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# The Presbyterian Enlightenment: The confluence of evangelical and enlightenment thought in British America

Brandon S. Durbin

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The Presbyterian Enlightenment: The Confluence of Evangelical and Enlightenment  
Thought in British America

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A thesis submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

JAMES MADISON UNIVERSITY

In

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Of course, I need to thank the Lancaster County Historical Society for allowing me to spend hours in their archive while I pestered them with questions. Their library contained some of the local sources that not only added some flavor to the paper, but also helped contextualize several of the Presbyterians ministers involved in this project. Similarly, I would like to thank the Library of Congress and the staff that assisted me in my research. Several of their reading room managers worked with me as I hunted for sources and they gave me permission to read some of the original printings of the sermons contained in this project.

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## Abstract

Eighteenth-Century British American Presbyterian ministers incorporated covenantal theology, ideas from the Scottish Enlightenment, and resistance theory in their sermons. The sermons of Presbyterian ministers strongly indicate the intermixing of enlightenment and evangelical ideas. Congregants heard and read these sermons, spreading these ideas to the average colonist. This combination helps explain why American Presbyterians were so apt to resist British rule during the American Revolution. Protestant covenantal theology, derived from Protestant reformers like John Calvin and John Knox, emphasized virtue and duty. This covenant affected both the people and their rulers. When rulers failed to uphold their covenant with God, the people no longer had to obey that ruler. Covenantal theology migrated to the American colonies through Scottish and Irish immigrants. These ideas spread rapidly during the First Great Awakening, especially through important ministers like Gilbert Tennent. Tennent established an academy in Neshaminy to provide an education for future ministers, which his students emulated. The Scottish Enlightenment arose during the eighteenth-century but was often unpopular among Scottish Presbyterians, but American Presbyterians were more willing to adopt these ideas. Presbyterian ministers often espoused Hutcheson's moral sense and Reid's common sense. When John Witherspoon reached America, it was already in the process of adopting the Scottish Enlightenment, providing him the opportunity to incorporate it into the curriculum of the College of New Jersey as its President. Ideas generated in British Enlightenment combined with older covenantal theology to create an American resistance theology. Presbyterian ministers incorporated enlightenment virtue, the *Vindiciae*, and John Locke into their sermons to promote

resistance to tyranny. This was a common refrain for ministers during the wars with France and often these sermons reached American militias who participated in that war. When British Parliament and King George III asserted their power over the British American colonies during the 1760s, American Presbyterians believed this violated the British Constitution, which they professed was a covenant. Since it was violated, Americans found justification to rebel against British rule. Many Presbyterians with connections to earlier ministers preaching covenantal theology and Enlightenment ideas played a key role during the Revolution.

## Introduction

American Presbyterians largely represented an important crux of the American mind during the eighteenth-century. Among the earliest to intermix Christian and Enlightenment thought were eighteenth-century America Presbyterian ministers. On October 2, 1757, Samuel Finley, a prominent Presbyterian minister preached to Pennsylvania soldiers during the French & Indian War: “Shall we, through S’oth, Cowardice, or Delusion, break the Entail? Shall we leave our Children, Slavery for Liberty, arbitrary Government, for Law and Equity, and Popery, for the pure Christian Religion?”<sup>1</sup> Finley warns his listeners that abrogating the French instead of fighting them will lead to political slavery, arbitrary government, and catholicism overtaking British liberty and faith. Eighteenth-century Presbyterian sermons encompass three interconnected strands of American Presbyterian thought: Covenantalism, the British Enlightenment, and Resistance Theory. Presbyterian ministers regularly incorporating these theological and philosophical ideas into their sermons explains the proclivity of American Presbyterians to resist British rule in the American Revolution.

Covenantalism, as described here, derives from sixteenth and seventeenth-century Protestant theologians and politicians who favored a binding contract between God and His people. This relationship, called a covenant, theologically derives from the relationship between God and the Hebrew people. When the ancient Israelites violated their covenant with God, it elicited his wrath upon them. Similarly, when they obeyed His laws as described in the Tanakh, they prospered. Protestants, especially Calvinists,

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel Finley, *Curse of Meroz, or the Danger of Neutrality, in the Cause of Our God and Country*, Preached October 2, 1757 (Philidelphia: Newest-Printing-Office, 1757), 27.



believed that this covenantal relationship still existed, but now between all of humanity and God. The Scottish variation of covenantalism derives from the Presbyterian sect referred to as Covenanters. They argued that a ‘bipartite covenant’ existed between God and His people and another covenant between God and rulers.<sup>2</sup> This ‘bipartite covenant’ describes specific duties of the parties involved. Both rulers and citizens had specific duties to God and to one-another. These expectations were closely associated with virtues derived from Biblical principles. Enlightenment notions of virtue were eventually incorporated by the middle of the eighteenth-century. Theological and Enlightenment conceptions of virtue combined as part of covenantal thought. For the public, their expectations were to serve God and obey covenantal following rulers. For rulers, their virtuous duty was to preserve a Christian (specifically Protestant) kingdom, fairly dispense justice, and obey both the laws of God and the laws of the kingdom. If political or religious authorities failed to uphold their covenant and the virtues that comprise it, the people, including their civil magistrates, are no longer required to obey that ruler. American Presbyterians were aware of these ideas because they were continually preached from Scottish ministers through the First Great Awakening. From these principles, American Presbyterians found justification to first resist the French during the French & Indian War and the British during the American Revolution.

Present day tensions between secular and religious groups over scientific and social issues often causes a perception that theological and Enlightenment thought are incompatible, so the suggestion that Enlightenment and religious beliefs simultaneously influenced Presbyterian ministers appears counterintuitive. During the seventeenth and

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<sup>2</sup> The term ‘bipartite covenant’ is of my own creation and was not used at the time, but it pithily describes the complex relationship of the two separate but closely related covenants between God and people and God and rulers.

eighteenth-centuries this perception of antagonism between Enlightenment and theology was uncommon because these ideas were embraced simultaneously. After all, the Scientific Revolution and the Protestant Reformation occurred in conjunction with one-another. Ministers were often trained in Enlightenment philosophy and new scientific ideas and incorporated them into their sermons.

Few, if any, historians today argue against the influence of Enlightenment ideas upon eighteenth-century Americans. Historians more often debate on what specific elements of the Enlightenment mattered to British Americans, whether it be ideas from the French Enlightenment, English philosophers, or the Scottish Enlightenment. Studies by Gary Wills, Peter Gay, Bernard Bailyn, and many others convinced the discipline that the Scottish Enlightenment was important to understanding colonial American political thought.

Although the Enlightenment has almost near-universal acceptance as an important factor in understanding eighteenth-century Americans, religion has not always received the same treatment. Early in the twentieth century, progressive historians often discounted the importance of religion in society, often treating it as a cover for economic desires or as a means of control. Similarly, many New Left historians, with the rise of the new social history, embraced similar arguments about religion. While there have always been historians like Perry Miller advocating for religion as an important factor the tide of historiography has, at times, rejected religion as an underlying factor of the American Revolution. Historians of the present generally find it difficult to suggest religion was not influential to Americans before the Revolution because of arguments presented by David

D. Hall, Mark Noll, E. Brooks Holifield, Philip Greven, among others, all of which convincingly argued that historians need to take religion seriously.

Religious histories of seventeenth and eighteenth-century British America more often analyze the theology Congregationalists, Puritans, Anglicans, and even the Baptists and Methodists than Presbyterians. There are certainly a number of very important studies of the Americans who migrated from Scotland and present day Northern Ireland, but rarely have they investigated their theology. As a result, there is a massive gap in the historiography, one that even eminent historians Mark Noll and E. Brooks Holifield directly reference in *America's God* and *Theology in America* respectively. Both of those authors, and several others, argued that there is a great need for a more thorough study of the Presbyterians. This study fills this gap, by not only explaining their theology and embrace of Enlightenment thought, but also how these explain their involvement in the American Revolution.

Religious forces shaping eighteenth-century American Presbyterians come from two major sources: the Scottish Reformation and the First Great Awakening. The first chapter establishes the background information on these two significant events. Purposefully, this chapter relies on important scholars like Marilyn J. Westerkamp whose 1988 *Triumph of the Laity* established the overarching connections between the eighteenth-century revivals in both the British American colonies and in Scotland and Ireland. Her study utilized a bottom-up interpretation of the Great Awakening where popular evangelists, especially George Whitefield, appealed to existing sentiments of their congregants instead of reinterpreting theology. Westerkamp is likely correct to argue that these revivalists appealed to their audience's prejudices. The colonial

backcountry preferred extemporaneous preachers over those who depended on notes in their sermons. Westerkamp's framework has its limitations for this study. Although Presbyterian ministers did appeal to popular perceptions they typically agreed with, it is highly unlikely that a typical farmer or laborer had detailed knowledge of Enlightenment ideas. The average person depended on verbal and printed sources for information, but printed information was less likely to reach beyond coastal communities. Ministers were then one of the key sources of outside information for the average American. Thus, this study must approach this subject from the top-down to understand the information congregants overheard. Printed sources are of the utmost importance in this study because these sermons survived. Similarly, printed sermons were more popular and had a much wider audience than a single congregation. Sometimes these printed sermons managed to penetrate the backcountry, leading to a demand for Presbyterian ministers.

Regardless, of the limitations of Westerkamp's study, *Triumph of the Laity* provides important connections between Scottish and Irish perspective and the larger issues facing the British Isles. There are also several phenomenal studies explaining the complex challenges facing the British Empire during the seventeenth-century, including Mark Kishlanski's well-known overview of seventeenth-century Britain and Steve Pincus's recent work on the Glorious Revolution. Both of these works provided a useful framework for the first chapter, allowing for a smooth reorientation of these complex periods towards a Presbyterian perspective.

Any understanding of the Presbyterian perspective of seventeenth-century Scotland and England must begin with the Scottish Reformation. The Scottish Reformation arose from the evangelism of John Knox and other major reformers like

William Wishart. Presbyterians were unable to completely unify under one branch. Instead, they vigorously debated the meaning of the sermons of John Knox and other reformers, establishing intense divisions within the Scottish Kirk that lasted well beyond the seventeenth-century. By the eighteenth-century, many Presbyterian covenantalists reached America. Some like Gilbert Tennent, preached a theology of “New Birth,”<sup>3</sup> which entailed that a person underwent a deep and intense religious conversion experience. ‘Converts’ regularly questioned the legitimacy of ministers that they believed did not undergo a conversion experience. These converts asserted the importance of itinerant ministers and spreading this theology to parishes controlled by ‘unconverted’ ministers.<sup>4</sup> Disagreements over the revivals within print media and the pews divided the American Presbyterian Church into the Synod of Philadelphia (those opposed to the revivals) and the Synod of New York (those favoring the revivals).

The Great Awakening coincided with the arrival of the Scottish Enlightenment to America. While these events are distinct, both of them greatly affected Presbyterian Ministers. Although there is not a total correlation between members of Old-Side Presbyterians (Synod of Philadelphia) and New Side Presbyterians (Synod of New York) in their embrace of the Scottish Enlightenment, New Side ministers generally adopted the ideas of Hutcheson and Reid much earlier. Old Side Presbyterians adopted these ideas after the Synods fused together in 1756.

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<sup>3</sup> The idea of “New Birth” comes from the Gospel of John 3:3. In this passage, Jesus converses with the Pharisee Nicodemus. Christ tells Nicodemus, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.” (KJV).

<sup>4</sup> Itinerant ministers were ministers who traveled outside of their own parishes, if they even had one, and spread the Gospel to areas without existing ministers.

Studying the Great Awakening's historiography is complex. The term 'Great Awakening' first appeared in Joseph Tracy's 1841 history of the event.<sup>5</sup> Though there remain a few dissenters, most historians now recognize the Great Awakening as an inter-colonial, inter-connected, Anglo-American event that affected multiple denominations.<sup>6</sup> Recent studies define the Great Awakening as, at minimum, a semi-unified intercolonial event because of its influence on rhetoric, print culture, religious schisms, and other parts of American society.

A major shift in historical thought is dating the First Great Awakening. Decades ago, historians understood the First Great Awakening as a significant short-term event encompassing about a decade beginning with Whitefield's first tour of the American Colonies (1739-1741) and ending with the wars with France.<sup>7</sup> Eventually, historians extended the revivals to the 1720s and 1730s. Some analysts argued that the Great Awakening was part of the general forces of the Protestant Reformation. While this argument might be excessive, it raises broader questions about the nature of Protestant revivalism that will be continually debated in the coming years.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the time of Edwards and Whitefield* (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842). Tracy's work was the first general history of the First Great Awakening. While it is mainly explanatory, the purpose of his study was to connect the religious events of his time, what is often referred to as the Second Great Awakening, to the earlier awakening led by Whitefield and Edwards.

<sup>6</sup> Jon Butler and Frank Lambert were the main opponents to the idea of a unified awakening in the colonies. Butler argued that while Whitefield preached along the east coast and influenced these revivals, the revivals themselves were largely independent. Lambert similarly sees these as independent revivals, but, he perceives them as an exaggerated and manufactured event by Whitefield himself. Lambert, then, understood the Great Awakening as a result of the rise of consumerism. See Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction," *Journal of American History*, 69, no. 2 (September 1982), 305-325; Jon Butler, *Becoming America: The Revolution before 1776*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999); Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the trans-Atlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>7</sup> King George's War (1744-1748) and the French and Indian War/Seven Years War (1754-1763)

<sup>8</sup> Twentieth century historians such as Perry Miller, Alan Heimert, Cedric B. Cowing, focused mostly upon Whitefield and Edwards in their studies. Perry Miller analyzed the broader Calvinist themes and origins of the Awakening. The core debate of their time was whether the Great Awakening was a cause of the

The original end of the Great Awakening arises from the sharp decline in advertisements and theological debates in colonial newspapers once the wars commenced. While this evidence is indisputable, newspapers are not the lone source of evidence of revivalist activity. Recent studies elucidate that printed sermons and revivalism remained popular during and after the wars with France.<sup>9</sup> Current scholarship expands the Great Awakening into the colonial south and the trans-Appalachian backcountry where Presbyterians including Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, John Todd, John McMillan, among others transplanted the Great Awakening beginning in the late 1740s and especially in the 1750s. A few recent studies suggest that the revivalism directly connected to the Great Awakening persisted until the 1780s and 1790s, meaning

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American Revolution. Heimert theorized that resistance to religious authorities led to resistance against political authorities. Cedric B. Cowing formalized and furthered Heimert's thesis to make it more accessible while also providing a history of the Great Awakening. See Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1956); Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1966); Cedric B. Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Company, 1972). With the Advent of Atlantic history, Marilyn J. Westerkamp and W. R. Ward decided to reinterpret the Great Awakening as a trans-Atlantic event. Westerkamp explained the Scots-Irish roots of the awakening in the middle colonies as a continuation of earlier revivals in Scotland and Ireland. Furthermore, she explained that it was the people within the faith that drove these changes. W. R. Ward instead underwent a larger study of the Awakening and saw it as a continuation of the Protestant Reformation in Europe. He most directly connected the Great Awakening to the Pietist movements, especially the Dutch Reformed pietism of Frelinghuysen. See Marilyn J. Westerkamp, "Division, Dissent, and Compromise: the Presbyterian Church during the great Awakening," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 78, no. 1 (Spring 2000): 3-18. JSTOR; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988); W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>9</sup> For more on the explanation on the continued popularity of sermon literature and theological works during the 1740s through 1780s see E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003); Thomas S. Kidd, *God and Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010); Lisa H. Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, Maryland: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2012); James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013); Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Bible* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016); Mark A. Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016); Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017).

that the revivals related to the Great Awakening arguably extends throughout the entirety of the eighteenth-century.<sup>10</sup>

Besides religion, Enlightenment philosophy transformed European society throughout the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth-centuries. The second chapter largely deals with the arrival of the Scottish Enlightenment in America. The Enlightenment challenged many traditional understandings of philosophy, science, politics, and religion. The Enlightenment encouraged heterodox religious opinions such as deism, natural religion, and the fallibility of the Bible. It would be in error to say that the Enlightenment and religion were mutually exclusive. Often Enlightenment thinkers were religious, sometimes with heterodox views. Enlightenment ideas entered the American mind throughout the eighteenth-century, particularly towards the more educated class. Yet, we do see commoners engaged with Enlightenment ideas from John Locke, Algernon Sidney, John Milton, Hutcheson, and Reid. For the purposes of this study, Hutcheson, Reid, and Locke are the most valuable. This is not to say they were quickly accepted. Presbyterian preachers were initially hostile to Hutcheson's ideas. By the late 1740s, many theologians adopted his perceptions of morality. Understanding and explaining why American Presbyterians were more apt to adopt the Scottish Enlightenment than their British counterparts is an important part of this study.

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<sup>10</sup> Scholars have long shown that there was Great Awakening revivalism in the south. In the past, it was limited to slight references or specific histories of the key players or as specific histories published by the Presbyterian Church. See George William Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971); Dwight Raymond Guthrie, *John McMillan: the Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, 1752-1833* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1952); Richard Webster, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1857); Ernest Trice Thompson, *Presbyterians in the South*, Vol. 1 (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1963). The main change in the recent scholarship is that the spread of evangelism into the south and trans-Appalachia is considered with the larger history of the Great Awakening. For more information see Jewel L. Spangler, *Virginians Reborn: Anglican Monopoly, Evangelical Dissent, and the Rise of the Baptists in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, Virginia: University of Virginia Press, 2008) and John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British North America, 1725-1775* (Lanham, Maryland: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2015).



The Scottish Enlightenment is the distinctly Scottish portion of the European Enlightenment. Prominent individuals associated with the Scottish Enlightenment were connected to Scotland's universities, legal system, and the Kirk. Preachers and professors of divinity, especially Thomas Halyburton and John Simpson, assisted in developing the region's Enlightenment philosophy and participated in the era's theological debates. Theologians associated with the Scottish Enlightenment challenged the natural theology of the continental Enlightenment, while defending the ability of humans to interpret the Bible.<sup>11</sup>

The Scottish Enlightenment, ironically enough, was less influential upon Presbyterian ministers on the British Isles than in the American colonies. This is most apparent with John Witherspoon. Witherspoon was originally a minister who later migrated to America for the opportunity to become the sixth president of the College of New Jersey. It is unclear as to when Witherspoon adopted the ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment, but it was not until he came to America was he outspoken about his

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Broadie, et al., *The Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, ed. Alexander Broadie (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 9-15; 31-38 is the best one volume history of the different philosophical ideas encompassing the Scottish Enlightenment. It proved the most useful secondary source for this paper and allowed me to hone in on the specific thinkers more effectively. For more on the Scottish Enlightenment and American Enlightenment thought in general, see James Buchan, *Crowded with Genius: The Scottish Enlightenment: Edinburgh's Moment of the Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003); Francis Hutcheson, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. John McHugh (Exeter, United Kingdom: Imprint Academic, 2014); David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2003); John Fea, "The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian's Rural Enlightenment," *Journal of American History*, (September 2003): 462-490; John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009); Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1997); Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1967). The inclusion of John Locke is also important. Though Locke is associated more with the Enlightenment Whigs in England, many of Locke's ideas originate from Calvinist Resistance thought, Presbyterian ministers in Scotland, and the Scottish Enlightenment. For more on Locke and his works see John Locke, *Two Treatise of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro, et al. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003). Dreisbach includes a good discussion of Locke's Calvinist origins along with related examples of resistance theory during the Reformation and particularly in Scotland in his *The Founders and the Bible*, 113-121.

favorable views towards the event, implying that American Presbyterianism was more favorable towards the ideas of Hutcheson and Reid.

The core of the second chapter focuses upon ideals of morality and virtue. Hutcheson's 'moral-sense' and Thomas Reid's 'common-sense' are both apparent in the sermons of Presbyterian preachers. A larger theological issue was whether morality and virtue could be discerned outside of Biblical Revelation. This debate ties closely to the theological debates of the era between the reliability of Bible revelation, natural religion, and the reliability of human reason. In Scotland, these debates led to several schisms within the Presbyterian Church. Colonial America, on the other hand, embraced both Biblical revelation and Enlightenment rationalism. During the eighteenth-century, the American and Scottish wings of Presbyterianism diverged, creating an atmosphere in America favorable to older Scottish precepts that the Kirk virtually left. Simultaneously, Americans adopted thinkers that already aligned with their theological positions. Scottish and American Presbyterians contrasted in their perceptions of what constituted orthodoxy and heterodoxy in Presbyterianism and this appears to be the root of their fundamentally different perspectives on the Enlightenment. At the most fundamental level, the blending of religious and intellectual thought helps us ascertain how people in the middle of the eighteenth-century, and afterwards, understood their own values and their expectations of their society. This chapter focuses on how Hutcheson and Reid transformed the epistemology of virtue and morality among British American Presbyterian ministers.

Explaining American and British theology, politics, education, and other social and cultural structures of the seventeenth and eighteenth-century are essential for this thesis. In recent years, studies brought new information about religion, education, the

structure of colonial society, politics, and other facets of the eighteenth-century to light, making this study possible. Any attempt at a study such as this one before now would be excessively cumbersome, as one would have to undergo substantive background research to answer many basic questions. This study owes an immense amount of gratitude to the scholars behind these earlier studies.<sup>12</sup>

The third chapter amalgamates covenantal Presbyterianism with Enlightenment ideals of the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. These ideas, it turns out, complimented each other well in the American colonies. While the first chapter deals with the importance of covenantalism in Scotland and British America, this chapter deals with the implications of covenantalism. Covenantal thought prominently appeared in Presbyterian sermons indicating a widespread familiarity with the ideas. In the same vein, this suggests a widespread recognition of the right to resist covenant-breaking rulers. In developing these connections, chapter three shows the development of Protestant, or Calvinist, resistance theory beginning with the works of Calvinist and briefly reaching the works of John Locke. Ministers, actively preached resistance to tyrants, explicitly those that seemingly supported arbitrary power, as was the case of Louis XIV of France. During the French & Indian War, resistance thought connected with an Enlightenment sense of virtue was indoctrinated into American minds. Later, these ideas provided the

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<sup>12</sup> For works related to theological issues in Britain and America, see Holifield's *Theology in America*; Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: the Faith that Made the Modern World* (New York: Penguin Random House, 2017); David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgement: Popular Religious Beliefs in Early New England* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1990); Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth-Century Virginia* (Macon, Georgia: Mercer University Press, 2000); Lauren F. Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice in the Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010); Charles F. Irons, *The Origins of Proslavery Christianity: White and Black Evangelicals in Colonial and Antebellum Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008); A. Glenn Crothers, *Quakers Living in the Lion's Mouth: the Society of Friends in Northern Virginia, 1730-1865* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002); Mark A Noll, *America's God: from Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). For more on education see Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: American Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837* (New York: New York University Press, 1976).

mindset for Americans entering into the 1760s and 1770s when they actively resisted British rule. While this is not another study arguing in favor the religion as a cause of the American Revolution, it does suggest that theological and philosophical precepts worked in conjunction to produce the intellectual capacity necessary for Americans to justify resistance against British rule.

As a whole, this study encompassing many of the broader themes of the sixteenth through eighteenth-centuries, placing them within an Atlantic Presbyterian context. Although it does not cover every layer of Presbyterian thought and conflict during this time frame, it does fulfill the historiographic gap of Presbyterian thought during the time. American Presbyterians, it turns out, remained close to the seventeenth-century variant of Presbyterianism, embracing the covenantal theology developed there. This eventually created the circumstances for American Presbyterians to adopt Enlightenment ideas more easily, and spread them in their academies and to their congregants. With their reputation and influence, they could disseminate these ideas along with the implications of covenantal thought intermixed with the Enlightenment. American Presbyterians were ripened with an ideology that not only justified resistance to tyrants, but encouraged it.

