PARALLEL GUIDE 2

The Great Awakening

Summary

During the eighteenth century, Christianity in North America awakened to a new phenomenon—a great evangelical revival (renewal). In response to the dryness of eighteenth-century rationalism and deism there arose a new fervor among the Protestant groups that had established a foothold in North America. This era gave rise to missionary groups and, amidst a general lethargy among Anglicans, the growth of the Methodist Church in the English colonies took place.

Learning Objectives

- Identify:
  The Reformed tradition
  The Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S. P. G.)
  Theodore J. Frelinghuysen
  Gilbert Tennent
  Jonathan Edwards
- Define what historians mean by "The Great Awakening" and "The New Light"
- Discuss:
  The importance of George Whitefield
  The Methodist Episcopal Church and The Methodist Church in Canada.
  The significance of the revival in America's Protestant churches

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

The American experience shaped the new church and has shaped religion in America, especially among the Protestants, ever since. How has this experience shaped you? What do you perceive as the influence of the revival tradition on Christianity in general?

Preparing for Your Seminar

Look back over the previous three years of work in EfM. What do you find might serve as antecedents for the revival tradition that became strong in the eighteenth century? What does this tradition bring to the church? How might it detract from the gospel?

Additional Sources

Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974).

Winthrop S. Hudson, *Religion in America* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965).

Norman Knowles, *Stepping Stones: A Short History of Christianity in Canada.* (Kelowna: EfM Canada, 2001).

Chapter 2

THE GREAT AWAKENING

Background for Revival

The pattern of spiritual revival that took shape in the American colonies was no novelty; it had clear antecedents in Europe. In seventeenth-century Germany, for example, Lutherans fell into a spiritual lethargy by overemphasizing theological details at the expense of the central message of the gospel. Pietism, a movement stressing good works, Bible study and Holiness of life, arose in response to restore the church's vitality. Eighteenth-century Deism in England appealed in the measured tones of rationalism to a natural God who would not answer anyone's prayer. Deism had created a spiritual vacuum, and Evangelicals rushed in to fill it. The pattern was repeated in English America, with colonial modifications.

Rationalism had its disciples among the American colonial leaders. Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* reveals a man who equated religion with common sense and reason. Simple, common-sense morality, guided by moderation and prudence, spelled religion for him. Such views were common in the emerging colonial aristocracy. Thomas Jefferson and George Washington shared the American version of Deism with Franklin, and Thomas Paine—whose booklet *Common Sense* stirred up revolutionary passions—went the next step to atheism. He found no need to appeal to the Almighty for support of principles he believed inherent in reason itself.

Most American colonists remained untouched by the rationalistic spirit that had sapped the vitality of English spiritual life. Their religious commitment ebbed for two main reasons. They lost touch with the old-world cultures that had kept them rooted in church life, and they found the various new denominations often contentious and confusing.

Separation from the Old World

The original Puritans who set sail for New England and the German sectarians who sought refuge in Pennsylvania were alike in one respect. They emigrated as entire communities. They brought with them the customs, beliefs, friends, and families that had given shape and stability to their lives in the home countries. Most of the other settlers, however, came singly or in single family units. Uprooted from their native lands and their familiar social setting, they had to forge new patterns for life in a strange new world. The decision to emigrate required traits of independence and initiative that were intensified by the task of domesticating a wild continent. Many settlers who had participated only peripherally in church life back home—out of custom rather than personal commitment—did not seek out a congregation in which to worship when they arrived in the New World. Even those who cherished their Christian faith often found it difficult to affiliate with a strange congregation. Some no doubt read the Bible at home and led their families in prayer at meal times, but did not join a church. Others found their spiritual energies exhausted by the tasks of daily life. For them, religion became a thing of the past.

Congregational

Life in the New World presented challenges to the churches. In New England the Congregationalists found it difficult to make the transition from sect to church. As a small group within a parent communion, or as an exclusive sect set apart from the culture in which it lived, it could continue to insist on the Puritan criterion for membership: a personal spiritual experience. When congregationalists tried to be the established church for an entire colony, they found the standard was impossible to support. What, then, was the Congregational Church to become? The struggle between Harvard's liberals and Yale's conservatives was symptomatic of this internal dilemma.

