Virginia Evangelicals and the American Revolution: The Role of the Baptist, Presbyterian, and Methodist Clergy

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VIRGINIA EVANGELICALS AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION: THE ROLE OF THE BAPTIST, PRESBYTERIAN, AND METHODIST CLERGY

by

William Jennings Terman, Jr.

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University Kalamazoo, Michigan December 1965
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William J. Terman
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I. RELIGIOUS FACTORS AS A CAUSE OF REVOLUTION

Standard history books contain little or nothing of the documentary material which would relate religion to the factors contributing to the American Revolution. References to social, political, and economic causations abound, but only occasional statements concerning the influence of religion are found, and among these the role of the Anglican, Roman Catholic, and Quaker persuasions receives most attention. Yet the involvement of the evangelical churches was significant enough to merit separate, intensive studies. It is the object of this essay to investigate the involvement of the Methodist, Presbyterian, and Baptist groups in the American Revolution as it took place in Virginia.

On March 22, 1775, Edmund Burke arose in Parliament to speak concerning conciliation with America. His address included a segment describing the religion of the American colonists:

Religion, always a principle of energy in this new people, is in no way worn out or impaired; and their mode of professing it is also one main cause of this free spirit. The people are Protestants; and of that kind which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. This is a persuasion not only favorable to liberty, but built upon it.

The accuracy of Burke's view was remarkable, especially since he


spoke as a contemporary of the colonists. His knowledge of the Protestant dogma peculiar to America, however, gave him insights into their motivations and responses. He sympathized with the colonists and urged British patience and caution.

Typical of evangelical Protestant thinking of the period was this emotional outcry of Virginia's anonymous "Country Poet" as he wrote to the House of Delegates meeting at Williamsburg in 1776.

FREEDOM we crave with ev'ry breath;
An equal freedom, or a death.
The heav'nly blessing, freely give,
Or make an act we shall not live!
Tax all things, water, air, and light,
If need there is; yea tax the night!
But let our brave heroic minds
Move freely, like celestial winds.
Make vice and folly feel your rod,
But leave our consciences to GOD.
To mortal power she never bows,
For Heav'n alone claims all her vows.3

This and similar pleas were not the result of imaginary circumstances. The Anglican Church was recognized in Virginia as the official state church to the exclusion of all other ecclesiastical organizations. Some of these, like the Presbyterians and Quakers, were permitted to establish congregations and appoint preachers upon the receipt of a license, but total religious liberty was unknown. The struggle for religious liberty in Virginia became involved with the conflict over political problems. A summary of the involvement follows.

The English Toleration Act of 1689

One of the earliest Virginia decrees concerning religion was dis-

3Virginia Gazette, October 18, 1776, p. 2.
tated by Governor William Berkeley in 1643. It stated clearly that "no minister should preach or teach publicly or privately except in conformity with the doctrines of the Church of England, and nonconformists shall be banished from the colony." The object was to exclude all dissenters and allow Anglicanism full rein in the religious affairs of Virginia. This was one of a series of statutes that succeeded in driving the dissenters into Maryland, the Carolinas, and elsewhere and would be remembered as a prime example of the result of unchecked church-state involvement.

In 1688 William and Mary replaced James II upon the English throne. Foes of James had invited their assistance in overthrowing the Catholic king and had made the change of governments comparatively easy. The dissenters were rewarded for their part in the revolution when the Act of Toleration was passed the following year. The statute permitted dissenting church groups to absent themselves from Anglican worship and to erect meetinghouses providing they took the oath of allegiance, denounced Catholicism, and registered their worship centers. Before the law's enactment, dissenters had been vigorously opposed and forced by law to attend worship services in the established churches. There were

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6Edward P. Cheyney, Readings in English History Drawn from the Original Sources (Boston: Ginn and Company, 1922), p. 548.
still laws which denied them full civil liberties, but the act was a step toward religious liberty.\(^7\)

The English Toleration Act did not officially apply to the colonies.\(^8\) Sects were recognized there either through direct legislation or by applying the British law without legal sanction. Virginia used both means. In 1699 the Virginia Assembly extended the application of the act, permitting legally-recognized dissenters to attend their own places of worship at least once in two months, thus allowing them to desist from attending the Anglican Church.\(^9\)

This did not create immediate problems for the Virginia Establishment since there were few dissenters. These were small groups of Quakers and a few Presbyterians. However, after 1738, dissenters rapidly migrated to Virginia's Great Valley region partially surrounding the older settlements to the east. These were chiefly Presbyterians who had obtained through the Philadelphia Synod the promise of William Gooch, lieutenant-governor of Virginia, that their religious observances would suffer no interruptions, provided they adhered to the Act of Toleration and manifested peaceful intentions toward the government. Many of these migrants were of Scotch-Irish origin and had resisted English domination in their homelands. This dissatisfaction was to continue as the valley-people tired of their limited religious freedom and hoped for the day.

\(^7\)Mitchell, p. 468.


\(^9\)Ibid., pp. 496-97.
when their religious convictions could be expressed freely and liberty of conscience would be reality.

To augment their desires they sent elected representatives to the House of Burgesses to support the separation of church and state, total religious toleration, and other important reforms. Their efforts inaugurated the long conflict in Virginia and made the Appalachian area of Virginia a source of continuous agitation for larger liberties.¹⁰

The Great Awakening

Just before the Revolutionary War commenced, Virginia witnessed a religious phenomenon, known as the Great Awakening, which coincided with and strengthened the agitation for religious freedom. This movement came to the South much later than it did to the New England and Middle colonies, and it found religious groups there ready for its propagation. Peculiar to Virginia, above all the other American colonies, was the rapidity with which evangelical sects became established and grew. New Light Presbyterians, Separate Baptists, and Methodists were endeavoring to evangelize the area, and they possessed a uniqueness which made them logical perpetuators of the spirit of the Awakening.¹¹ To the North, the aroused churches seemed to follow the tendency to fall back into their former patterns. This was probably due to a more authoritarian ecclesiastical government and a rational theology that conflicted with


the emotional aspects of the revival.\textsuperscript{12}

Not all classes in Virginia were deeply affected by the Awakening. The lack of coverage by the contemporary literature indicates that the urban educated, for the most part, were not attracted to the revival.\textsuperscript{13}

On the other hand, the rural areas, where dissenting sympathies were stronger, received the Awakening as Heaven-sent. The message and emotionalism, the individualism and lay exhortation, the simple freshness and nonliturgical fervency—all collaborated to create an atmosphere of opposition to upper-class and High Church England. In other words, the free spirit energized by the Awakening was tempered by the fear of an ever-present Establishment with its restrictions and controls. Anglicanism was a constant "personal menace"\textsuperscript{14} and often showed open opposition to the revival.\textsuperscript{15} In fact, the only Anglican clergyman in Virginia to embrace the Awakening was Devereux Jarratt, who later became the good friend of Virginia Methodism.\textsuperscript{16}

The narrow dogmatism constantly manifested by the presence of the state-church irritated the evangelicals in another manner. The Great

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid.


\textsuperscript{16}Albright, p. 24.
Awakening increased the piety of the people, and pietism is of a personal and voluntary nature. It does not flourish when it is compulsory; neither is its nature strengthened by culture. Religious pietism resisted controls and condemned the ties of the state to an ecclesiastical organization of "unredeemed, reprobate" men. Pietism made definite distinctions between the elect and nonelect and brought the issue of political suffrage for the elect to the forefront. Thus the environment created by the Great Awakening was hostile to religious controls as set up by the Establishment.

The Great Awakening was one of the many forces in colonial America working toward union. It gave the people common emotional and intellectual ground as well as a consciousness of national religious unity, as the news spread of "revival fires" igniting each colony in sequence from New England to the South. The masses experienced a self-esteem as God's children and an equality as far as spiritual matters were concerned. These embryo democratic feelings changed "inevitably the temper, if not the form, of government." No longer would the Vir-


18 Ibid.


21 Gewehr, p. 187.
ginia colonists accept the jurisdiction of a ruling minority. They would discuss, question, and petition; they would convince their Assembly of the rightness of their cause.

The great revival contributed another invaluable service to the developing American continentalism when it produced the first intercolonial religious leaders. With the merger of religious and political dissatisfaction, it was inevitable that spokesmen for the colonial sects would lend their influence to the American cause. This meant that interest in friendly cooperation would eventually lead to united action, for the cause was a common one, and union would provide strength.

One religious historian has ascribed to the revival the setting down of America's religious convictions, which balanced the political revolution and prevented it from being hurled into the anarchy and ruin which characterized the French Revolution. Undoubtedly, there are scholars who would be critical of this appraisal in light of the deism and humanism which were prevalent on the colonial scene. Yet the fundamentals of the evangelicalism of the period fostered a defiance of atheism and anarchy and assisted in paving the way for the experiment in republican democracy. America "cannot eradicate, if it would, the marks left upon its social memory, upon its institutions and habits, by an awakening to God that was simultaneous with its awakening to national

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22Sweet, Religion in Colonial America, p. 325.

The Desire for the Separation of Church and State

The aspect of individualism which was an outgrowth of the Great Awakening contributed to what has been called a "new freedom" in the colonies. Dissatisfaction with the old order grew. The Establishment resisted every attempt to lessen its power and assisted where possible in the suppression of dissenting congregations. There was always the possibility of an increase of this power, which would eliminate all other sects and create an episcopate in the American colonies. Virginia dissenters were especially concerned over such a possibility, for Anglican strength there was greater than in any other colony.

Plans for an episcopate were not new. As early as 1638, Archbishop Laud had attempted to establish a New England bishopric, but civil war in the mother country blocked any official study. Later, in 1675, Alexander Murray was to be appointed Bishop of Virginia, but financial problems arose that tabled any further action. Apprehension increased despite reassurances from England's bishops that dissenters would not be affected by an episcopate. In April, 1760, Ezra Stiles, a New England Congregational clergyman, proposed a union between the Presbyter-


27. Albright, p. 96.

28. Ibid.
ians and his own denomination to maintain liberty and equalize the strength of the Anglicans. Although this did not occur, cooperative resistance efforts began in the form of conventions and continued until the Revolutionary War. The 1770 convention, meeting in Norwalk, Connecticut, expressed their concern over the fact that Parliament had taken no action protecting the dissenters from being forced to support an appointed bishop. Furthermore, there were no safeguards prohibiting bishops from becoming involved in the civil and religious affairs of other denominations.

