

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Green, American Christianity, Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Roger Green's lecture on "Religion and the American Revolution," part of a series on American Christianity, examines the **First Great Awakening's** lasting societal and theological impact, including the elevation of the laity and a new humanitarian impulse. The lecture then shifts to **deism** as a significant 18th-century religious philosophy characterized by reason and natural theology, contrasting it with theism and noting orthodoxy's response. Finally, Dr. Green presents a thesis that **most of the key Founding Fathers** were significantly influenced by deist thought rather than evangelical Christianity, using Thomas Jefferson and the ideas of Rousseau's *Social Contract* to support this view and highlighting the philosophical basis of the Declaration of Independence. The lecture concludes by inviting discussion and contrasting this perspective with Puritan and Roger Williams' approaches to faith and governance.

2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 7 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Church History → American Christianity).



Greenk_AmXy_Sessi
on07.mp3

3. Briefing Document: Green, American Christianity, Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution

Briefing Document: Religion and the American Revolution

This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas presented in Dr. Roger Green's Session 7 lecture on "Religion and the American Revolution," part of his teaching on American Christianity. The lecture covers the results of the First Great Awakening, the rise of Deism, the political and religious theories of the Founding Fathers, and the reaction of churches to the Revolution.

I. Results of the First Great Awakening:

Dr. Green emphasizes the profound impact of the First Great Awakening on American life and culture, extending beyond theology to significant social contributions.

- **Elevation of the Common Person and Lay Activity:** The Awakening empowered the laity, granting them new roles and opportunities within church life. They could "speak in public," "read the Bible in public," and actively participate in the congregation beyond traditional roles. This stressed "lay activity" and introduced "new roles of leadership in the church" shared with the clergy.
- **Personal Independence in Religious Life:** Freedom of religious choice fostered personal independence, which Dr. Green suggests had implications for political life as well. This aligns with the growing desire for the "separation of church and state," a principle valued by groups who had experienced state oppression in Europe, such as Baptists, Roman Catholics, and some Puritans.
- **New Humanitarian Impulse:** The emphasis on the Matthew 22 passage ("love God, love your neighbor") became central. Figures like John Wesley defined "neighbor" as "the poorest among you" and "the one who is most helpless among you." George Whitefield's building of an orphanage in Georgia is presented as a key example of this emerging humanitarian impulse.
- **New Forms of Assembly:** The Awakening fostered new social contexts for assembly beyond traditional church buildings. These gatherings often took place "out in the open air" and were accessible to everyone, regardless of church membership. Crucially, these new forms of assembly provided an opportunity to "criticize authority" openly and publicly, a characteristic that would carry over into the political sphere.

- **Sovereignty of the People:** The Awakening contributed to the growing idea of the "sovereignty of the people," which became "critical to political office." Leadership was no longer solely based on connections, wealth, or power, but increasingly on the will of the people expressed publicly.
- **First Stage of the American Revolution:** Dr. Green quotes a strong statement viewing the First Great Awakening as nothing less than "the first stage of the American Revolution." He posits the question of whether the Revolution would have occurred without the Awakening's profound impact.
- **Emergence of "Evangelical":** The individuals involved in the First Great Awakening considered themselves "evangelical," a term that resurfaced from the Reformation and was strongly used by Wesley in England during the concurrent Wesleyan Revival. While the term would evolve in the future, it was a self-descriptor for many during this period.

II. Deism in the 18th Century (Age of Reason):

Dr. Green then transitions to the 18th century, characterized as the "Age of Reason" or "Age of Rationality," and discusses the influential religious philosophy of Deism.

- **Characteristics of the Age of Reason:** Modern philosophy emphasized reason, leading to skepticism about aspects of traditional Christianity perceived as "unreasonable" or "not being able to be measured with what is reasonable, what is rational."
- **Natural Theology:** Theology based on reason and observation of the natural world gained prominence. The beauty, order, and design of the world were seen as evidence of a creator. However, Dr. Green points out the flaws of natural theology, including its downplaying of "revealed theology" (Scripture, Christ) and its difficulty in explaining natural disasters and suffering.
- **Rejection of Religious Wars:** The numerous religious wars in Europe led to disillusionment and a desire for a more "reasonable kind of approach to life and to religion."
- **John Locke's Influence:** John Locke's book, "The Reasonableness of Christianity," argued that the basic truths of Christianity are rational and can be discerned by reason, heavily relying on natural theology. While Locke still used the Bible, his followers increasingly discarded it, believing reason alone was sufficient. Locke is seen as crucial in shaping what became known as Deism.