Reformed

Some denominations in the New World reflected ethnic backgrounds more than doctrinal distinctions. Dutch Reformed, French Reformed, German Reformed, and Scotch-Irish Presbyterian denominations were all Calvinists. True, their confessions contained slight variations in doctrinal statements. The Westminster Confession of 1646 defined the Scottish version of the Reformed tradition and was adopted—with some reservations—by the Congregationalists. It differed in some minor respects from the earlier confessions composed by the other reformed groups. Yet it was not doctrine but ethnic background that kept these denominations separate from one another. To many new settlers, it was very important to go to a church where they heard and spoke the language of the old country. Variations in religious teaching or worship were not as important as congenial fellowship.

Anglican

The Church of England in the colonies faced problems it had not known in England. The Elizabethan Settlement let people of diverse doctrinal persuasions come into the national church. This was Elizabeth's aim when she determined that the form of worship should be consistent throughout the realm, while theological convictions might vary. Her policy met with relative success, except with extreme Puritans on the one hand and Roman Catholics on the other, who found it impossible to live within the *via media*. After the restoration of the English monarchy in 1660, even many moderate Puritans found themselves unwilling to accept its terms. For most English people, however, it was easy to tell what the Church of England stood for: it was English Christianity—a compound of the traditions, customs, beliefs, and sentiments that had always been there. With all the changes that took place in the upper echelons of church and state, it was remarkable how little had changed in everyday life. By and large, the same priests served the same congregations in the same ways, no matter who was king or archbishop. Once people recovered from the trauma they had felt when the liturgy was translated into English, most citizens of the realm rested content to assume that to be English meant to be Anglican.

Everything was different in the colonies. Everything was new. The village parish that had always been there was not there. The parish church had been the repository of generations of past memories, all of them together defining what it meant to be Anglican. It was untranslatable and impossible to export. The attempt to establish the Church of England as the official church in the southern colonies was doomed to failure from the beginning. It may have been true in England that to be English meant to be Anglican; it was not true that to be Virginian meant to be Anglican. On the contrary, in America, to be Anglican meant little more than to be English. It is little wonder that, as people felt themselves less comfortable with the Englishness of Anglicanism, this was paralleled by tensions between England and her colonies.

The Great Awakening

For the most part the missionaries sent by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G.) were able pastors and teachers. They did much to raise the spiritual level of the struggling Anglican congregations in the colonies. More importantly, however, they imported an emphasis entirely new to Congregationalist New England. Through them the Catholic tradition as it exists in Anglican form became known, especially in Connecticut. Under S.P.G. auspices, Anglicanism began to stand out from the others by virtue of its doctrine of the church and its episcopal (having overseers or bishops) polity.

In September 1722, five Congregationalist ministers, one of them the president of Yale College, shocked their colleagues by announcing that they had become convinced by the S.P.G. apologists that their ordinations were invalid. Four of them went to England to receive ordination by Anglican bishops and returned to serve Anglican parishes in America. It was the beginning of many such conversions. Congregationalists were irate. It seemed to them that the S.P.G. was stealing sheep already in the fold rather than seeking the lost. The influx of clergy who had become Anglican by conviction rather than heritage did much to revitalize the Anglican Church in New England. There, where it was not the established church, it had found a distinctive characteristic by which to appeal for loyalty. In the eyes of most Americans, however, the Church of England stood as little more than a symbol of English culture.

Of all the major religious bodies, only the Baptists were gaining new converts when the eighteenth century opened. They continued to follow the tradition, gradually abandoned by the Congregationalists, that required a personal spiritual experience for membership. The rapid growth of the Baptist churches indicated that such an approach was effective for many who were spiritually starved in their own denominations.

Theodore J. Frelinghuysen (1691-1748)

Spiritual hunger differs from physical hunger. It is usually characterized by a diffused apathy rather than by acute pangs and often goes unnoticed until someone draws attention to it. Theodore J. Frelinghuysen, a Dutch Reformed pastor of several small congregations in New Jersey’s Raritan Valley, began pointing out its presence. He had seen the vitality of the experiential religion still flourishing in Holland after the English Puritans had taken refuge there a century earlier. The contrast he saw in his American congregations appalled him. They were going through the prescribed forms of worship, but showed no hint of spiritual transformation in their lives. It seemed enough simply to affirm their national identity by belonging to a Dutch church. As for Christian conviction, they showed none of it.

