

Dr. Roger Green, American Christianity, Session 8, 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 8, Religion and the American Revolution, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

This source presents **Dr. Roger Green's lecture on religion and the American Revolution**, specifically focusing on the **religious understandings of the Founding Fathers and the reactions of various churches** during this pivotal period. The lecture initially addresses the **Judeo-Christian framework** underlying the nation's founding and then examines in detail the experiences of **Anglicanism (which became the Protestant Episcopal Church), Roman Catholicism, and American Methodism** in the context of the Revolution. For each denomination, Dr. Green discusses their challenges, adaptations, and key figures during this transformative era, highlighting the evolving landscape of religious freedom in the nascent United States.

2. 16 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Green, American Christianity, Session 8 – 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).



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3. Briefing Document: Green, American Christianity, Session 8, Religion and the American Revolution

Briefing Document: Religion and the American Revolution

Overview: This briefing document summarizes the main themes and important ideas discussed by Dr. Roger Green in Session 8 of his lecture series on American Christianity, focusing on the reaction of various Christian denominations to the American Revolution. Key topics include the underlying Judeo-Christian framework of the founding, the achievement of religious freedom in America, and the specific experiences of Anglicanism (later the Protestant Episcopal Church), Roman Catholicism, and Methodism during and after the Revolutionary War.

Key Themes and Important Ideas:

1. The Judeo-Christian Framework of the Founding:

- Despite the deist leanings of many founding fathers, there was undeniably a "moral, ethical, Judeo-Christian framework" underpinning the foundation of the United States.
- While the language differed from earlier Puritan or Pilgrim settlers, the core moral and ethical principles were present.
- Attempts to dismiss this framework would require a radical societal shift, as theologian Martin Marty suggested: "you would have to lobotomize the American people to get rid of that kind of Judeo-Christian framework in which we are living in our common life together."
- The current need to "return to" this framework is debatable. While the foundation exists, looking back to the Revolution as a "very evangelical religious time and event" is inaccurate, as church attendance even dipped in some areas due to focus on political life.

2. The Achievement of Religious Freedom:

- Religious freedom became a defining characteristic of Christianity in American public life.
- Several factors contributed to this:

- **Multiplicity of Religious Groups:** The sheer number of diverse denominations prevented any single one from becoming a state religion.
- **Distance from European Churches:** The Atlantic Ocean limited the control European churches could exert over their New World counterparts.
- **Immensity of the Continent:** The vast and expanding territory made it impossible for one denomination to control religious life across the nation.
- **Desire for Economic Prosperity:** Economic needs fostered tolerance as religious differences were overlooked in the pursuit of a common economic good.
- **Increased Toleration in England:** Growing tolerance in the ruling power (England) influenced the colonies. King Charles II's Act of Toleration is cited as an example, impacting even Puritan practices in Boston.
- **Influence of Radical Reformation Groups:** Groups on the "left wing of the Reformation" and Puritanism, such as German Dunkers, Mennonites, Quakers, and Baptists, flourished and contributed to a climate of religious freedom. The initial persecution of Quakers highlights their eventual success, leading to Pennsylvania being known as the "Quaker State."
- **Demonstration of an Orderly State:** The ability to have a stable, just, and compassionate state without religious uniformity proved that religious freedom was viable.
- **The First Great Awakening:** This movement fostered the idea of separation of church and state across various denominations.
- **The Age of Reason:** The 18th century emphasis on rationality led to the belief that religious freedom was a reasonable and civilized way for people to coexist. Proponents of this view advocated for religious liberty from a rational, rather than purely theological, perspective.

3. The Reaction of Specific Churches:

- **Anglicanism (later Protestant Episcopal Church):**
 - Suffered the most due to its ties to Britain. An estimated "about 70,000 Anglicans went back home because they were British."
 - The number of Anglican priests dwindled dramatically, with only "about 10 Anglican priests left in all of the colonies" at the war's end.

