Bonomi, Patricia U. Under the Cope of Heaven. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986.

1. What types of legislation and judicial actions limited New Light activities?

2. What activities supported the separation of church and state?

3. Why and how did Quakers play an important role in politics?

4. Identify methods that churches adopted to influence political change.

5. How did all of the Great Awakening prompt greater political unity and organize the colonists for the Revolution?

6. What is Bonomi's thesis?

CHAPTER 6

The Political Awakening

The relationship between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution has long been one of the nicer perplexities of early American History. That the Awakening fostered a shift in political as well as religious consciousness is frequently asserted. Yet there has been little agreement about how the revival helped to prepare the provincial mind for revolution. A recent attempt to link the retrograde Calvinism of the Awakeners to the Revolutionary impulse—rather than the more "obvious" coupling of rationalist liberals and Revolutionaries—has struck some critics as improbable.[1] For such an argument implies not only that most revivalist clergymen became supporters of the Revolution—which they did—but also that the rationalist opposers of the revival became reluctant revolutionaries or outright loyalists—which they frequently did not. Should we move beyond theological differences, however, to consider the revival's impress on patterns of leadership and on popular participation in organized opposition to authority, we might discover a more pivotal linkage between the Awakening and the Revolution.

Eighteenth-century Americans found it far easier to break through the classic taboos against schism and public contention in

the religious rather than the political sphere, especially after 1720 when Anglo-American political thought entered a quiet phase that celebrated stability and unity, public virtue and the common good. True, radical whigs regularly jogged the collective memory about the evils of power and its tendency to encroach on liberty, but the prevailing political atmosphere was moderate, even complacent.[2] Religious strife, on the other hand, was endemic throughout America by the mid-eighteenth century. And within religion's zealous precincts the provincials would discover a less ambiguous, a more propulsive, source of political radicalism.

Clergymen, along with other community leaders, were expected to set the tone of eighteenth-century public discourse and to indicate by their own example the limits of acceptable behavior. Thus when the people saw their ministers locked in public combat, in the course of which they openly heaped verbal and printed abuse on each other and vigorously contested for popular support, it seemed increasingly apparent that something was changing—that a kind of license was being granted for a more broadly based and contentious style of public life. Through it all impressions were accumulating and expectations were being aroused that would alter the way Americans responded to issues of every sort.

Though new political attitudes and a heightened partisanship were manifested to some degree in every colony, for our purposes a look at three of them—Connecticut, Pennsylvania, and Virginia—will illustrate the changing tone of public life.

From Religion to Politics in Connecticut

The proverbial land of steady habits, Connecticut in the post-Awakening years became a colony where a "dividing, party-Spirit . . . threat[ened] like a Bear, to rend us in Pieces."[3] Connecticut's vaunted harmony had been subjected to increasing strains since the late seventeenth century as an expanding economy, land disputes, and dissent from the Congregational Way occasionally gave rise to discord. Yet the public face of unity remained more or less intact

until the Great Awakening, when first the Congregational establishment and then the political establishment were riven into New Light and Old Light parties. The majority of Connecticut ministers initially had welcomed the revival, but when evangelical excesses and separatist rumblings began to threaten both religious and civil peace, orthodox ministers joined an alarmed magistracy to uphold order. By aligning itself squarely with the orthodox churches, the Connecticut government not only exacerbated the religious split but gave it the added dimension of a political contest between "ins" and "outs."

At the urging of Old Light ministers, the Connecticut legislature in 1742 and 1743 passed a remarkable series of laws designed to suppress revivalist, or New Light, activity. A May 1742 "Act for regulating Abuses and correcting Disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs" forbade uninvited ministers—from Connecticut and elsewhere, ordained and lay—to preach or exhort in neighboring parishes under pain of fines, loss of salary, or expulsion from the colony. This law was then invoked to deprive New Light ministers in West Haven, Lyme, and elsewhere of their pulpits, and to expel from the colony such itinerants as Samuel Finley and James Davenport. In May 1743, the legislature moved to prevent separatist New Light congregations from seeking the protection of a 1708 law granting limited toleration by specifically prohibiting all persons worshiping as Presbyterians or Congregationalists from claiming legal exemption as dissenters. Other laws passed in these years required legislative approval for any new seminary of learning (thereby suppressing the evangelical Shepherd's Tent at New London), instituted an oath of religious orthodoxy for students and faculty at Yale, and barred the hiring of any minister who did not possess a college degree. In addition, marriages and baptisms performed by separatist preachers were disallowed, with some New Light ministers being jailed for officiating at weddings of their own church members.[4]

It was a dazzling display of raw power by the establishment. So dazzling, indeed, that it offended not only revivalists but moderates—many of whom had for years resisted the centralizing impulse

of the Saybrook Platform—and aroused the ever latent localism of Connecticut's towns and congregations. Yet the authorities, wrapped in self-righteous oblivion, proceeded to enforce the new laws with such overweening harshness that the colony erupted from the mid-1740s on in a rash of church separations and political schisms.

At Canterbury the reborn lawyer, Elisha Paine, led a group of evangelical separatists out of the town church. Arrested in 1744 as an exhorter and imprisoned for a month at Windham jail, Paine continued to preach from his cell, attracting such large crowds that his supporters built a stand of bleachers. In a single year at Norwich forty separatists who refused to pay church rates to an Old Light minister were confined in jail. So many persons were imprisoned for nonpayment of rates in Windham County—a hotbed of separatism—that another story had to be added to the jailhouse. The ailing mother of Isaac Backus was carried off to a dank cell, a preacher from Mansfield was incarcerated for six months, and innumerable separatists had their personal property seized for nonpayment of church taxes. Throughout the 1740s evangelical ministers and their sympathizers were haled before the General Assembly to be publicly humiliated. Meanwhile the ministerial consociations denied ordination or salaries to New Light preachers and secured the expulsion from Yale of the sons of leading separatists.[5]