In 1719, soon after his arrival from Holland as pastor, Frelinghuysen began a campaign to awaken them. He visited families in their homes, engaging them in conversations about the deeper issues in their lives and praying with them. He preached about the reality of sin and the grace of the gospel and called his hearers to take their Christian faith seriously. He spoke so sharply to his congregations that many among them took offense; groups split into factions over his style of ministry.

He became unpopular not only in his own congregations but beyond them. Many of the other Dutch ministers in New Jersey thought he was too much of a zealot and sided with those of his flock who wanted him to leave. He had begun to enforce a long-standing Reformed discipline that required people to prepare themselves rigorously before they received communion at quarterly celebrations of the Lord's Supper. Frelinghuysen insisted that members of his congregation go through a period of deep soul-searching, to turn from sin and change their ways.

Frelinghuysen's persistence, however, began to bear fruit after more than six years of painful work. By 1726, many of his people had experienced strong emotional conversions. Their faith had been awakened, and Christianity had become an affair of the heart for them. Even those who did not undergo such a spiritual experience themselves came to accept the phenomenon as normative and tried to approximate it by making a deeper commitment to worship and to the church's moral standards. Seeing such fruits, many of Frelinghuysen's fellow ministers revised their estimate of him and followed his example.

Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764)

Frelinghuysen's activities attracted the attention of a minister outside Dutch Reformed circles, Gilbert Tennent, of the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church. Called to a church in the town of New Brunswick in 1726 when Frelinghuysen's revival was at its height, Tennent was inspired to try to duplicate it in his own congregation. He knew that the heart's inner commitment to faith transcends the mind's assent to doctrine. His own faith had been awakened by his father, William Tennent (ca. 1673-1748), who had trained Gilbert and two of his brothers for the Presbyterian ministry. Neither father nor sons, however, had yet found an effective way to arouse their congregations to a like awareness of God's grace.

Gilbert recognized a pattern in Frelinghuysen's sermons: first, stir up the terrors of hell and damnation, then preach the reassuring message of the gospel. When he preached that way to his Presbyterians, he began to get results. By 1730 several other Presbyterian preachers, including Gilbert's brothers John and William Jr., joined in the movement for renewal, and several congregations within the Philadelphia Synod began to take on new spiritual vigor as a result.

Both revival movements, the Dutch Reformed and the Presbyterian, were supported by the Calvinist teaching that salvation comes only as a free gift from God. Neither Frelinghuysen nor the Tennents emphasized doctrine in their preaching. Aiming their messages straight to the hearts of their hearers, they stressed the immediate experience of grace and left theology in the background. That sinners receive the gift of God was the important thing; they could learn later that it came because of God's eternal act of predestination.

Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758)

Jonathan Edwards, however, a brilliant young New England scholar, achieved conversions by a direct appeal to Calvinist theology. In 1727 he came to Northampton, Massachusetts, to assist his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard (1643-1729), the minister of the Congregational Church there. At his grandfather's death two years later, he was called to succeed him as minister. As a tutor at Yale, before coming to Northampton, he saw in Massachusetts a theological trend that distressed him. The rationalistic tenor of the eighteenth century had prompted many New England Congregationalists to consider the doctrine of original sin an affront to common sense.

Human beings were not, they said, totally depraved. The mental capacity God has given us not only renders us capable of doing great things, but more importantly it provides our only basis of moral responsibility. Reason alone enables us to distinguish right from wrong. The doctrine of original sin, they said, makes nonsense of moral responsibility.

The argument was not new. Lutherans had fought it out in debate between the Philippists (followers of Philip Melancthon) and the strict Lutherans; Roman Catholics addressed it in the Molinist controversy. (Luis de Molina, a sixteenth century Jesuit argued that, given divine grace, the human will was free.) But Edwards believed he saw a direct connection between this view, which he compared to Arminianism (see Year 3), and the moral laxity he saw around him. He observed an attitude of complacency about life that disposed people to take the moral demands of Christianity too lightly. Rather than fostering moral responsibility, the new perspective was undermining it by removing the threat of the judgment that was absolutely inescapable except for the grace of God.

Edwards first tried to reverse the trend toward moral and spiritual indifference by preaching in a fairly low key to the young people of Northampton. They responded to his pastoral concern for them but seemed unaffected by his sermons. Meeting with them in small groups, he persuaded them to behave with greater decorum and go to church more regularly—little more.