- The denomination changed its name to the "Protestant Episcopal Church" to distance itself from its British origins while retaining the concept of episcopacy (church hierarchy).
- They still maintained ties with the Archbishop of Canterbury, though his role is more of a spiritual leader among equals rather than a ruling authority.
- Key figures in rebuilding the church were Samuel Seabury (first bishop), William White (Bishop of Pennsylvania), and Samuel Provoost (Bishop of New York).
- The reorganized church adopted several key principles: lay participation in general conventions, revision of the prayer book to reflect American needs (e.g., removing prayers for the British monarch), and a focus on unity and healing after the divisions caused by the war.
- The ordination process shifted to American bishops, eliminating the need to travel to Britain.
- The emergence of new "Anglican churches" in America in recent decades represents a separate development from the original name change post-Revolution.
- **Roman Catholic Church:**
 - Was a "very, very, very tiny minority" at the time of the Revolution.
 - Its public standing improved due to the atmosphere of religious freedom and the patriotic service of Catholics in the Revolutionary War.
 - John Carroll became the first Roman Catholic leader in America, eventually becoming a bishop and then an archbishop in Baltimore, Maryland.
 - Early important Roman Catholic centers included Baltimore, New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and surprisingly, Bardstown, Kentucky, which was the first diocese of the West, encompassing a vast territory. The choice of Bardstown was due to its central location within this territory.
- **American Methodism:**
 - Originated as a reform movement within the Anglican Church in England, led by John Wesley.
 - Wesley sent eight missionaries to the American colonies before the Revolution to bring renewal to Anglican churches and preach to others.

- Francis Asbury was the most important missionary as he was the only one who remained in America during and after the war, despite Wesley's and other missionaries' disapproval of the Revolution.
- Wesley controversially began using lay preachers and ordaining priests in England, believing there was no biblical distinction between bishop and presbyter.
- To provide ordained leadership for American Methodists, Wesley sent Thomas Coke, an ordained Anglican priest, to America.
- Coke ordained Francis Asbury in Baltimore, Maryland, on December 24, 1784, at the "Christmas Conference," marking the official beginning of Methodism in America.
- Methodist denominations did not officially break away from Anglicanism until after John Wesley's death in 1791.
- Early American Methodist leaders like Coke and Asbury even began calling themselves bishops, which concerned Wesley, who feared the establishment of a separate church. Despite being called home, they remained in America.
- Methodism, while small during the Revolution, was poised for significant growth in the following century.

Quotes:

- "there's no question that there was a moral, ethical, Judeo-Christian framework to all of this."
- "...you would have to lobotomize the American people to get rid of that kind of Judeo-Christian framework in which we are living in our common life together." - Martin Marty
- "Religious freedom becomes the hallmark of what we're concerned with, Christianity in American public life..."
- "By the end of the Revolutionary War, it's estimated that about 70,000 Anglicans went back home because they were British."
- "...only about 10 Anglican priests left in all of the colonies."

Conclusion:

Dr. Green's lecture highlights the complex interplay between religion and the American Revolution. While the founding fathers may have held diverse religious beliefs, a Judeo-

Christian ethical framework provided a common foundation. The Revolution also catalyzed the development of religious freedom in America, driven by a confluence of social, political, and economic factors, as well as the actions of various religious groups. The experiences of Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, and Methodism demonstrate the profound impact of the Revolution on the religious landscape of the nascent nation, shaping their identities and trajectories in the years to come.

4. Study Guide: Green, American Christianity, Session 8, Religion and the American Revolution

Religion and the American Revolution: A Study Guide

Key Concepts and Themes

- **Deism and the Founding Fathers:** Understand the prevalent religious beliefs of key figures in the American Revolution and the debate surrounding their faith (primarily deism vs. evangelical Christianity).
- **Judeo-Christian Framework:** Recognize the underlying moral and ethical influences on the founding of the United States, even if the founders did not use explicitly religious language in the way earlier settlers did.
- **Religious Freedom as a Hallmark:** Analyze why religious freedom became a defining characteristic of American Christianity in the post-Revolutionary era.
- **Factors Contributing to Religious Freedom:** Identify and explain the various elements that facilitated the rise of religious liberty in America, such as the multiplicity of denominations, distance from European churches, the immensity of the continent, economic desires, increased toleration in England, the influence of radical Reformation groups, the demonstration of an orderly state without religious uniformity, and the First Great Awakening.
- **The Age of Reason:** Understand the impact of Enlightenment ideals and rational thought on the concept of religious freedom during the 18th century.
- **The Reaction of Churches to the Revolution:** Examine how different denominations navigated the challenges and opportunities presented by the American Revolution.
- **Anglicanism's Transformation:** Analyze the significant impact of the Revolution on the Anglican Church, including the decline in numbers, the departure of loyalists, the shortage of clergy, and the subsequent renaming to the Protestant Episcopal Church.
- **The Formation of the Episcopal Church:** Understand the key figures (Samuel Seabury, William White, Samuel Provoost) involved in reorganizing and leading the newly formed Episcopal Church, including the establishment of general conventions with lay representation and the revision of the prayer book.

