell their numbers.

Church & Sect

Some sociologists of religion use the words “church” and “sect” to distinguish between two types of religious institutions. Church refers to a religious body that tries, so far as possible, to include all members of society within its ranks. To do this, it makes its requirements for membership as broad as it can, within the limits of its essential self-understanding. A sect, on the other hand, is more exclusive. It accepts members only from those who adhere to particular beliefs and practices that mark it off—often in protest—from the prevailing church. Applying these meanings of the words, the groups that comprised the radical reformation were sects.

The distinction between sect and church is a relative one. Some of the Puritans, for example, withdrew from the Anglican establishment and

became dissenters. Under the circumstances prevailing in England, they displayed the characteristics of a sect. In the Massachusetts Bay Colony, on the other hand, the same Puritans were a church; in relation to them the Baptists were sectarian. As the New England Puritans discovered, when a sect becomes a church, the features that set it apart from society grow less distinct.

In Germany after the Thirty Years' War (1618-1648) living conditions were difficult for almost everyone. The land had been laid waste, the economy all but destroyed. Among those most bitterly affected by bad times were the small radical sects. Isolated from the mainstream of German society by their sectarian exclusiveness, they were allowed little share in the meager resources that society was able to muster. When William Penn issued urgent appeals for settlers, three German sects responded to his invitation: the Mennonites, the Dunkers, and the Schwenkfelders.

German Sects

The Mennonites were followers of Menno Simons, a sixteenth-century Anabaptist. They espoused pacifism, lived a life of austere morality, and practiced believers' baptism. Accustomed to living apart from society's worldly temptations, they had no desire to settle in the midst of the growing population along the American coastline. They trekked deep into the interior of Pennsylvania and established a self-sufficient community in what is now Lancaster County.

The Dunkers were German Baptists. An offshoot of the seventeenth-century Pietist movement in German Lutheranism, they adopted Anabaptist views about believers' baptism and insisted on immersion as the only proper method of administering it—hence their nickname, Dunkers. They settled with other German immigrants at Germantown, near Philadelphia, the city of brotherly love.

The Schwenkfelders were Spiritualists. They emphasized the Holy Spirit's inspiration rather than the written word of the scriptures. Hounded from place to place in Germany for generations, they found refuge, like the Moravians, on Count von Zinzendorf's Saxon estate in 1720. In 1734 they came to Philadelphia. The Quakers invited them to join their English brand of Spiritualism, but the Schwenkfelders preferred to retain their ethnic identity.

Unlike these smaller sects, who migrated to the New World as entire communities, most of the German immigrants of pre-revolutionary America came alone or as families. Most were refugees, made homeless by the economic depression in Germany and torn from their ancestral roots. Some signed themselves into indentured service, contracting to work in the new country as servants or apprentices to a tradesman. Under such conditions few felt any close ties to the Lutheran faith of their homeland, and even fewer could have aspired to found or lead new Lutheran congregations.

While shiploads of Germans were coming to America, only a few German Lutheran congregations existed to serve them. To remedy this, Lutheran Pietists at the University of Halle subsidized the first active missionary enterprise among the German-American Lutheran population. They sent Henry Melchior Muhlenberg to Philadelphia in 1742. Under his leadership, seven Lutheran congregations were founded, staffed with ministers sent from Halle in response to Muhlenberg's pleas. In 1748 he formed the first Lutheran Synod in America, the Ministerium of Pennsylvania.

Even the most successful denominational enterprises failed to reach most of the settlers' lives. Except for the few groups that made the pilgrimage to the New World for explicitly religious motives, most of the settlers were independent-minded, self-sufficient adventurers seeking either to make their fortunes from the opportunities of the new American society, or at least to survive within broader economic limits than at home. Religion was not a very important aspect of most colonials' lives. According to some estimates, no more than ten percent of the colonists were active in the affairs of any church. The contrast was striking between the hopes for a new and vigorous Christian commonwealth that had inspired the Plymouth Pilgrims and the reality that had emerged a century and a half later in the American colonies. It offered little encouragement for the future of Christianity in the New World.