In 1734, however, the earnest former tutor changed his approach. Putting aside his exhortations, he preached a series of five sermons on the doctrine of justification by faith alone. He read them to his congregations, much as he would have lectured to a class at Yale. His tightly-knit theological discourses could not have sounded less like the emotional extemporaneous preaching of the New Jersey revivalists. But they accomplished all he had hoped; his hearers began to have conversion experiences.

Without consciously planning it, Edwards had followed Gilbert Tennent's pattern for preaching: first describe the terrors of judgment and then speak the good news of redemption. He made his appeal in his own style—calm, reasoned, scholarly tones quite different from Tennent's skillful oratory. The results were the same. By 1736 the revival had spread to several towns around Northampton, with Edwards in great demand as a preacher. In 1737 he published a treatise called *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton.* In England, John Wesley read it; George Whitefield happened to come across it during his first visit to Georgia in 1738.

George Whitefield (1714-1770)

Frelinghuysen, the Tennents, and Edwards had all fed the souls of people suffering from spiritual hunger. But their work was limited to their immediate surroundings. It took George Whitefield to spread revivalism through the American colonies and precipitate the Great Awakening. His first visit to Georgia in 1738 had proved he was a powerful preacher who evoked considerable immediate response. But his work in Georgia had no lasting effects. It had to be regarded as little more than an exciting interlude: the Southern colonies had not yet produced their own revivals. When he returned from England a year later, going through Philadelphia on his way back to

Georgia, he was persuaded to remain in the city long enough to preach in some of the churches there.

Success

As an Anglican priest, Whitefield preached to the Anglican congregation first, then accepted invitations to speak from the pulpits of other denominations. He also went out in the open air to preach, as he had to the English coal miners. The steps of the court house served as his pulpit. Large crowds gathered to hear him in the evenings. His success in Philadelphia was as great as it had been the year before in Georgia. He was now working on ground that had been prepared for him. William Tennent invited him to go on a preaching tour from Philadelphia to New York where congregations had already been aroused by earlier revivalist preachers. Much encouraged by his reception, Whitefield abandoned his earlier plans to sail from Philadelphia to Savannah, where he wanted to build an orphanage. Instead, he went there by land, preaching all along the way wherever people would listen to him.

After a brief stay in Savannah, he returned to Philadelphia and from there began a tour of New England. Once again throngs of people came to hear his powerful oratory. Harvard and Yale welcomed him, and Jonathan Edwards was his host at Northampton. He represented a new kind of preacher—a man who crossed denominational lines as though they did not exist and for whom any place was a suitable pulpit. Many preachers copied his style, as Wesley had in England. But his chief lasting effect was in spreading experiential Christianity throughout the colonies, liberating it from the isolated pockets in which it had sprung up, and in ignoring the theological and cultural differences that separated the denominations. Wherever his influence was felt, theological boundaries disappeared in the wake of a Christian faith defined in terms of individual experience of salvation. He made three other trips to the colonies. A fourth, to Massachusetts in 1770, was cut short by his death.

By 1740 the Great Awakening was under way, except among Anglicans and Lutherans. Whitefield had been received unsympathetically by many of his Anglican colleagues, who objected to his style as well as his personalistic theology. Lutherans were largely untouched by revivalism because Muhlenberg was creating support for the foundation of enough Lutheran congregations to meet the needs of the burgeoning German immigration. The growth that resulted from his efforts made revival unnecessary.

Opposition

The awakening affected most of the other major denominations, however, and met with a ready welcome at first. Before long, however, a reaction began to set in. Gilbert Tennent and Whitefield himself made some unguarded statements about clergy they considered not fully converted. Epithets such as “pharisee-teachers,” “blind men,” and men who did not “experientially know Christ” understandably struck sparks from the ministers to whom they were addressed. Many of the new evangelists who joined their efforts to the cause of the awakening were even more sharp-tongued.

At a meeting in 1741 the Philadelphia Synod of the Presbyterian Church expelled Tennent’s revivalist party. The ousted group, comprising twenty-two ministers in all, formed a new Synod of New York which remained as a separate branch of the Presbyterian Church for seventeen years until the breach was healed in 1758. By that time the revivalists had softened their approach, and the more positive aspects of the awakening had proved to the others that it was a movement of lasting value.

