A CONTROVERSIAL SPIRIT

Evangelical Awakenings in the South

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Introduction

Francis Asbury warned of Methodism's impending failure in his 1813 Valedictory Address to Bishop William McKendree. He might have focused on success, for the numbers of Methodists in America had grown tremendously, from just over one thousand participants in 1773 to more than 200,000 forty years later, the time Asbury wrote. Instead, his letter resounded with advice presented with a demanding tone and a foreboding overtone. Methodism, he argued, was full of troubles and challenges, which, if left unchecked, could lead to its demise. The very presence of these stains spoiled the church's purity, and they rendered it a tarnished witness to the salvific truth of God. Asbury filled his letter with exclamatory punctuation and language condemning the faults, and with scriptural quotes supporting his guidelines for corrections and remedies.[1]

The core problem, in Asbury's view, was compromise. Methodists were altering their pure, apostolic order, and by doing so, they were becoming like other churches. Asbury insisted that Methodists' distinctive reliance on episcopacy and itineracy represented the true application of New Testament ideals, for with their own system of authoritative bishops who made preachers' appointments, Methodists duplicated the offices and precedents of the early Church. Methodists also claimed that their practice of circuit riding copied the original apostles' system of traveling evangelism. Many other churches had abandoned these plans long ago, but Asbury believed that Methodists faithfully revived them when John Wesley set the rules for his religious movement. Now, however, Asbury's confidence was shaken, for he saw that some ministers were settling in cities rather than traveling the countryside, others were too concerned with bookish education and the titles that went with

higher degrees, and some Methodists were wavering in their commitment to episcopal structure and authority. Everywhere Asbury looked, he saw settled preachers instead of travelers, and popular opinions questioning the word of bishops and their appointees. Movement and episcopacy must prevail, Asbury affirmed, if Methodism were to represent Christ's cause. If Methodism failed, the religious awakening would collapse, for Asbury equated the spirit of the awakening with Methodism alone. He obsessed that Methodists were becoming like Presbyterians and Baptists, the Methodists' greatest rivals in the early South. Those denominations compromised authority by parceling it out to congregants in varying degrees, and by relying on settled ministers who became lazy, pompous, and entangled in community politics. When Methodists gave up traveling and hierarchy, they were joining the others in compromise, Asbury feared, and that was their downfall. Asbury was certain that these concessions were the core faults in Methodism, but his certitude blinded him to another, greater transformation of both Methodism and New Light religion generally.[2]

Asbury's rant pointed to the more significant change: Methodism had transformed from a New Light religion into an evangelical denomination. When Asbury had begun his ministry in America, Methodism was the model of New Light—an ecumenical religious movement that presented an open message of salvation in expressive meetings. When Asbury wrote his Valedictory Address near the end of his career, Methodism had become an evangelical denomination, a church preoccupied with arguments, boundaries, and distinctions from other Christians. Episcopacy and itineracy were two of the most distinguishing features of Methodism, and Asbury's defense of these particulars did more to emphasize difference than to advocate evangelism. In Asbury's mind, the two issues had fused—Methodists could succeed and grow only by reinforcing their distinctions, for Methodists alone represented true Christianity. Asbury's own actions did much to alter Methodism, for in his complaints about becoming like the Presbyterians and Baptists, Asbury actually connected his Methodists with the other churches. Rather than separating the Methodists from the others, he swelled the chorus of voices proclaiming distinctiveness and purity, as the many churches measured their uses of awakening techniques and mixed these with their own traditions. Presbyterians and Baptists had done so from the beginning of the eighteenth-century awakenings, and Methodists joined them through the era of the American Revolution. Together, they restrained the ideals, growth, and spontaneity of the New Light within the parameters of denominational competition and values. Ironically, Asbury's complaints did quite the opposite of what he intended. When Asbury equated Methodism's practices with its distinctiveness, he changed it. Attempting to distinguish Methodists, Asbury had merged them with Presbyterians and Baptists in the mainstream of evangelical religion, where they struggled for converts. In competition, the groups transformed

American culture as they subordinated the New Light techniques of the awakenings to their denominational ways.

This book is a study of elements of piety and ideals among Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists, and it explores the formation of evangelicalism out of awakenings, religious traditions, Revolution, religious freedom, and denominational interaction. It is an attempt to clarify and develop understanding of evangelicalism by exploring its internal dynamics—religiosity and interchurch relations—rather than by comparing evangelicals with nonevangelicals.[3] The new religious mood grew, in part, from the denominations' subordination of the New Light in one hearth of American revivals—the early American South during the era of the Great Awakenings, from 1740 to 1820. Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists all established key centers in Virginia and North Carolina on the eve of the Revolution from which they spread to the rest of the South in subsequent generations.[4] This book presents the way Presbyterians and Baptists adapted the techniques of awakening for their own purposes, and it traces how Methodists, founded in the awakenings, fell into the same pattern in their pursuit of converts.

Supporters of the awakenings had originally reacted against the schisms and bitterness that were the long-term legacy of the Reformation. They disliked the coldness they perceived in state-run churches. In response, participants from various churches had joined in quests for an active, ecumenical Christianity they hoped would overcome lifelessness and schism. Through their efforts, an idealistic movement developed whose members promoted "true" Christianity that was active and universal.[5] The same goal that brought them together, however, rent them apart. The techniques of revival split existing churches like the Presbyterians, whose division lasted from 1741 to 1758, and the newly organized activists like Methodists caused more controversy and schism with their field preaching and challenges to parish boundaries. Christians variously defined "true Christianity" the moment they thought beyond their simple notions of activism and ecumenicity. Debates created fresh controversies and schisms, and through the arguments splinter churches and new compromise beliefs resulted, formed in defiance of the New Light ecumenical ideals. Ultimately, existing churches appropriated aspects of the new religious movements, and New Light groups like the Methodists institutionalized themselves. When the awakening met the churches, traditional plans triumphed. The awakening was absorbed into the fabric of denominational distinctions. It remained there, influential in motivating evangelism, but equally instrumental in creating intense competition and division. Most important, it was absolutely patterned by the values, traditions, beliefs, and reactions of the several churches.[6] Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists created and re-created separate pieties that mixed the techniques and ideals of the New Light into their own heritages to produce purposefully distinctive religiosities. They presented these to the peoples of various temperaments and

predispositions in the developing nation, creating the religious choice, freedom, and heated activity that would subsequently characterize American religious life.[7] This book examines these creations in the late colonial era, and their results in Revolutionary and early national America.

The New Light revolutionized religious culture, but like the contemporaneous political revolution, the results of the quest for tearing down and rebuilding religious authority were mixed. Proponents of both the political and the religious revolutions clearly identified faults in existing institutions and practices, and the rebels in both events defined their goals in idealistic and universal absolutes. Like the leaders of the political revolution, the New Light awakeners did not seek a democratization of culture. Democracy was an unintended and delayed result of their emphasis on choice and freedom. Promoters used conflated ideals as a means of assaulting the establishment, and they assumed their aspirations were self-evident, based in natural law or God's precepts. They were not so manifest or indisputable to all. In addition to meeting strong opposition, proponents of both revolutions met ambivalence and even internal factionalism. They responded by using techniques of coercion and force against the nonconformists as the issues further complicated. The battles only infrequently pitted Patriot versus Tory or evangelical versus Old Light in clear sides. Instead, multifaceted disputes and alliances developed, creating party and denominational factionalism, guerrilla tactics and rhetorical ambushes, shifting loyalties and selective conversions. Democracy and religious freedom originated not in contest with authoritarian or authoritative entities but in the very competition over authority among promoters of change. Just as republican revolutionaries feared the potential excesses of the masses, so, too, did Presbyterians, Baptists, and Methodists fret at the possibility of each others' successes, and worse, of the intrusions of other religious groups. They had differing designs for the religious life of the developing country, and they all equated their own beliefs with eternal, if not enlightened, truth. The Revolution resulted in a nation divided by party competition, and the religious fight for conversions changed into a struggle over converts and the proper mode of conversion.[8]

The awakenings, like the Revolution, transformed the sources of authority. At the time of the awakenings, state church traditions dominated western Europe. In the aftermath of the Reformation, kings and aristocrats had moved swiftly to enhance their own powers by wresting control of religion (and the bonus church lands) from popes and reformers. The schemers were largely successful, such that people seeking their own religious choices were deemed dissenters, a label that reinforced a hierarchy of religious truth by stigmatizing those who failed to follow the dictates of an established church. Dissent multiplied, however, taking various forms of both political and religious opposition, ranging from Scottish Presbyterians whose alternative state church rivaled the English version, to Quakers and Baptists who offered radical critiques of the marriage of church and state. The New Light that developed in

this context attracted various dissenters who shared a belief that religious authority should rely on personal religious commitment and activity, not just citizenship, coercion, or locale. New Light groups spread easily in the American colonies, where the Anglicans and Puritans often struggled to renew elements of the state church traditions. The American Revolution intruded just as the New Light dissenters and state church boosters were beginning to clash, and the political upheaval effectively removed the foundation of the establishment. In its place was religious choice—a new basis of religiosity the various interests could accept. The dissenters were unleashed, and rid of presumed authority, they strove to spread their own, relying on their traditional critiques of the old state church and building denominational institutions to support their endeavors. In the process they realized their significant disagreements with each other, and increasingly they defended their religious truths with reference and in opposition to each other. Religious authority became a contest between several distinct religious truths, cultures, and styles exercised in the marketplace of popular choice.[9]