Warming to the task, the legislature—urged by such as the Old Light preacher Isaac Stiles to deny public office to men who "breaketh any of the wholsome Laws of the Government" or of God—set about weeding New Lights out of the government. Justices of the peace who failed to prosecute separatists in Branford and Hartford with sufficient vigor were removed from office. A former rector of Yale and moderate opponent of the law against itineracy, Elisha Williams, was dropped as judge of the supreme court in 1743; nor was he supported for justice of the peace at Hartford two years later. New Light sympathizers elected from Canterbury, Plainfield, and Lyme were denied their seats in the General Assembly.[6] At the local level Old Lights made alliances with Anglicans in order to block the election of New Lights to the

assembly. In the mid-1740s several Anglicans were elected to the legislature with the support of Old Lights. Apparently even a Church of England man was preferable to a New Light enthusiast.[7]

Richard Bushman has observed that the revival "broke the seal on political controversy" in Connecticut.[8] The Old Lights were responsible for the initial politicization of the religious split, but with matters of conscience at stake the New Lights rapidly developed a political response of their own. A typical power struggle occurred in the town of Branford, where the Reverend Philemon Robbins was a dedicated New Light with a large following in his own and neighboring churches. In 1742 Robbins had preached to a Baptist congregation at Wallingford, for which he was suspended from the New Haven consociation. Robbins's efforts to compose his differences with the consociation failed, but his popularity with the people was unimpaired. In 1745 the ecclesiastical society at Branford voted fifty-two to fifteen to continue him as minister, and on November 4, 1745 the church specifically renounced the Saybrook Platform. A few months later the New Haven consociation found Mr. Robbins guilty of promoting "schismatic contentions, separations and divisions," and demanded that he confess the same before that body. Robbins resisted and the Branford society again supported him, noting that since the church had renounced the Saybrook Platform the consociation was assuming "a pretended government and jurisdiction over this church and society" which had no force. The consociation thereupon deposed Robbins and stopped his salary. The people—at first fearfully and then more boldly— continued to attend Robbins's sermons and to support him with voluntary contributions.[9]

When the Branford Old Lights petitioned the assembly for assistance, the separatist majority in the town appointed agents to present their case at Hartford. Another effort at compromise failed, and the assembly thereupon ejected Branford's two New Light representatives, replacing them with the town's leading Old Light. Justices of the peace favoring the revival also were dismissed. As the rift widened New Lights continued to gain political strength in Branford, and soon the "gentlemen who had been kept out of the

assembly because they had been friends to the religious awakening, were now chosen again by the freemen." The displaced justices also were returned to office as the Old Lights lost credit with the people.[10]

Over the several years of this controversy at Branford countless meetings were held by both sides, votes were taken, petitions circulated, agents appointed, and pamphlets printed.[11] A similar politicization of the religious dispute was taking place in other churches and ecclesiastical societies throughout the colony. From Hebron, Canterbury, and Stonington came petitions signed by hundreds of New Lights. In 1754, over one thousand names were gathered for a petition to the king alleging denial of the Toleration Act in Connecticut. Sermons and pamphlets thundered against the "corrupt Constitution" of the colony's ecclesiastical establishment. One unanticipated consequence of this campaign was the loosening of ties between church and state, as New Lights came to favor voluntary support of minister's salaries, a position that developed less from principle than from their circumstances as outsiders.[12]

Though religious strife declined in Connecticut after about 1748 owing to the balm of time and compromise, concurrent tensions of a secular character were increasingly being subsumed under the New and Old Light party labels. Currency disputes and land controversies fed readily into the division because they, like the religious question, involved challenges by outsiders to those in authority. The struggle was now for power and the right to set the direction of government, especially as imperial measures moved to the fore in the 1760s.[13] William Samuel Johnson noted that the New Lights, though initially formed around the religious issue, had by 1763 gained a majority in the government "owing to their superior Attention to Civil Affairs and close union among themselves in Politicks." True, New Lights controlled the General Assembly, but it took something more to dislodge Old Lights from the council and the governor's chair. The Stamp Act provided the occasion. When one of the most prominent Old Lights in the colony, Jared Ingersoll, agreed to serve as stamp distributor, the complete rout of the orthodox party was assured. As if heeding New Light Jonathan Lee's

1766 election sermon, which recommended that the governor and council members should be "cordial friends to Christ and his church, and patriots to the republick," the deputies replaced the Old Light governor and four councillors with resolute New Lights.[14]

Thus was a religious dispute transmuted into a political one from 1742 onward. Still, Connecticut's experience shows clearly that the divisions of the Great Awakening did not translate directly into the divisions of the American Revolution. In the more than thirty years between those two events, many new issues—to say nothing of an entire generation of citizens—were added to the New and Old Light party configurations. As the *New London Gazette* declared in 1767, "Calvinism and Arminianism have for several years lost their theological meaning and have been used mostly in their political sense."[15] True, theological issues were reactivated from time to time, perhaps inevitably in a colony where religious values formed a common touchstone of the culture. But just as some early New Lights had been attracted to the party's daring antiauthoritarianism, others were by mid-century attracted to its growing power. Thomas Clap, the rector of Yale College, shifted from Old to New Light after 1740 partly to assure the independence of the college and the continuation of its government subsidy. The politically ambitious Roger Sherman, an outspoken Old Light when he lived in western Connecticut, joined a New Light church and adjusted his politics accordingly when he moved east to New Haven. And more than one political commentator accused paper money advocates, Susquehanna land speculators, and other secular interests of hypocritically joining the New Light party "under the Paint of Religion."[16] Such opportunists were nothing more than "Political New Lights [who hoped] . . . to advance some worldly Interest by this Means, tho' they were not from Principle, and Conscience on that side the Question."[17]

Nor was the brash contentiousness of the new politics confined to New Lights alone. The "outs" of every political or religious hue tended in the later colonial years to employ a more bluntly assertive style. In 1775 even Benjamin Gale, the outspoken Old Light activist turned patriot, while professing a distaste for radical methods

allowed that "different sentiments of the *mode* of opposition must not divide us in making opposition."[18] Such was the legacy of the Great Awakening in Connecticut. New forms of political behavior, leaders who did not shrink from appeals to the populace at large, and new ways of thinking about authority were now familiar and available to any individual or group that believed its cause was just.

