

Timothy D. Hall

MIGRATION, CHOICE, AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RELIGIOUS MARKETPLACE IN EARLY AMERICA

Timothy D. Hall laat zien hoe de verschillende rondtrekkende evangelisten en predikanten met name in de achttiende eeuw zich goed aan de religieuze behoeften van de migranten wisten aan te passen. Hij spreekt daarbij van een 'religious marketplace', waar de pioniers troost konden vinden in het religieuze, en waar tevens hun mogelijkheid tot individuele zelfontplooiing gegarandeerd werd.

In the late 1760s, the Anglican missionary Charles Woodmason headed west to carve a new parish out of the South Carolina frontier. He braved treacherous, sometimes almost impassable trails to reach a scattered, mobile population which he presumed to be ignorant and wholly bereft of religious leadership. When he arrived in the region he had targeted for ministry, however, Woodmason found himself competing in a robust environment of religious choice. The crusty clergyman complained that the absence of parishes in the Carolina backcountry permitted his prospective flock to be 'eaten up by Itinerant Teachers, Preachers, and Impostors from New England and Pennsylvania -Baptists, New Lights, Presbyterians, Independents, and an hundred other Sects.' He charged that the 'Variety of Taylors who would pretend to know the best fashion in which Christs Coat is to be worn' exacerbated the spiritual poverty of backcountry settlers, confusing them so thoroughly that they avoided religious teachers altogether.¹

1 Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant* (Chapel Hill 1953) 13.

Woodmason may have experienced the frontier as an environment of declension, chaos, and religious confusion propagated by the cacophonous voices of competing itinerants. The followers of these itinerants, however, perceived them as angels of salvation and agents of a new religious form well-suited to the condition of a people trying to carve viable communities out of an inhospitable, hazardous, and often lonely wilderness. Evangelical religion also suited the backcountry settlers' experience of increased choice and self-determination that contrasted sharply with many aspects of eighteenth-century life along the Anglo-American coast and in the parts of Europe from which many had voyaged. Migrants from long-settled colonial regions found on the frontier none of the social institutions and cultural expectations which had formerly structured their existence. Though somewhat disconcerting, this absence opened new opportunities for Anglo-American settlers to adapt social forms more closely to their own needs and interests. Scots-Irish immigrants who had been perpetual tenants in Ulster, Northern Ireland found themselves able to become landlords themselves, purchasing or often simply occupying real property they could make their own. Germans from the Rhinelands experienced a setting free of the complex legal restrictions on personal liberty -including liberty of movement- and property they had known in their homeland.² Woodmason's trip to the backcountry had in fact brought him into firsthand experience of a vast colonial transformation of both the physical landscape of North America and the experiential world of the diverse Euro-American migrants who were flooding west to inhabit it.

The phenomenal population growth of Great Britain's mainland colonies -from a mere 250,000 in 1700 to over 2,150,000 by 1770- was

- 2 On the structure of eighteenth-century Anglo-American society, see Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America: Persons, Houses, Cities* (New York 1992); Michael Zuckerman, *Peaceable Kingdoms: New England Towns in the Eighteenth Century* (New York 1970); Alan Tully, *Forming American Politics: Ideals, Interests, and Institutions in Colonial New York and Pennsylvania* (Baltimore 1994); Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill 1992). On the Scots-Irish experience in Ulster, see Patrick Griffin, *The People with No Name: Ireland's Ulster Scots and the Creation of a British Atlantic World, 1689-1764* (Princeton 2001) 9-64; Marianne S. Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers: The Beginnings of Mass Migration to North America* (University Park 1999) 167-220. On the German migrant experience, see A. G. Roeber, *Palatines, Liberty, and Property: German Lutherans in Colonial British America* (Baltimore 1993) 27-132; Wokeck, *Trade in Strangers*, 1-165.

fueling rapid territorial expansion to the Appalachian Mountains and beyond. The majority of this growth stemmed from natural increase, augmented by more than 250,000 immigrants from the British Isles and Continental Europe and another 150,000 men and women carried from Africa in chains. By the first census in 1790, the population of the newly-independent United States had nearly doubled again to 4,000,000. Over the next thirty years it soared to 9,600,000, with fully one-fourth of that total residing west of the Appalachians.³

Well before the American Revolution, this explosive numerical and geographical growth was prompting colonial leaders to worry about the future of Anglo-American society and religion alike. As early as 1752, essayists in the *Virginia Gazette* were warning that the 'widening of our settlements to the Westward is, itself, no better than a wide mistake.' They worried that territorial expansion would carry the population from a series of provincial Anglo-American coastal societies which had become increasingly structured to resemble -indeed, to emulate- the colonial conception of Europe's more stratified, bounded societies. The experience of frontier boundlessness, they feared, would produce a 'weak, dissipated, roving People, the mere Skeleton of a Government, without either Nerves or Sinews.' Such writers favored policies that would promote a well-ordered society of 'thick settlements in narrow Bounds, rather than unnavigated rivers, unuseful Tracts, nominal estates, and diffused habitations in unbounded Countries.'⁴ They urged that an Established Church modeled on the European parochial system would play a central role in this effort by 'humanizing a savage World, putting the Reins of licentious Appetite into the controuling Hands of conscience, and explaining and inculcating the Duties of social Life; as well as to shew Men the Way of Salvation.'⁵

Similar concerns occupied clergymen and government officials from New England to Georgia, where debates over the best means of imposing civil and religious order on westward expansion persisted into the nineteenth century. The issue of governing the frontier occupied a

3 See James T. Lemon, 'Colonial America in the Eighteenth Century' and Sam B. Hilliard, 'A Robust New Nation, 1783-1820', in: *North America: The Historical Geography of a Changing Continent*, ed. by Robert D. Mitchell and Paul A. Groves (Totowa, NJ 1987) 121-146, 149-171.

