

In early stages of my ministry, I made a visit almost to the Bay; in that course of preaching, I travelled a considerable distance, and met with exceeding few that had a desire for the conversion of their souls.

From reasons heretofore assigned in my narration, I will not discuss the circumstances attending my journey any further than mentioning a few particulars which I shall not mention together.

Opposition attended me every where; in the time of preaching, one body of the congregation would be calling out to the other to whip the fellow off the ground; half a dozen of fists would be drawn at a time, when I expected to be knocked down every minute; sailors were brought on board from their vessels, through the influence of the people, in order to take me out into the stream, hoist me up to the mainmast's arm and so to give me a ducking. At other places public teachers would, after sermon, introduce controversies, principally on the ordinance of baptism, which I would undertake accordingly to the mortification of those who introduced them; by which their congregations were convinced of the propriety of believing baptism by immersion.

Without any more animadversion, there was always a liberty in favour of the cause I had espoused; often soliciting me to visit them again: and when ever the Lord was pleased to form any opening upon their minds, it was surprising to see how docile and tractable they were to receive instruction. They were a people possessing good parts naturally; all that they wanted for religious advancement, and divine improvement, was the quickening, awakening, convincing and divine teaching of the holy spirit, attended with the heart enlarging and efficacious grace of God upon their souls, which was opening upon them at that period, and many of them soon manifested divine progress, in the ways of Jesus.

The prisons, in divers places, were honoured with the most despised preachers: however their situations were much more comfortable than mine; because none were precluded

from visiting them; none of those punishments inflicted on me attended them; whilst several of them at a time would be in company together, by which means, they proved a mutual comfort and establishment to each other. By comparing their situation with mine already given, the reader may easily draw inferences from the premises.

Being two hundred miles from my residence, I longed to be back among those called my own people; that being the *second* division, which lays between the Blue Ridge and Alleghany mountains. The people inhabiting these valleys, were better informed, arising from the following considerations: they were a divided people as to religious persuasions, consisting of Baptists, Presbyterians, Methodists, Quakers, Menonists, Tunkers and Churchmen, with a variety of others. As persecution was not a reigning principle among them, and they lived in a common state of sociability, it gave them an opportunity of being acquainted with each other's principles and practices, by which their *ideas* became more enlarged, and their *judgments* more generally informed than those of the first division.

With regard to the *third* division, who lived beyond the Alleghany mountains, in our western settlements, it would be hard for one to give a proper description of them, until time and opportunity of action, would enable such to form a correct opinion. But as kind providence had allotted, under the Blue Ridge, through all the courses and windings of this valley, (between the Ridge and Alleghany) and from the other side of the Alleghany down upon the Ohio, to be the sphere of my ministerial labours, and public services put in my power, were it necessary, I could give a full detail respecting them. When I went among them, I found them to be an uncultivated people; the farther I went back the more rude and illiterate they were: I often thought they constituted a compound of the barbarian and the indian; although I found among them, a number of respectable and well behaved people. . . .

Questions

1. Why did the Baptists and other evangelical sects pose such a threat to the established religious order in colonial Virginia? How might the threat have been social as well as religious?
2. How are Ireland's attitudes toward slaves shaped by his religious beliefs?
3. To what does Ireland attribute what he describes as the greater tolerance of peoples living in the western valleys of Virginia? How might this illuminate for you the origins of the religion clause of the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution?

4-9 Fighting Revivalism in the Carolina Backcountry (1768)

Charles Woodmason

Religious revivalism in the southern colonies was often accompanied by social conflict (see text pp. 114–121), and nowhere is this better illustrated than in the accounts of Charles Woodmason. Born into the gentry class in England about 1720, Woodmason

arrived in South Carolina in 1752 and established himself as a planter, merchant, and public official. In the early 1760s, however, he grew increasingly worried over the inroads that revivalists, especially New Light Baptists, had made into the Carolina backcountry, and he soon determined to “disperse these Wretches.” Woodmason traveled to England to be ordained as an Anglican minister—there were no Anglican bishops in the colonies to perform ordination—and returned to South Carolina in 1766. He spent the next six years in the backcountry, working for the “advancement of religion” and fighting against what he perceived to be the “idleness, beggary, prophaneness, lewdness, and villany” of the revivalists. The following excerpt is taken from an undated sermon, delivered around 1768, in which Woodmason attacks the New Lights.