## Chapter 1: Presbyterian Legacy

Seventeenth Century Scotland and England were fraught with turmoil. John Knox led the religious upheaval in late sixteenth century Scotland known as the Scottish Reformation. The efforts of Knox and other reformers overthrew the Catholic establishment in Scotland. ‘God’s Firebrand’, as John Calvin called him, boldly asserted the duties of rulers in their covenant with God, “The first thing then that God craveth of him that is called to the honour of a king, is, The knowledge of his will revealed in his word.” Kings, as executors of the law were responsible for a second and more important task than knowing the word, they needed to be “upright and willing mind to put in execution such things as God commandeth in his law, without declining to the right or the left hand.” In other words, Knox emphasizes the ruler’s covenant with God is obedience to His laws. Knox firmly emphasizes that this covenant limits kingly authority, “Kings, then, have not an absolute power to do in their regimen what pleaseth them; but their power is limited by God’s word.” Kings that exceed their authority “are but murderers” and those that directly violate God’s demands, “they and their throne are criminal and guilty of the wickedness that aboundeth upon the face of the earth.”

Knox preached the above sermon at St. Giles on August 19, 1565. The second husband of Mary Queen of Scots, Lord Darnley, perceived this sermon as a threat and discharged Knox from St. Giles. Knox responded with publishing this sermon, the only one he published. This sermon functions both as a commentary of tyrants in the Bible, and a rebuke of tyranny in his own age, “tyrants that do oppress, shall die and fall with shame...tyrants of this age...shall be guilty not only of blood shed by themselves, but of

all, as is said, that hath been shed for the cause of Jesus Christ from the beginning of the world.” Tyrants are, according to Knox, the arbiters of Satan on Earth. Scottish Presbyterians embraced the idea of resistance to tyrants through covenantal theology and later spread Covenantalism to the American colonies during the eighteenth century.<sup>13</sup>

Arguments from Knox and other reformers undermined the existing political and religious structures within the Scottish Kirk. Knox’s death in 1572 caused an intradenominational schism among Presbyterians over the legacy of Knox and his written works. Scottish Covenanters, one such Presbyterian branch, embraced a stricter interpretation of the Calvinist idea of a covenant. Scotland’s tenuous relationship with England resulting from the attempted Union of Crowns by James VI and I of Scotland and England along with his leanings towards arbitrary power and his Catholic tendencies led to increased defiance. His son, Charles I enticed expanded the role of the Monarchy perceptively more than James I and VI.

The next several decades engulfed the British Empire into first a Civil War, then the tyranny of Cromwell’s Protectorate, and the Glorious Revolution of 1688. While these intermittent political struggles offered a chance for Parliament to assert its authority and defend the British Constitution, these same challenges led to the persecution of many Scots, encouraging them to flee the British Isles for the New World. Colonial Scots were both more theologically conservative and more apt to adopt the Scottish Enlightenment during the eighteenth-century. The combination of Enlightenment with covenantal theology created conditions for Presbyterian resistance against British Rule during the American Revolution (see Chapter three). That aside, the successful intermixing of these

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<sup>13</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland, Complete in One Volume*, Forgotten Books (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, & Co., 1831), 469, 472, 484-485.

ideas was due, in large part, to the persistence of the Scottish religious and political influence among American Scottish Presbyterians. The transformation of Scotland led to the Scottish migration to the Americas. Migrating Scots brought their Scottish heritage with them, but the American version was more theologically conservative than the Presbyterians on the British Isles by the First Great Awakening.

In an ironic twist, American Presbyterians were more apt to adopt ideas from the Scottish Enlightenment than their Scottish Counterparts were. Embracing the Enlightenment did not come immediately, in fact, many initially derided the Enlightenment, but, as the Great Awakening persisted, the intermixing of theology and the Scottish Enlightenment increased. Understanding and explaining how Presbyterians in America came to adopt the Enlightenment but their Scottish counterparts did not must come from three sources: the religious and political crises in the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, the ministers that brought Presbyterianism to America, and the spreading of these perspectives to their fellow Presbyterians. For this, we need to focus on printed sources that were also verbal such as Sermons and pamphlets, two of the main sources for the spreading of ideas during the period. Within these societal changes, we will be able to understand how the Scottish Enlightenment came to influence Presbyterian ministers in the British American colonies by the middle of the eighteenth-century.

### The Rise of Scottish Presbyterianism

The Protestant Reformation produced immense theological disruptions to sixteenth and seventeenth century Scotland. John Knox, the most recognizable leader of the Scottish branch of the Reformation was born in 1513, eighteen miles east of

Edinburgh. His early years remain a mystery, but we know he attended a University, likely St. Andrews, and joined the priesthood. George Wishart first brought the Reformation to Scotland, influencing Knox to join in the effort. Scottish nobles sympathetic to Wishart attacked the castle of Cardinal David Beaton, an opponent of the Reformation. The captors of the castle invited Knox to be a chaplain in 1547 and he remained there until the French bombarded it later that year. The French held Knox captive in a galley for nineteen months. After his captivity, Knox spent the next five years of his life as the Royal chaplain for Edward IV of Britain. After the death of Edward IV, the Catholic Mary Tudor obtained the throne, forcing Knox to become a refugee. Knox fled to settle in John Calvin's Geneva. While in Geneva, Knox fully adopted Calvinism. He persistently wrote to his peers in Scotland to inculcate moral virtue and resist idolaters—his description of Catholic and Anglican political authorities. Knox spent a few years traveling around preaching in Geneva, Frankfurt, and Scotland until officially returning to Scotland in 1559. Since his original forced departure from Scotland, the effects of the Reformation grew, threatening the power of the royal family.

Knox returned to Scotland in 1560 after the legal abolition of Papal authority over Scotland. With Knox back in Scotland, reformers managed to reorganize the church into congregations, presbyteries, synods, and the Kirk, creating the basic structure of Presbyterianism. During this time, Knox preached at St. Giles Cathedral, whereas earlier he often gave open-air sermons. Knox ultimately died in his still-standing home in Edinburgh in 1572. Succeeding generations of preachers and laypeople attempted to replicate Knox's theological vision and constantly feuded with one-another over whom



best represented his legacy, creating a number of schisms within the Scottish Presbyterian Church.<sup>14</sup>

John Knox's followers struggled to discern and define Presbyterianism. His works were printed as a collection in 1590, providing his successors a means to interpret their faith and determined Knox's theology. Certainly, the availability of his works was a great resource, but proved to be a double-edged sword because it caused Presbyterians to divide among themselves during seventeenth century revivals in Scotland and Ireland. James Glendenning and Robert Cunningham initiated the revivals of the 1620s, arguing with other reformers within the Church of Scotland over the need for a return of ritual sacraments like baptism and communion. These reformers disagreed with the public baptisms promoted by the Reformation because the Presbyterian Church Elders opted to transform ceremonial baptism into daylong rituals merely to prepare for the actual baptism. Glendenning, Cunningham, and others preferred a private baptismal ceremony instead of the overbearing ritualism promoted by the Elders.

Revivalism in the Scottish Kirk encouraged the Anglican Bishop to restrict Presbyterian practices, resulting in the suspension of several high-ranking ministers for six months. Robert Blair pleaded their case to King Charles I. Charles I accepted Blair's arguments and permitted these ministers to return to their posts. However, the arrival of William Laud reinvigorated Anglican oversight of the Church of Scotland. William Laud came to power in 1633 and tried to implement, with the help of Thomas Wentworth, the Thirty-Nine articles of the Church of England upon the Kirk. Laud required ministers to

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<sup>14</sup> Alec Ryrie, *Protestants: the Faith that Made the Modern World* (New York: Random House, 2017), 56-60; Geddes Mac Gregor, "John Knox, the Thundering Scot," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* (1943-1961), 38, no. 1 (March 1960): 13-25; Marilyn J. Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 18-20.

take an oath supporting these articles if they wanted to preach. Naturally, many Presbyterian preachers such as Robert Blair, Cunningham, and Samuel Row refused to take the oath, leading to their removal from the ministry. Efforts to restrain those who refused to conform to the doctrines of the Church of England angered both the Presbyterian clergy and the laity. A radical group of Presbyterians led by Cunningham and John Livingstone responded with their own National Covenant in 1638, promoting the abolition of the Presbyterian Bishops induced by James I in 1617. These ministers sought Presbyterianism's return to its Knoxian roots by adopting the codes outlined in Knox's 1590 collected works.<sup>15</sup>

### British Politics in the Age of the Enlightenment

Scotland's religious challenges coincided with serious political issues affecting the British Empire, namely the English Civil War and the later Glorious Revolution. From James VI and I until William III, an ongoing debate regarding the arbitrary power of kings plagued Scotland and England politics. For many Protestants, specifically Knoxian Presbyterians, arbitrary power was associated with the Catholic kings like Louis XIV of France. These monarchs had absolute or near absolute power to generate policy, inciting fear among Protestants that arbitrary rulers would usurp their rights of worship. Seventeenth-century British kings attempted to expand their power to strengthen and modernize Great Britain.

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<sup>15</sup> Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity: Scots-Irish Piety and the Great Awakening, 1625-1760*, 28-36.

James VI of Scotland became the rightful heir to the English throne after the death of Elizabeth I, becoming James I of England.<sup>16</sup> One of his primary goals was to unify the crowns of Scotland and England. Although the rightful ruler of both, James I and VI found the union of crowns to be a difficult task because of the political and cultural differences between the two countries. James VI and I was generous to nobles, providing him popular support among the aristocracy, but it also created financial challenges via a large increase in the nation's debt. As his rule continued, the national debt continued to increase, but James VI and I believed he had prerogative to determine the country's spending. By 1618, after reaching the largest peacetime debt in British history, up to that point, Britain entangled itself into the Thirty Years War, exacerbating the existing problem, creating problems for his son later. James I died in 1625, bringing his son Charles to the throne.

Charles I aspired to reform England's finances, armies, and religion. His attempt to modernize England fell under the concept of Divine-Right Monarchy, transforming the British Constitution away from the direction first established in the Magna Charta. The theory of a divine-right monarchy argues that since God instituted monarchies, the ruler has unlimited authority to establish laws. Divine-right monarchs can claim that their decisions equate God's will. Charles I believed this prerogative granted him power over parliament, resulting in no requests for a parliament between 1629 and 1640. Further, he attempted to usurp the power of the Scottish church by removing clergy who criticized his policies, installed Anglican ministers into Presbyterian churches, and forced the Anglican Book of Common Prayer (at the direction of William Laud) upon the Scottish

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<sup>16</sup> Since none of Henry VIII's children provided any living descendants, James VI became the most suitable heir. James was the great-grandson of Henry VIII's sister, Margaret Tudor.

churches. Many Scots negatively reacted to the policies of Charles I and incited riots in Edinburgh in 1637 and the creation of the National Covenant.<sup>17</sup>

When Edinburgh Covenanters, who sided with the National Covenant of 1638, engaged in rebellion in 1640, Charles I finally called for a Parliament. The National Covenant rooted itself in Scottish fears of Catholicism and arbitrary power. The covenant intended to restrict the king and prevent Parliament from enacting any policies that permitted Roman Catholic authority over Scotland. The National Covenant argued, “[We] detest and refuse the usurped authority of that Roman Antichrist,” Protestant Reformers historically referred to the Pope as the antichrist, “upon the Scriptures of God, upon the Kirk, the civil magistrates, and consciences of men.” The Pope, and indirectly Charles I (after all the National Covenant was largely a response to his decisions), established “tyrannous laws made upon indifferent things against our Christian liberty.” After listing several Catholic doctrines they opposed such as the papacy, original sin, and rites which they claimed were “brought in to Kirk without or against the Word of God, and doctrine of this true reformed Kirk”—a direct reference to Charles I inserting Anglican ministers and the Book of Common Prayer into the Kirks—they affirmed their covenant with God. The Covenanters willingly joined into this covenant “in doctrine, religion, faith, discipline, and life of the holy sacraments...in Christ our head.” They promised and swore to “continue in the obedience of the doctrine and discipline of this Kirk,” pledging a steadfast grasp on Presbyterian doctrine. Covenanters expected Charles I and Parliament to abide by the National Covenant. Failure to do this threatened resistance. The Covenant proclaimed that those agreeing to it “shall defend the same according to

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<sup>17</sup> Mark Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714* (London: Penguin Books, 1996), 136-139.

our vocation and power all the days of our lives, under the pains contained in the law, and danger both body and soul in the day of God's fearful judgment." The Covenanters opted to be his justice upon civil rulers, proclaiming to be "open enemies and persecutors" of rulers who failed to meet their obligation.<sup>18</sup>

Not only does the National Covenant directly oppose Roman Catholicism, it associates it with tyranny. The Covenant advocated resistance to Catholicism, directly implying open resistance to laws they perceived as promoting Catholicism. The document specifically lists a several laws passed by Parliament that the Covenanters believed allotted power to Roman Catholicism. The National Covenant argued that the monarch is responsible for ensuring the persistence of Protestantism in Britain. While the document appears to support monarchy, it expects the ruler to follow the guidelines established in the Covenant; however, since it is a covenant, the failure to uphold its guidelines justifies resistance to their rule.

Resistance to political figures was not a new concept in the time of the National Covenant. John Calvin favored of resistance to civil authority if led by nobles and magistrates because they already acquired a position of power. John Knox, following the guise of Calvin, similarly argued that nobles had the power to resist and even end the reign of "an unworthy ruler." George Buchanan, a humanist member of the clergy, authored the 1582 *Rerum Scotticarum Historia* (or *History of Scotland*), wrote on moral theory and resistance theory. His moral theories were for people, nobles, and kings. His

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<sup>18</sup> "The Scottish National Covenant," Constitution.org, February 28, 1638, <http://www.constitution.org/eng/conpur023.htm>.

resistance theory was more radical than Calvin or Knox in that “any individual” can resist tyrants.<sup>19</sup>

Scottish Parliament, dominated by Covenanters, signed the National Covenant in 1640 and formed an army to fight the English forces of Charles I. The battle between Charles I and the Covenanters was short-lived because even though the Scots conquered defensible positions in Scotland and Charles prepared an army to retake them, no shots were actually fired. In 1641, Irish Catholics similarly went into open rebellion because of the forced settlement of Scottish Presbyterians into Ulster by the crown to weaken the power of Catholicism in Ireland. Parliament decided to use the Scottish forces to challenge the Irish Catholics. These clashes antagonized two conflicting notions of government. Parliament believed in its essentialness in responding to these crises, whereas Charles I believed he possessed divine-right authority to respond. He expected Parliament’s loyalty and obedience in his desire to challenge those that resisted his rule. Charles I issued a proclamation requiring churches in England and Scotland to conform to the rituals of the Church of England—a violation of the National Covenant. Parliament mostly ignored his proclamations, increasing the tension between the two. Charles I responded to Parliamentary resistance by his attempt to have a few members of parliament arrested. Naturally, Parliament and the people did not respond well to Charles I usurpation of parliament, culminating in the English Civil War.<sup>20</sup>

The war ended with a parliamentary victory and the beheading of Charles I in 1649. Peace was not established with the end of the Civil War; instead, it invited the repression of Oliver Cromwell’s Protectorate. Cromwell conquered both Scotland and

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<sup>19</sup> Caroline Erskine, “The Political Thought of the Restoration Covenanters,” from *Scotland in the Age of Two Revolutions* (Boydell Press, 2014): 157-158, 160.

<sup>20</sup> Kishlansky, *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*, 138-148.

Ireland while subduing denominations that dissented from his Puritan rule. Cromwell also attempted to establish new parliamentary assemblies in Scotland and Ireland, but was unsuccessful. Eventually, he endeavored to reform the British Constitution by creating a new parliament called “The Instrument.” This new Parliament opted for resistance to Cromwell. Republicans in parliament argued that only Parliament had exclusive authority to establish a Constitution.

After the death of Cromwell in 1658, the role of Lord Protector befell on his son Richard. Parliament filibustered against the weak rule of Richard and ejected him from power. After a convention, Parliament recalled Charles II, the son of Charles I, from Spain in 1660, effectively ‘restoring’ the monarchy. The British Restoration resulted in further controversies and intermittent anxieties of a popish plot to assassinate Charles II and subvert the British Constitution with arbitrary government. English Whigs seized upon these fears and in 1680 during their Parliamentary dominance and passed the Exclusion Bill to exile Charles’s Catholic brother James. Charles II sent his brother James to Scotland and he remained there, even after the end of the Exclusion Bill, until just before Charles II’s death in 1685.

The traditional story of James II’s rule suggests that he wanted to reestablish Catholicism in England and reassert kingly dominance over Parliament. Once James II bore a child, the English immensely dreaded the possibility of a Catholic dynasty. Therefore, to protect English traditions, Parliament overthrew James II to institute a Protestant monarch. Although this story is not entirely wrong, it ignores the philosophical battle over the relationship between the king and parliament. James II adopted the views of divine-right monarchy he absorbed during his time in Catholic France. James II

ultimately lost the support of the English people and parliament because of his efforts to drift England towards absolutism. Once James II vacated the throne and Parliament declared William of Orange, the Dutch Protestant King, as the new king of England, they reasserted their power over the Monarchy in what became known as the Glorious Revolution.<sup>21</sup>

The turmoil in Europe during the seventeenth-century provided material for philosophers to debate. Determining what it means to be a Presbyterian, the rise of what was to be called ‘natural religion’—a view that through rational observations we can understand the universe and, most importantly, rationalism can supplant religious beliefs, what it means to be virtuous, and whether it is theologically justified to resist arbitrary power. These themes comprise a sizable portion of the religious and political debates contained in the Scottish Enlightenment. Often, historians date the beginning of the Scottish Enlightenment to the eighteenth-century where important figures such as Francis Hutcheson and David Hume become influential; however, we already see evidence of an Enlightenment perception of the world in the middle of the seventeenth-century, suggesting that at minimum we must recognize the importance of seventeenth-century Scottish thought.

Enlightenment rationalism encouraged new understandings of the world during the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries, yet, the early phase of the Enlightenment occurred roughly during the tail end of the Protestant Reformation. With the Reformation

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<sup>21</sup> There is a substantial historiography encompassing seventeenth-century English politics. A well done history of the period can be found in Mark Kishlansky’s *A Monarchy Transformed: Britain 1603-1714*. For a more detailed history of the Glorious Revolution in particular, see Steve Pincus, *1688: The First Modern Revolution*.



came widespread access to the Bible and Protestants encouraged and expected people to read, and therefore interpret, the Bible. Newfound access and interpretations led to divisions within sects, but more importantly, this access challenged conventional understandings of the Word. In Scotland, one of these new interpretations is found in Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex*.<sup>22</sup> The title itself is a massive indicator of what this book suggested. In Latin, *Lex* means law and *Rex* means ruler. The intent here is to show that the law precedes the ruler and he is therefore subservient to it. Rutherford argues in *Lex, Rex* similarly to Calvin and Knox that the nobility is the one with the right and authority to overthrow an unjust ruler. Other Presbyterian ministers, such as John Brown of Wamphray and James Stuart of Goodtrees were in exile during the Restoration with Alexander Shields. Shields was a preacher at the field conventicles that led to the National Covenant. The three of them argued that commoners had the right to resist unjust rulers. These writers depended on religious sources and secular ideas to justify the right of resistance. The ideas from these writers along with the Presbyterian religion would not remain isolated to Scotland or even England, it would eventually influence American Presbyterians just as much, if not more so than those in the British Isles.<sup>23</sup>

### Presbyterianism in the New World

Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians migrated to America throughout the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century for economic and theological reasons. Most were low on the social hierarchy, but a few of the immigrants did have higher status. They aspired to enhance their economic position and receive more religious toleration

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<sup>22</sup> Rutherford was a Presbyterian Minister trained at the University of Edinburgh.

<sup>23</sup> Erskine, "The Political Thought of the Restoration Covenanters," from *Scotland in the Age of Two Revolutions*, 158-160.

and freedom than they as dissenters on the British Isles. Even post-Act of Toleration the British government harshly treated dissenters from the Church of England. The Test Act prevented Presbyterians from holding public office. Furthermore, in the decades before the Act of Union of 1707, England persecuted Presbyterians if they supported the Kirk and tortured Covenanters for dissenting from the Church of England. The majority of these Scottish and Scots-Irish Presbyterians settled in the middle colonies of Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Most of these migrants were Covenanters from Ireland, not Scotland. Some 40,000 or more left Ireland in just the years between 1720-1728. Between 1730 and 1769, some 70,000 people migrated from Ulster alone. The earliest migrants already established the Synod of Philadelphia (the sole American Synod before the Great Awakening).

The Synod of Philadelphia was formed in 1706 by Francis Makemie of Maryland with the assistance of John Hampton of Snow Hill, the Scot George McNish and Nathaniel Taylor of Monokim and Patuxent respectively, John Wilson at New Castle, Jedidiah Andrews of Philadelphia, and the Irish Samuel Davies of Lewes, Delaware.<sup>24</sup> Philadelphia was central and nearby many Presbyterian communities and it grew by ten ministers by 1708. Due to its growing influence, the Synod divided itself into three presbyteries governed by the Synod: New Castle, Long Island, and Philadelphia. The Presbytery of Philadelphia suffered from Scottish and Scots-Irish arrivals that did not contain themselves to Philadelphia but tended to move west. A larger problem for the Synod was the division between Scottish, Irish, and English Presbyterians. English Presbyterians opposed any written creed including the National Covenant and

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<sup>24</sup> Samuel Davies at Lewes is not to be confused with the famous Great Awakening evangelist of Virginia, Samuel Davies.

Westminster Confession and disagreed with the church hierarchy. English Presbyterians tended to be more theologically liberal with church membership than their Scottish and Irish counterparts who believed it was fairly easy to distinguish between those who were saved or not. Both sides did agree on the importance of an educated ministry. Regardless, by 1724, all members of the Synod were Irish and Scottish, not English.<sup>25</sup>

Even though there were a number of Presbyterian ministers already present in North America, no other Presbyterian minister was more responsible for spreading and evangelizing Presbyterianism in America than Gilbert Tennent. Gilbert Tennent came from a family of ministers. His maternal grandfather, Gilbert Kennedy, participated in open-air conventicles, meaning he preached in the outdoors. In 1662, the Church of Scotland expelled him for nonconformity. Gilbert Tennent's father, William Tennent, Sr. trained as a Presbyterian minister at the University of Edinburgh and after receiving his license migrated to County Down in Ulster where the Church of Ireland ordained him as a Deacon in 1704 and in 1706 the Bishop of County Down. William Tennent Sr.'s ties to the Anglican Church withered over time because he opposed the Anglican Church's hierarchy and its "Armenianism" until finally returning to his Presbyterian roots by 1718. That year he traveled to America with his wife and three sons, Gilbert, William, Jr., and John with the hope of freedom from religious persecution.