- **Definition of Deism:** Deism is presented as a "religious philosophy" or "religious worldview" that began in England and spread to America. It posits a distant God who "wound up the world like a clock" and does not actively intervene in human affairs.
- **Deistic Beliefs: Monotheism (Unitarianism):** Deists believed in one God but rejected the Trinity, evolving into Unitarianism.
- **Sin (Not Original Sin):** They acknowledged sin as a result of free will but denied the doctrine of original sin.
- **Emphasis on Morality and Ethics:** Deists strongly emphasized the possibility of living a virtuous and moral life, unhindered by original sin.
- **Afterlife (Rewards and Punishments):** Early Deists generally believed in an afterlife with rewards for virtue and punishment for wrongdoing. This later evolved into Universalism within Unitarianism, the belief that all people will eventually enjoy the rewards of heaven.
- **Key Deist Writers: John Toland ("Christianity Not Mysterious"):** Argued that nothing in the Bible is above or contrary to reason, suggesting that any such elements should be discarded.
- **Matthew Tindall ("Christianity as Old as Creation"):** Upheld reason as the primary means of understanding God, viewing Scripture not as divine revelation but as a word of God apprehended through reason. He saw Christianity as reflecting the order, beauty, and design of creation.
- **Orthodox Response to Deism:** Orthodox Christianity responded to the growing popularity of Deism in three main ways:
 - **Acknowledging Common Ground:** Agreeing with Deists on the order, beauty, and design of the world, finding support for this in the Old Testament and even Calvin's writings.
 - **Defending the Entire Biblical Record:** Asserting that the Bible contains not just reasonable truths but also miracles, prophecies, and the incarnation – mysteries that Deists often ignored.
 - **Faith Seeking Understanding:** Arguing that while reason is important for understanding God, there are limits to human rationality, and faith is necessary to embrace the mysteries of God, particularly the incarnation of Christ. Jonathan Edwards is mentioned as one figure who responded to the Deists.

III. Political and Religious Theory of the Founding Fathers:

Dr. Green presents a controversial thesis that most of the key Founding Fathers were not evangelical Christians but were significantly influenced by Deism in their religious and political thinking.

- **Influence of Deism:** He argues that the "Founding Movers and Shakers" were largely not evangelical Christians and that Deistic thinking profoundly shaped their views.
- **Thomas Jefferson as an Example:** Jefferson is presented as a clear example of a Deist, citing his creation of the "Jefferson Bible," where he removed the miracles of Jesus because he deemed them "irrational and unreasonable." Jefferson sought a "very tame" and "rational 18th-century Jesus."
- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau and "The Social Contract":** Rousseau's "Social Contract" is highlighted as a highly influential text on Jefferson and other Founding Fathers, presenting a deistic perspective on politics and society. Key points from the book include:
 - **Denial of the Divine Right of Kings:** Rousseau argued that political leadership does not come from divine right but from the people.
 - **General Will of the People:** Laws should reflect the "general will of the people" and not be imposed by a monarch.
 - **Social Contract:** This involves safeguarding individual freedom while establishing a just government to care for the common good.
- Dr. Green emphasizes the book's significant influence on the thinking of American political leaders during the lead-up to the Revolution, particularly concerning perceived tyranny.
- **Documentary Appeal (Declaration of Independence):** Dr. Green points out that the philosophical basis for the Revolution, as articulated in the Declaration of Independence, is not rooted in the Bible or divine revelation but in "self-evident" truths. The document speaks of individuals being "endowed by their Creator" (a Deistic term) with "certain unalienable rights" including "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." The justification for government comes from "the consent of the governed," and the right to alter or abolish destructive government is a principle of popular sovereignty, not divine mandate.