Source: Richard J. Hooker, ed., *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution: The Journal and Other Writings of Charles Woodmason, Anglican Itinerant*. Copyright © 1953 University of North Carolina Press, renewed 1981 by Richard J. Hooker. Published for the Omohundro Institute of Early American History and Culture. Used by permission of the publisher.

In Singing of Hymns and Spiritual Songs—whereby their Hearts are greatly inflam'd with Divine Love and Heav'nly Joy, and makes the H[oly] G[host] be shed abroad in their Hearts. This is very fine *Talking*: I could wish that all the *Doings* too, were equally Innocent. . . .

But let us go on, and examine if in the General Corruption of Manners these New Lights have made any Reform in the Vice of Drunkenness? . . . There is not one Hogshead of Liquor less consum'd since their visiting us, or any Tavern shut up—So far from it, that there has been Great Increase of Both. Go to any Common Muster or Vendue, Will you not see the same Fighting, Brawling Gouging, Quarreling as ever? And this too among the Holy ones of our New Israel? Are Riots, Frolics, Races, Games, Cards, Dice, Dances, less frequent now than formerly? Are fewer persons to be seen in Taverns? or reeling or drunk on the Roads? And have any of the Godly Storekeepers given up their Licences, or refus'd to retail Poison? If this can be made appear, I will yield the Point. But if [it] can be made apparent that a much greater Quantity of Rum is now expended in private families than heretofore—That the greater Part of these religious Assemblies are calculated for private Entertainments, where each brings his Quota and which often terminates in Intemperance and Intoxication of both Sexes, Young and Old: That one half of those who resort to these Assemblies Go more for sake of Liquor, than Instruction, or Devotion. That if it be proven that Liquor has been top'd about even in their very Meeting Houses, and the Preachers refreshed with Good Things, and after the Farce ended Stuff'd and Cramm'd almost to bursting, then it must be granted that little or no Reform has been made among the Vulgar in Point of Intemperance save only among some few Persons in some Places where the Mode only is chang'd, and drinking in Public way'd for the Indulgence of double the Consumption in Private.

The horrid Vice of Swearing has long been a reproach to the Back Inhabitants, and very justly—for few Countries on Earth can equal these Parts as to this greivous Sin. But has it

ceas'd since the Admission of rambling Fanatics among us? I grant that it has with and among many, whom they have gain'd to their Sect. Yet still it too much prevails. But the Enormity of this Vice, when at the Highest, produc'd no Evils, Jarrs, disturbances Strifes, Contentions, Variance, Dis-simulations, Envyings, Slanders, Backbitings and a thousand other Evils that now disturb both the Public Places and repose of Individuals. So that where they have cast out one Devil, Seven, and twice Seven others have enter'd In and possess the Man. For never was so much Lying, Calumny, Defamation, and all hellish Evils and vexations of this Sort that can spring from the Devil and his Angels, so brief so prevalent, so abounding as since the Arrival of these villainous Teachers, Who blast, blacken, Ruin, and destroy the Characters, Reputations, Credit and Fame of all Persons not linked with them to the Ruin of Society, the Peace of families, and the Settlement of the Country.

We will further enquire, if Lasciviousness, or Wantonness, Adultery or Fornication [are] less common than formerly, before the Arrival of these *Holy* Persons? Are there fewer Bastards born? Are more Girls with their Virginity about them, Married, than were heretofore? The Parish Register will prove the Contrary: There are rather more Bastards, more Mulla-toes born than before. Nor out of 100 Young Women that I marry in a Year have I seen, or is there seen, Six but what are with Child? . . . And as for Adulteries, the present State of most Persons around 9/10 of whom now labour under a filthy Distemper (as is well known to all) puts that Matter out of all Dispute and shews that the Saints however outwardly Precise and Reserved are not one Whit more Chaste than formerly, and possibly are more privately Vicious.

