THE IMPACT OF JONATHAN DICKINSON UPON AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY

By

ROBERT RAYMOND HOOPER

A.B., NEW YORK UNIVERSITY

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INTRODUCTION

A. The Subject

1. The Subject Stated.

"It may be doubted whether, with the single exception of the elder Edwards, Calvinism has ever found an abler or more efficient champion in this country, than Jonathan Dickinson."[1] These words, written midway between Dickinson's age and the present day, are a competent authority's evaluation of the man whose labors form the subject of this thesis.

The pastor of the Presbyterian church in Elizabethtown, N.J., was above all else a man who fervently loved the Lord Jesus Christ and desired that others should come to love Him too. One of the aims of this thesis is to present Jonathan Dickinson as a living Christian person, for there is always, in studying the life of any great man, a temptation to reduce him to a mere repository of achievements. But the impact of a man upon his own and upon succeeding generations consists not only in what he accomplishes but also in what he is.

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1. Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, Vol. III, p. 16

Ironically, the role in which Dickinson is most often remembered today -- that of the co-founder and first president of what was to become Princeton University -- is a role which he did not assume until the last year of his life, after having spent thirty-eight years as a pastor, during which time he shepherded his flock faithfully, expounded the Calvinistic theology in a manner that is still helpful and convincing, helped mould the history of his denomination in the troubled times of the 1740s, and was instrumental in forming policies which, in the opinion of a noted modern churchman[2], have had great effect not only upon the church but upon the state as well. Finally, he maintained the necessity of a living faith in Christ, as over against merely a dead orthodoxy, and took a leading part in the widespread surge of revival known as the Great Awakening. In each of these roles he has left a mark upon American Christianity, and thus to a certain extent upon the nation as a whole. It is the purpose of this thesis to show how this influence was exerted.

2. The Subject Justified.

One might have expected that a man of Dickinson's stature would have been a familiar figure among American Protestants. Yet today the mention of his name is likely to be greeted with a blank expression and a polite inquiry as to who he was. The paucity of the available modern reference material concerning Dickinson -- and, indeed, con-

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2. Hanzsche, Forgotten Founding Fathers of the American Church and State, p. 88. Hanzsche gives Dickinson a major share of the credit for creating the principle of the separation of church and state.

cerning almost all the churchmen of his age, many of whom deserve better treatment -- is evidence of the fact that Americans have generally been more diligent in the preservation of their political and social than of their spiritual heritage.

This in itself may be considered abundant justification for the choice of this subject. If Dickinson made a sufficient impression upon his own times to warrant the reputation he enjoyed, it is at least worth asking whether he might have an equally valuable contribution to make to the present day. Personal exposure to his writings, as well as to the available accounts of his life, have convinced at least this one reader that he has. And if this thesis communicates any appreciable part of the interest aroused in the course of its preparation, perhaps its readers will agree.

3. The Subject Delimited.

The study of any prominent man is likely to provide a window through which his whole society may profitably be viewed. But the focus of this thesis is the study of Dickinson's own contribution, and the limitations of space prevent extended digressions into the history and theology of his times, except insofar as they bear significantly upon Dickinson's own life and labors. Some digression has been considered sufficiently important for the subject at hand to warrant its inclusion; this will occur mainly in Chapter Four, where a more general treatment of the Great Awakening and its direct and indirect effects will be included as a background for Dickinson's contribution.

B. The Available Sources.

There is, to the present author's knowledge, no full-length biography of Jonathan Dickinson available. Most of the biographical framework of this thesis had to be gleaned from short sketches[3] published between 1867 and 1885, while the most extended modern treatment of the man is a 33-page chapter in a book significantly entitled Forgotten Founding Fathers.[4]

There are, however, numerous works from the pen of Dickinson himself, to be had in the New York Public Library, the Princeton University Library and the Biblical Seminary Library. Some of these have been reprinted and are in fairly good condition; others are available in early editions which need to be handled with special care. It is well worth the effort. Dickinson was a gifted writer, and the study of his own works has been perhaps the most interesting part of preparing this thesis.

C. The Method of Procedure.

The thesis will be divided into four chapters, plus the introduction and the conclusion. The first chapter will be preparatory, including a brief biographical sketch of Dickinson's early years, prior to his acceptance of the pastorate at Elizabethtown, and a preliminary description of his major personal characteristics. The remaining three chapters will trace his activities in three areas: as

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3. Webster, History of the Presbyterian Church in the U.S.A., pp. 358-361 (1857)
   Sprague, Annals of the American Pulpit, Vol. III., pp.14-18 (1858)
   Hatfield, History of Elizabeth, N.J., pp. 326-354 (1868)
   Dexter, Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College, Vol.I, pp. 45-52 (1885)
4. Hanzsche, op.cit., pp. 56-88 (1954)

a theologian,as a churchman, and as a participant in the Great Awakening. Since these activities were carried on concurrently, this arrangement cannot be strictly chronological; rather it is designed to indicate the three major ways in which Jonathan Dickinson had an impact upon American Christianity.

CHAPTER I

DICKINSON THE MAN

A. Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to give a brief biographical sketch of Dickinson's life up to and including his ordination, and a summary of the personal traits which may further a more thorough understanding of his actions as they are outlined in succeeding chapters.

B. Biographical Sketch

1. His Ancestry.

Jonathan Dickinson was the grandson of Nathaniel Dickinson, a comparatively wealthy layman with an active pioneering spirit. The elder Dickinson was one of the first settlers of Wethersfield, Connecticut, and later, with "the aggrieved brethren in Hartford"[1], purchased and settled several small towns, including Hadley, Massachusetts, in 1659. His son Hezekiah lived in Hatfield, Massachusetts, with his wife, the former Abigail Blackman.

2. His Birth and Early Years.

Jonathan Dickinson was born on April 22, 1688, in Hatfield, being the second child of Hezekiah and Abigail Dickinson. The family soon afterward moved to Hadley and thence in 1695 to Springfield, where Jonathan's brother Moses[2], who later followed him into the ministry, was born.

There is virtually no information available concerning these

1. Webster, op.cit., p.358. He does not mention the cause of the grievance.
2. ibid., p.373

formative years of Dickinson's life. Hezekiah Dickinson was a trader, and his work may have been the reason for the family's frequent changes of residence. Their financial and social status is not told, although one is tempted to suspect that they were not destitute, in view of the grandfather's status.

On June 14, 1707, however, Hezekiah Dickinson died[3] and his widow married Thomas Ingersoll of Springfield.

3. His Education

Yale College had just opened its doors for the first time when Dickinson entered in 1702. During his stay there, the student body never numbered more than twenty, and was lodged and taught at the home of the Rector, Abraham Pierson, in Kellingworth.

Two other men are listed[4] with Dickinson in the graduating class of 1706: Jared Eliot and Timothy Woodbridge, both of whom were later to manifest "Old Light" sympathies in the controversy that produced the schism of 1741. The former was the grandson of John Eliot, the "Apostle to the Indians", and was, like Dickinson, a practicing physician. Among those who did not take the full four-year course, but were graduated in 1705, was Samuel Cooke, who later was sufficiently

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3. For the date, vid. Dexter, op. cit., p. 45. Sprague, op. cit., p. 14, says that Dickinson lost his father "at a very early age", with his mother marrying Ingersoll shortly thereafter. He notes, "She is said to have educated her sons by assistance derived from the estate of her second husband" (presumably Ingersoll). But the fact that Jonathan's younger brother Moses, born in 1695, bears the name Dickinson rather than Ingersoll, proves that Hezekiah Dickinson lived until Jonathan was at least twelve.
4. Dexter, op. cit., p. 45.Their biographical sketches are on pp. 52-56 and 57-58 respectively.

"New Light" in his outlook to urge the ministers of Boston to invite Whitefield to preach there. A member of the class of 1709, who may have known Dickinson for a year before Dickinson's graduation, was Joseph Noyes, who later became the college chaplain and was the center of bitter controversy when the revivalist James Davenport accused him of being an unconverted hypocrite.

Between 1706 and 1708 Dickinson studied theology, but where he did so is not recorded. Had he continued at Yale, his post-graduate study probably would have appeared in the record, but Dexter, in his collection of biographies of Yale graduates, confesses, "Where he studied theology is not known."[5] It was often the practice for a candidate to study privately with some established minister, but there is no record of Dickinson's having done so. All that is known is that he was licensed to preach the Gospel, before he came to Elizabethtown in 1708.

4. His Marriage.

When Dickinson arrived to take charge of the Elizabethtown church in 1708, he met Joanna Melyen, who was five years his senior, and she became his wife before his ordination in 1709. Webster calls her, rather indefinitely,

> the daughter of the Rev. Samuel Melyen, or of some other descendant of Joseph Melyen, one of the associates in the purchase of the Elizabethtown Tract under Governor Nicoll's grant.[6]

But Dexter has identified her as the sister of Samuel Melyen, and

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5. Dexter, op. cit., p. 45
6. Webster, op. cit., p. 359

indeed has identified Samuel Melyen as the minister who preceded Dickinson at Elizabethtown.[7]

This was the beginning of a thirty-six year union, which lasted until Joanna's death in 1745.[8] The couple was blessed with nine children.

5. His Installation as Pastor at Elizabethtown.

Dickinson was ordained and installed as pastor of the church in Elizabethtown on Friday, September 29, 1709. A group of ministers from the Consociation of Fairfield County, Connecticut, conducted the service, and Mr. Morgan, of Freehold, N.J., delivered the sermon, entitled, "The Great Concernment of Gospel Ordinances Manifested from the great Effect of the well Improving or the Neglect of them." The text was Mark 16:16, "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned." One can well imagine the urgency of that text remaining with Dickinson throughout his ministry, compelling him to urge upon his hearers the choice of life as over against damnation.

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7. Dexter, op. cit., p. 45. In view of the greater certainty with which Dexter makes his point, his view seems preferable to Webster's. Hatfield, op. cit., p. 296, in an article on Mr. Melyen, similarly mentions Joanna as Mr. Melyen's sister. He believes it probable that Mr. Melyen's ministry ended in dissatisfaction between himself and the congregation, and notes that Mr. Melyen continued to live in Elizabethtown until his death. But there is no record of his presence causing any difficulty between Dickinson and the congregation.
8. Dickinson remained alone for about two years, and then married Mary Crane. David Brainerd performed the ceremony on April 12, 1747. But by this time Dickinson's own passing was only slightly more than six months away.

His charge was to include not only Elizabethtown itself, but the neighboring areas of Rahway, Westfield, Springfield, Union[9] and part of Chatham. Dickinson remained with this same congregation for the entire length of his thirty-eight year service in the ministry.