- **Separation of Church and State:** The Constitution's rejection of religious tests for officeholders reflects a break with the idea of a state-controlled church. Dr. Green notes that Christianity flourished under this separation.
- **Defining a "Christian Nation":** Dr. Green argues that America can be called a Christian nation only in the sense that it has a large Christian population and a Judeo-Christian influence on its culture. He contests the idea that the Founding Fathers intended to establish an "evangelical Christian nation based on the Bible."
- **Contrast with the Puritans and Roger Williams:** The Founding Fathers' approach is contrasted with the Puritans, who envisioned a "city set on a hill" based on biblical principles (though not a theocracy), and Roger Williams, whose establishment of religious freedom in Rhode Island was also rooted in his biblical understanding. Dr. Green argues that the Founding Fathers, being largely Deists, had a different view of Scripture and God.
- **Discussion and Counterarguments:** Dr. Green acknowledges potential disagreements with his thesis, noting that many Founding Fathers had Anglican backgrounds (though often with low church attendance). He addresses the point that common people were likely more orthodox in their faith but suggests they generally supported the separation of church and state due to historical experiences. He uses Jefferson's rewriting of the Bible and Franklin's Deistic views as further support. He mentions the book "The Light and the Glory" as presenting a contrasting view of the Founding Fathers as evangelicals. He also acknowledges the presence of individuals like the Quaker signer from Rhode Island and the Presbyterian clergyman John Witherspoon, while still maintaining that the core "movers and shakers" were largely Deistic and utilized the language of social contract rather than the Bible in establishing the nation. He suggests Deism was an appealing intellectual force among the well-educated leaders.

IV. Church Attendance During the Revolution:

Dr. Green notes the paradoxical decline in church attendance leading up to the Revolution, despite the recent First Great Awakening. This suggests a complex religious landscape during this pivotal period.

Conclusion:

Dr. Green's lecture provides a detailed exploration of the religious context surrounding the American Revolution. He argues for the significant influence of the First Great Awakening on social and political life, and he presents a controversial but well-supported case for the prevalence of Deistic thought among the Founding Fathers, shaping their approach to governance and the separation of church and state. He emphasizes the importance of examining the language and philosophical underpinnings of foundational documents like the Declaration of Independence to understand the religious perspectives of the nation's early leaders.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution

Religion and the American Revolution: A Study Guide

I. Key Concepts and Figures

- **First Great Awakening:** A period of religious revivalism in the American colonies during the 1730s and 1740s.
- **Jonathan Edwards:** A key intellectual figure of the First Great Awakening, known for his theological writings and sermons.
- **George Whitefield:** A powerful and influential itinerant preacher during the First Great Awakening, known for his open-air sermons and humanitarian efforts.
- **Lay Involvement:** Increased participation of non-ordained members in church life and leadership during the First Great Awakening.
- **New Humanitarian Impulse:** A social consequence of the First Great Awakening, emphasizing love of neighbor and leading to initiatives like Whitefield's orphanage.
- **New Forms of Assembly:** Gatherings that extended beyond traditional church settings, fostering open criticism of authority and contributing to the idea of the sovereignty of the people.
- **Evangelical:** A term originating in the Reformation, emphasizing the importance of the Gospel; used by participants in the First Great Awakening and the Wesleyan Revival.
- **Deism:** A religious philosophy prevalent in the 18th century that emphasizes reason and natural theology, viewing God as a creator who does not actively intervene in the world.
- **Age of Reason/Rationality:** The 18th century, characterized by an emphasis on reason, philosophy, and natural theology.
- **Natural Theology:** A theological approach based on reason and observation of the natural world to understand God.
- **Revealed Theology:** The belief that knowledge of God is primarily derived from divine revelation, such as scripture.