The Tennents' originally chose to migrate to New York since the Philadelphia Synod offered William, Sr. a Parish in East Chester, but conflict with the Anglican Church led him to leave East Chester for Bedford, New York. This too was short lived

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<sup>25</sup> Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 140-148; John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Lanham, Maryland: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 2015), 65-66; Joseph M. Wilson, *A History of the Presbyterian Church in America, From its Origin Until the Year 1760, etc.* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Historical Society, 1857), 121.

and by 1726, he migrated to Bucks County, Pennsylvania to a parish in Neshaminy where he would eventually establish the first 'Log-College'. Gilbert Tennent's education began under his father's tutelage, eventually obtaining the necessary proficiency in Latin and other requirements to enter into Yale College for an M.A., which he received in 1725. In 1726, Gilbert Tennent sojourned to New Brunswick, New Jersey, beginning his pastorate in 1727. Gilbert, like his father, came to believe that many Christians, if not most, were not truly converted and this influenced his decision to preach in New Brunswick instead of New Castle, Delaware where he was originally committed to preach. New Brunswick, along with the rest of the Raritan Valley was under the stewardship of Theodorus Frelinghuysen who was a zealous and strict German Dutch-Reformed Pietist. Tennent befriended and was inspired by Frelinghuysen. Together, Tennent and Frelinghuysen worked in conjunction to spread the gospel; the two of them sometimes even shared services with one of them speaking in English and the other in Dutch. Tennent himself was partly a protégé of Frelinghuysen.

Gilbert Tennent had a particular advantage preaching Covenanter Presbyterianism in New Jersey because it was laden with Scots and Scots-Irish. His sermons, in part, emphasized a medieval conception of theology focusing on practical knowledge to help comprehend and understand the works of God to ensure salvation. His experience with Frelinghuysen also honed his skills as a preacher, creating a distinct style to foster conversion experiences while ostracizing ministers he believed were unconverted. Within a year, Tennent oversaw his first revival. This success prompted his brothers and Frelinghuysen to spread revivals into other parts of New Jersey and Staten Island. These

revivals continued sporadically throughout the 1730s before the eruption of the major revivals at the end of the decade.<sup>26</sup>

Significant differences between the Presbyterians in America and the British Isles developed over the course of the eighteenth-century. American Presbyterians had a higher proclivity for covenantal thought, emphasizing the importance of covenanting documents such as the Westminster Confession. The Westminster Confession of Faith was a follow-up to the Solemn League and Covenant, a document similar to the National Covenant but it was developed in the midst of the English Civil War to convince the Scottish Presbyterians to side with Parliament. It required Parliament to leave behind the Episcopalian doctrine in the Church of England and replace it with a Calvinist doctrine. The Westminster Confession is a declaration of Orthodox Calvinist doctrine that lists the tenants of the faith and the scriptural passages justifying the viewpoints on theological issues including predestination, salvation, and so on. The Westminster Confession is essentially an extension of the Solemn League but includes the underlying theology behind the Solemn League. As time passed, the Church of England and the Church of Scotland slowly abandoned the articles of the Westminster Confession and the Solemn League; however, in America, the articles of the Westminster Confession became nonnegotiable and covenantal views sturdily persisted.<sup>27</sup>

The perspectives on religion and intellectual ideas between Americans and the British counterparts diverged over time. Increased migration to the colonies exported

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<sup>26</sup> John Howard Smith, *The First Great Awakening: Redefining Religion in British America, 1725-1775* (Lanham, Maryland: Farleigh Dickinson Press, 2015), 70-78; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 92-93; W.R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 245, 269-273.

<sup>27</sup> Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 19-21.

many dissenters from the Church of England comprising Scottish and Irish Presbyterians with traditional interpretations of the Bible to America. The 'stable' structure of American Presbyterianism during the first two to three decades collapsed because of the evangelism of the Tennent family, the arrival of George Whitefield, and the outpouring of new evangelicals beginning with what is now referred to as the First Great Awakening.

### The Presbyterian Awakening

Developing evangelical ideals converged in the British American Atlantic world around the middle of the eighteenth-century during the First Great Awakening. Historians often explained the origins of the revivalist surge in terms of a decline in religious influence upon the colonies in the first three decades of the eighteenth-century. Recent studies complicate this interpretation. New England Congregationalists believed the Puritan interpretation of fluctuating purity in the faith. They migrated to the Americas in a time they perceived as turning away from a pure faith not tampered with by heterodox views. By the eighteenth-century, it is true that the church membership in Congregationalism became increasingly liberal, Solomon Stoddard, the grandfather of the famous Jonathan Edwards, was a major supporter of these liberal membership requirements. Jonathan Edwards opposed his grandfather's loose requirements for church membership, which, in his mind, weakened the faith in the church. He sought to vitalize the faith and preached as a revivalist with relative success in the 1730s. In 1734-1735, there was a first major revival in Northampton after a large earthquake at Lynn-End but as a whole, the following revival only temporary. It was in 1737 when his Northampton

parish underwent a revival do we see the beginning of the Congregational side of the Great Awakening.

Presbyterians expanded their influence in the early eighteenth-century, as described above, and were among the most active participants in the First Great Awakening. The Presbyterian revivals representative of the Great Awakening arose much earlier than the Congregationalists revivals did. Tennent was already a popular minister by the 1730s. Several of his and other popular Presbyterian ministers' sermons were printed in Boston as a small collection in 1739.<sup>28</sup> As a whole, 1739 was a big year for revivalism because of George Whitefield revivals in Britain spread to the American colonies. Newspapers like Benjamin Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette* reported on these revivals, including their controversies, more than any other newspaper. Newspaper reports on the Revivals and controversy of the Great Awakening remained popular for years.<sup>29</sup> Whitefield physically arrived to the British American colonies for his first preaching tour in 1740 and his sermons erupted the growing revivalist trend into the First Great Awakening with thousands and in even in the tens of thousands trying to hear his voice.<sup>30</sup>

The First Great Awakening followed older traditions of revivalism. Presbyterians repeated larger revivalist tendencies dating to the Scottish Reformation and seventeenth-century Scottish religious. A supporter of the Great Awakening, James Robe, partly defended the revivalism based on these earlier traditions. The Scottish Seceders

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<sup>28</sup> The sermons in this work mostly dealt with sacramental issues and sinfulness. Westerkamp, 161-162.

<sup>29</sup> For more information on newspaper coverage of the First Great Awakening. See Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, Maryland, Lexington Books, 2012) and Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>30</sup> See Lisa Smith, *The First Great in Colonial Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington, 2012) for more information on how the Great Awakening was reported in the colonial newspapers.

underwent revivals in Scotland during the 1620s and 1630s, creating their own sect of Presbyterianism. The Seceders were rigid Calvinists. While emphasizing the Bible alone, common among Protestants, the Seceders were most concerned with Scottish traditions and strictly obeying the words of John Knox, beginning every public document with a brief history of the Reformation. Like other Scottish revivals, they were explicitly critical of and attempt by the English government to intervene in the Kirks. Eighteenth-century Seceders wanted to distinguish themselves from the Great Awakening within Scotland and proclaimed themselves as the true heir of the Scottish Reformation, but, in actuality, their only means of distinguishing the Reformation from the Great Awakenings were analyzing specific historical and theological differences. While there certainly were differences between the two (after all, Presbyterian revivals in the eighteenth-century had a stronger Covenantal bent), the preaching styles adopted by Whitefield and Presbyterian ministers followed the Scottish revivalist traditions.

Historians and others often refer to Whitefield as the 'Grand Itinerant'. Itinerant preachers were traveling ministers who preached to audiences outside of their own parish (if they had one), reaching people who had insufficient access to a minister. In the British-American colonies, this tactic was particularly useful as colonists increasingly traveled west of the urban areas into the backcountry. People in the backcountry brought their religious traditions with them, but often lacked the resources and time to construct church structures or finance a minister. Itinerants had the power to breach these limitations and could cycle across various towns in a region, reaching audiences that lacked official ministers. Itinerants often did not have access to church buildings, whether barred by the official minister of a parish, or because there was a lack of a church



altogether and thus opted for open-air conventicles. This strategy derives directly from Scottish reformation traditions when John Knox and others preached outdoors. Certainly, this does not imply that all of these preachers are drawing upon the Scottish tradition, but these are important connections to the broader history of Protestant revivalism. For the Scots, in particular, this is just a continuum of the Knoxian tradition.<sup>31</sup>

The First Great Awakening encouraged intradenominational tension. Revivalists emphasized “New Birth,” a term originating from the story in John 3:3 where Jesus speaks to the Pharisee Nicodemus. Nicodemus asked Jesus on the requirements to enter the kingdom of God. Jesus responded, “Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.”<sup>32</sup> New Birth was a common thread for revivalism and during the 1730s and 1740s, becoming the central idea tying all of the Great Awakening revivalism together. All ministers supporting the revivals stressed New Birth in their sermons. Some, like Gilbert Tennent emphasized the need for New Birth during his early years preaching in New Brunswick, long before the major revival of the 1740s.

The persistent emphasis on New Birth often led to animosities among the members of the Synod of Philadelphia. By the 1730s, tension over the issue of choosing ministers enticed divisions within the Synod. The Presbytery of New Brunswick wanted exclusive power to choose its own ministers, without the Synod’s consent. The Synod attempted to pass a motion to ensure that American Presbyterian ministers were educated. While this may appear mundane, the Synod wanted these ministers to appear before a committee, giving total control of the ministry to the Synod, not the individual

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<sup>31</sup> Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 27, 118-123.

<sup>32</sup> For all Biblical references, I am opting to use the King James Version because it was the most accessible translation for eighteenth-century British-Americans.

presbyteries. In response to this act, the New Brunswick Presbytery, led by Gilbert Tennent, appointed its own minister, John Rowland, licensing him to preach at a vacant Philadelphia church. The Synod censured the New Brunswick Presbytery as punishment but went no further. Animosity between New Brunswick and the larger Synod continued to persist into the 1740s.

Tensions between New Brunswick and the rest of the Synod grew further when it tried to ban itinerant preaching in 1740. The peak of the internal strife came after Gilbert Tennent published his *The Danger of An Unconverted Ministry* in 1741 which criticized ministers he considered unconverted, that is to have not undergone a “New Birth:”

Are not wicked Men forbid to meddle in Things sacred? Ps. 50. 16. *But unto the Wicked, GOD saith, What hast thou to do to declare my Statutes, or that thou shouldst take my Covenant in thy Mouth?* Now, are not all unconverted Men wicked Men? Does not the Lord JESUS inform us, *John 10. 1. That he who entreth not by the Door into the Sheep-fold, but climbeth up some other Way, the same is a Thief and a Robber?*<sup>33</sup>

Tennent’s emphasis on converted ministers was certainly not new, but his derogatory comments directed towards those that opposed the evangelical revivals angered his opposition. The rhetoric here intensely judges ministers disagreeing with Tennent, describing them as unconverted implies that they lack the authority to preach. Gilbert Tennent provides power and authority to congregants to question the legitimacy of their own ministers. Congregants in fact, did utilize this power and directly questioned their ministers.

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<sup>33</sup> Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of An Unconverted Ministry, Considered in a Sermon on Mark VI. 34*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Edition (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1742), 5, University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N04113.0001.001?rgn=main;view=fulltext>. Throughout this paper, I will retain the original formatting and word choices the author chose to help ensure that the author’s meaning is not distorted.

Unsurprisingly, many ministers were aghast by this new reality and quickly asserted their opposition to the revivalist activity, culminating into two sides of the debate: New Lights who supported the revivals and Old Lights who opposed them. Presbyterianism specifically referred to their divisions as New Side and Old Side respectively. The Old Side represented the more traditional approaches of the ministry with strict rules regarding behavior in church with strict adherence to the Westminster Confession. New Side ministers embraced itinerant preaching and were highly covenantal but not supportive of the entirety of the Westminster Confession.

Many Presbyterians opposed specific articles of the Westminster Confession of Faith that went against certain Presbyterian doctrines. Emphasis must be given to the fact that their opposition to aspects of the Westminster Confession had no bearing to the idea of it being a covenant, in fact, New Lights profoundly stressed them in their sermons. Part of their opposition likely relates to the Anglican Church's power to enforce the Westminster Confession. The Church of England required dissenting ministers to subscribe to it if they wanted to preach. If they opposed certain passages, they had to provide, in writing, the specific passages they opposed and provide a detailed theological explanation elucidating their oppositions.

Regardless, the New Brunswick Presbytery challenged the authority of the Synod of Philadelphia. Alexander Craighead of Lancaster notably criticized ministers within their own parishes. Robert Cross, a longstanding minister of the Synod, publically rebuked the New Brunswick Presbytery and all ministers connected to the Log-College for their behavior and successfully called for their exclusion. The New York Presbytery was purposely absent for most of these debates to appear neutral and tried to defend

Tennent and his flock. The Presbytery of New York's appeals repeatedly failed and, by 1745, the Presbytery of New York split and formed its own Synod, which included the Presbyteries of New Brunswick, New York, and half of New Castle.<sup>34</sup>

Intrad denominational Schism fractured American Presbyterians. While these divisions were sharp, the New Lights had the advantage because those like Gilbert Tennent tapped into Scottish and Irish Presbyterian heritage and Knoxian theology recognizable by the congregants. Furthermore, it was not a particularly new situation for a split in the Presbyterian Synod, after all, it happened several times in seventeenth-century Scotland. Most importantly, New Lights were more successful than Old Lights in outreaching the public through printed works and itinerant ministering.

The New Light information campaign came in two forms: printed sermons and the spoken word. Before the American Revolution, theological works like sermons dominated printed works. People within the British Empire attached themselves to what the eminent historian Mark Noll describes as "Biblicism" in opposition to "Christendom." Christendom is characterized by the reliance on church and political authorities to discern the Bible for the audience whereas Biblicism relies on individual discernment of the Bible, emphasizing the need for preachers and laymen to directly discern and explain the Bible, often leading to very literal understandings of it. The Protestant emphasis on the Bible alone as the only source of theology and guide to one's life began to lose popularity within England after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, but, in the American colonies, Biblicism prospered. This largely relates to the oppressive

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<sup>34</sup> Wilson, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, 140-141; Westerkamp, *Triumph of the Laity*, 180-190; J. Barry Girwin, *Middle Octorara and the Revolution: A History Prepared for the Bicentennial and 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee of the Middle Octorara Presbyterian Church* (Lancaster: Bicentennial and 250<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Committee of the Middle Octorara Presbyterian Church. 1976), Lancaster County Historical Society.

regime of the Puritan Oliver Cromwell, Puritans unsurprisingly emphasized Biblicism. The First Great Awakening reinvigorated these existing notions, especially for the Congregationalists but in many respects also for the Presbyterians. Leading ministers sought to restore the church from the corruption of ministers that in their minds were not fit to lead the Christian masses.<sup>35</sup>

Many, but not all, twentieth century analysts perceived the intensive Biblicism within the British American colonies as antithetical to Enlightenment reason. Typically, they denoted the First Great Awakening as contradiction to the rationalism of the eighteenth-century, relegating the Awakening's overall importance as a side note or irrelevant gong forward. This misunderstanding is not surprising considering the intensive debates between science and religion throughout the twentieth century to the present day. People in the eighteenth-century did not perceive reason and religion as antithetical to each other. In fact, they saw them as mutually inclusive so long as rational thought does not attempt to supplant Biblical revelation. Indeed, reason and revelation coexisted in the sermons of major religious figures throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth-centuries. Approximately ninety percent of ministers during this period were college educated. Many ministers studied Isaac Newton, John Locke, Francis Hutcheson, Thomas Reid, classical theorists, and other Enlightenment thinkers. Ministers were particular about which works they embraced, only relying upon those that did not subvert the Bible as David Hume did, resulting in his persistent unpopularity in America. To simplify the opinions of these ministers, they did not understand reason and religion in

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<sup>35</sup> Holifield, *Theology in America*, 1, 29-30; Mark Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 5-11, 72-99, 141-149; Daniel L. Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 5-19, 24-34.

conflict; rather they embraced both so long as the Bible itself was unquestionable and retained an integral role within rational works.<sup>36</sup>

As the 1740s progressed, the Great Awakening lost steam in the northeast and on the coast. This was not entirely true for all denominations, as the Presbyterians continued to evangelize successfully into the 1750s. For George Whitefield this was especially true. He retained substantial crowds for the entirety of his career in which he preached some 18,000 sermons.<sup>37</sup> Presbyterians opted for a long-term approach. By relying upon their Log-Colleges, Presbyterians retained a generational continuity after the Tennent family could no longer preach and were able to consistently produce new ministers to reach untouched regions in the south and backcountry. The Great Awakening's revivalism persisted into the next few decades through the ministers who led Presbyterianism into the South and the backcountry.

Arguably, the best example of Great Awakening revivalism in the south came from Samuel Davies. Unlike many of the other major Presbyterian preachers of his day, Davies was born of Welsh parents. In fact, he was not initially raised a Presbyterian, but instead as a Baptist. Born in Delaware in 1723, he spent the first nine years of his life studying under Reverend Abel Morgan. His studies only ended when the local Baptist church excommunicated his mother Martha for adopting some of the views of the Presbyterians, what these exact beliefs she adopted was never made clear by the Baptist church. Nevertheless, this led to Samuel Davies studying under a new tutor, William Robinson. Robinson studied under William Tennent at the Neshaminy Log-College in Bucks County, Pennsylvania and afterward became an itinerant minister. In the 1740s, he

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<sup>36</sup> Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 23; Perry Miller, *Errand into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1956), 168-176.

<sup>37</sup> Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, 3.

was among the first Presbyterian itinerants to travel to Virginia, specifically to Hanover County. By the time Davies was under his tutelage, he was the minister at St. Georges, Delaware.

After Samuel Davies finished his basic schooling under Robinson, he next went to Samuel Blair's Log-College at Fagg's Manor, Pennsylvania.<sup>38</sup> Samuel Blair also studied under William Tennent at Neshaminy. It is unclear at what point in his life Samuel Davies decided he wanted to be a minister and when he had his New Birth experience. His sole biographer, George William Pilcher suggested that George Whitefield's visit to Fagg's Manor in 1740 inspired his conversion experience, but it is not even clear if Davies attended Whitefield's service. Although it is likely that he did attend the service as parallels exist between the preaching styles of Davies and Whitefield. It is more likely he had this experience while studying under Robinson for two reasons. One, his classmates commented his sudden engagement in "secret prayers" over his perceived imminent death. It turns out that Davies was stricken with Tuberculosis early in his life, probably around twelve years old when he began engaging in these prayers. Secondly, his eulogist and close friend, Samuel Finley, stated in a eulogy that "the first twelve years of his life were wasted in the most entire negligence of God and Religion...the God to whom he was dedicated by his Word and Spirit awakened him to solemn thoughtfulness, and anxious concern about his eternal state."<sup>39</sup> Since he was twelve while studying under Robinson and that same year his behavior dramatically changed, his bout of Tuberculosis

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<sup>38</sup> The name of Fagg's manor comes from the owner of the land Fagg's Manor Presbyterian Church was placed upon. For more about Fagg's Manor see Rev. W.B. Noble's sermon on the History of Fagg's Manor located at the Lancaster County Historical Society's archives.

<sup>39</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 1, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802). xx-xxi.

is most likely the cause. By the time Davies entered Blair's classical school, he was already pious and driven towards the ministry.

Davies graduated from Blair's academy at Fagg's Manor and was thereafter ordained by the Synod of New York on January 19, 1747. The Synod appointed him to the parish of Hanover County, Virginia. Hanover County contained a growing population of Scots-Irish. Being in Virginia, Davies entered into an environment with an established church, the Church of England. The Anglican Patrick Henry Sr., the uncle of the revolutionary Patrick Henry, led the Parish of Hanover County. Throughout the entirety of Davies's time in Hanover, which officially began in 1748, Henry made every effort to stall the spread of his evangelism and his efforts to itinerate areas outside of the Parish limited to him by Virginia. During his time in Hanover, even with the restrictions placed upon him, the demand for Presbyterian ministers in Virginia skyrocketed because of how many new Presbyterian congregations sprung up in Virginia due to Davies's sermons.<sup>40</sup>

Davies's influence only grew over the next decade of his life. In 1753, the surging demand for Presbyterian ministers increased the pressure upon the College of New Jersey (presently called Princeton), founded by Reverend Ebenezer Prime and Gilbert Tennent to educate New Side Presbyterian ministers. Growing pressure necessitated the need for more funding to accommodate them, so the trustees of the college requested Tennent and Davies to travel to the British Isles to obtain funding. The voyage began on September 3 and Davies kept a diary for the entirety of his trip. For a few weeks, Davies circulated between Philadelphia, New York, and Fagg's Manor giving sermons and attending the

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<sup>40</sup> For more on Hanover County, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982) and Martha W. McCartney, *Nature's Bounty, Nation's Glory: Heritage and History of Hanover County, Virginia* (Mechanicsville, Virginia: Heritage and History of Hanover County, Inc., 2009).



New York Synod before departing for England on November 16. Apparently, the ship, *The London* was behind schedule. After just over four weeks at sea, he landed at Dover. Davies returned to Virginia on February 13, 1755. His journey was eventful, he preached a substantial number of sermons; however, he like other New Light Preachers that traveled to England, including George Whitefield, noted that dissenting faiths were weakening there. In late October of 1754, he visited the Wesley brothers, founders of Methodism, and apparently visited the grave of John Locke, copying the epitaph into his diary. Davies and Tennent procured at least £2,947 for the college. The exact amount of funds they obtained was likely higher, but the treasury book for the college is lost to history. The last few years of his life remained eventful; he fought for increased religious toleration in Virginia, preached a variety of sermons to Virginia militia during the Seven Years War, and became the fourth President of the College of New Jersey before dying on February 4, 1761.

For the Presbyterians, the Great Awakening appears to have finally ended with the unification of the Synods in 1758—due in particular to the efforts of Samuel Davies to bring them back together. New Lights overwhelmingly dominated this updated Synod of Philadelphia, but they decided to somewhat compromise on the intense evangelism and criticisms of other ministers. The unified Synod remained theologically New Light for the next few decades. Other denominations were on the rise including the Baptists in the 1750s and 1760s and the Methodists beginning in the 1770s. For these groups, their rise resulted directly from the earlier efforts related to the Great Awakening. Due to their late bloom, their revivalism persisted until the 1790s. Ultimately, These evangelical

efforts were only possible with the efforts to expand the number of Presbyterian ministers throughout the period of the Great Awakening.<sup>41</sup>

### Education in the Era of Revivalism

The Puritan faith's main objective was the purification of the Church of England. They also believed education needed purified from corrupt doctrines and thus began an enduring tradition of parental education to ensure their children would grow up capable of reading the Bible. To further education, British American Puritan leaders relied on their ministers to educate children in philosophy, culture and, naturally, religion. Books typically entered into the colonies from overseas. Books on piety, devotionals, and philosophical works were all popular. It was this environment where American education first formed. By 1636, the Massachusetts Bay Colony established Harvard to educate students primarily for the ministry. Puritan leaders modeled Harvard from Cambridge,

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<sup>41</sup> Davies left us with an immense number of documents in the forms of sermons, letters, hymns, a diary, among others. While he is recognized as important within literature of the Great Awakening, he has been greatly underrepresented in the historiography. Only one biography of him exists: George William Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (Knoxville, Tennessee: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971). While Pilcher's work is useful, an updated biography of Samuel Davies is greatly needed because of new information on Davie and the Awakening has arisen over the past forty years. Pilcher also wrote two other works on Davies. He published his diary in *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753-1755* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967) and "Samuel Davies and the Instruction of Negroes in Virginia," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 74, no. 3 (July 1966): 293-300. Davies left behind sixty-three sermons, all of which were either printed in his lifetime or included in the three-volume collection of his sermons printed by Thomas Gibbons in 1765. These sermons remain in print to the present day and went through multiple editions. The edition this paper relies upon is the fifth edition printed in 1802 reprinted by Forgotten Books, which included a few sermons missing from the earlier editions, a memoir, a sermon preached at Davies's funeral by his friend Samuel Finley and Thomas Gibbons. Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects, etc.*, 3 vol. (New York: Printed for T.S. Arden, 1802). There are also a number of secondary articles about Davies: George H. Bost, "The South's Great Awakener," *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1943-1961)*, 33, no. 3 (September 1955): 135-155; Richard M. Gummere, "Samuel Davies: Classical Champion of Religious Freedom," *Journal of Presbyterian History (1962-1985)*, 40, no. 2 (June 1962): 67-74; Craig Gilborn, "The Reverend Samuel Davies in Great Britain," *Winterthur Portfolio*, 8 (1973): 45-62. A number of other works survive on his preaching to minorities such as African slaves and Native Americans, on his time as President of Princeton, and even of him as a hymn writer. In fact, Davies is probably America's first hymn writer.

but this type of schooling was replicated by other denominations such as the Presbyterians.<sup>42</sup>

Presbyterians followed a similar path as the Puritans. First education began in the home. Initially, since British American Presbyterians lacked a sectarian college to train their own ministers, early eighteenth-century Presbyterians were either trained abroad in Edinburgh or another Scottish University. In other cases, they attended a colonial school, most often Yale. William Tennent, Sr. decided to take matters into his own hands and founded the Neshaminy Classical School in 1726 to educate Presbyterians for the ministry. Schools like the log-colleges and the later College of New Jersey modeled themselves from Scottish Universities and Congregationalists schools. The Presbyterian schools retained continual contact with their Scottish counterparts to obtain the latest important publications from the British Isles. From this route, many works from the Scottish Enlightenment entered into the American colonies. Later Presbyterians institutions followed the Neshaminy School. Gilbert Tennent created his own classical academy in New Brunswick. Samuel Finley and other ministers received their initial training at New Brunswick. Finley constructed his own log-college in West Nottingham Maryland in 1744. Samuel Blair graduated from Neshaminy in 1735 and traveled to Fagg's Manor to establish a Presbyterian Church and a classical school. The classical school may have been in the church as there is no clear indication of a separate building ever constructed. Samuel and his brother John Blair trained a number of recognizable revivalists such as Samuel Davies and John McMillan. McMillan is best known for

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<sup>42</sup> Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1970), 16-49; Octorara Area Historical Society, "An Account of Some of the Private Schools in the Octorara Area," *Octorara Historical Society*, vol. 4. n.d..

spreading New Light Presbyterianism into the Pennsylvania backcountry.<sup>43</sup> Another minister John Steel (his educational background is not clear, he was ordained in 1744 by the New Castle Presbytery) founded a Latin school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. New Lights established all the above academies; however, this does not imply that Old Lights did not create their own schools. Francis Alison, for example, constructed an academy in New London, Pennsylvania. The New London academy trained several ministers, including future founding father, Jonathan Dickinson.