- **The Growth of the Roman Catholic Church:** Explain why the Roman Catholic Church, despite being a small minority, saw its public standing improve after the Revolution, emphasizing the role of religious freedom and Catholic participation in the war effort.
- **Early Catholic Leadership:** Identify John Carroll as the first Roman Catholic leader in America and the establishment of early dioceses, including the unexpected importance of Bardstown, Kentucky.
- **The Origins and Development of American Methodism:** Trace the roots of Methodism back to John Wesley and the Wesleyan revival in England, understanding its initial aim as a reform movement within the Anglican Church.
- **Francis Asbury's Role:** Recognize the crucial contribution of Francis Asbury as the key Methodist missionary who remained in America during and after the Revolution, establishing the foundations for American Methodism.
- **The Christmas Conference (1784):** Understand the significance of this event in the formal establishment of Methodism in America, including the ordination of Francis Asbury by Thomas Coke.
- **The Emergence of Methodist Denominations:** Note that the formal separation of Methodism into distinct denominations largely occurred after the death of John Wesley in 1791.

Short-Answer Quiz

1. What was Dr. Green's initial assertion about the religious beliefs of the founding fathers, and what caveat did he immediately offer?
- Dr. Green stated that he believes most of the influential founding fathers were deists, not evangelical Christians. However, he encouraged listeners to challenge this view if they held a different understanding.
1. According to the lecture, what foundational framework undeniably underpinned the documents and actions of the founding fathers?
- Despite their potential deism, there was undeniably a moral, ethical, Judeo-Christian framework and foundation to the founding of the United States and the documents they created.
1. Why did the multiplicity of religious denominations in the colonies act as a safeguard against any single denomination becoming the state religion?

- The sheer number and flourishing of various religious groups prevented any one denomination from gaining enough dominance to be established as the official religion of the newly formed nation.
1. Describe two ways the American Revolution significantly impacted the Anglican Church in the newly formed United States.
 - Firstly, approximately 70,000 Anglicans, being loyal British subjects, returned to England after the war. Secondly, the number of Anglican priests remaining in the colonies dwindled drastically to an estimated ten.
 1. What key decision did the reorganized Episcopal Church make regarding lay participation in their governance?
 - In keeping with the American spirit of freedom, the Episcopal Church decided that their general conventions would include both priests and lay people who would come together to make decisions for the church's future.
 1. What were the two main reasons for the improved public standing of Roman Catholics in post-Revolutionary America?
 - The atmosphere of religious freedom and liberty in the new nation fostered greater acceptance of Roman Catholics. Additionally, the patriotic service of Roman Catholics who fought in the Revolutionary War earned them respect and integration into public life.
 1. Who was John Carroll, and what significant role did he play in the early American Catholic Church?
 - John Carroll was the first Roman Catholic leader in the United States. He played a crucial role in organizing and leading the Catholic community, eventually becoming a bishop and then an archbishop in Baltimore, Maryland.
 1. Why was Bardstown, Kentucky, a significant location in the early history of the American Roman Catholic Church?
 - Bardstown, Kentucky, was chosen as the location for the first diocese of the West, making it a geographically central and important bishopric that oversaw a vast territory from the Great Lakes to the Deep South and from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi.
 1. Explain John Wesley's initial goal for the Methodist movement and why he began to employ lay preachers and ordain priests.

- Wesley's initial goal was to bring reform and renewal to the Anglican Church, not to create a separate denomination. He began using lay preachers and ordaining priests because he was concerned about the spiritual stagnation within the Anglican Church and believed these actions were necessary for the growth of faith.
1. What was the significance of the Christmas Conference of 1784 in the development of American Methodism?
- The Christmas Conference, held in Baltimore, Maryland, marked the official beginning of Methodism in America with the ordination of Francis Asbury to the Christian ministry by Thomas Coke, signifying a more independent trajectory for the movement in the United States.