The church at Elizabethtown was Independent rather than Presbyterian in government. This, of course, posed no problem for Dickinson, who had come from the New England church, where Congregationalism was traditional. Many of his parishoners, similarly, were New Englanders, which explains, very probably, why Dickinson's ordination was performed by Connecticut ministers. As Wertenbaker put it, "New England Congregationalism...overflowed into New York and Northeastern New Jersey."[10] Accordingly it has been said that even after Dickinson had been active for a long time in the Presbyterian denomination, he remained a Congregationalist at heart.[11] This would not affect his theology, since both groups shared a thoroughly Calvinistic outlook. But Dickinson's early tradition of congregational autonomy may help to explain some of his later activity in Presbytery and in Synod.[12]

C. Dickinson's Personal Characteristics.

The following remarks refer to an overall view of Dickinson's life rather than specifically to the period which the biographical sketch

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9. Cyclopedia of American Biography, vol. II. p.174. Sprague, op.cit., p. 14, gives the same list, with the exception of Union, for which Connecticut Farms is substituted.
10. Wertenbaker, Princeton 1746-1896, p.6. Cf. The Middle Colonies, ch.IV.
11. ibid.
12. Post, chapter III.

has reached. They are added to pave the way for a fuller understanding of the man and his actions as described later.

1. His Physical Appearance.

No exact description of Dickinson's physical appearance is on record, but something of the impression that he produced upon others may be gained from the statements of Dr. Rodgers, who believed "that he was one of the most venerable and apostolical-looking men he ever saw,"[13] and of Mr. David Austin, a pastor of the Elizabethtown church after Dickinson's death, who is quoted as follows:

> His person was manly and of full size, his aspect grave and solemn, so that the wicked seemed to tremble in his presence.[14]

2. His Intellectual Capabilities.

"That President Dickinson's intellect was of a very high order, no one can doubt who reads half a dozen pages of any thing that he has written."[15] Such a testimony may at least be based upon considerable evidence, for a liberal sampling of Dickinson's work is still extant.

One fact that testifies to his capability is the variety of material that he produced. Letters, sermons, theological discourses

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13. Webster, op. cit., p. 361
14. ibid. This, however, is a second-hand report, Mr. Austin having heard this description from those who had known Dickinson. A picture of Dickinson is printed opposite page 56 of Hanzsche's Forgotten Founding Fathers.
15. Sprague, op. cit., p. 16

and controversial tracts[16] flowed abundantly from his pen, and each category he showed considerable skill. The True Scripture Doctrine especially illustrates his capacity for treating difficult theological reasoning with a clarity that is not burdensome to follow. His arguments are presented clearly enough to be persuasive even today.

An example of the care with which he ordered his thinking may be found in his exposition of Romans, chapter 7, in a letter to a friend who had inquired as to whether the passage described regenerate or unregenerate experience.[17] Before attempting to prove his point (he referred the chapter to regenerate experience) with a direct study of chapter 7 itself, he performed a survey of the first seven chapters as a whole, and sought to determine the place of chapter 7 in the logical scheme of the epistle to that point. Then, turning specifically to chapter 7, he argued from the purpose of the Apostle in including the section, from the nature of the experience involved (in comparison with other Scripture references), and even from the causal connection with chapter eight, as involved in the expression of 8:1, "There is therefore now no condemnation.."In short, he employed a method similar in principle to the methods of modern inductive study.

That he would collect and publish a series of sermons under the title The Reasonableness of Christianity is in itself a commentary

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16. Published examples of these four types of literature are, respectively: Familiar Letters to a Gentleman upon a Variety of Seasonable and Important Subjects in Religion; The Witness of the Spirit; The True Scripture Doctrine Concerning some Important Points of Christian Faith; A Defence of Presbyterian Ordination.
17. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, pp. 143-168

upon his regard for rationality.

Dexter comments upon his writing: "His style is unusually free and attractive, and his reasoning indicates a mind very much above the common."[18] And Hanzsche, a modern writer, has this comment:

> In a day when so many preachers were wrangling over non-essentials and getting lost in the impractical things on the outer circumference of religion, it was always Dickinson's genius to stress the basic essentials, the fundamental things of the faith, and to rally and unite men on the great essentials.[19]

And again Hanzsche writes:

> He was a profound scholar, second only to New England's Jonathan Edwards in his reputation as a theologian; but his scholarship had a decidedly practical turn.[20]

This practicality may be seen in his unwillingness to become ensnared in merely academic discussions of theology. In his discussion of election, for instance, in The True Scripture Doctrine, he not only discussed the doctrine itself, but having done his best to establish it, he proceeded to some "reflections upon what has been said, by way of improvement."[21] This "improvement", or application to the practical considerations of life, consisted of three parts: a vindication of God's justice in election, a word about the unspeakable comfort that comes to the believer through the knowledge that it is God who is saving him, and a call for men to exercise diligence to make their calling and election sure. Thus his theological discussion was not merely carried on in the abstract, but was made an occasion for urging greater trust in God, greater comfort

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18. Dexter, op. cit., p. 48
19. Hanzsche, op. cit., p. 78
20. ibid., p. 65
21. Dickinson, The True Scripture Doctrine, p. 53

and rest in His provision, and greater diligence in practical obedience.

Another and quite non-theological evidence of this practical turn of mind is Dickinson's interest in medicine. The busy pastor somehow found time to earn a considerable reputation as a physician, and published in 1740 a pamphlet entitled, "Observations of that terrible disease, vulgarly called throat distemper", which in Hanzsche's opinion refers to sinus trouble and the common cold[22], although the only medical pamphlet which Dexter records was concerned with diphtheria.[23]

3. His Character.

Perhaps the aspect of his character for which Dickinson is most generally appreciated was his "benign, kindly Christian spirit".[24] Sprague refers to "his uncommon sagacity, his calm judgment, and his unshrinking firmness -- tempered, however, by the spirit of Christian forbearance and moderation."[25] Dickinson's efforts on behalf of toleration with respect to theological non-essentials[26] and his attempts to heal the schism of 1741[27] may be regarded as evidence of this kindly disposition.

Further, a real love for people is evident in certain of his writings. The sermon entitled "The Witness of the Spirit" is an excellent illustration. Dickinson vividly portrayed the misery of

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22. Hanzsche, op. cit., p. 65
23. Dexter, op. cit., p. 48
24. Hanzsche, op. cit., p. 65
25. Sprague, op. cit., p. 14
26. Post, Chapter III.
27. Post, Chapter IV.

the damned and strenuously urged his hearers to repentance, and yet the whole tone of the sermon is permeated with a deep love and concern for them. In speaking to those earnest souls among his hearers who were struggling to be Christian and yet were in doubt concerning their salvation, he spoke with the tenderness and sympathy of one who knew what it is to stand in need of encouragement.

Strikingly different are his polemical pamphlets, such as his Defence of Presbyterian Ordination. Apparently Dickinson varied his tone according to the audience involved. In this case an attack had been made, not upon Dickinson personally but upon the whole non-Episcopal ministry, and apparently it had been forceful enough so that Dickinson feared it might shake the confidence of some of his flock. In such a case the sympathetic pleading of the sermon gave way to convincing logic, coupled with this sort of scorn:

> It's much more difficult to know what he would be at, than to answer his Arguments, if there be anything under this Head, which deserves that Name.[28]

Of course the language of theological debate in Dickinson's day was much more likely to contain invective than its modern counterpart. Such darts would not be out of place in Luther's writings, or, for that matter, in those of some of the Old Testament prophets. Yet, as one biographer of Dickinson has conceded,

> One who knew him well (the Rev. Thomas Foxcroft) admits that he had a natural turn for controversy.[29]

It is a tribute to his Christian charity, however, that he carried on controversy only on the level of principles, never of personalities.

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28. Dickinson, Defence of Presbyterian Ordination, p. 14
29. Dexter, op. cit., p. 48,49

For all his objections to Episcopacy, for instance, he remained on very cordial terms with Mr. Vaughan, the Episcopal minister in Elizabethtown.

The fact of the matter seems to be that Dickinson distinguished carefully between the essential and the non-essential. He was firm when it was necessary to be firm, and perhaps it must be admitted that he was sometimes more sharp than modern readers might prefer. Yet he was disposed to make concessions when it appeared to him that he might do so without endangering a central article of faith.

For him an eager concern for the truth was an important part of Christian love. Just as it is an act of love for a parent to discipline his child, whereas over-indulgence is no real kindness at all, so Dickinson felt that the honest proclamation of essential truth was the greatest kindness, and that to withhold it for fear of hurting a listener's feelings would actually be treachery. Accordingly Dickinson, who was generally very conscious of the proper etiquette[30], did not hesitate to describe "The Danger of Infidelity" in terrifying terms in a letter to an inquirer, although he felt the departure from his customary courtesy keenly enough to conclude:

> You see, I have addressed you with an unreserved Freedom and Familiarity. I have overlooked the Distance of your Character; and treated you as if we were in the same State of Equality now, as we shall quickly find ourselves before the tribunal of our glorious Judge.--The Cause requires this at my Hands; and I

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30. Sprague, op. cit., p. 17: "He was bland and courteous in his manners, and though sufficiently easy of access, was never tolerant towards undue liberties."

> should have been unfaithful, I had almost said unmerciful to you, if I had not failed of the Decorum, which would have been my Duty to have observed in any other Case. I shall therefore depend upon your candid Interpretation of this unpolished Address; and your kind Acceptance of the faithful Designs and Desires of, Sir, your most Obedient humble Servant..[31]

4. His Religious Experience.

The greatest obstacle to a precise description of Dickinson's religious experience is the fact that he seldom wrote of it -- that is, in a form clearly identified as his own personal experience. It is therefore necessary to scan his writings for his conception of what is normative for Christian experience, and for evidence of how far he personally walked in the path he recommended for others.

