

## Presbyterian Controversies

January 6, 2019

### Recap

- Presbyterians prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> Century over three century of development
    - Presbyterians from Scotland and northern Ireland formed one faction
    - English Puritans and Continental Reformed settlers formed another
  - Geographic concentrations of Scottish-Irish Presbyterians in Middle Atlantic states and the South; English group predominate in Greater New England
  - Recap
  - Prior Presbyterian Controversies
    - 1729: Adoption Act set ordination standards for clergy based on the Westminster Confession
    - 1741: Split deepened by Great Awakening, reunion in 1759
  - Old Side-New Side Reunion
  - Rapid growth of New Side churches (triple the size of Old Side churches)
  - Reunion efforts began in 1754, finalized in 1758
  - Tennent's apology (1749)
  - Candidates for the ministry would have to demonstrate an "experimental acquaintance" with the gospel (New Side)
  - Proper education required for all ministers (formation of Princeton University in 1746)
  - Candidates needed to affirm Westminster Standards and could declare scruples
  - Great Awakening declared a "blessing from God"
  - Old Side-New Side Reunion
  - Leonard Trinterud
    - "The driving force that shaped American Presbyterianism in its formative years, and thereby determined also its later course, was the reinterpretation of the Christian life which inspired the Great Awakening. This conception of the Christian life was introduced by the Log College men, who in turn had heard it preached and taught by William Tennent. Against it one group in the church had united in what came to be known as the Old Side. After 1745, the Log College conception of the Christian life became normative for most of American Presbyterianism"
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- John Witherspoon (1723-94)
  - Scottish clergyman
  - Princeton President (1768-1792)
  - Proponent of Scottish Common Sense Philosophy
    - Reaction to philosophy of John Locke and David Hume
    - Maintained that humans can and do know the real world directly through senses
    - Thus, ideas are mental acts, not objects, and that the self does exist.
    - Simply "Common Sense"

- ▣ The Presbyterian Rebellion (aka the American Revolution)
- Presbyterians became strong supporters of American Revolution, seeing shades of 1643 in 1776
- George III called the American Revolution a “Presbyterian Rebellion”
- Scots and New England dominated colonial leadership
- Cornwallis surrender at Yorktown to nine American officers (all but Washington were Presbyterians)
- Founders and Presbyterianism
- US Constitution founded on Presbyterianism?
  - ▣ Recognition of human depravity
  - ▣ Common sense philosophy
  - ▣ Representative governance
  - ▣ Madison, Witherspoon, and Alexander Hamilton (along with 5 other of the 55 signers)
  - ▣ 1789: General Assembly
- First General Assembly convened in Philadelphia May 21, 1789 at 2<sup>nd</sup> Presbyterian Church
- John Witherspoon presided
- 419 congregations, 111 licentiates, 177 ministers, 16 Presbyteries, and 4 synods (Philadelphia, New York/New Jersey, Virginia, and Carolina)
- Adoption of the Westminster Standards and creation of the Book of Order
- The Presbyterian Family Tree: Photo 1