4 *Virginia Gazette*, April 10, 1752.

5 *Ibid.*, March 5, 1752; compare J. C. D. Clark, *English Society, 1688-1832* (Cambridge 1985) 93-141, 216-235, Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 58-64.

significant place in the constitutional debates of the Revolutionary and Early Republic. A workable system ultimately emerged as the states ceded of western lands, the Confederation Congress passed the Land Ordinance of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, and the new Federal government incorporated these methods for organizing land distribution and representative institutions in the western territories. Yet the principle of religious freedom which also emerged as fundamental law during those same constitutional debates prohibited a religious establishment that could 'inculcate the duties of social life.' To be sure, founders such as Thomas Jefferson hoped that education would fill this role, and the Congress of 1785 incorporated that hope into the Land Ordinance by setting aside one square mile section in every thirty-six to support public schooling. An effort to set aside another square-mile lot to support the religion of the majority of inhabitants missed passage, leaving the western population to fend for itself in a sphere of experience that many founders believed crucial for the survival of a virtuous republic.⁶

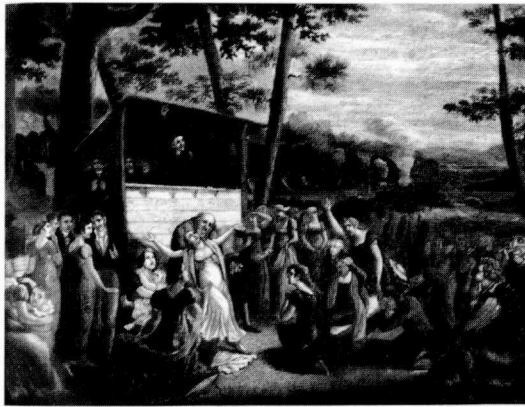
Despite elite concerns, a new religious order was emerging on the western frontier, as Charles Woodmason's early clash with backcountry itinerants reveals. Indeed, the Anglican missionary implicitly contradicted his own complaints about the backcountry's religious disorder by recognizing and adapting to the principles of religious life he found there. Woodmason reluctantly became a peddler of salvation, competing to sell 'Christ's coat' in its respectable Anglican style to a frontier people determined to exercise their freedom to choose among an increasing range of religious options. He adapted by imitating the fashionable extemporaneous delivery of his rivals, repeating the Liturgy by heart and using 'no Book but the Bible, when I read the Lessons.' He also strove to keep 'the whole Service and all the Offices at my fingers Ends,' and gave an 'Extempore Prayer before Sermon.' In the first weeks of his visit, Woodmason did not 'venture to give Extempore Discourses, tho' could certainly perform beyond any of these poor Fools.' He practiced constantly, however, and hoped to 'make Trial in a short time.'⁷

The clergy of churches that had enjoyed establishment in Europe or in

6 For the significance of the Land Ordinance and Northwest Ordinance to westward migration, see Hilliard, 'Robust New Nation', in Mitchell and Groves, eds., *North America*, 152-62.

7 Hooker, ed., *Journal of Woodmason*, 20.

the long-settled regions of Anglo-America operated at a disadvantage in this raucous marketplace of salvation. To be sure, most had to adapt in order to bring their cherished traditions to New World settlers who wanted them. Some energetic eighteenth-century clergymen such as the German Lutheran Henry Melchior



'Camp meeting', attributed to Alexander Rider, early nineteenth century. Uit: Nathan O. Hatch, *The democratisation of American Christianity* (New Haven 1989) 51.

Muelenberg did so very effectively, organizing scores of vibrant congregations that provided migrants to a strange new land with familiar forms of spiritual nurture. Yet the primary agents in the spread of Protestant Christianity to the eighteenth and early nineteenth century American frontier were the traveling evangelical preachers and exhorters who emerged in the wake of George Whitefield's innovative transatlantic ministry. Beginning in 1739, this Anglican itinerant and comrade of John Wesley swept through North America in a series of tours -six in all- that ended only with his death in New Hampshire in 1763. His opening tour in 1739-1740 fanned the flames of the first Great Awakening of the 1740s while introducing a new mobile model of ministry that rapidly reshaped the Anglo-American religious world.⁸

An army of imitators both lay and ordained took up the mantle over the next several decades to carry Whitefield's message of the New Birth to every corner of Anglo-America. The new evangelical style found substantial support among New England's Congregational clergy and the Middle Colonies' Presbyterian and Pietistic Dutch Reformed groups. Yet its most

8 See Timothy D. Hall, *Contested Boundaries: Itinerancy and the Reshaping of the Colonial American Religious World* (Durham 1994); Frank Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity: George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton 1994); Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids 1991).

explosive growth occurred outside these older traditions, where it could flourish unhindered by clerical attempts to control it. Three groups - Separates in New England, Separate Baptists in the Virginia and Carolina backcountry, and Methodists throughout the early American frontier-honed their message and methods to resonate powerfully with their hearers growing experience of an expansive, mobile world of choice that America was becoming. By examining briefly how each adapted Protestant evangelical Christianity to westward migration, we can begin to understand their crucial role in transforming lived experience into a set of potent, increasingly articulated meanings that came to characterize the way a migratory American people thought and acted in this expansive new world.