There were Virginia Anglicans who strongly questioned the advisability of requesting the appointment of a bishop. The vestries, made up mostly of influential and wealthy laymen, had accumulated ecclesiastical power unsurpassed anywhere in the colonies. This had come about when, in the absence of a bishop, the vestry of a given church would invite a minister to serve for a year at a time rather than request his induction by the governor, which meant political control of clerical placement and tenure. The action by the vestries could actually involve a life-long tenure for a pastor. These men feared what episcopal supervision might do to their positions in the church, and this in itself reduced their ardor for English spiritual controls and made their Anglicanism more Americanized.

29Ibid., p. 103.
30Ibid., pp. 104-105; Hall, p. 169.
31Smith, Handy, Loetscher, pp. 16-17.
The Virginia dilemma, then, involved the dissenters' concern for the political and religious consequences of an American episcopate, while the Anglican laity resisted any reduction of their power, which an episcopate might impose upon them. This, however, did not destroy Anglican support of the Establishment. The church-state ties were strong, and it would take more than controversy over an episcopate to nullify this arrangement. On the other hand, dissenter emotions were so heated over the possibility of an episcopate that Jonathan Boucher, a learned Maryland clergyman, recalled in 1797 that the issue was "one great cause that led to the revolution."33

At least two other factors on the Virginia religious scene were responsible for dissenter unrest. They were the supposed loyalty of the Episcopal clergy to the Crown and the commonly-held opinion that those same ministers were delinquent in their duties and their morals. Accusations of Anglican disloyalty ran the gamut of suspicion all the way from their being pro-British sympathizers to the theory that they were emissaries of and in conspiracy with a foreign government.34 It is true that some of the clergy were attached to the cause of the King, but this must be understood as a normal, typical reaction of a British patriot in light of Virginia circumstances. However, the presence of these Tories simply aggravated the situation by causing the Establishment to be suspected, and by increasing the agitation for its long-awaited

33Quoted in Ibid., p. 104.
34Maxson, p. 149.
destruction. Those who made much of what little Anglican disloyalty there was were Baptists and Presbyterians with adherents almost unanimously pro-American.

Records have been discovered which contain a list of ninety-four Anglican clergymen who served in Virginia during the years 1774-76. Information is available for seventy-three of these; sixty-four were definitely pro-American, and nine were Tories. Another view declared that no less than one-third of the Anglican clergy were active in their support of the Revolution. It does seem safe to say that a high percentage of Anglicans were active in the American cause, and that traditional charges have been exaggerated.

The dissenters had looked with disdain upon certain pastimes of the Anglican communities for many years. In the 1750's, Samuel Davies preached of Episcopalian excesses to his Presbyterian followers. He condemned them for abandoning themselves to "lawless pleasures, to gaming, cock-fighting, horse-racing, and all the fashionable methods of killing-time, as the most important and serious business of life."  

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38E. G. Lowes Chorley, "The Planting of the Church in Virginia," William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, X (July, 1930), 211.

The clergy, he said, were "stupidly serene and unconcerned, as though their hearers were crowding promiscuously to heaven, and there were little or no danger." As the Revolution approached, conditions had not improved. Anglicans were still racing and gaming—"dice rattled, cards appeared, and money in immense sums was lost and won." Their church had become an appendage of the planter class; its spiritual ministry had largely ceased. The piety of the dissenters would not allow them to overlook this moral decline. This was one more reason for disestablishment.

Increasingly, the Anglican Church was opposed until it stood with its "back to the wall." The controversy grew until it became almost equal in importance to the disputes over taxes and other economic and political regulations. In fact, John Adams believed that even the opposition to taxation had religious overtones for many. He declared that "if Parliament could tax us, they could establish the Church of England, with all its creeds, articles, tests, ceremonies, and tithes, and prohibit all other churches, as conventicles and schism shops." This view has been expressed more recently, with the added view that

40Ibid., p. 753.


Virginia dissenters cherished political independence because they felt it would result in the rejection of religious oppression.\textsuperscript{44}

The decline of Anglican vitality was due to the rapid development of republican principles, whose adherents saw the Establishment with its clergy as an "inseparable appendage" of the monarchy, which gave the state church its chief support.\textsuperscript{45} With the decline of Anglican supremacy and popularity in many parts of Virginia, the dissenters envisioned freedom. They aimed at the complete ruin of the Establishment.\textsuperscript{46}

The year 1775 marked the beginning of a long series of petitions to the Virginia Assembly to enact laws guaranteeing the separation of church and state. These number into the hundreds.\textsuperscript{47} When this separation was not forthcoming at the conclusion of hostilities, both the Baptists and the Presbyterians reminded the Assembly of their goal in fighting the Revolution. A Baptist petition from Powhatan County, November 6, 1783, declared that "while we were opposing our enemies in the field, we were petitioning our rulers at the helm of legislation, to set us free from the yoke of religious oppression, which we long groaned under from the former government."\textsuperscript{48} On October 31, 1787, the Presbyterians informed the legislators that "love of liberty and political

\textsuperscript{44}Gewehr, p. 189.

\textsuperscript{45}Semple, pp. 26-27.

\textsuperscript{46}Ibid.

\textsuperscript{47}Gewehr, p. 200 (footnote).

\textsuperscript{48}Ibid., p. 200.
equality had been the "principles which engaged us and carried us through the late glorious contest." They continued, "We cannot help expressing our sorrow to see how slowly and with what seeming reluctance equal justice is done, and all denominations of Christians in the state are put in possession of their constitutional rights." 49

The constitutional rights referred to were those contained in the Virginia Bill of Rights, adopted in 1776. The last clause of the draft, submitted by Anglican George Mason and amended by James Madison, assured:

That religion, or the duty we owe our Creator, and the manner of discharging it, can be directed only by reason and conviction, not by force or violence, and therefore all men are equally entitled to the free exercise of religion, according to the dictates of conscience, and that it is the mutual duty of all to practice forbearance, love and charity toward each other. 50

The term "fullest toleration" had appeared in Mason's draft, which technically implied the right of government interference. Madison, fearful of this possibility, sought the elimination of a "term intrinsically fallacious and fraught with dangerous implications." 51 His efforts came to fruition when the Bill of Rights was adopted.

James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Patrick Henry were extremely vocal on behalf of religious freedom, but Madison was the key to its legal recognition. As a student of Dr. James Witherspoon at the College

49 Ibid.


51 B. F. Riley, p. 88.
of New Jersey (Princeton), Madison was influenced by Witherspoon's opposition to a state-controlled church, which began as a conflict with moderate churchmen in Scotland. Many of Madison's friends were dissenters, a factor which helps account for his interest in this cause. He wrote a letter from Orange County, April 1, 1774, to William Bradford, Jr., in which he described the religious struggle. He stated his hopes that the dissenters' predicament might be at an end but hastened to add that the odds were against such a conclusion.

Our Assembly is to meet the first of May, . . . The affair was on the carpet during the last session; but such incredible and extravagant stories were told in the House . . ., that I believe they lost footing by it. And the bad name they still have with those who pretend too much contempt to examine into their principles and conduct, and are too much devoted to the ecclesiastical establishment to hear of the toleration of dissentients, I am apprehensive, will be again made a pretext for rejecting their request.

Madison's sympathetic efforts throughout the controversy were appreciated by the evangelicals, but his work was made easier by the years of effective crusading by the dissenters.


54 Bradford was a major in the Pennsylvania militia. During the Revolution, he held the rank of Lieutenant-Colonel as a Deputy Master-General. In 1794 he was Attorney-General of the United States. See Gaillard Hunt (ed.), The Writings of James Madison (9 vols.; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1900), I, 22.

55 Ibid., pp. 22-23.

56 Thompson, p. 97.
With conditions so inflammatory, it is surprising to find a lack of denunciatory preaching and writing by the southern ministers. An unknown Tory wrote in November, 1774, that "few or no pulpits resound, or are in a foam with politics." An analysis of the role of the southern pulpit during this period reveals that it was "far less prominent in the development of the Revolutionary sentiment" when compared to the northern preachers. The leaders of the evangelical movement in Virginia did not express their political views in writing. It is logical to assume that since the revival came last to the South and since its central theme was "salvation from eternal punishment through repentance," the pulpit was used to proclaim this message, and what little writing was done concerned this doctrine. Political involvement came quickly as revolutionary conditions swept through the colonies. Training and convictions predestined the part these men would play in the conflict.

In June, 1775, Philip Vickers Fithian, a Presbyterian clergyman, wrote his impressions as he traveled among the Presbyterians of the Valley of Virginia. He described the general attitude toward the approaching rebellion as follows: "Mars, the great God of Battle, is honored in every Part of this spacious Colony, but here every Presence is warlike, every sound is martial! Drums beating, Fifes and Bag-pipes

58 Ibid.
59 Gewehr, p. 189.
playing and only sonorous and heroic Tunes. War fever had gripped these frontier evangelicals. For them acceptance of the existing political and religious inequities could no longer be tolerated. Changes must be made, despite the cost.

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II. THE BAPTISTS: CHAMPIONS OF THE REVOLUTIONARY SPIRIT

Virginia Origins

The Baptists first came to Virginia rather inauspiciously about 1714. Migrating from England, they quietly settled in the southeastern part of the colony. There they carried on their religious practices without molestation until the middle of the eighteenth century.\(^1\) A second group from Maryland settled in Frederick County in 1743. These Baptists, like those before them, were Arminian in doctrinal persuasion and had little influence on the Baptists who followed them.\(^2\) These made up what came to be called Regular or General Baptists and affiliated with the Philadelphia Baptist Association. In 1756 they formed the Ketoctin Association, the first Baptist association in Virginia. These were respected churchmen with trained clergy and orderly services.\(^3\)

New England was the source of the third migration. In 1754 a few Separate Baptists with Congregational background moved to what is now Berkeley County, West Virginia. Being Calvinistic in doctrine, they naturally clashed with the Arminian Baptists and as a result moved to

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\(^2\) M. O. Clark, p. 5.