It is not recorded whether Dickinson had any sudden conversion experience. The insistence upon such an experience seems to have been a point of contention between the conservative and the revivalist ministers in the controversy leading up to the schism of the synod in 1741. One "Old Side" minister complained of the revivalists:

> A prevailing rule to try converts is, that if you don't know when you were without Christ and unconverted. &c., you have no interest in Christ, let your love and practice be what they may; which rule, as it is unscriptural, so I am of the mind will cut off nine in ten, if not ninety-nine in a hundred, of the good people in the world that have had a pious education.[32]

Dickinson's sermon, "The Witness of the Spirit", makes it clear that he did not consider sudden conversion necessary for all men; but he

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31. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p. 9
32. Andrews' letter to Pierson, in Webster, op. cit., p. 179-180. It must be remembered, of course, that this is the description of the revivalists' position as drawn by an opponent.

did consider it necessary that the Holy Spirit should bring a man to see himself as a condemned sinner, to recognize his inability to save himself by any means whatsoever, and to cast himself completely on the mercy of God, receiving Christ by faith as his one sure hope of salvation. The very tone of the sermon leaves no doubt that this had been Dickinson's own experience, although when it occurred, or whether it was more or less sudden, he never mentioned. When speaking of the Holy Spirit's action in making a man see his need of Christ, he admitted that this varies from case to case:

> This he sometimes does more suddenly; and by a more forcible Impression, filling the Soul with the greatest Agony and Distress.. But in (others) Convictions are more gradually brought on (with) lower Degrees of Terror and Amazement.. Some Sinners agonzie long under these Distresses, before they find Rest in Christ. Others are sooner bro't to act Faith in him; and to the comfortable Evidences of it.[33]

As a Christian, Dickinson apparently experienced the daily warfare with sin which he ascribed to a penitent Christian in one of his "Familiar Letters". One cannot avoid the feeling that he was writing a record of his own experiences when he put these words in the mouth of the Christian:

> Have I Hope...that God has pardoned my Sins? What an Instance of pardoning Mercy is This!..And am I still offending against such Mercy and Love! Am I still so formal, lifeless and hypocritical! Am I doing so little for him who has done so much for me! Ah vile, sinful Heart! Ah base Ingratitude to such amazing Goodness! Oh for more Victory over my Corruptions; for more Thankfulness for such Mercies..What need have I, every Day to have this polluted Soul washed in the Blood of Christ, and to Benefit of his Intercession! [34]

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33. Dickinson, The Witness of the Spirit, pp. 6,7. The words in parentheses are conjectures to supply missing words where the manuscript was defective.
34. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p. 137

Indeed, he regarded such warfare within oneself as a sure evidence of salvation:

> If we cannot rest contented with our Defects and Imperfections... but greatly lament them before God, & mourn our Want of Conformity to him, and all our Want of Affection and Devotion to him, and all our Want of Communion with him; Then we may conclude that we have the Witness ourselves, that we are the Children of God.[35]

Yet he did not fasten morbidly upon his imperfections, but constantly trusted in Christ for victory over them. Never, so far as there is any record, did he let his consciousness of his own imperfections mar his assurance that Christ had forgiven him, was constantly transforming him into a more Christlike man, and would at last receive him into heaven. Even on his deathbed, he was confident:

> Many days have passed between God and my soul, in which I have solemnly dedicated myself to Him, and I trust that what I have committed to Him, He is able to keep until that day.[36]

It may be remarked of Dickinson's devotional practice that he was heartily in favor of a regular daily schedule of Bible reading, prayer and meditation, and that he stressed the value of private devotions, family worship and church attendance as highly important means of maintaining personal fellowship with God. "Walk by Rule, in an exact Observance of stated Devotions,"[37] he advised, even to

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35. Dickinson, The Witness of the Spirit, p. 13
36. quoted by Sprague, op. cit., p. 16. Cf. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, pp. 398-399: "Be humbled, but not discouraged by your Deadness, Darkness, Temptations and Corruptions; for however your spiritual Frames, Affections, or Dispositions of Soul may change, yet Christ Jesus is the same Yesterday, Today and for ever, and may be safely trusted for Deliverance, how distressing soever your Condition..Act always under the Influence of this Maxim, that you cannot trust too little to your self, nor too much to Christ."
37. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p. 389

the point of keeping "an exact Account in Writing of your daily Expence of Time."[38] So careful was he to fill every available moment of the day with some devotional practice or meditation upon God, that the modern reader is likely to be repelled by what seems to be such a Spartan schedule. Indeed, for most men, the schedule he recommended could easily degenerate into a hopeless formalism. But for Dickinson, perhaps because of the greater discipline to which his mind was already accustomed, it proved to be an effective means of fellowship with the God he loved and served. Both in his religious observances and in "every Affair of common Life", he lived as one who daily followed his own advice:

> You will always find your Soul enlivened, your Graces invigorated, and your Affections spiritualized, in Proportion to your humble, steady, cheerful Dependence upon Christ, for all those Supplies of Grace you stand in need of. -- Thus wait upon the Lord Jesus Christ, and be of good Courage, and he shall strengthen your Heart.[39]

D. Summary

As already indicated, the available information concerning Dickinson's early years is rather scanty, but it seems certain that he entered upon his pastoral work with training at least equal to the average, and with a keenness of mind far above average. He combined warm Christian love with zeal for the proclamation of essential Christian truth. Finally, he had a fervent love for Christ and a genuine spiritual experience which made him a ready and dependable counselor for others.

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38. ibid., p. 394
39. ibid., p. 398

CHAPTER II

DICKINSON THE THEOLOGIAN

A. Introduction

During the course of his pastorate at Elizabethtown, Jonathan Dickinson attained a wide reputation as a theologian--not as the founder of a new theological school or party, but as a champion of the received theology of his church. It was not for any radical new insight that he was known, but for a fresh, logical presentation and defense of classic Calvinistic Christianity. For Dickinson lived in a day when the Christian Church was being attacked from without by deist and skeptic, and disturbed within by the disputes of Calvinist and Arminian, presbyter and prelate. Dickinson wrote fervently on all these fronts, not with a debater's concern for doctrine as such, but with a pastor's concern for the salvation and nurture of souls. As his friend, Thomas Foxcroft wrote in his preface to Dickinson's book, The Reasonableness of Christianity:

> To promote this experimental Religion, and spread the genuine Spirit and Practice of Christianity, is the ultimate Design of the following Essay on the Reasonableness of it.[1]

With this end in view Dickinson kept his pen busy, with an effect that may be estimated from Hanzsche's statement that his sermons were printed in Philadelphia, New York and Boston, the three largest cities in the American colonies, and were even republished in Edinburgh in

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1. Preface to The Reasonableness of Christianity, p. XIV

1793, after the Revolutionary War.[2] This gives something of an idea of the breadth of his influence.

The present chapter will discuss Dickinson's apologetic works, his theological system, and his controversial works, in that order.

B. Apologetic Works

Hatfield has mentioned the prevalence of skepticism and deism in the years of Dickinson's pastorate,[3] and Dickinson himself has left something of a description of the opposition with which he had to contend:

> Shall we confront our Oracles of wit, and seek some rational scheme of religion and happiness, from our modern pagans, the Deists? These libertines can vainly boast of unprejudic'd Reason and Science....They put out the eyes of conscience, & bravely scoff at reveal'd religion, as an idle dream, and the effect of a melancholy imagination, enthusiasm or Priestcraft.[4]

Dickinson was equipped to deal with such people not only by his intellectual capacities, but also by his very disposition to use reason wherever it was capable of functioning. Thus he could meet the deists on their own ground.

> It must therefore be agreeable both to our duty and interest, to enquire into the grounds of our holy Religion; and reasonably to establish our selves in those precious Truths, on which we build our hopes....[5]

In 1732 Dickinson collected four of his sermons and had them published under the title, The Reasonableness of Christianity, a work which was directed essentially to the unbeliever who required

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2. Op.Cit., p.77
3. Op.Cit., pp. 334-335
4. Dickinson, The Reasonableness of Christianity, p.61
5. ibid., p.2

reasonable proof of the truth of Christianity. These four sermons began with Biblical texts, but in each the exposition of the text itself was followed by a more general discussion of the topic. (This expository-topical approach must have been somewhat characteristic of Dickinson, since it appears also in his other major book, The True Scripture Doctrine.)

Sermon I was based upon Romans 1:20, and was aimed at presenting logical proof of the existence of God; the argument followed was essentially that of the First Cause.

> We see the cause by the effect; and have the brightest evidence, that this vast and spacious World, with its amazing magnificence, lustre and harmony, was not its own efficient; did not proceed from chance, nor could be the product of an Author unequal to the Work: And must therefore be the Workmanship of an Infinitely wise, & powerful Being.[6]

In the course of his proof Dickinson considered the major alternative to his belief, namely, the eternal existence of an uncreated world. But he concluded that a world which existed from eternity would have had to be from eternity exactly as it now is; there would be no possibility of change in the world, since a change would require some external force to bring it about. Contingency, too, would be impossible, for if the world exists eternally it must therefore exist necessarily, and it would be impossible that there should be, for instance, one more or one less grain of sand on any beach. This idea Dickinson rejected as absurd.

He also argued that the presence of thought in the world was proof of the existence of God; since thought could not have arisen out of

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6. ibid., p.4

inert matter, therefore the existence of an original Mind was deemed necessary. Dickinson cited Locke, Of Human Understanding, in support of this idea.

Thus in Sermon I Dickinson argued philosophically, with a minimum use of Scriptural revelation, in an effort to reach those for whom reason was the only acceptable approach. And the sermon contained a clear presentation of many of the arguments for the existence of God which have grown out of centuries of philosophic thought. But, true to his practical purpose, Dickinson did not stop at argument, but proceeded to its application:

> This Doctrine teacheth us the last necessity that we are in, of an interest in the favour of this glorious God.[7]

In Sermon II he moved from the general ground of religion to the specifically Christian concern of his text--"Christ died for the ungodly" (Romans 5:6). Yet his approach remained largely on the level of reason rather than of revelation, as he sought to prove two propositions:

> 1) That mankind is brought into a sinful, miserable, helpless State.
> 2) That our Lord Jesus Christ did in due time die for their deliverance out of that state.[8]

The first was supported largely by an appeal to personal experience: men must admist that they see the evidence of corruption, weakness and sinfulness in their own characters, and since it is inconceivable that a good and holy God would deliberately create such sinful creatures, the Biblical account of the fall of man is the most probable

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7. ibid., p.36
8. ibid., p.40

explanation of the corruption that all must acknowledge. As for the redemption of man by the propitiatory death of Jesus Christ, Dickinson showed that, if true, this doctrine would be worthy of a perfect God, since it would give Him opportunity to exercise His infinite goodness and mercy without compromising His justice. The transfer of penalty from the guilty sinner to the innocent Christ would be counted unjust if performed by a human judge, Dickinson conceded, but this could not apply to God, who has sovereign power over all life. Furthermore, the idea of Christ dying for the ungodly is reasonable because it is the best answer imaginable for the problem of man, since thereby man's sins are pardoned, and yet man is not set at liberty to sin more and more, but rather is brought under the control of God's Spirit and trained in Christian virtues.

> In a word, the Gospel-scheme is in every way perfective of human nature, and calculated for our present and future happiness.[9]

Therefore, men should thank God for providing such a way of salvation, and should earnestly seek to receive Christ by faith.