PARALLEL GUIDE 2

The Great Awakening

Summary

During the eighteenth century, Christianity in North America awakened to a new phenomenon—a great evangelical revival (renewal). In response to the dryness of eighteenth-century rationalism and deism there arose a new fervor among the Protestant groups that had established a foothold in the colonies. This era gave rise to missionary groups and, amidst a general lethargy among Anglicans, the growth of the Methodist Church in the English colonies took place.

Learning Objectives

- Identify:
 - The Reformed tradition
 - The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S. P. G.)
 - Theodore J. Frelinghuysen
 - Gilbert Tennent
 - Jonathan Edwards
- Define what historians mean by “The Great Awakening”
- Discuss:
 - The importance of George Whitefield
 - The Methodist Episcopal Church
 - The significance of the revival in America’s Protestant churches

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

The American experience shaped the new church and has shaped religion in America, especially among the Protestants, ever since. How has this experience shaped you? What do you perceive as the influence of the revival tradition on Christianity in general?

Preparing for Your Seminar

Look back over the previous three years of work in EFM. What do you find might serve as antecedents for the revival tradition that became strong in the eighteenth century? What does this tradition bring to the church? How might it detract from the gospel?

Additional Sources

Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1965).

Chapter 2
THE GREAT AWAKENING

The pattern of spiritual revival that took shape in the American colonies was no novelty; it had clear antecedents in Europe. In seventeenth-century Germany, for example, Lutherans fell into a spiritual lethargy by overemphasizing theological details at the expense of the central message of the gospel. Pietism arose in response to restore the church's vitality. Eighteenth-century Deism in England appealed in the measured tones of rationalism to a natural God who would not answer anyone's prayer. Deism had created a spiritual vacuum, and Evangelicals rushed in to fill it. The pattern was repeated in English America, with colonial modifications.

Rationalism had its disciples among the colonial leaders. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* reveals a man who equated religion with common sense and reason. Simple, common-sense morality, guided by moderation and prudence, spelled religion for him. Such views were common in the emerging colonial aristocracy. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington shared the American version of Deism with Franklin, and Thomas Paine—whose booklet *Common Sense* stirred up revolutionary passions—went the next step to atheism. He found no need to appeal to the Almighty for support of principles he believed inherent in reason itself.

Most American colonists remained untouched by the rationalistic spirit that had sapped the vitality of English spiritual life. Their religious commitment ebbed for two main reasons. They lost touch with the old-world cultures that had kept them rooted in church life, and they found the various new denominations often contentious and confusing.

The original Puritans who set sail for New England and the German sectarians who sought refuge in Pennsylvania were alike in one respect. They emigrated as entire communities. They brought with them the customs, beliefs, friends, and families that had given shape and stability to their lives in the home countries. Most of the other settlers, however, came singly or in single family units. Uprooted from their native lands and their familiar social setting, they had to forge new patterns for life in a strange new world. The decision to emigrate required traits of independence and initiative that were intensified by the task of domesticating a wild continent. Many settlers who had participated only peripherally in church life back home—out of custom rather than personal commitment—did not seek out a congregation in which to worship when they arrived in the New World. Even those who cherished their Christian faith often found it difficult to affiliate with a strange congregation. Some no doubt read the Bible at home and led their families in prayer at meal times, but did not join a church. Others found their spiritual energies exhausted by the tasks of daily life. For them, religion became a thing of the past.

**Background
for Revival**

**Separation
from the
Old World**

Congregational

Life in the New World presented challenges to the churches. In New England the Congregationalists found it difficult to make the transition from sect to church. As a small group within a parent communion, or as an exclusive sect set apart from the culture in which it lived, it could continue to insist on the Puritan criterion for membership: a personal spiritual experience. When congregationalists tried to be the established church for an entire colony, they found the standard was impossible to support. What, then, was the Congregational Church to become? The struggle between Harvard's liberals and Yale's conservatives was symptomatic of this internal dilemma.