\(^3\) Morton, p. 821.
North Carolina. In 1760 they formed the Sandy Creek Association and sent itinerant ministers into Virginia in the area called Pittsylvania. Their evangelistic labors took them into Spottsylvania about 1767, and thereafter their growth was rapid between the Blue Ridge Mountains and the Bay Shore.

As a result of their exposure to the Great Awakening in New England, these Separatists were known for their fervor and radical standards, which caused them to consider the Established Church and some other conservative groups "grossly ignorant" of the principles of Christianity. Their preachers were allowed to minister regardless of their level of literacy or amount of training. Adaptation to wilderness conditions was accomplished readily by these simple people with their loosely-organized church government and their fierce individualism. Spiritual matters were private and deeply personal even as their surroundings were. What relationship was there between the state and a man's religious life? Just as the state was far removed from their living conditions, so it was remote from their religious experiences and worship practices.

In the meantime, the Regular Baptists had spread slowly into the northern neck of Virginia by 1770. Despite the ostracism which both groups suffered, Regular and Separate Baptists did not unite until 1785, but

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4Ibid., p. 822.
5Mitchell, p. 474.
6Morton, p. 822.
7M. O. Clark, p. 6; Mitchell, p. 459.
8M. O. Clark, p. 27.
they did so under the banner of Calvinism. In 1770 all the Separatists united to form the General Association of Separate Baptists. In 1773 this association divided to form the Northern and Southern Districts. The James River was the line of division.9

Baptist evangelistic efforts were responsible for a growth in membership of four hundred per cent in the period 1771-74.10 The Northern District, in 1774, had twenty-four churches with a combined membership of 1,921, while the Southern District reported thirty churches with 2,083 members.11 Estimates of numbers of Baptist churches in Virginia in 1776 run from seventy-four12 to ninety.13 Membership statistics are also sketchy, with 1776 figures showing from five to ten thousand members.14

Persecution and Suppression

There is no doubt that the Baptists were agitators, as they resisted the inequities of the Establishment and criticized unrelentingly the Anglican clergy.15 Their ministers preached whenever and wherever op-

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9 Gewehr, p. 117.
10 Ibid.
11 Ibid.
14 M. O. Clark, p. 111; Hill, p. 44.
15 Chorley, p. 211.
portunities were found, and their witness was always aimed at the sal-
vation of the "lost," which included the clergy and laity of the Church of England.

Perhaps because of this, no other Virginia denomination suffered the abuse which became the lot of the Baptists. They were regarded as lawbreakers worthy of punishment because they ignored the worship ser-
ices of the Anglican Church. They were accused of being a menace to society, and their preachers were often called false prophets. Charges of promoting laziness were also leveled against them as a result of their meetings, which took people from their work. They were feared because the success of their movement might mean the destruction of the Establishment.

The most serious threat, however, came from the law-enforcement officials. In the eight years before the Revolution, approximately thirty Baptist ministers were imprisoned, some on several occasions.

These were confined in the following jails: Alexandria, Caroline, Chesterfield, Culpeper, Fredericksburg, King and Queen, Middlesex, Tappahannock, Urbanna, and Warrenton.

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16 M. O. Clark, pp. 17-18.


18 James, pp. 29-30; M. O. Clark, p. 27.
In August, 1771, John Waller, Robert Ware, James Greenwood, and William Webber, all Baptist ministers who had failed to obtain licenses to preach, were arrested in Middlesex County and charged with "unlawfully assembling themselves," "taking upon themselves to Teach or Preach the Gospel under the pretense of the exercise of Religion in other manner than according to the Liturgy of the Church of England," and "laboring to persuade many Persons in Communion of the Church of England to dissent from the same and for raising factions in the minds of his majesty's Subjects." Waller's interpretation of the charges were revealed in a letter he wrote while in Middlesex jail, August 12, 1771. He disclosed that they were searched for arms and then charged with mutiny.

Similar indictments were presented by Culpeper County against Nathaniel Saunders and William McClennahan on August 21, 1773. Their warrant charged that they did, "Teach and Preach Contrary to the Laws and usages of the Kingdom of Great Britain, raising Sedition and Stirring up Strife amongst his Majestie's Liege People."

Some of the aristocracy, staunch supporters of the Established Church, spread the rumor that Baptists were "dangerous radicals" who would take possession of the country as soon as they were strong enough.

19 Baptists in Middlesex, 1771, William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, V (July, 1925), 209.

20 Quoted in Gewehr, p. 130.


22 Quoted in Sweet, Religion in Colonial America, p. 305.
Many of the imprisoned ministers were well-known and influential. Thus public sympathy for them was aroused in some areas. Others felt the wrath of the mob as the baser elements of the lower classes gathered to break up Baptist services just for the sport of it. No religious interest served as a motive for their harassment. The mob was little concerned with religious freedom. Throughout the persecution, these clergymen continued their evangelistic efforts and actually saw an increase in converts, some of whom came from the ranks of the persecutors. Probably the most celebrated of imprisoned evangelists was Elijah Craig of the Blue Run Baptist Church. He was incarcerated in Culpeper County for preaching dissenting doctrine but continued expounding from his cell window. So effective was his ministry that his attorney warned the court that Baptists "were like a bed of camomile; the more they were trod, the more they would spread." Craig was imprisoned again in Orange County for the same offense.

These persecuted evangelicals were not without friends in the higher echelons of society and government. Thus, John Blair, Virginia's Deputy-Governor, wrote the king's attorney in Spotsylvania with regard to charges of disturbing the peace levied against John Weller and Lewis Craig. He described their use of the sacraments as being similar to

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23 Hill, p. 44.
24 M. O. Clark, p. 17.
the Church of England, except for the mode of baptism and the application of traditional disciplines. He continued:

They have reformed some sinners and brought them to be truly penitent. Nay, if a man of theirs is idle and neglects to labor and provide for his family as he ought, he incurs their censures, which have had good effects. If this be their behavior, it were to be wished we had more of it among us. 27

Another sympathizer was James Madison who wrote William Bradford in Pennsylvania, January 24, 1774, about the sufferings of the Baptists: "That diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution rages among some, and to their eternal infamy be it said the clergy can furnish their quota of imps for such purposes." He mentioned the imprisonment of several "well-meaning" ministers and commended their "very orthodox" religious sentiments. 28

Still another advocate of religious liberty who vocally supported the Baptists in their struggles was Patrick Henry. He defended the imprisoned for the "heinous charge of worshipping God according to the dictates of their own consciences." 29 One early Baptist historian wrote of his personal knowledge of Baptists who were persecuted 30 and expressed his regard for Henry's efforts on behalf of the beleaguered Baptists:

Patrick Henry; being always a friend of liberty, . . . only

27Quoted in B. F. Riley, p. 61.


29Quoted in Mitchell, p. 474.

needed to be informed of their oppression; without hesitation he stepped forward to their relief. From that time, until the day of their complete emancipation from the shackles of tyranny, the Baptist found in Patrick Henry an unwavering friend.31

When Henry became governor of Virginia, the Baptists, meeting in Louisa, August 13, 1776, sent him a message of congratulations, part of which stated: "As a religious community, we have nothing to request of you. Your constant attachment to the glorious cause of liberty, and the rights of conscience, leaves us no room to doubt of your Excellency's favourable regards."32

Suppression of the Baptist mode of worship and ideas of personal rights continued until war appeared imminent. Then, with the energies of the people directed toward resisting the British, persecution ceased, and Baptists were encouraged to join the fray. As one Baptist put it, "Soon the hitherto dominant party were glad to have the aid of dissenters in their struggle for liberty, civil and religious."33

Petitions and Memorials

When the Virginia Assembly met in August, 1775, it was the recipient of a petition, which has been called the "entering wedge to religious equality in Virginia."34 The petition was the production of a joint meeting of the Baptist Northern and Southern Districts, which had

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32Quoted in the Virginia Gazette, August 24, 1776, p. 7.
33Benedict, p. 655.
34B. F. Riley, p. 87.
met at Dupuy's Meetinghouse in Cumberland, now Powhatan, County. The House of Burgesses, which received the document, had called a conven-
tion to replace the defunct colonial government. The Baptist paper, as it was presented August 16, observed that despite their religious differences, they considered themselves citizens of their communities and consequently involved in the common struggle. It continued:

After we had determined that in some Cases it was lawful to go to War, and also for us to make a military resistance against Great Britain, in regard to their unjust Invasion, any tyrannical Oppression of, and repeated Hostilities against America, our people were all left to act at Discretion with respect to enlisting, without falling under the censure of our Community.

Then the petition requested that certain Baptist clergymen, Elijah Craig, Lewis Craig, Jeremiah Walker, and John Williams, be permitted to preach to the soldiers without interference. The paper concluded with a prayer to God for His blessing on the government's "patriotic and laudable Resolves, for the good of Mankind and American Freedom, and for the success of our Armies in Defense of our Lives, Liberties, and Properties."

The convention responded with a resolution formed by Patrick Henry that granted the dissenting ministers permission to conduct worship services and to preach to the troops. This meant that the regimental chaplaincies, which had been established in 1758 at the request of

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36 Quoted in Ryland, pp. 95-97.

37 Henry, p. 317.
George Washington, were open to ministers of all religious bodies, not just the Established Church. \(^38\)

Baptist hopes rose, while the Church of England must have faced the reality that its power was beginning to decline. The Establishment began an emergency program of canvasses, circulated petitions, and urged action in favor of the retention of the Episcopacy as a permanent legal establishment. The Baptists retaliated with petitions which numbered several thousand names, chiefly freeholders. \(^39\) Baptist memorial had gone to the House of Burgesses since 1770, \(^40\) but now the pace was quickened. They were contending for a divorce between the church and the state so the church could be free to serve as it saw fit.

A host of petitions greeted the Virginia Assembly in the fall of 1776. Coming from every part of the state, the memorials, for the most part, dealt with religious liberty. A typical one was dated October 22 and came from a group of dissenters in the counties of Albemarle, Amherst, and Buckingham. In it they declared

> that the same motive namely liberty, that exerted them to venture life and fortune in opposing the measures adopted by the king and Parliament of Great Britain will still determine them to bleed at every vain \(^{sic}\) before they submit to any forms of Government that may be subversive of there \(^{sic}\) Religious Privileges that are a natural Right, and that stand nearer

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\(^38\) Anson Phelps Stokes and Ralph H. Gabriel, Church and State in the United States (3 vols.; New York: Harper and Brothers, 1950), I, 268.