Sermon III, from Luke 24:44, was an attempt to prove the Saviorhood of Jesus Christ from the prophecies of the Old Testament. Dickinson defined a prophecy (as used in this discussion) as "a Divine prediction of future contingent events",[10] and stated that a prophecy could be "fulfilled" in any one of three ways. "Accommodation" would be simply the parallelism of a New Testament fact with an Old Testament fact, such as Matthew's citation of

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9. ibid., p.75
10. ibid.,p.80

Hosea's words, "Out of Egypt have I called my son" (Hosea 11:1), with reference to the return of Jesus' family from Egypt following the death of Herod. A prophecy could also be fulfilled in terms of a literal fulfilment of words intended as direct predictions, and it was with such fulfilments that Dickinson was principally concerned. Finally,

> a prophecy may be said to be fulfilled, when it has a double accomplishment; and is completed both in the Type and Antitype, in the Sign, and in the thing thereby signified.[11]

Dickinson proceeded to list instances in which Christ literally fulfilled direct Old Testament predictions, with detailed explanations of several of these prophecies. Lest it be objected that these fulfilments would be convincing only to those who accepted the original predictions, Dickinson declared:

> The accomplishment of these prophecies is a clear and certain Indication of their Divine original.[12]

Thus he sought not only to prove the claims of Christ from the convergence of many Old Testament prophecies upon Him, but also to establish the veracity of the Biblical record to the unbeliever.

Sermon IV was based upon Peter's reference (Acts 2:22) to "miracles, and wonders, and signs" as showing God's approval of Jesus Christ. Dickinson defined a miracle as "an extraordinary operation of God in nature, either stopping its course, or producing some effects, that are above its laws and power." [13] Jesus performed such miracles, Dickinson reasoned, and they have been reliably reported by men who

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11. ibid., p.84
12. ibid., p.103
13. ibid., p.120

show the marks of honesty and integrity, and who had no reason to falsify their reports, since these reports led to persecution for themselves and their followers, all of which they would have sought to avoid if they had thought that their message was not true. Furthermore, there were hostile witnesses to these miracles, who would have discredited the reports if they had been able. But in fact even the bitterest enemies of the Christians accepted these reports as true. Therefore, since Christ did perform these miracles, and since God would not have so blessed the efforts of an impostor, therefore Christ must have been all that He claimed to be.

In conclusion, Dickinson exhorted his hearers to make sure of their faith in Christ. They were to give evidence of this faith by a holy life, and attend upon Christ's ordinances. For those earnest Christians who stood in doubt as to which Christian denomination should claim their allegiance, Dickinson added this rather characteristic advice:

> Concern yourselves as little as possible with matters of doubtful disputation: but where you must be of a party chuse the charitable side.[14]

The Reasonableness of Christianity was doubtless Dickinson's major apologetic to the non-Christian world, but other examples of his efforts are still extant. Familiar Letters to a Gentleman, published in 1745, exhibits a much more informal style, and whereas the book contains Dickinson's letters to a friend, covering the friend's whole progress from his first interest in Christianity to his later questions

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14. ibid., p.173

on specific Christian doctrines and his search for maturity in Christ, the first few letters deal with such questions as "The Evidences of Christianity","The Prophecies of the Old Testament", and "The Certainty of the Facts Reported in the Gospel", --very much the same topics as in the earlier book, although somewhat differently handled.

By publishing these addresses Dickinson undoubtedly performed a great service to the church. In the twentieth century, with so many other sources of information within easy access, men are likely to underestimate the influence of such works. But in the eighteenth century, as Hanzsche has written, "the influence of the pulpit was the one dominant influence of the day,"[15] and while it would be impossible to determine the exact extent of Dickinson's importance, there can be no doubt that many a skeptic was at least challenged to consider anew the claims of Christ in his life, through the writings of the pastor at Elizabethtown.

C. Dickinson's Theological System

The most systematic presentation of Dickinson's theology was set forth in The True Scripture Doctrine, published in 1741. This too was a collection of sermons, with the pattern of exposition followed by topical argument. The five doctrines specifically treated were eternal election, original sin, grace in conversion, justification by faith, and the perseverance of the saints. Dickinson here defended orthodox Calvinism with clarity and vigor, and with several fresh insights that make the book worthy of study even today.

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15. Op.Cit., p.150

Many of Dickinson's other writings abounded in doctrinal discussion, of course, but for the sake of simplicity the present chapter will follow the major outline of The True Scripture Doctrine, mentioning others of his writings when necessary.

1. Eternal Election.

"That God has according to the good pleasure of his will, from all eternity, elected some to everlasting life"[16] is of course one of the principal beliefs that sets the Calvinistic system apart from other branches of Christian theology. Dickinson began his defense of the doctrine with the observation that

> God's foreknowledge of the sanctification and eternal salvation of all that shall ever be saved, renders those events certain and necessary;...they will not, they cannot be otherwise than he foreknew they should be.[17]

Thus Dickinson sought to remove contingency as an ultimate fact, and to show how future events are contingent only from man's limited viewpoint. He believed that even those who denied absolute predestination would have to acknowledge the certainty of future events as a natural result of God's foreknowledge. And once this certainty were admitted, the objector would have no ground to complain that predestination removes the incentive for moral effort, since certainty based on predestination does not have this effect any more than the certainty based on foreknowledge.

Dickinson's second step was to show that since all the perfections of God's nature are in agreement, His foreknowledge cannot be

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16. Dickinson, The True Scripture Doctrine, p.9
17. ibid., p.23

separated from His having willed certain events to occur.

> Whatever difficulties there may be in our minds with respect to the eternal concurrence of God's will with his knowledge...it is certain that in some way or other, their futurity was agreeable to his will, or else his knowledge and his will would have been at disagreement, which may by no means be imagined.[18]

It was impossible then, for Dickinson to think of God's will being thwarted, since this would have involved a contradiction in the nature of God. The Arminian would consider God's willing the salvation of any individual as being contingent upon the individual's faith, but for Dickinson there could be no such contingency, whereby the will of the Creator would be dependent on the will of the creature. Rather, the will of God is eternal, and unchangeable: "He is not a man, that he should repent." (I Samuel 14:29) Biblical references to God's "repenting" are to be explained as condescensions to limited human understanding, and refer only to a change in the outward appearance of God's providence toward men.

This view Dickinson supported from numerous passages of Scripture. Having taken Ephesians 1:4, 5 as his text--"According as he hath chosen us in him, before the foundation of the world...according to the good pleasure of his will"---he cited also Romans 8:29, 30; 9:23 and 11:5, 7, as well as several other statements of Scripture.

The great objection to eternal election has always been the contention that it would destroy human freedom and responsibility. There is involved in the objection the presupposition that free will and necessity are opposite, mutually exclusive principles; and this presupposition Dickinson rejected as a fallacy:

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18. ibid., p.27

> Freedom cannot be opposed to necessity. Every free agent must necessarily will what his understanding, appetites and affections represent to him the most fit object of choice..To suppose a power to do otherwise, is to suppose a power that is extrinsical to him, that must move his will as a clock or watch is moved; and is therefore utterly inconsistent with freedom.[19]

An objector might claim that Dickinson redefined freedom so as to deprive it of any real meaning, but actually his definition involves only the idea that men make their decisions according to the sort of men they are--an idea which seems logical enough. It is because man's "understanding, appetites and affections" are evil, argued Dickinson, that his will is necessarily and helplessly evil until such time as God interposes to change it. This conception, as will soon be seen, had a decided effect upon Dickinson's doctrine of conversion.

Dickinson's position is further explained in an exchange of pamphlets with John Beach, a former Independent who had gone over to the Church of England. Beach had preached a sermon in which he denied predestination, and affirmed that, even though men are naturally evil, God had given all men sufficient grace to enable them to repent if they were willing. Dickinson replied, in effect, that it would be futile to offer men salvation on condition of their being willing to accept it, for it is precisely the will of man that is corrupt: "the true Reason why Sinners can't comply with the Terms of the Gospel, is because they won't.---Their hearts and affections are wedded to their lusts and idols."[20]

Beach responded with references to Scriptural statements that God

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19. ibid., p.39
20. Dickinson, A Vindication of God's Sovereign Free Grace, p.40
    Cf. The True Scripture Doctrine, p.61, for the same idea.

has no pleasure in the death of the wicked (Ezekiel 33:11) and that God will have all men to be saved (I Timothy 2:4). He charged Dickinson with teaching that God has two wills, one desiring to save all men and one electing only certain men to salvation, while deliberately condemning all others. He then pointed to what he considered a practical shortcoming of Dickinson's doctrine:

> Besides, by preaching your doctrine, I should cast stumbling-blocks in the way of men's salvation; and I should put them upon spending their lives in gaping for a personal revelation that they are elected, when they ought to spend all their time in repenting of their sins, in mortifying their lusts, and in endeavoring to grow up into as great a likeness to God and Christ as possible.[21]

This last thrust might have been spared if Beach had been familiar with the ringing notes of exhortation in Dickinson's preaching. Never one to advocate passive waiting for a spiritual experience, Dickinson urged men to put forth all their efforts in repentance, faith and deliberate seeking after God, for

> ...God never does in Sovereignty appoint Salvation for any, in the final wilful neglect of Gospel-Means...But if we have Hearts given us, to be humbly and earnestly attending upon the Means of Grace, it is an encouraging Sign, that he who has excited our Diligence, intends to crown it with Success.[22]

Dickinson's purpose here was obviously to preserve the complete sovereignty of God in the salvation of the elect. Man must not be allowed to claim credit for any part of his salvation---not even for being willing to accept it, for this very willingness was given to him

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21. Beach, God's Sovereignty and His Universal Love to the Souls of Men, Reconciled, p.52
22. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p.97. Dickinson's teaching was similar with respect to sanctification. Holiness of life was not a prerequisite for election; God, rather, worked in the lives of those whom He had already elected, to produce the holiness without which none shall see Him. Cf. The True Scripture Doctrine, p.57

by God. Certainly this position has its problems--Dickinson's answer to Beach on the subject of God's universal love may leave something to be desired[23]--and paradox may be the only answer that finite human minds can give. But surely Dickinson was attempting to live by the principle Soli Deo Gloria.

2. Original Sin.

Under this head in The True Scripture Doctrine Dickinson sought to prove three propositions:

I. That the whole world of mankind are by nature in a state of sin and guilt.
II. That this state of sin and guilt, which we are naturally in, is the fruit of Adams's apostasy.
III. That we are by virtue of this sin and guilt justly liable to death, temporal, spiritual and eternal.[24]

Dickinson's opening proof of the sin of mankind was a direct appeal to experience; he felt that his readers would be forced to acknowledge their own sinful inclinations and moral weakness. He also pointed to the immense cost of redemption and reasoned that the malady that needed a cure so drastic as the cross must necessarily be serious. Finally, he introduced a series of Scriptural references to the wickedness of man, such as Romans 3:9, 10, 23, Romans 7:18 and Ephesians 2:3, 5.

