

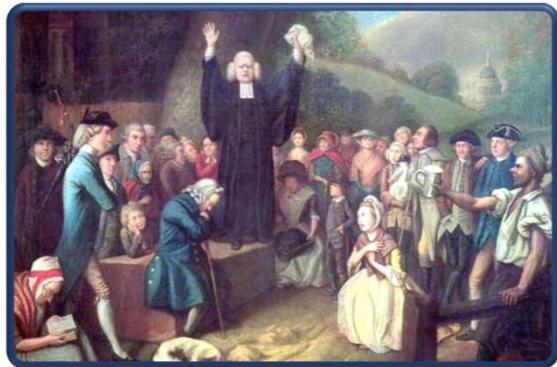
Faith of Freedom: A Survey of Christianity in America



CLASS 3

The 'Great Awakening'

- Other Beginnings
- Figures of Revival
- The Birth of Evangelicalism

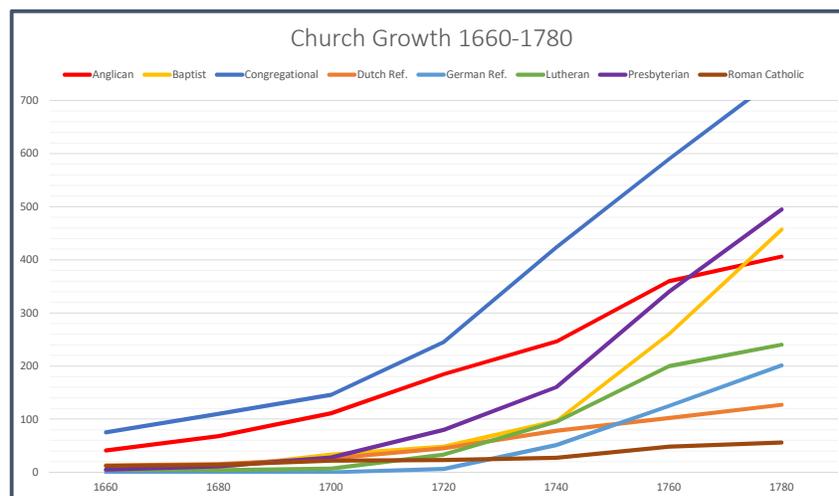


Other Beginnings

- While the Congregationalists cornered the market on religious society in the northeast, and the Anglicans ruled in the southern colonies, a new influx of a variety of Protestant denominations during the era anticipated the later diversity of faith in the American colonies.
- The American colonies saw a massive population growth in the late 1600s and early 1700s. In less than 50 years the number of people rose from 250,000 to over 1 Million
- In 1660, 75% of documented churches were either Congregationalist or Anglican. By 1740, that number was down to 56%



Other Beginnings



Other Beginnings

- The Anglican church continued to have the dominant religious presence in southern colonies (VA, GA, NC, SC) based on its position as the official state church. But with its many failures came stunted growth
 - Among the failed Anglican ministers of the era was John Wesley, who would later found Methodism.

“It is now two years and almost four months since I left my native country, in order to teach the Georgian Indians the nature of Christianity. But what have I learned myself in the meantime? Why, what I the least of all suspect, that I, who went to America to convert others, was never myself converted to God.” – John Wesley

- But Anglican faith would maintain itself based on its acceptance of the slave trade which supported the regional economy to the benefit of its parishioners.



Other Beginnings

- Congregationalists saw the new denominations as a stain upon the ‘holy ground’ of America.