In Massachusetts the new movement ran into opposition, principally from Charles Chauncey, minister of the Congregational First Church of Boston, one of the rationalists whom Edwards classified as an Arminian. He denounced enthusiasm from his pulpit in an extended series of barrages. The faculties of Harvard and Yale, stung by Whitefield's declaration that nothing could be hoped for from clergy trained at their institutions, joined in deploring Whitefield's methods and his judgmental attitude. New England Congregationalism was split between the traditional Old Lights and the New Lights, those who favored the revival.

The movement produced several lasting results. It attracted countless converts; all the denominations involved in it grew much larger. As people increased their commitment to the churches, they also became more aware of social problems; missionary work and charitable enterprises were undertaken for the benefit of Native Americans, slaves, and poor whites. Several new colleges were founded to train the larger number of clergy needed to serve the new congregations. On the spiritual side, there arose among Americans a notion that God was preparing a special destiny for the colonies of the New World. More and more frequently, preachers envisioned colonists as having made a new Exodus across a new body of water, the Atlantic, to a new Promised Land.

At the movement's height, many had wanted to purify the churches of all but the converted. Now they began to fear that such a goal would not be achieved. Edwards himself was dismissed from his post at Northampton for refusing to admit to his congregation anyone who had not shown signs of a spiritual experience. The Baptists, who had come into existence when the Massachusetts Bay Colony experimented with the halfway covenant, now once again became beneficiaries, as dissatisfied zealots left the Congregational Church to join them.

The New Light in Canada

Nova Scotia had a religious revival in the 1770s and 1780s, led by preacher Henry Alline. A Congregationalist from Rhode Island, he settled in Nova Scotia with his parents at the age 12. As a young man, after an intense religious experience, he traveled the area calling on people to uphold the "New Light" amid news of the political upheaval in the Thirteen Colonies. The revival tradition continued with the preaching of Freeborn Garretson, a Methodist minister from Maryland. The New Light movement splintered into other groups. Some became Baptists, today one of the leading denominations in the Maritime provinces of Canada.

Methodism—Devereux Jarratt (1733-1801)

American Methodism began as a delayed Anglican version of the awakening, long after the movement had run its course in the other denominations. Devereux Jarratt, rector of the Anglican parish at Bath, Virginia, had sought ordination in the Church of England as a result of his own conversion experience. As a young man in Virginia he was nominally a member of the Anglican church, solely because it was the established church and he had not cared enough about religion to join any other.

Through his studies he became increasingly aware of his own sinfulness but found no way to experience joy or peace. Meanwhile, Presbyterian revivalists had carried the message of the Great Awakening into the South, and Jarratt began to go to hear them. It was a great contrast to hear such fiery exposition of the doctrines of sin and salvation after long years of listening to the ethical exhortations that characterized most Anglican preaching. His own experience of salvation occurred while he was reading a passage of scripture. Of that moment he later wrote, "The comforts I then felt were beyond expression, and far superior to anything I had ever known before that memorable hour . . . . It was a little heaven on earth—so sweet, so ravishing, so delightful. I uttered not a word, but silently rejoiced in God my Saviour."

In the spring of 1762, Jarratt sailed for England and presented himself to the bishop of London for ordination. By this time he had read deeply in scripture and theology and was judged well prepared by the bishop. He was ordained deacon at Christmas, 1762, and priest one week later. While in England he met both Whitefield and John Wesley and heard them preach—without being greatly impressed.

On his return to Virginia in 1763 he was called as rector at Bath. The sobering reality of his responsibilities pressed on him as he saw the apathy of his congregation and its almost complete ignorance of the Christian religion. The Calvinist view of original sin and divine grace had shaped his theology, and the only effective style of preaching he knew was what he had heard from the Presbyterian evangelists. Such preaching was entirely foreign to his parishioners. He persisted in it, however, and as he records in his journal, "In the year 1765, the power of God was more sensibly felt by a few. These were constrained to apply to me, and inquire, 'What they must do to be saved?'"

Soon Jarratt embarked on a preaching career that resembled those of the northern evangelists two decades earlier; he began to preach in private homes and from pulpits wherever they were open to him. Many Anglican priests challenged him, calling him "an enthusiast, fanatic, visionary, dissenter, Presbyterian, madman, and what not."