The religious revolution that was intended to transform the world became focused instead on redefining the substance of the cause. Instead of promoting the triumph of universal Christianity, awakeners debated whose New Light should predominate. Perspective narrowed, confining the sights of the participants. New Light advocates took for granted the need for conversion and the sinfulness of the secular; they believed that the greater challenge lay in guiding potential converts toward the particular truth and away from deceptive detours. Hell was at the end of the wide road, so it was crucial to divert people from that path and especially its feeders. The first misstep began with the corrupt notions of other denominations. One falsehood led to another on the path toward Satan's truths. Many Baptists believed, for example, that Methodists, with their expressiveness, stood a step removed from the Shakers and their fanatical delusions. Not everything a competitor did was wrong, however, and evangelical groups took full advantage of their similarities to borrow ideas and especially techniques when useful for competitive advantage in establishing religious authority. Doing so, they transformed the New Light from a religious movement into a series of techniques to be borrowed. Both Baptists and Presbyterians experimented with plans for circuit-riding ministers, for example, but controversy effectively killed the trials. Innovation could prompt accusations within a group of diversion and compromise with the opposition. Some Baptists and Presbyterians claimed that itineracy violated their principles and smacked of Methodism. Denominational advocates responded to such disputes by reinforcing distinct traits and identities, such that even as the groups adapted to each other, they intensified their attempts to further distinguish themselves. As they studied their external relationships, churches renewed their self-examination, and comparisons and reflection created even more strife. Internal divisions and tensions themselves reinforced the pattern, intensifying the denominations' debates over their distinct ideals and identi-

ties. In attempts to persuade and sway, partisans took their campaigns public, and waves of publications in the early nineteenth century showed the determined intent of denominational promoters to further define and distinguish central values of their group for themselves, the competition, and the prospective converts. By the time of the later rounds of awakenings in the early nineteenth century, promoters in their advocacy had abandoned the term "New Light" as meaningless. It was consigned to its original use to distinguish advocates of revival from others. That was a historical concern. In their contemporary preoccupations with each other, they substituted the new term, "evangelical," as they transformed New Light concern for the universal into obsession with the particular. The awakeners strove to make clear their differences with other awakeners and to identify precisely who was on the path toward heaven.[10]

As the vision of universal Christianity blurred into obscurity, participants in the New Light generally failed to see another shared pattern, that their recreation of denominational structures resulted in the subjugation of some participants. Denominationalism demanded conformity, and the unorthodox had to submit or leave. There were some protestors, as with the various Baptist groups, some of whom challenged Calvinism and others who resisted associations of churches. Among Methodists, some questioned the authority of Bishop Francis Asbury and his closest council. Yet the larger pattern reinforced denominational consolidation and centralization. The same trend squelched more liberal elements in the churches that favored participation of women and African Americans beyond limited societal standards. New Lights were inconsistent in their commitment to equality of treatment for all members, and steadily the churches left behind their occasional challenges to inequalities. They did so quietly, perhaps embarrassed by their hypocrisy, but certainly more concerned with their competing agendas to gain converts and grow. Denominational concerns shaped the ways Presbyterians and Baptists treated Africans as religious outsiders whose potential for conversion depended entirely on their ability to conform to the precise standards of the European groups. When Africans began to try, and to fail in this endeavor, the churches kept them at arm's length, placing the members they had gained into balconies and separate fellowships and conforming ever more with the practices of slaveholders. Methodist leaders briefly advocated a more liberal approach to the relationships between the sexes and races, but as Methodists joined the competition with the other religious groups, they fell into the patterns of the others. Compromises of all sorts allowed for competitive advantage and a broader appeal, but the decisions to accommodate slavery and gender inequality were made less strategically. The intense battles over denominational identities and distinction set in sharp relief the failure to uphold the interests of many in their fellowships. The churches accommodated a society that subordinated women and Africans, and doing so, they began to resemble each other. All hoped to avoid being pariahs or outcasts in order to have access to

more people who might join their particular church. Publicly each group defined itself as the correct fellowship, and in the process each quietly refined its relationship with its members to meet the expectations of outsiders.[11]

The churches' commitment to denominational distinction turned them away from New Light ideals. Despite all other compromises, the evangelicals would not abandon their particularity, and it became their reputation that hindered their own growth and success in the South. Assertive evangelization took on a new meaning. Nonparticipants had complained that New Lights accosted them whenever they met, but now the participants in the churches redirected toward each other the aggressiveness they had aimed previously at the unconverted. The ultimate goal was more than distinction from non–New Lights; it was the precise definition of the New Light itself. True conversions replaced conversions. Many Americans turned away from the fellowships because they appeared to be squabblers and nitpickers, intent on argument as much for its own sake as for its substance. As one Virginian complained, a person " 'cannot meet a man upon the road, but they must ram a text of Scripture down his throat.' "[12]

The fortunes of Methodism clearly illustrate the relationship between evangelicals, who were obsessed with distinction, and American culture. Different from Presbyterian and Baptist New Lights who campaigned through the pre-Revolutionary South, Methodists were comparatively ecumenical. They compromised their ideal of absolute openness, of course, but they did not abandon the rhetoric. Whereas Presbyterians and Baptists incorporated New Light innovations into their structures, Methodists structured themselves around the New Light. Presbyterians and Baptists shifted toward the New Light ideals, while Methodists drifted from them even as all became particularistic evangelicals. On a relative scale, Methodists were the most inviting to those pursuing the ecumenical ideals of the New Light. During the Great Awakenings, the number of Methodists grew rapidly. Yet, just as the New Lights adjusted to the resistance of the South, so, too, did southern society adopt elements of the New Light, evangelicalism, and the ways of their practitioners, even if the region did not convert entirely. Methodists dominated the era of the New Lights, but they would stumble in the post-Revolutionary era of evangelicals. Southerners borrowed the argumentativeness of evangelicals, and as the change developed in the nineteenth century, Baptists, the most disputatious of evangelicals, rose to preeminence in numbers and cultural identity, overtaking the Methodists who had dominated earlier. That change paved the way for the rise of fundamentalism and the enshrinement of contentiousness and confrontation in twentieth-century American culture.[13]

The first three chapters of this book survey the planting and growth of denominations in the South. Chapters 1 and 2 trace the ways Presbyterians and Baptists converted the New Light to fit their traditional political dissent and religiosity, while chapter 3 distinguishes the initial religious dissent that Methodists introduced to the region and to the others. Chapter 4 examines

the struggles and transformations caused by the American Revolution, setting up the beginnings of free competition. The remaining chapters explore the results of the interactions among evangelical rivals as clergy and laity joined in the open skirmishes. The last chapter presents the denominations' reinventions of themselves in the aftermath of a generation of interaction, at the moment Methodists, at their zenith, gave way to the Baptists.

1

Good Reasons to Believe

Presbyterians were among the first to introduce elements of the New Light in the South. In Hanover County, Virginia, in the late 1730s, a small group of religious inquirers absented themselves from their parish church in order to read revivalistic sermons and tracts. The people explored the New Light piety described in George Whitefield's sermons, and they pursued more religious instruction. They eventually formed a church under the guidance of William Robinson, Samuel Davies, and other Presbyterian missionaries. Joining with other Presbyterian groups that immigrated into the backcountry, the Hanover readers helped to solidify a unique denominational presence in the upper South.[1] The Hanover explorers joined themselves to larger numbers of Scottish and Scots-Irish migrants who were streaming down the Great Wagon Road to establish a strong Presbyterian presence in the Piedmont and foothills of the upland South. Together, they were pioneers for the New Light, blazing a path for more Presbyterians and for the masses of Baptists and Methodists who would follow. The later New Lights would quickly make the Presbyterian presence look insubstantial, and their more vigorous use of revival techniques would render the Presbyterians passé. Soon, both Presbyterians and non-Presbyterians alike were questioning whether these churches were indeed participants with Baptists and Methodists in the revival movement. To be sure, some Presbyterians showed hesitation when the Great Awakening developed, and they certainly criticized the zeal of Methodists and Baptists, who seemed to outperform them in expressiveness and numbers of converts.

Relegating Presbyterians to the role of moderate pathbreakers for more radical Baptist and Methodists lends too much credence to the triumphalist claims of those who measured success merely by counting heads, or souls.

Presbyterians had not failed the New Light, nor had it left them in its wake. Rather, Presbyterians explored the New Light and adapted it to their interests, needs, and traditions. They selectively implemented its techniques to the limits of their tolerance. Their use differed from those of other denominations, and among Presbyterians themselves a range of applications developed, creating a tension and dynamic that directed members of this denomination down their particular path. Thus Presbyterians were no temporary aberration—they were not participants who got cold feet and turned away from the New Light. In their selectivity and use of the New Light, Presbyterians were paradigmatic, setting the pattern for the way of the awakenings. Like the Presbyterians had done, Baptists and Methodists themselves made their selections, variously adapting and rejecting elements and techniques to meet their standards and adjusting the New Light in ways that defined unique denominational dynamics. The story of the Hanover seekers, who discovered both the New Light and Presbyterianism, reveals in case study how Presbyterians converted the New Light to their denominational ways. It is an example of a first evangelical awakening in the South, and of the trajectory of the Great Awakening as its participants particularized and denominationalized it.