Essay Format Questions

1. Analyze the extent to which the religious beliefs of the founding fathers influenced the principles of religious freedom enshrined in the early American republic. Consider the arguments for both deistic and Judeo-Christian influences.
2. Evaluate the various factors that contributed to the establishment and flourishing of religious freedom in post-Revolutionary America, prioritizing the most significant influences.
3. Compare and contrast the immediate impacts of the American Revolution on two different religious denominations discussed in the lecture, explaining the reasons for these differing experiences.
4. Discuss the leadership and key decisions that shaped the development of either the Protestant Episcopal Church or the early American Roman Catholic Church in the aftermath of the Revolutionary War.
5. Trace the evolution of Methodism from its origins in England to its establishment as a significant religious force in America by the late 18th century, highlighting the key individuals and events that shaped this transition.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Deism:** A religious and philosophical belief that posits a God who created the universe but does not intervene in its affairs. Deists typically rely on reason and natural law rather than divine revelation or scripture.
- **Judeo-Christian Framework:** A set of ethical, moral, and cultural principles that are considered to have historical roots in both Judaism and Christianity, often seen as influencing Western civilization.
- **Religious Freedom (Religious Liberty):** The principle that individuals should have the autonomy to practice or not practice any religion without coercion or interference from the state.
- **Denomination:** A recognized branch or autonomous division within a larger religious tradition (e.g., Baptists within Christianity).
- **Anglicanism:** The tradition within Christianity that originated with the Church of England.
- **Episcopal Church:** The autonomous American branch of the Anglican Communion, which changed its name from the Church of England after the American Revolution.
- **Church Polity:** The organizational structure and system of governance within a church.
- **Episcopacy:** A form of church governance in which bishops hold the chief authority.
- **Archbishop of Canterbury:** The senior bishop and spiritual leader of the Church of England and the symbolic head of the worldwide Anglican Communion.
- **Diocese:** A district under the pastoral care of a bishop in the Christian Church.
- **Methodism:** A Protestant movement founded by John Wesley in 18th-century England, initially focused on personal piety and social reform within the Church of England.
- **Wesleyan Revival:** An 18th-century religious movement in Great Britain led by John Wesley and others, emphasizing personal conversion, holiness, and social action.

- **Lay Preacher:** A non-ordained member of a church who is authorized to preach or lead religious services.
- **Ordination:** The ceremony or process by which a person is consecrated and authorized to perform ministerial functions in a church.
- **Presbyter (Priest):** An ordained minister in some Protestant denominations (including Anglican/Episcopal and Methodist) and in Catholic and Orthodox traditions, typically having responsibility for a local congregation.
- **Bishop:** A senior member of the Christian clergy, typically in charge of a diocese and having the authority to ordain ministers.
- **Christmas Conference (1784):** A pivotal meeting of American Methodists in Baltimore, Maryland, during which Francis Asbury was ordained, marking a significant step towards the establishment of an independent Methodist church in America.
- **Itinerant Minister:** A religious leader who travels from place to place to preach and minister to different congregations or communities.
- **First Great Awakening:** An interdenominational Protestant revival that swept through the British colonies in North America during the 1730s and 1740s, emphasizing personal religious experience.
- **Age of Reason (Age of Rationality):** An intellectual and cultural movement of the 18th century that emphasized reason, logic, and individualism over tradition and religious authority.

5. FAQs Green, American Christianity, Session 8, Religion and the American Revolution, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions: Religion and the American Revolution

