

Visible Saints and Notorious Sinners: Puritan and Presbyterian Sacramental Doctrine and Practice and the Vicissitudes of the Baptist Movement in New England and the Middle Colonies

Peter J. Wallace

On November 4, 1764, Jacob Green preached a sermon to his Presbyterian congregation at Hanover, New Jersey, declaring that he would no longer baptize the children of any except communicant members. Explaining his new position that only those with an outward appearance and credible evidence of grace would be admitted to the Table, Green explicitly sided with the late Jonathan Edwards in utterly rejecting the idea of a halfway covenant in which almost anyone could be admitted to baptism. Richard Webster states that Green had at first followed Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr in "admitting to the sacraments all who seemed desirous of leading a godly life: the reading of Watts and Edwards on the Terms of Communion changed his views, and he, first of all our ministers, took his stand that only those who were hopefully pious should be received into church-membership." A Harvard graduate of 1744, Green was originally from Massachusetts, and had been ordained by the New Side Presbytery of New York--a body with strong New England connections. In 1780 he led four churches into the independent Morris Presbytery in order to practice his Edwardsean beliefs.

Seven years after Green's sermon, in 1771, his fellow Presbyterian, John Blair, published his own recantation. Blair had formerly believed that while virtually anyone could bring their children for baptism, only the converted should come to the Table. Now he changed his mind. All but those who had been disciplined by the church should come to the Table. He had become convinced that all who had been baptized into the covenant should be "reputed the professors of it untill they disavow it." He claimed that requiring a public profession by those baptized in infancy denied their membership given them in baptism: "Are not the Signs which our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed and the Manner of Covenanting which he has prescribed sufficient, without the Addition of our own Inventions to supply the Defect?" Blair had been trained at the Log College, and developed into one of the leading Edwardseans in the middle colonies, but hailed originally from Northern Ireland.

Both of these men insisted that the terms of admission to one sacrament should be the same as the other. The difference is that whereas Green sought to tighten requirements, so that only communicants could have their children baptized, Blair sought to loosen them, so that all who were baptized could partake of the Lord's Supper. At first glance, this appears to echo the New England debates between the followers of Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards. After all, Green appeals to Edwards and Blair calls the sacraments, "converting ordinances." Yet this paper claims that while both Green and Blair were steeped in the New England controversies and trained in the New Divinity, they were involved in an argument substantially different from Stoddard and Edwards--a difference rooted in their Middle Colonies Presbyterian environment.

This paper will explore the relationship between New England sacramental disputes and the sacramental doctrine and practice of colonial Presbyterians. After examining the impact of the debates over infant baptism in New England and the Middle Colonies, we will turn to the conflict over the terms of admission to communion between the Edwardseans and the Stoddardeans. Many historians have ignored the crucial differences between New England Congregationalism and Middle Colonies Presbyterianism. This paper will attempt to demonstrate 1) that divergences in sacramental doctrine and practice reflect some of the most basic distinctives between these two bodies; 2) that within colonial Presbyterianism, any influence from the New England debates was reshaped by the local traditions within Scottish and Scotch-Irish Presbyterianism; and 3) that these differences begin to explain why Baptists were successful in New England and not in the Middle Colonies. In short, this paper argues that differences in sacramental doctrine and practice help show

why the heirs of the New England Puritans became Baptists but Middle Colonies Presbyterians didn't.

I. Demographics: The Rise of the Baptists in New England and the Rise of the Presbyterians in the Middle Colonies

Whereas the growth of English Baptists occurred largely from 1640-1660 (becoming a fairly stable dissenting body by 1700), there was no corresponding explosion in the colonies. The emergence of the Baptists as a substantial movement in the new world occurred a century later. And while they often relied on English Baptists such as John Gill for their polemics against "infant sprinkling," the American Baptist movement maintained its own distinctives.

At first the English Baptists occupied the fringes of Puritan culture, but gradually fought to position themselves within the realm of "tolerable" dissent. Underwood's study of Baptist-Quaker polemics during the seventeenth century reveals a clear movement among Baptists toward respectable nonconformity by 1689. Those few Baptists who emigrated to the new world after the Glorious Revolution generally brought with them that more or less settled dissent--not at all in the character of the later Separate Baptists from New England.

So while some historians have assumed that the Baptists would naturally gravitate toward the revivals of the Great Awakening, most studies of the Middle Colonies have noted that they remained aloof from what they considered a paedobaptist affair. In New England, especially after 1749, the Separate Baptists were zealous revivalists; but most of their Regular Baptist brethren in the Middle Colonies tended to shy away from what they considered extreme new measures. The following chart reflects the growth of Baptist and Presbyterian churches in the eighteenth century:

Bapts	MA	CT	RI	NE	NY	NJ	PA	MC	VA	South	Total
1660	0	0	4	4			0				4
1700	2	0	7	12/9	0	4	3		1	1	33
1735	7	1	12	23/20							
1740						5					96
1750	16	12	30	58	4	14	29	53	3	21	132
1770	27	12	30	75		19			7		
1774									54		
1780	45	22	31	/114							457
1795	136	60	40	/325	84	23/30	31	170	227	476	1,152

Pbns	MA	CT	RI	NE	NY	NJ	PA	MC	VA	South	Pbn	Cong
1660								5			5	75
1700						9					28	146
1740											160	423
1750	8	1		19	35	51	56	187	17	27	233	465
1776							140		50+			
1780											495	749

Baptists and Presbyterians maintained a similar number of congregations through 1700. But while Presbyterian immigration from Scotland and Ireland quickly boosted their numbers, fewer Baptists immigrated to the new world, causing their numbers to languish throughout the first half of the eighteenth century. By 1750, Presbyterian congregations outnumbered Baptists nearly two to one.