Separate congregations began to appear in Massachusetts and Connecticut within months of George Whitefield's first visit to New England in the late summer of 1740, as local Congregational churches began to divide over disputes concerning the Grand Itinerant's methods and doctrine. In most cases, the 'New Light' supporters of Whitefield separated from churches they regarded as spiritually dead, cold, and opposed to the heart religion the New Lights had experienced under the evangelist's preaching. An itinerant's visit often provided the occasion for a separation, as the 'roving minister' or lay-exhorter arrived in town demanding admission to the local pulpit and denouncing any minister who denied it as a 'dead, unconverted' impostor who was leading his congregation to hell. The fiery itinerant James Davenport sparked scores of such local controversies and separations during his tours through New England in 1742 and 1743, and the new Separate congregations persisted and multiplied long after Davenport repented his tactics.⁹

Separates' defense of itinerancy as a form of ministry 'blessed of God' led them to attack the parochial system that had structured the established Congregational churches of New England for more than a century. In their view, a system which confined individuals to parish churches which God had forsaken, prohibited itinerants from preaching where the Spirit led, and seized peoples' goods for refusing to support 'dead, formal ministers'

9 On James Davenport's career see Edwin S. Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York 1957) 37-41, 69-70; Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, 'James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London', *Journal of American History* 70 (1983-84): 556-78.

was as diabolically Antichristian as Papism itself.¹⁰ The fiery New Light preacher Andrew Croswell defended the formation of Boston's Separate congregation as a means of keeping at least one of the city's pulpits open 'to receive Mr. *Whitefield*, and others whom we look upon to be the zealous and faithful Ministers of Jesus Christ.'¹¹ Croswell warned that by excluding itinerants from their pulpits, Boston ministers often excluded the Lord himself. 'You cannot reasonably expect *much of the Presence* of Christ in your Assemblies,' he warned, 'while Mr. *Whitefield* and other godly Ministers, who occasionally come to *Boston*, are industriously kept out.'¹²

Separate leaders like Solomon Paine and Ebenezer Frothingham soon came to believe that the only practical way to ensure the freedom of itinerant preachers to proclaim the Gospel was to abolish New England's ecclesiastical constitution. People had a right to obey the dictates of their own conscience, listening to whatever preacher they wished without fear of punishment for transgressing a parish line. Frothingham, pastor of the Separate congregation in Middletown, Connecticut, argued that the social order would actually grow stronger if the parish bound were abolished as a tool of coercion. The civil authority would then defend 'every one of different sects, in their sacred rights of conscience, not allowing one sect to disturb another while they are peacefully and publicly worshipping God.' Frothingham appealed to his own experience of pluralism in Middletown. Despite the existence of 'five different worships in the town, within the compass of a mile on the Lord's day,' he observed that 'no damage accrued to any man's property, or civil interest, any more than if they had all worshipped under one roof.'¹³

10 Solomon Paine, *A Short View of the Difference between the Church of Christ, and the Established Churches in the Colony of Connecticut, in Their Foundation and Practice, with their Ends: Being Discovered by the Word of God and Certain Laws of Said Colony, Called Ecclesiastical* (Newport 1752), in: Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, eds., *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (Indianapolis 1967) 417; Ebenezer Frothingham, *A Key to Unlock the Door, That Leads in, to Take a Fair View of the Religious constitution, Established by Law, in the Colony of Connecticut* (n.p. 1767) 204 ff.

11 Andrew Croswell, *A Narrative of the New-Gathered Congregational Church in Boston* (Boston 1749) 13.

12 Ibid., 16. For other examples of Separates who cited the desire to keep the parish open to itinerant preaching see Richard L. Bushman, *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-45* (New York 1970) 102-3; C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism, 1740-1800: Strict Congregationalists and Separate Baptists in the Great Awakening* (New Haven 1962) 54-114 passim.

13 Frothingham, *A Key to Unlock the Door*, 153-5.

Frothingham's proposal seemed radically counterintuitive to those who defended religious establishment as a bulwark of social order. The Congregational minister Isaac Stiles had warned that the experience of religious pluralism would lead people to believe that they 'had their religion to chuse'.¹⁴ The spectre of religious pluralism conjured a language of opposition in New England strongly resembling the complaints of South Carolina's Charles Woodmason about having to compete for followers within a frontier religious marketplace.

Yet Separates continued to affirm the freedom of individual religious choice and mobility that the parochial system inhibited, defending in the process an enhanced, far more centered position for the self in eighteenth-century community life. The Separate congregation of Ipswich, Massachusetts welcomed persons from surrounding communities into their fellowship in the belief that each individual possessed an 'unalienable Right' to cross parish bounds and 'seek Edification where he thinks he can best obtain it.' In the view of Ipswich's Separate minister John Cleaveland, '*Edification is the Benefit we ought to have in view*' when joining a congregation, and no church could edify members 'against their Judgment or Choice'.¹⁵

Cleaveland's defense of individual liberty of choice entailed an adaptation to Anglo-America's increasing openness and mobility. Cleaveland opened his own congregation to all who chose to come, accepting pastoral responsibility for people beyond Chebacco's line. An ongoing interest in revival extended the boundaries of John Cleaveland's world still further, prompting him and the members of his congregation to take responsibility for much more distant strangers in need. In 1761, his congregation agreed to spend 'one Day every Quarter of the Year, in a congregational Fasting and Praying for an Out-pouring of God's Spirit upon us and upon all Nations, agreeable to the Concert for Prayer'.¹⁶ When the Lord answered with revival in 1764, Cleaveland cheerfully opened his pulpit to itinerant 'instruments of revival,' welcomed new members from

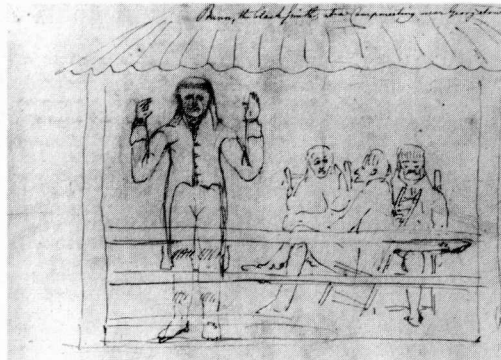
14 Isaac Stiles, *A Looking-Glass for Changelings, A Seasonable Caveat against Meddling with them that are given to Change* (New London 1743) 15.