1. **What was Dr. Green's initial assertion about the religious beliefs of the Founding Fathers, and what important nuance did he add to this idea?** Dr. Green initially suggested that the "movers and shapers" among the Founding Fathers were mostly deists rather than evangelical Christians. However, he immediately qualified this by emphasizing that regardless of their personal theological leanings, there was undeniably a moral, ethical, Judeo-Christian framework and foundation to the documents they created and the society they envisioned. He cited theologian Martin Marty's assertion that this framework is deeply ingrained in American culture.
2. **How did the concept of religious freedom emerge as a central theme during and after the American Revolution?** Religious freedom became a hallmark of Christianity in American public life due to several converging factors. The multiplicity of religious denominations present in the colonies prevented any single church from becoming a dominant state religion. The vast distance from European churches weakened their control. The immensity of the continent made centralized religious control impractical. The desire for economic prosperity led to overlooking religious differences in the workforce. Increased tolerance in England, exemplified by King Charles II's Act of Toleration, also played a role. Furthermore, the flourishing of more radical Protestant groups advocating for greater separation of church and state, the understanding that an orderly and just state did not require religious uniformity, the groundwork laid by the First Great Awakening with its emphasis on separation of church and state, and the prevailing Age of Reason which championed religious liberty as a rational way for civilized people to coexist all contributed to the rise of religious freedom.
3. **How did the American Revolution impact the Anglican Church, and what changes did it undergo as a result?** The American Revolution had a significantly negative impact on the Anglican Church in America. Approximately 70,000 Anglicans, loyal to the British crown, returned to England. The number of Anglican priests in the colonies dwindled to a mere ten by the end of the war. To distance itself from its British roots and ensure its survival in the newly independent nation, the denomination changed its name from the Anglican Church or Church

of England to the Protestant Episcopal Church (later often shortened to the Episcopal Church). Despite this change, they maintained ties with the Archbishop of Canterbury, albeit in a less authoritative role than the Pope holds in the Catholic Church.

4. **What were the key steps in the reorganization and leadership of the Episcopal Church after the Revolutionary War?** Recognizing the need for leadership, Samuel Seabury was chosen as the first bishop of the Episcopal Church in America. He traveled to Europe for his ordination and subsequently returned to convene the first general convention of the Episcopal Church in Philadelphia in 1785. To further establish leadership, William White and Samuel Provoost were chosen as Bishops of Pennsylvania and New York, respectively. These bishops then focused on shaping the American Episcopal Church by ensuring lay representation in general conventions, revising the Book of Common Prayer to reflect American needs (e.g., removing prayers for the British monarch), and fostering unity among Episcopalians despite differing opinions on the war.
5. **How did the status and influence of the Roman Catholic Church in America change after the Revolution, despite its small size at the time?** Although a very small minority during the American Revolution, the Roman Catholic Church's position in American public life improved for two main reasons. Firstly, the growing atmosphere of religious freedom and liberty necessitated the inclusion and acceptance of Roman Catholics. Secondly, the patriotic service of Roman Catholics who fought in the Revolutionary War earned them respect and acceptance among their fellow Americans. This allowed the Catholic Church to gain a tiny but significant foothold in the new nation.
6. **Who were the key figures in establishing the early leadership of the Roman Catholic Church in the United States, and where were the significant centers of Catholic influence?** John Carroll became the first Roman Catholic leader in America, eventually serving as a bishop and then archbishop in Baltimore, Maryland. Baltimore emerged as the most important early Catholic center, becoming an archdiocese. Other significant cities with eventual bishoprics included New York, Philadelphia, and Boston. Interestingly, Bardstown, Kentucky, was also a very important early center, serving as the first diocese of the West and overseeing a vast territory.

7. **What was the initial purpose of the Methodist movement founded by John Wesley, and how did it relate to the Anglican Church?** John Wesley, an Anglican priest, initiated the Methodist movement as a means of reform within the Anglican Church in England. Appalled by the lack of spiritual growth he observed among Anglicans, he emphasized a deeper love for God and neighbor and the pursuit of holiness. The Methodist movement, supported by the powerful hymns of Charles Wesley, aimed to bring revival and new life to the Anglican Church and was not initially intended to be a separate denomination.
8. **How did Methodism become established as a distinct religious force in America during and after the Revolutionary War?** Before the Revolutionary War, John Wesley sent Methodist missionaries to the American colonies to bring renewal to Anglican churches and preach the Gospel. Francis Asbury was the only missionary who remained in America despite his and Wesley's disapproval of the revolution. After the war, Asbury became the key itinerant minister of Methodism in America. Wesley later sent Thomas Coke, an ordained Anglican priest, to America to ordain Asbury. This occurred at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784, marking a significant step towards the formal establishment of Methodism in America. Although Methodist denominations did not officially separate from the Anglican Church until after John Wesley's death in 1791, the ordination of Asbury and the subsequent actions of American Methodist leaders like Coke (who began calling themselves bishops) demonstrated a growing independence and laid the foundation for the future of Methodism as a distinct religious tradition in the United States.