Denominational Politics in Pennsylvania

Religion and politics were perhaps more closely intertwined in Pennsylvania than in any other colony. The temptation is strong to portray Pennsylvania's eighteenth-century partisan broils as a kind of forerunner of modern ethnic politics. To be sure, Philadelphia saw the formation around mid-century of such fraternal societies as the Hibernian Club and the Deutschen Gesellschaft von Pennsylvanien, which would later take on a political dimension. Throughout the colonial years, however, these were philanthropic societies which concentrated almost exclusively on providing material assistance to needy immigrants from the old country.[19] But if ethnic consciousness had not yet assumed a political form, the same cannot be said of religious consciousness. Indeed, as often as not the two converged. With the post-1740 growth of denominationalism, churches and sects offered ready-made institutional structures and a corps of articulate leaders for whatever cause or grievance their congregations believed needed attention or remedy. Though not every clergyman or elder sought a public role,[20] those with a taste for political action soon discovered that church networks could be used to promote both the religious and civil rights of their adherents.

The Society of Friends had no choice but to augment its influence in Pennsylvania by political means since Quakers were reduced to a minority within two decades of the colony's founding. By 1740, with the great German and Ulster migrations at floodtide, Quakers probably accounted for no more than a quarter of the inhabitants. Yet the Friends managed to retain political power by weighting

representation in the assembly toward Philadelphia, Chester, and Bucks counties where Quakers were most heavily concentrated, and by cultivating alliances with the German pietists and churchpeople. By 1750, the expansion of western settlement, mounting tension between the British and French empires, and a revitalization of the Society of Friends' peace doctrine gave new urgency to the perennial issue of Quaker pacifism and frontier defense. The question was further complicated by the ethnosectional character of the dispute, since the Germans and Scotch-Irish were predominantly settled in the western region.[21] Another threat to Quaker hegemony was the proprietary party, a political faction that by 1740 had formed around the authority of the now-Anglican governor as a counterweight to the Quaker-dominated assembly. Despite these challenges and the continuing flow of non-Quakers into the colony, Quakers retained considerable power in the assembly up to the eve of the Revolution, largely because of their remarkable ability to combine religion and politics.

The Anglican minister, William Smith, charged that the Quakers turned their Philadelphia Yearly Meeting into a political cabal. "Convened just before the Election, and being composed of Deputies from all the monthly Meetings in the Province, [it] is the finest Scheme that could possibly be projected for conducting-political Intrigues, under the Mask of Religion." Smith's own partisan disposition led him to overstate the case, but it is clear from the record that the Quakers discussed political issues, among other subjects, at their annual conclave. The Pennsylvania Society of Friends was organized on several levels—local monthly meetings, regional quarterly meetings, and the colony-wide Philadelphia Yearly Meeting, the last convening shortly before election day. This web of meetings facilitated rapid communication among the Friends and could readily be mobilized to promote political goals.[22]

As the paradox of Quaker membership in an assembly responsible for the military defense of the colony became distressingly evident after mid-century, the Yearly Meeting devoted ever more time to the issue. In 1755, following a prolonged debate that John Woolman described as "the most weighty that ever I was at," *An Epistle of*

Tender Love and Caution to Friends in Pennsylvania urging Quakers not to pay taxes for military supplies was distributed among the membership.[23] At the same time the Yearly Meeting appointed a special standing committee whose function was to take immediate action when Quaker interests were threatened, as well as to alert the influential London Yearly Meeting at home. This special committee was expanded into the permanent Philadelphia Meeting for Sufferings in 1756, which included four members from each Quarterly Meeting. Convening at least once a month, it undertook to disseminate literature vindicating the Society's position on defense and to engage in a kind of "preventive lobbying" with the assembly and executive. Or, as an order of the Yearly Meeting put it, representatives from the Meeting for Sufferings were to "appear in all Cases, where the Reputation & Interest of Truth and our Religious Society are concerned."[24]

When the governor of Pennsylvania formally declared war on the Indians in the spring of 1756, six "conscience Quakers" withdrew from the assembly in accordance with the Philadelphia Yearly Meeting's advice that Friends not accept civil office if its duties were repugnant to Quaker doctrine. Other Quakers in the assembly thought it unwise to abandon the political arena. Noting the rise of proprietary party strength and the weakening of their traditional alliance with the Germans, a number of the more worldly Friends chose to remain in office throughout the war years. During the 1760s, moreover, several conscience Quakers were drawn back into the assembly. As the devout James Pemberton reasoned, "the Interest of our Society has Suffered in Some cases either through inattention or thro absence of [assembly] members acquainted with our circumstances." Thus Pemberton agreed in 1765 to stand for the assembly as the best way "to preserve unanimity[,] to keep out an Envious Presbyterian & to [protect] our rights & Liberties."[25] As the Quaker "politiques" continued to participate in government the Society of Friends' influence over them lost some of its force. But proprietary party leaders, recalling the historic connection between Quaker religion and politics, held fast to their belief that the sect had "prov'd their very Religion to be a political Engine, to which

they themselves pay no conscientious Regard, but as it suits their crafty Purposes."[26]

Presbyterians formed a second group in Pennsylvania's denominational politics. As early as 1729 James Logan feared that the Presbyterians would "make themselves Proprietors of the Province," and as Ulster immigration swelled, Quaker apprehension mounted. But with many Scotch-Irish settling in the frontier counties, which sent only one or two representatives each to the assembly in contrast with eight representatives from each eastern county, the Quakers managed to retain control over the legislature. By 1760 the longer settled southeastern counties of Philadelphia, Bucks, and Chester contained 16,221 taxables, whereas the western counties of Lancaster, York, Berks, Northampton, and Cumberland had drawn nearly equal with 15,443 taxables. Representation continued as before, however, with the three eastern counties sending more than twice the number of delegates to the assembly as did the five western counties.[27] As a consequence of this obvious inequity, western concerns received short shrift in the provincial assembly.