Rather than depend on immigration, Baptist growth took place largely through the conversion of paedobaptists (usually English Congregationalists or Episcopalians). Baptists more than doubled in New England between 1735 and 1750, doubled again by 1780, and then nearly tripled by 1795. In the South, growth was slow until 1770, but over the next quarter century they doubled (on average) every three years. In New York the Baptists grew, especially among emigrants from New England, but in the rest of the middle colonies, growth was painfully slow. Pennsylvania only netted two additional congregations between 1750 and 1795, while New Jersey netted either 9 or 16, depending on which numbers are accurate.

Meanwhile, Scottish and Scotch-Irish immigration to New Jersey and Pennsylvania resulted in the dramatic growth of Presbyterianism in the middle colonies. The best estimates suggest that around 50,000 Scots and well over 150,000 Ulster Scots had immigrated to the colonies by the 1770s (at least 50,000 came in the years 1768-1774), more than half of which came through Pennsylvania (though many settled in the backcountry of Virginia and the Carolinas); with the result that Benjamin Franklin estimated in 1774 that one-third of Pennsylvania's approximately 350,000 inhabitants were Scotch-Irish. Fifteen years before, William Smith had broken down Pennsylvania's inhabitants as follows:

1759--250,000 inhabitants:

95,000 Germans (1/3 each Anabaptist, Lutheran and Reformed)

55,000 Presbyterians

25,000 Anglicans

50,000 Quakers

5,000 English Baptists

These estimates concur with the scholarship on immigration that suggests that in these fifteen years when the population of Pennsylvania rose by 40%, the Scots/Scots-Irish population grew by over 100%. With Pennsylvania as one of the centers of Presbyterian church planting, and Baptist converts normally coming from English stock, the middle colonies did not offer a promising field for Baptist growth. As Baptist historian A. H. Newman once said, "ground once preoccupied by Presbyterians is relatively irresponsive to Baptist effort." Baptists would be successful among the descendents of the Scots-Irish after the American Revolution, but tended to be very sparse wherever the Presbyterians established churches in the colonial era. It appears that the Scots-Irish preferred Presbyterianism, but their children might become Baptists if the Presbyterians took too long in establishing churches.

In addition to denominational affiliation, another way to trace the rise of the Baptists is through the polemical literature of the period. An admittedly incomplete survey of American publications on infant baptism reveals the following chronology of the debate:

1639-1699--3

1700-1739--10

1740-1759--10

1760-1779--46

1780-1799--54

This demonstrates that by the 1760s, the Congregationalists and Presbyterians considered Baptist polemics to be a significant problem. The initial growth of the Baptists after the Great Awakening sparked a pamphlet war which resulted favorably for the Baptists--coinciding with their period of greatest growth. Yet another pamphlet war may have proved at least as significant in the success of

the Baptists: the Edwardsean challenge to the Halfway Covenant and Stoddardeanism. Isaac Backus and other Baptists certainly believed that the efforts of Jonathan Edwards and his followers to restore the purity of the visible church aided their efforts to gain converts for their cause.

II. New England Debates: Sacramental Controversies in Puritan Culture

This focus on the purity of the visible church had been a gradual development in Puritan thought. While the early Puritans, such as William Perkins, still insisted on baptizing all children within the parish, the increasing emphasis on inward subjectivity and the "disciplined and communal character of the Christian life" in English Puritanism led to a growing emphasis on baptizing only the children of visible saints. The original New England Puritans attempted to combine the ideal of the pure church with the holy commonwealth, holding purity and inclusiveness in tension. Michael Ryan McCoy argues that the "New England divines sought to limit the sacraments to those who clearly demonstrated evidence that they had received grace, but they feared to allow their society to become 'un-churched' by tolerating those without grace or barring from the churches persons who had a right to membership." The doctrine of the covenant was utilized to bring these two things together. McCoy points out that for the New Englanders, the sacraments "did not create church membership any more than they created covenant standing. They were seals of the covenant, not the cause of it....Church membership existed before baptism and was therefore independent of it." The difference between infant membership and adult membership was simply that the benefits for infants in the covenant were all external.

1) The Halfway Covenant and Solomon Stoddard. But as an alarming number of baptized people grew up without ever giving evidence of conversion, the ministers of New England feared that their holy commonwealth was crumbling. The halfway covenant offered the simplest solution: allow anyone who was willing to own the covenant (i.e., declare their approval of the terms of the covenant), to bring their children to baptism. The Halfway Covenant of 1662 may have continued to hold in tension the pure church and the holy commonwealth, but only at a price. Hereafter the sacraments took on new functions in New England culture: baptism was the symbol of inclusion in the holy commonwealth, while the Lord's Supper became the test of purity within the commonwealth.

The Halfway Covenant fitfully acknowledged the importance of baptism even as it attempted to retain the visible saints criterion for full membership. John Davenport and other opponents claimed that infant baptism was administered on the basis of a parental covenant--not the covenant of grace, per se--hence the sacrament did not seal immediate church membership at all. This ultimately led them to divide baptism from the covenant of grace, insisting that the covenant of grace technically belonged only to the elect, whom the church could never actually identify. The supporters of the Halfway Covenant thought that they espied baptistic tendencies in such remarks, since it left baptized children outside the covenant of grace altogether.

The first Baptists in New England had divided over the purity of the church--just as Separatists and Baptists had withdrawn in England during the English Revolution. But by 1650, the New England Puritans had established their experiment with fair success, and Baptist growth was negligible. But in the immediate aftermath of the Halfway Covenant and the failure of the Holy Commonwealth--signaled in the revocation of the charter--the twin goals of purity and inclusiveness both found themselves challenged. Yet while a few pamphlets sailed back and forth over the baptismal waters during the 1680s and '90s, the actual number of Baptist churches rose slowly.

But in the meantime, the inclusive policies of the Halfway Covenant received an extra push from the presbyterianizing Solomon Stoddard. Stoddard, besides his well-known description of the Supper as a converting ordinance, also declared that baptism was a converting ordinance, "through which God gave saving grace to some children 'in their infancy.'" As Holifield points out, both Stoddard and his opponents were preoccupied with sacramental and pastoral nurture largely because their churches

were full of Halfway Covenant members--many of whom were still "unconverted." With the demise of the New England Way, both theologically and politically, many began moving toward a Presbyterian understanding of the church. Few noticed, however, that seeds were being sown which would be reaped in a harvest of Baptist conversions a generation later.