- **John Locke:** An influential philosopher whose book *The Reasonableness of Christianity* argued for the rationality of basic Christian truths, impacting the development of deism.
- **John Toland:** A British deist writer who argued in *Christianity Not Mysterious* that nothing in the Bible is above reason.
- **Matthew Tindall:** Another British deist writer whose book *Christianity as Old as Creation* emphasized reason as the primary means of understanding scripture.
- **Orthodoxy:** In this context, refers to traditional Christian beliefs and practices that responded to the rise of deism.
- **Founding Fathers:** The political leaders who played a key role in the American Revolution and the establishment of the United States.
- **Thomas Jefferson:** A prominent Founding Father who was significantly influenced by deism, exemplified by his creation of the Jefferson Bible.
- **Jean-Jacques Rousseau:** An influential European philosopher whose book *The Social Contract* advocated for popular sovereignty and influenced the Founding Fathers.
- **Social Contract:** A political theory emphasizing that government legitimacy derives from the consent of the governed.
- **Divine Right of Kings:** The belief that a monarch's authority to rule comes directly from God.
- **General Will:** In Rousseau's philosophy, the collective will of the citizens that should guide the laws of the state.
- **Self-Evident Truths:** Principles that are considered obvious and do not require proof, as stated in the Declaration of Independence.
- **Inalienable Rights:** Rights that cannot be taken away or surrendered, such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.
- **Separation of Church and State:** The principle that government should not establish an official religion and should not interfere with the practice of religion.

II. Short Answer Quiz

1. Describe two ways in which the First Great Awakening elevated the role of the common person in church life.

2. Explain the "new humanitarian impulse" that resulted from the First Great Awakening, providing an example from the source material.
3. According to the lecture, how did the new forms of assembly during the First Great Awakening contribute to a changing social and political landscape?
4. Define deism as presented in the lecture, and contrast it with theism in terms of God's relationship with the world.
5. What are two key characteristics of the 18th-century "Age of Reason" that contributed to the rise of deism?
6. Briefly explain the core argument of John Locke's *The Reasonableness of Christianity*.
7. What was the main thesis of John Toland's book *Christianity Not Mystrious*, and how did Matthew Tindall build upon this idea?
8. Describe two ways in which orthodox Christians responded to the rise of deism in the 18th century.
9. According to Dr. Green, what was the primary religious influence on most of the key Founding Fathers, and what evidence supports this claim?
10. Explain the significance of Rousseau's concept of the "general will" in relation to the political theories of the Founding Fathers.

III. Short Answer Quiz - Answer Key

1. The First Great Awakening elevated the common person by allowing them to speak and read the Bible in public, activities previously more restricted to clergy. It also stressed lay activity, leading to new roles of leadership within the church shared between ministers and the laity.
2. The "new humanitarian impulse" was a social consequence rooted in the Matthew 22 passage to love God and neighbor, emphasizing care for the helpless. An example is George Whitefield's building of an orphanage in Georgia to care for abandoned children.
3. The new forms of assembly, characterized by open-air gatherings accessible to all, fostered a social context outside traditional church boundaries. Furthermore, they created an environment where the authority of leadership could be openly and publicly criticized.

4. Deism is a religious philosophy that views God as a creator who established the world according to natural laws and then ceased active involvement. In contrast, theism posits a God who is actively concerned with human lives and has intervened in the world, notably through Jesus Christ, fostering a personal relationship.
5. Two key characteristics of the "Age of Reason" were the exaltation of human reason, leading to skepticism about traditional religious authority, and the rise of natural theology, which sought to understand God through observation of the natural world rather than divine revelation.
6. John Locke argued that the basic truths of Christianity are rational and can be understood through human reason. He believed that these fundamental Christian principles were simple, basic, and in harmony with reason, partly evidenced by the natural world.
7. John Toland's *Christianity Not Mystrious* argued that there is nothing in the Bible that is beyond the grasp of human reason. Matthew Tindall, in *Christianity as Old as Creation*, built upon this by upholding reason as the primary tool for understanding scripture, rather than viewing scripture as divine revelation.
8. Orthodox Christians responded to deism by first acknowledging some common ground, agreeing with the deists on the order and design of the natural world. Secondly, they defended the entire biblical record, including miracles and prophecies, as beyond purely rational understanding and as integral to God's revelation.
9. According to Dr. Green, most of the key Founding Fathers were significantly influenced by deism, rather than being evangelical Christians. Evidence for this includes Thomas Jefferson's deistic views and his creation of the Jefferson Bible, which excised miracles as irrational.
10. Rousseau's concept of the "general will," suggesting that laws should reflect the collective will of the people, significantly influenced the Founding Fathers by providing a philosophical basis for popular sovereignty and the idea that governmental authority derives from the consent of the governed, rather than divine right.