\(^39\) B. F. Riley, p. 87.

\(^40\) James, pp. 32–41.
every man . . . . than even life itself. 41

A committee on religion numbering seventeen and including James Madison and Thomas Jefferson was appointed to handle these petitions. After a severe struggle which lasted from October 11 to December 5, a significant victory was won. A bill releasing dissenters from restricted religious opinions and worship and from the support of the Established Church was presented to the Assembly, where it was voted into law. 42

There remained, however, much work to be done. There were issues concerning obligatory support of the clergy, what ministers could legally officiate at marriages, and the superintending of ministerial conduct. Step by step, complete religious freedom came to Virginia. Many additional petitions were presented to the Assembly over the years, but at last the dissenters realized their goal. Thomas Jefferson provided the capstone when his famous bill to establish religious freedom was adopted January 16, 1786. It stated:

Be it enacted by the General Assembly, That no man shall be compelled to frequent or support any religious worship, place or ministry whatsoever, nor shall be enforced, restrained, molested, or burthened in his body or goods, nor shall otherwise suffer, on account of his religious opinions or belief; but that all men shall be free to profess, and by argument to maintain, their opinions in matters of religion, and that the same shall in no wise diminish, enlarge, or affect their civil capacities. 43

41Quoted in Francis Campbell Symonds, "Ferrar, Barnett," William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, XVI (April, 1936), 272-73.

42B. F. Riley, p. 90.

The disposal of the glebe lands came later, as did the discontinuation of the use of public funds for the relief of the poor by the vestries.44

The Virginia Baptists were definitely a persuasive force in bringing about the disestablishment of the Episcopal Church and securing religious liberty for all.45 For these Baptists the humiliating harassment was at last a memory of a bygone day. A man could worship as he pleased.

Preaching and Fighting Patriots

The dissenters put the same energy into the fighting of the Revolution that they expended in the struggle for disestablishment. An excellent explanation of Baptist participation was written a generation after the winning of independence and disclosed that Baptists favored revolution due to suppression by British laws. Mere toleration had proven inadequate, for their sufferings had occurred when that law was in force.46 Another appraisal of Baptist involvement is much the same, stating that their defiance was symbolical of the growing spirit of independence.47 Still another view reveals that the Baptist Church was the "only denomination . . . . that addressed either of the conventions [1775 and 1776] on the subject of going to war with Great Britain."48

44E. T. Thompson, p. 99.
45M. O. Clark, p. 27.
46Semple, p. 62.
47Gewehr, p. 135.
48James, p. 66.
As Christians, they struggled for religious freedom; as citizens, they battled for civil freedom. But to them religious liberty was of greater importance even though political freedom was a necessity.

Concern for religious liberty was so widespread in Virginia during the early phase of hostilities that the Virginia Assembly took an unprecedented step in October, 1777, when it passed an "Act for Speedily Recruiting the Virginia Regiments". This act contained the provision that religious groups could form companies and regiments with their own officers and chaplains. This would permit the evangelicals to engage in their country's defense without conflicting with their convictions of separation from those of more liberal beliefs.

Thomas McLanahan, a Culpeper County minister, was one of the first to take advantage of this regulation. He formed a company of Baptist soldiers, led them into battle as their captain, and served them as their chaplain. Jeremiah Walker and John Williams preached to the soldiers who were encamped in lower Virginia. After a short time, they ceased their efforts when the troops did not respond.

David Barrow was called "one of the most eminent, as well as one of the most useful" Baptist ministers of the period. He enlisted as a

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49 B. F. Riley, p. 86.
50 Ibid., p. 80.
51 Quoted in Humphrey, p. 121.
52 B. F. Riley, p. 91. Ryland listed his given name as William, p. 80 (footnote).
53 Semple, p. 62.
regular soldier and shouldered a gun as an infantryman. 54 Another heroic clergyman was the aged David Marshall. He was warned repeatedly by the British to cease his patriotic appeals in behalf of the rebellion, but threats did not make him desist.

As a friend to the American cause, he was once made a prisoner, and put under a strong guard. But obtaining leave of the officers, he commenced and supported so heavy a charge of exhortation and prayer, that, like Daniel of old, while his enemies stood amazed and confounded, he was safely and honourably delivered from this den of lions. 55

Samuel Harriss was a powerful preacher, denouncing tyranny whenever he could. It was he who was called "a mover of sedition everywhere." 56 Another dissenter who faced imprisonment at least three times in the controversy over religious freedom was Elijah Craig. He often represented the interests of his denomination at the general assemblies and the state revolutionary conventions. 57 John Leland, an indefatigable preacher of liberty, was looked upon as one of the most influential orators of Southern Protestantism. 58 He was known for his rugged forthrightness as he championed religious freedom and became a pillar of strength as the Revolution approached. 59

54B. F. Riley, p. 92.
55Semple, p. 372.
58Watson, p. 131.
59Ibid.
The loyalty of these preachers to the cause of freedom made them subject to the vengeance of the English soldiers. They were hounded from place to place and rewards were often offered for their capture or betrayal. Their churches were desecrated by being turned into British hospitals, warehouses, and magazines. With their pastors gone, congregations were broken up and scattered.60 In general, the people were demoralized and a spiritual indifference settled down upon them. Letters were received by the Baptist General Association meeting at Thompson's Meetinghouse, Louisa County, in August, 1776, which told the sad tale of decline. This declension was blamed on too active an involvement in political matters.61 It is difficult to see how this could have been any different with war all around them and their leaders in constant danger.

The war did accomplish a service for the Baptists. It drove many of them westward to the frontiers of their state. This meant that these evangelicals would be among the first to move beyond the mountains as the new nation outgrew its narrow confines.62 From being firm proponents of religious freedom, they became prime movers of their country's boundaries westward into an area vast and rich.

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60 Ibid., p. 97.
61 Semple, p. 63.
62 B. F. Riley, p. 97.
III. THE PRESBYTERIANS: EXFOUNDERS OF REVOLUTIONARY DOCTRINE

Beginnings in Virginia

Small groups of Presbyterians\(^1\) began migrating from Pennsylvania to the Piedmont and Shenandoah areas of Virginia in the 1730's.\(^2\) They were chiefly Scotch-Irish and German, and chose the region between the Alleghenies and the Blue Ridge Mountains in order to be as far away from the influence of the British government as was possible.\(^3\) The building of their log meetinghouses was approved by Governor Gooch, who had promised that Presbyterian ministers would not be hindered as long as they conformed themselves "to the rules prescribed by the Act of Toleration in England, by taking the oaths enjoined thereby, and registering the places of their meeting, and behaving themselves peaceably towards the government."\(^4\)

In 1743 William Robinson, a one-eyed exponent of the Great Awakening, went to Hanover, and New Light Presbyterianism began there. These dissenters became part of the Presbytery of New Castle.\(^5\) The New Lights

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\(^1\)There had been a few Presbyterian families in eastern Virginia at the beginning of the eighteenth century, but they were no longer organized as a church. See Morton, p. 583.

\(^2\)Gewehr, p. 25; Morton, p. 584.

\(^3\)E. T. Thompson, p. 88.

\(^4\)Quoted in Morton, p. 584.

\(^5\)E. T. Thompson, p. 53; Morton, p. 583.
were products of the Great Awakening who rebelled against the contemporary practice of the religion and the preaching of the day. They were dogmatic in their demands that each Christian must possess a personal religious experience and that each must have the "inner light" as an essential for Christian living. Of course, no minister should occupy a pulpit unless he had received this light.6

Their contention that the state church was unconverted and an opposition to the work of God brought down upon them the wrath of the Establishment. They were charged with inciting treason and disturbing the peace. It is true that their enthusiasm did cause them to divide congregations and bring confusion to many. As a result, on April 3, 1747, Governor Gooch and the Council issued a proclamation prohibiting the preaching of New Light doctrine within the colony.7 But by 1750 the proclamation was relaxed to allow clergy holding state permits to preach even though they were New Light.8 The growth of the valley settlements was rapid during these years, and the thrifty Scotch and Irish took advantage of the area's productivity. The organization of the Hanover Presbytery, December 3, 1755, at the Pole Green Church in Hanover County, was the result of this concentrated valley population.9

In 1765 the Presbyterians of the interior counties threw their full support behind Patrick Henry's resolutions against the Stamp Act, thus

6Baldwin, p. 52.
7Morton, pp. 591-93; Baldwin, p. 66.
8Baldwin, p. 66.
9Morton, p. 595.
helping to secure their adoption. By 1772 Presbyterian growth in the Valley of Virginia brought about a liberalization in the attitude of the civil and religious officials toward these dissenters. They were enjoying greater liberties than were guaranteed by the English Act of Toleration, and the question arose as to whether or not it was wise to continue the Established Church in this region. 

In the meantime, the Baptists were petitioning for the same consideration in religious matters as the Presbyterians were receiving. Both religious groups balked at the idea of mere toleration. They desired full freedom without the possibility of interference on the part of the state. When a more liberal toleration bill was proposed in 1774, the Hanover Presbytery petitioned the Assembly in November, asking that no action be taken but such as would guarantee liberty and equality to the petitioners. They viewed an "unlimited, impartial" toleration as an "equality of privilege and protection to all denominations, by the civil power." This was a step in the direction of the desired divorce between church and state.

