

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Heritage

Topic: Reason and Revival (1650-1800)

3rd Semester / Fall 2024

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and His Word for the sake of living rightly before God in His world. The topic this week is Reason and Revival, which covers the years 1650-1800.

The Enlightenment

The Enlightenment led many European intellectuals to argue for the superiority of reason over revelation, which they hoped would liberate Western Culture from all alleged superstitions. The **Thirty Years' War** (1618–1648) and **English Civil War** (1642–1653) had both led to widespread death and political turmoil, even though all the combatants were various types of professing Christians. Some of the leading Enlightenment thinkers included **David Hume**, **John Locke**, **Isaac Newton**, **Voltaire**, and **Immanuel Kant**. While the Enlightenment had many positive effects on political theory, for our purposes the movement represented a significant challenge to Christianity because it revised or rejected virtually every cardinal doctrine of the faith.

As a general rule, Enlightenment thinkers ruled out the possibility of miracles, including the incarnation and resurrection. In France, the **French Revolution** (1789–1799) led to widespread repression of Catholicism, which had previously been the state religion. In English-speaking lands, it became fashionable for intellectuals and cultural elites to become either **Deists** or **Unitarians**. Many American Founding Fathers such as John Adams (Congregationalist), Benjamin Franklin (Anglican), and Thomas Jefferson (Anglican) were Deists or Unitarians. In England, a majority of the pastors in denominations such as the General Baptists and the Presbyterians became Unitarians. Even among Trinitarian Protestants in England and North America, Universalism was very popular.

Continental Pietism

Central Europe remained divided between Lutheran and Catholic states. The Lutherans were in the minority, and a

[illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible][illegible]

[illegible]

denomination in 1811. **Selina Hastings**, the Countess of Huntington, was a wealthy noble woman who became a financial patron for the Welsh revivalists and many other revival leaders in eighteenth-century Britain.

In 1738, **John Wesley** (Anglican) had just returned from a failed mission in Savannah, Georgia. Wesley had been raised in the home of a renewal-minded Anglican priest and had been a good student at Oxford. He had also helped to start a “Holy Club” on campus for students who were earnest about pursuing godliness. After his graduation and ordination, he was sent as a missionary to Georgia. During his almost two years in Savannah, Wesley saw almost no converts, struggled with assurance of his own salvation, and was finally run out of the colony for practicing church discipline on a young woman who spurned his affections and married another man. One of his few encouragements during this time came from the Moravian missionaries in Georgia.

Wesley received assurance of his salvation on May 24, 1738, while attending a Moravian Bible study in Aldersgate Street in London. Most Anglican churches refused to allow Wesley to preach because he emphasized repentance and regeneration, so he began to preach evangelistic sermons outdoors. Following the Moravians, Wesley gathered his followers into “bands,” small groups that worked to renew the Church of England from within. The Methodists were committed to evangelism, discipleship, and social ministries. Wesley differed from most of the other revival leaders of this era because he advocated Arminianism rather than Calvinism. His brother Charles was also a key revival leader, though he is most famous today for his hymns. Wesley’s followers in America were called **Methodists**, though in England the term was more generic and was a synonym for evangelicalism.

George Whitefield

In 1740–1742, a second revival broke out in New England and spread all over the Eastern Seaboard. The key catalyst was **George Whitefield** (Anglican), an itinerant preacher from England who was the most influential figure during the eighteenth-century revivals. Whitefield grew up wanting to be a stage actor, and after he was converted he used his public speaking skills to great effect as a revivalist. After graduating from Oxford, Whitefield followed Wesley as a missionary priest to Georgia before returning to England in 1737. It was Whitefield who

[illegible]

[illegible]