

# REFORMATION CROSSES THE ATLANTIC TO AMERICA

Focus: the ways the heritage of the Reformation [Justification by Faith] of the old world becomes transformed by interaction with the cultures of the new world.

## **The 17<sup>th</sup> Century: Orthodoxy**

- I. The dynamism of Luther and Calvin of the 16<sup>th</sup> century becomes the orthodoxy of Lutheranism and Calvinism of the 17<sup>th</sup> century
- II. In our Presbyterian setting, let's explore the development of Calvinism.
  1. Calvin: dynamic, creative tension, open-ended, content not to answer every question. Example: election
  2. Calvinism: rational, logical, determined to answer every question
- III. 17<sup>th</sup> century examples:
  - A. The Synod of Dort (1618-1619) in the Netherlands
    1. The problem: Arminians
    2. The answer: the Dutch Calvinist response: 5 points of Calvinism
      - a. Total depravity
      - b. Unconditional election
      - c. Limited Atonement
      - d. Irresistible grace
      - e. Perseverance of the saints
  - B. The English Westminster Confession of Faith (1646)

## **Chapter III Of God's Eternal Decree**

I. God from all eternity, did, by the most wise and holy counsel of His own will, freely, and unchangeably ordain whatsoever comes to pass; yet so, as thereby neither is God the author of sin, nor is violence offered to the will of the creatures; nor is the liberty or contingency of second causes taken away, but rather established.

II. Although God knows whatsoever may or can come to pass upon all supposed conditions; yet has He not decreed anything because He foresaw it as future, or as that which would come to pass upon such conditions.

III. By the decree of God, for the manifestation of His glory, some men and angels are predestinated unto everlasting life; and others foreordained to everlasting death.

IV. These angels and men, thus predestinated, and foreordained, are particularly and unchangeably designed, and their number so certain and definite, that it cannot be either increased or diminished.

V. Those of mankind that are predestinated unto life, God, before the foundation of the world was laid, according to His eternal and immutable purpose, and the secret counsel and good pleasure of His will, has chosen, in Christ, unto everlasting glory, out of His mere free grace and love, without any foresight of faith, or good works, or perseverance in either of them, or any other thing in the creature, as conditions, or causes moving Him thereunto; and all to the praise of His glorious grace.

VI. As God has appointed the elect unto glory, so has He, by the eternal and most free purpose of His will, foreordained all the means thereunto. Wherefore, they who are elected, being fallen in Adam, are redeemed by Christ, are effectually called unto faith in Christ by His Spirit working in due season, are justified, adopted, sanctified, and kept by His power, through faith, unto salvation. Neither are any other redeemed by Christ, effectually called, justified, adopted, sanctified, and saved, but the elect only.

## **18th Century Renewal**

- I. A push back against “dead orthodoxy” with three streams of renewal
  1. Pietism on the European Continent (Lutheran and Reformed): a lay emphasis on a religion of the “heart”
  2. The Wesleyan Revivals in England (Church of England): a lay emphasis on small group “methods” and John Wesley preaching to the poor
  3. The Great Awakening in America (Congregational and Presbyterian): an emphasis on conversion and the “new birth”

### **(1) The Great Awakening (1730-1750)**

“it seem’d as if all the World were growing Religious.”  
Benjamin Franklin, after George Whitefield’s arrival in Philadelphia, 1739

“religion is now in a far worse state than it was [after Whitefield visited].”  
an association of Connecticut ministers, 1745

Farmer Nathan Cole captures the drama of the Great Awakening. He offered a vivid description of the coming of George Whitefield. Reports from Philadelphia that Whitfield “preached like one of the apostles,” had aroused Cole’s interest. He followed the itinerary of Whitfield’s preaching, “hoping to see him.” On the morning of October 23, 1740, a messenger on horseback raced through

Middletown, Connecticut, with news that Whitfield would preach out-of-doors at 10 o'clock that morning. Cole's response was frenzied:

I was in my field at work, I dropped my tool...and ran home to my wife, telling her to make ready quickly to go on and hear Mr. Whitfield preach at Middletown, then ran to my horse with all my might, fearing that I should be late. Having my horse, I with my wife soon mounted. We improved every moment to get along as if we were fleeing for our lives, all the while fearing that we should be too late to hear the sermon, for we had twelve miles to ride.

After the furious ride, Coles described the scene opening before him.

I saw before me a cloud of fog arising. I first thought it came from the great great river, but as I came nearer the road I heard a noise of horses' feet coming down the road and this cloud was a cloud of dust made by the horses feet...When I came within about 20 rods of the road, I could see men and horses slipping along in the cloud like shadows, and as I drew nearer it seemed like a steady stream of horses and their riders, scarcely a horse more than a length behind another, all of a lather and foam with sweat, their breath rolling out of their nostrils every jump. Every horse seemed to go with all his might for the saving of souls. It made me tremble to see the sight.