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23. Vid. Dickinson, A Second Vindication of God's Sovereign Free Grace, p.80, where in commenting upon Ezekial 33:11 Dickinson wrote: "the Words can mean no more, than that the Repentance and Conversion of Sinners is agreeable to the compassionate and merciful Nature of God; this is an Event according to the good Pleasure of his Goodness." In line with the former argument about the agreement of all the perfections of God's nature, one would have expected an explanation of the agreement of this compassionate and merciful nature of God, with His will, as exercised in reprobation.
24. The True Scripture Doctrine, p.80

That this present state of corruption must be acknowledged to be the result of Adam's fall, seemed obvious enough to Dickinson, since he could not conceive of God having created man in sin:

> Could it be agreeable to the justice of God, to make us under a natural necessity of sinning against him; and yet punish us for the sinful affections which he himself had given us; or for such sinful practices as are the necessary result of them? No, surely; the Judge of all the earth will do right.[25]

Here, of course, is an infralapsarian position as over against the more extreme form of Calvinism, which asserts that even the fall was the result of God's deliberate influence. Dickinson believed that the original fall was the result of Adam's free agency, but that because of Adam's sin his progeny is totally depraved and unable to obey God.

> How impotent are we now become! How does every good thought die even in the thinking; and every good disposition naturally languish and decay! How are we an easy prey to every temptation; and continually betrayed by our own lusts to the enemy, that lies in wait to destroy us! [26]

This, however, does not absolve man of responsibility, for all men are involved in the fall of Adam, and thus share in the responsibility for the moral weakness that prevents their serving God.

> If a master in a morning command his servant his work till night, is the servant guiltless and unworthy of punishment, if he wilfully break his axe or spade, and thereby render himself incapable of obedience?[27]

As for defining the way in which all men are involved in Adam's sin, Dickinson considered two possibilities. He rejected the idea that a sinful nature is inherited through natural generation, since

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25. ibid., p.95
26. ibid., p.82
27. ibid., p.59

he felt that this would make all the ancestors of a man, equally with Adam, the cause of his sinfulness.[28] Therefore, he concluded that Adam underwent the trial of his obedience as the legal head and representative of all his progeny. If he had passed this test, not only he but all his progeny would have been forever established in righteousness.[29] In fact Dickinson believed that if Adam had eaten of the tree of life (Genesis 3:22) before he ate of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2:17), his trial would have been over, and he and all mankind would have been forever safe. Conversely, since Adam as the legal head of mankind broke the commandment of God by eating of the forbidden fruit, not only he but all men stand under the punishment of that sin, being judged to have sinned "in Adam".

Dickinson admitted that there was no express mention, in the Genesis account, of any trial involving the whole of mankind; but he argued that this must have been the case, since in fact all men do participate in the death which was threatened to Adam in the event of his sin. Furthermore, Romans 5:12 explicitly states that "by one man (Adam) sin entered into the world, and death by sin." Having rejected the transmission of sin by natural generation, Dickinson was forced to the idea of Adam representing humanity in his trial, as the only alternative explanation.[30]

The present result of this fall is that all men are under the just

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28. ibid., p.103. Perhaps this is not a conclusive argument, since the sin of all a man's progenitors would still be ultimately traceable to Adam.
29. ibid., p.96
30. ibid., p.103

condemnation of God unless they are somehow saved by Christ. But perhaps the worst of all the results of the fall is the inability of man, by the exercise of his unaided will, even to be converted to God:

> Such is our depravity, such our impotency by the fall, that we cannot so much as accept of the remedy, that is in infinite mercy provided, without supernatural influences inclining and enabling us to do it.[31]

Thus the plight of man is to be plunging helplessly toward judgment and wrath, unable even to accept the solution that God offers, unless God should affect a radical change in the very nature of man.

3. Grace in Conversion.

It will be remembered that in his discussion of eternal election Dickinson expressed the view that

> Every free agent must necessarily will what his understanding, appetites and affections represent to him the most fit object of choice.[32]

According to this view the result of Adam's fall is interpreted as a perversion of man's "understanding, appetites and affections" such that man must unavoidably make wrong choices--including the rejection of the gospel's offer of salvation in Christ. Dickinson, consistent with this view of the human will and of freedom, explained the working of God in converting a sinner, in terms of the enlightening of the sinner's understanding.

> Upon the whole, I cannot see that the Spirit of God does in any other manner work this wonderful change in the hearts of sinners, than by giving them a just view of things as they are, by bringing

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31. ibid., p.83
32. ibid., p.39

> them to act reasonably, worthy the dignity of their rational nature, and the intellectual powers they are endued with. By this he conquers the enmity to God there is in their hearts; and brings them from the power of their lusts, of Satan, and the world, into the fear and favour of God.[33]

Once this has been done, there is no need of coercion of the sinner's will, for he will see what is truly according to his best interests, and will act accordingly. Thus Dickinson attempted to retain the freedom of the will within the framework of the sovereignty of God, who enlightens His elect.

> The sinner acts most freely, in choosing what his darkened understanding and vitiated appetites represent to him most worthy of his choice. The convert acts most freely, when his enlightened understanding gives him a contrary view of things; and represents the objects of his former detestation and abhorrence, to be most worthy of his desire and delight.[34]

Both in The True Scripture Doctrine and in his sermon entitled The Witness of the Spirit, Dickinson enumerated the steps through which a person normally passes in the course of conversion: a sense of his deep sinfulness and the prospect of judgment, a sense of his inability to save himself by any good works and formal religious observances, and an utter abandonment to the mercy of Christ, as the sinner trusts Christ both for pardon and for the power to lead a new life in God's service.[35] It must be remembered that Dickinson urged

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33. ibid., pp. 151-2
34. ibid., p. 166
35. This is not to say that he insisted upon these steps in every case--infants would seem to be excepted. But it is clear that Dickinson regarded this pattern as usual and normative for genuine conversion. Yet he refused to regard any pattern as absolutely necessary, and was able to conceive of the salvation even of pagans, apart from the preaching of the word. In The True Scripture Doctrine, p.196, he wrote, "I would not limit the Holy One of Israel, who may, for aught I know, reveal his Son in an extraordinary manner to some that never heard of the gospel; so on the other hand, I would leave secret things to God, unto whom they belong."

his hearers to take these steps, and yet he did so with the understanding that his urging was merely a tool in God's hands, and that if men were to be converted it would have to be by the action of the Holy Spirit, in making them aware of their need of Christ.

The conversion thus brought about would be the starting point of a new life in union with Jesus Christ. One of Dickinson's Familiar Letters is entitled "The Nature and Necessity of our Union with Christ." Dickinson referred to this union as mystical and spiritual, although he did not presume to describe how it is brought about:

> I shall...not adventure to inquire into the Modality of this Unity of Spirit in Christ and Believers, but only endeavor to consider it in a scriptural and practical Light.[36]

As a result of this union the believer may draw upon Christ for the grace and strength necessary for a life that is pleasing to God.

> The Believer's Refuge, therefore, in all his Trials, in all his prevailing Darkness, Deadness, Temptation and Imperfection, is to act Faith in Christ, for Grace to help in Time of Need. There is sufficient Stock laid up for him in the Hands of Christ; and if he will reach forth the Hand of the Soul, and by a believing View of the Fulness of Christ, be ready to receive, he shall surely find the Grace of Christ sufficient for him, and the Strength of Christ made perfect in his Weakness.[37]

4. Justification by Faith.

Dickinson devoted one chapter in The True Scripture Doctrine to this cardinal doctrine of the Protestant Reformation, and mentioned it often in his other writings. The basic thrust of his teaching was that men, being altogether too sinful to please God by their own merits, are justified completely by the imputation of the righteousness

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36. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p.335
37. ibid., p.336

of Christ, and by his atoning sacrifice, as they cast themselves upon His mercy in faith.

His concept of the atonement was thoroughly substitutionary. He thought of Christ as having died in the believer's place,

> by taking upon him our sin and guilt, bearing our punishment, and fulfilling the law for us, and thereby purchasing our acquittance from death and hell, and recovery to life and happiness.[38]

And just as the believer's sins are imputed to Christ, so also Christ's righteousness is imputed to the believer, and forms the only ground of the believer's acceptance before God.

> ...the imputation of the obedience of Christ, does fully and perfectly acquit the believer from the guilt of sin, the empire of Satan, the curse of the law, and the damnation of hell.[39]

Yet this is no arbitrary transfer of guilt and innocence between two unrelated parties. Dickinson believed that it is only on the basis of the union of believers (considered together, the Church) with Christ, that a "common interest" is effected, whereby the transfer of guilt and of merit is possible.

> It should then be observed, that in the great Design of reconciling Sinners to God, and preparing a chosen Number for eternal Glory, Christ and the Church were one mystical Person; so One, that what he did was imputed to them, as if done by them; and what they deserved was imputed to him, as if he had been personally obnoxious.---Thus the Lord Jesus Christ is called the LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS, Jer. xxiii. 6.[40]

This union with Christ, whereby men are justified by the imputation of His righteousness, is the result of faith, which Dickinson defined variously as assent to gospel truth, consent of the will to gospel

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38. Dickinson, The True Scripture Doctrine, p.192
39. ibid., p.191
40. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, pp. 339-340

terms, and trust in Christ for salvation---with the understanding that any one of these definitions, properly understood, involves the other two.[41] Thus faith itself is not to be equated with the assurance of salvation,[42] although a believer, realizing that his salvation rests upon the finished work of Christ and not upon any works or merits of his own, may quite legitimately have assurance of his salvation.

In his debates with Beach and again in Familiar Letters, Dickinson attacked the doctrine

> that our Justification, or Title to eternal Life, depends not on Christ's righteousness imputed to us; but on our Faith, including sincere Obedience to the Gospel, as the Condition to which it is promised..[43]

The trouble with this doctrine was that it substituted a human attitude for Christ's work as the deciding factor in salvation; and even though that attitude be human faith itself, Dickinson would have none of it.[44] For even human faith is an imperfect thing, and the remaining corruptions and weaknesses in the Christian make his "sincere obedience to the gospel" a very imperfect thing indeed. And Dickinson was anxious to guard against the idea "that as our Obedience is imperfect, so our State of Justification is imperfect also."[45] As he insisted,

> We are either justified, or we are not; either God does pronounce us righteous, or he does not. Now, if he does, we are free from Guilt, and fully accepted of him; but if he does not, we are under Guilt and a Sentence of Condemnation. There can be no Medium, no

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41. Dickinson, True Scripture Doctrine, p.194
42. Vid. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p. 169, and The Witness of the Spirit, p.25
43. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p.222
44. In this position Dickinson was consistent with the Westminster Confession, XI, 1.
45. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p.222

> no middle State between that of Justification and that of Condemnation.[46]

Quite rightly, Dickinson saw that the idea of imperfect justification was more akin to Roman Catholic than to Protestant doctrine. And he maintained that an imperfect justification is no justification at all.