Baptist Opposition

The major threat to Jarratt's work came from the Baptists rather than from his fellow Anglicans, however. In 1769 Baptist evangelists came down from the North, extremists of the revivalist movement in New England who had found even the awakened Congregational Church too lax. Their attacks on the Anglican Church in Virginia and its clergy knew no bounds. Jarratt himself was included in their condemnation on the grounds that he had the form of evangelical faith but still retained the trappings of the unreformed—a reference to the liturgical framework in which Anglican worship was set. Jarratt knew the Baptists were undermining his own evangelistic aims; their attacks confirmed the worst suspicions his fellow priests had been harboring about his own enthusiasm.

Methodist Influence

The Methodist movement in England was still operating within the Church of England. (For backgrond see Year 3, chapter 33.) Wesley firmly enforced his rule that no lay preacher was to perform any sacramental function. In 1766 two Methodist immigrants arrived in America, one in New York and the other in Maryland. In 1769 Wesley sent the first officially appointed lay minister who was followed soon after by seven more. When Robert Williams, a Methodist lay preacher, arrived in Virginia in 1771, Jarratt made his first reacquaintance with Methodism since his meeting with Wesley and Whitefield in England years earlier.

Alliance with Methodists

Williams assured Jarratt that the Methodists were loyal members of the Church of England, determined not to usurp any of the authority or functions of the clergy. He often recited the motto that Wesley constantly repeated: "He that leaves the Church of England leaves the Methodists." Jarratt determined then and there to encourage the Methodist revivals as a counter to the Baptists and as a means of carrying his own evangelistic work further. Methodism immediately began to spread throughout Virginia and into Maryland. With Jarratt's example and the continued assurances that the Methodist societies served only to renew the spiritual vitality of church people, many Anglican parishes lent support to the movement.

As large numbers of converts began flooding the societies, however, the Methodists' promise not to administer the sacrament of baptism or to celebrate the Eucharist was tested. Jarratt himself traveled long distances to administer the sacraments to the throngs that assembled wherever the itinerant Methodist preachers went, but there were not enough Anglican clergy to supply the need. Some lay ministers, responding to the lack of duly ordained clergy, violated Wesley's strict orders to observe Anglican rules requiring episcopal ordination.

Protests flew to Wesley in England, and he at first tried to enforce his prohibition against non-episcopal ordination. When the American Revolution broke out, however, further resistance from Wesley was impossible. Anglican clergy, especially the S.P.G. missionaries, whose salaries were paid from England, began to leave the colonies, either for England or for Canada, making the supply of clergy who could minister to the Methodists even more inadequate than it had been. Wesley finally consented to ordain his own clergy.

The Methodist Episcopal Church

In 1784 a General Conference of Methodists was held in Baltimore to organize the Methodist Episcopal Church in America. Thomas Coke (1747-1814), a priest in the Church of England, had been sent to America by Wesley, authorized to ordain clergy and given the title superintendent. Wesley refused to use the title bishop; he had convinced himself that authority to ordain was contained in the presbyteral order, but he was equally certain that the episcopate was a distinct order. At the General Conference, Coke ordained Francis Asbury, who had been sent as a lay missionary to America in 1771, making him deacon, presbyter, and superintendent. Jarratt felt himself betrayed. The movement that he prayed would bring evangelical vitality to Anglicanism in America had abandoned the church that sponsored it.

In fact that church had not been willing to embrace his movement. It always held revivalism suspect, and when the revolution drew much of its clerical leadership into the English cause, evangelical Anglicanism had no recourse. American Methodism was launched, and Anglicanism faced many lean years before Jarratt's hopes began to be fulfilled in the evangelical movement after the Revolutionary War.

The Methodists in Canada

Methodist missions began in Newfoundland, and Methodist settlers arrived from England to Nova Scotia in the 1770s. At the time of the American Revolution, there were those who supported the British cause. After the war, about 40,000 Loyalists fled to Canada. They were members of many religious groups, Methodists among them. From 1800 to 1855, Methodists were part of the English Wesleyan Conference. In 1855, a conference of eastern British America was formed. Methodism was also strong among Loyalists and British settlers in Upper Canada (now Ontario). In 1812, there were 13 Methodist preachers in the province and only 6 Church of England clergy. Their strong commitment to education led to the founding of schools and universities. Methodist minister and educator Egerton Ryerson became superintendent of education, working to establish the public school system in Upper Canada.