Early Preachers of the Libertarian Doctrine

The widespread interest in religious freedom was nurtured at least

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10 Mitchell, p. 475.
11 Ibid.
12 Morton, p. 754.
13 Mitchell, p. 475.
14 Quoted in Ibid., pp. 475-76.
15 Ibid.
in part by the Presbyterian pulpit and classroom. The sermons, letters, addresses, and journals of the New Light leaders abound with references that prove the interplay of religion and politics.16

Outstanding for the contribution he made was Samuel Davies, who took his fight for toleration to England and the attorney-general.17 Succeeding in getting an extension of the toleration law for Virginia, he called for large liberties; "the sole supremacy of Christ in the church—the authority of the word of God—the equality of the ministers of religion—and individual rights of conscience."18 He criticized the degeneracy of the clergy of the Establishment, as did others.19 Yet his ministry was not all criticism. His labors brought a respectability to evangelical Presbyterianism, for they were marked by an order and dignity that served to moderate the emotionalism of the period.20 He had some well-chosen words for religious fanatics, calling them "enthusiastical freaks."21

Davies' oratory was impressive. He served the parish where Patrick Henry resided as a boy, and for eleven years, Henry listened to Davies eloquently expound dissenter doctrine.22 Perhaps young Patrick heard

16 Van Tyne, p. 64; Baldwin, p. 59.
17 Watson, p. 131; Norton, p. 593; Mitchell, p. 472.
18 Mitchell, p. 473.
19 Norton, p. 754.
20 Ibid., p. 821.
21 Ibid., p. 589.
22 Ibid., p. 596.
him say with conviction that "man has a natural right to question authority, to compare it with certain great principles of justice and of righteousness and, if he finds them incompatible, to act as seems to him right, to meet opposition and perhaps persecution, but never to yield" the liberties that belong to a free people.²³ Patrick Henry's untiring efforts in behalf of freedom later on undoubtedly had for their basis this boyhood atmosphere.

Davies carried on his fight as president of Princeton (then the College of New Jersey) from 1759 to 1761, where ministerial students and prospective teachers were schooled in these liberal views. His contribution to his times has been appraised in these glowing words: "To Davies, perhaps Virginia owes more than any other man for services in behalf of religious liberty."²⁴

George Whitefield's brief evangelistic visits to Virginia were sufficient to shape New Light preaching. He taught that the world was part of God's great government and that no man was superior to other men until their consent gave him a superior position. His teachings had a "levelling, democratic tendency that seemed dangerous to the conservative elements in society."²⁵

Another Princeton president who gave himself completely to the proclamation of the gospel of liberty was John Witherspoon.²⁶ The South

²³Baldwin, p. 56.
²⁴Mitchell, p. 472.
²⁵Baldwin, pp. 55-57.
²⁶Witherspoon's tenure as Princeton president was from 1768 to 1794.
especially felt his impact as clergymen, trained in this "seminary of sedition," went forth as apostles of freedom. Evidence exists to support the view that independence was advocated there before there was popular support for it. Witherspoon's political doctrine could be summarized in three phases:

1. Since men are originally made equal by nature, they are consequently free.

2. Society is an association or compact of any number of persons who may deliver up or abridge some part of their natural rights in order to have the strength of the united body to protect the remaining.

3. Society then presupposes an expressed or implied contract, which necessarily implies the consent of every individual to become a member of that society, and which implies also some particular plan of government and a mutual agreement between the subjects and the rulers.

It was perhaps a fitting fulfillment of these convictions when John Witherspoon added his name as one of the signers of the Declaration of Independence.

These men and others unmentioned sincerely preached the seventeenth-century doctrines of the Covenant and believed strongly in the divine law and constitution, which no human ruler should violate morally. Their ideas were bound to place them on the side of freedom and religious liberty.


28 Baldwin, p. 62.

29 Ibid., pp. 62-63.

30 Ibid., p. 53.
Development of the American Identity

Following the French and Indian War, it was apparent that a new spirit, akin to nationalism, was moving up and down the Atlantic coastal settlements. It was a growing cohesiveness which was evidenced as Americans looked to each other for the solutions to problems rather than the mother country. Especially was this true among the Presbyterian inhabitants of the Valley of Virginia. They saw themselves as an American church and conceded to no extra-American body any authority over their organization. This was an early expression of the growing American identity.

It is not difficult to understand why this should have happened to the Presbyterians. Their firm stand for freedom has already been mentioned, and the Scotch-Irish antipathy to British control is well-known. Captain Johann Heinricks of the Hessian Juger Corps wrote in his letterbook sometime between 1778 to 1780: "Call this war . . . . by whatever name you may, only call it not an American Rebellion, it is nothing more or less than an Irish-Scotch Presbyterian Rebellion." Recent studies have verified that Presbyterian support of the rebel cause was nearly unanimous. The underlying importance of this fact was that Presbyterian government was representative and their yearly Synod, the "prototype of

31 Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 50.
34 Ibid.
so many American republican national federal assemblies," was the most complete and powerful intercolonial organization of the period.35

Their was a constitutional republicanism, "a federated Christian commonwealth," governed by assemblies.36

Beginning in May, 1774, the Presbyterians used the right to petition in an attempt to enlarge their religious freedom. In quantity they never equaled the Baptists; however, in quality and effect the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians could not be surpassed. On January 20, 1775, in Fincastle County, these pioneers approved the meeting of the Continental Congress and appointed a committee to express themselves to the Congress. Their pastor Charles Cummings was the chairman. Their feelings are apparent in the document they produced. It spoke of the dangers of coming to a wilderness possessed by savages and the relentless pursuit of the emigrants by the government supposedly left behind. They expressed their willingness to be loyal subjects of England if their property rights and liberties were guaranteed, but they were determined never to surrender these to the power of a "venal British Parliament, or the will of a corrupt ministry."37 One month later, the Presbyterians of Augusta County, largely Scotch-Irish, prepared a similar statement.

The action of the General Synod of the colonial Presbyterian move-


36Ibid.

37Quoted in E. T. Thompson, pp. 88-89.
ment was mixed with resolute purpose and moderating caution. In May, 1775, a year before the Declaration of Independence but after the beginning of hostilities in New England, the Synod's Pastoral Letter said that Presbyterians were righteous men, brave and unafraid of death, who were committed to that fate if need be for their country's cause. On the other hand, their attachment to the Crown was not to be ignored. There was little or no allegiance to England as far as parliamentary procedure was concerned. But their devotion to the King was expressed when they declared that their opposition to his administration did not come from dissatisfaction with him or a desire to separate from their national ties. It cautioned that civil wars "wound more deeply than those with foreign countries" and closed with the statement that that "man will fight most bravely who never fights until it is necessary, and who ceases to fight as soon as the necessity is over." The Presbytery of Hanover was the first church body to recognize officially the Declaration of Independence. On October 24, 1776, it adopted a memorial to the Virginia Assembly, to the effect that those sentiments which brought about the United States of America were shared by the presbytery and that every effort would be made to guarantee the success of their common cause. It is not surprising then that there

38 Quoted in Thomas C. Fears, Jr., "Presbyterians and American Freedom," Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society, XXIX (June, 1951), 84-85.


40 Quoted in E. T. Thompson, p. 93.
are those who attribute the greatest determination to push the issue to a successful conclusion to the Scotch-Irish Presbyterians. They were the "most irreconcilable" in their quest for freedom. For them, it was not to be denied.

Ministerial Hall of Fame

Horace Walpole, shortly after the beginning of the revolution, candidly observed that "Cousin America has run off with a Presbyterian parson." There were others who felt similarly. Dr. Charles Inglis, the rector of New York's Trinity Church and an exponent of Toryism, wrote in 1776: "I do not know one Presbyterian minister, nor have I been able, after strict inquiry, to hear of any, who did not, by preaching and every effort in their power, promote all the measures of the Continental Congress, however extravagant." Shortly before Nicholas Cresswell returned to his native England after a lengthy tour through the colonies, he wrote his impressions of the revolutionary scene.

The Presbyterian Clergy are particularly active in supporting the measures of Congress from the Rostrum, gaining proselytes, persecuting the unbelievers, preaching up the righteousness of their cause and persuading the unthinking populace of the infallibility of success. Some of the religious rascals assert that the Lord will send his Angels to assist the injured Americans. They gain great numbers of converts and I am convinced if they establish their Independence that Presbyty [sic] will

41 Ibid., p. 88.
42 Quoted in Pears, p. 80.
be the established religion on this continent. 44

A few months later, he accused these same clergymen of being the chief supporters of the Revolution, calling them "Bellows of Sedition." He continued, "Divine teachers, or Godly teachers, I cannot call them without a vile prostitution of that sacred function." 45 Cresswell's error in predicting a Presbyterian nation was due to an over-estimation of their strength. Their rapid growth and influence astonished him. However, it is worth noting that the religious issue was of sufficient importance to be classified by the tourist as a major factor in the Revolution.

It has been estimated that over one-third of the objects of Cresswell's ridicule—the Presbyterian clergymen—gave significant service to the Revolutionary forces. Some were chaplains in state and national assemblies, and many served in the chaplaincy of the armed forces. Others were active in recruiting, encouraging the civilians, and feeding the propaganda mills. 46

The continental picture showed that Presbyterian chaplains numbered thirty-seven out of a total known chaplaincy of one hundred seventy-nine. 47 Several of these served in Virginia. Amos Thompson was spiritual advisor


to a company of Maryland-Virginia riflemen and was characterized as a "warm patriot" by Philip Vickers Fithian. Fithian himself enlisted as a chaplain early in 1776. Having been trained at Princeton, licensed to preach by the Philadelphia Presbytery, and sent as an itinerant missionary to the Valley of Virginia, it was logical that he would be challenged by the call to duty. Shortly after the battle of White Plains, he died following an attack of dysentery and exposure in camp.

One of the intriguing characters of Virginia chaplaincy service was Charles Cummings. He has been described as "a zealous Whig" who contributed much to kindle the patriotic fire which blazed so brilliantly among the people. He was the first named to the committee, appointed by the freeholders of Fincastle County, to prepare an address to the Continental Congress recalling the oppression of the British government. He was chairman of the Committee of Safety for Washington County after its formation. An admirer of Locke, he preached his dogma and gained the reputation of being "the fighting parson." As a chaplain, he served the Virginia troops when they moved into Tennessee country against


51 Baldwin, p. 71.
the Cherokee Indians.\textsuperscript{52} Also serving as a chaplain in this area was a Joseph Rhea, of whom we know little.\textsuperscript{53} During Cummings' tenure as a pastor, he and his congregation marched armed to church. He would deposit his rifle in a corner of the pulpit, lay aside his shot pouch, and direct the service.\textsuperscript{54} He was indeed a minuteman ready for any emergency.