The "awakened" people of Hanover would soon realize that their awakening related to that of others. They were not the first Presbyterians in Virginia, nor were they the largest Presbyterian body in the colony. They tapped into a Presbyterian stream whose origins were in Scotland. Presbyterians defined themselves as dissenters from the Church of England; their church was an alternative to the established church in England and some of its colonies. Presbyterians developed their polity, rituals, and creeds against those of the less reformed Anglican Church. During years of conflict over the state religion in England, Ireland, and Scotland, Presbyterianism grew to dominate Scotland. Within that particular tradition of creeds and polity arose an emphasis on the personal application of religion. Parties in the Scottish church advocated personal salvation; they celebrated the power of God and the mysterious workings of the Spirit, and they contrasted their way with the more conservative Presbyterians' rationalized theology and insistence on moral living. Those who favored "revivals" lauded the events at Shotts, Cambuslang, and elsewhere, where the Spirit seemed to have poured out upon masses of people. The heritage of revivals in the Scottish church left a legacy and model for the religious leaders of the mid-eighteenth century who led a new cycle of religious awakening.[2]

Organized Presbyterianism made its way to the colonial South by the beginning of the eighteenth century. Francis Mackemie had traveled the colonies visiting Virginia, Maryland, and Barbados. He settled briefly in Accomac County, Virginia, and formed a church of Presbyterian dissenters to the Anglican Church. Mackemie even worked to establish the first denominational organization in the colonies. Laity and other clergymen, including Josias Mackie, also moved into Virginia and the Carolinas; however, the organized

church in eastern Virginia disintegrated after Mackemie's death in 1708. Some years later Presbyterianism reappeared in the western parts of the colony. Groups of Scottish immigrants traipsed from Pennsylvania into the southern backcountry along the Great Wagon Road, while others streamed in from the south, entering the colonies from ports at Charleston and the Cape Fear area. In the mountain valleys and Piedmont they re-formed their communities and churches, attempting to rebuild their traditions and familiar lives. Those ethnic immigrants dominated the Presbyterian presence in the South.[3] Because they were so familiar with their own religious traditions, they re-created them easily, assuming acceptance and understanding among the immigrant population. The religious seekers at Hanover, Virginia, did not know Presbyterianism when they first read New Light writings, and because they had to learn it, they reveal its distinctiveness. The Hanover church, as the exceptional Presbyterian presence in Virginia, illustrates the rule by which the majority of Scottish people in the west lived.

The Presbyterian church at Hanover began sometime before 1740 when a small group of families, apparently led by Samuel Morris, heard reports of religious revivals in the North and began to explore the idea of personal salvation. No Anglican preacher in their area spoke of the New Light, so Morris and others read whatever books they could obtain that addressed the subject. They began with a lottery pick—Luther's commentary on Galatians—but then a Scottish woman introduced them to Thomas Boston's *Man's Fourfold State*, a standard Presbyterian choice. Boston's sermon presented four stages of spiritual life: innocence, corruption, grace, and eternity. Mankind began life in this world sinless, in Edenic bliss. By his own fault, man chose to sin and thus corrupted himself and the whole race. Only through God's grace could people overcome that state of nature, and grace came only through Christ. One's relationship with Jesus determined one's eternal fate: those who knew Christ and grace would be eternally happy in heaven, but those who were strangers to Christ and acquainted only with their own sins would experience eternal misery.[4] Boston outlined the points with precision, and in closely detailed applications he specified their implications for people. His arguments were carefully reasoned, but compellingly presented. People who read his extended sermon were to comprehend the message and take it to heart, for their eternal fates depended on it. Indeed, the readers at Hanover found the message sensible and urgent, and so they inquired further into their relationships with Christ and the way of grace.

The New Light, according to its proponents, broke into a religious world that increasingly demanded only morality of laity, and dry, rational inquiry by clergy. Influenced by Enlightenment thought, the Anglican Church's leaders explored Scripture with their minds and exposited point-by-point analyses of lessons from the Bible and the writings of holy thinkers. Preachers accepted their title as a rank that bestowed gentlemanly status on them. In the colonies in particular, the church joined with the rising gentry to form an elite corps

of social leaders who maintained their status by keeping moderate views of religion and a distance from the masses. Promoters of the New Light now accused the Anglican divines of coldness, even lack of religion, and they extended their accusations to any church or clergyman who would not support their ideas and cause. The Hanover readers, according to their own accounts, were disappointed that they had heard nothing of this urgent religiosity, yet they turned their energies not toward blame but toward discovery.[5]

The readers knew that the most famous representative of New Light religion was George Whitefield, the Anglican clergyman who effectively broke with his church to travel and preach the new birth. Whitefield made several trips to the colonies in the eighteenth century, and he passed through Virginia as he traveled between the populous cities of the middle colonies and his orphanage in Georgia. The Hanover readers missed hearing Whitefield when he visited Williamsburg in 1740, but they obtained copies of his sermons and added those to their reading repertory. They used Whitefield's notoriety to expand their exploration in another way. Morris and the others shared with neighbors their new findings and religious concerns and drew them into their circles. Whitefield's sermons, like the evangelist himself, aroused curiosity, so that Morris's company built first one, then several "reading houses" to hold the crowds that were attracted to the novel messages. The groups met often on weekdays and regularly on Sundays, absenting themselves from Anglican services. Doing so, they participated in Whitefield's dissent against the cold, rationalistic, formalistic religion that New Lights believed the Anglican Church practiced.[6]

The growing group at Hanover showed all the marks of the near-spontaneous revivals of the First Great Awakening, especially in their reliance on printed revival accounts and sermons. The people's religious concern owed much to their reading in religious publications and news reports that were distributed throughout the colonies and across the Atlantic. Morris sent to England for additional copies of Boston, and he obtained Whitefield's sermons by contacting one of the many publishers of the itinerant's works. Sermons were printed and spread wherever the evangelist traveled in the colonies, Scotland, and England—Morris's group obtained a copy from a man from Glasgow. Whitefield and his peers envisioned one universal, ecumenical church of active believers bound together by his preaching, reading, and correspondence. He and his fellow religious strategists drew attention with their activities, and they spread curiosity with calculated news reports and publications. The religious seekers at Hanover tapped into an extensive transatlantic network that promoted the necessity of the new birth.[7]

Their reading in the promotional literature had the desired effect on the Hanover hearers: they became concerned about their spiritual condition. One man in the original group "never ceased to read and pray till he found consolation in believing in Christ Jesus, the Lord his Righteousness." He experienced what Morris had, and through their reading they had learned about

the extent and consequences of their sins, so that they feared for their eternal lives. Humans were sinful, Whitefield's sermons insisted, and without cleansing through faith in Jesus Christ, people were hell-bound. The ideas alarmed those who heard them, creating an anxiety about their "state," such that members of the reading houses " 'could not avoid crying out, weeping bitterly.' " As soon as Morris and his friends found relief, they directed their concern to others, explaining to them the spiritual matters and attempting to draw them into the reading houses. Constant meetings convicted more sinners, prompted more conversions, and reaffirmed the religious experiences of the founders. The remarkable occurrences in the reading houses attracted more and more interested people.[8]

With so many people attending Morris's houses instead of mandatory Anglican services, the colony's officials inevitably took notice and called the truants to account. Governor Gooch brought Morris and a delegation before his council, demanding they state the name of their sect and defend their practices. The New Light novices did not know how to style themselves, but, wrote the participants, " 'recollecting that Luther was a noted reformer, and that his book had been of special service to us, we declared ourselves Lutherans.' " The interview convinced Gooch that the naïve group represented little threat, and he dismissed them with an admonition to cause no trouble. But the readers had, in fact, gained greater liberty because their meeting had forced the colonial officials to apply the Act of Toleration and permit the "Lutheran reformers" the freedom to pursue their religious interests. The Hanover "Lutherans" continued their reading, their conversions, and their dissent as participants in the New Light.[9]

At that point, however, the general awakening in Hanover began to transform into a specifically Presbyterian one as the readers further explored their religious beliefs and tapped into a developing Presbyterian network in Virginia and North Carolina. The first link to Presbyterianism is shrouded in legend. One story traces the connection to the interview with Governor Gooch. He had Scottish roots and knew Presbyterianism, so when he quizzed Morris's delegation, he heard in their answers enough to label them Presbyterians rather than Lutherans. Another story advocates that Morris happened upon a copy of the Presbyterian Confession of Faith and agreed with his friends that it represented their sentiments; thus they presented themselves thereafter as Presbyterians. Whether that happened before or after the meeting with Gooch is debatable, but the significance is not: Morris's readers began to explore what it meant to be Presbyterian. Likely they equated the term with the general sense of religion and conversion they knew, and as they reflected on their spiritual journey, they found more substantiation for their new identity. Presbyterians believed in conversion, for their confession contained the basic formula of sin and salvation, and Thomas Boston, whose writings first explained to them the concept of applied religion, was a Presbyterian. In the minds of the Hanover seekers, "Presbyterian" was a synonym for "New Light."