15 John Cleaveland, *A Short and Plain Narrative of the Late Work of God's Spirit at Chebacco in Ipswich, in the Years 1763 and 1764: together with some Account of the conduct of the fourth Church of Christ in Ipswich in admitting Members -and the Defense of said Conduct* (Boston 1767) 38.

16 *Ibid.*, 4.

surrounding parishes, and published a narrative to promote the revival among a wider public.

The Separates' embrace of mobility for both the preacher and his hearers contributed in more than one way to their expansion onto the early American frontier. Separate artisans and farmers who felt the Spirit's call to preach often found some of their most



'Bunn the Blacksmith at Camp Meeting near Georgetown,' pen sketch by Benjamin Henry Latrobe, 1809. Uit: Hatch, *Democratisation*, 53.

willing hearers among migrants to New England's frontier settlements. The settlers there often resented the college-educated ministers who read prepared sermons in stilted language, but warmed to the simple heart religion which the lay exhorters preached in terms drawn from their everyday experience. Separate itinerants pursued their calling among frontier settlements throughout Maine, New Hampshire, Vermont, and New York. By the early 1770s, a 'considerable number of *separates* or lay preachers' were attracting the notice of other New Yorkers for their ability to draw 'large congregations' in the new northeastern counties of the province.¹⁷ Lay preachers such as the Salem, Massachusetts baker Richard Elvins could travel to the Maine frontier, gather a congregation in one of its frontier communities, and serve it for the remainder of his days.¹⁸

The Separates' style of ordination to ministry facilitated rapid supply of preachers to budding congregations wherever they appeared. Separates usually eschewed the education and formal ordination that marked ministers of the Congregational establishment, believing that their gifts for preaching signified a divine call far more authoritative than any mere ordination ceremony. Other Separate ministers and lay leaders conferred

17 John Rodgers, 'A Brief View of the State of Religious Liberty in the Colony of New York, Read before the Reverend General Convention of Delegates from the Consociated Churches of Connecticut, and the Synod of New York and Philadelphia, Met at Stamford Set. The 1st. 1773', *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 1, Series 2 (1814) 152.

18 Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 108.

recognition of a preacher's divine calling by a simple laying on of hands.¹⁹ Through this method, self-taught preachers could test and improve their gifts and calling as lay people, honing their skills on the job while bypassing the protracted education the Established Order demanded of its candidates for ministry. In the meantime, Separate lay preachers could spur the movement's growth through itinerant revival preaching, unfettered by the formal qualifications that hampered their Established rivals.

Separate mobility could also carry entire congregations to the frontier either to gain relief from prosecution for failure to pay a town's ministerial rate or simply to seek greater freedom to worship according to the dictates of conscience. In this respect, Separate migration differed greatly in motives but little in form from the common pattern of New England movement to the frontier. Like other migrants, Separates moved in groups of kin and neighbors from older communities to new locations on the frontier. There they, like other New England migrants, covenanted to form new towns and congregations similar to those they had left. Few external features distinguished Separate communities and congregations from their established counterparts. Yet Separates did take care to enshrine their most cherished principles into the foundational documents of their new communities. The Separate congregation of Bennington, Vermont -the only congregation in the newly-established town- specified in the minutes of their first meeting that the 'civil law' would not be used to 'support the gospel,' nor would the 'civil magistrate's coercive power' be invoked to enforce conformity to congregational order.²⁰

Where New England Separates replicated in most respects the patterns of frontier settlement that had already come to mark northeastern migration, Separate Baptist migrants to the Southern Piedmont and backcountry introduced a radical form of religious organization adapted to move as quickly as did the people of this rapidly expanding region. The earliest Separate Baptist preachers hailed from New England, where they had followed the logic of revivalist conversionism a step further than their Separate Congregationalist brethren by rejecting infant baptism to insist

19 Ebenezer Frothingham, *The Articles of Faith and Practice, with the Covenant, that is confessed by the Separate Churches of Christ in General in This Land* (Newport 1750) 374-80; Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 174-80.

20 Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 109. For a description of migration to the eighteenth-century New England frontier, see Charles E. Clark, *The Eastern Frontier: The Settlement of Northern New England 1610-1763* (New York 1970) 169-98.

that only adult converts should receive the rite.²¹ By the late 1750s, when Separate Baptist preachers began intruding into Anglican parishes in Virginia and the Carolinas, the Southern backcountry was becoming home to thousands of new migrants from Ulster, Germany, and Scotland as well as from older Anglo-American settlements to the north. The Scots-Irish penchant for relocating multiple times -often as many as four moves in a lifetime- marked them with a reputation as a rootless people.²² Yet mobility extended beyond the Scots-Irish to characterize backcountry settlement as a whole.

