

American Presbyterians in the Early National Era

I. Presbyterianism After the Revolution

A. Importance of Princeton

1. Founded as College of New Jersey (1746)—First Presbyterian college
2. Famous President: John Witherspoon (1723-94)
 - a. Scottish clergyman opposed to Moderatism
 - b. Signed Declaration of Independence
 - c. Popularized Scottish Common Sense philosophy
 - 1) One can perceive reality through “common sense” observations because senses are dependable
 - 2) Humans all reason from the same principles (e.g., evidential apologetics)
 - 3) Influential concept in 19th-century American intellectual history
 - 4) Optimistic: One can find first principles of politics, science, morals, etc. by careful, honest study
 - 5) Ultimately fails to reckon with the noetic effects of the fall
3. Princeton Seminary
 - a. Founded 1812 as first American Presbyterian Seminary
 - b. Early professors: Archibald Alexander, Samuel Miller, Charles Hodge
 - c. Became leading scholarly Old School institution

B. Plan of Union (1801)

1. Joint effort of Presbyterians and Congregationalists to evangelize the “west”
2. Plan opposed by Old School
 - a. Lacked Presbyterian control (discipline by presbyteries)
 - b. Introduced influence of New England Theology
3. New England Theology
 - a. Traces back to Jonathan Edwards but modified by later proponents
 - b. Disputed Ideas
 - 1) Governmental theory of atonement (Jonathan Edwards Jr.)
 - 2) Questioned imputation of Adam’s sin (Samuel Hopkins)
 - 3) Sin as voluntary action (Nathaniel Taylor)
 - 4) Charles Finney often viewed as climax
4. Brought some New England Congregationalists (e.g., Lyman Beecher) into Presbyterianism
5. Most new churches in west became Presbyterian (because of superior organization and discipline)

C. Old School–New School Tension

1. Old School
 - a. Heir of “Scots-Irish” Presbyterianism
 - b. Stress on denominational distinctives
 - c. Strict Westminster theology
 - d. Presbyterian polity
 - e. Generally opposed political activism *in the church* (“spirituality of the church”)
 - f. Opposed revivalism
 - g. Strong in South with centers in the North
2. New School
 - a. Heir of New England Puritanism
 - b. Stress on interdenominational cooperation

- c. Openness to other theological traditions—notably New England Theology—and usually looser subscription
 - d. Presbyterian polity—but not too insistent (e.g., Plan of Union)
 - e. Social reform—Christianizing society (abolition, prohibition)
 - f. Supported revivalism
 - g. More dominantly (but not entirely) in the North
 - h. Not inherently “liberal”
- II. Second Great Awakening
- A. In the East
 - 1. College Revivals
 - a. Revivals following spiritual declension from original founding
 - b. Example: Timothy Dwight at Yale
 - 2. Church Revivals
 - a. Awakening nominal Christians in “churchly” society
 - b. Example: Asahel Nettleton, Congregationalist
 - 3. John Chavis in Virginia an example of African American Presbyterian work
 - B. In the “West” (Old Northwest, Kentucky, Tennessee, etc.)
 - 1. Circuit-riding—basically Methodist, but illustrates religious conditions in the West
 - 2. Camp meetings
 - a. Began with Presbyterian James McGready in Logan County, Ky.
 - b. Early Presbyterian involvement, e.g., Cane Ridge Camp Meeting near Lexington, Ky. (1801) hosted by Presbyterian Barton Stone
 - c. Revival growth led to founding new Springfield Presbytery by revivalists
 - 1) Growth precluded usual standards in education & ordination, over the protests of other Presbyterians
 - 2) Eventually dissolved as leaders held non-Presbyterian views
 - d. Founding of Cumberland Presbyterian Church
 - 1) Began in 1810 when Synod of Kentucky suspended Cumberland Presbytery over subscription to the Westminster Confession
 - 2) Adopted Arminianized version of Westminster Standards
 - 3) Strongly revivalist and located in Border States
 - C. Challenge of Charles Finney and the “New Measures”
 - 1. Career: West meets East
 - a. Began preaching in frontier NY: “Burned-over district”
 - b. Greatest campaign: Rochester, NY (1830-31)
 - c. Became pastor in NYC
 - d. Became a professor & president of Oberlin College in Ohio
 - 2. The “New Measures”
 - a. “Plain” preaching and praying
 - b. Women praying in public
 - c. “Protracted Meetings”: campaigns over a series of days
 - d. “Anxious Bench”
 - 3. Theology
 - a. Revival: “A Revival of Religion Is Not a Miracle”
 - b. Regeneration: “Sinners Bound to Change Their Own Hearts”
 - c. Denied Imputation

- 1) Of Adam's Sin
 - 2) Of Christ's Atonement
 - a) Governmental theory of atonement
 - b) "Amnesty" instead of "pardon"
 - 3) Of Imputed Righteousness of Christ
 - d. Later added teaching of Christian perfection
 - e. An example of democratization?
- D. Results
- 1. Reform Movements
 - a. Perfectionist tendency: Transform society
 - b. Bible societies, temperance/prohibition, abolition of slavery
 - c. "Benevolence Empire": Organizations to "Christianize" nation
 - 2. Theological Shifts
 - a. Softening of Calvinism & rise of Arminianism
 - b. Dominance of revivalistic/evangelical methodology
- III. Division of 1837-38
- A. Points of Tension
- 1. Old School–New School differences
 - 2. Heresy trials (Albert Barnes)
 - 3. Congregationalist links: Plan of Union and New England Theology
 - 4. Slavery was not an issue *per se* but slavery/abolition was an Old/New School point of tension
- B. Split
- 1. General Assembly (1837) dominated by the Old School
 - a. Abrogated the Plan of Union
 - b. Expelled four New School synods on doctrinal grounds
 - 2. Auburn Declaration: New School protest
 - 3. Two churches (in North) from 1837 to 1869, Old & New School