The most famous of the Log-Colleges was The College of New Jersey chartered by the New Side Synod of New York in 1746. The College of New Jersey, present-day Princeton, became the prime source for training Presbyterian ministers. Its first six presidents are all recognizable: Aaron Burr, Sr., Rev. Jonathan Dickinson, Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, and John Witherspoon, signer of the Declaration of Independence. The College of New Jersey produced a number of noted founders including Benjamin Rush and James Madison.

Schools created by Presbyterians certainly had an important role in educating youths. Ultimately, this success must come from their curricula. Each academy's curriculum is not always clear, and changed often. One aspect that was consistent for all of these academies was training in classical works like Cicero, Livy, and Homer. These schools expected students to be able to translate these works from their original languages and thus taught Latin and Greek. We can infer that some taught Hebrew, as it

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<sup>43</sup> For more on John McMillan, see Dwight Raymond Guthrie, *John McMillan: The Apostle of Presbyterianism in the West, 1752-1833* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1952). After finishing at Fagg's Manor, McMillan went to Pequea Academy founded by Robert Smith. Smith underwent his New Birth experience after listening to Whitefield preach and went for ministry training, graduating from Fagg's Manor Academy. Later on, McMillan traveled to the backcountry as a missionary and founded the Canonsburg Academy (one of the two schools that formed into the modern day Washington & Jefferson College) and helped establish the Pittsburgh Academy (University of Pittsburgh today).

was an expectation for incoming ministry to Presbytery of Hanover led by Samuel Davies. These schools also taught both theologians and religious philosophers including Erasmus, Calvin, and Milton. Initially, these schools did not teach Enlightenment philosophers, but over time, they were adopted. The Congregationalist schools such as Yale adopted Locke and Newton into their curriculum in the early eighteenth-century. By the mid-1740s, the Log-Colleges incorporated Locke, Newton, Thomas Reid, Francis Hutcheson, and others. When John Witherspoon became President of the College of New Jersey, he expanded the amount of Scottish Enlightenment works used in the curriculum. As a whole, these schools intended to create a virtuous student body and respectable future leaders. Students were required to become proficient orators, have strong familiarity with logic and mathematics, knowledgeable about scientific inquiries, ethics, and other aspects of a liberal arts education.<sup>44</sup>

The introduction of Presbyterianism into sixteenth-century Scotland, through the revivals of John Knox and other Protestant Reformers profoundly influenced both Scotland and later America. Successive generations of Presbyterianism claimed Knox's legacy and embraced a strong covenantal tradition during a time of intense political turmoil on the British Isles. These intense debates over religion and politics led to the development of resistance theories and new ideas about virtue. By the eighteenth-century,

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<sup>44</sup> Several works exist detailing education in the American colonies. The most comprehensive is Lawrence Cremin's *American Education*, which he separated into three volumes. The first volume is pertinent here, For the Presbyterians in particular, see Howard Miller, *The Revolutionary College: Presbyterian Higher Education, 1707-1837* (New York: New York University Press, 1976). Noll's study of the Bible in American Public life and E. Brooks Holifield's *Theology in America* along with John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008). Probably the best work on the influence of the classics upon education is Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

organized Presbyterianism migrated to British America. Presbyterianism spread rapidly due to the Tennent family. The growth of Presbyterianism and the desire to return to its revivalist roots led to the New-Side, Old-Side schism during the Great Awakening. These New-Siders reached audiences on the coast, in the Anglican stronghold of the south, and the backcountry. Relying upon their academies designed from the Scottish and Congregational models, Presbyterians could train new ministers with detailed knowledge of not only religion, but also science, ethics, logic, and the Enlightenment. For British American Presbyterians, the Great Awakening was both a theological event and a continuum of Knoxian revivalists traditions and their Scottish past.

## Chapter 2: Presbyterian Virtue

Morality mattered to eighteenth-century Presbyterians. Samuel Davies, a Virginian Presbyterian minister of the period preached a sermon entitled “Jesus Christ the Only Foundation to a Virginia militia on February 13, 1757. Like many of his sermons, there was a definitive mixture of Christianity and the Scottish Enlightenment: “Your proud self-confident virtue, your boasted philosophic morality, is but a loose tottering foundation. Virtue and morality are necessary to complete and adorn the superstructure; but when they are laid at the bottom of all, they will prove but quicksand.” For Davies, the foundation must be religion; however, he acknowledges the importance of Enlightenment virtue and morality to “adorn the superstructure.” Within the context of this sermon, he defines morality in similar terms as Francis Hutcheson’s ‘moral-sense’ philosophy. Conceptually, this tells us that Davies perceived no contradiction between Christianity and Enlightenment ideals as long as Enlightenment thought did not subvert religious faith.<sup>45</sup>

For Presbyterians in mid-eighteenth-century British America, the primary source of morality and virtue, unsurprisingly, came from the Bible. New Conceptions of virtue arose during the eighteenth-century from Scottish Enlightenment thinkers, especially Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid, who challenged conventional thinking on morality. The differences between American Presbyterians and British Presbyterians are complex. American Presbyterians tended to embrace covenantal thought. In contrast, the Scottish Kirk mostly rejected covenantal thought by the eighteenth-century. The most peculiar

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<sup>45</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects, by the Late Reverend and Pious Samuel Davies, A. M. Sometime President of the College of New Jersey*, vol. 2 (New York: Printed for T. Allen, 1802), 201.

difference between the two arrived with the Scottish Enlightenment. Presbyterian churches in Scotland commonly resisted Enlightenment ideas, even from religious moderates. American Presbyterian ministers responded more positively to the Scottish Enlightenment than Kirk and actively incorporated Hutcheson's 'moral-sense' and Thomas Reid's 'common-sense' philosophies into their academies. Presbyterian ministers preached the Enlightenment philosophies of Hutcheson and Reid and became an important source for colonial Americans to learn and embrace the Enlightenment in the decades before the American Revolution.

A key overarching figure between the theological debates over the Scottish Enlightenment is John Witherspoon who arrived in America when Presbyterians already began to embrace these ideas. Witherspoon, unlike many of the American Presbyterians involved in these theological debates, lived through the founding of the republic, when the fusion of Enlightenment thought and religion beliefs dominated public thinking. Evidence strongly suggests that many mid-eighteenth-century Presbyterians ministers embraced these new ideas of virtue from the Scottish Enlightenment and they spread them to their congregants and students.

### The 'Old' Virtue

Christian theologians, clergy, and the laypeople believed virtue was a fundamental method of displaying respect to God. In the simplest terms, virtue represented an underlying factor in a theology of works. Catholic theologians conceptualized 'heavenly virtues' such as chastity, fortitude, temperance, and charity to describe the Christian way of life. Christians debated, and continue to debate, the



importance of virtue and morality. John Calvin associated virtuous behavior as a sign of God's grace. Virtuosity was most importantly a sign of the 'elect'—meaning that the person is among the saved. Calvin argued that scripture is the fundamental source of virtues, but he also recommends in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, the fundamental source for Calvin's theological thought, the best place to comprehend Biblical ideas of virtue are the exhortations of the Church Fathers.<sup>46</sup> Church Fathers is a broad term for the theologians of the early Christian church including Augustine, Ignatius, and others that tradition suggests were either taught directly by the Apostles and Paul or were Church leaders within the first few generations after Christ. The aforementioned Catholic 'heavenly virtues' derive directly from the homilies of the Church Fathers.

Calvin's 'elect' were preordained to be saved before the creation of the universe. Calvin argued that morality was unconditional, in other words, it only appeared in those who were among those chosen by God and not of their own free will. Laymen of various backgrounds often misunderstand or unintentionally mischaracterize Calvinism, as entirely denying human will because God prescience of people's decisions. A better, albeit probably more convoluted, way to understand Calvinist predestination is that people consciously make their decisions and are not necessarily compelled to make these decisions. God is fore-knowledgeable about human action because God has absolute authority over the Universe, but he does not compel human action. Essentially, God preordains people based on decisions He knows they will make of their own volition.

Arminianism, in opposition to Calvinism, expressed an absolute or near-absolute view of

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<sup>46</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, III.6.1, 1536, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/master/index.html?mainframe=/books/institutes/>

free will. God, in their theological vision, God does not predetermine who is saved. 'Election' is conditional in Arminianism and therefore dependent upon their moral actions. This theological paradox has been a contentious debate since the foundation of Christianity. For strict Calvinists, only some could be virtuous. Arminians would suggest anyone could be virtuous.

### The Scottish Enlightenment

By the eighteenth-century, there were two predominant schools of thought regarding the source of morality. The heterodox view presented by the 'empiricist' school suggested that morality and all aspects of knowledge derive from experience. 'Empiricists' argued in favor of the impossibility of arriving to any knowledge of the world from any innate source, including God. The alternative and more theologically orthodox understanding of morality is associated with the 'rationalist' school of thought. 'Rationalists' contended that while it was true that knowledge derives from experience, accepting John Locke's notion of *tabula rasa* (meaning that at birth, the mind is essentially a blank slate, devoid of any knowledge of the ideas of the physical world),<sup>47</sup> they rejected the idea that morality derives from experience. Unlike the 'empiricists', 'rationalists' believed that morality was innate. 'Rationalists' suggested that 'empiricist' understanding of morality implies that morality is entirely associated with self-interest.<sup>48</sup> The debate between 'empiricists' and 'rationalists' is part of the larger context of the Scottish Enlightenment.

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<sup>47</sup> From Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*.

<sup>48</sup> Francis Hutcheson, *Selected Philosophical Writings*, ed. John McHugh (Exeter, United Kingdom: Imprint Academic, 2014), 6.

Francis Hutcheson is probably the most important figure of this debate on moral epistemology. Hutcheson was born to a family of Scottish Presbyterian ministers living at the Ulster Plantation in 1694. Hutcheson originally wanted to become a minister, following the Irish ‘New Light’ Presbyterian theology, which tended to be less rigid in church membership and less strict in its Calvinist views. Like American New Side Presbyterians of the First Great Awakening, many Irish ‘New Lights’ rejected the need to subscribe to the Westminster Confession to become a minister. Irish “New Lights” were more optimistic towards human nature and usually treated the doctrine of original sin less rigidly.

During his time in Glasgow, Hutcheson studied under Gershom Carmichael. Carmichael centered much of his philosophical undertakings on Scottish religious debates of the seventeenth and early eighteenth-century regarding new scientific and Enlightenment ideas. One of Carmichael’s most famous works was his *Synopsis Theologiae Naturalis*, which argued the existence of God was necessary for the ability to reason. After the passing of Carmichael in 1729, the University of Glasgow offered Hutcheson his former teacher’s position as the Professor of Moral Philosophy.<sup>49</sup>

One of Hutcheson’s most important theories was his notion of the ‘moral sense’. This theory positioned him at the middle ground between the ‘empiricists’ and ‘rationalists’. Hutcheson aligned himself with the ‘rationalists’ because he contended that morality was innate but simultaneously sided with the ‘empiricists’ in arguing that through experience people can obtain new interpretations of morality. Hutcheson suggests that people will make moral decisions without self-interest. Hutcheson

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<sup>49</sup> Hutcheson, *Selected Philosophical Works*, 1-2; Broadie, *Cambridge Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, 37-38.

suggested that engaging in actions that are perceptively moral to avoid punishments from either human legislatures or God are not actually virtuous because they occur out of self-interest. Hutcheson derives that the moral sense is derives from God; however, he maintains that people lacking in religious viewpoints can still make moral decisions. His argument arises from the idea that people naturally find themselves approving or disapproving of certain behaviors without any knowledge of other viewpoints on morality or empirical arguments on the subject. In essence, Hutcheson intermixes the innate ‘moral sense’ with Locke’s *tabula rasa*. The idea of virtue, to Hutcheson, derives from both the moral sense and experience. As people acquire knowledge, they are able to make decisions that could either be approved or condemned by God. Hutcheson ties moral goodness to love towards the deity or others, while our sense of moral evils roots from “anger, hatred, and fear” and most importantly “self-love.” Self-love, Hutcheson argues, exists in a middle state that is “neither virtuous nor vicious.” Decisions based upon self-interests are not inherently good or bad, rather it is whether those rational decisions benefit or injure others.<sup>50</sup>

Hutcheson’s philosophy matches his semi-heterodox religious views. His Presbyterian views clearly relate to the divine origins of the moral sense, while at the same time, several of his views were particularly unorthodox. In 1718, Hutcheson received his preaching license and orated a sermon on the goodness and benevolence of God. Allegedly, the elders of the Armaugh Church suggested that Hutcheson stated that “heathen” could make it to heaven if they followed their conscience. While the truthfulness of this allegation is questionable, it does suggest that local religious authorities found his views problematic. Hutcheson’s philosophical and theological views

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<sup>50</sup> Hutcheson, *Selected Philosophical Works*, 11-14, 97-98, 119-127.

derive mostly from the theology of John Simson, the Professor of Divinity at Glasgow University. Hutcheson's other major influence was his close friend Robert Molesworth—an ardent New Light Whig. Both Simson and Molesworth had religious opinions outside the orthodoxy. The University of Glasgow removed Simson from his position in 1729 because of his views. Contrary to the orthodox clergy at Glasgow, Simson argued God was benevolent—meaning that God's love extends beyond the predestined 'elect'. Hutcheson probably derived his views of God as benevolent from Simson. Hutcheson's Whig views either derive or were reinforced by Molesworth. Hutcheson, though, did not entirely align his theology with Simson. Simson agreed with Samuel Clarke's denial of the Trinity, whereas Hutcheson wrote in a private letter his opposition to Clarke's views. With Carmichael, the third important influence for Hutcheson, he defended the existence of God along with the idea that there are aspects of God beyond human comprehension including the Trinity. While certain aspects of Hutcheson's theology were problematic for the orthodoxy of the Presbyterian Church, for American New Side Presbyterians, his views typically aligned with their own.<sup>51</sup>

Hutcheson's arguments do not conflict with the Knoxian Presbyterian perception of predestination because people can be innately moral and make moral decisions, but still can be among the saved or not. The way to best perceive whether someone was among the 'elect' has more to do with their actions and views of God. For New Side Presbyterians in America like Gilbert Tennent and his followers, this theological position is insurmountably important in understanding how American Presbyterians embraced certain aspects of the Scottish Enlightenment while simultaneously deriding others. The

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<sup>51</sup> James Buchan, *Crowded with Genius: The Scottish Enlightenment: Edinburgh's Moment of Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 62-63, 69, 361 n. 54; Hutcheson, *Selected Philosophical Works*, 2; Broadie, *Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, 14, 38, 56 n. 14 and n. 18.

religious perceptions of the Enlightenment philosopher is the most important factor in determining whether a British-American New Side Presbyterian aligns themselves with the arguments of said philosopher.

### Adopting the Scottish Enlightenment

Morality and virtue for American Presbyterians during the first half of the eighteenth-century are best understood as a covenant between man and God. Gilbert Tennent described God's role in this covenant in the eleventh sermon of the *Twenty Three Sermons on the Chief end of Man*, "That it is a Perfection of the divine Nature whereby Jehovah hath enough in himself, for himself, and for his People in every respect." Tennent elucidates two key concepts, that God is a perfect being, meaning that He needs no sustenance from the people, while being able to fulfill any needs of His followers if He so chooses. These ideas derive directly, as Tennent explains, "from his Infinity in particular, as well as from his other Attributes in general, because he existed not by the Will of another, therefore he is independent and infinite in his Essence and in all his Attributes and Being."<sup>52</sup> The Covenantal structure, according to Tennent is that God, because He is an infinite being, He can operate independently, regardless of the actions of mortals.

Another premise Tennent argues in the same sermon is that God "hath no Dependance upon Creatures, neither can he receive any Good or Excellency from them,

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<sup>52</sup> Gilbert Tennent, *Twenty Three Sermons upon the Chief End of Man. The Divine Authority of the Sacred Scriptures, the Being and Attributes of God, and the doctrine of the Trinity, Preach'd at Philadelphia* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1743), 215, University of Michigan, <https://quod.lib.umich.edu/e/evans/N04442.0001.001/1:3?rgn=div1;view=fulltext>. Like the first chapter, I will not alter the original author's words or emphasis. All quotes remain as close as possible to the original provided by the author.

because they have deriv'd their All from him.”<sup>53</sup> Combining these two ideas insinuates that the Theological understanding of virtue and morality presented by Tennent was a covenant expressed as a sacred duty of the people to serve God through virtue they derived from him. This theological derivation is undoubtedly from an orthodox view of Calvinism and more importantly Knoxian Presbyterianism since it describes morality as inherent and derived directly from God. Simultaneously this implies that being among the ‘elect’, according to Presbyterian, and particularly in this case New Side Presbyterianism, infers a Knoxian perception of predestination. Yet, this traditional understanding presented by Tennent is important in the context of the theological and intellectual debates during the eighteenth-century concerning the source of morality.

The above quotes from Tennent arguing that morality is innate and the emphasis on utilizing evangelism to obtain converts relate closely with Hutcheson’s arguments. Both Tennent and Hutcheson were in favor of innate morality. While these two ideas align, it does not necessarily suggest that Tennent was familiar with Hutcheson’s arguments, rather it does show that their theological and epistemological thinking coalesce, making it possible for Presbyterians like Tennent to embrace Hutcheson. Even if we are uncertain of Tennent’s direct familiarity with Hutcheson’s works, many mid-eighteenth-century Presbyterians studied his works and included Hutcheson and other Scottish philosophers into their curriculum. Samuel Blair’s academy at Fagg’s Manor, Pennsylvania and Samuel Finley’s academy in West Nottingham, Maryland both

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<sup>53</sup> Tennent, *Twenty Three Sermons upon the Chief end of Man*, 216.

included Hutcheson's Moral Philosophy and Thomas Reid's 'Common Sense' philosophy.<sup>54</sup>

Thomas Reid is most identifiable for his views on 'common sense' philosophy. He published his argument to challenge the religious skepticism of David Hume. Hume is undoubtedly the most recognizable and influential figure of the Scottish Enlightenment. Hume, like other theorists discussed the importance of perception and experience to understanding the world. Hume challenged religion by criticizing the impossibility of miracles, on the basis that a claimed miracle not provable through the testimony of others. Rather, miracles need empirical evidence. Furthermore, our understanding comes from the senses, which are not always reliable. Our perceptions and arguments cannot contradict our senses; this is the root of his skepticism.<sup>55</sup> Thomas Reid questioned Hume's proclamation of skepticism in his 1748 *Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*. Reid certainly acknowledges that Hume makes a convincing argument in this work; however, Reid suggests that Hume did not question his fundamental premise that perceptions are rooted in preexisting ideas. Reid suggests that 'common-sense' itself is philosophically not provable because it is the root of all perception. His argument continues that 'common-sense' is the means of deriving evidence and based on this premise, our senses are reliable enough to provide adequate and trustworthy information.

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<sup>54</sup> It is important to mention that New Side Presbyterians did not exclusively teach these ideas. Francis Alison, a student of Francis Hutcheson at Glasgow. Later, he migrated to America, worked as a probationer in 1734/1735, and later tutored the son of John Dickinson of Delaware. The Presbytery of New Castle, which later became part of the New Side New York Synod, ordained Alison at some point before May 1737. Alison's congregation was the same congregation that Alexander Craighead intruded upon, leading ultimately to the split in the Synod. Although Alison always remained with the Old Side, during the schism in the Synod, he was never divisive towards New Side Presbyterians. For more information about Alison see Richard Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America: From its Origin until the Year 1760* (Philadelphia, Joseph M. Wilson, 1857), 440-443. For more on education in the Academies see Lawrence A. Cremin, *American Education: the Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* (New York: Harper & Row, 1970), 460.

<sup>55</sup> David Hume, *Enquiries Concerning Human Understanding and Concerning the Principles of Morals*, ed. P.H. Nidditch (Oxford: Clarendon Press. 1975), 109-131.



Reid thus recommends that we use ‘common-sense’ to understand the world beyond our mind because they are our means of comprehending evidence—directly contradicting Hume. The division between Hume and Reid are important to understanding why Presbyterians utilized Reid’s ideas while utterly ignoring those of Hume.<sup>56</sup>

Both Hutcheson and Reid rejected Hume’s skepticism and defended the existence of God. For American Presbyterians, their defense of God was the key component in their adoption and inclusion of their views into their academies. Hume’s philosophical works rarely appear in America. Few British-Americans adopted Hume’s belief system. Hume’s *History of England* was more recognizable than his philosophical works in America, but even this work was unpopular because Hume faulted religion as the cause of the crises during the reign of Charles I. Hume goes as far as to support Charles I in this work, a king that Presbyterians and Congregationalists both despised. Hume advocated in his *History* for a strong monarchy and aristocracy. New Side Presbyterian theologians rejected these arguments from Hume and rarely taught them in any capacity. This was also true for non-Presbyterian academies entwined with religious denominations such as Yale and the College of Philadelphia. American knowledge of the Scottish Enlightenment was generally limited to Hutcheson, Reid, and other thinkers that are not among those skeptical of religion. One major access point for most colonials in the British-American colonies to this information were their ministers. Since theological works were still the most commonly printed works, it is not a stretch to argue that knowledge of Hutcheson’s

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<sup>56</sup> Brodie, *Companion to the Scottish Enlightenment*, 117-132.