The patriarch of southern Separate Baptists, Shubal Stearns, followed a common pattern of migration among Separates in his New England home by leading his entire congregation to the 'charming Liberty' of the southern backcountry.²³ Stearns's congregation settled at Sandy Creek, North Carolina and almost immediately began obeying the Spirit's call to send out lay itinerants to preach in the southern wilderness.²⁴ The Sandy Creek church provided the base from which the Separate Baptist itinerants invaded Virginia parishes.²⁵

The Separate Baptists enjoyed phenomenal growth during the 1760s and 1770s by adapting a novel form of itinerancy and church formation to reach the migratory backcountry population. Their method of planting churches obviated the need for either parishes or college-trained ministers. Separate Baptist churches possessed no definite territorial boundaries, but extended as far as itinerancy could take them. They typically began with

21 On the origins of the Separate Baptists see Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, 107-11; William G. McLoughlin, *New England Dissent 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State*, 2 vols. (Cambridge, MA 1971) 1:420-88. For the impact of Separate Baptist on the South Christine Leigh Heyrman, *The Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill 1997) 3-17.

22 Griffin, *People with No Name*, 99-125.

23 Morgan Edwards, *Materials towards a History of the Baptists*, 2 vols., ed. by Eve B. Weeks and Mary B. Warren (Danielsville, GA 1984) 2:114.

24 Robert B. Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia*, revised and extended by G. W. Beale (Richmond 1894) 13.

25 For an analysis of the Separate Baptist confrontation with the southern Anglican Establishment, see Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 194-205; idem, 'Evangelical Revolt: The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 3d ser., 31 (1974): 345-68; J. Stephen Kroll-Smith, 'Transmitting a Revival Culture: The Organizational Dynamic of the Baptist Movement in Colonial Virginia, 1760-1777', *Journal of Southern History* 50 (1984): 551-68.

'great meetings' that drew hundreds of people from the surrounding countryside to hear itinerant preachers and lay exhorters. The churches that sprang from these meetings consisted of a 'mother church' and several 'branches' composed of converts living at a distance. Some branches were established at the church's founding. Others sprang up as laymen within the 'mother church' discovered a gift for exhortation and cultivated it by itinerant preaching in new locations. Branches which achieved full standing as 'daughter churches' repeated the process, sending out itinerant exhorters who established further branches and daughter churches.²⁶

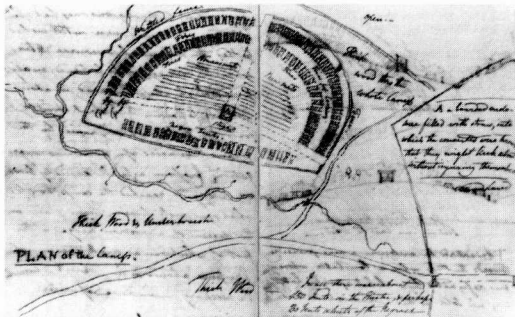
This system situated Baptist converts within an expansive, long-distance community of fluid boundaries. They could think of themselves not simply as members of the local, face-to-face assembly into which they were baptized. They also became participants in a regional network of associations among strangers who lived at a distance but shared a common experience of New Birth and baptism. They shared a common responsibility to propagate their gospel to the world beyond their bounds. Their religious world could expand as far as itinerants – indeed as converts themselves – were willing to push it. As with New England Separates, expansion among southern Separate Baptists was not slowed by the long process of ministerial training and ordination. It could begin as soon as Baptist laymen discovered a gift and a call to carry the Word abroad. Shubal Stearns's Sandy Creek church exemplified this expansive model. The eighteenth-century Baptist historian Morgan Edwards described it as the 'mother of all the Separate Baptists,' embracing as daughters every church in Virginia, the Carolinas, and Georgia and extending its reach westward 'as far as the great river Mississippi.'²⁷

The Separate Baptists adapted to their mobile world not only by adopting innovative patterns of church growth, but also by developing close-knit, disciplined assemblies. The Baptist obsession to quell disorder by mutual enforcement of strict codes of moral conduct betrayed a need to order their own rapidly-changing environment. Much of the Baptists' explosive growth took place in counties inundated by migrants from the north and east as well as immigrants from Ulster. At least two of the Virginia Baptist churches visited by Morgan Edwards in 1772 were founded by migrants, and most were located in the Piedmont and on the frontier where available land was

26 Edwards, *Materials*, 2:33-117 passim; Kroll-Smith, 'Transmitting a Revival Culture', 551-68.

27 Edwards, *Materials*, 2:92.

continuing to draw an influx of migrants.²⁸ Membership in these churches could also ebb and flow with the tide of in- and out-migration. The membership of Sandy Creek itself, the 'mother of all Separate Baptists,' reached a high point in the late 1750s of 606 souls, but by 1772 out-migration had decimated its number to 14.²⁹



'Plan of the camp' sketch by Benjamin Henry Larobe, 1809. Uit Hatch, *Democratisation*, 54.