They could not distinguish between Presbyterianism and the teachings of Whitefield; they knew only that both taught the New Light, a religious concern for personal salvation generally shunned by the Anglican Church. The novelty of the message transformed their views of themselves and their religion. Whitefield and the Presbyterians had created in Morris's people a concern, an anxiety that their quiet assent to the practices and moral instructions of the Church was incomplete and potentially destructive. The New Light turned them away from their past religiosity—now seemingly irreligion—and toward a new kind that at first view seemed infinitely better. The New Light seemed a new, unified religion that contrasted with their old one. When Presbyterian clergy began to visit the Hanover groups and instruct them, however, their religious understanding became much more particular, complex, and denominational. The visiting clergy linked the Hanover groups to the other Presbyterians in the colony, developed the Presbyterian system of government and structure, instructed the Hanover seekers in doctrine, and inculcated in them a specifically Presbyterian piety. The New Light in Hanover was converted to Presbyterianism.[10]

As the Hanover groups pondered their new religious identity, they searched for other Presbyterians, especially clergy, to visit and instruct them. Hanover first received the services of Presbyterian ministers through the Scots-Irish settlements that grew up in the Shenandoah Valley and western Piedmont of Virginia and the Carolinas. The majority of Presbyterians who settled in the upper South in the mid–eighteenth century came as immigrants from Scotland and Ireland. In the decades before the American Revolution, some two hundred thousand came to America, leaving behind the religious struggles and economic limitations of their homelands. Some settled in Pennsylvania, and many others headed south and spread into the backcountry of Virginia and the Carolinas. Virginia's Governor Gooch encouraged the influx and settlement, for it provided the eastern settlements with a buffer zone of Europeans against Indian intrusions and attacks. These newcomers represented the majority of Presbyterians in the region, and they formed their communities around their ethnic and religious heritage.[11]

The Scottish settlers in the backcountry lacked ministers, so they constantly appealed to other Presbyterian centers—especially Philadelphia—to send ministers on traveling missionary assignments to visit and preach to them. Their perpetual "earnest supplications" prompted a series of clerical journeys, creating a pattern of visitation that the Hanover group discovered. In 1743 the readers of Hanover heard that one William Robinson would tour the Presbyterian settlements in the Shenandoah Valley. Somehow the Hanover group had enough contact with the western Presbyterians to work themselves into Robinson's itinerary. Still unsure of their own religious tenets, the group sent a delegation to examine the visitor before he preached. In their religious naïveté, they could only inquire of his opinions about the few books they had studied. Robinson easily passed their test, and from that point on, he and

subsequent ministers became Hanover's instructors. Hanover became a regular stop for the Presbyterian ministers who traveled through the valley, to settlers in the Piedmont of North Carolina, and back to the Presbyterian base in the Middle Colonies.[12]

Robinson's preaching had dramatic effects on the Hanover people during his four-day visit. His message reinforced the conversions of the regulars and caused the many new curious visitors to leave " 'astonished, alarmed with apprehensions of their dangerous condition, convinced of their former ignorance of religion, and anxiously inquiring, what they should do to be saved.' "[13] Many in the meetings could not contain themselves, as Robinson brought to the reading houses the skill and aura of the preacher. His masterful presentations of the gospel message and his authority as a minister heightened the urgency of salvation. He might not have had Whitefield's talents or presence, but he certainly surpassed Morris's reading of Whitefield's sermons.

Robinson confirmed the readers' explorations of conversion, but he did more to complete their conversion from the New Light to Presbyterianism by increasing their understanding of Presbyterian doctrine and order. Robinson apparently discovered that the group was too enamored of the conversion event itself. He feared that they were tending toward antinomianism—the belief that good works were not terribly necessary because of the all-sufficiency of God's grace to cover human sins and shortcomings. Critics of the awakenings accused the New Lights of making the conversion event the whole of religious experience. Beyond the crisis of sin and the relief of salvation, one needed nothing else: heaven awaited entrance of the souls who after converting could comfortably anticipate their eternal bliss. Any gratitude they might have could readily turn to ease and complacency, detractors thought. In response to those critics, some New Lights taught their converts to live lives of active response and service to God, expressing their thanks for grace and forgiveness. Being moderate partakers in the New Light, many Presbyterians emphasized that the conversion event merely reflected and reinforced a fuller life of religious devotion. Most Presbyterians grew up with careful devotional habits and catechetical instruction; when they converted, they applied the teachings of their church to themselves, then showed their converted state by living moral lives of service to their church. Robinson undoubtedly insisted on that balance of the roles of grace and works in the lives of the Hanover converts. Other clerical visitors continued to moderate the impact of the conversion moment and thus established a Presbyterian application of the New Light in Hanover.[14]

Robinson also modified Hanover's reading occasions so they became more like Presbyterian church services. Before Robinson's visit, Morris and others were hesitant to do or say anything beyond what they read from books. Robinson provided a model of worship and directed the group to pray and sing Psalms at the opening and close of its meetings. When a minister was not present, the people would continue to read sermons as they had at the

start of their religious inquiry. Now, however, their reading houses contained not just New Light inquiry but rather Presbyterian-like worship that framed the sermon with periods of prayer and singing. Later, Presbyterian missionaries Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Blair introduced the sacrament of the Lord's Supper and the distinct Presbyterian method of taking the elements. Presbyterians commemorated Jesus' death in a ritual that inspired wonder and interest: groups of people sat together in large outdoor meetings and partook of the bread and drink. Presbyterians distinguished their sacrament from those of Anglicans and other Protestants by sitting at tables and taking the elements as a community. Around the sacramental event grew days for preaching, socializing, and singing. The style developed in the Scottish Church, where Presbyterians deliberately sat in defiance of the Anglican Church that would have them kneel to receive the sacrament, and the practice came to the colonies with the immigrants. It remained a unique Presbyterian practice through the late eighteenth century, and now it distinguished the Hanover group.[15]

Along with doctrinal instruction and the development of orderly Presbyterian worship, Robinson and other clerical visitors linked the Hanover church to the larger Presbyterian organizations in the colonies. Already the assembly acted like the western Scots-Irish settlements when it appealed to the more populous churches in the Middle Colonies for preachers. Now the eastern Virginians voluntarily placed themselves under the care of the Presbytery of Newcastle in the Synod of Philadelphia. Missionaries like Hugh McAden traveled in the region and helped the immigrants structure their churches. Scottish settlers formed strong communities and churches in North Carolina in what are now Charlotte and Greensboro, adding those centers to the Hanover and Shenandoah regions. Presbyterians throughout Virginia and North Carolina continued to receive visiting preachers from Philadelphia and from the New Brunswick Presbytery in the Synod of New York.[16]

Aligning with those organizations provided more than clergymen; it also gave the southern Presbyterians a hierarchy through which they could test prospective clergymen, inquire into confusing or controversial issues of theology, and appeal troublesome local discipline cases. Presbyteries gathered representatives from the constituent churches to initiate, supervise, and correct preachers and to hear cases on appeal from local churches. The synods were the ultimate arbiters of disciplinary cases and doctrinal issues. Visitors such as William Robinson had to obtain a license from the presbytery in order to preach. To be approved by a presbytery, candidates had to present evidence of their academic qualifications, which included theological and biblical-language instruction; relate their personal religious experience as evidence of conversion and God's call to the ministry; and prove their overall qualifications by presenting a series of disputational lectures and religious sermons. Together, these measures assured that Presbyterian clergymen would be thoroughly tested. Henry Pattillo, who would settle in North Carolina as

a minister, began a journal to track his religious life, in part to prepare for the difficult examinations.[17]

In 1755 the Hanover churches formed Hanover Presbytery, the first presbytery in the South. With their Presbyterian organization now firmly in place, they began to try ministers, including John Martin, by demanding a discourse and sermon, by testing academic qualifications, and by checking religious experience. The presbytery supervised appointments of all clergy, assured that all ministers fulfilled their appointments to preach, and even insisted that one minister desist from preaching because of a "disorder" that made his presentations "exasperating" to hear. For all participating churches, the Presbyterian system provided a graduated polity that balanced local concerns and opinions with the broader authority of clergymen. The churches in Hanover, the Shenandoah, and North Carolina sought out the administration they lacked and quickly submitted themselves to it. By doing so, they completed their transformation from New Lights to Presbyterians. The Hanover group, in fact, discovered a Presbyterian identity that the Scottish immigrants were recovering.[18]

Presbyterians in America overall subsumed the New Light to their traditions. Between 1741 and 1758, Presbyterian hierarchy in America separated into two branches, the result of a schism. The events and ideas of the New Light split the denomination into Old Side and New Side, with the Old generally displeased about the revival, and the New embracing some methods and results. George Whitefield represented the fault line, with his reputation for mass meetings stirring thousands and inspiring spontaneous, intense conversions. Thousands wept as they heard the evangelist, and even more fell under the influence of the new religiosity as Whitefield's legacy, publications, and imitators spread the new ideas beyond his physical presence. Critics suspected the New Lights because they so valued spontaneous and expressive religious experience. Suspicions turned to defensiveness when some New Lights suggested that Old Lights did not know God because they had never had a sudden, identifiable religious experience.

Presbyterian leaders were most concerned with matters that seemed to challenge their traditions. Thus the qualifications of traveling preachers and the evidence of conversion in people awakened by revival preaching created the greatest stir. Presbyterians placed high value on clerical education, as evidenced by their strict and extensive testing of ministerial candidates and by their insistence that their clergy attend schools in Scotland or at the College of New Jersey in America. When William Tennent Sr. opened his "Log College" academy to train new clergy to meet the great demand caused by the Great Awakening, some Presbyterians protested. They wondered about the new school's standards, and they derided its facility and limited instructional resources: although Tennent himself was proficient in the biblical languages and theology, his cabin was no campus and his classes no complete curricu-

lum. His emphasis on the role of preaching to effect immediate religious response (conversion) raised the other issue of the controversy. In traditional Presbyterianism, converts as well as clergy were supposed to demonstrate knowledge of creeds and doctrines when interviewed about their religious experiences. Converts' hearts could be warmed, but their minds should govern their religious transformation so that they comprehended their religious state. The rapid conversions of the revivals seemed to trivialize the process. The cries and noisy outbursts signaled to the Old Side clergy that the conversions were entirely emotional, without proper instruction and background in religious doctrine, and thus lacking depth and staying power. Presbyterian leaders in the Middle Colonies argued over the means of revival promoted by Whitefield, and they parted ways when Tennent and others rapidly incorporated new practices into traditional Presbyterian systems. The Old Side dominated the Synod of Philadelphia; the New Side formed the Synod of New York.[19]

Both synods supplied clergy to the Presbyterian churches in Virginia and North Carolina, but while the southern churches watched the dispute, they absorbed only some of its effects. The Scots-Irish to the west tended to remain with the Old Side, while Hanover, with strong initial ties to Whitefield, leaned toward the New Side. But ministers from both synods traveled to both regions, and especially as supplies from the Old Side dwindled, Presbyterians in the Shenandoah received any ministers who visited. People in the valley welcomed New Side preachers, becoming more attracted to their message to the point of pushing aside Old Side clergy like John Craig. Hanover did reject Old Side minister John Thomson when he visited, and the dispute prompted Thomson to write against the New Side, bringing the fight to the South in a limited way. Yet the South escaped the intensity of the battles that prevailed among the concentrations of clergymen and settled Presbyterians farther north.[20]