Stoddard himself wished to preserve the New England tension between visible saints and the holy commonwealth. Far from denying the criterion of "visible saints," Stoddard insisted that New Englanders had actually wound up excluding visible saints from the Table by adding extra terms of communion. Stoddard argued that the church should indeed consist of visible saints, and that those who did not exhibit such signs should be excluded altogether and banished from the church. But those who qualified for baptism also thereby qualified for the Lord's Supper. The Halfway Covenant erred in retaining too strict a definition of visible saints: "There is not the least foundation in Scripture, for two sort of adult members, one that might, an other that might not come to the Lords Supper; unless they were under offense, or wanted sufficient knowledge for that Ordinance." Instead, he declared that the Table was for all who made a "solemn Profession of Faith, & Repentance, & are of Godly Conversation, having Knowledge to Examine themselves, & discern the Lords Body." This profession was not "an Affirmation that they have Saving Faith and Repentance" but only "an Assent unto, & Acknowledgement of the Doctrine of Faith & Repentance (as the onely Doctrine according to which they hope for Salvation) together with a Promise of Obedience to all the Commandments of God."

Edward Taylor, Stoddard's chief opponent in the Connecticut Valley, replied that Stoddard's definition of profession lacked any inward appropriation of the outward assent to doctrine. Insisting upon some evidence of sanctifying grace in the heart, Taylor claims that while the grounds for admission to baptism includes only "Federall Holiness," whereas "Sanctifying Grace, or a Saving Implantation into Christ is the proper ground of the Lords Supper. None without Life can receive Food." Further, Taylor disclaimed knowledge of any churches who scrutinized "the method of Gods Working upon the Soule in the Work of Conversion" as a requirement for coming to the Table. "All that is Expected by the Churches is onely some such Evidence of their Faith & Repentance as may be an hopefull ground for the Charity of Gods people to stand upon."

When Stoddard replied in 1690 that the Lord's Supper was a converting ordinance, he did so on the grounds that the means of grace were intended for all those in the visible church, not only for those who were regenerate, but for all members of the covenant--thereby including only those unregenerate who were already within the covenant.

Increase Mather, one of the leading Boston ministers, rejected this whole approach, declaring: "A man may be qualified for church-membership, and yett not to be admitted unto the Lords Supper, without that examination wee plead for. Yea, hee may be qualified for full communion, and yett not to be admitted unto full communion untill such time as his qualifications have passed under the churches examination." But Stoddard pointed out that the standards for admission in the New Testament did not include entering church covenants or taking doctrinal exams. Hence, whereas in 1640 there was some danger of facing hordes of unbaptized children, by 1720, anyone who wanted to be baptized could find a minister ready and willing to do so.

2) Edwardseans and the Baptists. The two eighteenth-century results of New England's sacramental conflicts were the Edwardsean and the Baptist movements within New England Congregationalism. Just as the English Baptists were the extremists of seventeenth-century Puritanism, so also the Separate Baptists were the extremists of eighteenth-century New Lights. But in the same ways that Edwards differs from his Puritan forebears, so also the Separate Baptists differ from their English Baptist cousins.

Jonathan Edwards signaled a new emphasis on purity when he rejected his grandfather's scheme and instituted a requirement for making a more specific profession of faith in order to come to the Lord's Table. McCoy suggests that there were three basic reasons why ministers started questioning

Stoddard after the Great Awakening: 1) the revival raised tensions about sacramental practices, particularly with respect to worthiness to partake of the Lord's Supper; 2) the increasing criticism from Baptists and Separates that they had fallen from the Fathers led ministers and interested lay persons to reopen the question of visible sainthood; and 3) the traditional fears of declension that revived as ministers began to think that open sacramental policies had not provided the results that they had hoped. Edwards, as one of the first to question Stoddard, did not advocate returning to the earlier practice of the conversion narrative; but rather attempted to discern those who had received a divine and supernatural light, which Edwards claimed would be revealed in a declaration of the will consisting of an inclination toward God and willingness to enter the covenant. Edwards did not seek to scrutinize some internal evidence of grace, but simply requested a declaration of the will that the candidate for the table had their affections set on their desire to know God. Once again, the doctrine of "visible saints" was redefined.

But Edwards followers sounded an even more strident call for purity. As Joseph Bellamy declared, "Your baptism gives you not the least right to any one of the peculiar blessings of the covenant of grace...but you are now, this moment, in fact, as liable to be struck dead and sent to hell by the divine justice, as any unbaptised sinner in the land." Insisting that only those who were admitted to the Lord's Supper could have their children baptized (and requiring transfers from "impure" churches to make a full profession of faith), the New Divinity pastors were often indistinguishable from the Separatists, and frequently cooperated willingly with Isaac Backus and the growing Baptist movement.

Moses Mather and the Old Calvinist establishment responded with alarm. If gracious affections are "the Band of Union to the visible Church; it will follow, that no Person in an unrenewed State can be a Member of it." In Mather's mind, it was only a small step from such a position to denying infant baptism. Clearly seeing that the differences between the Old Calvinists and the New Divinity were rooted in their different conceptions of primitive and fallen human nature and their divergent understandings of the different dispensations of God to man in these two states, Mather attempted to unfold the implications of these differences. Claiming that Bellamy divorced the external administration of the covenant from grace altogether, Mather concluded that the New Divinity was well on its way to dividing election from the covenant. In its stead, Mather offered a distinction between the covenant of grace and the external administration of the covenant: "the intention of the covenant of grace is to make over to the believer, a sure title to eternal life: but the evident design of the covenant with Abraham was to set up a visible church." Claiming that Bellamy belonged logically to the Anabaptists, Mather concluded: "But if we must not unite with the visible church, till we have faith; it is an undeniable consequence, that we may not unite with it, till we know we have Faith:....And by this means a very great part even of true believers must be cut off from the privileges of church-communion, which God hath appointed for the saving benefit of his people." Nonetheless, Mather finally gave in to the pressure of the New Divinity and the Baptists, granting that the covenant of grace contains no visible church. The visible church, he argued, was grounded on the Abrahamic covenant--not the covenant of grace itself.