Reformed

Some denominations in the New World reflected ethnic backgrounds more than doctrinal distinctions. Dutch Reformed, French Reformed, German Reformed, and Scotch-Irish Presbyterian denominations were all Calvinists. True, their confessions contained slight variations in doctrinal statements. The Westminster Confession defined the Scottish version of the Reformed tradition and was adopted—with some reservations—by the Congregationalists. It differed in some minor respects from the earlier confessions composed by the other reformed groups. Yet it was not doctrine but ethnic background that kept these denominations separate from one another. To many new settlers it was very important to go to a church where they heard and spoke the language of the old country. Variations in religious teaching or worship were not as important as congenial fellowship.

Anglican

The Church of England in the colonies faced problems it had not known in England. The Elizabethan Settlement let people of diverse doctrinal persuasions come into the national church. This was Elizabeth's aim when she determined that the form of worship should be consistent throughout the realm, while theological convictions might vary. Her policy met with relative success, except with extreme Puritans on the one hand and Roman Catholics on the other, who found it impossible to live within the *via media*. After the restoration of the English monarchy, even many moderate Puritans found themselves unwilling to accept its terms. For most English people, however, it was easy to tell what the Church of England stood for: it was English Christianity—a compound of the traditions, customs, beliefs, and sentiments that had always been there. With all the changes that took place in the upper echelons of church and state, it was remarkable how little had changed in everyday life. By and large, the same priests served the same congregations in the same ways, no matter who was king or archbishop. Once people recovered from the trauma they had felt when the liturgy was translated into English, most citizens of the realm rested content to assume that to be English meant to be Anglican.

Everything was different in the colonies. Everything was new. The village parish that had always been there was not there. The parish church

had been the repository of generations of past memories, all of them together defining what it meant to be Anglican. It was untranslatable and impossible to export. The attempt to establish the Church of England as the official church in the southern colonies was doomed to failure from the beginning. It may have been true in England that to be English meant to be Anglican; it was not true that to be Virginian meant to be Anglican. On the contrary, in America, to be Anglican meant little more than to be English. It is little wonder that the dissolving Anglican spirit in the churches would be a harbinger of the dissolution of governmental ties between England and its colony.

For the most part the missionaries sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) were able pastors and teachers. They did much to raise the spiritual level of the struggling Anglican congregations in the colonies. More importantly, however, they imported an emphasis entirely new to Congregationalist New England. Through them the Catholic tradition as it exists in Anglican form became known, especially in Connecticut. Under S.P.G. auspices, Anglicanism began to stand out from the others by virtue of its doctrine of the church and its episcopal (having overseers or bishops) polity.

In September 1722, five Congregationalist ministers, one of them the president of Yale College, shocked their colleagues by announcing that they had become convinced by the S.P.G. apologists that their ordinations were invalid. Four of them went to England to receive ordination by Anglican bishops and returned to serve Anglican parishes in America. It was the beginning of many such conversions. Congregationalists were irate. It seemed to them that the S.P.G. was stealing sheep already in the fold rather than seeking the lost. The influx of clergy who had become Anglican by conviction rather than heritage did much to revitalize the Anglican Church in New England. There, where it was not the established church, it had found a distinctive characteristic by which to appeal for loyalty. In the eyes of most Americans, however, the Church of England stood as little more than a symbol of English culture.

Of all the major religious bodies, only the Baptists were gaining new converts when the eighteenth century opened. They continued to follow the tradition, gradually abandoned by the Congregationalists, that required a personal spiritual experience for membership. The rapid growth of the Baptist churches indicated that such an approach was effective for many who were spiritually starved in their own denominations.

Spiritual hunger differs from physical hunger. It is usually characterized by a diffused apathy rather than by acute pangs and often goes unnoticed until someone draws attention to it. Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed pastor of several small congregations in New Jersey's Raritan Valley, began pointing out its presence. He had seen the vitality of the experiential religion still flourishing in Holland after the English

The Great Awakening

**Theodore J. Frelinghuysen
(1691-1748)**

Puritans had taken refuge there a century earlier. The contrast he saw in his American congregations appalled him. They were going through the prescribed forms of worship, but showed no hint of spiritual transformation in their lives. It seemed enough simply to affirm their national identity by belonging to a Dutch church. As for Christian conviction, they showed none of it.

