

Events:

Presbyterianism

The material below is summarized from On Being Presbyterian: Our Beliefs, Practices and Stories by Sean Michael Lucas (Covenant Seminary) in Chapters 9 – 13.

- John Calvin, John Knox and the Westminster Assembly form the heritage of the Presbyterian churches in Scotland, England and America.
- Two of the first known (by name) Presbyterian churches in America are Jamaica Presbyterian Church (Long Island, NY) in 1672 and First Presbyterian Church (Philadelphia, PA) in 1698.
- Francis Makemie (1658-1708) planted churches in Virginia and Maryland in 1699. He was ordained in Scotland in 1682 and arrived in America in 1683. He organized the first presbytery in 1706 consisting of seven ministers meeting in Philadelphia.
- The first split occurred in 1741. The “Old Side” believed that ministers should be educated at a recognized university and should subscribe to the Westminster Confession. The “New Side” believed that ministers could be educated by apprenticeship and in other schools (e.g., William Tennant’s “Log College”) and should be known by their conversion experience. Both sides compromised in 1758 and reunited.
- The “New Side” established the College of New Jersey (now Princeton) in 1746 at the home of its first president, Jonathan Dickinson, in order to train ministers. Jonathan Edwards served as president for a few short months before his death.
- After several other presidents with short tenures, John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was became president in 1768. He greatly influenced Presbyterian churches and those who established the new nation.
- Witherspoon published the first “Book of Church Order” in 1788. Increasing and widespread population caused him to establish the General Assembly in 1789.
- The Second Great Awakening occurred at the beginning of the 19th century in the areas around Virginia, North Carolina and western New York. One event was held at Cane Ridge Presbyterian Church in Kentucky in 1801. Several different denominations attended it. There were four days of preaching leading up to the Lord’s Supper on Sunday. The “Cumberland Presbyterian Church” eventually formed out of this event in 1810.
- Another split of the church occurred in 1837 as the result of differences that had been building up for several years in four main areas: subscription to doctrinal standards, form of church government, methods and effects of revival and the need for the church to assist in social reform.
 - The “New School”, led by Charles Finney and others, took a “progressive” stance: less importance on doctrine and form of government (some were Congregationalist) and more importance on revivals and social reforms (such as abolishing slavery and supporting benevolence societies).

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- The “Old School”, led by Charles Hodge in the north and James Henley Thornwell in the south, took a “conservative” stance.
- The “New School” established Union Theological Seminary in New York City in 1836. Princeton Seminary remained primarily with the Old School.
- The Civil War caused both the “Old School” and “New School” to split once again. Differences revolved around whether the support of slavery was a sin (the north) or not (the south).
 - Southerners in the “New School” formed the “United Synod of the South” in Richmond, Virginia in 1858.
 - Southerners in the “Old School” formed the “Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States” in Augusta, Georgia in 1861 under the leadership of Thornwell and others.
- The southern denominations were the first to reunite in 1864. Mostly through the efforts of Robert Lewis Dabney, the “United Synod” joined the “Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States”. The denomination was renamed to the “Presbyterian Church in the U.S.” after the civil war ended.
- The northern denominations reunited in 1869. Many of the issues of 1837 were no longer as important. The “New School” accepted the need to subscribe to the doctrinal standards, and the “Old School” accepted the need for social reform. The two became the “Presbyterian Church U.S.A.”
- The northern church suffered several crises around its ministers not adhering to the Westminster standards. Also, moves to revise the confession began in order to woo the “Cumberland Presbyterians” back into the denomination. During all this, the Princeton faculty and chairmen remained conservative: first Charles Hodge, then his son A.A. Hodge, and then B.B. Warfield.
- Most of the “Cumberland Presbyterians” rejoined the northern “Presbyterian Church U.S.A.” in 1906.
- The publication of Charles Darwin’s The Origin of Species in 1859 sparked the “modernism” movement. Evolution and random selection began to replace the literal six-day creation in many peoples’ minds. Charles Hodge fought the book as atheistic, but A.A. Hodge and Warfield thought that evolution and creation could possibly be reconciled.
- The opposition against modernism and liberalism came on two fronts. The first was the Fundamentalism movement led by Dwight L. Moody. Fundamentalists mostly taught very literal form of biblical interpretation and dispensationalism.
- Within the Presbyterian Church, opposition also came from J. Gresham Machen (1881-1937), a Princeton Seminary professor of New Testament, who fought against liberalism in his 1923 book entitled Christianity and Liberalism. He also formed Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia in 1929, the Independent Board of Presbyterian Foreign Missions in 1933, and the “Orthodox Presbyterian Church” (OPC) in 1936 after he was deposed from the northern denomination.
- The “Bible Presbyterian Church” (BPC) split from the new OPC denomination in 1937, less than one year after the OPC was formed. Carl McIntire (1906-2002)

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and others led the BPC in a direction toward more social reform (prohibition) and more dispensational and fundamental doctrines in the church.

- Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) was a friend and aid to McIntire, but he eventually left the BPC and joined the RPCES (see below).
- A large group (about 60% of the members) began to feel that McIntire held too much personal sway in the BPC. McIntire and 40% of the membership formed a new synod based in New Jersey in 1956. Those remaining renamed themselves to the “Evangelical Presbyterian Church” (EPC – not the same as below) in 1961.
- The EPC wanted to reconcile with other Presbyterian denominations, and they united with the “Reformed Presbyterian Church, General Synod” in 1965 to form the new “Reformed Presbyterian Church, Evangelical Synod” (RPCES).
- The northern denomination and a smaller “United Presbyterian Church of North America” (UPCNA) denomination with congregations mostly in Ohio and western Pennsylvania merged in 1958 to form the “United Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A.” (UPCUSA) as the main northern denomination.
- Doctrinal liberalism in the UPCUSA resulted in the formation of the “Evangelical Presbyterian Church” (EPC – not the same as above) in 1981. The EPC’s motto is “In Essentials, Unity. In Non-Essentials, Liberty. In All Things, Charity; Truth in Love.”
- The southern “Presbyterian Church in the U.S.” had continued pretty much as it was when it was formed in 1864, but liberal movements (social gospel, evolution and neo-orthodoxy) had been rising there as well. Liberal teaching in southern seminaries (Union in Virginia and Columbia in South Carolina) was blamed. Conservative ministers such as W.M. McPheeters at Columbia, his nephew Tom Glasgow, L. Nelson Bell (missionary to China until 1941), and his son-in-law Billy Graham tried to hold the conservative line.
- By 1968, the southern PCUS was discussing joining with the northern PCUSA. At the same time, another group of conservatives were planning to leave the PCUS and form a new reformed denomination. In 1973, that group met in Birmingham, Alabama and established the “Presbyterian Church in America” (PCA) – “Faithful to the Scripture, True to the Reformed Faith and Obedient to the Great Commission of Jesus Christ.”
- The southern PCA received the northern RPCES in 1982.
- Overtures between OPC and PCA in 1981 and 1986 both failed to meet the vote required.
- The northern PCUSA and the southern PCUS denominations finally merged in 1983 to form the “Presbyterian Church (USA)”, also known as the PCUSA.

Heroes:

Jonathan Edwards

- Born in East Windsor, Connecticut in 1703. Died in 1758.
- His father Timothy Edwards was a Congregationalist pastor. His mother Esther Stoddard was the daughter of the Rev. Solomon Stoddard. Jonathan was the only boy in a family of eleven children.
- Edwards entered Yale University in 1716 just before age 13. He graduated four years later as valedictorian of his class. While at Yale, he studied science, philosophy and psychology.
- Edwards preached in New York City for eight months after graduation before returning to Yale to complete a Master's degree and remaining at Yale for a couple of years as a senior tutor.
- He had difficulty accepting Calvinism until one day in 1721 when he reached what he called a "delightful conviction" while meditating on 1 Timothy 1:17 ("To the King of ages, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever. Amen."). From that point onward, he believed in God's sovereignty, and he counted that event as his conversion to Christ.
- He was ordained as a minister in 1727 and began assisting Solomon Stoddard (Edward's grandfather) as a student minister in Northampton, Massachusetts.
- That same year, he married Sarah Pierpont, daughter of one of the founders of Yale. Eventually, the couple had eleven children.
- Stoddard practiced an "open" communion in which any person who lived an outwardly pious life and who had a good reputation in the community could partake. He considered communion to be a "converting ordinance", and he used it to increase the size (although not the spirituality) of his congregation. This practice caused much controversy among other the Puritan preachers in the area.
- Stoddard's sudden death in 1729 left Edwards as the sole minister of one of the largest and wealthiest congregations in the Massachusetts colony.
- Edwards' preaching helped to bring about great spiritual revivals in the 1730's and 1740's. He was one of the leading preachers (along with his friend George Whitefield) in what became known as the First Great Awakening.
- Missionary David Brainerd lived with Edwards and his family for several months before dying suddenly in 1747. In 1749, Edwards published his book entitled The Life and Diary of David Brainerd, Missionary to the Indians.
- Edwards became more and more convinced that Stoddard's "open" communion was harmful, so he eventually ceased its practice. Disagreement by members of the congregation resulted in his dismissal as pastor in 1750.
- After considering several options, Edwards moved to the small frontier settlement of Stockbridge, Massachusetts and led a small congregation. He also served as a missionary to the Housatonic Indians.

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- While in Stockbridge, he found more time for studying and writing. Among his many works was a book entitled Freedom of the Will published in 1754. Using Romans 16 as its basis, it takes a classic Calvinist approach to total depravity and man's need for God in salvation.
- Edwards' daughter Esther married Aaron Burr, Sr., president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton). Their son, Aaron, Jr., became Vice President for Thomas Jefferson. The senior Burr died in 1757.
- Edwards was invited to be the new president of the College of New Jersey after Burr's death. Since Edwards had been a friend and supporter of the college, he accepted.
- Within five weeks after his installation, Edwards died due to complications from receiving a Smallpox vaccine.
- More than 1,000 of Edward's sermons survive in one form or another. All his major sermons may be found online. His style was to write out the full text of a sermon in his earlier years. In his later years, he appeared to use mostly notes and outlines rather the full text.
- In addition to being a strict Calvinist, Edwards was also interested in science and philosophy and their role in the spiritual life. He had a great analytical mind and could present his arguments both logically and convincingly.

Audio CD: #9 – Jonathan Edwards

Discussion