The Baptists saw their opportunity. Isaac Backus now claimed that not only was the Old Testament invalid for determining who should be admitted to the Lord's Table (as Mather and Taylor had claimed), but it was also invalid for determining who should be admitted to baptism! Further, he claimed that New England had fallen from its purity, and was now permitting the unregenerate to come freely to the Lord's Supper. Pushing the visible saints criterion to the next step, Backus argued that only the Baptists could faithfully continue the New England tradition, since even Edwards and the New Lights compromised their principles by allowing non-professing infants into church membership. Claiming that only the New Testament was a sufficient guide to understand who the church should admit to the sacraments, the Baptists relied heavily on the argumentation of the New Lights to show that the only way to guarantee a church full of visible saints was to stop baptizing babies.

The Great Awakening alone (to say nothing of later developments) produced almost 100 separatist churches--many of which became Baptist. C. C. Goen's survey of these churches suggests that "the logic of the pure church ideal" drove New Englanders to affirm believers' baptism as the only way to guarantee a pure church. Denying entirely that the "ordinances" of baptism and the Lord's Supper were converting ordinances, Backus claimed that in them the "work of sanctification in believers is carried on," but no salvific power. Hence he denied access to all but visible saints. He rejected infant baptism for several reasons: 1) it falsely supposed that there is no distinction between the old covenant, which was based on the family and the nation, and the new covenant, which was made purely with elect individuals; 2) it permitted the baptism of those who were neither regenerate nor even disciples, since they had not been taught; 3) historically, it was an innovation from the second or third century without warrant in the New Testament; 4) it violated the heart of the Puritan doctrine of visible saints, creating a territorial church that gets mingled with the world; 5) it is harmful to children by making them think that they are inside the covenant of grace, when actually even paedobaptists only believe that they are inside the external covenant; 6) if its advocates were truly consistent, they would give the Lord's Supper to infants as well. His arguments resonated with his audience. Within a span of only fifty years, nearly 300 Baptist churches were founded in New England.

III. Middle Colonies Presbyterians and New England's Sacramental Conflicts

James Burton McSwain argues that seventeenth-century English paedobaptists--whether conforming or dissenting--held firmly to the union of church and state. His analysis of Robert Baillie suggests that Scottish Presbyterians held a similar view. McSwain argues that paedobaptists argued from a position of cultural dominance, rehearsing their arguments that Baptists were dangerous to society because they tossed infants out of the visible church, thereby removing them from the moral oversight of the clergy.

McSwain's arguments make sense in New England. The New England Puritans continued the model of the established church--only now the established church was congregational and more fully reformed. Their insistence on infant baptism continued the English emphasis on the unity of church and state--with one major alteration. In New England, only the children of communicant members--visible saints--could be baptized. As the years passed it became clear that a large number of people were now falling outside the pale of the visible church. When children failed to make their profession of faith, their children could not be brought for baptism, undermining the religious bonds that held New England society together. The logic of the Puritan desire for a communion of visible saints ran counter to their insistence on an ecclesiastical establishment. The resulting Halfway Covenant provided a temporary stop-gap, but could not forever stem the tide.

Presbyterians in the middle colonies, however, had no such aspirations to the union of church and state. Like their Ulster Presbyterian forebears, they attempted to create a self-sustaining dissenting Presbyterian culture which proved remarkably impervious to Baptist incursions during the seventeenth century. The tendency of predominantly Scotch-Irish presbyteries to render judgment in divorce cases suggests that they viewed themselves as competent to determine matters normally reserved for the civil magistrate.

McCoy blithely assumes that Middle Colonies Presbyterians faced the same situation as New England Congregationalists, frequently quoting from New Side Presbyterian sources to substantiate his claims about New Light beliefs and practices. But New Side Presbyterianism itself consisted of two elements: the Presbytery of New York, which consisted largely of ex-Congregationalists who had migrated from New England; and the Presbytery of New Brunswick, led by the Log College revivalists who were mostly from Northern Ireland. The two elements had largely blended together by the early 1750s, but their distinctive roots remained important. After all, the New Englanders had generally joined the Scots precisely because they found in Presbyterianism a congenial solution to the Halfway Covenant. And while many of the Scotch-Irish contingent gravitated toward

Edwardsean doctrines, it never resulted in a wholesale embrace of the New Divinity, but remained couched within traditional Presbyterian sacramentology.

Presbyterian sacramental doctrine and practice was rooted in its Scottish and Scotch-Irish background. Puritan sacramental practices had developed through their attempt to purify the Church of England, resulting in an emphasis on the gathered congregation of visible saints, called out of the world. Presbyterian sacramental practices had developed through the resistance of local communities against external pressure from England (not to mention a century of struggle with Scottish episcopacy), resulting in a strong emphasis on the sacraments as bonds which held together the whole community. While Presbyterian doctrine emphasized faithful partaking just as strongly as the Puritans, the Scots and Scots-Irish had an even more vibrantly communal spirituality of the sacraments. The rise of the Scottish communion season, with its multi-parish congregation is but one example of such a communal mentality.

Ned Landsman offers another explanation for Presbyterian communal attitudes. Pointing out that Scottish Lowlanders were perpetually migrating (though generally within a single county--and often within a single parish), he claims that this peripatetic lifestyle did not fracture community, but actually built it--though on a larger scale than the English village. The Lowlanders did not just wander anywhere, they usually followed friends and relatives to another "toun" (clusters of 2-12 huts) after the lease expired from their previous residence. These Scottish communities were constantly on the move, but remained connected especially through the church. After the Reformation all of the Catholic festivals which had structured time and place for the community were banned by the reformers. Yet within a generation or two the "holy fairs" of the Scottish communion seasons had begun to function in many of the same ways.

