

RELIGION AND REVOLUTION

I. The Disestablishment of State Churches

A. Major Events in the Revolution

The Stamp Act, 1765
 The Boston Massacre, 1770
 The Boston Tea Party, 1773
 First Continental Congress, 1774

THE WAR, 1775-1783

Paul Revere, April 18, 1775
 Battle of Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775 (beginning of war)
 Capture of Fort Ticonderoga, May 10, 1775
 Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775 (first major battle)
 Declaration of Independence Adopted, July 4, 1776
 George Washington Crosses the Delaware, December 25, 1776
 America Chooses a Flag Sewn by Betsy Ross, June 14, 1777
 Battles of Saratoga, September 19 – October 17, 1777
 Valley Forge, winter 1777-78
 France Openly Enters War, February 1778
 Articles of Confederation, 1781 – SEE BELOW
 Battle of Yorktown, 1781 (last major battle; unofficial end to war)
 Treaty of Paris, September 3, 1783 (formal recognition of U. S. independence)

Articles of Confederation, 1781-1789

The Articles of Confederation was the first written Constitution of the United States. It established the U. S. as a confederation of sovereign states. The Continental Congress began to draft it in 1776 and an approved version was completed in 1781.

Constitution and Bill of Rights, 1789-1791

During the Constitutional Convention of 1787 a new Constitution was drafted in Philadelphia. The first three articles established the three branches of American government: legislative, executive, and judicial. The last four articles established the principle of federalism. The Articles of Confederation were replaced with the United States Constitution on March 4, 1789. The United States Constitution can be changed through the amendment process. The first Congress proposed the first ten amendments (Bill of Rights), which were ratified by December 1791. Their purpose was to prevent encroachments by the federal government upon the powers of the states.

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B. The Impact of the Churches on the Revolution

On the whole, the American churches supported the Revolution. The Church of England was probably the most divided, as many of the ministers and members of that communion, felt particularly close to the mother country. During the war, Anglicanism lost heavily in prestige and influence. Churches of a Calvinistic background (Congregationalists, Presbyterians and Dutch Reformed churches) generally supported the Revolution. The German Reformed churches, however, typically were either neutral or opposed to the Revolution. John Wesley was loyal to the crown, making it difficult for American Methodists. Henry Muhlenberg remained neutral, but most Lutherans, including several of Muhlenberg's sons, supported the American cause. Most of the small group of Roman Catholics also favored the Revolution. Pacifists such as the Quakers, Mennonites and Moravians had a very difficult time. Their neutrality was often misunderstood for anti-patriotism.

C. The Impact of the Revolution on the Churches

All religious bodies suffered materially during the Revolution. The period following the war was a time of readjustment and constitution-making for the churches. The Episcopal Church was formally separated from the Church of England in 1789. The independent Methodist Episcopal Church was instituted in the United States in 1784. The constitutions of the Dutch and German Reformed churches respectively in 1792 and 1793 recognized breaks from Holland, which had actually already come about.

Some churches did not sever their foreign ties (e.g., Moravians and Roman Catholics). However, the Reverend John Carroll was named prefect apostolic for the United States in 1784 and was consecrated bishop of Baltimore in 1790. Denominations already independent (Presbyterian, Congregational, Baptist, Lutheran, Quaker) did not confront major reorganizations because of the Revolutionary War, but the Presbyterians did seize the opportunity to reorganize themselves. A new constitution was put into effect in 1789 forming the (PC-USA). American Lutherans would be organized along state lines until 1820.

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D. Church and State at the Outbreak of Hostilities and the Problem of Causation in Religious Freedom

There are many factors (including geographical, political, economic, and pluralistic factors) which led to the rise of religious freedom in the United States. Enlightenment thought emphasized that religious belief and practice could be directed only by conviction and reason and not by force and violence. Hence, all women and men had the right to the free exercise thereof. Some drew their conclusions directly from Protestantism, rather than the Enlightenment. Mennonites supported religious liberty from the beginning. Baptists and Quakers believed in religious freedom based on biblical and religious grounds. Although Catholics in principle were committed to establishment, on practical grounds they came to prefer religious toleration. John Carroll declared that religious liberty was best for the American situation.

E. The Case of Virginia

Excerpt from Virginia Constitution

That religion, or the duty which we owe our creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason, and conviction, not by force or violence; and therefore, all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion according to the dictates of conscience; and that it is the duty of all to practice Christian forbearance, love, and charity towards each other. Article 16 of the Virginia Constitution, 1776.

Excerpt from Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom

That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place, or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinion in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities. The Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom, Virginia, 1786.

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II. Separation of Church and State at the National Level

A. The Constitution and the Bill of Rights

Excerpts from Constitution and Bill of Rights

Article 6 of the Constitution of the United States: No religious test shall ever be required as a qualification to any office or public trust under the United States.

First Amendment: Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the government for a redress of grievances.

B. The Fourteenth Amendment

The Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution guarantees religious civil rights. It secures “the equal protection of the laws” for every person:

All persons born or naturalized in the United States, and subject to the jurisdiction thereof, are citizens of the United States and of the State wherein they reside. No state shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

III. African Americans in the Churches

The first independent black Baptist churches in America were organized in the 1770s and 1780s. At that time, the father of the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, Richard Allen (1760-1831), also began his ministry of preaching. The AME Church became the first African-American independent denomination in 1816. The Reverend Lemuel Haynes (1753-1833), who fought in the Revolution, was licensed to preach in the Congregational Church of Vermont in 1780 and was later ordained in 1785. Haynes was the first African American to be ordained by any denomination. The rhetoric of liberty surrounding the American Revolution gave many African Americans hope for their own freedom; however, the realization of their hope would take more than three quarters of a century to manifest.

THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND LIBERAL CHRISTIANITY

I. Theological Liberalism

The emergence of theological liberalism in the United States can be traced at least as far back as the work of Charles Chauncy and Jonathan Mayhew who led many Americans into Unitarianism. In 1819, William Channing (1780-1842) preached his famous Baltimore sermon, outlining the basic belief of the rational Christians. What many of these “liberals” believed about Christ was essentially Arian, and the Arian Christology of the earliest liberals would ultimately give way to a purely human conception of Jesus. Harvard College embraced liberalism in the 1820s. Thomas Jefferson also spoke approvingly of Channing. Liberalism, however, was out-paced by evangelicalism.

II. Deism

Deism, like liberalism, was rationalistic. However, unlike the liberals, the deists cared little for institutional religion and spent much of their energy attacking Christian orthodoxy. The leading American deists were Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, Ethan Allen, and Elihu Palmer. Franklin and Jefferson were reluctant to express their religious notions in public. Allen, who was a hero at Ticonderoga, wrote *Reason the Only Oracle of Man* (1784). The most zealous exponent of American deism was Elihu Palmer (1764-1806), a former Baptist minister. His most substantial treatise was perhaps *Principles of Nature*, first published around 1801.

III. Comparing Liberalism and Deism

Liberals did not believe that natural religion was all-sufficient and often accused deists of irreligion and infidelity. Deists certainly were more radical than liberals in their Christology. Liberals were typically Arian whereas deists confined Jesus wholly to the category of humanity. Liberals allowed for the concept of the miraculous. Deists discounted miracles altogether. Deism wilted away in America early in the nineteenth century.

All material after this point will be on the final, rather than the midterm.

THE CHURCH ON THE FRONTIER

I. The Challenge to the Churches

The Great Awakening began to wane by the time of the Revolution. However, toward the end of the eighteenth century and at the beginning of the nineteenth century, new awakening impulses gave rise to what is sometimes called “the Second Great Awakening.”

A. The Three Phases of the Second Awakening: First Eastern Phase

The revival in the East was centered in the colleges and towns along the coast. Hampden-Sydney, a small Presbyterian college in Virginia, experienced revival in 1787, and the movement spread to other Presbyterian colleges.

At Yale, under the preaching of Timothy Dwight (1752-1817), the grandson of Jonathan Edwards, revival came in 1802. About one-third of the student body was converted. The revival spread to other campuses. One of Dwight’s students, Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) carried the revival to cities in New England and then to the frontier towns and cities. Through the efforts of Beecher and other disciples of Timothy Dwight, revival currents continued to surge throughout New England Congregationalism and some other churches for many years.

The Second Great Awakening stimulated the rise of a number of missionary societies such as the American Education Society (1815), the American Bible Society (1816), the American Colonization Society (1816), the American Sunday School Union (1817-24), the American Tract Society (1825), the American Temperance Society (1826), and the American Home Missionary Society (1826).

The new awakenings invigorated the Congregationalists, Methodists, Baptists, and Presbyterians of the East.

B. The Geographical Setting of the Western Phase

When the Revolution was over, American interest turned westward.

C. The Significance of the Frontier in America and the American Church

American churches were faced with the task of organization, maintaining a vital religion, and following the population.

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II. The Nature and Impact of the Western Revival

A. The Adaptability of the Baptists and Methodists

Baptists and Methodists became the numerical giants in American Protestantism.

B. The Camp Meetings

By the dawn of the new century, settlers in the Kentucky-Tennessee region had begun to flock in great numbers to protracted outdoor revivals of great emotional intensity, conducted initially by Presbyterians.¹ Methodists and Baptists also found these camp meetings very congenial, and hastened to use them. Often Presbyterian, Methodist, and Baptist preachers would minister during the same meeting. The early years of the revivals were marked by unusual manifestations.

C. The Harvest of Revival

Baptist churches grew because of revivalism and congregational autonomy. Methodist growth was even more rapid than that of the Baptists, particularly because of circuit riders. There was a considerable determined opposition among Presbyterians. As a consequence, Barton W. Stone formed a new denomination, the Disciples of Christ. Other denominations were also born out of the revival. Two examples are the Church of the United Brethren in Christ (1800) and the Evangelical Association (1803). The little sect of Shakers also grew during the revival. The major consequence of the Second Great Awakening was the dominance of Evangelical Christianity.

¹ The revival in the West apparently began in 1797 in three Presbyterian churches in Kentucky, pastored by James McGready. McGready had attended the Hampden-Sydney revival. Barton Stone carried the revival to Cane Ridge, Kentucky around 1800.

REVIVALISM AND BENEVOLENCE

Voluntary societies channeled the energy released by the revivals into specific missionary, educational, and reform causes. A number of prominent ministers supported the societies and served as members of their boards.

Many of the leaders in the benevolence movement were members of Calvinistic (Congregational and Presbyterian) churches. Yet, there was a strong theological current working in these churches for a softening of the notion of total depravity. Nathaniel W. Taylor (1786-1858), for example, espoused a “New Haven Theology” which claimed to remain true to Calvinism while making a larger place for free will. People were encouraged to use their freedom wisely, particularly in evangelical and benevolent undertakings.

The aim of the benevolence movement was not only to evangelize individuals and plant churches, but also to remake society. The benevolence societies supported temperance, prison reform, education, and the abolition of slavery. The rapid growth of benevolence societies slowed in the 1830s, but benevolence efforts continued to go hand in hand with revivalism between 1840 and 1860.