‘moral sense’ or Reid’s ‘common-sense’ philosophy first came from the pulpits of those ministers, especially Presbyterians, who expressed these ideas in their sermons.<sup>57</sup>

Certain Enlightenment thinkers challenged rigid Calvinism, resulting in three theological divisions among the Congregational clergy. ‘Edwardeans’ were disciples of the theology of Jonathan Edwards who desired a pure church with members that can testify to their own evangelical experiences. Critics rebranded Edwardeans as the ‘New Divinity’ and Edwardeans embraced this term by the 1770s. The second group, known as ‘Old Calvinists’ hoped for an uncontested religious establishment with liberal church membership requirements. This group, by the 1770s referred to as the ‘Old Divinity’, reflects the theological divisions between Old Light and New Light divides within Protestantism during the First Great Awakening. The ‘Old’ and ‘New’ Divinities referred to the third group as Arminians. The revivalist division during the First Great Awakening eventually transformed into a theological debate about virtue during the 1750s. All three agreed that there was room for both reason and revelation in the church; however, they disagreed as to what extent reason should play into theological interpretations. Armenians wanted to expand upon existing moral philosophy into a school of thought most similar to those like Samuel Clarke. The ‘Old Divinity’, ‘New Divinity’, and Armenians borrowed from the Scottish Enlightenment. The ‘Old Divinity’ view was more conservative on the matter in that while they agreed with the idea of a ‘moral-sense’, they did not believe the sinful could be naturally moral. Those who were not among the ‘elect’ were incapable of repenting since they lacked a moral-sense. The ‘New Divinity’ embraced the moral-sense

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<sup>57</sup> Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 120-121; Mark A. Noll, *America’s God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 107-111; Cremin, *American Education: Colonial Experience*, 460-463; E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*, 1, 29-30.

more along the lines of how Hutcheson described it as a universal ‘moral-sense’. These divisions bear very close resemblance to the divides of the Great Awakening, as Old Lights did not believe the revivalist activity was not divine, but instead hysterical. New Lights, of course, embraced the revivals as miraculous works of God, and they believed anyone could repent. In short, the New Divinity was less rigidly Calvinist than the Old Lights, but both fully embraced Calvinism in different ways.

While the above debate was technically within the Congregational Church, it infected Presbyterians as well. Presbyterians certainly debated virtue, but the division was less clear. Ultimately, both the New Side and Old Side came to embrace the Scottish Enlightenment, but the New Side incorporated it, for the most part, earlier. Davies, Tennent, Samuel Finley, Samuel Blair, among others all fell into the theological category of ‘New Divinity’. Presbyterian ‘New Divinity’ did not perfectly align with Congregationalist ‘New Divinity. Unlike Congregationalists, Presbyterian ‘New Divinity’ ministers did not believe in the strict membership requirements of the Edwardeans.<sup>58</sup>

### The ‘New’ Virtue

As alluded to above, moral behavior was a defining feature of Calvinist faiths. Eighteenth-century American Presbyterians divided themselves over the influence of outside sources in defining virtue, but realistically, their differences were much smaller than they perceived, at least between the Old and New Divinities. For both of them, the ideas of the Enlightenment had to align themselves to their preexisting theological

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<sup>58</sup> E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America*, 127-156.

perspectives. The real difference between Old and New Divinities were the same as the divides between Old and New Lights during the First Great Awakening based on the use of evangelism. For both sides, proof of the reach of God's grace depended greatly on the virtue individuals expressed, regardless if they were layman or rulers.

The fundamental purpose of the use of these sources was to inculcate virtue upon their students and congregants. During the First Great Awakening, many revivalist ministers utilized the virtue in their sermons. Samuel Davies, in his sermon entitled *The Rule of Equity* defines a good Christian as “not only devout, but moral and virtuous: he is not only a dutiful servant of God in matters purely religious, but he is an useful member of every society to which he belongs.” Davies explicitly defines the virtues of a good Christian in that they make “conscience of justice, charity, and all the good offices due to his fellow-creatures. He Is a good ruler, or a good subject...in short, he endeavours to have a *conscience void of offence towards God and towards men.*”<sup>59</sup> This tells us two things about Davies's teleology. First, a Christian has a duty to God and virtue is the means for a good Christian to show their obligation to Him. Second, virtue is about their duty to the rest of humanity. Davies, Tennent and other Presbyterians, prioritized their covenant with God:

Were I reading to you a lecture of moral philosophy in the school of Socrates or Seneca, what I have offered might be sufficient. But in order to adapt this discourse to the Christian dispensation, and make it true Christian morality it is necessary I should subjoin two evangelical peculiarities...the first is, that all our good offices to mankind should proceed not only from benevolence to them, but from a regard to the divine authority, which obliges us to these duties. We should do these things not only as they are commanded, but because they are commanded...The second qualification of evangelical virtue...is, that you perform it in the name of Christ...Without this all your actions of charity

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<sup>59</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 226.

and justice, however fair and splendid they appear in the eyes of men, are but proud philosophic virtue, utterly abhorred by an holy God.<sup>60</sup>

Davies here intermixes moral philosophy with Christian doctrine, but the important qualification for Davies, like other Presbyterians, is that philosophy and reason are always subordinate to Christian theology. Yet, as the quote by Davies from his sermon *Jesus Christ the Only Foundation* at the beginning of the introduction to this paper suggests that he believes moral philosophy is useful so long as Christ is the foundation for a person's intellectual identity.<sup>61</sup> It is important to fully recognize how important of a role Davies placed upon reason in building from a Christ-oriented foundation. Davies criticizes faith in Christianity based purely on education, hereditary, and politics. Davies also derides blind faith:

Let me also tell you that *that* faith in the christian religion which proceeds from insufficient or bad principles, is but little better than infidelity. If you believe the christian religion to be divine, because you hardly care whether it be true or false, being utterly unconcerned about religion in any shape, and therefore never examining the matter;--if you believe it true because you have been educated in it; because your parents or ministers have told you so; or because it is the religion of your country...it is not such a faith as constitutes you true christians...I am afraid there are many such believers among us, who are in the right only by chance: and these lie a prey to every temptation.

Davies sermons always provide constructive criticism. His solution to blind faith is theological and philosophical education, "It is therefore necessary to teach them the grounds of the Christian religion, both to prevent their seduction, and to give them a rational and well-grounded faith, instead of that which is only blind and accidental." This commentary originates from one of Davies's earliest

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<sup>60</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 233-234.

<sup>61</sup> As a reminder to the reader, the quote is: "Your proud self-confident virtue, your boasted philosophic morality, is but a loose tottering foundation. Virtue and morality are necessary to complete and adorn the superstructure; but when they are laid at the bottom of all, they will prove but quicksand."

sermons, *The divine Authority and Sufficiency of the Christian Religion*. When his individual sermons were later compiled into one complete multi-volume work, this sermon was chosen to be the first, we can infer that the publisher believed this to be his most important sermon. This sermon provides a strong foundation for Samuel Davies's intentions as a minister and establishes the rationale of the other sixty-three sermons in the collection. His sermon attempts to justify Christianity through reason via an apologetic sermon. Davies even argues that "In the scriptures we find the faint discoveries of natural reason illustrates, its uncertain conjectures determined, and its mistakes corrected; so that Christianity includes natural religion in the greatest perfection." Here he provides a direct explanation between the role of reason and revelation that Enlightenment reason exists and the Bible perfects reason.<sup>62</sup>

There is, undoubtedly, an alternate argument that these ministers deny ideas from the Enlightenment in favor of Biblical precepts and are not actually intermixing the two. This argument would be fair and correct if it was not for the divide among Presbyterians that resulted from the Scottish Enlightenment or if they were not in constant contact with these ideas. After all, the American Presbyterian 'log-colleges' and the College of New Jersey retained constant contact with Scottish Universities, especially Edinburgh and Glasgow, the centers of the Scottish Enlightenment. In fact, Davies probably first encountered Hutcheson's moral philosophy while studying under Samuel Blair at Fagg's Manor. These Presbyterian ministers were often alumni from Scottish Universities or trained by those who attended them. The Presbyterian academies also sought new

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<sup>62</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 1, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 71-77.

materials from these universities. Therefore, while the intent of these sermons is disputable, the very fact that these relationships exist strongly implies their common use. Furthermore, if we would assume that these connections are superficial and the profession of these ideas only come from scripture, we must then assume that these Presbyterians adopted the same ideas as Hutcheson and others through parallel thinking, essentially making them philosophers within the Enlightenment rather than influenced by them. It is safe to say then, that these ideas are very likely coming from these Scottish sources.<sup>63</sup>

To further illustrate this issue, it is worthwhile to understand how Davies treats the moral philosophy of the ancients in comparison to that of Hutcheson and other Scottish Enlightenment figures: “Until the doctrine of the cross was introduced, the world was sadly at a loss about a rule of duty. All the admired writings of pagan antiquity cannot furnish out one compleat system even of morality.” Davies’s education, like other well-educated individuals of his time, included a significant amount of classical works. While in grammar schools like Fagg’s Manor, the curricula usually included the requirement of being capable of translating these classical works to and from Latin. Davies, like any other student, proved his capability in this task many times, strongly suggesting he was well versed in the specifics writings of ancient philosophers. In other matters, including the standards he set for newly trained ministers to have a parish in the vicinity of Hanover county, there is an expectation of knowledge about these same pagan philosophers. Frequently his sermons have positive statements about many classical

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<sup>63</sup> Lawrence Cremin, *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*, 322-325, 460-463.

thinkers such as Cicero. In this specific instance upon the question of morality, he is very critical; much unlike he is of Scottish Enlightenment thinkers on the same subject.<sup>64</sup>

The above discussion of virtue specifically relates to a description of the expectations of laymen and those without significant authority. Davies and other ministers had lengthy orations upon the expectations of virtue for the aristocracy and civil government. The sermon above, *The Rule of Equity* has as much to say about the moral expectations of the upper classes as it does for the lower classes. After emphasizing that God's authority is above people and rulers, he outlines the expectations for the relationship between the rulers and their subjects: "Every man should be treated according to his character and station; and therefore that conduct which may be proper towards me in my station, may not be proper towards another in a different station." Indeed, Davies believes that people of different classes have specific duties in a typical Calvinist fashion. But his approach is also egalitarian between rulers and subjects, "Thus, for example, a magistrate is bound to protect his subjects, and behave towards them as he would desire a ruler to behave towards him if he were a subject." Davies's allusion to the golden rule for those with power strongly implies a level of equality between social classes. Davies is critical of those with power who mistreat others:

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<sup>64</sup> This sermon is entitled *The Preaching of Christ Crucified the Mean of Salvation*. Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 121. For more information about classical education see Lawrence Cremin's *American Education: The Colonial Experience, 1607-1783* and Carl J. Richard's, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994). We know specifically what Davies expected from new ministers. The Hanover Presbytery expected ministers to know "Latin and greek Languages...Logick, ontology, Ethics, natural Philosophy, Rhetoric, geography, and Astronomy." Applicants were required to know Hebrew and to expound several sermons that they prepared from scratch. The Presbytery told them what portion of the Bible they were to preach from and told them where they would go to preach the sermon. For more specific details, see William M. E. Rachel, "Early Minutes of Hanover Presbytery," *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 63, no. 1 (January 1955): 53-75, 58-60.



How extravagant and ridiculous is it that you should be treated well by all mankind, and yet you be at liberty to treat them as you please? What are you? What a being of mighty importance are you?...Are not his rights as sacred and inviolable as yours? How come you to be entitle to an exemption from the common laws of human nature.<sup>65</sup>

Davies here presents an Enlightenment view of equal rights that apply equally to all regardless of status. Summarizing his view of the relationship of virtue between classes, Davies argues that treating people respectively to the station they are in while simultaneously recognizing their equality under God is the virtuous choice. It is important to emphasize that in a hierarchal British aristocratic society, Davies is argues that even the lavish aristocracy are equal to the average person under God. In part, this undermines the authority of the aristocracy and rulers in the ability to cite their status as justification for their actions.

The fact that I am emphasizing Davies so much here on the subject is not accidental or an attempt to overemphasize one minister in favor of others who might disagree. Davies's arguments in his sermons are common for ministers classified as New Side Presbyterians or those of the 'New Divinity'. The purpose of using his sermons so frequently is because of how succinctly he states his ideas without devoting too much time to scriptural passages or theological minutia. Davies writings were undoubtedly popular considering how many of his sermons were printed. Thomas Gibbons published the first edition of Davies's collected sermons in 1765.<sup>66</sup> By 1792, Davies's three volume collected *Sermons on Important Subject* were in their fifth edition.<sup>67</sup> Even though the

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<sup>65</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 227-233.

<sup>66</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 1, 5th edition. Forgotten Books. (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), v.

<sup>67</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, 5th edition. (New York: T. Allen, 1792). Archive.org. <https://archive.org/stream/sermonsonimporta03davi#page/n7/mode/2up>. The fifth edition was continually

three-volume collection of sixty-three sermons was frequently printed, many of these sermons were first printed as pamphlets during Davies's lifetime.<sup>68</sup> While we cannot accurately estimate how widely read his works were, the large number of printings of his collected sermons and the sizeable number of pamphlets printed, they were likely widely read. An important facet of these ideas is the fact that ministers are an important source for churchgoers to obtain ideas and information. Davies's choice of language is much closer to the vernacular style that George Whitefield relied upon. People in the backcountry of Virginia detested ministers that read directly from their notes or prewritten sermons. Philip Vickers Fithian, for example, was Presbyterian minister known for his Enlightenment sympathies during the era of the revolution. From a secondhand account, Fithian exclaimed that the congregants in the Virginia backcountry attentively "listened to with Patience and Wonder" ministers who "preach without papers". This standard even included preachers of the quality of John Witherspoon or Samuel Davies.<sup>69</sup> Davies's popularity among his congregants and those who heard him preach suggests how well his message resonated with them. Many historians allude to the unverified suggestion that Davies influenced the oratory style of Patrick Henry. While there is a lack of empirical evidence to support this notion, the fact that Patrick Henry's first biographer and modern historians perceive this relationship elucidates the similarities of their techniques and their comparable popularity.<sup>70</sup>

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reprinted by other booksellers through 1802. The second edition of the collected sermons was printed in 1767 because of the substantial demand for his sermons. The second edition is available at <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=yale.39002013378626;view=1up;seq=18>.

<sup>68</sup> The Library of Congress has copies of many of these sermons in pamphlet form in the Jefferson Reading Room.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted from John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 175.

<sup>70</sup> The first mentioning of this relationship comes from William Writ Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches* (New York, 1891). While Writ undoubtedly researched the matter, it is not

## The Case of John Witherspoon

John Witherspoon was an interesting figure in the mix of the debate around religion and Enlightenment. Witherspoon's role deserves an entire section of this chapter exclusively devoted to him. Witherspoon was in Scotland during the Scottish Enlightenment, arrived in the American colonies to head the College of New Jersey, influenced eventual founding fathers such as James Madison and became one by the American Revolution. The greatest hurdle for analyzing the long-term effects of these New Side ministers intermixing religion and Enlightenment ideas before the American Revolution is the fact that most of them died before the Stamp Act or the first shots at Lexington. For decades now, the historical scholarship rightly recognized that Enlightenment ideas profoundly influenced the American Revolution. Scholars instead recurrently contest the role of religion in the Revolution. Undoubtedly, congregants of these ministers encountered Enlightenment ideas from sermons, but proving the relationship between religion and the revolution is tenuous. Decades ago, Alan Heimert, Cedric B. Cowing and others tried to establish this connection, developing the 'Heimert Thesis', which surmises that the challenging of religious authorities led to the challenging of political authorities. For decades, historians operated from this framework, or a similar one, to argue in favor of the connection between religion and the Revolution. The real issue here is not insufficient evidence; rather it is a false dichotomy. Presbyterians in Scotland developed their political ideology and their spiritual theology simultaneously, just as their forbears during the Protestant Reformation did. As shown in the first chapter, Scottish Presbyterians challenged their religious authorities with their covenantal

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entirely clear how he derived this information. For more information on this relationship, see Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1988), 266-269.

perspectives while also relying upon the same covenantal theology to justify resistance towards political authorities. In Scotland, Presbyterians were a dissenting faith from the Church of England. Inherent to the idea of being a dissenter is in of itself resistance to political authorities because the monarch is the head of the Anglican Church. This is equally true for dissenters in the American colonies because they too resisted the same established Church of England. The third chapter will proceed with this line of thought, explaining how American Presbyterians intermixed Calvinist Resistance Theory with the British Enlightenment in the decades before the Revolution. This chapter focuses instead on the adoption of the Scottish Enlightenment by American Presbyterians and John Witherspoon plays an important role in this process.

Witherspoon was born in 1723, just as the Scottish Enlightenment erupted, in Gifford, Scotland. He earned a Master's of Arts at Edinburgh in 1739 and afterwards pursued the ministry. His career began at Beith, about twenty-one miles southwest of Glasgow. Later he was a minister for the Laigh Kirk in Paisley. John Witherspoon's relationship with the Enlightenment is complicated for historians and scholars. While in Scotland, during the early 1750s, Witherspoon strongly aligned himself with the evangelical party, a group that supported revivalism in a similar way to the colonial American revivals. The Evangelical Party strongly opposed the moderate party and the Scottish Enlightenment. Witherspoon even wrote a satirical work, "Ecclesiastical Characteristics, mocking Hutcheson's moral-theory and the Moderate Party. By Hutcheson's arrival in America in 1768, he appears to have fully adopted Thomas Reid's 'common-sense' philosophy and Hutcheson's 'moral-sense' ideas.

After the death of the College of New Jersey's fifth president, Samuel Finley, in 1766, there was a need for a new President. Benjamin Rush, Richard Stockton, and George Whitefield all requested Witherspoon to become the college's sixth president. Continuing the trend set by Samuel Finley, or perhaps earlier, of bringing texts of the Scottish Enlightenment into the curriculum of the College of New Jersey, Witherspoon drastically increased their number. Part of the job of the College of New Jersey's President is to function as a lecturer. Witherspoon's lectures on moral philosophy incorporated ideas from Hutcheson and Thomas Reid. While president, he rejected purist idealistic interpretations of philosophy that were popular among many Congregationalist 'Edwardeans', removing those who espoused those ideas from the university. Witherspoon by no means eliminated the religiosity of the college. 'Edwardeans', while influential upon many Presbyterians, were really a portion of Congregationalism. This does not mean he eliminated other denominations altogether, many Congregationalist tutors were still present. Witherspoon removed them because of his criticisms of an idealist philosophical system. Idealism argues that all aspects of reality come from ideas and thoughts rather than observation or the senses. Furthermore, there was no religious qualification for entry into the College of New Jersey during its incorporation.

One of the greatest challenges in understanding Witherspoon belief system is his transition in favor of the Scottish Enlightenment. Mark Noll does not posit an answer to this problem, but he notes on this subject that Witherspoon, a member of the Popular Party, (another, more common name for the evangelical party) rejected the Scottish Enlightenment thoroughly until he arrived in America. Lawrence Cremin argues that as he increasingly read Thomas Reid's 'common-sense' philosophy, Witherspoon came to

adopt the Scottish Enlightenment before traveling to America. The major challenge of analyzing this problem is probably a result of how few records Witherspoon kept and wrote down. Definitively, we can say Witherspoon apparently came to adopt the Scottish Enlightenment between 1758 and 1768. He does not appear to publicize it since he remained part of the Popular Party while in Scotland. America then was more welcoming for him and these ideas since the clergy already began incorporating the Scottish Enlightenment nearly two decades before his arrival. Ultimately, while many scholars of the Scottish Enlightenment in America point to Witherspoon as the harbinger of these ideas, he was, in reality, a latecomer. The fundamental difference is he conveyed these ideas to a national level instead of being isolated to Presbyterian and some other congregations.<sup>71</sup>

While president of the college he nurtured twelve members of the Constitutional Convention, five delegates to the Constitutional Convention, seventy-seven members of the United States Congress, three justices of the Supreme Court, among many others. There is an overlap of people between these positions, but his influence was astronomical and undeniable. Under the tutelage of Witherspoon, Alexander Hamilton proclaimed the College of New Jersey to be a more republican institution than King's College (Columbia University), which he attended. Witherspoon's influence only grew over the next few decades. Witherspoon found himself on the side of American Independence. In 1774, he created a Committee of Correspondence for Somerset County, New Jersey, his home county. Early on in his independence efforts, Witherspoon rejected calling King George III a tyrant. Most likely, he was of the thought that Parliament was to blame and had not yet embraced the idea that George III could be at fault as well.

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<sup>71</sup> Noll, *America's God*, 98; Cremin, *American Education: Colonial Experience, 1607-1783*, 297-299.

Witherspoon, like many if not most of his eighteenth-century Presbyterian peers asserted a belief in resistance theory. He relied upon the proponents of resistance theory mentioned in the first chapter like Calvin, Knox, and others. Witherspoon justified resistance through the Knoxian and Calvinist limitation that only magistrates and nobles could resist civil authorities by explaining that the continental congress was such a body of magistrates. He also relied upon other important works, especially the *Vindiciae contra Tyrannos* and *Lex, Rex*. A century of political thought separates Witherspoon from these Scottish Predecessors and his library thus included updated works on resistance including Locke's *Two Treatises of Government*. Witherspoon, like his Scottish Predecessors, relied upon Calvinist covenantal literature to justify resistance to tyrants, he differs in the inclusion of works from the British Enlightenment on the same matter. These newer works relied upon the same older works like the *Vindictae* but justified resistance in broader terms like natural law and natural rights. Like the situation above, that Witherspoon was a latecomer. Presbyterians in America already understood and embraced similar views in the decades before the arrival of Witherspoon. More importantly, they frequently preached resistance to divine-right monarchs and tyrants during the 1750s to their congregants, under a decade before resistance to the Stamp Act erupted. We should not underestimate the importance of Witherspoon, even if he did not necessarily bring new ideas to the colonies. Witherspoon used his position as President of the College of New Jersey in ways his predecessors did not. Witherspoon's influence over students that would play a significant role in the establishment of the United States and the direct part he played during and after the American Revolution makes him a towering figure of the eighteenth-century. For the context of this paper, Witherspoon is

just part of a larger story of the Enlightenment's influence upon eighteenth-century Presbyterian ministers.<sup>72</sup>

Francis Hutcheson's 'moral-sense' philosophy and Thomas Reid's 'common-sense' philosophy arrived in America during the middle of the eighteenth-century. Hutcheson's suggestion that people have an innate sense of morality and Reid's argument that all observations come from preexisting observations became part of the sermons of many Presbyterian ministers during the period. Reid and Hutcheson appealed to these ministers because they defended the existence of God with their ideas and their philosophies, generally, did not challenge Calvinism. Reid, in particular, justified the existence of God with his 'common-sense' philosophy. Not only did ministers incorporate these ideas into their sermons, but also in their academies. The 'log-colleges' of Blair, Finley, and others taught Hutcheson and Reid to their students. Additionally, these ministers introduced the Scottish Enlightenment into the College of New Jersey. The Scottish Enlightenment formally entered into the curriculum under the tutelage of Samuel Finley, but Witherspoon, the college's next president, incorporated it much more so.