Peter Brooke tells a similar story of Ulster Presbyterianism. During the seventeenth century, Presbyterians stood for "the ideal of the church as a kingdom or polity separate from the state, with authority in matters of faith and morals. In the eighteenth century it functioned as the organising centre of a distinct, quasi-national society." For Ulster Presbyterians, their church courts were the political as well as religious center from the seventeenth to mid-nineteenth century. Since Presbyterians emphasized the church "as the means of organising and disciplining the whole society" they only required "external profession and decent conduct" for church membership.

Whereas English and Scottish Presbyterians often conformed after the Restoration in 1661, only five out of the seventy Irish Presbyterian clergy did so, reflecting the relative political independence of the Ulster Presbyterian community. Once the army left Ulster, they returned to their pulpits and even before the Glorious Revolution of 1688 they had established the first dissenting synod in the British Isles. While maintaining cordial relations with their brethren in Scotland, the Ulster Presbyterians had a unique situation: 1) they did not need the permission or representative of the king for their Synod to meet; 2) they could establish their own criterion for ordaining ministers (Scottish GA was forced to accept many conforming ministers after 1690); 3) they had no patrons. Hence, Ulster Presbyterians developed an independent subculture which thrived for nearly two centuries.

Yet while the difference between Ulster and Scotland may appear significant in some respects, the practical differences between Ulster Presbyterians and their neighbors in southwestern Scotland are negligible. For instance, Landsman points out that southwestern Scots rarely had to quarrel with patrons, since the lairds were often such fierce Presbyterians themselves that they would never dream of exercising their rights.

This Scottish and Ulster Presbyterian community was transplanted to the new world, where it developed in slightly different directions from the parent communities, but still within a similar trajectory. While Scottish and Ulster immigrants flourished throughout the middle colonies, central Jersey was actually a Scottish colony from the 1680s to 1702, and remained predominantly Scottish throughout the eighteenth century. Indeed, New Jersey was the center of Presbyterian revivals,

Scottish commerce (along the Philadelphia/New York corridor), and with the founding of the College of New Jersey in 1746, Presbyterian education as well.

Landsman traces the development of the Jersey colony, and notes that the Scottish propensity for mobility within the framework of a larger community remained prominent in the shaping of early Scottish-American culture. But the first Scottish immigrants to New Jersey were largely Quaker and Episcopalians from the northeast, near Aberdeen. Only gradually did the southwestern Scots--and later the Scots-Irish--become dominant. Yet by the 1730s and 1740s the Presbyterians had united virtually all the Scots in one church. Landsman comments that the children of Scottish Quakers and Episcopalians generally preferred to join with their Scottish friends and neighbors in the Presbyterian church, rather than fellowship with English co-religionists. Indeed, Landsman claims that the early revivals of the 1730s in New Jersey were largely aimed at uniting the Scots into one Presbyterian church.

But, as should be expected among Scottish Presbyterians, these revivals were focused around the traditional communion seasons. The evangelical preaching that accompanied such sacramental seasons accomplished the work for which it was intended, and the majority of the Scottish community united with the Presbyterian church. Landsman may be correct about central Jersey when he suggests that as the Scottish contingent grew, the English portion of Presbyterian congregations dwindled; but certainly that is not the case for West Jersey and New York, where the heirs of New England continued to mingle with the Scots in joint congregations. Admittedly, there could be tensions between the two ethnic groups over which version of the Psalms to sing, or whether to have a Scottish or a New England pastor; but it appears that Presbyterian doctrine, government, and sacramental practice continued to gain in popularity with those who migrated to those areas. By 1750, there were 51 Presbyterian churches in New Jersey, and only two Congregationalist churches.

In the same year there were 14 Baptist churches in New Jersey, and 29 in Pennsylvania. Whereas in New England, Baptist churches tended to reflect the doctrine, worship, and polity of the Congregationalists, Norman Maring claims that New Jersey Baptists were very similar to the Presbyterians in doctrine, worship, and even government. Francis Sacks' study of the government of the Philadelphia Baptist Association shows that the PBA functioned like a presbytery--exercising almost as much authority over its constituent churches as the Synod of Philadelphia. This is largely due to the connectional tendencies of the Welsh Baptists who were prominent in the founding of the PBA in 1707, but contact between Middle Colonies Baptists and their more numerous Presbyterian neighbors appears as a likely influence as well.

Certainly when the PBA encouraged New England's Separate Baptists to form their own associations and get involved in the founding of a college for ministerial training, the Separates initially reacted with suspicion and wariness. For several decades, they refused to form associations, but preferred to operate on the basis of ad hoc councils. And whereas the Philadelphia Baptists accepted the authority of a council, following their Welsh roots and their Presbyterian neighbors; New England Baptists, true to their Congregational roots, insisted that a council had only advisory power. It was not until 1766 that Rhode Island College opened for ministerial training, largely funded at first by the PBA.

But while such similarities existed between Middle Colonies Baptists and Presbyterians, the subject of infant baptism could still produce fiery debates. Such a debate erupted in 1743 between Samuel Finley and Abel Morgan while the pair were in Cape May, New Jersey. Morgan was one of the few Baptists who gravitated toward Whitefield and the Great Awakening, while Finley was one of the leading New Side Presbyterians. Between 1746 and 1750 each side produced two volumes, and then stopped. Bryan Le Beau suggests that the Presbyterians did not perceive the Baptists as a significant threat in the Middle Colonies, but offers as his only explanation that the Anglicans were a more powerful opponent.

Digging down into the roots of Presbyterian sacramental thought and practice provides a more satisfying answer. The Presbyterian practice was that virtually everyone should be baptized (even those who were born of scandalous parents could be sponsored by godly folk, who would thereby promise to give them a Christian education). But some profession was required for admission to the Lord's Table. Not indeed the Puritan requirement of a conversion narrative, nor an Edwardsean profession of the will; they simply required that each communicant have an adequate knowledge of Christian doctrine and an outwardly godly life. Only the scandalous and profane were to be excluded from the Table. The practice of giving out communion tokens guaranteed that only those approved by the session would come to the Table, but it appears that the elders generally gave tokens to the vast majority of those who desired them. Marilyn Westerkamp reports that in one congregation,

"these persons were then summoned before the elders and told to appear before the congregation that very afternoon and acknowledge their sins. All who did so were publicly absolved; all who would not come before us or, coming, could not be induced to acknowledge their fault before the congregation, upon the Saturday preceding the communion, their names, scandals, and impenitency, were read out before the congregation and they debarred from communion; which proved such a terror that we found few of that sort."