In the 1760s western grievances that had been accumulating for years finally burst forth with explosive fury. Proprietary land policies and underrepresentation were significant irritants, but the catalyzing event was Pontiac's War, together with the assembly's continuing failure to provide adequate frontier defenses. Enraged at the assembly's seeming disregard for their plight, a number of Scotch-Irish from the western Lancaster County town of Paxton finally took matters into their own hands. First they killed twenty Conestoga Indians in two raids in December 1763. Then in February 1764 they and other westerners marched over 200 strong to the outskirts of Philadelphia, where they finally dispersed after the government promised a speedy consideration of their grievances.[28]

Whether the assembly was actually prepared to redress frontier grievances when it met later in February may never be known, for just as debate began two pamphlets challenging the Quakers' fitness

to govern Pennsylvania made their appearance. Because it was immediately evident that the pamphlets had been written by Presbyterians, their publication signaled the start of Pennsylvania's denominational wars. *A Declaration Of the distressed and bleeding Frontier Inhabitants*, proclaimed the westerners' indignation at seeing their Indian enemies "cherished and caressed as dearest Friends. . . . [by] a certain Faction that have got the political Reigns in their Hand." On the heels of this came *The Quaker Unmask'd*, charging that Friends showed "more real Affection for Enemy Savages than for their fellow Subjects, of certain Denominations." Because some Friends had taken up arms against the Paxton Boys, the entire Society was accused of hypocrisy. The time had come, concluded the author, for Pennsylvanians to ask themselves "whether Quakers are fit to be their Representatives, or not."[29]

Now the Quaker politiques were ignited.[30] They and their allies in the assembly responded with a virulent anti-Presbyterian campaign, which destroyed all chance for compromise and spurred members of that denomination to unite in a colony-wide "Presbyterian Party." By fusing politics to religion, the bitter aftermath of the Paxtonian winter of 1763–1764 raised denominational consciousness in Pennsylvania to unprecedented levels, drew lay leaders and ministers alike into politics, and gave shape to group loyalties that in many cases would carry over to the Revolutionary era.

Drawing on stereotypes dating from the seventeenth century, Quaker party propagandists from 1764 onward reviled the Presbyterians as a coarse and lawless rabble, the very antithesis of the peace-loving Friends. The Paxton marchers "were of the same Spirit with the . . . blood-thirsty Presbyterians, who cut off King Charles . . . Head."[31] One author gleefully seized on a 1641 episode when, he charged, "the Scotch Presbyterians . . . without the least Remorse . . . murder'd four thousand of the Native Irish, Men, Women and Children, in the Isle Mc'Gee much in the same Manner their Offspring murder'd the Indians at Lancaster." Building on memories of the English Civil War, Quaker party writers laced their pamphlets with allusions to the Presbyterians' "Oliverian Spirit" and seditious proclivities. Retracing the history of Scottish

resistance to the British crown from the Civil War to the Jacobite uprising of 1745, the Quaker polemicists charged that wild-eyed Presbyterians were incapable of "a firm Attachment to the KING, and the laws of our Country." In both church and state their governments were fashioned "after the Model of a Geneva Republic." "Whoever heard," one writer asked, "of a Presbyterian Sermen upon the Duty of Submission to the present Establishment?"[32]

That Presbyterians throughout the province would close ranks in response to this ferocious attack might have been foreseen. And as the potential for a powerful alliance between the Presbyterians and the proprietary party grew, Quaker party leaders concluded that the best way to curb both groups was to press for Pennsylvania's conversion to a royal colony. The campaign for a royal charter thus became the focal point of the assembly elections of 1764 and 1765. In 1764, leadership of the anti-charter or proprietary group fell disproportionately to the Presbyterians—both lay and clerical—owing to the political diffidence of Governor John Penn and the travels to England of such proprietary party activists as William Allen and the Reverend William Smith. Moreover, the zest with which Presbyterian leaders threw themselves into the fray, their skillful use of church networks, and their shrewd manipulation of religious sensibilities demonstrated that the Sons of the Kirk would henceforth rival the Quakers in the art of denominational politics.[33]

On March 30, 1764, three leading Philadelphia Presbyterians, the Reverends Gilbert Tennent, Francis Alison, and John Ewing, wrote a pastoral letter to their fellow ministers in Pennsylvania urging that everyone under their influence be advised not to sign any petition for a royal charter.[34] One week earlier, on the very day that the assembly voted to seek a royal charter, the ministers and elders of the Philadelphia Presbytery had sent a circular letter to all congregations in Pennsylvania containing "proposed articles of union." The letter observed that while Presbyterians were now very numerous in the province, "we are considered as *Nobody*, or a body of very little weight and consequence." Indeed, having little to fear "from any opposition that can be made to their measures by us . . . , some denominations openly insult us." What was needed,

declared the Philadelphia leaders, was a means "to unite us more closely together; so that when there may be a necessity to *act as a body*, we may be able to do it . . . [especially] to defend our civil or religious liberties." In order to promote Presbyterian unity and welfare, it was proposed that each congregation and district set up committees to correspond regularly with each other, and further that each church send representatives to a yearly or half-yearly general meeting of the denomination. In pursuance of these goals, a twenty-eight-member Philadelphia committee of correspondence was named whose members—including John Allen, son of the Presbyterian Chief Justice William Allen, and the proprietary party activist Samuel Purviance, Jr.—were to keep in touch with Presbyterians in the counties. In addition, a general meeting was called for the last Tuesday in August.[35]