Even more serious was the implication that justification should be in any sense grounded upon human obedience. This to Dickinson was a reversal of cause and effect, since it is actually God who produces obedience in man, not man who earns salvation by obedience:

> as there can be no sincere Obedience antecedent to our Interest in Christ and Union to him, it hence appears, that our sincere Obedience must necessarily be the Consequence of our Justification, and therefore cannot be the Condition of it.[47]

Thus the idea of a man being justified on the basis of his sincere obedience to the gospel is properly a doctrine of justification by works, rather than by faith. Dickinson set up the contrast as follows:

> Upon the one Supposal, Christ himself has performed all the proper Conditions of our Justification, and freely bestows the Benefit on our grateful Acceptance; whereas, upon the other Supposal, Christ has not performed the Conditions of our Justification, but only procured for us the Privilege to perform them ourselves.[48]

In Dickinson's eyes this doctrine clearly violated the principle of salvation by the pure, unmerited grace of God. And it did not help to speak of "faith" as the condition of justification, for

> ...Faith is here considered but as an Act of Obedience, and as being seminally or virtually all evangelical Obedience, including

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46. ibid., p.224
47. ibid., p.225
48. ibid., p.240

> the same in the Nature of it; so that this Faith is nothing else but a constitution Part and active Principle of Works required, and not distinct from them in the Office of Justifying.[49]

For Dickinson, on the contrary, faith was a complete abandonment of all human means of salvation, and a complete dependence of the sinner--as a sinner, with no good works to plead in his own defense--upon the mercy of God. One thinks of the publican of Luke 18:13, crying "God, be merciful to me a sinner," or of Abraham, trusting in "him who justifies the ungodly" (Romans 4:5). When the Holy Spirit has brought a man to that position, the man is instantly, eternally and perfectly justified by being united to Christ. Then and only then does the Holy Spirit work in that man's heart a "sincere obedience to the gospel".

For Dickinson, this realization meant a new confidence in those periods when he felt weak, sinful and defeated in the Christian life; he could always look beyond his own impotency to the almighty power of the God who had accepted him, and who was still faithfully working in him to perfect the likeness of Christ which He had begun to produce in him. Protestant Christianity owes much to Jonathan Dickinson for stressing this article of its faith.

5. Perseverance of the Saints.

This final doctrine need not be treated at great length, for it is the logical outcome of the rest of Dickinson's theology. If a man is converted solely by the grace of God, with no admixture of human effort

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49. ibid., pp.228-229

and merit as a contributing factor, then it follows that he is kept in a state of salvation in precisely the same way; and since there is no variableness with God, it may be concluded that He will not permit the final fall of any true believer.

Like all Calvinists, Dickinson did not attempt to deny temporary falls of believers---Scripture and experience unite in testimony to these--but only asserted that God would so act as to reclaim these believers before their apostasy became final. Likewise Dickinson freely admitted the final fall of some who appeared to be believers, since it is all too possible for hypocrites to deceive themselves and others by an external profession of Christianity, when no real conversion and union with Christ had taken place.

Dickinson offered five proofs of this perseverance. The first was the immutability of God's decree. The second was the sufficiency of Christ's redemption, which is complete:

> Can it consist with the goodness of God, to bestow an interest in Christ upon the believer, and yet to withhold from him the glorious benefits of his redemption? The apostle assures us, it cannot be. "He that spared not his own Son, but freely delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?" Rom. viii 32.[50]

> Third, the gospel covenant is an everlasting one:
>
> > It is a covenant everlasting and sure; a covenant that he will not turn away from them to do them good, that he will put his fear in their hearts, that he will put his laws in their minds, and write them in their hearts; and what is full to the purpose, a covenant, that they shall not depart from him.[51]

Fourth, the continual intercession of Christ for His own on earth guarantees their final safety, for surely His prayer is answered.

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50. Dickinson, The True Scripture Doctrine, p.232
51. ibid., p.234. Dickinson drew this idea from such passages as Isaiah 61:8, Jeremiah 32:40, Ezekiel 38:26, 27 and Hebrews 8:10.

Finally, the state of peace and joy which the Scriptures describe as the lot of the believer would be impossible, Dickinson reasoned, if believers were constantly under the possibility of falling from God's grace. The prevalence of temptation would make their final fall much more likely than their final perseverance, and Dickinson was sure that they could have no joy at all if it were not for the assurance that God would keep watch over them to prevent such a fall.

Dickinson did not consider perseverance an excuse for spiritual carelessness, for he believed that the indwelling Holy Spirit was the One who kept the believer from falling, and that very Spirit would produce in the believer a sincere love to God, a love to His children, victory over the world (that is, prevalent temptation) and a spirit of prayer;[52] in the absence of these a man would have reason to question whether he had ever been truly converted at all. This is not to say that Dickinson demanded perfection; he knew very well how the remaining corruptions in a man's nature even after conversion made perfection impossible in this life. He urged his hearers, however, to seek some evidence of a changed life.

> ...Believers may have good Satisfaction of their safe Estate, and full Persuasion of their Interest in Christ, from their Experience of a Work of Grace in their Hearts; and from the Fruits of Faith in their Affections and Conversations.[53]

Those who had even imperfect evidence of the working of the Spirit of God in their hearts, while they still needed "caution and circumspection" as a means of establishing their perseverance, could rest assured that He who had undertaken to save them would bring His

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52. Vid. Dickinson, The Witness of the Spirit.
53. Dickinson, Familiar Letters, p. 170

work to completion.

6. An Over-View.

The characteristic element in Dickinson's theology was a strong emphasis upon the sovereignty of God. Man by participation in the sin of Adam has made himself spiritually helpless; and it is God who elects, God who converts, God who justifies and God who preserves them by the exercise of His pure sovereign grace. Surely this theology was calculated to give a humbling view of one's own impotency, and yet a joyous sense of peace in trustful dependence upon the almighty power of God. It was the sort of theology in which no one could rest until he knew he was converted and at peace with God; but once possessed of this assurance a man could find in it an occasion for everlasting joy. It was a demanding theology and a reassuring one; and through the efforts of Dickinson and others it was a major factor in the thinking and in the lives of men.

D. Controversial Writings.

Dickinson's major opponents were the Episcopalians, and the debate was carried on principally in the areas of worship, government and the doctrine of baptism. Mention has already been made of Dickinson's exchange of pamphlets with John Beach, on the subject of eternal election. The rest of his controversial writings will be discussed very briefly under the three heads just now enumerated.

1. Regarding Worship.

Dickinson touched off debate on June 2, 1736, in a sermon entitled The Vanity of Human Institutions in the Worship of God, in which he attacked the Church of England for requiring certain

ceremonies in worship which had no Scriptural warrant. This was answered by John Beach, a former Independent now a pastor in the Church of England, in a pamphlet entitled A Vindication of the Worship of God, According to the Church of England. Dickinson countered with a defense of his original sermon, and Beach's reply, Appeal to the Unprejudiced, drew from Dickinson a full-scale book, The Reasonableness of Non-Conformity to the Church of England, in Point of Worship.

This paper will not analyze the detailed arguments for and against the sign of the cross, the practice of kneeling at communion, and other such issues. It is more to the present purpose to see Dickinson's general attitude on such questions. He did not oppose certain practices per se, but he did object to their being required of men.

> Did Christ ever condemn the Use of innocent and indifferent Rites, when they are not taught as divine Ordinances? Yes, Sir, Christ ever condemns the Use of any Rites (how indifferent soever) being imposed upon Men's Consciences..[54]

His own position was largely a matter of live and let live. Concerning those who disagreed with him in such minor points in religious usage, he wrote:

> Mayn't every Body entertain their own Opinions in these Points; and still be treated with Kindness and Friendship, having all sacred Priviledges allow'd them notwithstanding, among us?... If they won't impose upon us their own Humours or Imaginations, neither will we impose on them. They may peaceably neglect what they can't comply with, and yet be treated with Christian Love and Charity.. For my own Part I would admit any Man that I have Reason to believe a true and sincere Christian, unto Communion in all the

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54. Dickinson, The Reasonableness of Nonconformity, p.35.

> Ordinances of Christ, if he would regularly and peaceably desire it; notwithstanding any lesser Differences in Principle.[55]

This broad toleration was characteristic of Dickinson in several respects, and some have attributed it to his Independent background. The same point of view was also in evidence in much of Dickinson's conduct within his own denomination; he was constantly stressing the essentials of a man's relationship with Jesus Christ, and leaving peripheral matters in their secondary place.

2. Regarding Government.

The Anglican doctrine of the apostolic succession gave rise to a pamphlet exchange which began with A Modest Proof of the Order and Government Settled by Christ and His Apostles in the Church; this presented the Anglican point of view that there were bishops superior to presbyters (elders) in the New Testament Church. These bishops alone had the right to ordain, so that any minister not ordained by a bishop in the regular apostolic succession, was no true minister.

Dickinson responded in 1724 with a bristling Defence of Presbyterian Ordination in which he gave Scriptural evidence that:

a) The Scriptures assign the same offices to bishops and to presbyters (Acts 20:17, 28; Titus 1:5, 7; I Peter 5:1, 3), so that there can be no difference between them.

b) There are no gospel ministers in a regularly constituted church, except bishops (Philippians 1:1), so that bishops and presbyters are identical.

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55. Dickinson, A Defense of a Sermon Preached at Newark.., pp.94-95

c) Presbyters are the only ordinary ministers, and so are equal to bishops. (Ephesians 4:11, 12).

d) Presbyters have the power of ordination (I Timothy 4:14) and so are equal to bishops.

e) The apostles are themselves presbyters (I Peter 5:1, 2; II John 1)

f) Scripture contains no mention of bishops who are superior to presbyters; therefore it is groundless to make a distinction.[56]

K. D. Checkley answered this with a defense of the book Dickinson had attacked, and sought to prove the distinction between bishop and presbyter on the basis of the presbyters' being the successors of the seventy disciples. Because of Dickinson's lack of episcopal ordination, Checkley declared,

> Jonathan Dickinson is a bold and insolent intruder, & c, and no Minister of the Gospel at Elizabeth-Town.[57]

A modern reader gets the impression that the heat evolved on both sides was no help to the cause of truth.