Others might not practice such a public version of discipline, but the common usage of communion tokens debarred the profane and scandalous from coming to the Table. As Westerkamp points out, even "those who were given tokens were reminded through preparatory sermons that while they appeared worthy, in fact they probably were not." The Scottish emphasis on conversion--but rejection of the visible saints criterion--resulted in a distinctly communal approach to conversion. Since the community itself was impure, the whole community needed to be transformed. Therefore, "in the case of the English, these experiences were intensely personal, while in the case of the Scots-Irish, they were vibrantly communal."

These emphases continued in the American context as well. The practice of American Presbyterians in determining the subjects of baptism prior to the Great Awakening was set forth in the Minutes of Synod in 1735:

"And [we] do also exhort all the ministers within our bounds, to take due care in the examination of all candidates for baptism, or that offer their children to God in that sacred ordinance, that they are persons of a regular life, and have suitable acquaintance with the principles of the Christian religion; that that seal be not set to a blank, and that such be not admitted to visible church relation that are manifestly unfit for it."

Here there is neither a requirement for an account of a conversion experience, nor is there any mention of a "profession of faith," per se. Insisting that ministers could not judge the heart, they did not require positive proof of godliness, merely an understanding of the gospel and a life that was consistent with such an understanding.

In the same way, in 1734, when Gilbert Tennent attempted to require an examination "into the evidence of the grace of God" in candidates for the Lord's Supper, the Synod merely exhorted "all the ministers within our bounds to use due care in examining those they admit to the Lord's Supper," declining to add such a requirement to the church's admission policy. In effect, Tennent was attempting to implement a "Halfway Covenant" in colonial Presbyterianism--but with this difference: rather than loosening requirements as had happened in New England in 1662, this proposal would have tightened requirements.

In 1749, after the Old Side/New Side split, the Old Side leader John Thomson authored an exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, explicitly designed to aid in the catechizing of his far-flung congregations in Virginia and the Carolinas. In his introduction, he laments "how many

visible Professors there are in this Part of the World, who have been baptized in the Name of the Holy Trinity, and so received as Members of the Visible Church, who are absolute Strangers, both to the Doctrines of Christianity, and Practice of serious Piety." His treatment of the questions on the sacraments reveals his traditional Presbyterian approach to the question of admission to the sacraments.

First, he insists that baptism is not to be administered to any outside the visible church until "they profess their Faith in Christ, and Obedience to him." The children of those baptized persons "who are orderly, and not under Censure" should also be baptized. For the children whose parents are profane and scandalous, however (or for the children of non-professing slaves), "it's the common Way in the Church, when the children of scandalous Persons are admitted to Baptism, some of their Friends, who are orderly, and willing to engage for their Education are taken for Sponsors."

Second, Thomson declares that all Christians who can examine themselves are commanded to come to the Lord's Table. "The grossly ignorant and the scandalous or prophane" must be excluded, but no others. One who has been baptized and has not been excluded by the minister, should examine himself and come. Lest some scrupulous person fears that his examination has been incomplete, Thomson asserts: "Let him but truly and sincerely comply with the Gospel Proposals, and immediately he is prepared in the Main, and may safely come and seal that Covenant which he hath consented unto."

But Thomson was a leader of the Old Side. How did the New Side view admission to the sacraments? Numerous scholars have claimed that the New Side was strongly influenced by New England--did such an influence reach so far as sacramental practice? In 1745 the New Side Synod of New York declared that it held to the Westminster Confession, Catechisms, and Directory just as firmly as they had under the united Synod. By itself this does not prove much. But in 1755 the New Side Synod of New York made its first direct statement on admission to the sacraments. In dealing with an ongoing debate over baptismal practices in the Presbyterian Church of New York City, the Synod declared:

"That previously to the administration of baptism, the minister shall inquire into the parents' knowledge of the great and fundamental doctrines of the gospel, and the regularity of their life; and being satisfied so as to admit them, shall in public point out the special duties of the parents, and particularly, that they shall teach their children the doctrines and precepts of Christianity, contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, and comprised in the WCF and Catechisms: which therefore he shall recommend to them."

The complaints in New York had been directed against the Scotch-Irish minister who was accused of being too lax in his baptismal practices. While there may have been some New Englanders in the congregation who found the Synod's answer too weak, there is no evidence that any minister in the New Side Synod of New York required a New England-style profession of faith prior to baptizing a person's children until 1764.

But is this also true respect to admission to the Lord's Supper? Did Gilbert Tennent succeed in requiring New Side communicants to testify to a work of grace in their hearts? Perhaps certain ministers did so, but there is no clear evidence that the Synod required such a step. It appears from the objections of John Blair and Jacob Green that New Side Presbyterians held that there was one requirement for bringing your children for baptism, and another for coming to the Lord's Supper. But while the tendency may have been to fence the Table more strictly, Richard Webster tells the following story of John Wright, a New Side graduate of Nassau Hall (the College of New Jersey) from one communion season in 1757:

One B. W. had been three years under temptation.

"Such miserables as I," said he, on Friday, "have no place at the Lord's table."

"Are you then willing to give up all your part and portion in Christ?"

"No; not for a thousand worlds."

On Sabbath, Wright took him aside, and gave him a token, which he accepted with great reluctance. In fencing the first table, he saw this poor object, and, going to him with the bread, he said, "I cannot take; I feel no faith."

"But don't you want Christ?"

"Yes; but I am not worthy of him."

"Are you not ready?"

"I am lost without him."