Compromise soon prevailed as Presbyterians figured out how to meld the New Light into their traditions. The practices of Presbyterians in the upper South prefigured the understanding reached between the two synods. Once Old Side Presbyterians overcame the perceived threat of Whitefield and the entrenched traditions of education at the more established schools, they could easily acknowledge the importance of some heartfelt emotions in the conversion process. New Lights admitted some extravagances in outdoor meetings and were generally wary of too much expressiveness in converts. They also kept most of the educational requirements for Presbyterian clergy. In 1758 the two synods reunited and agreed to maintain traditional Presbyterian practices and ideals. Yet they enhanced their religion with a few techniques introduced in the Great Awakening, namely, preaching that stirred more immediate response from people, itinerant clergy only where necessary, and inquiry into both the intellectual and the emotional impact of conversions in new believers. This is what Presbyterians in the South had done all along without significant variation. Although the Hanover fellowship began by discovering the general

awakening, the members soon joined other Presbyterians who merely adopted features of that movement into their Presbyterian ways. To their polity, services, education, and creed, they merely increased their emphasis on the personal application of religion inspired by a new style of preaching and meetings. The result was a victory for Presbyterian balance and moderation: the warmed heart and the instructed mind; mass meetings of potential converts who would voice some distress yet could recite catechetically correct answers to their ministers.[21]

This piety is clearly exemplified in the conversion accounts left by leaders of the first and second generations of Presbyterians in Virginia and North Carolina. Leaders' experiences do not represent all Presbyterian religious experience, of course. But because those people were the teachers and spiritual guides of the rest, their conversions were influential models of Presbyterian ideals. Most of the examples that follow are drawn from clerical accounts, although some lay accounts are included. Clergymen encouraged lay followers to convert in a certain way, and they often recorded and related their own experiences as paradigms and references for others to discover and follow. Based on their own education and church traditions, Presbyterian clergy modeled a distinct form of conversion.[22]

Education was the foundation for Presbyterian conversions. Presbyterian parents raised their children on the Shorter and Larger Catechisms of the church in order to teach them the key principles of the faith. The catechisms surveyed the basic Christian and Presbyterian doctrines, from depravity to grace, the Trinity to the Ten Commandments and the Lord's Prayer. The catechisms were written in question-and-answer format. Question 98, for example, read:

> Q. Wherein is the moral law summarily comprehended?
> A. The moral law is summarily comprehended in the ten commandments, which were delivered by the voice of God upon Mount Sinai, and written by him on the tables of stone; and are recorded in the twentieth chapter of Exodus: the first four commandments containing our duty to God, and the other six our duty to men.[23]

The format encouraged memorization and testing, and it simplified the complex stories and teachings found scattered in the Bible into a thematic, organized synthesis even as it maintained respect for the complexity of the faith. For children and adults, this organization presented the doctrines and teachings—including those of salvation and conversion—as a rational system. When asked about salvation, "How doth the Spirit apply to us the redemption purchased by Christ?" the Presbyterian respondent was trained to reply with a catechetical answer that was literate and logical: "The Spirit applieth to us the redemption purchased by Christ, by working faith in us, and thereby uniting us to Christ in our effectual calling." Previous and subsequent ques-

tions and answers surveyed the meaning of Christ's redemptive sacrifice, the Spirit's work, and the definition of effectual calling, broken down into analytic parts.[24]

Education in families held high value for Presbyterians. Parents instructed their children and impressed religious ideas upon them. Thus they reinforced and exemplified the messages children heard from clergymen.[25] A mother might use John Willison's modified version of the Shorter Catechism, aptly called "A Mother's Catechism." Although no less complex in its doctrinal teaching, the "Mother's Catechism" presented shorter questions and answers that were easier for younger children to memorize and repeat. For example, it broke down Question 98 into a staccato of questions:

Q. How many commands are there?
A. Ten.
Q. How are they divided?
A. Into two tables.
Q. How many are there in the first table?
A. Four
Q. How many are there in the second?
A. Six.
Q. What does the first table contain?
A. Our duty to God. . . . [26]

Layman John Barr recalled that his parents emphasized the importance of getting to heaven, and he read about the happy deaths of children. In his autobiography, "left as a legacy to his grand-children," he added an appendix stressing not only the importance of the true doctrines of salvation but also the necessity of family worship and instruction so that children learn the teachings of Scripture.[27]

Mothers played a crucial role in the education of their children, from catechizing to setting pious examples, but other pious women also influenced young Presbyterians. John McCorkle's neighbor Martha Andrews urged him to cast his soul on Jesus when McCorkle was troubled. Later, when McCorkle feared he was deathly ill and despaired of his religious understanding, Andrews exhorted him to " 'try and trust' "—words that McCorkle repeated and pondered until he overcame his fears and "saw the plan of salvation." William Hill's sister gave him a copy of Joseph Alleine's *Alarm to the Unconverted* while he was wavering under religious impressions. Hill tried to avoid letting his male friends see his condition, but his sister either perceived his thoughts or became his confidante and helped guide his spiritual inquiry. Mothers, sisters, neighbors, preachers, friends: all guides pointed to further reading, instruction, and comprehension of creeds and doctrine.[28]

Churches provided important means of educating Presbyterians, and ministers often started schools or academies for promising youth who had "graduated" from their mothers' instruction. Samuel McCorkle started a "classical school" in his house in 1785, one of many that Presbyterians created

wherever they settled, even during their early years in the South. Church services themselves blended worship with instruction. Ministers in their sermons often expounded on points of the catechism or the Westminster Confession of Faith. Samuel Davies's sermon "The Method of Salvation Through Jesus Christ," for example, followed a point-by-point analysis of his topics along a logical progression. His language included words like "reasons," "account," "considerations," and "proof." He explored subpoints and nuances, implications and premises, facets and definitions, so that his sermons approximated mathematical proofs. Yet, built into his presentation were a few main points that he presented in clear structure. He often employed a question-and-answer format that both corresponded to the catechism and led his listeners through his rationale. Davies used phrases like "I hope you see good reasons why I should exhort you to believe, and also perceive my design in it." Salvation was a proven necessity by Davies's argument, and a sensible proposition presented to his congregation. Hearers of Presbyterian sermons were to leave with the basic points outlined in their minds and convinced of the argument made. John Brown, for example, recorded in his memorandum book the texts and main headings from sermons of the Reverend John Blair. His notebook is evidence of the success of Presbyterian ministers in guiding their congregations' spiritual minds. No wonder, then, that many Presbyterian converts referred to the "plan" or "method" of salvation when reflecting on their conversions. They had been carefully and systematically taught in doctrine, Scripture, and its application.[29]

As they matured, Presbyterians continued their reading and scholarship. For ministers, that meant schooling and pursuit of a divinity degree; for laity, it meant continued devotional reading and some ventures into theological literature. Their studies traced their spiritual searching, and the reading their inquiry into that plan of salvation. Clergyman Samuel McCorkle's conversion, like those of many Presbyterians, was a drawn-out process and intellectual search, for his training and education encouraged a gradual religious transformation. The process could take years because it might involve the entire educative process of the youth. John Barr's conversion, for example, was in process when he was between the ages of eight and fifteen. He, like most Presbyterians, could not identify a particular moment of conversion, but he could list the books he read during the process. Even the New Light Presbyterians, who stressed a moment of crisis and application, acknowledged the importance of a lifetime of devotion, instruction, and progress in piety.[30]

Presbyterians learned that the experience of salvation itself was equal to instruction and learning. Samuel Davies literally defined "faith" as the consent to the scheme of salvation. Converts had to acknowledge their sinful state, then understand the role of Christ as Savior. God's justice and "government" demanded condemnation for sinners, but Jesus saved people. Christ not only rescued sinners from destruction but also restored them to a positive relationship with their Maker. When people understood that plan, they had faith.

When they applied it to themselves, they participated in the "experimental" application of salvation, according to Davies.[31]

Presbyterian converts recorded their experiences in ways that showed the strong emphasis on the complex doctrinal plan of salvation. The available Presbyterian conversion accounts read like annotated bibliographies of a metaphorical denominational library. A host of works were available, for Presbyterians had aggressively debated Anglicans and others during the era of the English Reformation over theological particulars and religious authority. Much of the strife was over Calvinist notions of predestination and the selectivity of the church. Presbyterian arguments filled a range that extended from conservative to moderate. By the time the Hanover group was joining Scottish and Scots-Irish immigrants in establishing a denominational presence in Virginia and North Carolina, moderates were prevailing in the Old World, and a very influential "Common Sense" strain was spreading through the writings of Thomas Reid and Frances Hutcheson. In America, other temperate pietists like Philip Doddridge remained the favorite authors of Presbyterians, and while clergy began the debate over Common Sense, their parishioners kept popular older authors in print and in circulation within their households. The issues were reinvigorated in the awakenings—as they had been during Scottish revivals at Cambusland and Shotts—and prominent Americans weighed in to relate the matters to concerns over revivals and human ability to effect conversions. Jonathan Edwards, Samuel Hopkins, and others managed to reinforce Calvinistic notions of God's absolute selection while applying these axioms to the cause of a New Light movement that required converts to actively pursue evidence of religious awakening in their hearts and lives. The tensions surrounding God's relationship to the origins of evil, man's absolute inability, and his active pursuit of faith all required nuanced arguments and understandings. Those were Presbyterian specialties, and clergy and laity both plunged into classics like Doddridge and newer writers like Hopkins who could mix traditional theology with warm personal application.[32]