The Separate Baptists' rapid growth helped Virginia leaders to perceive a structural link between itinerant revivalism and the vast swirl of eighteenth-century mobility. Virginia and the Empire was increasing 'by Population, and the addition of new Territories.' Migration to the hinterland was rending friend from friend and family member from family member far more finally than adult baptism ever could. The neglect of the legislature to order this growth by a sound 'civil and religious Policy' seemed only to make matters worse by opening a door for sectaries to foment commotion, turmoil and division throughout 'this poor Colony.'³⁰

To Virginia elites, Separate Baptist growth provided a powerful symptom of the much more pervasive problem of uncontrolled growth and mobility. Yet to the backcountry settlers who flocked to the new movement, the experience of New Birth and believers baptism offered them salvation and initiated them into a supportive community where they, like the New England Separates, could find meaning and order in a rapidly shifting world. Their movement, as the historian Patrick Griffin has observed was 'well suited to a world of rapid change and continual movement, allowing

28 Edwards, *Materials*, 2:35, 42 and passim; see also Beeman, 'Social Change in Virginia', 455-76; Kroll-Smith, 'Transmitting a Revival Culture', 559-66; D. W. Meinig, *The Shaping of America: A Geographical Perspective on 500 Years of History*, vol. 1, *Atlantic America, 1492-1800* (New Haven 1986) 147, 159-60; Georgia C. Villaflor and Kenneth L. Sokoloff, 'Migration in Colonial America: Evidence from the Militia Muster Roles', *Social Science History* 6 (1982) 544-52; Griffin, *People with No Name*, 164-65.

29 Edwards, *Materials*, 2:91.

30 *Virginia Gazette* (Purdie & Dixon) Dec. 19, 1771; May 30, 1771.

people to absorb the shock of transformation and to come to terms with dislocation.³¹

In the years immediately following the American Revolution, the Methodist missionary Francis Asbury and a burgeoning army of itinerant followers improved further on the Separate Baptist model of mobile ministry by perfecting a regular system of itinerancy. Methodists sought to foster a sincere heartfelt religion and supportive communities of faith through the observance of regular 'love feasts' and Quarterly Meetings which gathered the faithful for mutual support and attracted new converts through powerful preaching. The heart of the system were the circuit-riding preachers who traveled from settlement to settlement proclaiming the message of New Birth and sanctification to anyone who would listen. By 1810 this system had propelled the number of Methodist hearers to an estimated 14 per cent of the total American population, making it the fastest-growing denomination in the early United States.³²

The experience of the early Methodist itinerant William Burke affords a rich example of how the movement's leaders adapted to compete so effectively for converts among the mobile frontier settlers of the early Republic. Burke recalled that during his youth in the Revolutionary Southern backcountry, 'the denomination of the Baptists were the most numerous.'³³ His own family, however, had converted to Methodism while living in Loudon County, Virginia, where some early Methodist ministers were regularly allowed to preach in the parish church, 'there being no parson at the time.' Burke recalled that Methodism 'first took root in that section of the country' when one resourceful preacher employed a creative marketing technique to attract 'a great concourse of people,' a practice that was becoming increasingly necessary in the competition for souls among backcountry itinerants.³⁴ The month before, the visiting itinerant had promised to 'show them a wonder' the next time he came through. When he again appeared, the 'whole country' assembled in the hopes that he had brought with him a calf recently rumored to have been born with an

31 Griffin, *People with No Name*, 165.

32 John H. Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm: Methodism and the Rise of Popular Christianity in America* (Urbana 1998) 4.

33 James B. Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism* (Cincinnati 1854) 61.

34 On marketing the gospel, see Lambert, *Pedlar in Divinity*, passim; Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 26; Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven 1989) 141-46.

‘enormous high roll’ on its head in the shape of a then-fashionable women’s hair style. Instead, the itinerant preached on Revelation 12:1, ‘there appeared a great wonder in heaven, a woman clothed with the sun.’ This ‘gained the attention of the multitude,’ Burke recalled, and won many Lunenburg County converts, his own parents among them.³⁵

Methodist converts who migrated to new settlements helped spread the new faith by carrying it with them to new frontier communities. Burke’s parents themselves carried their own Methodist convictions to Guilford County, North Carolina, where the family settled to farm. Burke’s mother was only one of many pious Methodist women of the day who prayed for wayward children and sought spiritual nurture and community wherever they could find it, often traveling many miles to attend the preaching of itinerants. Isolated pioneer families further contributed to Methodism’s growth by offering lodging and meals to itinerant preachers and by making their dwellings available for fledgling Methodist classes to meet for spiritual encouragement. Methodism’s combination of a warm communal dimension with itinerancy’s long-distance connections proved as crucial to its frontier spread as did congregations to frontier Separatists and branch churches to migrant Baptists. Like these other evangelical adaptations, Methodist classes provided warm enclaves of order in a rapidly shifting environment.³⁶

Like Separate and Separate Baptist preachers, early Methodist leaders also eschewed long years of education and formal ordination. The practice enabled them to multiply frontier leadership very rapidly while infusing a strong measure of egalitarianism and democratic spirit into the culture of the movement. William Burke claimed to have received only two years of ‘English education’ where he learned to read, write, and cipher, but he used the tools he possessed to school himself thoroughly in the Bible and the Methodist discipline. Like other young itinerants, Burke began to travel about preaching not long after he had received ‘the witness of the Spirit’ which assured him that he was indeed ‘born again.’ He soon found himself called upon to open the local Methodist class meetings with a prayer and exhortation, sparking a ‘heavenly flame’ of revival through his neighborhood. This effect of his exhortations, coupled with ‘favor’ his preaching found ‘in the eyes of the people,’ confirmed to Burke and those

35 Ibid., 24.

36 See Russell Richey, *Early American Methodism* (Bloomington 1991) 2-5.

around him that he possessed the gifts and calling to preach.³⁷ The role of popular opinion in confirming Burke's call to preach was reinforced among the preachers and exhorters themselves at quarterly and annual meetings, where they conducted debates and formal votes on all aspects of church affairs.³⁸

The Methodists' reliance on lay initiative to carry the faith to new regions, to foster and sustain communities of spiritual nurture in those areas, and to identify new leaders all bore strong similarities to the Separate and Separate Baptist movements which had preceded them to the frontier. Yet two features - one organizational and the other doctrinal - set the movement apart as the most effective religious adaptation to the mobile post-Revolutionary American population. Both did more than simply attempt to *impose* order on the fluid world of the early Republic, as eighteenth-century efforts to replicate the parish system had sought to do. Instead, they managed to *engage* and *reflect* crucial features of a new order that was unfolding beyond anyone's ability to control.