"Are you not labouring and heavy laden?"

"I am crushed under the load of sin."

"Then Christ calls you by name to come to him"

He took the bread, and stood up. Being a tall man, he was seen by all, as, stretching out his hands, with the most affecting countenance, he said, "Lord Jesus, I am lost without thee. I come trembling. I would fain be a partaker of thy broken body; for I am undone without thee. Lord Jesus, have mercy on me!"

So while some New Side Presbyterians were drawn towards a practice that echoed certain features of the halfway covenant, others appear to have retained the traditional Presbyterian understanding that Christ called all who were "labouring and heavy laden" to the Table. The key difference from the Congregational practice is that Presbyterianism had no strong tradition of the "visible saints" doctrine. Rather, colonial Presbyterians had inherited from Ulster and southwestern Scotland a tendency to develop regional communities organized around their presbyteries. Hence they faced neither the "visible saints" insistence on purity, nor the "holy commonwealth" notion of inclusiveness. The tradition of Scottish covenanting permitted the Scots and Scotch-Irish to establish regional communities which proved capable of adapting to change without substantially disrupting the community. Hence while the tension between purity and inclusiveness drove wedges all through Congregationalism, it only created a temporary rift in Presbyterianism.

This also helps to explain why Baptists never took root among the Scots and Scotch-Irish. Baptists affirmed an extreme version of the Puritan visible saints criterion, insisting that the church should be composed only of the hopefully converted. Presbyterians had little interest in starting with visible saints; they gathered all but the profane and scandalous into the church and through preaching, catechizing, and communing, sought to transform the community into visible saints. Hence even when New Side Presbyterians augmented Scottish revival practices with the revival doctrines and techniques of Whitefield and Edwards, they did not offer any significant challenges to sacramental admission policy until the 1760s

So it was only in 1764 that Jacob Green finally issued a challenge to the traditional Presbyterian policy of admitting virtually all children to baptism. In 1766 he published this challenge in a sermon on Christian Baptism. At first he had followed his mentors, Jonathan Dickinson and Aaron Burr in "admitting to the sacraments all who seemed desirous of leading a godly life," but now after reading Watts and Edwards he had decided that only those who could manifest a "relish for religion" would be permitted to have their children baptized (9). Liberally quoting from Edwards, Green identified covenant renewal with a profession of faith which would include renouncing "the flesh, the world and the devil" (7) and professing "that in which true religion consists"--namely a testimony of a heartfelt desire to be God's people (17). Green now declared that the unregenerate have no right to the covenant seals, and while he admitted that he could not know the heart, he insisted that he would require at least the "outward appearance and credible evidence" of grace before he would baptize their children or admit them to the Table (15-17). He concluded his sermon with some admonitions to the congregation urging the greater attention to discipline, calling on those who were baptized to seek God's blessing by owning the covenant, relishing religion, and coming to the Table (27-36).

Green went on to develop his views in his 1768 treatise *An Inquiry into the Constitution and Discipline of the Jewish Church*. He prefaced his remarks by juxtaposing two camps: 1) "those that admit only gracious persons" to the sacraments (identified with Edwards); and 2) "those that admit graceless persons" (identified with Stoddard). This latter group would grant the sacraments to "men of knowledge, Orthodoxy, Civility, and Thoughtfulness about Religion, yet having Evidence and fully believing themselves to be unregenerate" (ii).

Green insisted that to be "properly in the Covenant of Grace is the same as to be a State of Grace, or truly gracious" (1). The unregenerate may not partake of the Covenant of Grace at all, but only partake of the external administration of the Covenant of Grace. He attempts to prove this from the Old Testament, by arguing that God did not focus on the heart as much in previous administrations of the Covenant of Grace as he does now (7). Appealing to the examples in the Old Testament where God refused to accept the sacrifices of the people due to their sin, Green claimed that there is Old Testament support for his contention that only gracious persons should be permitted to receive the sacraments. After all, he said, pointing to the Book of Joshua, the Israelites had neither circumcision nor the Passover while they wandered in the wilderness (37-43). Since only the regenerate can truly be in the covenant, Green urged Presbyterians to require at least a "Taste or Relish for Divine Things" in those who would be admitted to the sacraments (58). Green concluded by asserting that membership in the visible church consisted of three things for an adult: profession, life and baptism; but four for an infant: being a child of believing parents, baptism, and then profession and life when he reached years of understanding. Here he clearly followed the trend in New England to dissociate church membership from baptism. Insisting that the church should discipline her youth, he argued that if by age eighteen or so they neither love Christ nor walk in his ways, churches should "drop them out of their number" (71).

Faced with resolute opposition from even the New England-born ministers in the New York Presbytery, Green finally led a four minister secession in 1780, founding the independent Morris Presbytery on Edwardsean principles. Webster reports that Green wished to reduce the requirements for ministerial training, and notes his objections to Scottish Presbyterianism. The dissenting ministers did not wish to return to Congregationalism, however, as they put it in their letter to the New York Presbytery, "we consider ourselves, in a Scriptural sense, Presbyterians."

Three years after Green's Christian Baptism, in 1771, John Blair responded with his *Essays on I. The Nature, Uses, and Subjects of the Sacraments of the New Testament*. While not referring to Green's treatise or sermon, he step by step dismantled Green's arguments, claiming that since there is no promise of salvation outside the church, all those who want to be saved should be included (12). Blair had previously established himself as one of the leading Edwardseans in the Presbyterian church, but had spent the previous two years as the professor of theology at the College of New Jersey under the new presidency of John Witherspoon. While Allen Guelzo sees him as a slightly more traditional version of Samuel Hopkins, his reconsideration of the relationship between the sacraments, the covenant, and the church, demonstrates that something more was at work.

After briefly showing the connections between the biblical sacraments, from the Tree of Life in the Garden of Eden, through circumcision and Passover, to baptism and the Lord's Supper, Blair bluntly asserts that baptism alone makes one a church member: "Membership in the Church of Christ admits not of Degrees" (9). There are no grounds, he claimed, for distinguishing between the church and the congregation--as though one were gathered out of the other. Rather, all who are baptized are commanded by Christ to come to the Table as soon as they have sufficient knowledge to examine themselves and discern the Lord's body (11).