Samuel McCorkle, who would become a prominent clergyman in North Carolina, kept a diary while a student at Princeton College in 1772 in which he listed the several books from this Presbyterian collection that addressed his progression of questions about his own salvation. He included both the older standards and the "New Divinity" that proceeded from the Edwardsian thinkers of his day. Thomas Boston's *Man's Fourfold State* showed him his selfishness. Samuel Hopkins's *State of the Unregenerate* convinced him that his heart was wicked, that he had never had " 'any proper views of God,' " and that he " 'had never known any thing about religion.' " Jonathan Edwards's sermons and Hopkins's "Sermon on the Law" increased his understanding of his own " 'enmity' " and horrid sin. Edwards and Hopkins both emphasized that reasoning alone could not effect a true conversion, for man's inabilities extended to his very thoughts. Something beyond human effort must effectively present God's grace to the human heart. John Smalley's sermons further

instructed him in the " 'doctrine of man's inability' " and God's justice. McCorkle's discovery of his own depravity was an intellectual inquiry into the particulars of the doctrines of his church and its debates, past and present, over their application. His language describing the process discloses his rational emphasis: "proper views," "know," "convinced." At his deepest pursuit of his sinfulness, McCorkle concluded, " 'I could never raise my *thoughts* to *contemplate* the feelings and glory of God in Christ, though I sometimes attempted it.' " It was an incriminating statement, for while he admitted his own rational inability to comprehend God's ways, following the emphases of the Edwardsians, his very attempts gave him away. He came to understand, logically, the means of God's revelation transcending human logic.[33]

McCorkle needed to understand the complicated process of conversion in order to undergo it, even if that understanding forced him to comprehend something beyond intellectual processes in salvation. Indeed, the study of the theology of conversion and the comprehension of the inconceivable became the conversion process itself. He became absorbed with the problem of human depravity and discovered that it meant that he was entirely unable to save himself. Only God's grace could save sinful humans, but humans were completely unable to gain or even grasp that grace. Yet Presbyterians seized it intellectually. As McCorkle read Edwards, Hopkins, Smalley, and Green, his mind progressed from one problem to another, finally arriving at satisfactory conclusions and a balance of ideas. Each time he encountered a problem, he had to overcome it through more reading, rationalization, and nuance. Hopkins forced him to acknowledge that mercy was beyond human attainment, while Smalley allowed him to see God's full justice, which could vindicate McCorkle from his sinfulness. At this discovery, McCorkle became upset that God's justice was not given to him. That deficiency became a fault in the plan of salvation, in McCorkle's reasoning. Although McCorkle was the sinner, it was God's plan that seemed to be the problem. Then McCorkle read more and discovered his own error: he only wanted a savior from his misery, not his entire sin. He had to acknowledge that Jesus not only saved him from hell but also restored him to a proper state before God, as Davies had outlined in his sermon on salvation. Now McCorkle could balance the ideas of God's justice and human inability. He could understand his Savior "in all His offices and relations," and he could escape the conundrum that his initial exploration of salvation had presented him. Puzzlements remained in his system, but they were manageable complexities that proved true both his inquiries and the transcendent mystery of God's ways.[34]

McCorkle's examination of the system of salvation became his own conversion experience. The complex scheme was the truth of the human condition and experience; once McCorkle comprehended the system, he knew his soul. His study tended to refocus the problem away from his own sin and toward the logic of the plan of salvation itself. A temporary gap in his reading had pointed to his mind's shortcoming and his soul's distress. Like McCorkle,

Presbyterian layman John Barr had trouble finding his own sin when he began to examine the process of conversion. He had been a moral youth, and his own goodness challenged the notion of depravity. On further study of the concept, however, Barr recognized its importance, utility, and application. The system of salvation began making sense, and so he understood his conversion process. Presbyterians like Barr felt considerably more humble before the complexity of theological truth than before the sin in their lives.[35]

Converts relativized absolute concepts like God's justice and human depravity in order to make sense of them. Several ideas had to be balanced in order to complete the plan of salvation, and humans had to master the logic of the plan and weigh the subtle points. The crises in the process developed when converts could not immediately reconcile different concepts, and the relief they experienced came when they blended the points and read about new principles that helped them put conundrums in perspective. In the process, Presbyterians' doctrinal understanding became quite sophisticated, for conversion depended on subpoints and qualifications. Clergyman Henry Pattillo even acknowledged that his own religious understanding might differ from that of others. He repented of his fault of evaluating others by his own standards, and he admitted some relativity in the plan of salvation by allowing that God might use other ways to bring " 'his children home to himself.' "[36]

Although Presbyterian conversions depended first on instruction and reason, the process of comprehending the system created its own emotional anxiety. The reading itself did not force an exclusively intellectualized religious experience. For many Presbyterians, the experience of encountering and solving the rational religious propositions presented sufficient complications. Samuel McCorkle's explorations absorbed him intellectually and emotionally. The logical issues of man's inability and understanding Christ in all his offices became McCorkle's personal problems. Until he worked through the issues, he could not comprehend how he might be saved. That problem terrified him. Once he discovered the solution, he " 'felt considerable comfort.' "[37]

Education was the Presbyterians' enduring foundation that supported a superstructure of moderate feeling and emotional self-application during conversion.[38] Besides sermons and the catechisms, many of the books Presbyterians favored were devotional in nature. Although in accord with the catechisms and confessions, devotions were designed to impress on their readers a personal application of the teachings of salvation. Often they did so through narrative stories and biographies. John Barr, for example, who read the accounts of happy deaths of children while he was young, continued to enjoy such literature as he matured. He absorbed John Willison's *Afflicted Man's Companion*, which contained "the dying sayings of good men." When struggling to find evidence of saving grace in himself, he looked to William Guthrie's *The Trial of a Saving Interest in Christ* and there read descriptions of others' religious exercises, with which he could compare his own. He found good models but felt that by comparison he lacked a thorough change at a

precise point in his life. John the Baptist's experience, which appeared gradual like his own, reassured him. Additionally, Barr referred to studying John Flavel and the Bible, which helped him lose his troubles. Reading poems, his "thoughts and affections rose like the waters in Ezekiel's vision, till [he] lost sight of earth." Barr frequented a secluded spot to read, and through understanding and contemplation he gained emotional relief and happiness. But always, for Barr, such "religious feeling" merely built on a base of proper religious instruction and knowledge.[39]

For other Presbyterians, however, the relationship of religious instruction and personal application was neither so harmonious nor so easily assumed. Impressed by the accusations of more radical New Light clergy, some Presbyterians condemned the stifling effect of too much instruction and declared that the workings of religion in the heart should be distinct from the mind's reasoned processes. While Barr had implied such, he returned to the importance of instruction overall. Others, like James M'Gready, claimed that religious feeling was distinct from religious understanding as a source of truth and as a step toward actual conversion. While studying for the ministry, he overheard one man saying to another that M'Gready had no spark of religion. That prompted M'Gready to review his religious life: he found that while his principles, beliefs, and practices were correct, he had not applied religion to his heart. He needed to understand religion "experimentally" and have the Holy Spirit affect his feelings—an experience distinct from other Presbyterians' mental explorations. Minister John Craig was not so emphatic about the distinction, but on leaving Virginia he, too, insisted in a parting sermon that formalities and knowledge alone proved inadequate in relationship with God; people had to be more involved in the covenant of grace. Craig especially thought that people must live godly lives, which would be their complete enjoyment. Whatever the particular emphasis of individuals, Presbyterians agreed that the heart must animate the doctrines of the head. The degree of animation remained debatable, but Presbyterians generally agreed that they were not "enthusiastic" as George Whitefield or James Davenport were, nor were they "formalistic" as Anglicans tended to be. Despite the reunion of the Presbyterian factions, New Lights continued to stress the separate importance of heartfelt religion, while Old Lights feared that such an emphasis might detract from the foundation of education. Craig's sermon reveals the moderate compromise, that applied religion would best be shown in moral lives, that doctrine would be operative in pious lives. The debate that lingered stayed confined within distinctly Presbyterian boundaries defined by denominational tradition.[40]

Most recorded Presbyterian accounts suggest that even conversions with emotional crises were gradual rather than instantaneous. That fact did not preclude watershed events in the religious lives of converts. Many conversion accounts focused on certain key events—often including entering the ministry or facing death—that sparked religious thought or emotional struggle. The

moment of going to school, like the theological concepts learned there, challenged young men spiritually. For Henry Pattillo, attending Princeton meant preparing for the ministry—a pursuit that was less an occupational choice than a call from God. As already mentioned, Pattillo began a diary to track his religious life, which proved an important step in his experience. For John Craig, crossing the Atlantic Ocean to America from Scotland was as traumatic as entering the ministry. In his case, the events corresponded, such that he was entering a new life twice over. During a storm on the Atlantic crossing, a wave swept him overboard briefly, and he felt as if he were close to death—closer, certainly, than stepping for the first time into the pulpit.