In 1719, soon after his arrival from Holland as pastor, Frelinghuysen began a campaign to awaken them. He visited families in their homes, engaging them in conversations about the deeper issues in their lives and praying with them. He preached about the reality of sin and the grace of the gospel and called his hearers to take their Christian faith seriously. He spoke so sharply to his congregations that many among them took offense; groups split into factions over his style of ministry.

He became unpopular not only in his own congregations but beyond them. Many of the other Dutch ministers in New Jersey thought he was too much of a zealot and sided with those of his flock who wanted him to leave. He had begun to enforce a long-standing Reformed discipline that required people to prepare themselves rigorously before they received communion at quarterly celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Frelinghuysen insisted that members of his congregation go through a period of deep soul-searching, to turn from sin and change their ways.

Frelinghuysen's persistence, however, began to bear fruit after more than six years of painful work. By 1726, many of his people had experienced strong emotional conversions. Their faith had been awakened, and Christianity had become an affair of the heart for them. Even those who did not undergo such a spiritual experience themselves came to accept the phenomenon as normative and tried to approximate it by making a deeper commitment to worship and to the church's moral standards. Seeing such fruits, many of Frelinghuysen's fellow ministers revised their estimate of him and followed his example.

**Gilbert
Tennent
(1703-1764)**

Frelinghuysen's activities attracted the attention of a minister outside Dutch Reformed circles, Gilbert Tennent, of the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church. Called to a church in New Brunswick in 1726 when Frelinghuysen's revival was at its height, Tennent was inspired to try to duplicate it in his own congregation. He knew that the heart's inner commitment to faith transcends the mind's assent to doctrine. His own faith had been awakened by his father, William Tennent (ca. 1673-1748), who had trained Gilbert and two of his brothers for the Presbyterian ministry. Neither father nor sons, however, had yet found an effective way to arouse their congregations to a like awareness of God's grace.

Gilbert recognized a pattern in Frelinghuysen's sermons: first, stir up the terrors of hell and damnation, then preach the reassuring message of the gospel. When he preached that way to his Presbyterians, he began to

get results. By 1730 several other Presbyterian preachers, including Gilbert's brothers John and William Jr., joined in the movement for renewal, and several congregations within the Philadelphia Synod began to take on new spiritual vigor as a result.

Both revival movements, the Dutch Reformed and the Presbyterian, were supported by the Calvinist teaching that salvation comes only as a free gift from God. Neither Frelinghuysen nor the Tennents emphasized doctrine in their preaching. Aiming their messages straight to the hearts of their hearers, they stressed the immediate experience of grace and left theology in the background. That sinners receive the gift of God was the important thing; they could learn later that it came because of God's eternal act of predestination.

Jonathan Edwards, however, a brilliant young New England scholar, achieved conversions by a direct appeal to Calvinist theology. In 1727 he came to Northampton, Massachusetts, to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), the minister of the Congregational Church there and, at his grandfather's death two years later, was called to succeed him as minister. As a tutor at Yale, before coming to Northampton, he saw in Massachusetts a theological trend that distressed him. The rationalistic tenor of the eighteenth century had prompted many New England Congregationalists to consider the doctrine of original sin an affront to common sense. Human beings were not, they said, totally depraved. The mental capacity God has given us not only renders us capable of doing great things, but more importantly it provides our only basis of moral responsibility. Reason alone enables us to distinguish right from wrong. The doctrine of original sin, they said, makes nonsense of moral responsibility.

**Jonathan
Edwards
(1703-1758)**

The argument was not new. Lutherans had fought it out in debate between the Philippists and the strict Lutherans; Roman Catholics addressed it in the Molinist controversy. (Luis de Molina, a sixteenth century Jesuit argued that, given divine grace, the human will was free.) But Edwards believed he saw a direct connection between this view, which he compared to Arminianism (see Year 3), and the moral laxity he saw around him. He observed an attitude of complacency about life that disposed people to take the moral demands of Christianity too lightly. Rather than fostering moral responsibility, the new perspective was undermining it by removing the threat of the judgment that was absolutely inescapable except for the grace of God.