The Presbyterian unification meeting, duly held at Lancaster on August 28, 1764, was promptly labeled by Quaker party propagandists as a "Synod . . . to settle Election-Tickets, for the Province."[36] The Quakers, after all, knew something about the wider purposes to which such meetings could be put. Nor did the Presbyterians deny that their pre-election conclaves were used to organize political support. What little we know about this first meeting at Lancaster comes from satirical writings about it by the Presbyterians' opponents. One reported scornfully that after the Reverend John Ewing was chosen moderator, the convention of "good Republicans" discussed how to take the election from "these cursed Quakers" and establish Presbyterianism in Pennsylvania. An impudent elder supposedly questioned whether ministers should "trot about the Country after Politicks" or engage in "Writing Lampoons, Satires and Libels." Rejecting the notion of Presbyterian unanimity, the elder then declared that he would be " a free Agent and think for myself." But, the satirist concludes, the conclave overrode his objections and voted out a series of resolutions, one opposing all kings except those of the Presbyterian faith and another recommending that Presbyterians voting contrary to their ministers' instructions be excommunicated.[37]

A "Scribbler" also noted disdainfully that Presbyterian "Haberdashers in Politics" had met at a Lancaster tavern "to chuse Legislators for the whole Province." In this piece the ministers were unanimously accused of corruptly infecting their parishioners with an itch for politics. "Even the Pulpit is turn'd to a Drum Politic to enlist Party-Voluntiers. . . . In short so high does this kind of Enthusiasm swell among the Sons of the Kirk, that Opposition Sentiments are almost become a Criterion of Orthodoxy!" Another pamphlet charged that ministers had become "the Minions of arbitrary Power" by urging Presbyterians to "read political Papers, and sign Petitions thereupon, as a Sabbath-Day's Exercise."[38]

Presbyterian preachers, to be sure, employed the institutional structure of their church to good advantage in preparing for the election of 1764. But their parishioners were hardly being led by the nose. Presbyterian activists included such politically astute laymen as Colonel John Armstrong of Cumberland County, James Burd and the Edward Shippens, Sr. and Jr., of Lancaster, and above all Samuel Purviance, Jr. of Philadelphia. These men carried on a lively correspondence about their political forays among Lutherans, Baptists, and German Reformed, as well as Presbyterians in Chester, Bucks, Lancaster, and the western counties.[39] In building a coalition against the royal charter, they tried to construct assembly tickets that would attract the broadest support. Samuel Purviance, Jr., for example, proposed that German candidates be added to the Philadelphia ticket. "The design is by putting in two Germans to draw such a Party of them as will turn the scale in our favour," he informed Colonel James Burd. Denominational partisanship had reached such a pitch in Pennsylvania by 1764 that William Allen, describing the results of the Philadelphia election to Thomas Penn, automatically reached for religious labels to identify the contesting factions. "We had great help from the Lutherans, and Calvinist among the Dutch[;] from the other Sects we had great opposition: we had about half of the Church of England, and the Presbyterians to a man."[40]

That the Presbyterians made their votes count in the 1764 election was widely acknowledged. The election was the "warmest & most close ever known here," commented one observer, "the

Presbyterian party having made use of every artifice in their power." Though the anti-charter coalition was not strong enough to capture the assembly, they did manage narrowly to defeat the Quaker party luminaries Benjamin Franklin and Joseph Galloway in Philadelphia County.[41] Certainly the Presbyterian vote contributed significantly to this outcome. Yet, according to contemporary witnesses, it was the German churchpeople, more than any other single group, who tipped the scales in the Philadelphia election.

Pennsylvania's Germans had from the early eighteenth century aligned themselves politically with the Quaker party. Whereas the German quietist sects shared the Friends' pacifist principles, the later-arriving Lutherans and German Reformed initially trusted the Quaker assembly to protect their liberties against both proprietary and royal authorities. As the peace issue came to dominate politics in the 1750s and 1760s, such German sectaries as the Mennonites, Schwenkfelders, and Moravians tightened their ties with the Quakers. But the churchpeople, many of whom had settled closer to the frontier, expressed growing concern about the assembly's failure to formulate a strong defense policy. The March of the Paxton Boys and its aftermath created a crisis for the Lutherans and German Reformed that would be resolved by a decisive shift in their political allegiance.

When word reached Philadelphia in early February 1764 that the marchers were heading for the city, Quaker party leaders urged the Germans to take up arms against them. As the Reverend Henry Muhlenberg noted in his journal, however, the Philadelphia Germans preferred neutrality to "Wag[ing] war against their own suffering fellow citizens for the sake of the Quakers and Herrnhuters and their creatures . . . the double-dealing Indians." Muhlenberg, his colleague the Reverend Paul Brycelius, and the Swedish Lutheran minister Charles Wrangel actively prepared their congregations for a restrained response to the Paxton Boys. On February 6, Brycelius went out to warn the Germantown congregation to remain calm and there ran into an advance contingent of Paxtonians. Taking advantage of this unexpected opportunity, he told the men

that an armed advance into Philadelphia "would cause a great and horrible blood-bath . . . [which] appeared to give them pause and to make an impression on them."[42]

The provincial government was obviously aware of the clergy's potential influence over the Paxton marchers, for they had dispatched other Philadelphia ministers to act as the initial peacemakers. The Presbyterian Gilbert Tennent and two Anglican clergymen met with the Paxton men at Germantown on the night of February 6, having been asked by the governor "to see what they could do among these people." On the following day Benjamin Franklin and other provincial officials, including the Reverend Dr. Wrangle, rode to Germantown where, after a lengthy meeting in a tavern, the westerners agreed to return home on the assurance that their grievances would be taken up by the assembly and governor.[43]

Henry Muhlenberg had reluctantly been drawn into the politics of the Paxtonian affair, since he thought it inappropriate for ministers to take an active part in such matters: "Our office rather required us to pray to God . . . for protection and mercy and to admonish our fellow German citizens to fear God, honor our king, and love our neighbor."[44] Thus Muhlenberg's journey from noninvolvement to cautious involvement to full participation in political affairs says much about both the secularization of the church in America and the powerful influence that a respected minister could exert among his people.