Of Rhode Island: “such a variety of religions together on so small a spot of ground...Antinomians, Anabaptists, Antisabbatarians, Arminians, Socinians, Quakers, Ranters – everything in the world but Roman Catholics and real Christians.” – Cotton Mather

- Baptists
 - Like Puritans, held to Reformed Theology
 - But influenced by European Anabaptists (‘Re-Baptizers’) rejected infant baptism in favor of ‘believer’s baptism,’ and issued the practice by full immersion
 - The first Baptist congregation in America was in Rhode Island and founded by Puritan Dissenter Roger Williams in 1639



Other Beginnings

- Presbyterians
 - Distinguished by their organization wherein local churches are represented by Elders into collective governing 'Presbyteries.'
 - Another staunchly Reformed church based on the Westminster Confession, and mostly made of Scot-Irish immigrants
 - Observed the Lord's Supper in 'Communion Seasons' which would later develop into camp meeting revivals in the 1800s
- Quakers / 'Friends'
 - Religion of informal, personal religion which promoted a mystical piety of experiencing the 'inner light of Christ.'
 - After being expelled from Massachusetts, their leader William Penn obtained most of the land that became Pennsylvania, leading to the 'Holy Experiment' of the city of Philadelphia



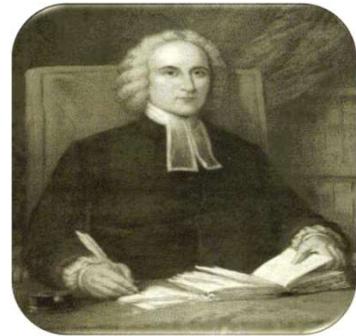
Other Beginnings

- Most churches in colonial America retained religious patterns from their ethnic and denominational ties in Europe, but some marginal expressions of religious freedom and diversity were made.
- Definitive ecclesiastical lines meant more denominational distinction, but also more 'inter-denominational tolerance.'
- By 1730, there were 3 major religious patterns:
 - New England: Dominated by Congregationalists, with some uneasiness about declining church influence
 - Middle Colonies (e.g. RI, MD, PA, NY): Protestant Pluralism
 - Southern Colonies: Anglican status quo as part of a slave-based economic culture



Figures of Revival

- ‘The Great Awakening’ was a movement of spiritual revival and personal piety throughout the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s.
- At the same time the colonies became more populated, the ‘Age of Reason’ was sweeping across Europe. Enlightenment ideas, with their emphasis on scientific progress and individual potential influenced those in America.
- This movement has a complex legacy. Driven by Calvinist thinkers, it reacted against the Enlightenment, but also took advantage of its emphasis on the ‘power of the people’ to promote a more personal relationship with God.

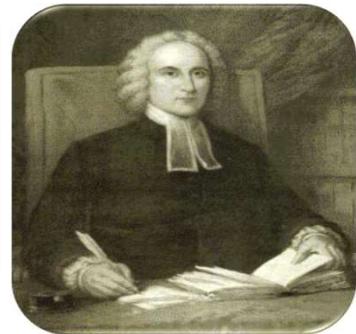


Figures of Revival

- Jonathan Edwards
 - Congregationalist minister and theologian; a resolute Calvinist whose preaching focused on the utter dependence of sinful humanity upon God and his holiness.

On Deuteronomy 32:35: “That the reason why [sinners] are not fallen already and do not fall now is only that God's appointed time is not come. For it is said, that when that due time, or appointed time comes, their foot shall slide. Then they shall be left to fall, as they are inclined by their own weight. God will not hold them up in these slippery places any longer, but will let them go; and then, at that very instant, they shall fall into destruction; as he that stands on such slippery declining ground, on the edge of a pit, he cannot stand alone, when he is let go he immediately falls and is lost.”

— Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*



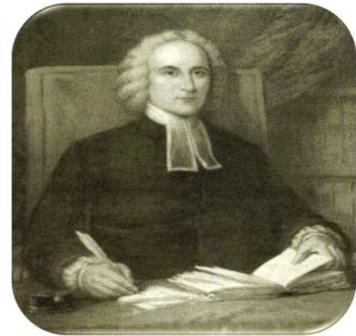
Figures of Revival

- Jonathan Edwards

- Congregationalist minister and theologian; a resolute Calvinist whose preaching focused on the utter dependence of sinful humanity upon God and his holiness.