And nothing more leads to this Than what they call their Love Feasts and Kiss of Charity. To which Feasts, celebrated at Night, much Liquor is privately carried, and deposited on the Roads, and in Bye Paths and Places. . . .

But certainly these Reformers have put some Stop to the many Thefts and Depradations so openly committed of late

Years?—To answer this Question recourse must be had to the Magistrates and Courts of Justice, who are ready to declare, that since the Appearance of these New Lights, more Enormities of all Kinds have been committed—More Robberies Thefts, Murders, Plunderings, Burglaries and Villanies of ev'ry Kind, than ever before. And the Reason hereof, Is, That most of these Preaching fellows were most notorious Theives, Jockeys, Gamblers, and what not in the Northern Provinces, and since their Reception and Success here have drawn Crowds of their old Acquaintances after them; So that the Country never was so full as at present of Gamesters Prostitutes, Filchers, Racers, Fiddlers and all the refuse of Mankind. All which follow these Teachers, and under the Mask of Religion carry on many detestable Practises. In short, they have filled the Country with Idle and Vagrant Persons, who live by their Criminalities. For it is a Maxim with these Vermin of Religion, That a Person must first be a Sinner e're He can be a Saint. . . .

For only draw a Comparison between them and Us, and let an Impartial Judge determine where *Offence* may chiefly be taken, At our Solemn, Grave, and Serious Sett Forms, or their Wild Extempore Jargon, nauseous to any Chaste or refin'd Ear. There are so many Absurdities committed by

them, as wou'd shock one of our *Cherokee* Savages; And was a Sensible Turk or Indian to view some of their Extravagancies it would quickly determine them against Christianity. Had any such been in their Assembly as last Sunday when they communicated, the Honest Heathens would have imagin'd themselves rather amidst a Gang of frantic Lunatics broke out of Bedlam, rather than among a Society of religious Christians, met to celebrate the most sacred and Solemn Ordinance of their Religion. Here, one Fellow mounted on a Bench . . . One on his knees in a Posture of Prayer—Others singing—some howling—These Ranting—Those Crying—Others dancing, Skipping, Laughing and rejoicing. Here two or 3 Women falling on their Backs, kicking up their Heels, exposing their Nakedness to all Bystanders and others sitting Pensive, in deep Melancholy lost in Abstraction, like Statues, quite insensible—and when rous'd by the Spectators from their pretended Reveries Transports, and indecent Postures and Actions declaring they knew nought of the Matter. That their Souls had taken flight to Heav'n, and they knew nothing of what they said or did. Spect[at]ors were highly shocked at such vile Abuse of sacred Ordinances! And indeed such a Scene was sufficient to make the vilest Sinner shudder.

Questions

1. What evidence is there in this account to suggest that social conflict was at the root of Woodmason's complaints about the inhabitants of the backcountry? Why might Woodmason, a member of the social elite, feel particularly threatened by the New Lights?
2. What was the primary difference "between them and Us," according to Woodmason? What does this reveal about the nature of the contest between the established churches and the revivalists?
3. What vices did Woodmason single out? What is the significance of his catalogue of sins? Did he suggest any remedies for the ills of the backcountry?

Questions for Further Thought

1. In what ways did the ideas of the Enlightenment and the Great Awakening challenge the authority of the established social and cultural order of colonial American society?
 2. Was the conflict between the revivalists and the established clergy rooted in cultural differences? Explain.
 3. Why did Americans in the eighteenth century embrace both religion and science with equal fervor? What was it about pietistic religion and Enlightenment rationalism that Americans found so attractive, and why?
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