For many Presbyterians, contemplating death precipitated religious crisis. Whether it was a near-death event, the prospect of death, or the passing of a relative or friend, death reminded them of the afterlife's proximity. John Barr and John McCorkle both recalled how death impressed them; Barr even read accounts of happy deaths. Parents, ministers, and a growing body of devotional literature used death as the ultimatum: if people died "unprepared"—that is, unconverted—they would suffer in hell eternally. That ultimate threat, along with the uncertainties of the onetime experience, easily captured people's interests. Barr dreamed that the Judgment Day had arrived. He watched in terror as all the people were divided into two groups and only one went up toward heaven: "I followed them with a wishful eye till out of sight, but remained still with those left upon the ground." Soon his group was ushered along the wide path to hell, but his dream stopped short of his final destination, and hell remained only a mysterious and foreboding possibility. Yet the vivid dream reinforced Barr's fears of going to the unknown—the great Presbyterian terror—and once he analyzed the vision, he redoubled his exploration of the way of salvation. John Craig was struck dumb during his wife's difficult delivery, and he further despaired when his first child died, followed by many deaths among his livestock. Craig struggled to understand the events, which seemed to put him in Job's state. On reflection, he believed that the events illustrated his human inabilities, and he prayed to God to help him resist the attacks of Satan and the temptation to lapse into sinful responses. His neighbors assaulted and tempted him by accusing him of casting spells and practicing witchcraft, but Craig prayed even harder for God's help against his foes. Another Presbyterian, Frances Blair, wrote in an exhortatory letter to her children that a sickness in her youth and the admonitions of ministers prompted her to explore religion seriously and leave behind trivial company. Illness, the prospect of death, and her husband's death had chastened her and reduced her pride, as she reflected. When John McCorkle became quite sick and believed himself near death, his inquiry into religion accelerated. He feared that he did not "have religion"—that he was not a full participant in God's plan of salvation and was thus alien to God. It was not hell that threatened McCorkle but the potential lack of heaven. McCorkle

relied on books, neighbors, and the teachings of his church. Death and the unknown remained frightening possibilities that stirred religious exploration.[41]

McCorkle turned to the sacramental occasion, an event peculiarly Presbyterian and strategically important to the religious experiences of Presbyterian converts. Sacramental occasions gathered large groups of Presbyterians outdoors, for several days, to worship and especially to partake of the Lord's Supper. At the meeting, benches and tables were arranged in the middle of the assembly, and after prayer, singing, and preaching, as many people as could fit on the benches would sit together and communally eat bread and drink. When one group finished at the table, another took the seats, the procession continuing until all had sat and partaken. Presbyterians considered the events as social occasions because they gathered people from great distances, yet the sacraments were important in personal religious experience also. Because they were held infrequently, their significance was enhanced; Presbyterians looked to them expectantly and remembered them fondly. In John McCorkle's case, the prospect of the sacrament distressed him at age twenty-two. He had come to understand the need for salvation and his own lack of religion. He felt unworthy of participating in communion, for the sacrament symbolized God's grace and the sacrifice of Jesus, God's only son. McCorkle eventually would accept the gift of God and take the symbolic sacrament, but approaching the occasion he felt undeserving. He thought that he did not adequately comprehend God's salvation, that he had to explore it further. Salvation meant full participation with the community of believers in the community's ritual, and McCorkle was unsure of his membership. Yet the event itself temporarily calmed him, as it did many other Presbyterians. McCorkle's "mind seemed to be swallowed up in a love which [he] had never felt before"; he did not quite understand his love, the teachings of his church escaped him, and he did "not know that [his] love centred immediately on God or Christ." Yet caught up in the outdoor communal experience, he "loved all the human race, and indeed every thing that God had made." The experience in community was love to McCorkle.[42] William M'Pheeters's mother returned from a communion Sabbath to a night and day of religious rapture that deprived her of her sleep and strength, yet she was profoundly joyous. Later the feelings tempered, but the lasting impression of the sacrament and the religious conversation at the occasion did not. The meetings became many Presbyterians' entryway into the world of the New Light or, rather, the New Light's intrusion into Presbyterianism.[43]

The sacramental occasions, like all special events, cannot be removed from the context of the overall religious experience of Presbyterians. Death, schooling, and entry into the ministry all depended on Presbyterians' training and upbringing. Sacramental occasions, too, demanded instruction and preparation. In anticipation of the events, many attendees read devotional works. Some such books and tracts, like Willison's *Sacramental Catechism*, were de-

signed specifically for this use. Those works helped people examine their lives and religious progress. People believed that they had to be ready for the sacrament, as John McCorkle had felt.[44]

Preparation also helped them through the testing necessary to sit at the tables and partake of the elements. At the occasions, ministers interviewed people to check their basic doctrinal understanding, application of teachings to their lives, and current religious states. Without the proper background in Presbyterian teachings, without some devotional preparation and exercise, the hopefuls would not be approved by the clergymen. Individuals who passed the interview received communion tokens that admitted them to the table area, but those who failed could not enter or partake. Naturally, anticipation of the testing fostered intense efforts in some cases and despair or ambivalence in others. Some were turned out but did not leave; others felt unworthy enough that they jealously watched the sacramental participants from outside the gates. People gathered on the outskirts of the table area represent as important an element of Presbyterian experience and identity as those seated, Leigh Eric Schmidt has noted. Indeed, all the participants knew that the great events depended on a lifetime of study, devotion, and religious understanding in the Presbyterian Church. Distinctive forms of conversion and religious experience set Presbyterians apart from others.[45]

With this New Light–influenced Presbyterian piety, the Scots-Irish and their converts in Hanover faced new situations in Virginia and North Carolina. They first confronted the Anglican establishment. Beginning with William Robinson, one of the first Presbyterian clergymen in Virginia, and continuing through Samuel Davies, Presbyterians were called before the governor and officials to account for themselves. Anglicanism was the official religion, and technically all colonists were to attend their parish churches. But, especially in the western regions, parishes were large, not always well-defined, and chronically short of clergymen. Despite their own shortcomings, Anglicans jealously guarded their exclusive status, and they were bolstered by secular authorities who maintained the Anglican Church as an arm of their administration and control. Generally the same elite who dominated political offices also filled the parish vestries. Governor Gooch had invited the Scots-Irish settlers to fill the "frontier" of his colony, but when clerical leadership appeared, some of his officials questioned the situation. They felt threatened by the ministers who represented an alternative source of authority. They prosecuted the newcomers with their particular complaints: Presbyterian clergy were travelers who violated the parish boundaries. They were also New Light "enthusiasts" who violated proper religious doctrines and decorum with delusions of immediate salvation.[46]

The controversy between Anglicans and Presbyterians did not simply pit the establishment against New Light democratizers. Anglicans themselves recognized the variety and distinctiveness of the dissenting sects: Presbyterians were different from Quakers and Moravians, they knew. Anglicans also rec-

ognized that Presbyterians might have the right to pursue their own religion under England's Act of Toleration. But they chafed when ministers like John Roan publicly condemned Anglican clergy as immoral and questioned whether they were converted and heaven-bound. Faced with bold accusations, Anglican authorities stereotyped Roan as a traveling enthusiast and sought to curb his work. That characterization grew from the disputes of the Great Awakening between Anglican authorities and the evangelist George Whitefield. Although Whitefield was no Presbyterian, and many Presbyterians remained aloof from the evangelist, he became the symbol of the New Light and its practices. To Anglicans, New Lights and dissenters were of a type.[47]

In the particular Presbyterian attitude and posture, however, was another threat to the Anglicans. The Presbyterians themselves addressed Anglicans in a way that reflected a distinct religiosity. Even without people like Roan, Presbyterians in their very existence challenged the establishment. They recalled the heritage of the Scottish Kirk, which was the established church of Scotland. The battle for recognition by the English Anglicans had been fought in the Old World and won in the Act of Toleration. In America, Presbyterians had only to argue for the application of that act to prove legally what they already knew, that their church stood equal with, if not superior to, the Anglican Church. Presbyterians did not need to stoop to Roan's assaults, for when word reached the Presbyterian hierarchy of John Roan's imprudent speaking, the Synod of Philadelphia wrote to Governor Gooch and apologized. The letter not only condemned Roan's actions and behavior but also presented Roan as an exception to the usual dignity and peacefulness of Presbyterians. Presbyterians confidently viewed themselves as the religious and social equals to Anglicans.[48]

Presbyterians were confident in their stance, for moderation defined them and their heritage of polity and relations to the state. They had emerged in the midst of the Protestant movements in England and the subsequent turmoil of the English Reformation. Among the host of sects sprawling through England and Scotland during the Reformation, Presbyterians claimed to be the least extreme in their governance. Placed in a range, they landed solidly between two extremes. At one end stood Roman Catholics, whose reliance on the supremacy of the pope had been tempered only slightly by the embarrassments of the late medieval crises and was now being renewed in reaction to reform. Joining them to the Presbyterians' right was the Church of England, which had rejected papal authority only to substitute the king's hierarchy and an episcopacy that retained the Catholic flavor. At the other end of the course were the ranks of Baptists and Congregationalists who found both papacy and episcopacy intolerable. They chose another extreme by investing all power in the hands of the congregants and by jealously guarding against any usurpation by clergy of any rank. Presbyterians claimed the middle ground with their system that balanced the interests of clergy and laity together by governing churches with committees composed of both, and by sending delegates of the

same to interchurch meetings. The hierarchy of the church would include the congregants and thus represent the best of both worlds, Presbyterians asserted. They failed to implement their ideal way when, during the mid-1600s, negotiations over structuring England's state church resulted in the reinforcement of episcopacy. A resistance movement in Scotland used the reaction against William and Mary in 1688–89 to bolster their cause and establish their polity in defiance of their neighbor. Their fellow dissenters in England won toleration, but the Presbyterians were more confident of the prospects for their middle path. From their base in Scotland, Presbyterians strove to show England their better, more moderate way, and through migration to Ireland and America, they spread their polity across the Isles and on to the New World. There Presbyterians found a religious climate that was unlike both England and Scotland, yet they used it once again to introduce their own ways.