Edwards first tried to reverse the trend toward moral and spiritual indifference by preaching in a fairly low key to the young people of Northampton. They responded to his pastoral concern for them but seemed unaffected by his sermons. Meeting with them in small groups, he persuaded them to behave with greater decorum and go to church more regularly—little more.

In 1734, however, the earnest former tutor changed his approach. Putting aside his exhortations, he preached a series of five sermons on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He read them to his congregations, much as he would have lectured to a class at Yale. His tightly-knit theological discourses could not have sounded less like the emotional extemporaneous preaching of the New Jersey revivalists. But they accomplished all he had hoped; his hearers began to have conversion experiences.

Without consciously planning it, Edwards had followed Gilbert Tennent's pattern for preaching: first describe the terrors of judgment and then speak the good news of redemption. He made his appeal in his own style—calm, reasoned, scholarly tones quite different from Tennent's skillful oratory. The results were the same. By 1736 the revival had spread to several towns around Northampton, with Edwards in great demand as a preacher. In 1737 he published a treatise called *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton*. In England, John Wesley read it; George Whitefield happened to come across it during his first visit to Georgia in 1738.

George Whitefield (1714-1770)

Frelinghuysen, the Tennents, and Edwards had all fed the souls of people suffering from spiritual hunger. But their work was limited to their immediate surroundings. It took George Whitefield to spread revivalism through the American colonies and precipitate the Great Awakening. His first visit to Georgia in 1738 had proved he was a powerful preacher who evoked considerable immediate response. But his work in Georgia had no lasting effects. It had to be regarded as little more than an exciting interlude: the Southern colonies had not yet produced their own revivals. When he returned from England a year later, going through Philadelphia on his way back to Georgia, he was persuaded to remain in the city long enough to preach in some of the churches there.

Success

As an Anglican priest, Whitefield preached to the Anglican congregation first, then accepted invitations to speak from the pulpits of other denominations. He also went out in the open air to preach, as he had to the English coal miners. The steps of the court house served as his pulpit. Large crowds gathered to hear him in the evenings. His success in Philadelphia was as great as it had been the year before in Georgia. He was now working on ground that had been prepared for him. William Tennent invited him to go on a preaching tour from Philadelphia to New York where congregations had already been aroused by earlier revivalist preachers. Much encouraged by his reception, Whitefield abandoned his earlier plans to sail from Philadelphia to Savannah, where he wanted to build an orphanage. Instead, he went there by land, preaching all along the way wherever people would listen to him.

After a brief stay in Savannah, he returned to Philadelphia and from there began a tour of New England. Once again throngs of people came to hear his powerful oratory. Harvard and Yale welcomed him, and

Jonathan Edwards was his host at Northampton. He represented a new kind of preacher—a man who crossed denominational lines as though they did not exist and for whom any place was a suitable pulpit. Many preachers copied his style, as Wesley had in England. But his chief lasting effect was in spreading experiential Christianity throughout the colonies, liberating it from the isolated pockets in which it had sprung up, and in ignoring the theological and cultural differences that separated the denominations. Wherever his influence was felt, theological boundaries disappeared in the wake of a Christian faith defined in terms of individual experience of salvation. He made three other trips to the colonies. A fourth, to Massachusetts in 1770, was cut short by his death.

By 1740 the Great Awakening was under way, except among Anglicans and Lutherans. Whitefield had been received unsympathetically by many of his Anglican colleagues, who objected to his style as well as his personalistic theology. Lutherans were largely untouched by revivalism because Muhlenberg was performing his task of creating support for the foundation of enough Lutheran congregations to meet the needs of the burgeoning German immigration. The growth that resulted from his efforts made revival unnecessary.