“So that whatever some have imagined and pretended about Promises made to natural Men’s earnest seeking and knocking, 'tis plain and manifest that whatever Pains a natural Man takes in Religion, whatever Prayers he makes, till he believes in Christ, God is under no manner of Obligation to keep him a Moment from eternal Destruction. So that thus it is, that natural Men are held in the Hand of God over the Pit of Hell”

— Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*



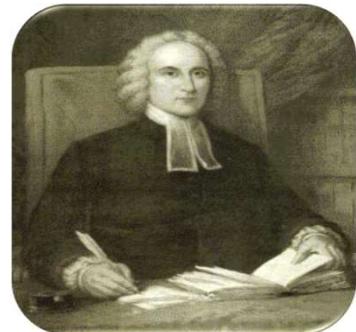
Figures of Revival

- Jonathan Edwards

- Congregationalist minister and theologian; a resolute Calvinist whose preaching focused on the utter dependence of sinful humanity upon God and his holiness.
- But Edwards was also the foremost apologist for the presence of emotion in religious expression, a pattern that began in his Northampton, MA church and spread to other towns

“Spiritual Wisdom and grace is the highest and most excellent gift that ever God bestows on any creature...It is not a thing that belongs to reason...it is not a speculative thing, but depends on the sense of the heart.” — Jonathan Edwards

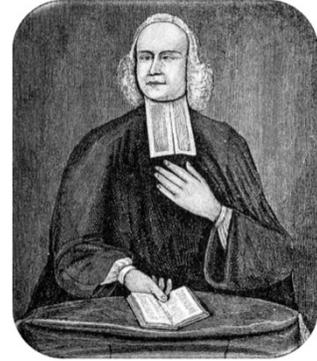
- Edwards’ support of revivals and reports of the activity of the Holy Spirit split Congregationalists into ‘New Light’/‘Old Light’ churches



Figures of Revival

- George Whitefield

- Anglican minister, and associate of the Wesleys, who came to America in 1739 after his innovative preaching style brought scorn among other ministers in England
- An actor by trade, Whitefield was known for his loud and dramatic preaching, enactments of biblical characters, speaking in plain speech without notes, and appealing to the emotions of his audience
- When not offered the pulpit in American churches, he began preaching outdoors and appealed to those who did not attend, and those who were social outcasts, including many slaves.
- Theologically a Calvinist, but took a casual approach to theology, ordination and denominational distinctions



Figures of Revival

- Message

- While Whitefield still emphasized Calvinist doctrines of depraved humanity and predestined election, what Whitefield offered to people was a personal religious experience of conversion.
- Whitefield emphasized the sudden and perceptible 'new birth' of God's salvation for the individual soul
- Took an anti-authoritarian tone against religious establishment

"God, give me a deep humility, a well-guided zeal, a burning love and a single eye, and then let men or devils do their worst!"

— George Whitefield

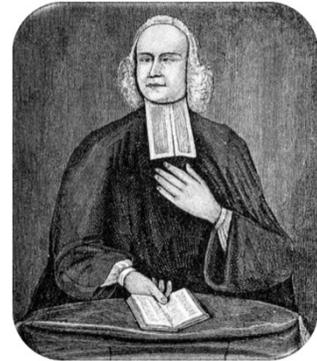


Figures of Revival

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“...every one that has but the least concern for the salvation of his precious and immortal soul, having such promises, such a hope, such an eternity of happiness set before him, should never cease watching, praying, and striving, till he find a real, inward, saving change wrought in his heart, and thereby doth know of a truth, that he dwells in Christ, and Christ in him; that he is a new creature, therefore a child of God” — George Whitefield