The royal charter campaign of 1764 was the catalyst that finally pushed Muhlenberg into partisan politics. Unlike his Swedish colleague Dr. Wrangel, who industriously circulated petitions supporting proprietary government among his parishioners, Muhlenberg at first abjured such activity. When a frontier resident pleaded with him in March of 1764 to send a circular letter to all German Lutheran congregations urging them not to sign petitions for royal government, Muhlenberg responded that "we preachers could not permit ourselves to interfere in such critical, political affairs." Moreover, he initially urged his own elders not to involve themselves in the controversy. In July, however, Muhlenberg noted that "conditions in the province look[ed] very dark and

dangerous." At the urging of William Smith, the Anglican provost at the College of Philadelphia, and of Dr. Wrangel, Muhlenberg translated some political materials from English into German and allowed his elders to circulate petitions favoring retention of the proprietary charter.[45] His interest no doubt escalated when two Germans, Henry Keppel, an elder in Muhlenberg's church, and Frederick Antis, of the prominent German Reformed family, were added to the proprietary party assembly slate for Philadelphia County. By election time in early October, Muhlenberg was fully committed, and his church became the gathering point for Lutheran voters from Philadelphia and the surrounding countryside. At one o'clock on the first afternoon of the election, Muhlenberg went to the schoolhouse "where all the citizens who are members of our Lutheran congregation assembled to discuss the election and then proceeded to the courthouse in an orderly group." Benjamin Franklin was sure that the German vote had cost him the election: "They [the proprietary party] carried (would you think it!) above 1000 Dutch from me."[46]

Muhlenberg meanwhile summed up the Philadelphia results in a paragraph that shows how fully he had adopted the language of denominational partisanship:

> There was great rejoicing and great bitterness in the political circles of the city, since it was reported that the German church people had gained a victory in the election by putting our trustee, Mr. Henry Keple, into the assembly—a thing which greatly pleased the friends of the Proprietors, but greatly exasperated the Quakers and German Moravians. Never before in the history of Pennsylvania, they say, have so many people assembled for an election. The English and German Quakers, the Herrnhuters, Mennonites, and Schwenckfelders formed one party, and the English of the High Church and the Presbyterian Church, the German Lutheran, and German Reformed joined the other party and gained the upper hand—a thing heretofore unheard of.[47]

The proprietary group, having won significant ground in 1764, decided to make a spirited push for an assembly majority in the 1765 election, especially after the Stamp Act created confusion in Quaker party ranks. Samuel Purviance, Jr. was again active in "concert[ing] some measures for dividing the Qu——r Interest." In Bucks County he organized a "considerable meeting of the German, Baptist and Presbyterians . . . to attempt a general confederacy of the three Societies in opposition to the ruling party."[48] In Lancaster County he recommended that the proprietor's friends "run" (Purviance's word)[49] some "popular Lutheran or Calvinist." Moreover, he proposed that word be spread through the country that the proprietary party "intend to come well armed to the Election & . . . if there's the least partiality . . . that you will thrash the Sheriff every Inspector Quakers & Menonist to Jelly." Such a bellicose report, "industriously spread before the Election . . . will certainly keep great Numbers of the [pacifist] Menonists at home," schemed Purviance.[50]

The political strength displayed by the German churchpeople in 1764 made Muhlenberg the object of persistent overtures from the Quaker party prior to the election of 1765. Two party leaders, John Hughes and Henry Pawling, visited him as early as February 1765 attempting to gain his support for a royal charter. According to Muhlenberg's detailed journal notes, he told them that he preferred to stay out of politics, though he had been asked from time to time to "prepare the members of the German congregation for the coming election day on behalf of one or another interested party." This he had been reluctant to do until 1764, when Pennsylvanians had reason to fear that the priceless religious and civil privileges granted by Charles II in the proprietary charter might be given away. Hughes observed that by not supporting the movement for a royal charter the Germans, who should cherish their king the more because of his Hanoverian origins, "openly declared that they are enemies of our king!" To this Muhlenberg replied tartly that according to the rights granted by Charles II every inhabitant could vote as he wished at election time. And, Muhlenberg added, when in 1764 the Lutherans had unanimously decided to support several Germans for election to the assembly, "I approved it because we German citizens are not bastards but His Majesty's loyal subjects and naturalized children. . . . therefore we have the right and

liberty to have one or more German citizens in the Assembly and to learn through them what is going on."[51]

Soon, however, Muhlenberg had drawn back again from the political precipice, finding it "scandalous that the two parties . . . [should] descend to personalities and carry their bitter enmity to such lengths in anonymous writings and engravings." He had been deeply offended by blasphemous cartoons, using representations of Satan and abusing the Scriptures, which had been hawked about the city by a harlequin on horseback. To Muhlenberg, now chastened, "religion and politics are thereby mortally poisoned and wounded." Yet no one with Muhlenberg's weight and influence among such a large bloc of voters as the Lutherans now constituted could avoid involvement in the fevered campaign of 1765. That Muhlenberg was still somewhat naive about politics is shown in his reaction to Governor John Penn's granting of charters of incorporation to the Lutheran, Reformed, and Swedish churches shortly before election time. To Muhlenberg's innocent eye, "this has been done by the finger of God!" But that a less exalted hand was at work is revealed in Governor Penn's private statement that he had granted the charters at the instigation of proprietary party leaders "with a view to engage these people to vote against the Quaker faction."[52]

As it turned out, the charters and other party inducements brought the desired result, for at nine o'clock on the morning of the election Muhlenberg once again rang his schoolhouse bell "& within a few hours about six hundred German citizens assembled in and before the schoolhouse and marched in procession to the courthouse to cast their votes. They conducted themselves very soberly and honorably and acted in a body [that is, voted unanimously] to the delight and also the dismay of the English nationality, depending upon which of the two parties the people belonged to." But at this election the other side, still smarting from the close call of the previous year, had worked harder to bring out its vote. Muhlenberg therefore had to record that the Quaker party won the election "*per fas et nefas*, and . . . are jubilant over it."[53] Thus closed the first phase of the political education of the Reverend Henry Muhlenberg.