Rejecting Green's insistence on trying to discern a work of grace, Blair argued that the "visible church consists of all those, who by an external Profession of the Doctrines of the Gospel, and subjection to the Laws and Ordinances of Christ, appear as a Society separate from the World, and dedicated to God and his Service" (13-14). Agreeing that there is only one covenant of grace, and

that the unregenerate only partake of the external privileges thereof, Blair nonetheless declined to seek to ascertain who had received such a work of grace.

Instead, Blair trumped Green's claim to be more zealous for discipline. Blair argued that if we view baptism as the seal of the covenant which truly makes us members of the visible church, then we should treat all baptized children as fully obligated to the covenant. Those who do not live according to Christ should be cut off (20-21). Yet the very means by which Christ has chosen to build faith within his people is through the sacraments. Baptism and the Supper "exhibit Jesus Christ and him crucified" and by the Holy Spirit "quicken and raise the Affections, and enliven every grace" (21). But if we truly believe that baptism brings our infants into the covenant, then we should believe that infants are "reputed the Professors of it untill they disavow it" (24).

But Blair went a step further and challenged the very notion of a profession of faith arguing that requiring a public profession of baptized infants denies their membership: "Are not the signs which our Lord Jesus Christ has appointed and the Manner of Covenanting which he has prescribed sufficient, without the Addition of our own Inventions to supply the Defect?" (26). Those who have been baptized should be welcomed to the Table as soon as they have sufficient knowledge to examine themselves. No public profession is necessary.

In response to Green's objection that unregenerate people should not come, Blair granted that if a man knows for certain that he is unregenerate, then he would indeed perjure himself by coming to the Table; but Blair claimed that very few people truly know themselves to be unregenerate. Instead he proposed the case of one who is hopeful of the grace of God: when he comes to the Table, then he simply obeys Christ (36). Granting that all ordinances are converting ordinances--though only for those who are within the covenant--Blair appealed to the continuity of the covenant administrations of Old and New Testament in such matters (37, 49-51).

In conclusion, Blair attached a short treatise on the nature of regeneration. Reflecting his Edwardsean connections he defined regeneration as "the Communication of a Principle of Spiritual Life to the Soul of a Sinner, naturally dead in Trespasses and Sins, by the Agency of the Holy Spirit" (56). Refusing to get caught up in the debate over whether it was a moral or natural principle, Blair insisted that it is a Spiritual principle, because granted by the Holy Spirit. Certainly there is a moral effect--because it affects both the understanding and the will, but regeneration itself is a "subjective Light created in the Soul"--an "immediate intuitive sense or knowledge of the Moral Perfections and Character of God" (60-63). Yet, returning to his main theme, this regeneration is not accomplished apart from the means of grace; hence we ought to welcome all who desire salvation into the church (74).

In this argument Blair returns to the Scottish and Scots-Irish practice of viewing the sacraments as the bonds which hold the community together. But the influence of New England is evident in two ways: 1) his definition of regeneration, which follows Edwards closely; 2) his description of the sacraments as converting ordinances, which echoes the Stoddardean approach. As odd as it may sound, Blair utilized an Edwardsean understanding of regeneration to undergird his Stoddardean (or more precisely, Presbyterian) view of the sacraments. When combined with his Ulster Presbyterian upbringing, it resulted in the reintegration of the visible church as truly a part of the covenant of grace (something the New Englanders had nearly abandoned), reinforcing the value of traditional Scottish sacramental practices. And in response, the injection of an Edwardsean understanding of the necessity of informing the mind rather than appealing directly to the will only bolstered the traditional Presbyterian emphasis on catechizing and disciplining their youth within the bounds of the church. The flexibility of colonial Presbyterianism consisted precisely in their ability to redirect the impulses first of the Awakening, and then of the New Divinity, harnessing them to a more communal form of doctrine and polity than existed in New England.

IV. Conclusion: Why the Baptists Never Rose

Why did Baptists fare so well among the English, but not among the Scots or Scotch-Irish? Le Beau follows Maring and Gaustad in suggesting that the reason why the Baptists saw little fruit from the Great Awakening among Presbyterians in the Middle Colonies was because of 1) the "formation of the more flexible and liberal New York Synod...[which] made possible an expression of New Side sympathies and interests within Presbyterianism"; 2) the lack of "civil pressure on potential schismatics to join another denomination, as was the case in New England"; and 3) the closed communion practices of the Baptists, "something the more tolerant New Side Presbyterians resented." These suggestions, while perhaps pointing in the right direction, betray a lack of awareness of the divergent cultural contexts in which the Great Awakening occurred.

This paper proposes an alternative answer based on three interwoven themes: 1) the Scots and Scotch-Irish had a deeply ingrained pattern of communal identity which could withstand all sorts of external and internal pressures. This communal identity had its sacramental foundation in the doctrine of infant baptism and only faded where the Presbyterian church was absent for an extended period of time. 2) Presbyterian polity, which was intimately connected to Scottish communal values, provided a stronger authority and more stable basis for the community than the congregational model. Presbyterian polity required the whole community to change and adapt together. When the revivalists tried to push too hard, a temporary split resulted--but centrifugal forces pulled the community back together. 3) Finally, Scots and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians had never developed the "visible saints" criterion that had arisen among the English Puritans, but had welcomed all who desired salvation into the church. While both camps may have sounded similar when insisting upon faithful participation in the Lord's Supper, the actual practice of communion differed drastically, due to the fundamentally different conceptions of the nature of the visible church. Hence, when New England sacramental debates arrived in the Middle Colonies, they found a rich tradition of sacramental doctrine and practice already present, and were therefore significantly reshaped by their encounter with Presbyterian community, doctrine, and practice. The ultimate losers in the Middle Colonies were the Baptists.

Copyright © 2002 Peter J. Wallace