

## Growth in America

Although Presbyterianism apparently gained a foothold on Long Island as early as 1644, there were only a few Presbyterians recorded in the American colonies by 1650. During the next half century their growth was exceedingly slow.

The real father of organized Presbyterianism in America was Rev. Francis Makemie. Ordained in Ireland, Makemie began working with six other ministers in Maryland and Pennsylvania in 1683. In 1706 they organized the first general presbytery, evidently at Philadelphia. American Presbyterianism gained world attention when Makemie was compelled to stand trial for preaching in New York as a dissenter. The courageous Makemie went free when he produced a license valid in any part of the realm. Unfortunately, Governor Edward Cornbury of New York forced Makemie to pay the court costs himself; but Cornbury was recalled to Britain for this severe action.

Meanwhile, congregations multiplied owing to Scotch-Irish immigration to America. Additional presbyteries were formed in the Colonies, and in 1716 the Synod of Philadelphia was organized.

A powerful educational stimulus was given Presbyterianism by Rev. William Tennent, a

Scotch-Irish preacher, who started the "Log College" at Neshaminy Creek, north of Philadelphia, about 1727. Here all of Tennent's sons were trained as were many others who became revival preachers during the period of the Great Awakening. Gilbert Tennent, who became the leading Presbyterian revivalist, split his denomination into two camps in 1741 — the Old Side (opposing the Tennents) and the New Side (favoring the revivals). This schism was not closed until 1758. The College of New Jersey, founded in 1746 and now Princeton University, could not have done its work without this original force of revivalism.

Some of the really great names in colonial history were associated with the College of New Jersey, among them Jonathan Dickinson, Samuel Davies, Jonathan Edwards, and John Witherspoon. The adoption of independence by the Second Continental Congress was urged by Witherspoon, who became one of the eleven Presbyterians, and the only clergyman, to sign the Declaration of Independence.

In the Revolutionary War, Presbyterianism and American Independence were almost equivalent terms. The members of this denomination made heavy sacrifices, and Presbyterian chaplains rendered distinguished service in Washington's armies. No denomination had more of its churches destroyed by war than did the Presbyterians.

In 1788, the same year Washington was elected

President, the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America was constituted with four synods and sixteen presbyteries. Its members could be found far to the west and south of Philadelphia. No church had grown more rapidly in the previous half century, Presbyterians being largely recruited from among the thousands of thrifty Scotch-Irish who swarmed into Pennsylvania and then trekked southward. The acknowledged Presbyterian leader was Dr. John Witherspoon, Scottish-born president of the College of New Jersey, and moderator of the first General Assembly in 1789. There was a cordial exchange of felicitations between the first President of the United States and the newly-established General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church.

In 1802, the Presbyterian Committee on Missions began to carry the denomination still farther West though doing so in cooperation with Connecticut Congregationalists under the Plan of Union of 1801. Later, cooperation continued through the American Home Missionary Society.

In the West the Presbyterians made rapid progress, a leading New School minister estimating in 1837 that 500 churches had been built on the Plan of Union. But the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians soon tired of the Plan, and both revolted against its further operation. The Presbyterian schism of 1837/1838 saw the Old School

pitted against the New School, and congregations and church bodies of both types occupied the stage for over a generation.

The approaching Civil War brought many changes in the Presbyterian Church. In 1847 numerous leaders had organized the Free Synod of Cincinnati (to which body an Iowa Presbytery was attached later) as a protest against slavery. Ten years later the New School element in the South, alarmed by the increase of abolitionism, left the General Assembly and formed the United Synod. The most serious and lasting separation among Presbyterians took place a month after Fort Sumter surrendered; the entire southern wing withdrew from the Old School General Assembly in 1861. This act was the beginning of the "southern" church, officially the Presbyterian Church in the United States, now the second largest unit of American Presbyterianism.

Through the years some consolidation has taken place among Presbyterians, though much more remains to be achieved. At present, the Presbyterian Church in the U. S. A., the Presbyterian Church in the U. S., and the United Presbyterian Church of North America all have commissions studying plans for general union. The good will pervading these sessions is a hopeful sign.

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