3. Regarding Baptism.

Concerning baptism Dickinson was in the interesting position of maintaining a middle ground between two extremes. Against the Anglicans, he denied the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. On the other hand, he opposed the Baptist view that baptism should not be given at all until the recipient is old enough to profess his faith.

Dickinson's sermon as moderator of Synod in 1743 was entitled The Nature and Necessity of Regeneration, and was published along with

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56. Vid. Dickinson, A Defence of Presbyterian Ordination, pp.40-42
57. Checkley, A Defense of the Book...A Modest Proof..,p.60

his comments on a discourse given by Dr. Waterland, an Anglican, in which the latter had defended the doctrine of baptismal regeneration. It was inevitable that Dickinson, with the views already described as to the manner in which the Holy Spirit converts a sinner and units him to Christ, should oppose the principle that such a change should be brought about automatically in baptism.

When Mr. Wetmore, an Anglican pastor, published a defense of Dr. Waterland's discourse, Dickinson answered it with Reflections Upon Mr. Wetmore's Letter. In this exchange it soon became apparent that Dickinson and Wetmore meant two drastically different ideas by regeneration. Wetmore's position may be summarized as follows:

> They are regenerated in the Sense of the Word, as it is used metaphorically, to signify a great Change made in the State and Circumstances of the Person..I don't mean any inward Change wrought, upon the Faculties of the Soul..We may understand here no more, than to be received into Christ, His Body or Church, with a Right to such Priviledges as belong to that Society.[58]

For Dickinson, regeneration was no metaphor, but a literal fact. It had to do, not with membership in a socity, but with personal union with Jesus Christ. And he denounced the practice of encouraging sinners to rest in an imagined "regeneration" received at baptism, without seeking the true regeneration which comes with faith in Christ.

> Multitudes of these seem to quiet their Consciences with a vain Apprehension of their regenerate State, and to cry Peace to themselves, while walking in the imagination of their own Hearts.[59]

On the other hand, baptism was not to be understood, as in the

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58. quoted by Dickinson, Reflections Upon Mr. Wetmore's Letter, pp.21-22
59. ibid., p.8

Baptist view, as a profession of faith, unless the person being baptized is an adult. There is no reason to withhold baptism from infants, Dickinson argued, since baptism is primarily a sign not of faith but of God's covenant.

Dickinson's Brief Illustration and Confirmation of the Divine Right of Infant Baptism was done in the form of a dialogue between a minister and one of his parishoners, who was considering joining the Baptists. The burden of Dickinson's proof, as expressed through the minister, was the parallel between Old Testament circumcision and New Testament baptism, both given as signs of God's covenant with men, and therefore to be administered to infants regardless of their inability to accept this covenant immediately by faith:

> ...'tis rather our engagements to be the Lord's, that is sealed by baptism, whether of infants or adult..And now, is it not more fit and safe to tell persons, who were baptized in infancy, that in their baptism, they were solemnly given up to God in covenant, and that their engagements to be the Lord's was sealed; rather than to tell them, that their faith was sealed: as if they were baptized on the presumption that they had grace in heart?--would this not lead them to think, that their baptism was regeneration?.. Verily 'tis not their inward real, but visible federal holiness, that gives a right to baptism; as appears from the passage in I Cor. vii. 14.[60]

4. Dickinson's Attitude toward Opponents.

There is no denying that "polemical theology" in Dickinson's day was stormy and often rather bitter. Dickinson did not wholly escape this tendency, particularly in such works as his Defence of Presbyterian Ordination. Yet on the whole, his personal feelings toward those who disagreed with him were much kinder than the

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60. Dickinson, A Brief Illustration and Confirmation of the Divine Right of Infant Baptism, p.27

strictures he sometimes felt called upon to direct toward their doctrines. An excellent example is found in these words to John Beach:

> As I said before, so I again say, that there may be such of each Party, that are Fellow-Members of the mystical Body of Christ, who should live in Love and Peace, and not fall out of the Way; for they are Brethren. We agree in the Profession of one Lord, one Faith and one Baptism; tho' we don't agree in one Ritual, and one Form of Worship and Discipline..I dare not limit the Mercies of God to any Party, since we are all liable to Mistake and Error, while cloathed with Mortality.[61]

E. Conclusion

To sum up the effect of one man's theology on the age in which he lived would be a difficult undertaking. But such was the popularity of Dickinson's printed discourses, and such his reputation as a theologian, that he must have had a wide influence not only upon the clergy (many of whom would embody his insights in their own preaching) but also upon the educated laity. He was one man in a movement; he did not create the theology of the Presbyterian Church, nor the special emphases that marked the revival movement within that Church. But he expressed that theology clearly, forcefully, and under God, convincingly; and the history of his age shows that his labors have borne fruit.

61. Dickinson, The Reasonableness of Nonconformity, pp.126-127

CHAPTER III

DICKINSON THE CHURCHMAN

A. Introduction

The purpose of the present chapter is to consider the various aspects of Dickinson's activity within the church. The subject will be divided into three areas, as follows: his work in Elizabethtown, his broader outreach (especially in theological education and in missionary interest) and his relation to the Presbyterian denomination, of which he became a member in 1717.

B. His Work in Elizabethtown.

1. Schedule of Work.

The variety of activities in which Dickinson engaged is itself a tribute to his energy. In addition to his preaching and pastoral work, he had to manage a small farm or "glebe", which the church provided to supply a portion of his and his family's food.[1] Further, he continued his aforementioned medical practice, and functioned both as pastor and as physician to his flock. Then, of course, he had to meet the normal demands of family life. (The fact that amidst such a schedule he found it both possible and helpful to keep frequent appointments with God in prayer[2] is a lesson for modern pastors and all other Christians.)

1. Vid. Hanzsche, op. cit., p.65. This was the customary practice.
2. Ante, p.14

2. His Preaching.

Dickinson's forcefulness and popularity as a preacher is attested by the fact that he had numerous invitations to speak from other men's pulpits.

His style, however, was so radically different from modern preaching, that a few comments are in order. The first concerns the length of his sermons. The sermons in The True Scripture Doctrine, for instance--and one assumes that these were preached to congregations before they were gathered into this collection and printed--[3] average 50 pages in length, and might well have taken over three hours to preach, unless the printed versions represent expansions of the original sermons.

A further difference from modern standards was the fact that Dickinson usually had a very detailed outline, employing many heads and subheads. The very fact that his sermons could be woven into a theological treatise like The True Scripture Doctrine shows that they were not based primarily upon an emotional appeal, but contained carefully prepared structures of thought. As for the method of detailed outlining itself, Sweet writes that it "was generally true of all eighteenth-century preachers"[4], but Dickinson excelled in its effective use.

Some mention has already been made of Dickinson's customary combination of the expository and the topical approaches in his

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3. That they were not originally written as a unit, but were first intended as individual sermons, is proved by the fact that the sermon on "Conversion" first appeared in another collection. Vid. Sweet, Revivalism in America, p.76
4. ibid.

preaching. The first step was often a phrase-by-phrase explanation of the text, which was usually confined to one or two verses of Scripture.[5] The second, and by far the longer part of the sermon, consisted of a topical treatment of the subject which was raised by the text. In this topical approach Dickinson both employed reasoned arguments and brought forth supplementary passages of Scripture in evidence.

While it may not be safe to judge all Dickinson's preaching by the profound doctrinal sermons which were later printed, it is safe to assume that all his preaching had a definite doctrinal undergirding, and was never limited to moral exhortation alone. Actually his revival sermon, The Witness of the Spirit, may be more typical of his normal preaching style, with an even greater emphasis upon exhortation and application to daily life; yet even here the doctrinal content was strong, as Dickinson pointed out in very practical fashion, the ways in which the Spirit bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God.

Perhaps the finest part of Dickinson's preaching was by way of exhortation. He never discussed theology merely as an academic subject. All the urgency of his message, and his shepherd-love for his people, came to a great culmination when he urged his hearers to accept the mercy that God had provided, and to give themselves to the Lord.

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5. He did not usually explain in any detail the wider context of these verses, unless he felt that it was necessary to do so in order to show wherein his interpretation was true to the passage. When he did consider it necessary, however, he was likely to explain context quite thoroughly. Vid. Familiar Letters, pp.144-155

It should be remembered that though Dickinson's Calvinistic outlook reminded him that in the last analysis it was neither preacher nor people, but God who converted sinners and maintained the Christian experience of His saints, yet he recognized that God was often pleased to use human preaching and human response as a means to that end. So he never tired of urging upon men the necessity for decision. A few quotations from the conclusion of The Witness of the Spirit may be sufficient to show the warmth of his appeals:

> But consider (I entreat you, my dear Brethren) what the Consequences will be, if you are mistaken. What Comfort will it be to you, if in the Day of Judgment you should be found at the left Hand of Christ, to say, "I expected better things than this...?.. Without Breach of Charity, I am afraid, that this is the State of the greater Part of this numerous Audience..And can you sleep in such a State as this?.. O my Brethren, be intreated to give Diligence, to make your Calling and Election sure!.. If you would obtain this Witness of the Spirit, strive for it in all the Ways of God's Appointment..But up and be doing; and you may hope that the Lord will be with you..Labour to evidence the Truth of Grace in your Hearts, by the present Exercise of it. Thus, for Instance, if you doubt the Sincerity of your Repentance...Review your Sins both of Nature and Practice: Confess 'em to God with Shame and Sorrow, (&) cry for Pardon and Cleansing in the Blood of Christ. Resolve against 'em, & renounce 'em forever: And be importunate with him, who is exalted at God's right Hand for that End, that he would give you Repentance unto Life.[6]

It is easy to see how preaching of this sort would stir a great audience. The sternest warnings are given with a tone of loving concern, and there is also the practical advice which men need, as to what they are to do about their sinful state. All in all, it seems safe to say that Dickinson embodied much of what was best in the preaching of his day.

6. Dickinson, The Witness of the Spirit, pp.28-31. The last few sentences reveal clearly the balance between God's sovereignty and human action: men are to seek, but ultimately it is Christ who gives them repentance.