IV. Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the interconnectedness between the theological and social impacts of the First Great Awakening in colonial America. How did religious revivalism contribute to broader changes in American life and culture?
2. Compare and contrast deism and orthodox Christianity as they existed in 18th-century America. What were the key points of disagreement, and how did each worldview shape perspectives on God, humanity, and scripture?
3. Evaluate the extent to which the political and religious theories of the Founding Fathers were influenced by deistic thought. Provide specific examples from the lecture and the Declaration of Independence to support your argument.
4. Discuss the significance of the separation of church and state in the context of the American Revolution and the formation of the United States. How did the religious landscape of the time, including the legacy of the First Great Awakening and the rise of deism, contribute to this principle?
5. To what extent can the American Revolution be considered a consequence of the First Great Awakening, as suggested by the quote in the lecture? Analyze the social and intellectual shifts brought about by the Awakening and their potential contribution to the revolutionary movement.

V. Glossary of Key Terms

- **Deism:** An 18th-century religious philosophy that posits a creator God who does not intervene in the universe after its creation, emphasizing reason and natural law.
- **Evangelical:** A broad movement within Protestant Christianity that emphasizes personal conversion, the authority of scripture, and the importance of spreading the Christian message.
- **First Great Awakening:** A significant religious revival that swept through the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s, characterized by emotional preaching and personal conversion experiences.
- **Lay Activity:** The involvement of non-ordained members of a church in various aspects of church life, such as leadership, public speaking, and Bible reading.
- **Natural Theology:** The branch of theology that seeks to gain knowledge of God through reason and observation of the natural world, independent of divine revelation.
- **Orthodoxy (in this context):** Traditional or established religious beliefs and practices, particularly those of mainstream Christianity, in contrast to new or dissenting viewpoints like deism.
- **Revealed Theology:** The belief that the primary source of knowledge about God is divine revelation, typically found in sacred texts like the Bible.
- **Social Contract:** A philosophical theory that government legitimacy arises from the voluntary agreement among individuals to form a state and accept its authority, often involving the surrender of some individual freedoms for collective benefit and protection of rights.
- **Sovereignty of the People:** The principle that ultimate political authority rests with the people, who have the right to govern themselves or elect representatives to do so.
- **Theism:** The belief in the existence of God or gods, especially a personal God who actively intervenes in the world. In contrast to deism, theism emphasizes God's ongoing involvement and relationship with creation.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 7, Religion and the American Revolution, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Religion and the American Revolution

1. **What was the significance of the First Great Awakening in relation to the American Revolution?** The First Great Awakening had a tremendous social impact that can be seen as the "first stage of the American Revolution." It elevated the importance of the common person and lay activity within church life, allowing for greater participation and new roles of leadership beyond just priests or ministers. This fostered a sense of personal independence in religious life, which arguably translated to a desire for personal independence in political life. The Awakening also spurred a new humanitarian impulse, emphasizing loving one's neighbor through actions like Whitefield's orphanage. Crucially, it introduced new forms of assembly outside of traditional church buildings, in open-air settings where everyone could attend and, eventually, openly criticize authority. This experience of public discourse and the rising sovereignty of the people were foundational shifts that prefigured the political mobilization of the Revolution.
2. **What was Deism, and what were its key beliefs during the 18th century?** Deism was a religious philosophy or worldview prevalent in the 17th and 18th centuries, particularly during the Age of Reason. It is characterized by a belief in a creator God who designed and set the universe in motion like a clock but does not actively intervene in its affairs. Key beliefs of Deists included monotheism (though rejecting the Trinity), the existence of sin as a result of free will (not original sin), a strong emphasis on morality and ethics as achievable through reason, and a belief in an afterlife with rewards and punishments. Early Deists initially engaged with scripture but eventually prioritized reason and natural theology—understanding God through observation of the natural world—over revealed theology and the Bible. They were often critical of organized religion, perceived mysteries within Christianity, and the history of religious conflict.