William Graham, also holding to Locke's views, received his training for the ministry under John Witherspoon. He was a pastor and teacher at Timber Ridge, Rockbridge County, Virginia. He also was the principal of the school which later became known as Liberty Hall. When the majority of the students were drafted into the armed forces, the institution temporarily closed in 1779.\textsuperscript{55} It was said of him that "the patriotic fire burned in no bosom with a warmer flame."\textsuperscript{56} His effectiveness was illustrated by his actions when a volunteer company of riflemen was being raised for active duty. The men were slow to respond, so Graham "stepped out, and had his own name enrolled, which produced such an effect that the company was immediately filled, of which he was unanimously chosen captain."\textsuperscript{57}

An announcement from General Washington to the effect that he did

\textsuperscript{52}Kramer, "Muskets in the Pulpit," Part II, p. 46.

\textsuperscript{53}\textit{Ibid.}


\textsuperscript{55}Gewehr, p. 231.

\textsuperscript{56}Sprague, III, 366.

not desire any more volunteer companies kept these men from being in-
ducted, but Graham was successful in inspiring the older men and youths to
defend their Blue Ridge region in case of enemy invasion.\textsuperscript{58} Aiding in
this were Presbyterian ministers John Brown and Archibald Scott, who
carried on a campaign of exhortation to keep the people fighting for
their freedom.\textsuperscript{59}

On one occasion the alarm was sounded that British dragoons under
Colonel Tarleton were nearby. After prayer, these Augusta County parish-
ioners of Graham, Brown, and Scott—certainly not the cream of the region
since the men of fighting age were at the front—marched off to Rock Fish
Gap to resist the British. Later General Washington was said to have
recalled this scene with the words: "If I should be beaten by the British
forces, I will retreat with my broken army to the Blue Ridge, and call
the boys of West Augusta around me, and there I will plant the flag of
my country."\textsuperscript{60}

Archibald Scott's announced purpose in serving the people of the
Blue Ridge area was "to assist in laying deep the foundations of our Re-
public on religious truth," and by doing his duty through instruction
and example, "to prepare the rising generation to enjoy and preserve
constitutional liberty."\textsuperscript{61}

\textsuperscript{58}W. P. Breed, Presbyterians and the Revolution (Philadelphia:
Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1876), p. 94.
\textsuperscript{59}E. T. Thompson, p. 94.
\textsuperscript{60}Sprague, III, 388.
\textsuperscript{61}Ibid.
John Blair Smith was an instructor in, and then president of, Hampden-Sidney College at the time when Virginia was first feeling the brunt of the war. Benedict Arnold's invasion had occurred in 1780 and the main British southern army under Cornwallis had arrived. When a company of Prince Edward militia started for the scene of action, this intrepid Presbyterian clergyman, wishing to encourage his parishioners, hastened to overtake them. Arriving on blistered feet, Smith met the captain, who was his friend and an elder in his church. When the captain saw the bedraggled Smith, he insisted the cleric return to serve the families of his church. Before this event, on two occasions (1777 and 1778), he had brought a volunteer company of students from the college to Williamsburg and Petersburg for six weeks of garrison duty in each place. His student-soldiers wore a uniform composed of a purple hunting-shirt. As more of his students entered militia duty, classes and even church services had to be suspended. Since the frail Smith was not suitable as a soldier, he turned his attention to recruitment and became one of the best recruiting officers of Virginia.

There were Moses Hoge, who interrupted his preparation for the ministry to serve in the Revolutionary Army, and James Turner, who fought

63 Ibid., p. 207.
64 Campbell, p. 678.
65 E. T. Thompson, p. 94.
66 Ibid.
at the tender age of seventeen and went on to become one of Virginia's eloquent pulpiteers. Another Presbyterian chaplain who served a Virginia regiment stationed in New York was a Mr. Thomson, whom Nicholas Cresswell met while visiting there.

An earnest preacher who vindicated the American cause as few men could was James Waddel. His early ministry was marked by a vociferous demand for liberty. Following the war, he gained the reputation of being a dynamic speaker, despite blindness. Caleb Wallace was known for his able pen. Memorials and letters declared his position clearly throughout the war years. A sample of his thinking was addressed to the Rev. James Caldwell, of Elizabethtown, New Jersey, April 8, 1777:

An American ought to seek an emancipation from the British King, ministry, and parliament, at the risk of all his earthly possessions of whatever name; . . . sometimes I have a fight with the prejudices—I would rather say the perverseness—of such as are inclining to toryism among us; but we have reason to rejoice that we have few such cattle with us.

Others, beside Charles Cummings, served on Committees of Safety throughout Virginia. John Todd, pastor of the Providence Church, was elected to the committee for Louisa County in 1774. He was also chaplain of the county militia and held a military rank of colonel. Samuel Smith and Richard Sankey were committee members in Prince Edward

67 Breed, p. 96.
68 Journal of Nicholas Cresswell, p. 227.
69 Gewehr, pp. 102-103; E. T. Thompson, p. 94; Henry, p. 16.
70 Quoted in Campbell, p. 674.
County, with Sankey serving as chairman.  David Rice was an ardent and active member of Bedford County's Committee of Safety. Excerpts from two of his sermons disclose typical Presbyterian patriotism. In a discourse on Job 32:10, he concluded:

The grounds of the Americans' struggle and the reason of our opposition to the claims of the British Parliament are very just and important. It is nothing less than a fundamental subversion of the Civil Constitution of the Colonies and the substitution of arbitrary despotic power in the room of a free government that we oppose. Were it only some small encroachments, some lesser instances of maladministration that did not affect the very being of the constitution, resistance by force of arms would not be lawful; but where the very being of the constitution is struck at, resistance is justified by the laws of God and the dictates of common sense, and is agreeable to the fundamental principles of the civil constitution of Great Britain.

In March, 1777, he proclaimed to a company of soldiers: "We should resist oppression by every means in our power to the last extremity; cheerfully undergoing the various fatigues and dangers of military life. This is wise because oppression is worse than death."

Lay leaders of the Presbyterian Church were also active in Revolutionary War leadership. As a reaction to the notorious Gunpowder Conspiracy at Williamsburg, Patrick Henry led a small army of one hundred fifty men to within sixteen miles of the Virginia capital. These volunteers were Hanoverian Presbyterian laymen, who were resisting despotism.

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72 Ibid.
73 "Therefore I said, Hearken to me; I also will shew mine opinion."
74 Quoted in E. T. Thompson, pp. 93-94.
75 Ibid., p. 94.
On October 7, 1780, the important battle of King's Mountain was fought by a patriot army made up mostly of Presbyterian frontiersmen. Five of the colonels were elders, including one of the commanding officers, William Campbell. He has been called the hero of the battle because of an unique contribution he made to the rebel forces. An excellent marksman, he invented a gun which was reputed to be better than any in use at the time, and reports stated that he could even outdo the Indians in accuracy, regardless of body position. Earlier he had assisted Charles Cummings in composing the Fincastle Memorial to the Continental Congress. A few months after King's Mountain, at the battle of Cowpens, Generals Morgan and Pickens were the able and courageous American leaders. They, too, were Presbyterian elders.

It is true that as the war progressed the rigors of campaigning reduced the ardor of the soldiers. The account of the threatened mutiny of Captain William McKee's south-valley Scots is an example of this. There were reasons for the incident. Hunger from reduced rations, nearly-worthless currency, increased taxation, discrimination in calling militia, and too long periods of military service in the face of needs at home

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76 Henry, p. 287.
77 Campbell, p. 700; Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 11.
78 Lyman C. Draper, King's Mountain and Its Heroes (New York: Dauber and Fine Bookshops, 1929), pp. 381-82.
79 Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 11.
were factors creating unrest. Freedom and independence were still goals. But a man had to support his family! How could you maintain a peak fighting condition when anxiety plagued you? Fortunately, a cancellation of the order reducing rations eased the situation.

British Retaliation

The Baptists were not alone in their suffering at the hands of the British. No other denomination was called upon to pay so dearly for its convictions as was the Presbyterian. Severe treatment resulted in the destruction of more than fifty churches in the colonies, and many others were ruined beyond refurbishing.

The attitude of the Presbyterians toward this maltreatment was summed up in the General Synod's Pastoral Letter of 1783 at the war's conclusion:

We cannot help but congratulating you on the general and almost universal attachment of the Presbyterian body to the cause of liberty and the rights of mankind. This has been visible in their conduct, and has been confessed by the complaints and resentment of the common enemy. Such a circumstance ought not only to afford us satisfaction on the review, as bringing credit to the body in general, but to increase our gratitude to God, for the happy issue of the war.

The letter, furthermore, reviewed the disastrous consequences, had the Revolution been quelled.

Had it been unsuccessful, we must have drunk deeply of the cup of suffering. Our burnt and our wasted churches, and our plundered dwellings, in such places as fell under the

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81 Fears, pp. 82-83.
powder of our adversaries, are but an earnest of what we must have suffered, had they finally prevailed.

It concluded with a call to thanksgiving "to Almighty God, for his mercies, spiritual and temporal, and in a particular manner for establishing the Independence of the United States of America."83

83 Quoted in Pears, p. 83.
IV. THE METHODISTS: NON-COMBATANTS IN A REVOLUTIONARY ERA

Evangelism in Virginia

Although George Whitefield was a product of the English Methodist Revival, his visits to America did no result in the establishment of Methodist societies. He preached in Virginia in 1739 and 1745, leaving behind a group of followers who associated with either the Baptists or the Presbyterians.1

Methodism gained a small foothold in Virginia as early as 1766, when the ministry of Robert Strawbridge or some of his local preachers resulted in the organization of a society in Leesburg.2 There is also an account of Methodist services being held in an old Alexandria sail loft near the Potomac River waterfront in 1771, where Francis Asbury used to preach following his coming to America.3

But the Methodist movement actually began in Virginia when Robert Williams came to Norfolk in 1772. As was typical of the Methodists, the Norfolk society thought of themselves as Anglicans and turned to the clergy of the Established Church for the administration of the sacraments. Since Methodism was not separate from Anglicanism and Methodist preachers were largely unordained, this was perfectly logical.4

1 J. Manning Potts, "Francis Asbury, the Prophet of the Long Road," William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, XXII (January, 1942), 40.
3 Hill, p. 44.
4 Chorley, p. 211; Potts, p. 40
Partly because of these ties to the Church of England, Methodism found itself in a dilemma when the Revolutionary War began. Some were inclined toward agreement with the agitation for political and religious freedom. Many gave full support to England and the Establishment. Yet others were unable to take sides in the conflict due to divided loyalties. Most of the Anglicans, on the other hand, were hesitant in their acceptance of Methodism as part of the Established Church. Methodists were considered dissenters, highly emotional, and breakers of Anglican disciplines. Devereux Jarratt, an evangelical Anglican clergyman, was the only cleric of the Establishment who cooperated fully with the movement. He was a convert of the Presbyterian revival in Virginia; thus he shared many New Light ideas. Bath Parish in Dinwiddie County was where he served as rector, and it was here that Robert Williams stayed for one week in 1773. Williams gained Jarratt's support when he assured his host that Methodists were "true members of the Church of England" and that "their design was to build up the church." By this he meant that Methodism hoped to accomplish a revival of spiritual fervor within a movement they considered decadent.