The primary reason why these ideas gained popularity among ministers probably results from the Calvinist and Presbyterian emphasis on morality, as these ideas appear most commonly in their sermons discussing Christian virtues. Presbyterians saw moral behavior as a sign of God's saving grace and it falls into the category of a covenant where the being saved is dependent upon morality. Many Presbyterians found themselves

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<sup>72</sup> For more about Witherspoon in America, see Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the Democratic Republic* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame Press, 2005).



divided on the extent of this new Scottish Enlightenment inspired theology. Ministers who were on the Old Side before the reunification of the Synods most commonly opposed the new theology expressed mostly by former New Side Presbyterians before reunification. The importance of these ideas and this partial shift in thought is best understood in the case of John Witherspoon. Witherspoon came to America with mixed, or at least unexpressed, support of the Scottish Enlightenment. He found himself in an environment in support of these ideas and relied upon both traditional Calvinist and Knoxian notions of resistance and new Enlightenment ideas to support separation from Great Britain.

### Chapter 3: Presbyterian Resistance

Toward the end of his life, former United States President and Revolutionary leader John Adams responded to an inquiry from the editor and publisher Hezekiah Niles regarding the causes of the American Revolution. Adams responded, “The Revolution was effected before the War commenced,” declaring “A Change in their Religious Sentiments of their Duties and Obligations” as the key factor encompassing the true revolution—an inward religious and philosophical shift. Adams indicates Americans trusted the Monarchy and British magistrates to legitimately “govern in Justice and Mercy according to the Laws and Constitutions derived to them from the God of Nature, and transmitted to them by their Ancestors.” Praying even for the royal family because “they thought themselves bound” to their rulers through a religious covenant equating these rulers to “Ministers ordained of God for their good.”

Before the Revolution, Americans “Saw those Powers renouncing all the Principles of Authority, and bent up on the destruction of all the Securities of their Lives, Liberties and Properties, they thought it their Duty to pray for the Continental Congress and all the thirteen State Congresses, &c.” His letter to Niles explains that American colonists came to believe the Monarchy failed to live up to the ‘bipartite covenant’ established in the British Constitution and the “Laws of God” —that is between the people and their ruler and the ruler and God—they resisted authority, placing their faith into civil magistrates to lead that resistance. Following the reformed interpretation of political and religious thought beginning with Calvin’s *Institutes*, colonial Americans

came to believe the Monarchy and Parliament violated their covenant, justifying resistance to British rule during the American Revolution.<sup>73</sup>

Adams' letter mostly ignores issues of taxation, preferring to emphasize the public's perception on the proper role of government—shifting from the celebration of royal authority to resisting it. The real Revolution was not a response to British policies in the 1760s and 1770s. Rather, Americans accepted the argument that “rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God,”<sup>74</sup> first instilled by ministers and reiterated by individuals who later led the resistance to George III. Adams centered his attention to leaders in Massachusetts, of which he was most familiar. Jonathan Mayhew, for example, preached resistance thought in Boston. Likely due to Adams' proximity to the events in Boston, he does not devote his attention to those preaching resistance thought in other colonies like Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and Virginia. According to Adams' explanation, to understand how the colonists came to resisting Great Britain, we need to understand the adoption and preaching of resistance thought in the decades before the Stamp Act.

Presbyterians represented the second largest Christian denomination in eighteenth-century British America and they played an immense role in the eventual American Revolution. When the fires that ignited the Revolution first lit many loyalists in both Britain and its colonies blamed Presbyterians for the colonial rebellion. A Hessian soldier recounted his experiences in Pennsylvania during the Revolution and commented “Call this war...by whatever name you may, only call it not an American Rebellion, it is

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<sup>73</sup> John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, February 13, 1818, Founders Online, <https://founders.archives.gov/documents.Adams/99-02-02-6854> (accessed December 27, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> We tend to mistakenly credit this quote to Thomas Jefferson who suggested it as an epitaph and included it into his own personal seal or to Benjamin Franklin who suggested it to be the motto for the United States. The quote instead originates to John Bradshaw. Bradshaw was one of the fifty-nine commissioners who signed the death warrant for Charles I in 1649. Bradshaw was also the president of the same parliament. See Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 49.

nothing more or less than an Irish-Scotch Presbyterian Rebellion.”<sup>75</sup> Similarly, we have quotes from the General Howe’s Secretary, Ambrose Serle, believed the war was really against Presbyterianism. King George III allegedly called it a war with Presbyterianism.<sup>76</sup> Observers like those referenced above, implicated Patriots as Presbyterians because the term is associated with the section of the reformed movement inclined to resist authority. Furthermore, many Presbyterians did fight in the Revolution, influencing the discriminatory use of Presbyterianism as a broad stroke for all combatants against Britain.

Resistance theology rooted in Calvinism, and greatly associated with Presbyterianism, pervaded eighteenth-century American minds. This paper is not an argument that Presbyterian thought is the cause of the Revolution or even that religion is the fundamental cause of the Revolution. Rather, that the reformed tradition provided the intellectual backbone justifying resistance. The causes of the Revolution are actions undergone by Great Britain that violated the covenant. Ideas themselves do not cause Revolutions they can only justify them. This ‘transition’ did not happen overnight; instead, it is rooted in older traditions refined over two centuries. By the late 1750s, Presbyterian ministers like Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, and Gilbert Tennent actively preached for resistance against tyrants. Other Presbyterian leaders like John Witherspoon

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<sup>75</sup> Quoted from Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 1977), 51-52.

<sup>76</sup> Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005), 6. Many quotes suggest loyalists and other officials made similar remarks. The quote by King George III may or may not be accurate as it does not appear until the early nineteenth century, but that does not immediately discount it. Richard Gardiner wrote his dissertation on this topic of the association of Presbyterianism with the American Revolution: Richard Gardiner, "The Presbyterian Rebellion: An analysis of the perception that the American Revolution was a Presbyterian war" (2005). *Dissertations (1962 - 2010) Proquest Digital Dissertations*. AAI3172505. <http://epublications.marquette.edu/dissertations/AAI3172505>. Also see Richard Gardiner, "The Presbyterian Rebellion?," *Journal of the American Revolution*, September 5, 2013, <https://allthingsliberty.com/2013/09/presbyterian-rebellion/>.

taught resistance thought in their college curricula. Political Sermons, whether published or preached, inculcated a belief that rebellion against tyrants was a sacred duty to mid-eighteenth-century British Americans.

### The Development of Protestant Resistance Theology

The eruption of Protestantism in Europe inherently resisted political and religious establishments. Protestantism was an abrupt challenge to the Catholic Church and the monarchies it established. Reformed theology was in a precarious position during its first century of existence. Protestants were often massacred and interned for heresy. Even though several countries such as Britain and the Netherlands eventually rejected Catholicism, several of the most powerful rulers of Europe, like France and Spain, remained with the papacy. Protestant fears of Catholicism reclaiming its grip on Protestant countries often led to them proclaiming resistance to those monarchs. Framing their argument into the form of a covenant, reformed-minded theologians argued that the King and their subjects were part of a covenant with each member, subject, ruler, and God each with their own role. Subjects are subordinate to the laws of civil magistrates while both the magistrates and subjects were subordinate to God. Authority figures that failed to meet those obligations were labeled as tyrants, and because they failed to obey their obligations either to God or their subjects, civil magistrates or the people had the duty to resist their secular or religious rulers.

Reformation theologians not only stressed the importance of challenging tyrants, they justified their arguments favoring resistance directly from the Bible. The Protestant Reformation gave way to increased access to the Bible, resulting in new reformed-

minded reinterpretations of Biblical passages such as Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2. The Apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans is part of the core of Christian theology, Romans 13 states: "Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God: the powers that be are ordained of God. Whoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God and they that resist shall receive damnation." Similarly, 1 Peter 2 states: "Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord's sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well." Catholics of the sixteenth century and many of the Anglican clergy explained this passage as justification for divine right rulers that cannot be challenged by their subjects under any circumstances. These passages, along with several others, were the core for the concept of passive obedience to rulers.<sup>77</sup>

John Calvin provided one of the earliest challenges to the theological argument of passive obedience. In his commentary on Romans 13, he argues that magistrates differ from tyrants. Magistrates are ordained by God and ought to be obeyed, whereas tyrants are not ordained by God and therefore do not require obedience.<sup>78</sup> Similarly, in his commentary on 1 Peter 2:13-16, Calvin suggests that the Apostle Peter discussed magistrates specifically, and not all types of rulers.<sup>79</sup> Calvin contextualizes both of these passages as Paul and Peter's admonitions against anarchy. The Jewish followers of Christ in the early church thought themselves to be their own rulers, without any need for

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<sup>77</sup> This is referenced within the works of Calvin and other commentaries on the sermons. During the time of the Revolution, loyalists often cited these texts to oppose the rebels. See James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War: The Bible and the American Revolution* (New York, Oxford University Press, 2013), 116-118

<sup>78</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Romans*, ed. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classic Ethereal Library), Chapter XIII, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom38.xvii.i.html>.

<sup>79</sup> John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Catholic Epistles*, ed. Rev. John Owen (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Christian Classic Ethereal Library) 2 Peter 2:13-16, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/calvin/calcom45.iv.iii.v.html>.

governance, resulting in persistent disobedience towards Roman authorities. This led to increased persecutions of Christians during the time. The Apostles, according to Calvin, do not favor divine-right monarchs, but are merely criticizing anarchy. Calvin's different conception of these two passages opened the door for Protestant resistance to tyrants, something he elaborated further in his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*.

Calvin's *Institutes of the Christian Religion* provides us direct insights as to his broader theological interpretations. Foremost, Calvin asserts the superiority of divine laws over human laws. Human laws, especially those established by governments to force religious obligations were unjust because they violated "conscience," which are governed by the laws of God. As a result, Christians are not subject to human laws that violate the word of God. Magistrates are responsible for the dispensation of justice and creating laws that only apply to the temporal world, never conflicting with areas exclusively left for God. Tyrants, in contrast, are rulers who are in violation of God's laws.<sup>80</sup> As discussed in the first chapter, in Calvinists thought, resisting tyrants is not a task left for the general public, but is instead left with those with better judgment (i.e. magistrates) or are already in positions of power.

Conceptions about resistance were not exclusively left to Calvin, in fact, after his arguments, many expanded and justified these views, elaborating on what constitutes a tyrannical ruler and/or including more people who could conceivably resist a tyrant. The next major step in resistance theory was *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos* (A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants). Published in Basel by an unknown Huguenot, under the pseudonym of "Junius Brutus," the *Vindiciae* expands on what justifies resistance to

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<sup>80</sup> John Calvin, Commentaries *Upon the Christian Religion*, <http://www.reformed.org/calvinism/index.html>.

rulers. The *Vindiciae* was written as a response to the centralization under Charles IX of France and the St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre to invoke and justify resistance to the French government. It is divided into four chapters, or questions: "Whether subjects are bound and ought to obey princes, if they command that which is against the law of God," "Whether it be lawful to resist a prince who doth infringe the law of God; b whom, how, and how far it is lawful," "Whether it be lawful to resist a prince who doth oppress or ruin a public state," and "Whether neighbor princes may, or are bound by law to aid the subjects of other princes, persecuted for true religion, or oppressed by manifest tyranny."<sup>81</sup>

Similar to Calvin's arguments, the *Vindiciae* responds to Romans 13 and 1 Peter 2 with the same distinction of magistrates from tyrants. Although the *Vindiciae* appeared in the broader historical scholarship on several occasions over the past half-century or so, Daniel L. Dreisbach, of American University is responsible for recently alerting scholars of the immense importance of the document.<sup>82</sup> The author's primary argument on the matter is "that God reigns by his own proper authority, and kings by derivation...God hath a jurisdiction proper, kings are his delegates. It follows then, that the jurisdiction of God hath no limits, that of kings bounded." When a king exceeds those bounds "[he] loses his right, and many times his realm also, if he despise God, if he complot with his enemies, and if he commits a felony against that royal majesty." Like Calvin, the *Vindiciae* argues that rulers and subjects as subordinate to divine law, but more clearly

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<sup>81</sup> Junius Brutus, A Defence of Liberty Against Tyrants, *Vindiciae Contra Tyrannos: Of the Lawful Power of the Prince over the People and of the People Over the Prince* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2016), 3, 7.

<sup>82</sup> For Dreisbach's interpretation of the *Vindiciae* see *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 118-123.



emphasizes the covenantal relationship between kings, subjects, and God. The *Vindiciae* relates the relationship between God and king and king and subject as a ‘bipartite covenant’ where the king is required to serve God and ensure that the people serve God, while simultaneously both kings and subjects are subordinate to God.

The *Vindiciae* relies on more specific biblical examples than Calvin of Biblical covenants to justify his position. Examples of King David and King Solomon are common for virtuous kings who retain their throne because they (mostly) respected their subordinate position. The author also includes various instances of kings losing their kingdoms as a contrast to show the consequences of failing to abide by the laws of God. Since critics could claim that those Old Testament arguments did not apply in the New Testament, Brutus justifies his arguments from the Old Testament by suggesting that after the crucifixion, “for that which was before enclosed within the narrow bounds of Judæa is now dilated throughout the whole world...Christian princes being in the place of those of Jewry. There is the same covenant, the same conditions, the same punishments” for those who do not uphold the Gospel.<sup>83</sup>

While the author of the *Vindiciae* goes into more detail about the role of kings, it is the second chapter that extends the right of resistance to all Christians when the king violates his covenant to them. Resistance to tyrants was the responsibility of the prophets in the Old Testament, but the author declares that all of Israel had the responsibility to overthrow a tyrant king, or face divine retribution. Attached to the duties of Israel’s prophets was the responsibility to ensure that God’s laws were followed, even when kings violated the covenant. Specifically in the case of Elias, after King Ahab killed several of God’s prophets, he assembled “the people...he reproveth them [for worshipping

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<sup>83</sup> Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 7.

Baal]; the people at his exhortation take and put to death the priests of Baal.” Afterwards, the leaders of Israel’s estates, that is the prophets of Israel, were put in charge of resisting the rule of Ahab. In other instances, when Israel failed to remove covenant-breaking rulers and idolaters from positions of power, “the people have also been chastised for their negligence, connivency, and stupidity.” Since God punished the people of Israel for failing to overthrow tyrants, this suggests that if the magistrates fail to overthrow tyrants, the responsibility falls upon the public to overthrow them all.<sup>84</sup> In brief, Brutus argues that, with the leadership of those in leadership positions, the people have a divinely ordained duty to resist tyrants.

The ideas of Calvinist resistance reached Scotland during the leadership of John Knox. As stated in the first chapter, Knox closely aligned himself with Calvin’s theory of resistance. In his most famous work, the same one that divided Scottish Presbyterianism (see chapter 1), *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland*, Knox explains his position on resistance to rulers. In 1558, Knox was in a dispute with the Bishop of St. Andrews. According to Knox, these letters were meant to be rebuttals of Calvin’s arguments. Knox responded with a series of responses to the Bishop’s arguments. When the Bishop complained that violence towards political authority led to the death of many “noblemen,” Knox responded that “obedience towards God and our princes remains with us yet...and if there be any offence towards God, he is merciful to remit our offenses.” Knox argues then that God supports violent resistance towards rulers who offend God. Later, Knox reiterates his argument more clearly, “All Laws are—or at least should be—subject to God’s laws,” affirming his alignment with Calvin’s argument favoring the superiority of God’s laws over human laws. Knox continues, “If it would please

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<sup>84</sup> Brutus, *Vindiciae*, 27-29. For the Biblical story of Ahab, see 1 Kings 17-22.

authorities to putt at [attack] our house, for confessing of God's word, or for the maintenance of his law, God is mighty enough in his own cause; he should be rather obeyed nor [than] man." To clarify his statement, Knox argues that if authorities attack reformers for preaching the word of God, the people should obey God and not the authorities.<sup>85</sup> Knox's positions align very closely to Calvin's, which is unsurprising considering his theology directly derived from Calvin. Through Calvin, Knox, and the *Vindiciae*, resistance theory seeped into the minds of many living on the British Isles.<sup>86</sup>

One of the most significant works of resistance theory comes from Samuel Rutherford's *Lex, Rex* in Scotland. Rutherford was directly involved in the development of the Westminster Confession, and challenging the rule of Charles I. Rutherford's work was important in the fact that it combined earlier theological, humanist, and political justifications for resistance to tyrants. One of his most important messages combining earlier interpretations was his use of Calvinist views of divine ordinance towards rulers with the role of the people in this process. *Lex, Rex* suggests that the office of king comes from God, but the people also must consent to the ruler, "Whether the kingly office come from God. I conceive it is, and floweth from the people, not by formal institution, as if the people had by an act of reason devised and excogitated such a power: God ordained the power." Rutherford follows with more specific descriptions of the relationship between the power that "floweth from the people" and how they can restrict that power: "(1.) That [the people] may measure out, by ounce weights, so much royal power, and no more and no less. (2.) So as they may limit, moderate, and set banks and marches to the

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<sup>85</sup> John Knox, *The History of the Reformation of Religion in Scotland, Complete in One Volume*, reprint by Forgotten Books (Glasgow: Blackie, Fullarton, & co., 1831), 96-98.

<sup>86</sup> Daniel L. Dreisbach provides more insights and details than is possible here in his recently published *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 113-123.

exercise. (3.) That they give it out, *conditionate*, upon this and to that condition, they may take again to themselves what they gave out upon condition if the condition be violated.”<sup>87</sup> Simply put, Rutherford suggests that the office of king is divine, the king himself is not, and does not need to be absolutely followed. When a ruler violates their covenant with their people, whether in the form of custom, written law, or divine law, the people have the right to overthrow that ruler.

The culmination of resistance theory for the British Isles before the eighteenth-century arose with John Locke’s *Two Treatise of Government*, which provided one of the primary channels for explicating resistance and political thought from seventeenth-century Great Britain to its colonies during the eighteenth-century. While there is a natural and understandable desire to secularize the works of Locke, just like his forebears, he grounds his ideas of rights and resistance in theology. Like other proponents of resistance theory, Locke wrote in the context of a threat of absolutism in Britain. In seventeenth-century Britain, there was a debate among proponents of the monarchy supporting the divine right to rule—ideas directly coming from France. Several British rulers including James I, Charles I, and James II all emphasized their right to rule. In large part, divine right monarchy was closely associated with Catholicism, and in fear of a Catholic dynasty, James II was exiled from England to Scotland, home of the Stewart royal family. After the death of Charles II, James asserted his right to the throne. James II vocally supported a monarch’s power over Parliament, and in fear of absolutism, Parliament overthrew James II, asserting Parliamentary superiority over the monarchy in what came to be known as the Glorious Revolution. John Locke, an English Whig and

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<sup>87</sup> Rev. Samuel Rutherford, *Lex, Rex, or the Law and the Prince* (Harrisonburg, Virginia: Sprinkle Publications, 1982), 6.

adamant supporter of the British Constitution, argued against absolute monarchs. Locke was familiar with resistance thought, especially from Calvinist sources. The *Vindiciae* and was among the books in his library.<sup>88</sup>

Locke's *First Treatise of Government* is entirely about the roots of kingly authority in terms of Christianity. As a direct response to Sir Robert Filmer's book, *Patriarcha*, which defended the divine-right of kings and argued against Whig theorists like Algernon Sydney, John Milton, and other English Whig theorists, Locke uses Filmer's own arguments against him. Filmer justifies divine-right through the genealogy of the Biblical Adam of Genesis. Since Adam had authority over all of the Earth and as a father over his children, he distributed that land amongst his descendants. Rulers being the bearers of that authority had a right to all the land in their kingdom. Locke, points out, among many other things, "that of 1750 years that they were God's peculiar people, they had hereditary kingly government amongst them not one-third of the time." After correcting Filmer on how much influence King's had over Biblical history, he then criticizes the basis of royal inheritance, "of that time there is not the least footstep of one moment of paternal government...whether we suppose it to be derived...from David, Saul, Abraham, or, which upon our author's principles is the only true, from Adam."<sup>89</sup>

Thus concluding his first treatise, he begins his *Second Treatise of Government* with a new proposal as of the origins of political authority. Like most previous authors on the subject, Locke's second treatise grounds the origins of government to divine authority. He begins from a "State of Nature" which as he describes it "a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons, as they think

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<sup>88</sup> Dreisbach, *Reading the Bible with the Founding Fathers*, 119, n. 287.

<sup>89</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government and A Letter Concerning Toleration*, ed. Ian Shapiro (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 99.

fit, within the bounds of the law of nature...also a stat of equality, wherein all the power and jurisdiction is reciprocal.”<sup>90</sup> The law of nature, which is what governs the state of nature, is God’s authority:

The state if nature has a law of nature to govern it, which obliges every one: and reason, which is that law, teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that being all equal and independent, no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty, or possessions: for men being the workmanship of one omnipotent and infinitely wise Maker: all the servants of sovereign Master, sent into the world by his order, and about his business; they are his property.”<sup>91</sup>

In Lockean terms, the law of nature that government the state of nature, and exists above human laws is, in short, the laws of God. This places Locke in-line with earlier thinkers. With how revolutionary Locke’s ideas may appear, like his those before him, he clung to the importance of magistrates in resistance to tyranny, even distinguishing tyrants as separate from magistrates as Calvin did: “Whenever law ends, tyranny begins...and whosoever in authority exceeds the power given him by the law...ceases in that to be a magistrate; and, acting without authority, may be opposed as any other man who by force invades the right of another.”<sup>92</sup> Locke, ultimately summarizes older ideas from resistance theorists, but his presentation played a crucial role in spreading these ideas to the British American colonies.

### American Presbyterian Resistance in the 1750s

Less than a month before the Battle of Lexington, Edmund Burke, an English Whig in British Parliament gave a speech calling for conciliation with the colonies.

Burke, unlike many of his fellow M.P.s had considerable insight of the American mind.

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<sup>90</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 101.

<sup>91</sup> Locke, *Two Treatise of Government*, 102.

<sup>92</sup> Locke, *Two Treatises of Government*, 189.

Among the many issues Burke stated, he describes the role of religion in particular detail, “Religion, always a principle of energy, in this new people, is no way worn out or impaired; and their mode of professing it is also one main cause of this free spirit.” Because these people are Protestant “of that kind, which is most averse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion” they are “Favourable to liberty” and is “built upon it.” Burke then critically links this Protestant connection to liberty to their “averseness in the dissenting churches from all that looks like absolute Government,” connecting it to there “religious tenants” and their “history.”

Building on this relationship between religion and resistance, Burke explains that in the Northern Colonies refined “the principle of resistance; it is the dissidence of dissent, Protestantism of the protestant religion. This religion, under a variety of denominations, agreeing in nothing but the communion of the spirit of liberty, is predominant in most of the Northern provinces.” The sects he describes are the predominantly Calvinist faiths, specifically Congregationalism and Presbyterianism. Burke first blames this on the weak Church of England, which in those colonies “is in reality no more than a sort of private sect, not composing most probably the tenth of the people.” The second cause of this is “that stream of foreigners, which has been constantly flowing into these Colonies, has, for the greatest part, been composed of dissenters...and have brought with them a temper and character far from alien to that of the people with whom they mixed.” The circumstance, Burke shows, is that Calvinist dissenters continually entered the British American colonies, a place of existing animosity towards Britain, and reinforced those ideas.<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Edmund Burke, *On Moving Resolutions of Conciliation with the Colonies*, March 22, 1775 (London: J. Dodsley, 1775), 27-31, archive.org, <https://archive.org/details/speechofedmundbu00burkiala>.