Finally, Cole got close enough to see Whitfield, who *looked as if we was clothed with authority from the Great God*. Cole listened to a powerful sermon. When it was all over he recorded his response. *It gave me a great heart wound...I saw my righteousness would not save me.*"

- I. George Whitfield:
  - A. Faith does not come by birthright or ancestry
  - B. Each person needs a change of heart
  - C. From right theology (Puritans) to right experience
    - 1. Intellectualism had led to "dead orthodoxy"
    - 2. Emphasis on liturgy had led to "dead worship"
    - 3. Ministers, and their lack of true faith, were part of the problem:
  - D. In emerging church, individual experience became final arbiter of religious faith
- II. Understanding of humanity and contemporary culture
  - A. Implicit model of human psychology: less rational & more emotive
  - B. Whitefield not a theoretician (theologian) but preaching becomes performance

### III. Whitfield's strategy: characteristics of his American revivals

1. Chafed against authority and arbitrary powers
2. Aimed at creative "extrainstitutional" solutions to well-established problems
3. His message and strategy appealed especially to Americans
4. Outdoor preaching more inclusive: social stratification not as great as in England
5. His appeal and legitimacy depended more on public opinion
  1. Public Opinion depended upon access
  2. Access depended upon popularity
6. In England, true legitimacy conveyed from above; in the American colonies it came from below

Sarah Edwards, wife of Jonathan Edwards, offered description of Whitefield. "He makes less of the doctrines than our American preachers generally do and aims more at affecting the heart... It is wonderful to see what a spell he casts over an audience by proclaiming the simplest truths of the Bible. I have seen upwards of a thousand people hang on his words with breathless silence, broken only by an occasional half-suppressed sob . . . a prejudiced person, I know, might say this is all theatrical artifice and display; but not so will anyone think who has seen and known him."

### (2) Voluntarism: A New Principle for a New Nation

After the euphoria of the American Revolution, the joy of enacting a Constitution, and the election of George Washington as the first President, the first years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were as much about strife as stability. Religious leaders were filled as much with discouragement as hope. Why strife?

- A. The French, who had been important allies in the Revolutionary cause, now pursued their own Revolution which:
  1. Secular
  2. Violent
- B. The initial period of one party quickly became two parties (Beecher: "awakened animosities")
- C. Election of Thomas Jefferson as President [1800] disturbed many religious people.
- D. Changes in theology, in New England, the home of Jonathan Edwards, produced Unitarianism
- E. The move for disestablishment left religious leaders feeling vulnerable and unsure of the future

II. With the birth of a new nation a Constitution was adopted (1787) and a Bill of Rights (1991) put in place. The First Amendment of the Bill of Rights reads:

**Amendment I: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or Prohibiting the free exercised thereof;**

III. At the birth of the new nation the church was established in these states:

- A. Congregational: Massachusetts (1833) and Connecticut (1818)
- B. Church of England: (Episcopal) Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, and 5 counties in New York
- C. With a First Amendment in place, and the end of establishment, how would the churches live and grow?
- D. Rather than the pattern of established churches, as there was in England, Scotland, and much of Europe, America, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, witnessed the incredible growth of evangelical religion and a new principle: **voluntarism**.

A delegation from the Congregational Union of England and Wales left diaries of their impressions of “Anniversary Week” in New York City May, 1834.

May 5, Monday

American Anti-Slavery Society, Society’s Rooms, 4 p.m.

American Seamen’s Friend Society, at Chatham Street Chapel, 7:30 p.m.

May 6, Tuesday

American Anti-Slavery Society, at Chatham-Street Chapel, 10 a.m.

Children of the Sabbath Schools appear in the Park at half past 3 p.m.

Revival Tract Society, at Third Free Church, 4 p.m. and in the evening

American Tract Society, Society’s House, 4 p.m.

New York Sunday School Union, Chatham-Street Chapel, half past seven

They attended additional meetings: Presbyterian Education Society,

Seventh Commandment Society, New York City Temperance Society

Daily Prayer Meetings at 5:30 a.m.

- I. After the American Revolution, and Article 1 of the Bill of Rights, which disestablished any national church, how would American Christianity be formed in the new nation?
  - A. One answer: growth of denominations [Methodists and Baptists]
  - B. Second Answer: growth of voluntary societies: why did they grow?
    - 1. A fear: Christianity would retreat from public to private sphere
    - 2. The Evangelical voluntary societies became a major way to link personal and public faith

3. Opportunity provided for individuals from different congregations and denominations to pool their concerns and resources in initiatives in a society that was changing rapidly.

Definition: **“A voluntary association of individuals organized to do a specific task.”**

## II. Characteristics

- A. Individuals, not churches
- B. Laity, not clergy
- C. Deeds, not creeds
- D. A role for women
- E. Cooperation

## III. Some key societies:

- a. American Bible Society
- b. American Education Society
- c. American Board of Foreign Missions
- d. American Sunday-School Union
- e. American Tract Society
- f. American Home Missionary Society
- g. American Colonization Society
- h. American Antislavery Society

## IV. The problem (enemy) they sought to address

- A. The City
- B. The West [The Valley]

Lyman Beecher lecture: “A Plea for the West”

*If we do fail in our great experiment of self-government, our destruction will be as signal as the birthright abandoned, the mercies abused and provocation offered to beneficent Heaven.*

## C. The Anti-Christ

Matters have come to such a pass, that a peaceable man can hardly venture to eat or drink to go to bed or to get up, to correct his children or kiss his wife, without obtaining the permission and the direction of some moral society.”

Orestes Brownson