In 1774 the first circuit was formed by Williams, extending from Petersburg to beyond the Roanoke into North Carolina. Named Brunswick Circuit, it was the "cradle of Methodism in the South" and reaped a har-

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6 Ibid.

vest from Jarratt's evangelistic labors. Virginia became Methodism's stronghold in the few months before the Revolution.

Francis Asbury was actually the guiding hand in the development of southern Methodism during this period. This extraordinary man, whose leadership lasted through fifty years of Methodist growth, has been described as an orator with a unique organizational ability. He accomplished the transformation of a small colonial church into an ecclesiastical force in the growing American society.

The anti-British feeling which English Methodist missionaries encountered when they entered the colonies jarred them considerably. Asbury displayed his concern when, on May 8, 1774, he spoke of the evil-minded persons who opposed the Act of Toleration as it was being applied in Virginia and prayed: "May the Lord turn their hearts, and make them partakers of his great salvation."

Methodist preachers, for the most part, stayed out of political controversy. Their passion was a spiritual awakening, and they gave themselves to that end. A revival occurred during the winter of 1775-76 under the ministry of George Shadford. This resulted in the growth of Methodist followers in Virginia from two hundred ninety-one in 1774 to 2,456 in 1776. One of Methodism's most able historians, Jesse Lee,

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8Gewehr, p. 144.

9Watson, p. 134.


11Gewehr, p. 155.
Discordant Patriotism

As the Revolution approached, the Methodist position became more difficult. Missionaries and evangelists, born in England, sympathized with the mother country. Local preachers, native to America, were patriotic and consistently loyal to the revolution. The influence of the Establishment and John Wesley's anti-American views caused the Methodists, in general, to be looked upon as an unpatriotic body. In some respects this charge was unjust, but one incident did occur which seemed to indicate a Loyalist position. In 1776 the Virginia Methodists petitioned the House of Delegates in opposition to the efforts of the Baptists and Presbyterians to bring about the separation of church and state. In their memorial, they stated they were not "common dissenters" but were a "religious society in communion with the Church of England." This action increased the alienation between the Methodists and the dissenting evangelicals.

Meanwhile, events were taking place in English Methodism which would have a marked effect upon their American counterparts. John Wesley was becoming involved in the political arena through various statements and pamphlets he was releasing periodically. At the beginning of the rebellion, he manifested tolerance and understanding toward the Americans.

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12 Bucke, p. 170.

13 Humphrey, p. 123.

14 Quoted in Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 31. Three years later, these same Methodists sided with the dissenters.
He wrote Lord North, explaining that as an High Churchman he was unsympathetic toward the American cause.

And yet, in spite of all my long-rooted prejudices, I cannot avoid thinking, if I think at all, these, an oppressed people, asked for nothing more than their legal rights, . . . Indeed, some of our valiant officers say, "Two thousand men will clear America of these rebels." No, nor twenty thousand, nor perhaps treble that number, be they rebels or not. They are as strong men as you; they are as valiant as you; if not abundantly more valiant. For they are one and all enthusiasts; enthusiasts for liberty. They are calm, deliberate enthusiasts . . . We know men animated with this spirit will leap into a fire, or rush upon a cannon's mouth.15

It was not long, however, until his influence was definitely on the side of his countrymen. In 1775 he published a treatise, entitled "A Calm Address to our American Colonies." In it he espoused the doctrine that the ancestors of Americans had forfeited their right to votes by emigration. Therefore, Americans were to be happy in that they were protected by the law and to be dutiful in their obedience to the law. His reason for writing the pamphlet was to expose the source of the problem.16

It appeared to those who read it, on the other hand, that this was a restatement of Dr. Samuel Johnson's essay, "Taxation no Tyranny." Wesley and Johnson were friends, and the allegation seemed plausible.17

The pamphlet was probably the most controversial of all Wesley's writings.18

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17 Ibid., p. 159

He was a prolific author on English-American relations, producing at least ten political pamphlets between 1768 and 1782.\textsuperscript{19}

John Wesley was a Tory throughout the war, although he mellowed somewhat near its conclusion. He disliked war, knowing of its devastating effects on the religious life of the people. He believed the Americans were rebelling against constitutional authority and were causing a war that could not possibly benefit anyone.\textsuperscript{20} He frequently preached on war topics, using as his favorite text, "Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's." In 1777 he admonished his preachers to pray "that God would restore the spirit of love and sound mind to the poor deluded rebels in America."\textsuperscript{21}

This is all the more interesting when one considers that in March, 1775, Wesley advised his American preachers to keep themselves out of politics and to remain silent with regard to siding with either party in the conflict.\textsuperscript{22} Certainly, he would have saved them much suffering had he heeded his own advice.

Charles Wesley was just as much an High Church Tory as his brother. On one occasion, he commented that the war was not only a political rebellion, but it was in opposition to God, whose symbol in the colonies was George III. The monarch should be respected as the proper authority

\textsuperscript{19}Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 27.

\textsuperscript{20}Luccock and Hutchinson, p. 153.

\textsuperscript{21}Quoted in Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 30.

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid.
representing the divine as well as the temporal kingdoms. His poetry revealed his unwavering opposition to the colonial cause. One sees horror, unbelief, and wrath in these lines:

Why do the Christen's heathen rage,
And furiously their powers engage
Against the Lord most high?
Against his dread Vicegerent here,
Throw off the yoke of legal fear,
And God himself defy?  

Satan is blamed for American blindness here:

Monsters unnatural, who dare
Usurp the patriots' character,
And even art and means employ
Their dear-lov'd Country to destroy.  

When the Articles of Peace were drawn up in November, 1782, Charles Wesley produced "To the Patriots Written Dec. 1782."

Spirits perturb'd, ye now may rest,
Nor stir the hell within your breast,
The Rebels have their purpose gain'd,
Ye see your heart's desire obtain'd
And in their Independence see
Secur'd your own impunity.  

Needless to say, the American Methodists were embarrassed by the Wesleys. Asbury observed in his Journal for March 19, 1775, "I am truly sorry that the venerable man [John] ever dipped into the politics of America." He stated that he desired peace so that he could do all the

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25Ibid., p. 162.

26Ibid.
good he could. He further wrote that if Wesley had been born an Ameri-
can he would have been just as zealous for the colonial cause. Bitterness
can be detected in these closing words: "Some inconsiderate persons have
taken occasion to censure the Methodists in America on account of Mr.
Wesley's political sentiments."²⁷

Actually Asbury's was an understatement. Suspicion grew into re-
sentment. Methodist societies were regarded as centers of Toryism, and
individual Methodists had to prove their devotion to the American posi-
tion. A personal account, taken from the memoirs of Philip Mazzei,²⁸
illustrates these psychological aspects. Upon hearing that a Methodist
minister, who had just arrived from England, was preaching nearby, Maz-
zei and three friends went to hear him. They listened as he "talked of
the danger of losing one's soul by sudden death in time of war, reminding
mothers and fathers of their obligations toward their sons to remove that
peril." Mazzei's reaction was to corner the speaker following the ser-
vice, defend the actions of the colonists, and inform him that his mes-
sage would fall on deaf ears. According to Mazzei, the Methodist mis-
sionary left the building thoroughly confused.²⁹

The quandary in which many Methodists found themselves reached even

²⁷Quoted in Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture,
pp. 30-31.

²⁸Mazzei was an Italian physician who came to Virginia in December,
1773, to introduce the cultivation of grapes, olives, and other Italian
plants. A close friend of Jefferson, he took an active part in support-
ing the movement for independence. His was the first history of the
Revolution published in French.

²⁹Philip Mazzei, Memoirs, trans. E. C. Branchi, William and Mary
Quarterly, 2nd series, IX (October, 1929), 249.
to Thomas Rankin, John Wesley's "general assistant" in America. His Journal for September 20, 1775, revealed this confession:

My present situation exposes me to trials of different kinds more than ever. I cannot, I dare not, countenance the measures taken to oppose Great Britain; and yet at the same time, I could do nothing to hurt the inhabitants of America. How difficult to stand in such a situation; and not to be blamed by violent men on both sides?" 50

He remained at his post of duty for two more years, exerting great effort to keep himself out of politics so that he could preach the Christian gospel as the Methodists interpreted it.

The resentment the Methodists experienced was an indication of what was to come.

Wartime Conditions

The eruption of hostilities brought chaotic times to the Methodist missionaries. Some had distributed the Crown's proclamations, while others had talked too freely. Theirs was the choice of continuing their work in an America antagonistic to them or of returning to their native land. A few had embarked for England by August, 1775. Among them was Joseph Filmoor who had carried out an evangelistic tour of Virginia. 31

By the close of 1778, all missionaries but Asbury had returned to England. Asbury had cast his lot with the Americans whom he had come to love. Although he never took the oath of allegiance nor became an American citizen, his loyalty could not be questioned. His attachment was expressed in simple terms, "If I should leave America I should break

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30 Quoted in Bucke, p. 159.
31 Bucke, p. 158.
The suspicion created by his refusal to take the oath curtailed his work for many months and caused his American brethren to accept him with hesitancy.