Burke provides an acute explanation of why Americans resisted British rule. To summarize his statement, Burke suggests that the people who settled the northern colonies, in particular, were the types of Protestants who treated the principle of resistance as a religious tenant connected to natural rights. Over the century and a half of settlement, ideas of resistance were refined in these colonies. Its original Puritan settlers brought these ideas with them and it reinforced by new migrants who share the same ideas from places like Scotland, Ireland, and Germany. These migrants were of varying dissenting denominations like Congregationalism and Presbyterianism.<sup>94</sup>

If Burke's assertion is correct and the ideas of resistance theology are responsible for rebellion in America, why did begin to happen in the 1760s and 1770s instead of earlier? The answer is both simple and complex. The short answer is that most Americans did not believe Britain violated any covenant that justified resistance. In fact, Americans were largely supportive of British rule during the first half of the eighteenth-century.<sup>95</sup> Explaining the shift in thought is a more complex task and demands first understanding resistance thought in eighteenth-century America.

The connection between covenants and American puritans is an established idea in the scholarship. Mark Noll's *America's God* expresses this idea, as did Perry Miller a half century earlier in his *Errand into the Wilderness*. Many scholars associate the 1740s with a surge in covenantal thought, although most scholars focused on the Puritan aspects of the idea. Even a young Samuel Adams was fully aware of resistance theory. During

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<sup>94</sup> Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750-1820* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1997), 45.

<sup>95</sup> For more on how Americans were supportive of British rule during this period, see Brenden McConville, *The King's Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006) and Eric Nelson, *The Royalist Revolution: Monarchy and the American Founding* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014).



Harvard's Commencement, in 1743, the twenty-one year old Adams argued that resistance against rulers was lawful.<sup>96</sup> As discussed by his brother, John Adams, it was during this period of the 1740s and 1750s when the American hearts and minds were prepared for the revolution. Presbyterians equally embraced covenantal theology, using it as justification to resist Charles I and as a threat to other monarchs.

Resistance theory, like in Scotland a century earlier, simultaneously extended to both religious and political authorities. In places where the Church of England was established, dissenting denominations faced persecutions and restrictions to their ability to preach. In Virginia, the Presbyterian Samuel Davies challenged the Anglican Church's authority. During this same period, Presbyterians and ministers of other denominations made covenantal declarations relating to expectations of virtue and duty for the British Empire, and the potential wrath it would face for violating them.

During much of the eighteenth-century, Scotland was caught up in a dispute between the Whigs and Jacobites. Many of the Jacobites were comprised of members of the Church of England who were upset about the ending of the Stuart dynasty, the disestablishment of the Church of England in Scotland, or Catholics in Scotland wanting a return to Catholic authority in England. This motley crew united behind their belief in a divine-right monarchy. The first major rebellion came in 1715 and was squashed in 1716. The Jacobites rebelled again during the War of Jenkins Ear between Britain and Spain beginning in 1744, and continuing for the next few years. The American colonists shifted much of their attention to this war and the Jacobite rebellion. William Smith, the chaplain of Virginia's House of Burgesses preached on the tyranny of divine-right monarchies, and particularly Catholic rulers. Stith, who was an Anglican minister, suggested that "the

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<sup>96</sup> Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment*, 3.

present Attempt of a *Popish* Pretender against our gracious and rightful King.” Stith made clear that King George II was a “Protestant King...that governs according to Law” that has not “the least Violation or Enroachment upon...Liberty, Property, or Religion.”<sup>97</sup>

In fact, much of the calls for resistance during the 1740s and 1750s came were connected to a phobia of Catholicism, just as it often did a century earlier in Britain during the Civil War and Glorious Revolutions. During this period, many of the Great Awakening’s preachers, including George Whitefield were criticized as being sympathizers with the Jacobites or Spain because of their criticisms of the Monarchy or of the Church of England.<sup>98</sup> After the Jacobites were defeated again in 1746, George Whitefield chimed in to respond to his critics while asserting some key points about resistance. His description begins with a clear reference to the Glorious Revolution “How soon would this happy scene have shifted, and a melancholy gloomy prospect have succeeded in its room, had the rebels gained their point, and a popish abjured pretender been forced upon the British throne!” Whitefield relates James II, to the earlier James I who “put all Scotland into confusion; and afterwards when crowned King of England, for his arbitrary and tyrannical government, both in church and state.” Common to his time, Whitefield explains his belief in a connection between Catholicism and arbitrary government, “was a Popish pretender to rule over us, instead of being represented by a free parliament, and governed by laws made by their consent, as we now are; we should

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<sup>97</sup> Quoted from Mark Noll, *In the Beginning Was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 163.

<sup>98</sup> James Buchan, *The Scottish Enlightenment: Edinburgh’s Moment of Mind* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 17-20, Mark Noll, *In the Beginning was the Word: The Bible in American Public Life, 1492-1783* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016), 158-163; Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 30, 65-66.

shortly have had only the shadow of one, and it may be no parliament at all.” Whitefield suggests that an arbitrary ruler would destroy the church and filled society and the Protestant churches with what he calls “old antichristian doctrines” of “free-will, meriting by works, transubstantiation, purgatory, works of supererogation, passive-obedience, non resistance, and all the other abominations of the whore of Babylon?”<sup>99</sup> While his claims read like hyperbole today, but in the eighteenth-century, they were not as far removed as we are, resulting in prevalent and persistent concerns that arbitrary government could still pose a threat to their natural liberties.

Whitefield in this sermon both justifies the then reign of George II while at the same time describing several doctrines espoused by the Church of England such as passive-obedience and non-resistance as unchristian and popish. Accusations of popery, or at least popish elements, within the Church of England were common, and were part of the larger criticisms of it over the next few decades. In an earlier part of the same sermon, Whitefield specifically quotes Psalm 55:45, “That they might observe his (God’s) statutes and keep his laws.” This Psalm is often quoted in texts justifying resistance against tyrants because of their failure to do as the Psalm commands is equated with violating the covenant between God and ruler.

Gilbert Tennent equally had strong words for arbitrary rulers. In his 1749 Thanksgiving Sermon at Burlington, New Jersey, commemorating victory against the French, Tennent praised God and “his infinite Right of Sovereignty over us, and oblige us to obedience” in granting his favor over Britain. Tennent also proclaims his own

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<sup>99</sup> George Whitefield, “Britain’s Mercies, and Britain’s Duty,” August 14, 1746, Center for Reformed Theology and Apologetics, <http://www.reformed.org/documents/index.html?mainframe=http://www.reformed.org/documents/Whitefield.html>.

indignation against arbitrary rulers liked “the *Steward-family*,” that is the royal family of Scotland, including James I and his descendants, “whose violent Attachment to *Popery*, and arbitrary Power...made the oppressed Nations groan, and their illegal Government a Scourge to the Protestants in general, and a Curse to Great-Britain in Particular.”

Tennent’s criticisms follow the long tradition of antagonism towards the seventeenth-century monarchies that many Protestants believed put Britain at the greatest risk of losing its liberties. Similar to other sermons on this topic, Tennent only has praise for King George II and, in this particular sermon, to the former King William of Orange who secured Protestantism for Britain.<sup>100</sup>

A few years later, Samuel Davies became the Presbyterian minister for Hanover County, Virginia. While in that position, he often feuded with the established church in Virginia. His immediate threat was Patrick Henry, Sr. who was the rector of the Anglican Parish in Hanover County since 1737. Samuel Davies provided an account of the State of Religion among Virginian Presbyterians before and during his early ministry in a letter to New England minister, Joseph Bellamy. Davies describes that Hanover County neglected religion, ascribing it to the Anglican Clergies embrace of Arminianism.<sup>101</sup> He blames the Virginia church for failing to uphold Christian teachings such as “the *Depravity of humane Nature*, the *Necessity of Regeneration*, and its *Pre-requisites*, *Nature and its Effects*, the *various Exercises of pious Souls according to their Several Cases*, &c..”

Davies clarifies that there were some individuals in the county seeking God, but before

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<sup>100</sup> Gilbert Tennent, *A Sermon...for a Provincial Thanksgiving*, November 23, 1749(Philadelphia: W. Bradford, 1749), 16, 21, READDEX, <http://www.infoweb.newsbank.com/> (accessed February 8, 2017).

<sup>101</sup> Arminianism, in Christian doctrine, emphasizes free will and argues that people’s earthly actions determine their placement in the afterlife. This is opposed to Calvinism and its view of Predestination, which argues that because God is omnipotent He already knows where a person will end in the afterlife so their destination in the afterlife is already predetermined.

his revivals, only a few claimed to come to faith by “their own serious Reflections, suggested and enforced by divine energy; or on reading some Authors of the last Century.”<sup>102</sup>

Whether the situation in Hanover and the entirety of Virginia was as bad as Davies opined is debatable. It was a common for seventeenth and eighteenth-century Calvinists to unfairly claim the American south as destitute in religion. Studies from recent decades indicate a more complex picture that suggests these criticisms from Congregationalists and Presbyterians are a product of their biases than positive fact. Lauren Winner, for example, argued in 2010 that religious practices were present and active in Virginia, but they were tied to the home because of the distances between churches and particular locals. In objects from these homes, such as the dual-purpose punch bowl and baptismal bowl used by the family of George Mason, or the inclusion of biblical verses and scenes in tapestries, quilts, and so on.<sup>103</sup> The most substantial challenge to colonial Anglicans was the lack of a Bishop in America.<sup>104</sup> Functionally, bishops in the Anglican Church were responsible for dispensing ministry status, and the lack of one in America forced all those interested in joining the clergy had to travel to England for ordination. However, many of those that received ordination opted to areas

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<sup>102</sup> Samuel Davies, *State of Religion Among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia In a Letter To the Rev. Mr. Joseph Bellamy, of Bethlem, in New-England* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1751), 3-9, Readex. Virginia State Archives.

<sup>103</sup> For more information on this matter, see Lauren F. Winner, *A Cheerful and Comfortable Faith: Anglican Religious Practice of Elite Households of Eighteenth-Century Virginia* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>104</sup> The lack of an Anglican Bishop in America was partly the fault of religious dissenters who immensely and repeatedly prevented any effort to provide a solution. The Anglican Gentry were not much better and equally resisted an Anglican Bishop as it would be a threat to their power. The best comprehensive study on the Anglican Bishophoric controversy is Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962).

where the pay was better such as in England itself, or on the eastern seaboard of the British American colonies.

Overtime, there were efforts to increase the number of Anglican clergy in Virginia. Even so, expansion of clerical influence faced limitations presented by the Virginia gentry. The Virginia gentry resented increased interaction between them and the Church of England, not due to any lack of religion, but more so a perception of a power struggle. The Virginia planters often controlled local vestries resulting in increased expectations of cooperation with their needs. They typically recruited ministers with existing sympathies with the gentry. Anglican pastors often had to please these upper class gentlemen to retain their positions. Similarly, to accommodate these gentlemen, the religious calendar was slightly altered in Virginia to benefit the tobacco plantations. These circumstances benefited dissenters because it left much of the backcountry open for proselytizing, but also reinforced their perceptions of places like Virginia.<sup>105</sup>

Samuel Davies continued his letter to Joseph Bellamy with a discussion of how dissent spread to Virginia and Hanover County. Davies receives his account from another Hanover resident, Samuel Morris, a bricklayer, who lived in the county his entire life. In 1740, Reverend George Whitefield visited Williamsburg with Samuel Blair. Samuel Morris attended the sermon and returned with a copy of Whitefield's sermon, using it to proselytize. The people skipped their Anglican religious services during this time to hear the gentleman read Whitefield's sermons, which also encouraged many Hanover residents to demand a New Light minister. Soon, the Presbyterian Synod sent Rev.

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<sup>105</sup> Edward L. Bond, *Damned Souls in a Tobacco Colony: Religion in Seventeenth Century Virginia* (Macon, Georgia, Mercer University Press, 2000), 120-121, 181-199, 217-220, 248-259; Edward L. Bond, *Spreading the Gospel in Colonial Virginia: Sermons and Devotional Writings* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2004), 13-22, 72; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1982), 60-65, 94-95, 120, 143-145.

William Robinson to itinerate the people of Hanover and surrounding counties. A few other ministers itinerated the people of Hanover until the application of the British Act of Toleration in Virginia.<sup>106</sup>

Virginian Anglicans often resented the application of the 1689 Act of Toleration because it allowed for the expansion of dissenting denominations into Virginia. The Act of Toleration permitted dissenters to worship so as long they did not object to too many of the Church of England's Articles of Faith. Although dissenters were thus permitted to worship in Virginia, it was not in any sense, free worship. Dissenting churches were expected to pay "Parish Levies," a church tax, to the established Anglican Church. Dissenters engaged in a decades long struggle to remove parish taxes, to no avail. Quakers were among the most persistent groups to challenge these taxes, largely due to their long residence in Virginia. On November 17, 1738, they presented a petition to the Virginia House of Burgesses pleading for an end to the church taxes, which made them suffer "to great Loss and Detriment in our Substance and Employment."<sup>107</sup> Like their other attempts, this one was also unsuccessful. The following week, the *Virginia Gazette* published a satirical recipe to explicitly mock the Quakers, but also dissenters in general. The author suggested ingredients comprising Quakers included deceitful, foolish, vanity, envious, defiant, ill-mannered, ambitious, zealous, and ignorant. The presumably Anglican author saw ambitious dissenters in a subordinate position, envious of the power

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<sup>106</sup> Davies, *State of Religion Among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia*, 9-16.

<sup>107</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, November 17, 1738, 3-4, Williamsburg Newspapers 1736 to 1780, <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/> (accessed February 8, 2017).

the Church of England held in Virginia. The Quakers were defiant towards the privilege of permission to worship in an Anglican colony, ignorant of its laws.<sup>108</sup>

The effort to force Virginia's governor, William Gooch, to agree to allow dissenters in Virginia resulted from the lobbying of the Presbyterian Synod of New York. When dissenting ministers applied to receive a license to preach, they had to write a detailed exposition explaining their opinions on each article of the Church of England doctrine and provide a detailed, Biblically grounded explanation of why they dissented from certain articles. Davies accomplished this task, and began to officially preach at his Hanover parish in 1748.<sup>109</sup>

Davies was so successful in spreading Presbyterianism that within months, central Virginia needed more ministers.<sup>110</sup> The demand for more ministers persisted over the next ten years because of how rapidly the congregations grew during his tenure. Even though Davies led his own parish, he was still responsible for itinerating Hanover and the surrounding counties at their request. Between December 1755 and September 1757, nine requests were sent to the Presbytery for Davies to Preach. Davies fulfilled most of these requests; however, Davies increasingly failed to fulfill these requests from 1757-1758

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<sup>108</sup> The full recipe is "First, take a handful of the Herb of Deceit, and a few Leaves of Folly, and a little of the Rose of Vain-Glory, with some Buds of Envy, and a few Blossoms of Malice, with a few Formality Flowers, and a Sprig or two of idle Conceit; take some of the seeds of Pride, and some of the seeds of Hypocrisy, and some seeds of forbidden Pleasure, and some of the Bark of Self-Will, and put them altogether into a Mortar of Defiance, and pound them with a Pestle of Head-strong Wood. Also take an Ounce of Ill-Manners, and three-quarters of an Ounce of Cheat-Seed, a good quantity of the Roots of Ambition, and the Pith of Self-Conceit, together with some Plumbs that grow on Runagate Hill, and some of the Grapes that grow in the Suburbs of Sodom, and some of the Spice of Babylon; and then take these twenty sorts and stew them together in a stony-hearted Jug, over the Fire of cold Zeal, and pour in a little of the Water of Wild Fountain; and when they are all simmer'd and soak'd together enough, grate in a little Folly powder, and strain it through a cloth of Vanity, and suck every morning thro' a Spout of Ignorance, and in a little time it will satisfy the Spirit, and you will quake, and shake, and smite your Breast, and so you will become a perfect *Quaker*. W.W., "Instructions how to make a perfect Quaker," *Virginia Gazette*, November 24, 1738, 3, 3-4, *Williamsburg Newspapers 1736 to 1780*, <http://research.history.org/DigitalLibrary/va-gazettes/> (accessed February 8, 2017).

<sup>109</sup> Act of Toleration. May 24, 1689. <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/statutes-realm/vol6/pp74-76>.

<sup>110</sup> Davies, *State of Religion Among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia*, 20



due to Davies becoming the second president of the College of New Jersey and because his illness worsened.<sup>111</sup>

Regardless of the difficulties itinerating in the last few years of his life, he clearly was a popular preacher. Davies popularity tended to irritate Patrick Henry Sr.. Sometime before 1745, Henry corresponded with the Bishop of London to protest the growth of Presbyterian itinerants in his Parish. On several occasions, Henry requested for their immediate removal from Hanover County.<sup>112</sup> Henry wrote several letters to the London Bishop discussing the presence of Davies as an itinerant and later when Davies officially had his own parish. His fear was that those like Davies converted members of the Church of England to Presbyterianism. Henry was in denial about the legality of presence in Hanover County, calling his ministry “pretended” and unsupportive of civil Government. Other Anglican Clergy complained about his efforts to convert African slaves.<sup>113</sup> In fact, Davies made significant efforts to reach out to minority groups. He claimed that he baptized about forty slaves and, by 1755, some three hundred attended his sermons. Not only did he preach to them, he taught many of them how to read and provided them books.<sup>114</sup> Naturally, the tidewater planter class begrudged these actions, perceiving them as a threat to their authority over their own slaves. Part of Henry’s anger towards Davies might be a personal vendetta. Henry’s sister-in-law, the mother of the more famous Patrick Henry, attended Davies’s sermons. Allegedly, she brought the young Patrick

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<sup>111</sup> William M. E. Rachel, “Early Minutes of Hanover Presbytery,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 63, no. 1 (January 1955): 53-75, 53-75.

<sup>112</sup> Patrick Henry, et al., “Letters of Patrick Henry, Sr., Samuel Davies, James Maury, Edwin Conway, and George Trask,” *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 1, no. 4 (October 1921): 261-281.

<sup>113</sup> Patrick Henry, Sr., et al., “Letters of Patrick Henry, Sr., Samuel Davies, James Maury, Edwin Conway, and George Trask,” 261-281.

<sup>114</sup> George William Pilcher, “Samuel Davies and the Instruction of Negroes in Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 74, no. 3 (July 1966): 293-300; Jeffrey H. Richards, “Samuel Davies and the Transatlantic Campaign for Slave Literacy in Virginia,” *The Virginia Magazine of History and Biography*, 111, no. 4 (2003): 333-378.

Henry with her. Although the young Patrick Henry was a member his uncle's parish, Henry, Sr. probably feared that the young Henry would become a dissenter after hearing Davies's sermons.

Controversy over the Act of Toleration inflated after Davies attempted to construct a second meetinghouse for himself in Hanover. The Governor of Virginia, then Thomas Lee, revoked a granted meetinghouse for dissenters in New Kent County on April 12, 1750 as a way to restrict the spread of Presbyterianism in central Virginia. Lee notified British officials that Davies violated the Act of Toleration.<sup>115</sup> Davies appealed to the Bishop of London that dissenters should not be as restricted over this because dissenter religious licenses allowed for several meetinghouses. The Bishop of London responded to such claims: "the Act of Toleration was intended to permit the Dissenters to worship in their own way, and to exempt them from penalties, but it was never intended to permit them to set up itinerant preachers, to gather congregations where there was none before." Since the law only allowed ministers to preach in their own county "how Davies can be said to live in five different counties, they who granted the licenses must explain."<sup>116</sup> The Bishop's assertion was incorrect because Britain passed a supplement to the Act of Toleration in 1711 that allowed Davies to create extra meetinghouses in Hanover County. Davies worked with the other local dissenters and worked to dispel the claims by the Anglican establishment regarding some of his actions.

Davies did find support among the Lords of Trade in England, who argued that "a free exercise of Religion is so valuable a branch of true liberty, and so essential to the enriching an improving of a Trading Nation, it should ever be held sacred in His

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<sup>115</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 151.

<sup>116</sup> Quoted from George William Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent*, 125.

Majesty's Colonies.”<sup>117</sup> Regardless of their appeal, the Virginia government continued to deny Davies any new meetinghouses. Next he appealed to the Dissenting Deputies—that is leading dissenters in London, representing the interests of dissenting denominations—who agreed that Davies's interpretation of the Act of Toleration was correct. Davies's congregation was quite large by 1753, numbering between 500 and 600 people, not including those he itinerated to previously. These numbers continued to grow, resulting in the establishment of the Presbytery of Hanover, which allowed Davies to license new ministers. Even so, the Virginia Commissary to London, William Dawson, opposed him, primarily because he believed Davies stole members of the Anglican Church away from them.<sup>118</sup>

The controversy surrounding the Act of Toleration certainly retained the attention of many people within the colonies. One person wrote a response to Davies's justifications for more meetinghouses to accommodate distances between congregants and their churches:

This is an Argument, which, if it proves any Thing, proves the Necessity of a fresh Meeting-House so long as there is a single Family of Dissenters in the Colony 30 Miles from the nearest Meeting-House—and this. Tho' there should be but one Teacher of a dissenting Congregation in the whole Colony,--nay. Tho' there should be none;--for one might come sometimes to give them his occasional Ministrations from Pennsylvania.

This statement, which clearly comes from a strong supporter of the established church in Virginia, goes as far as to suggest that dissenters should have no place of worship in Virginia. Later in the same document, the author is also critical of the use of

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<sup>117</sup> Quoted from Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 151-152.

<sup>118</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 151-153; Edward L. Bond, *Spreading the Gospel in Colonial Virginia*, 34-35.

the Act of Toleration to justify his claims, because the author does not believe it applies to the colonies.<sup>119</sup>

While the licensing issue was never resolved (at least until the 1777 Virginia Statue for Religious Freedom drafted by James Madison), Virginia rescinded its attempts to restrict Presbyterians after 1759. One probable reason for this is that in 1759, Davies left for the College of New Jersey and was no longer a present and direct threat. Another possibility is that Virginian Presbyterians gained respect after the French & Indian War, although Rhys Isaac and others disagree with this notion, finding it improbable due to persistent dislike among Anglican clergy towards Presbyterians and vice-versa. Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, and many other Presbyterian ministers actively participated in the effort to defeat the French. Usually, this involved preaching to soldiers. On at least two occasions, Davies preached to soldiers, and in both instances, it involved the role of virtue, resistance, and covenants. A large part of his efforts were to recruit more soldiers to fight the French and their Indian Allies and to show loyalty to Britain at a time when many officials believed him to be disloyal. As a reaction to Braddock's defeat at the Battle of the Monongahela on July 9, 1755, Virginia's government voted for raising three thousand soldiers and forty-thousand pounds for the war effort in late August. At least two of Davies's sermons to soldiers are published.<sup>120</sup> The first one was preached to Hanover County volunteers under Captain Samuel Overton on August 17, 1755. Entitled

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<sup>119</sup> *Observations on Mr. Samuel Davies*, manuscript, Library of Congress, Manuscript Reading Room (Madison, LM101), 3-4. This source is among the miscellaneous manuscripts in the Library of Congress. Its author is unknown and it lacks a date, but it is probably from the early 1750s. Regardless, there are a few useful details. The document states that it is part of a larger letter, but the portion of the document in the Library of Congress are only pages three onward. The author intended, it appears, to have this critique of Samuel Davies become a pamphlet, judging by the various marks on the paper. Considering that this pamphlet never appeared anywhere else, it is likely that it was never published. It does, however, tell us that the public was interested in the subject.

<sup>120</sup> More may have been published during this time, but most of his sermons are undated.