Though Quakers were the first to practice denominational politics in Pennsylvania, by the mid-1760s all denominations and sects in the colony knew how to mobilize political opinion through the manipulation of ethno-religious sensibilities and networks. Few practitioners of the new politics were as skilled or open in its use as Samuel Purviance, Jr., yet virtually all the denominations of Pennsylvania had had their political consciousness raised, and would put it to good use in the decade ahead.

Dissenters vs. Anglicans in Virginia

Religious partisanship came late to Virginia, where a homogeneous population and the Church of England sustained establishment stability throughout the early years of the Great Awakening. Even a brief visit from George Whitefield in December of 1739 barely ruffled the surface calm.[54] Several Log College firebrands visited Hanover County in the mid-1740s, but it was not until the Presbyterian New Side minister, Samuel Davies, settled there permanently in 1749 that dissent became an issue of consequence in Virginia.

Davies's success, which owed much to his political skill, illustrates the close involvement with politics that characterized the ministerial office in the later colonial years. Davies's first object in Virginia was to secure the legal right to itinerate, or move freely about, among several congregations, he being the only Presbyterian preacher resident in the colony. The effort involved him directly with every branch of the Virginia government. Gambling that Lieutenant Governor William Gooch, originally a Church of Scotland man though officially pledged to support the established Anglican church, might respond favorably to a proper show of deference and moderation, Davies—who by his own description was "free from enthusiastic freaks"—stopped at Williamsburg for an interview with the governor before proceeding to Hanover County. Gooch, finding the young parson "dignified and courteous in manner," granted Davies a license to preach at four separate

meetinghouses erected by the rapidly expanding Presbyterians in northwestern Virginia.[55]

Less hospitable to the newcomer were members of the Council and House of Burgesses, most of them Anglicans, who shared the church's alarm about "schism spreading itself through a colony which has been famous for uniformity of religion." When Attorney General Peyton Randolph in 1750 asserted that enforcement of the Toleration Act would only sow confusion in Virginia, Davies argued the dissenters' case before the Council with such ingenuity and knowledge of law that it was soon whispered about that the attorney general had met his match.[56] Even after Davies won the legal argument, Randolph and others in government sought to delay or circumvent the act's application on the flimsy ground that Davies was in violation of the rule against itineracy. But as Davies pointed out in a letter to the bishop of London, "the extremes of my congregation lie eighty or ninety miles apart, and the dissenters under my care are scattered through six or seven different counties." As was well known, Anglican ministers traveled between several chapels of ease in large parishes, and yet none of them incurred "the odious epithet of an itinerant preacher." If dissenters were denied the right to itinerate, "can [they] be said to be tolerated at all?" wondered Davies. Unable to stop Davies's ministry by appeals to the law, some Virginia Anglicans resorted to ridicule, charging that Davies preached to "great numbers of poor people, who, generally, are his only followers." Davies brushed off such taunts as the lame grumblings of worldly Anglicans who "discard serious religion as the badge of the vulgar."[57]

Samuel Davies was in many ways the ideal apostle of dissent to the decorous Virginians. A man of considerable charm and obvious intellect, Davies disarmed his critics by rejecting religious extremes. "I have no ambition to Presbyterianize the colony," he told the Virginia commissary. He also denounced personal revelation and sudden spiritual impulses as presumptuous and enthusiastical. Moreover, he found Virginia's Anglican ministers to be "gentlemen of learning, parts and morality," though he would have given much to see them "inflamed with Zeal."[58]

Yet even with the diplomatic Davies as its chief spokesman Presbyterianism did not secure a firm base in Virginia until the outbreak of the French and Indian War, when the interests of Presbyterians—settled in greatest numbers in the exposed western section—and those of the royal government converged. Since frontier defense was a major concern of all Presbyterian congregations, both Old and New Side preachers worked to stiffen their parishioners' resolve to defend their homes—and thus the colony—against Indian and French attacks. John Craig, an Old Side minister in frontier Augusta County, was one of the staunchest advocates of strong defenses, berating those who would flee the frontier as cowards and "a lasting blot to our posterity." Craig urged that a series of small forts be built and saw to it that his own church was well fortified. Samuel Davies, too, put all his eloquence and personal influence behind the movement for a strongly defended frontier. Asserting that it was not only lawful but a Christian duty to take up arms, Davies urged his people cheerfully to pay taxes for the Fort Duquesne expedition and to "use our influence to diffuse a military spirit around us." He was, he told them, "particularly solicitous that you, my brethren of the dissenters, should act with honour and spirit . . . as it becomes loyal subjects, lovers of your country, and corageous Christians."[59]

In giving form and resolution to the combined political and material interests of his parishioners Davies also served their religious interests, for his growing reputation as the best recruiting officer in the province gave the Presbyterians added leverage in agitating for their rights. When Governor Fauquier arrived in 1758 he developed cordial relations with the Presbyterians, promising to exert himself to secure for them all the immunities of the Toleration Act. When the House of Burgesses proved less forward in supporting religious liberty, the Presbyterians began circulating petitions in the backcountry and dispatched a minister and leading elder to assert direct pressure on the legislature at Williamsburg. Moreover, as early as 1758 the denomination signaled its rising importance in elections by extracting from candidates promises to protect the Presbyterians' religious and civil privileges "before they would

agree to vote them Burgesses."[60] But if Presbyterians were becoming adept at denominational partisanship, the Baptists were not far behind.