In its organizational aspect, Methodism harnessed the power of itinerancy through 'connection' to an network of decentralized, constantly multiplying circuits managed with remarkable efficiency through quarterly and annual meetings of the ministers and exhorters in each region. William Burke joined a fellowship of mobile brethren who traveled roads and footpaths trekked by the migrants themselves, 'preaching in forts and cabins, sleeping on straw, bear and buffalo skins, living on bear meat, venison, and wild turkeys, traveling over mountains and through solitary valleys, and, sometimes, lying on the cold ground.'³⁹ They emphasized the similarity of their itinerancy to that of Jesus himself, who had 'nowhere to lay his head.' Neither Burke nor most of his fellows, however, would have relished the similarity of their efforts to those of the itinerant peddlers who marketed manufactured consumer goods along the same routes.⁴⁰ American Methodism's founder, Francis Asbury, organized a system of perpetual motion in which the road, not the boundary, formed the defining line. 'All the different orders which compose our conferences are employed in the

37 Finley, *Sketches*, 26.

38 Ibid., 81-82; compare Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 27.

39 Finley, *Sketches*, 58.

40 For the influx of a consumer market into the early backcountry, see Elizabeth A Perkins, 'The Consumer Frontier: Household Consumption in Early Kentucky', *Journal of American History* 78 (1991) 486-510.

travelling line,’ Asbury remarked, ‘and we will be bold to say that, next to the grace of God, there is nothing *like this* for keeping the whole body alive from the centre to the circumference, and for the continual extension of that circumference on every hand.’⁴¹ Rather than attempt to restrict American mobility, Asbury simply replicated it.

American Methodism’s most pronounced doctrinal distinctive was its emphasis on freedom of the will, a feature which resonated powerfully with the concrete experience of frontier migrants. William Burke recalled that when he first took up his itinerant laborers, Calvinism ‘was the prevailing doctrine of the time’ in his backcountry territory of Virginia and Kentucky where a large percentage of the migrants came from Scots-Irish Presbyterian stock.⁴² For simple Methodist preachers like Burke, the Calvinistic ‘doctrine of predestination and decrees’ contradicted everyday experience and constituted an obstacle to conversion among hearers. In contrast, the religion preached by Burke and his fellow itinerants lay within the power of every hearer to choose. It emphasized a practical, ‘experimental’ faith which expressed the ‘deep emotions’ of the Methodists’ own hearts. . . what they knew and how they felt.⁴³ Methodist preaching placed in the reach of ordinary people the chance to experience the extraordinary power of God, manifested not only in dramatic conversions but in prophetic revelations and visions ‘as in the days of the old Apostles.’ Those who embraced Methodism found, as the convert Samuel Crane put it, ‘a system that seemed to harmonize with itself, with the Scriptures, with commonsense, and with experience.’⁴⁴

The power of the Methodists’ freewill offer of salvation among the frontier population can be seen not only in the movement’s phenomenal growth, but also in how many of Methodism’s primary competitors among the Baptists and Presbyterians began adopting the freewill emphasis after 1790. Burke recalled that about that time, the Baptists in his region experienced a split between defenders of Calvinism and advocates of free will who ‘held in common the doctrines of the Methodists, except the unconditional final perseverance of the saints, and baptism by immersion

41 Methodist Episcopal Church, *Discipline* (1798) 42.

42 Finley, *Sketches*, 58; David Hackett Fischer and James C. Kelly, *Bound Away: Virginia and the Westward Movement* (Charlottesville 2000) 119–26, 152–64.

43 Charles Giles, quoted in Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 19.

44 Quoted in Tobias Spicer, *Autobiography of Rev. Tobias Spicer* (Boston 1851) 32–33. On the prophetic element in Methodism, see Wigger, *Taking Heaven by Storm*, 104–24.

as the only mode.⁴⁵ Even frontier Presbyterians were beginning at least to tolerate the Methodist emphasis on free will. Some like the famous Barton Stone, pastor of the Presbyterian congregation at Cane Ridge, Kentucky, were drifting toward an outright embrace of free will. This move would eventually thrust Stone into leadership of the new antidenominational Christian movement and would prompt other frontier Presbyterians to form the revivalistic Cumberland Presbyterian Church.

William Burke's participation in this freewheeling frontier competition for souls led him to Stone's Cane Ridge meeting house in August of 1801, the opening scene of America's Second Great Awakening. Burke recorded that thousands of people 'came from far and near from all parts of Kentucky; some from Tennessee, and from north of the Ohio river' for the event, though the historian Ellen Eslinger has recently argued that the overwhelming majority came from Bourbon County, where Cane Ridge was located, and the counties adjacent to it.⁴⁶ Burke's own description of his actions at Cane Ridge illustrate how the surrounding population experienced the great frontier revival as a bazaar of rival religious wares. The canny itinerant recalled that Stone and other Presbyterian ministers had invited the Methodists to a united sacrament at Cane Ridge in part, Burke hinted, because the Presbyterian ministers 'saw the advantage' of associating with preachers who could 'shake the bush' with powerful, soul-converting sermons while the Presbyterians waited to 'catch the birds' that fell in agonies of conviction and repentance. Yet three days after their Thursday evening arrival at Cane Ridge, Burke recalled, the Methodists were still waiting for an invitation to preach while a succession of Presbyterian ministers proclaimed the Word from a 'stand erected in the woods. . . whenever they could get a chance to be heard.' Other accounts mentioned at least two additional sites where preaching was taking place: a small log meeting house in the woods as well as the larger Presbyterian meeting house at Cane Ridge. Burke's patience finally ran out 'between ten and eleven' that Sunday morning, when he mounted 'a convenient place on the body of a fallen tree' and began to preach. Before long the itinerant had drawn a crowd he overgenerously estimated at 'about ten thousand people' who were soon responding to his sermon on the judgment seat of

45 Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 61.