3. **How did Deism influence the political and religious theories of the Founding Fathers?** Many key Founding Fathers, according to the source, were significantly influenced by Deist thinking, both religiously and politically, and were not necessarily evangelical Christians. Figures like Thomas Jefferson are cited as examples, evidenced by his creation of the Jefferson Bible, which removed miracles and irrational elements from the Gospels, portraying Jesus as an 18th-century moral philosopher. Deistic ideas, emphasizing reason, natural rights, and a distant creator God, resonated with their desire for a government based on self-evident truths and the consent of the governed, rather than divine right. The language of the Declaration of Independence, with its appeal to a "Creator" endowing inalienable rights, is presented as reflective of this Deistic influence rather than a direct appeal to biblical revelation.
4. **What was Rousseau's Social Contract theory, and how did it impact the American Revolution?** Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Social Contract* was a highly influential text that significantly impacted the thinking of Jefferson and other Founding Fathers. It denied the divine right of kings, asserting that political leadership and the right to govern come from the people. The theory posited that laws should reflect the general will of the people, not the dictates of a monarch. It also described a "social contract" where individual freedom is balanced with the need for a just government that cares for the common good. These ideas provided a philosophical framework for the colonists' rejection of British tyranny and their pursuit of self-governance based on popular sovereignty and the protection of individual rights.
5. **According to the source, did the Founding Fathers intend to establish a Christian nation?** The source argues that it is possible to call America a Christian nation in the sense that there is a large population of Christians and a Judeo-Christian ethical influence on American life and culture. However, it contends that the Founding Fathers did not intend to establish an *evangelical* Christian nation based on the Bible. Their appeals were to self-evident truths and natural rights endowed by a "Creator," rather than to specific biblical doctrines. The Constitution's rejection of religious tests for officeholders further suggests a move away from a religiously defined state. The source contrasts this with the intentions of the Puritans and Roger Williams, who would have grounded a new nation more explicitly in biblical principles, though not necessarily a theocracy.

6. **How did "Orthodoxy" (traditional Christianity) respond to the rise of Deism in the 18th century?** Orthodox Christianity responded to the growing influence of Deism in several ways. First, they attempted to find common ground by acknowledging the Deists' emphasis on the order, beauty, and design of the natural world, noting that these concepts were also present in scripture. Second, they defended the entire biblical record, including miracles, prophecies, and the incarnation, arguing that it was more than just a rational understanding of God's design. Third, they advocated for "faith-seeking understanding," asserting the importance of reason while also acknowledging its limits and the existence of mystery in God's ways, particularly the incarnation of Christ, which is accepted by faith. Figures like Jonathan Edwards are mentioned as participants in this pushback against Deist thought.
7. **Did the common people during the Revolution share the same religious views as the intellectual leadership?** While the intellectual and political leadership of the Revolution was significantly influenced by Deism, the source suggests that the common people were generally more orthodox in their religious beliefs. Despite this, they were often supportive of the separation of church and state, having a historical awareness of the problems arising when the state controlled the church and desiring religious freedom. The common people were also likely receptive to the idea of popular sovereignty and self-governance. However, the source notes an unfortunate trend of declining church attendance leading up to the Revolution, even after the First Great Awakening.
8. **What evidence is presented to support the argument that the Founding Fathers were more influenced by Deism than evangelical Christianity?** Several pieces of evidence are presented. The creation of the Jefferson Bible, with its removal of miracles, is a key example of Jefferson's rationalistic and Deistic leanings. The language of the Declaration of Independence, appealing to self-evident truths and rights endowed by a "Creator," is contrasted with language rooted in biblical revelation and a "Redeemer God." The Constitution's explicit prohibition of religious tests for public office is also cited as evidence of a break from a religiously defined state. Furthermore, the personal religious practices (or lack thereof, in the case of figures like George Washington) and the intellectual influences of the time, such as Locke and Rousseau, are highlighted as contributing to a Deistic worldview among the leadership.