“Religion and Patriotism The Constituents of a Good Soldier encouraged many soldiers to join through the fear of loss of liberty: “Shall Virginia incur the guilt, and the everlasting shame of tamely exchanging her liberty, her religion, and her all, for arbitrary Gallic power, and for Popish slavery, tyranny, and massacre?” Davies argues that “courage is an essential character of a good soldier:--not a savage ferocious violence: -- not a fool-hardy insensibility of danger...but calm, deliberate, rational courage; a steady, judicious, thoughtful fortitude,” making a distinct claim favoring virtue. Virtue, as discussed in chapter two, is in terms of the Scottish Enlightenment’s innate moral sense. This innate moral sense comes from God who, “adapted the natural genius of mankind...to the state in which they are placed in this world... he knew that innocence could not be protected, property and liberty secured...from the lawless hands of ambition, avarice and tyranny, without the use of the sword.” This overt statement of an Enlightenment and religious understanding of virtue and duty makes clear that God innately made some to defend liberty from oppressors. Indeed, Davies suggests that “This is a clear case: and it is equally clear, that you are engaged in a cause of the utmost importance. To Protect your brethren from the most bloody barbarities—to defend the territories of the best of kings against the oppression and tyranny of arbitrary power.”<sup>121</sup> This is not a statement of combating the French, this is a statement of resisting all arbitrary power, and those that do so are inspired by the innate courage gifted from God.

In the early years of the French & Indian War, it appeared France was going to be victorious because of a series of French victories. The Synod of New York called for a day of fasting on October 28, 1756 and Davies gave a Jeremiad and eschatological

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<sup>121</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 5th edition. Forgotten Books (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 363-387.

sermon that he titled “The Crisis: Or, the Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times.” This sermon focused on the collapse of Assyria because of their insufficient virtue and morality, intending to inspire the people of Hanover, and anyone who read the published sermon, to repent if there is any hope to defeat the French. In this sermon, he also makes an argument that the Seven Years War was the foretold battle against the Antichrist and Satan in the Book of Revelation. These millenarian sermons were a common thread in eighteenth-century America, even after the French & Indian War and the American Revolution.<sup>122</sup> Like the earlier sermon, there is an emphasis on the relationship between Catholicism and arbitrary power.

Probably Davies’s most famous Jeremiad sermon was his “The Curse of Cowardice” preached to Captain Samuel Meridith’s militia with the hopes of recruiting more soldiers, but in Davies’s mind, to ensure victory in the war. The string of British losses continued into 1758. William Pitt, Leader of the House of Commons during most of the war pushed for a massive increase in soldier recruitment to launch a campaign to capture Fort Duquesne from the French. Davies played his role perfectly for Virginia:

But when, in this corrupt, disordered state of things, where the lusts of men are perpetually embroiling the world with wars and fightings, and throwing all into confusion; when ambition and avarice would rob us of our property...when they would enslave the free-born mind, and compel us meanly to cringe to usurpation and arbitrary power; when they would tear from our eager grasp the most valuable blessing of heaven, I mean our religion...when our earthly all is ready to be seized by rapacious hands, and even our eternal all is in danger by the loss of our religion...must peace then be maintained...at the expence of property, liberty, life...No; in such a time even the God of Peace proclaims by his providence, “To Arms!”<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>122</sup> For more on these types of sermons and millenarian beliefs, see Susan Juster’s *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003).

<sup>123</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 3, 5th edition. Forgotten Books (New York: T. S. Arden, 1802), 412-430.

From this point in the sermon, Davies divulges into a series of critiques towards those that refuse to fight and commit sins, instilling a fear of God's wrath against them if they fail to take up arms. It undoubtedly worked considering that by the end of May, the first Virginia Regiment enrolled 950 soldiers and the second regiment enrolled 900. Each regiment had room for a 1,000 soldiers, filling nearly 93% of the openings with volunteers alone. Virginia's then governor, Robert Dinwiddie commended the efforts of Davies to recruit soldiers. These efforts, which also occurred in Pennsylvania, New Jersey, and other colonies in the month's prior, situated Britain into a formidable position, allowing for the conquest of Duquesne and Quebec. This was the turning point in the war.<sup>124</sup>

Other Presbyterian preacher played a role in soldier recruitment during the French & Indian War. Samuel Finley gave a sermon on October 2, 1757 entitled "The Curse of Meroz or, the Danger of Neutrality, in the Cause of God, and our Country." Beginning with a quote from Gilbert Tennent on the importance of duty to God and country, he eventually reaches his critique of those who proclaim neutrality, "That there can be no *Medium* between not helping and opposing the Lord: Or, that his Cause admits of no *Neutrality* in any of his Subjects. In Religion this is evident. *We cannot serve God and Mammon*, any more than one can *Serve two Masters* commanding contradictory Things." Finley broadens his discussion beyond the French & Indian War into "*civil Policy* the Matter is also evident...the Case of a *Body politic* is exactly *parallel*." Clearly framed as a religious struggle, Finley justifies his argument through logic. His first premise that "a

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<sup>124</sup> Fred Anderson, *Crucible of War: The Seven Years' War and the Fate of Empire in British North America, 1754-1766* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2000), 227-231; Martha W. McCartney, *Nature's Bounty, Nation's Glory: The Heritage and History of Hanover County, Virginia* (Heritage and History of Hanover County, Inc., 2009), 95-96.

*Nation* engaged in a *just*, but dangerous War, and that a Number of the professed Subjects are for being at Peace with the Enemies of the State.” Finley’s second premise is that these same individuals “refuse to give the least Assistance to repel the unjust Assailant by Force” it follows that they “expose the Nation to Ruin.” The consequence of this is “our Liberties are invaded, and we do not oppose the Invade, do we not give them away?”<sup>125</sup>

Finley’s circumstance was different from Davies, in large part because Finley preached in Pennsylvania where there were large numbers of Quakers and other pacifists. He had to convince them that neutrality was improbable and a violation of God’s commands when liberty is threatened. Like Davies did with his sermons, Finley sent his sermon to print a month after he gave the sermon.<sup>126</sup>

Gilbert Tennent similarly preached many sermons during the war, publishing eighteen sermons on the state of the British nation in 1758. The purpose of these sermons was promoting morality and virtue at a critical time of the war. Tennent threatened, “What will become of this miserable Town and Country, if Families continue to be thus neglected? Are we not, in a Course of Time, like to degenerate into *Libertines*, and mere *Pagans*, if *Popery* be not crammed down our Throats by the *French*?” On several instances, Tennent also warned his readers and listeners of the threat of tyranny and arbitrary power along with its association with Satan. Tennent pleads with his audience to spiritually improve or face ruin:

they do, in Fact, oppose... Salvation by the Lord Jesus Christ... real Christianity, and even Virtue itself are ready to expire, and take their final Farewel of our sinful and unhappy Land and Nation, and we are returning

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<sup>125</sup> Samuel Finley, *The Curse of Meroz; or The Danger of Neutrality, in the Cause of God, and our Country*, October 2, 1757, (Philadelphia: James Chattin, 1757), 13-15.

<sup>126</sup> James P. Byrd, *Sacred Scripture, Sacred War*, 76-77.



fast to Popery and Paganism...O may the Almighty bless them to our Repentance and Reformation, in Principle and Practice; that not only our own Souls may be saved, but the Ruin of our Land and Nation prevented!<sup>127</sup>

Each of the above ministers elucidated important ideas during the 1750s to congregants and the public at large. A few important ideas reveal themselves in these sermons: threats upon life, liberty, and property, towards religious liberty, and against the laws of God signify tyranny. Similarly, the importance of a virtuous people in relationship to God is emphasized, but this virtue is represented as largely innate. Combining these ideas provides a range of important thinkers, all referenced above: Calvin, Knox, *Vindiciae*, Rutherford, Locke, Hutcheson, and others. While these sermons direct their attention towards Catholicism and arbitrary power in France, not England, there is a clear consensus of thought in these Presbyterian sermons. Their ideas were not new, they reiterated over a century of thought from the resistance theories of Calvinist theologians and thinkers, virtue from the Scottish Enlightenment, and covenantal thought brought over from Scotland. These references are not coincidental, as the ministers were aware of these thinkers. Davies, for example, directly cites John Locke in his sermon “The Nature of Justification, and the Nature and Concern of Faith in it.” It should come to no surprise then, how similar their word choices of “laws of nature”, “life liberty, and property,” and others were identical, because they were in reality, intentional.<sup>128</sup> In each instance, these ideas are tied to earlier Calvinist ideas. By the 1760s, these ideas were reiterated in the American colonies, likely reinforcing earlier ideas, but bringing them to

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<sup>127</sup> Gilbert Tennent, *Sermons in Important Subjects; adapted to the Perilous State of the British Nation* (Philadelphia: James Chastin, 1758), xxvi, 51, 210, 250, 418.

<sup>128</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 3, 259.

the forefront of American thought. Together, this established a precarious situation for the British Empire that it was not prepared for.

### The Collapse of the British-American Covenant

American Presbyterians, like their forebears, had specific expectations for rulers. Rulers were expected to obey the laws of God and dispense justice fairly. Similarly, the expectation of monarchs was obedience to the laws of a nation, in the case of Britain, both King and Parliament must submit to the British Constitution. Americans, like Samuel Davies understood, or at least believed, the British Constitution fulfilled the covenant between the people and their rulers. Davies explicitly relates the British Constitution to a covenant in his sermon “Ingratitude to God an Heinous But General Iniquity.”

First his sermon set the covenant, “the blessing of not being a race of slaves, under the tyranny of an arbitrary government, but free-born Britons and Virginians in a land of liberty: these birth-right blessings are almost peculiar to us and our nations.” The constitutional arrangement is against arbitrary government, established after the Glorious Revolution, guaranteeing liberty. These liberties derive “From God, I say, all these blessings originally flow...acting according to the established laws of nature.” In a Lockean fashion, natural rights are shown to derive from God, and protected through the British Constitution. Davies relates the current struggle with earlier battles against these arbitrary powers, “You have also shared in the deliverances wrought for your country and nation in former and latter times,” directly referencing the political struggles of the seventeenth-century. Davies does not entirely attribute this to the people but also to God.

Holding strong to faith, one of the broader themes of this sermon is the responsibility for British peoples to worship God, fulfilling their side of the covenant. In the past, this led to “deliverances from the open violence and clandestine plots and insurrections of enemies abroad, and traitors and rebels at home: deliverances from the united efforts to subvert the British constitution.” Davies use of “deliverances” is a key point, linking their current and past causes against tyranny to deliverance in the sense of the Israelites deliverance from Egypt. Likening France to the Egypt of Exodus, France would “enslave free-born Britons to civil or ecclesiastical tyranny, or a medley of both.”<sup>129</sup>

This sermon was likely written during the French & Indian War, most likely after the capture of Duquesne and Quebec because this sermon has a much more positive tone than his earlier ones, but relates the same subject matter about tyranny. What is of particular importance is the fact that Davies relates English liberty to the constitution originally dispensed from God, not parliament or the king. The sermon elaborates how several biblical monarchs failed to uphold their respective covenants. This has important implications because the British government is just as capable of violating the British constitution. In these circumstances, Davies makes clear of the covenantal relations referenced in earlier resistance works like the *Vindiciae* of the bipartite position of the king as in covenant with God and a separate covenant with their subjects.

Most Americans, as visible in the sermons of Samuel Finley, Samuel Davies, Jonathan Mayhew, among many, many others, could not conceivably believe George II would violate this covenant. Sermons only express praise for George II, persisting even into the funeral sermons: “George is no more! George, the might, the just, the gentle, and the wife; George, the father of Britain and her Colonies, the guardian of laws and liberty,

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<sup>129</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 2, 130-132.

the protector of the oppressed, the arbiter of Europe, the terror of tyrants and France.”<sup>130</sup>

It is ironic, that Davies’s final sermon, which was on January 14, 1761, was both a eulogy for King George II, while also an expression of delight in British rule. Davies wholeheartedly expressed the importance of liberty and never lived to participate in the breakdown of the British imperial system over America.

Like Davies, few of the ministers that preached during the First Great Awakening through the French & Indian War lived to discuss the events preceding the American Revolution. We have a few notable examples such as George Whitefield joining Benjamin Franklin in his trip to England to express opposition to the Stamp Act, Yet, even though these figures could not express their opinions on these issues, their statements lived on in their congregants and those trained at the Log-Colleges or at the College of New Jersey. The revivals and the war sermons from these individuals brought the language of liberty back to the forefront of American language.<sup>131</sup> Among ministers that participated in the American Revolution, the “Presbyterians outnumbered all other denominations combined.”<sup>132</sup> Some of these ministers played extraordinary roles in the Revolution such as John Witherspoon. Witherspoon played a fundamental role in educating important leaders of the Revolution like Madison just as Samuel Finley educated Benjamin Rush a few years earlier. Witherspoon directly participated in Committees of Correspondence, drafted letters for the combined Synod of Philadelphia and New York to be read aloud in Presbyterians pulpits, which proclaimed loyalty to the king, but also to the resolves of the Continental Congress. After Lexington, he worked

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<sup>130</sup> Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects*, vol. 3, 344.

<sup>131</sup> Mark A. Noll, *Christian in the American Revolution*, 46-47.

<sup>132</sup> Charles H. Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1920), 118.

towards gaining support to oppose Great Britain and eventually became the first official in New Jersey to publicly declare for Independence in 1776.<sup>133</sup>

Many ministers involved themselves in the Revolutionary cause in a variety of way. In some cases, it was small. When Washington and his army reached Morristown, New Jersey in 1777, according to the church's history, Washington took communion there. In other cases, they directly were in contact with the British. Thomas McKnight who was trained at New Brunswick, eventually ministered the congregation at Middletown Point, New Jersey. In 1778, the British attacked and burned his church and captured McKnight. He died shortly after he was released from captivity. Similarly, Samuel Sackett's church at Crumpond, New York was burned by Americans to keep it out of British hands. The Continental Congress compensated him \$3,500 for the destroyed property (apparently never dispensed). Elihu Spencer preached in several places, but was consistently connected to the New Brunswick Presbytery. During the Revolution, Spencer worked towards uniting the people of North Carolina in rebellion against Britain, in 1775, but with little success. Being a Presbyterian minister and supporting the Revolution were not always a guarantee. Some, like Samuel Buell opted to retain their friendships with British officials. In his case in particular, he apparently agreed with the rebels' politics, but would not join their cause.

In many cases, Presbyterians participated completely in the cause, such as Nathaniel Whitaker, Robert McMordie, John Rogers, Jacob Green and Phillip Vickers Fithian. Whitaker greatly involved himself in the conflict, not only by obtaining munitions, but also participating in the propaganda after the Boston Massacre and in promoting independence from Britain. Robert McMordie and John Rogers were both

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<sup>133</sup> Jeffrey H. Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 71-77.

Revolutionary chaplains. Rogers was a chaplain for General Heaths brigade and for the New York State Convention.<sup>134</sup> Jacob Green is an interesting case. He was converted by Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent and eventually joined the ministry. He temporary headed the College of New Jersey between the presidencies of Jonathan Edwards and Samuel Davies. By the time of the Revolution, he was an ardent Whig and gave many political sermons supporting natural rights and criticizing tyranny. Oddly enough, Green shifted away from the Revolutionary cause in the middle of 1776 because he believed he focused too closely on worldly affairs, and not enough on exalting God.<sup>135</sup> Philip Vickers Fithian actively supported the Revolution and frequently commented his favorability towards liberty and opposition to political slavery. Fithian graduated from the College of New Jersey in 1772 under the tutelage of Witherspoon. In 1775, Fithian decided to directly fight in the Revolution. Within the next two years, his role shifted towards being a chaplain. Fithian's life was cut short, dying in October of 1776 due to dysentery.<sup>136</sup> These active participant ministers in the Revolution do not represent a comprehensive list. Countless others did as well, along with immensely more of their congregants from all over the colonies.

Presbyterian ministers like Gilbert Tennent, Samuel Blair, Samuel Davies, Samuel Finley, and many others all preached ideas about resistance theology, virtue, covenantal theology, and other important precepts, we cannot claim that they caused the

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<sup>134</sup> Richard Webster, *History of the Presbyterian Church in America*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: Joseph M. Wilson, 1857), 481-483, 485-486, 547-548, 576-581, 587-590, 592-599, 602, 665-666.

<sup>135</sup> Mark A. Noll, "Observations on the Reconciliation of Politics and Religion in Revolutionary New Jersey: The Case of Jacob Green," *Journal of Presbyterian History*, 54, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 217-237, 218-225.

<sup>136</sup> John Fea, *The Way of Improvement Leads Home: Philip Vickers Fithian and the Rural Enlightenment in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 181-183, 186-187, 189, 209.

American Revolution. Rather, these ministers accomplished what John Adams explained about the period before the 1760s,

A Change in their Religious Sentiments of their Duties and Obligations. While the King, and all in Authority under him, were believed to govern...according to the Laws and Constitutions derived to them from the God of Nature...when they Saw those Powers...bent up on the destruction of all the Securities of their Lives, Liberties and Properties, they thought it their Duty to pray for the Continental Congress and all the thirteen State Congresses, &c.

Fulfilling what Adams described decades later, British American Presbyterian ministers emphasized the covenantal relationship between British Americans and Great Britain. Perhaps a more accurate way of describing this is not so much of a “Change in their Religious Sentiments of their Duties and Obligations” but instead a returned emphasis to them. This change in duty relates directly to sermons during the French & Indian War, which emphasized the duty of British Americans to combat the arbitrary power of France. At that time, there was clear support for British rule because of a general perception of King George II following his obligations as King. As John Adams clearly explains that when British authority appeared to violate their “Lives, Liberties and Properties,” Americans understood Britain as engaging in that same arbitrary power they were told to fight a decade earlier. As proclaimed in Calvinist resistance thought of the past few centuries, the Americans of the 1770s, saw it as their duty to resist British rule, following their duly elected magistrates that included “the Continental Congress and all the thirteen State Congresses.” Adam’s sucking remarks to Hezekiah Niles explained pithily that ministers, along with other thinkers, influenced the American mind in such a way as to prescribe resistance to the threat of tyranny.

Ministers like Davies, Tennent, and Whitefield, as Adams described it, largely caused the true revolution, because they expressed, or at minimum reinforced, ideas from earlier Calvinists or Enlightenment thinkers. We cannot infer these ministers caused what we call the American Revolution because British violations of the perceived 'bipartite covenant' were the ultimate cause of the Revolution. These ministers, along with numerous others, preached ideas presented by earlier theologians and philosophers like Calvin, Knox, Brutus, Rutherford, and Locke. These ministers, especially Davies, challenged their religious and political establishments while at the same time resisting the possibility of tyranny from France. Many of them participated in recruiting soldiers during the war with France. While most of these ministers did not live to see the American Revolution, some did and actively participated such as Witherspoon, Green, or Fithian. Presbyterian ministers of the mid-eighteenth-century were knowledgeable of the resistance thought developed in generations before them, and reiterated them to new audiences in the years prior to the Revolution. It is impossible to know how far their influence reached in that regard, but they certainly were part of the collective body of thought representing Americans in the years before and during the American Revolution.



## Conclusion

Eighteenth-Century Presbyterians inherited notoriety from their rebellious forbears. British Aristocrats, Anglican Clergy, and others associated Presbyterianism with persistent resistance to religious and political authorities, so much so that Presbyterian became a derogatory term directed towards those that resisted British rule. This perception originates at least to the seventeenth-century. In seventeenth-century Scotland, Presbyterians regularly challenged attempts to amalgamate England and Scotland under one crown. Furthermore, many Presbyterians resisted the rule of their own Monarchs, politicians, and religious figures that did not agree on what it meant to be a Presbyterian.

Different sects of Presbyterians had different interpretations of John Knox's theological ideas. As a result, there were distinct variations of Presbyterianism in Scotland. One of the most vocal versions was the Covenantalists. The Covenantalists defied rulers, emphasizing a distinct covenant between rulers and subjects, both subjected to God. Violating their perception of a covenant justified resistance to rulers, leading them to challenge the reigns of Charles I, Cromwell, and James II. These Presbyterians did not isolate themselves to the Scottish Isles. Scots sent to the Ulster Plantation over several decades of the seventeenth-century and Scots remaining in Scotland migrated to America. Covenantalists, in particular, were among the most common Presbyterians to settle the New World in the eighteenth-century.

American Presbyterians retained their Scottish identity and customs within a vast wilderness. In America, they tended to migrate towards the Pennsylvania and Virginia backcountry. During this time, they developed educational institutions called 'log-

colleges', by their critics. At these colleges, they studied a variety of topics including ethics, morality, grammar, and other common topics in eighteenth-century curricula. These systems of education expanded into the eighteenth-century.

Similarly, these same Presbyterians remained in constant contact with their Scottish Counterparts, including those like Francis Hutcheson and Thomas Reid who played key roles in the Scottish Enlightenment. The ideas of Hutcheson and Reid appear in the sermons of American Presbyterians. Similarly, the ideas of John Locke and other thinkers appear in these sermons, strongly suggesting strong familiarity with these ideas. Most importantly, ideas from these thinkers such as an innate sense of morality, the *tabula rasa* of John Locke among other important ethical thoughts were spoken and published frequently by Presbyterian Ministers, attracting numerous congregants and readers.

One of the most important overarching figures of this issue was John Witherspoon. Originally, from Scotland, Witherspoon migrated to the American colonies after being offered the position of the College of New Jersey's President. While the Scottish Enlightenment was already present in the minds of American Presbyterian and was already partly included in the curriculum, Witherspoon expanded its role in education. Witherspoon himself has a confusing relationship with the Scottish Enlightenment. It is debatable whether or not he supported it while in Scotland, mainly because in Scotland, the ruling leaders of the Kirk opposed it, placing Witherspoon in a negative predicament if he voiced support. Alternatively, he may have disagreed with it while in Scotland. Regardless, once in America, he was a vocal proponent of the Scottish Enlightenment.

At the core of all of the above ideas is Calvinist Resistance Theory. Resistance Theory aligns closely with Covenantalism. When a ruler violates their ‘bipartite covenant’, they become a tyrant and thus the people (or their representatives) have the right and duty to resist that tyrant. American Presbyterians, like their earlier Scottish forbears, actively preached resistance theory, especially during the 1740s and 1750s. During the French & Indian War, these ministers actively supported the war effort and worked to encourage the citizenry to fight the “popish” tyrant of France. Ministers as if Samuel Davies and Samuel Finley argued that it was virtuous to fight in this war, and those with a proclivity to fight, do so because of their innate gift from God.

Many of the original Presbyterian Ministers that represented the era of the First Great Awakening like the Tennent family, Samuel Blair, Davies, and Finley did not live long enough to witness the ignition of the fires of the American Revolution. They all actively preached resistance to their religious and political authorities during their lifetime and passed on the Presbyterian views of Resistance, along with the particulars of the British Enlightenment ideas from Locke, Hutcheson, and Reid. The next generation of Presbyterians actively used the ideas of Resistance Theory in their fight against Great Britain. An overwhelming number of Presbyterians and ministers partook in the American Revolution, whether it was on the battlefield, encouraging congregants to fight, preaching to soldiers, or any number of other ways to help the war effort. This is not to undermine the role other denominations played in the American Revolution, there were active participants from nearly every denomination, here is only a highlight of some of the efforts undergone by Presbyterians.

Looking forward, this study tells us a number of important details about Presbyterian Americans. Not only did they remain close to their counterparts' abroad, in other ways, they developed a separate identity during the eighteenth-century. Scottish Presbyterians increasingly supported British rule and rejected the Scottish Enlightenment. American Presbyterians were more akin to their ancestors in seventeenth-century Scotland with their proclivity to rebel against authority. For a considerable amount of time, American Presbyterians did not receive the attention they deserved in the scholarship of colonial British America. They played a key role in the development of the resistance theory they helped drive the American Revolution forward while simultaneously spreading and partaking in ideas of the Scottish Enlightenment. American Presbyterian ministers represent an important part of America's revolutionary heritage and deserve to be elevated among other important figures of the eighteenth-century.

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