George Shadford was one of those missionaries who found it impossible to sign a loyalty oath. Since Shadford and Asbury were close friends, they agreed in 1778 to spend a day together in fasting and prayer to determine what their futures should be. At the close of the day, Asbury announced, "My convictions are as clear and strong as ever that it is my duty to remain." No doubt Shadford's memory recalled being examined by a magistrate and threatened with imprisonment. His memoirs contain statements of conviction and purpose: "I had sworn allegiance to the king twice, and could not swear to renounce him forever. I dare not play with fast-and-loose oaths, and swallow them in such a manner." His travel had been limited, since he would not subscribe to the oath required to obtain a pass, and his religious convictions would not allow him to preach political views. We can understand why Shadford told Asbury that his work in America was finished and he must return to England. Asbury felt that one of them must be in error, but Shadford was firm in his opinion that his "call" was to return to England.

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33 Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, pp. 5-6; Bucke, p. 159; Humphrey, p. 124.
34 Quoted in Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 92.
35 Quoted in P. P. Sandford, Memoirs of Mr. Wesley's Missionaries to America (New York: J. Collord, 1843), pp. 275-277.
36 Quoted in Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 92.
Following Shadford's departure, Asbury wrote in his Journal:

I am under some heaviness of mind. But it is no wonder: three thousand miles from home; my friends have left me; I am considered by some as an enemy of the country, every day liable to be seized by violence and abused. However, all this is but a trifle to suffer for Christ and the salvation of souls. Lord, stand by me.37

He felt keenly his aloneness and the loss of Shadford, probably the greatest revivalist and most successful of all the Methodist missionaries.38 The future was uncertain as Methodist allegiance to the new government was being tested, and military service was expected, which came into conflict with Methodist pacifism.

Most Methodists were conscientious objectors who refused to fight when drafted and rejected the practice of hiring another to take a draftee's place.39 This fact, along with extreme persecution, forced many Methodists to leave the coastal areas where the fighting was severe and move back into the pioneer settlements.

The remaining preachers found circuit-riding extremely difficult. Prejudice and armed clashes made traveling dangerous. Even loyal American preachers suffered from the Methodist stigma. They were seized, beaten, whipped, jailed, tarred and feathered.40 The Fourth Methodist Conference, held in Baltimore, May 21, 1776, reflected these circumstances. Norfolk, Virginia, was left out of the minutes completely because of the

37Quoted in Buckley, p. 175.
38Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 92.
39Gewehr, p. 158.
40Humphrey, p. 125.
war, which had brought distress to the town and forced the removal of the pastor. 41 This congregation was abandoned for five years. 42 The courage and determination of these pastors who resolved to stay with their societies was evidenced at a conference held in Harford County, Maryland, May 20, 1777. A disciplinary question was asked them: "As the present distress is such, are the Preachers resolved to take no step to detach themselves from the work of God for the ensuing year?" Their response, as passed by a vote, was: "We purpose, by the grace of God, not to take any step that may separate us from the brethren, or from the blessed work in which we are engaged." 43

Certain extremists were vitriolic in their denunciation of the Methodists. William Watters, a Virginia preacher and conscientious objector, was verbally attacked by a rebel Anglican clergyman in 1776. Watters and his Methodist associates were called "a set of Tories" who were "under a cloak of religion." The Anglican went on: "The preachers were sent here by the English ministry to preach up passive obedience and non-resistance. That they pretended their desire for the salvation of the people, led them to travel and preach through the country; but money . . . . was their real object." Watters recorded his accuser's


43 Minutes of the Methodist Conferences Annually Held in America: From 1773 to 1813, Inclusive (New York: Daniel Hitt and Thomas Ware, 1813), I, 14-15.
last words: "He the accuser would, if at the helm of our national af-
airs, make our nasty stinking carcasses pay for our pretended scruples
of conscience." Watters challenged the Anglican to offer proof that
Watters was a Tory, to which he received no reply. Watters had no ob-
jection to taking the Virginia oath of allegiance and did so in 1777.44

Freeborn Garrettson, another Methodist passivist, was determined
not "to have any hand in shedding human blood." When he refused to take
the Virginia oath, he was threatened with imprisonment. He was bold in
proclaiming his adherence to the American cause and became widely known
as an effective preacher, but he was often suspected of being a Tory spy.
He was forced to leave Virginia in 1778 and returned in 1781 to continue
his ministry.46

A Virginia traveling preacher who was apprehended in Maryland was
Joseph Hartley. He was told to desist from preaching, but his calling
obliged him to proclaim the gospel. So great was his concern for the
people, he would attend his appointments and after singing and praying,
he would kneel and preach to the people. The impact of such preaching
causd his enemies to state they would rather have him exhort on his
feet than on his knees. Later he was jailed and preached through the
prison windows.46

Throughout 1781, many Virginia Methodists were drafted. Jesse Lee

44Quoted in Bucke, p. 166.

45Bucke, p. 66; Thomas D. Clark (ed.), Travels in the Old South:
A Bibliography (3 vols.; Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1956),
1, 213.

46Lee, pp. 64–65.
who became one of Methodism's leading early historians, was one young minister who was drafted for military service. When ordered to carry a gun, he refused on the basis of personal convictions. The colonel placed him under guard and was astonished to hear him preaching to the soldiers. Lee assured the officer he was faithful to his country and would do anything while in the army except fight. He was assigned duty with the baggage train, where he became a teamster and an unofficial chaplain.  

Lee wrote from personal experience of the punishment many of the conscientious objectors received. Beside physical punishment, some were fined or imprisoned, while others were sent home in disgrace. Numbers grew discouraged and left their religious faith, but some returned home with as much confidence in their religious beliefs as they had formerly possessed. Lee expressed great interest in the war's effect upon spiritual conditions throughout the Methodist circuits and societies in Virginia. He described 1782 as the year when interruptions of worship happened more often than before. The people were alarmed at the approach of the British army and were prevented from having services. Their discussions concerned the times and the distresses, the news of the day, the dead and wounded, and the prospect of the immediate future. No wonder Lee was concerned about the progress of Methodism in Virginia during this time.

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47 Sweet, Methodism in American History, p. 97.
48 Lee, p. 77.
49 Ibid., p. 78.
As the war progressed, there was a definite tendency to break away from Wesleyan control and from the sacramental regulations of the Church of England. The Methodists of Virginia were especially involved in this ecclesiastical rebellion. A conference was held in Fluvanna County in 1779 to take steps to ordain some of the older preachers so the people might have the sacraments. The war had made it virtually impossible to observe communion at the hands of the Anglican clergy. Robert Strawbridge had gone so far as to administer the sacrament although he was unordained. Asbury succeeded in persuading them to stop this independent action until Wesley could suggest proper procedure. Certainly this "heretical" action was an omen of what was to come when the war was over.

While most Methodists remained passive with regard to participation in actual warfare, there were scattered sectors where open support of the Revolution was found. A large group in Lunenburg County took their Americanism so seriously they referred to themselves as Republican Methodists. In eastern Virginia, Philip Bruce's ministry was marked by unusual zeal on behalf of the American forces.

By 1780 Methodist membership in the South was beginning to decline

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50 Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 6.
51 Sweet, Religion in the Development of American Culture, p. 31.
52 Review of The Old Free State, by Landon C. Bell, William and Mary Quarterly, 2nd series, VIII (January, 1928), 69.
slightly. One new Virginia circuit was created in 1781, but none in 1782.\textsuperscript{54} Yet, at the close of the conflict, two-thirds of all the Methodists in the United States were found in the area of Virginia and North Carolina.\textsuperscript{55} The times had been hard, but the people's faith had held steady despite the opposition, persecution, and disturbances of wartime conditions. The Methodists would say it was their God who had preserved and protected them. Then they would add, "His will be done."

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{54}Gewehr, p. 159.
\item \textsuperscript{55}Sweet, Religion on the American Frontier, p. 8.
\end{itemize}
V. CONCLUSION

One cannot understand the Revolutionary period in Virginia without taking into account the religious struggle. For one hundred or more years, the issue of church and state had been constantly before the colonists in one way or another. This is not surprising since religion was very real and vital to the Virginians. The supernaturalism of their day was shaped by the more pious seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while we look back at it from the secular and materialistic twentieth century.\(^1\)

The Virginian of the period was cognizant of the fact that controversy existed over the interpretation of public and private religious matters. The entanglement of religious problems with the longed-for political and economic freedoms came about as a consequence of the accelerating revolutionary activity.\(^2\) It has been said that "political freedom is the offspring of religious freedom; it takes its rise in the Church."\(^3\) While this principle cannot always be applied to man's struggle for freedom, the action of the Virginia evangelicals presents a strong argument for such a position. They possessed a fundamental faith which molded their conception of human worth, freedom, and justice. It also contributed a perseverance in the face of overwhelming odds, which would assist them when dark days appeared to prophesy defeat.

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\(^2\)Ibid., p. xiv.

\(^3\)Charles Campbell, quoted in Gewehr, p. 31.
The importance of religious freedom as an issue during this period was made more evident by the reference to it found in the first series of state constitutions drafted in the newly-formed United States from 1776 to 1783. Virginia was no exception. Although this freedom was not established until 1786, petitions, proposals, and reports kept the ramifications of the issue before the Assembly from 1776 on. Denominational involvement included petitions written as the result of popular support, sermons motivated by the need of certain basic rights guaranteed to the individual, and armed resistance in the face of British tyranny.

Actually, religious liberty was inevitable. When the British political yoke was broken, ecclesiastical ties were severed, too. Probably the only state where a religious establishment might have continued was Virginia, but British influence in all areas was unpopular enough that the Establishment's survival was only a matter of time.

To ask whether the desire for civil liberty or religious freedom came first may appear to be as unanswerable as the proverbial chicken and egg question. It can be argued, however, that, as far as Virginia was concerned, the strife between the Church of England and the Dissenters began early and created conditions in which disputes over stamps, tea, and representation served as immediate contributors to revolution.

The evangelicals were agitators in the manner in which they condemned

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4 Bridenbaugh, p. xiv.

those holding different religious beliefs, as well as in their demand for certain basic rights. The result was a "battle of creeds and dogmas for New World supremacy," which prepared the way for a larger battle involving other great freedoms. The outcome is our own unique history.

6 Ibid.
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