To the genteel leaders of the Anglican community the Baptists constituted both a religious and a cultural oddity. Almost everything they believed and did, especially the more extreme Separate Baptists, made the gentlefolk of Virginia uneasy. Baptist religious practices were egalitarian, ardent, and peculiar. They included such collective intimacies as the laying on of hands, kisses of charity, and the washing of feet. Worse even than the Calvinists of New England, who at least included educated gentlemen within their ranks, the Baptists required no formal religious training of their preachers. Moreover, the Baptists' worldly face was equally strange; relentlessly solemn, they seemed to disapprove of all conviviality and merriment. By opposing gambling, horse racing, dancing and other customary pleasures, the Baptists represented a standing rebuke to the prevailing social style of the Virginia tidewater.[61] In short, they reminded the genteel Anglicans of nothing so much as the levellers of seventeenth-century England. And, indeed, some Baptist men even "cut off their hair, like Cromwell's round-headed chaplains."[62]

To be sure, the repugnance felt by Virginia Anglicans toward the Baptists can easily be overstated. And as James Madison pointed out in 1774, exaggerated accounts of Baptist behavior also served a political purpose: "incredible and extravagent stories . . . told in the House [of Burgesses] of the monstrous effects of the enthusiasm prevalent among the sectaries . . . [were] greedily swallowed by their enemies."[63] Nonetheless, it does not take much digging in the records of late colonial Virginia to find that the Baptists were seen as rather a disagreeable presence. The Baptists themselves cared little how they appeared to men and women of fashion. Being almost complete outsiders, they had nothing to lose by confronting authority—a circumstance that seems to have infused them with a great deal of energy and perseverance.

Beginning in 1770, the Baptists initiated petition campaigns to the Virginia legislature asking for full religious freedom under the

provisions of the Toleration Act. These petitions were circulated with great industry. "Vast numbers readily, and indeed eagerly, subscribed to them." So vigorous did the petitioning become that during one four-week period in 1772 five separate petitions were addressed by Baptists to the legislature. The concerted character of this campaign is evident from the identical wording of the petitions from Lunenburg, Mecklenburg, Sussex, and Caroline counties. Such activity continued to the Revolution and beyond, with one famous 1776 petition, circulated by the Baptists but receiving support from other dissenters as well, garnering 10,000 signatures.[64] Whether the Baptists attempted to sway the outcome of elections this early, as they would a few years later by endorsing specific candidates in local contests, is not clear. But that they were acquiring the numbers and concentrated strength for such political action was evident from the crowds of up to two thousand attracted to their camp meetings. Such numbers soon enabled the Baptists to give "a cast to the [political] scale, by which means many a worthy and useful member was lodged in the house of assembly, and answered a valuable purpose there."[65]

The American Revolution provided the Baptists with the ultimate political leverage, and they used it boldly to gain religious equality. A Baptist petition of May 19, 1776, stated their case forthrightly. If the Baptists were granted full religious rights and the Church of England disestablished, "we will gladly unite with our Brethren of other denominations, and to the utmost of our ability promote the common cause of *Freedom*."[66] May 1776 was a critical time for the Revolutionary movement in Virginia. By bartering their support of the Patriot cause for religious liberty, the Baptists and other Virginia dissenters who made similar demands knew they were dealing from a position of strength. Years of experience contesting for their religious rights, as well as a growing recognition that organized numbers meant power, prepared Virginia's dissenters for full political citizenship. Thus Baptists and Anglicans, backcountry Presbyterian farmers and tidewater gentleman planters, struck bargains and surmounted their differences, at least temporarily, in 1776. Facilitating that convergence was the realization that each

group's long-term goals, in the one case political, in the other religious, could best by achieved by severing ties with England.[67]

Denominational politics forms the bridge between the Great Awakening and the American Revolution. From 1740 to 1776, thousands of provincials from every rank and section—Old Lights as well as New—became embroiled in political activity as a consequence of their religious loyalties. Denominations organized committees of correspondence, wrote circular letters, adjusted election tickets for religious balance, voted *en bloc*, and signed political petitions "as a Sabbath-Day's Exercise."[68] Many ministers actively encouraged the use of ecclesiastical structures to communicate party views to their parishioners. Lay members, and in a number of cases clergymen themselves, provided the leadership for movements whose initially religious aims rapidly became indistinguishable from political ones.

In the long run it struck the provincials as more or less logical that the congregation should become a basic unit or cell of politics, and regional associations and synods the interconnecting tissue. As the number of congregations rose rapidly in the eighteenth century, denominational bodies often achieved a closer and more vital relationship with the people than did governmental institutions. The "federal" character and representative practices of most church governments made them efficient agencies for both religious and political activity, as colonial politicians never tired of observing. Indeed, all that has been said and written about the New England town as the "school of democracy" can be applied with equal or greater force to the church congregation. The congregation, moreover, unlike New England town government, was ubiquitous. It existed all over the colonies; and it reached out to rich and poor, men and women, the schooled and the unschooled.

Religion and the American Revolution

On March 22, 1775, Edmund Burke addressed Parliament on the subject of the American rebellion. The "fierce spirit of liberty is stronger in the English Colonies probably than in any other people of the earth," declared Burke, ascribing this feature of the American character to the colonists' English origins, their popular assemblies, and their heritage of religious dissent. Expanding on the last point, Burke continued: "Religion, always a principle of energy, in this new people is no way worn out or impaired. . . . The people are Protestants; and of that kind which is most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion." Indeed, religion in "our Northern Colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance."[1]

Joseph Galloway made the same point, though in less temperate language, five years later in his *Historical and Political Reflections on the Rise and Progress of the American Rebellion*. The Revolution was started by "republican sectaries," charged Galloway, specifically a seditious combination of Congregationalists and Presbyterians "whose principles of religion and polity were equally averse to those of the established Church and Government."[2]

Burke and Galloway were describing a tradition of popular