The awakening affected most of the other major denominations, however, and met with a ready welcome at first. Before long, however, a reaction began to set in. Gilbert Tennent and Whitefield himself made some unguarded statements about clergy they considered not fully converted. Epithets such as “pharisee-teachers,” “blind men,” and men who did not “experientially know Christ” understandably struck sparks from the ministers to whom they were addressed. Many of the new evangelists who joined their efforts to the cause of the awakening were even more sharp-tongued.

At a meeting in 1741 the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church expelled Tennent’s revivalist party. The ousted group, comprising twenty-two ministers in all, formed a new Synod of New York which remained as a separate branch of the Presbyterian Church for seventeen years until the breach was healed in 1758. By that time the revivalists had softened their approach, and the more positive aspects of the awakening had proved to the others that it was a movement of lasting value.

In Massachusetts the new movement ran into opposition, principally from Charles Chauncey, minister of the Congregational First Church of Boston, one of the rationalists whom Edwards classified as an Arminian. He denounced enthusiasm from his pulpit in an extended series of barrages. The faculties of Harvard and Yale, stung by Whitefield’s declaration that nothing could be hoped for from clergy trained at their institutions, joined in deploring Whitefield’s methods and his judgmental attitude. New England Congregationalism was split between the traditional Old Lights and the New Lights, those who favored the revival.

Opposition

The movement produced several lasting results. It attracted countless converts; all the denominations involved in it grew much larger. As people increased their commitment to the churches, they also became more aware of social problems; missionary work and charitable enterprises were undertaken for the benefit of Native Americans, slaves, and poor whites. Several new colleges were founded to train the larger number of clergy needed to serve the new congregations. On the spiritual side, there arose among Americans a notion that God was preparing a special destiny for the colonies of the New World. More and more frequently, preachers envisioned colonists as having made a new Exodus across a new body of water, the Atlantic, to a new Promised Land.

At the movement's height, many had wanted to purify the churches of all but the converted. Now they began to fear that such a goal would not be achieved. Edwards himself was dismissed from his post at Northampton for refusing to admit to his congregation anyone who had not shown signs of a spiritual experience. The Baptists, who had come into existence as a result of the same issue in the days of the Massachusetts Bay Colony's experiment with the halfway covenant, now once again became beneficiaries, as dissatisfied zealots left the Congregational Church to join them.

**Methodism—
Devereux
Jarratt
(1733-1801)**

American Methodism began as a delayed Anglican version of the awakening, long after the movement had run its course in the other denominations. Devereux Jarratt, rector of the Anglican parish at Bath, Virginia, had sought ordination in the Church of England as a result of his own conversion experience. As a young man in Virginia he was nominally a member of the Anglican church, solely because it was the established church and he had not cared enough about religion to join any other.

Through his studies he became increasingly aware of his own sinfulness but found no way to experience joy or peace. Meanwhile, Presbyterian revivalists had carried the message of the Great Awakening into the South, and Jarratt began to go to hear them. It was a great contrast to hear such fiery exposition of the doctrines of sin and salvation after long years of listening to the ethical exhortations that characterized most Anglican preaching. His own experience of salvation occurred while he was reading a passage of scripture. Of that moment he later wrote, "The comforts I then felt were beyond expression, and far superior to anything I had ever known before that memorable hour It was a little heaven on earth—so sweet, so ravishing, so delightful. I uttered not a word, but silently rejoiced in God my Saviour."

In the spring of 1762 Jarratt sailed for England and presented himself to the bishop of London for ordination. By this time he had read deeply in scripture and theology and was judged well prepared by the bishop. He was ordained deacon at Christmas, 1762, and priest one week later. While in England he met both Whitefield and John Wesley and heard them preach—without being greatly impressed.

On his return to Virginia in 1763 he was called as rector at Bath. The sobering reality of his responsibilities pressed on him as he saw the apathy of his congregation and its almost complete ignorance of the Christian religion. The Calvinist view of original sin and divine grace had shaped his theology, and the only effective style of preaching he knew was what he had heard from the Presbyterian evangelists. Such preaching was entirely foreign to his parishioners. He persisted in it, however, and as he records in his journal, “In the year 1765, the power of God was more sensibly felt by a few. These were constrained to apply to me, and inquire, ‘What they must do to be saved?’”