Figures of Revival

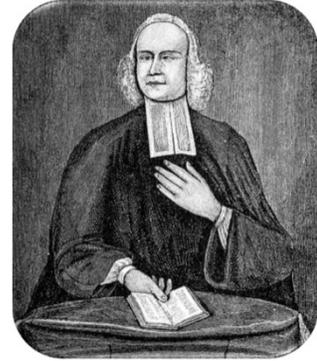
- Popularity

- Preaching tours covered 15+ cities along the East coast, with some estimates of his audiences at up to 8,000 people daily.
- Became known as ‘The Grand Itinerant’
- He also disseminated published materials and sermons which were widely read.
- He was America’s first major ‘celebrity,’ probably heard/read by 50% of all colonists by 1750.
- After his popularity rose, was accepted by more churches, but also other popular figures of the day



Figures of Revival

- Controversies
 - Edwards was accused of promoting nothing more than an empty and vain expression of fanaticism that led to disorder among churches.
 - Whitefield drew considerable criticism both for his preaching, and the 'type' of Christians that his preaching created.
 - An Anglican minister in South Carolina, Alexander Garden appealed to the Bishop of London to have Whitefield excommunicated on the grounds that he taught that salvation was 'an instantaneous work' and not a gradual cooperation of the Holy Spirit with Reason.
 - Many of the Christians who were converted by Whitefield's preaching and joined other denominations (e.g. Baptists, Presbyterians, etc.) actively disrupted the ministries of more traditional Anglican ministers.



The Birth of Evangelicalism

- Due to the revival preaching of many like Edwards and Whitefield, distinct 'evangelical' doctrines developed among the masses regarding the means of salvation:
 - **Conviction:** A sense of anguish and despair that generated from a realization of their sinful condition before God's Law
 - **Conversion:** The spiritual regeneration of a person (solely) through the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit, resulting in saving faith and a new commitment to God's Law
 - **Consolation:** Assurance of Salvation as a product of God's ongoing grace and the continuing sanctification of the believer
- The commonality of this Reformed theology led to broader toleration across denominations

- Robert W Caldwell III, *Theologies of the American Revivalists*.



The Birth of Evangelicalism

- The Great Awakening was a foundational episode in the history of America. It was the first ‘national’ event as it unified people with common experiences across different colonies and denominations
- In the early 1740s, church membership across all denominations rose by an average of 33 members per year per congregation
- Between 1700 and 1740, the number of individual congregations increased by over 300%
- A massive increase in church membership among ‘unofficial’ denominations caused slowed growth for Anglican churches in the south and middle colonies.



The Birth of Evangelicalism

- Because of the increase in visibility of other churches as alternatives to the Anglican Church and Congregationalists, a more democratic approach to church membership and attendance arose
- This also helped facilitate a more ‘evangelical’ form of Protestantism. The emphasis upon the personal experience of conversion as a ‘new birth’ allowed for a feeling of empowerment in making personal decisions in matters of faith and conscience.
 - Note the difference in Puritans who emphasized conversion as a measure of entry into the, united covenanted society, whereas Whitefield emphasizes it for its power to personally convict the individual



The Birth of Evangelicalism

- The movement underscored that Christ and the Holy Spirit are the only mediators for salvation, allowing individuals to have a direct encounter and relationship with God, regardless of church affiliation.
- Evangelization became more a product of ‘charismatic’ preaching than ordination. Baptists grew considerably through the use of itinerant ‘Farmer-Preachers’
- Many slaves heard the gospel for the first time, and were converted, though they stayed subject to their masters.
- The openness of the religious landscape, and the opposition among the more ‘traditional’ churches helped usher in ‘liberty’/‘tyranny’ as spiritual categories.



Review Questions

A) What contrasts do you see between the expectations of Nathan Cole and Benjamin Franklin in their anticipations of hearing George Whitefield preach? How do each of their outcomes change? What might that suggest about the power of charismatic voices?

B) ‘Old Light’ churches refused to acknowledge the power of the revival experiences in the ‘New Light’ churches, citing an empty fanaticism. What is the risk of denying such experiences? What is the risk of accepting them?



Review Questions

C) Whitefield's preaching brought new types of people to Christianity for the first time, and gave many the opportunity to 'join the church of their choice.' How might that affect American attitudes about freedom of religion?