Samuel Davies led and won the legal fight for recognition from an Anglican government in Virginia. In a series of sermons, letters, and arguments in court, he presented the Presbyterians' stance. His style reveals the Presbyterian self-image. Davies met Anglicans at their own level. He published his arguments as a proper scholar should, and he used language and reasoning that matched his learning and status as an educated clergyman. A short passage from one of his appeals to the bishop of London exemplifies his argumentation:

> I submit to your lordship, whether the laws of England enjoin an immutability in sentiments on the members of the established church? And whether, if those that were formerly conformists, follow their own judgments, and dissent, they are cut off from the privileges granted by law to those that are dissenters by birth and education? If not, had these people a legal right to separate from the established church, and to invite any legally qualified minister they thought fit to preach among them?[49]

Davies's skill and training enabled him to counter the accusations and interpretations of the Act of Toleration made by his opposers. He pursued, for example, the definition of a "teacher of religion" used in the law, as well as the matter of whether the act applied to the colonies and not merely to England. Davies's Presbyterian education prepared him for the legal battle and the face-to-face encounter with Anglican authorities.

Davies and the Presbyterians did represent a religious challenge to the establishment, for Presbyterians pursued the personal conversion of souls, as Davies insisted. Yet, as with their polity, Presbyterians presented a moderate stance. The Anglican Church had proper doctrines in general, Davies acknowledged, and although he would prefer that it recognize the superiority of Presbyterian polity, he was willing to allow Presbyterianism to coexist with episcopacy. Conversion, however, was a religious necessity that the established church too casually dismissed. With such an argument, Davies seemed to

identify his Presbyterians with the New Lights. Yet Davies did not present himself as a New Light, for he defended that he merely preached and applied universal Christian doctrines—ones that the Bible contained, the Reformation taught, and even the Church of England did not deny. Davies repudiated the label "Presbyterian *sectarian*" for the sake of his argument and expediency, yet his unique Presbyterian approach was clear in his insistence on applied religion in the context of his scholarly arguments. Davies insisted on warmed hearts, "burning and Shining Lights," but this was a good compromise between the extremes of "hot comets" (New Light enthusiasts) and "cold night stars" (Anglicans). His sermon, pointedly dedicated to the established clergy, was not a passionate address, just as his Presbyterians were not religious extremists. Davies proved Presbyterian moderation and orderliness by concluding his publication with an explication of the constituted duties of a minister, as well as a summary of the form of installation and rituals his Presbyterian Church followed. Davies and the Presbyterians in the upper South simply demanded their proper status as equals in every way with Anglicans. Occasionally they added a dig at the established church's coldness, but they affirmed that they themselves were not religious radicals in either polity or belief. After a few disputes and court cases, Presbyterians gained toleration in practice from the officials in Virginia and North Carolina, and the legal issue died until the American Revolution forced its resurrection.[50]

In addition to the Anglicans, Presbyterians confronted other ethnic and religious groups in the region, and in their encounters and responses, they continued to rely upon their heritage of moderation, system, and infatuation with education to address people of different beliefs in ways that perpetuated the distinctions yet offered the outsiders an invitation to improve themselves and become Presbyterian. Although most Presbyterians met diverse populations as they migrated through Pennsylvania, settlements in the upper South mixed ethnic and religious groups in a way that had profound implications for future religious relations. Their earliest encounters with African Americans intrigued the Presbyterians. Prior to the Revolution, most Scots-Irish in the west had minimal contact with Africans, but in Hanover and the Piedmont, the enslaved population was growing. Samuel Davies encountered plantation slaves when he settled in Hanover and responded to them with patronizing sympathy. He found their religious response to his preaching rather unsophisticated and extreme by his standards. Their reactions both pleased and concerned him. He appreciated what he perceived to be a straightforward, simple piety, and he marveled at the people's singing. But he immediately tried to tutor the new seekers both by teaching them to read and by instructing them in Presbyterian doctrines. Davies treated slaves as adult children whom he needed to educate if they were to be proper converts. They needed to be brought to Presbyterian standards of piety and understanding, for as they were, they showed an overly responsive and emotional religiosity that was grossly uninformed. Their appropriation of Christianity had them steering

too swiftly to one of the religious extremes. Davies responded predictably by ordering books for them, and he solicited funds to purchase even more books—Bibles, catechisms, and hymnals—to begin their instruction. On one level, his treatment of Africans was similar to his attitude toward poor white settlers: he felt obligated to condescend as a minister to instruct the ignorant and steer their religious feelings with proper doctrinal understanding. The Africans, however, were not free, and Davies never challenged their enslavement. Despite his own use of a bondage metaphor to describe the burden of the unsaved sinner, Davies did not question the institution. Instead he merely hoped to transform the Africans into Presbyterians as best he could given their "limited" educational background and superstitious tendencies, as he thought.[51]

Africans seemed to ignore the rules that governed Presbyterian converts. First, they were uneducated in European eyes. Many did not know English, of course, and those who learned the language spoke a broken form that mixed the grammar and pronunciation with their own languages—a mutation of English, to European ears. Although African religious sensibilities contained concepts that corresponded to Christianity's heaven, God, and life as a spiritual journey, they also continued African traditions that Europeans condemned as magical and demonic. In addition, Africans seemed to compress past, present, and future, so that biblical stories became their own experiences exemplified. And they all but rejected the notion of a fallen state; rather than believing themselves sinners struggling to deny a past self, African believers asserted that a "redeemed" life was to be lived in fulfillment of one's inner self. Religious life was not an alternative to one's natural state but the completion of it. Davies likely knew nothing of the tangents, but he quickly identified things that were amiss. He saw people responding to the gospel through inappropriate expressions, much like the radical New Lights emerging among European Christians in the era of awakenings. Those ways were misconceptions, to Presbyterian minds. Davies and other Presbyterians checked these tendencies and the emphasis on experiential Christianity with their own insistence on instruction and "balanced" Calvinist notions of salvation. Without proper instruction, Davies claimed, slaves would have no conscience, no restraint, and therefore they would be prone to insurrection of the soul if not the body. Africans needed to discover in themselves the inability that sin caused in European Presbyterians, Davies insisted, then they must understand the proper scheme of salvation. The differences between African and European religious outlooks helped limit African converts to Christianity, but the process of language acquisition played a significant role also. The particular relationship of Africans to Presbyterians depended strongly on the Europeans' insistence on their complex and nuanced theology. Before Africans could fully participate in Presbyterianism, they had to learn the language, then the catechism, and then all the characteristics of God and the plan of salvation that the Scottish Christians memorized. It was easy for them to fail. Ultimately, it

was through Presbyterian eyes that Davies viewed the enslaved seekers and their religious progress. When they sang, he wanted proper songs; when they prayed, he wanted the proper address to God; when they inquired, he supplied appropriate books. Several African American fellowships began, but Davies continued to fear that they were tending toward some radical spiritual piety instead of sophisticated instruction. Davies sought to shape the "simple" faith of Africans as they embraced the music and spiritual journey toward redemption, but in his own concerns, he was blind to their background, needs, and aspirations. African American tendencies were too akin to the radicals of Davies's world, and when Presbyterians viewed their potential converts, they looked right through them and saw religious error and misjudgment in need of correction. Africans were a different denomination of people, and Presbyterians responded with attempts to convert them.[52]

Before Presbyterians had the opportunity to convert numbers of Africans, they encountered people of European descent who held other religious beliefs, and Presbyterians were more comfortable addressing the differences they already knew from their traditions of disputes in Europe and America. Occasionally they met Quakers, whom they generally dismissed as a religious fringe group that should remain distant from Presbyterians and their potential converts. With increasing frequency, they ran into Baptists. At first Presbyterians simply noted the presence of Baptist clergy or laity. They shared with Baptists some general principles: Presbyterian Archibald Alexander, for example, studied Flavel under the tutelage of a Baptist woman. Presbyterians and Baptists held some basic Calvinist tenets in common, along with some emphasis on the New Light, but ultimately Baptists had a tremendously different religious identity and piety than Presbyterians. Presbyterians always noted distinctions between themselves and the Baptists. Hugh McAden, an early Presbyterian minister in North Carolina, identified groups of Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Baptists among his audiences. He noted some growing confusion among new converts when it came time to choose a church to join—the problem caused division, he said. McAden revealed his prejudice when he claimed that the "waverers" went to the Baptists, whereas the stable, instructed converts joined the Presbyterian churches. McAden's comment reveals the steadily growing rift between Presbyterians and Baptists as the two groups encountered each other, discovered their differences, and competed for converts. The difference between balanced moderation and extremism was showing itself clearly in the religious frontier, Presbyterians thought, but the tension remained muted while a common foe, the Anglican Church, continued to dominate the world of these dissenters.[53]

Presbyterians faced Anglicans, Baptists, Africans, Quakers, and others with their distinct religious identity. In their rituals of sacrament and worship they presented a unique religious experience. Through their polity that mixed lay and clerical leadership, they offered a moderate governance in a religious world that swung between extremes. With their emphasis on education and

complex doctrinal understanding, they promoted an intellectual religiosity, tempered somewhat by their insistence on applied religion and rituals like the communion seasons. Hanover believers had begun with New Light inquiry but quickly learned Presbyterian moderation, instruction, and tempered "warmth." As with everything they encountered, Presbyterians converted the New Light to meet their own standards. Presbyterians assumed that their traditions, balance, and insights would attract others because of their great appeal, academic sophistication, and moderation. Others would have to perceive the Presbyterian design. Based on their history as competitors with the Anglican Church, Presbyterians entered the South with some suspicion of the Anglican leaders, but they confidently recalled that they had challenged the English establishment with their own Scottish Kirk. Samuel Davies continued the tradition and won for his people a base from which their beacon would shine and attract people to them. Presbyterians were ready to assume their place in America, and through the American Revolution, they found another opportunity.