46 Ellen Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion: The Social Origins of Camp Meeting Revivalism* (Knoxville 1999) 208.

Christ with 'groans of distress and shouts of triumph.' That evening Burke erected his own tent for preaching, where 'the work continued . . . till Wednesday afternoon.' Similar 'works' took place at the nearby Presbyterian sites while multiple lay preachers stood up at convenient locations to offer exhortations to whomever would listen. Presbyterian and Methodist ministers also circulated about the Cane Ridge woods, offering spiritual counsel, praying with those 'under conviction,' preaching and offering exhortations.⁴⁷

Cane Ridge and the Great Revival it sparked throughout the West offered participants an expanding smorgasbord of choice in doctrines, preaching styles, and religious experiences. In doing so, it signaled the consolidation of a new religious order well suited to nineteenth-century America's inveterately migratory population. Decades of development by revivalists like the Separates, Baptists, and Methodists had strengthened frontier religion's similarity to the market which Charles Woodmason had noticed in the 1760s. By 1845, the famous German American church historian Philip Schaff was complaining that in America 'every theological vagabond and peddler may drive here his bungling trade, without passport or license, and sell his false ware at pleasure.'⁴⁸ Yet the western migrants and their religious leaders knew that a powerful set of purposes and convictions gave deep form and meaning to the experience of revival. Like the grid of roads which was beginning to spring up along section lines recently surveyed under federal land policy, the circuits of itinerant preachers and annual cycles of camp meetings were carving out channels through which the potent force of evangelical religion could spread to the West. To early American evangelicals, those who crossed the Atlantic and the Appalachians in search of a country remained pilgrims seeking salvation. By creating a frontier marketplace of religion, the evangelicals labored to ensure that all who sought could find both.

47 Finley, *Sketches of Western Methodism*, 76-79; Eslinger, *Citizens of Zion*, 208-12.

48 Philip Schaff, *The Principle of Protestantism*, ed. Bard Thompson and George H. Bricker (Philadelphia 1964) 150.

NETWORK OF CONCERNED HISTORIANS

‘EEN WOEDEND GEDICHT VAN TUSSEN DE ZWAARDEN’

De foto van een ex-leider in een Albanese stadsgids afdrucken. Als studentenvoorman oproepen tot meer democratie in China. Als lid van een Rwandese culturele vereniging gunstig verwijzen naar een voormalig regime. De geschiedenis van een Burmese studentenbeweging schrijven. Tot een fundamentalistische Palestijnse groep gerekend worden. Archieven bijhouden over Mexicaanse indianen. Schrijven over Oromogeschiedenis in Ethiopië. Een Guatmalteekse waarheidscommissie voorzitten. Een Palestijnse petitie tegen corruptie ondertekenen. Gedrukt materiaal verzamelen over de Culturele Revolutie. Als geschiedenislerares de vrouw zijn van een ongrijpbare Burmese pro-democratie-activist. De redactie voeren over een seculiere serie over de Indiase onafhankelijkheid. Als geschiedenisstudent opgepakt worden na een etnische rel in Ethiopië. Als archeologiestudent lid zijn van een legale pro-Koerdische partij in Turkije. Onderzoek doen naar Oeighoer geschiedenis in China. De rol van het leger in de lokale Guatmalteekse politiek doorgronden. Redenen waarom historici, geschiedenisstudenten en anderen moeilijkheden kregen met de overheid. Hun namen: *Elvira Shaplo en Vladimir Qiriaqi. Wang Dan. Philomène Mukabarali. Ko Aung Tun en U Myo Htun. Wael Ali Farraj. Andres Aubry en Angélica Inda. Moti Biyya, Garuma Bekele en Tesfaye Deressa. Juan Gerardi. Abdulsittar Qassem. Yongyi Song. Ma Khin Khin Leh. Basudev Chatterji. Badada Bayene. Emrullah Karagoz. Tohti Tunyaz. Matilde Leonor González Izas.*

Sinds oktober 1995 heeft het *Network of Concerned Historians* (NCH) actie gevoerd voor deze mensen. NCH doet mee aan alle campagnes van internationale mensenrechtenorganisaties voor historici. Daarnaast publiceert het jaarlijks een elektronische nieuwsbrief met informatie over het lot van vervolgte historici in tientallen landen.

Toen hij hoorde over de executie van vijf jonge schrijvers, noteerde de Chinese auteur Lu Xun in 1931: ‘Ik sta hier en kan slechts toekijken hoe mijn vrienden nieuwe geesten zijn geworden. Ik zoek een woedend gedicht van tussen de zwaarden.’ Doe mee. Laat je stem horen. Lidmaatschap kost niets.

Contacteer a.h.m.de.baets@let.rug.nl of bekijk de websites <<http://www.let.rug.nl/nch/>> en <<http://dit.is/nch/>>.