Soon Jarratt embarked on a preaching career that resembled those of the northern evangelists two decades earlier; he began to preach in private homes and from pulpits wherever they were open to him. Many Anglican priests challenged him, calling him “an enthusiast, fanatic, visionary, dissenter, Presbyterian, madman, and what not.”

The major threat to Jarratt’s work came from the Baptists rather than from his fellow Anglicans, however. In 1769 Baptist evangelists came down from the North, extremists of the revivalist movement in New England who had found even the awakened Congregational Church too lax. Their attacks on the Anglican Church in Virginia and its clergy knew no bounds. Jarratt himself was included in their condemnation on the grounds that he had the form of evangelical faith but still retained the trappings of the unreformed—a reference to the liturgical framework in which Anglican worship was set. Jarratt knew the Baptists were undermining his own evangelistic aims; their attacks confirmed the worst suspicions his fellow priests had been harboring about his own enthusiasm.

The Methodist movement in England was still operating within the Church of England. Wesley firmly enforced his rule that no lay preacher was to perform any sacramental function. In 1766 two Methodist immigrants arrived in America, one in New York and the other in Maryland. In 1769 Wesley sent the first officially appointed lay minister who was followed soon after by seven more. When Robert Williams, a Methodist lay preacher, arrived in Virginia in 1771, Jarratt made his first reacquaintance with Methodism since his meeting with Wesley and Whitefield in England years earlier.

Williams assured Jarratt that the Methodists were loyal members of the Church of England, determined not to usurp any of the authority or functions of the clergy. He often recited the motto that Wesley constantly reiterated: “He that leaves the Church of England leaves the Methodists.” Jarratt determined then and there to encourage the Methodist revivals as a counter to the Baptists and as a means of carrying his own evangelistic work further.

Baptist Opposition

Methodist Influence

Alliance with Methodists

Methodism immediately began to spread throughout Virginia and into Maryland. With Jarratt's example and the continued assurances that the Methodist societies served only to renew the spiritual vitality of church people, many Anglican parishes lent support to the movement.

As large numbers of converts began flooding the societies, however, the Methodists' promise not to administer the sacrament of baptism or to celebrate the Eucharist was tested. Jarratt himself traveled long distances to administer the sacraments to the throngs that assembled wherever the itinerant Methodist preachers went, but there were not enough Anglican clergy to supply the need. Some lay ministers, responding to the lack of duly ordained clergy, violated Wesley's strict orders to observe Anglican rules requiring Episcopal ordination.

Protests flew to Wesley in England, and he at first tried to enforce his prohibition against non-episcopal ordination. When the American Revolution broke out, however, further resistance from Wesley was impossible. Anglican clergy, especially the S.P.G. missionaries, whose salaries were paid from England, began to leave the colonies, either for England or for Canada, making the supply of clergy who could minister to the Methodists even more inadequate than it had been. Wesley finally consented to ordain his own clergy.

The Methodist Episcopal Church

In 1784 a General Conference of Methodists was held in Baltimore to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Thomas Coke (1747-1814), a priest in the Church of England, had been sent to America by Wesley, authorized to ordain clergy and given the title superintendent. Wesley refused to use the title bishop; he had convinced himself that authority to ordain was contained in the presbyteral order, but he was equally certain that the episcopate was a distinct order. At the General Conference, Coke ordained Francis Asbury, who had been sent as a lay missionary to America in 1771, making him deacon, presbyter, and superintendent. Jarratt felt himself betrayed. The movement that he prayed would bring evangelical vitality to Anglicanism in America had abandoned the church that sponsored it.

In fact that church had not been willing to embrace his movement. It always held revivalism suspect, and when the revolution drew much of its clerical leadership into the English cause, evangelical Anglicanism had no recourse. American Methodism was launched, and Anglicanism faced many lean years before Jarratt's hopes began to be fulfilled in the evangelical movement after the Revolutionary War.