3. Pastoral Activities.

Much of the daily pastoral activity of a minister is never recorded, of course, and so it is not surprising that there is less information about this phase of Dickinson's work, than about his preaching. The fact that he remained with the same congregation for thirty-eight years is itself a testimony to the esteem in which they held him. Yet here too there were scattered instances of dissatisfaction, such as the one that occurred in 1736, when a prominent member of the congregation was censured for trying to save his wheat crop by harvesting it on the Sabbath. Annoyed at the rebuke, he withdrew from the church and "gravitated towards Episcopacy",[7] taking away a party of the congregation with him. All in all, however, the relationship between Dickinson and the congregation seems to have been such as would justify the description of him as "Pastor of the first Presbyterian Church...and...the Joy and Glory of it."[8]

C. Broader Outreach

1. Theological Education.

Dickinson also made it a practice to train young candidates for the ministry. Such private instruction was a very common method of educating the future clergy, since there were not enough accessible universities to fill the need. Thus Wertenbaker writes that

> it became customary for pious youths, after acquiring a smattering of classical learning in the schools, to study divinity under some learned preacher and then to present themselves as candidates for the pulpit.[9]

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7. Hatfield, op.cit., p.337
8. Obituary in the Boston Gazette, Oct. 10, 1747; inserted by the publisher in Familiar Letters. p.V
9. Wertenbaker, Princeton 1746-1896, p.11

It was out of such beginnings that Samuel Finley's academy at Nottingham, Maryland, and the famous "Log College" of William Tennent at Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, grew up. Wertenbaker describes these schools as "partly grammar schools and partly colleges",[10] and notes that their main subject matter consisted of Greek, Latin, moral philosophy and theology. The instruction at such schools was generally sound if not at a university level; but beyond their academic training they generally sought to impart a zeal for evangelical religion.

Dickinson, too, gathered a small circle of scholars, and devoted no little time and effort to their training. In fact Sprague has written that even when Dickinson became president of the newly-formed College of New Jersey,

> it is probable that the office which he...formally assumed as President, occupied scarcely more of his time than he had previously devoted to the young men whose education he had undertaken to superintend.[11]

Thus Dickinson's influence was not confined to his own parish, but extended as far as the labors of those whom he had trained. The effectiveness of these young men's service could largely be traced to the faithfulness of Jonathan Dickinson, an instrument in the hand of God to raise up more laborers for the harvest.

2. Missionary Interest.

At the time of Dickinson's pastorate little or nothing was being done to reach the Indians of the area with the gospel. Dickinson and his fellow-pastor Aaron Burr of Newark were deeply concerned over

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10. ibid.,
11. Sprague, op. cit., p.16

this and, in Hanzche's words, "gave the missionary concept to the Synod."[12] Apparently there was no adequate capacity in the American synod to meet the need, for Dickinson and Burr wrote to Scotland and encouraged the Honorable Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge to send missionaries to the Indians of Long Island, New Jersey and Pennsylvania. The society appointed Dickinson and Burr as its American agents, and these appointed Azariah Horton, and later David Brainerd, as missionaries.[13] Brainerd, especially, was close to Dickinson; he "found, in Mr. Dickinson, a faithful counselor, and devoted friend; and in his house, an ever welcome home."[14]

The beginning of systematic fund-raising among the Presbyteries for Indian missions dates back to Brainerd's service,[15] and since Dickinson had a considerable role to play in getting Brainerd onto the field, the Elizabethtown pastor's missionary interest may be said to have borne long-term fruit.

D. Relation to the Presbyterian Denomination.

1. Entrance into Presbytery.

It will be remembered that the Elizabethtown Church was originally an Independent or Congregational church, and that Dickinson himself had been raised in an Independent background in New England.

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12. Hanzsche, op.cit., p.79
13. The name of Brainerd has become well known in missionary circles because of Jonathan Edwards' biography of him. Edwards had ample opportunity to know Brainerd because the latter had hoped to marry Edwards' daughter Jerusha, but died in missionary service before the wedding could take place.
14. Hatfield, op. cit., p.347
15. Hanzsche, op. cit., p.114

In 1716 the Synod of Philadelphia, the first synod of the Presbyterian Church in America, was established, consisting of the Presbyteries of Philadelphia, Snow Hill (Maryland), New Castle (Delaware) and Long Island (later to be called the Presbytery of New York). Almost immediately upon the erection of the new synod, invitations were sent to the Congregational churches of New Jersey and Long Island, to be affiliated with the Presbyterian denomination.

This was not considered a drastic change, since the theology of the two groups was identical, the only difference occurring in the area of church government. And the Independents were finding their congregational autonomy a hardship since, unlike the New England Puritan Independents, they were a minority in an area that was also populated by Anglicans, Baptists and others. They were attracted to the advantages of mutual support which the Presbyterians possessed through having some organization and control above the local church level. So attractive did this prospect seem, that almost all the Congregational churches in these areas eventually did join the presbyteries in whose boundaries they lay.[16]

Dickinson himself apparently joined the Presbytery of Philadelphia as a corresponding member at the ordination of Robert Orr in 1715, and was enrolled as a full member in 1717. The Elizabethtown church followed, in Hatfield's words, "then or very soon after."[17]

A mild difference of opinion exists as to Dickinson's motives in joining with the Presbyterians. Dexter has pictured him as remaining

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16. Vid. Sweet, Revivalism in America, p.74
17. Hatfield, op. cit., p.330

an Independent in his thinking, and being led to Presbyterianism by "circumstances"--possibly the precedent of other Independent churches in the area, or the pressure of hostile groups who forced him to seek for strength in organization:

> The circumstances in which he found himself sufficiently explain this step, without any supposition of a considerable change of his views as to church government.[18]

In Hatfield's opinion, however, he

> was not averse to the change from Independency to Presbyterianism. But he was very young, and needed first to establish himself with his people before proposing any innovations. They were thorough Puritans and...men of spirit.[19]

This much, at any rate, seems certain: the amount of labor that Dickinson spent upon the Presbyterian denomination from 1717 to 1747 indicates that he could not have been basically and radically out of sympathy with it. He was at times prone to argue for the rights of the individual congregation against what he considered undue extensions of the power of higher judicatories. But he seems never to have opposed the higher judicatories <u>in toto</u>, nor pleaded for the complete autonomy of congregations. In short, although external circumstances may have influenced his decision to join the Presbytery, the step must have been taken with the approval of his conscience, and one may assume that Dickinson was basically in agreement with Presbyterian polity.

2. Denominational Activity.

Dickinson's activity within the Presbyterian denominational

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18. Dexter, op. cit., p.46
19. Hatfield, op. cit., p.330

structure was considerable. He was elected moderator of the synod in 1721, and preached a strong moderatorial sermon in 1722, entitled Divine and Human Authority, in which he pled convincingly against the imposition of any authority except Scripture upon the consciences of men.

In 1733, when a separate Presbytery of East Jersey was formed out of the Presbytery of Philadelphia, Dickinson was an acknowledged leader in the new presbytery.[20] Again, in 1738, when the Presbytery of East Jersey was joined with the Presbytery of Long Island to form the Presbytery of New York, Dickinson was one of the most influential men in the new presbytery.

He was elected again in 1742 as the moderator of the entire synod, which still contained all the Presbyterian churches in the country except the exscinded Presbytery of New Brunswick.[21] Later, when the Presbytery of New York withdrew from the Synod of Philadelphia to unite with the New Brunswick Presbytery in a new Synod of New York, Dickinson was elected the first moderator of the new synod in 1745. Thus he three times held the most influential post in colonial American Presbyterianism; the importance of his position, coupled with his reputation as a preacher and theologian, no doubt widened his audience and gave his writings added weight in a day when their witness for evangelical faith was particularly needed.

3. The Subscription Controversy.

The part which Dickinson played in the subscription controversy

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20. ibid., p.336
21. The split was the result of a dispute which grew out of the Great Awakening. Vid. infra, chapter IV, section C.

leading up to the Adopting Act of 1729 may be singled out as one of the most far-reaching contributions which he made to the American Presbyterian Church. A brief survey of the problem will be necessary before Dickinson's activity is studied.

(a) The Danger of Heresy.

In England, the unorthodox views of Thomas Emlyn and James Pierce concerning the Trinity had led to heresy trials for both. Emlyn was read out of his presbytery, but no further action was taken to insure the orthodoxy of other ministers. The Pierce case, however, provoked such concern that the Synod of Ulster in 1705 required all ministers to subscribe to the Westminster Confession.

In Ireland, a heresy accusation against Professor Simpson of the University of Glasgow led to a dispute over subscription which was temporarily ended by the passage of the Pacific Act by the Synod of Ulster in 1720. By the provisions of this Act, a candidate who had scruples against any article of the Westminster Confession was required to substitute his own words. "If the substitute language was judged by the Presbytery to be consistent with the general substance of the Confessions",[22] the candidate was to be ordained. But the tension continued to rage, and across the sea, the American Presbyterians debated the danger of heresy and the best means to meet it.

(b) The Thomson Overture.

The American Church was divided into two parties; those who had come to the colonies from Scotland and Ireland wished to impose subscription

22. Hanzsche, op. cit., p.70

to the Confession as a safeguard of orthodoxy, while the New England element in the Church, coming largely from an Independent background, opposed the imposition of any standard other than Scripture.

The issue was crystallized when John Thomson, the pastor at Lewistown and a minister of some ten years' standing, brought forward an overture in 1727, but could not have it read on the floor of the synod. It was read in 1728, but the synod agreed to defer action until the 1729 meeting.[23]

The content of the Thomson overture may be summarized in the following terms:

(1) The Synod to be given authority to combat error.
(2) The Synod to publicly adopt the Westminster Confession and the Directory.
(3) Ministers to be compelled to subscribe to the Confession.
(4) Candidates for the ministry to be compelled to subscribe to the Confession.
(5) Presbyteries to censure ministers when necessary, for false teaching.
(6) The Synod to recommend to ministers and congregations earnestness in the Christian life.[24]

The overture, as printed in 1729, represented the viewpoint of those who believed that a rigid subscription to the Confession was the best method of preventing heresy in the church. The Scotch-Irish party in the Church was almost unanimously of this opinion.

(c) Dickinson's Plea for Latitude.

Dickinson, however, and almost all the New Englanders with him, were

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23. Brynestad, The Relations of Gilbert Tennent to the Religious Development of the Middle Colonies, p.99, quotes a letter of Andrews to Colman: "Measures were taken to stave it off." Yet Brynestad states that when the overture was presented in 1729 it "constituted the expression of the majority opinion of the church." (ibid., p.101)
24. Taken from Brynestad, op. cit., p.101

convinced that subscription was not the answer. He pointed out that many sincere Christians might be kept out of the ministry because of a scruple over some minor point of the Confession, while hypocrites could feign an orthodoxy which they did not really possess. Further, his earlier sermon on Divine and Human Authority had made clear his position, that

> Ministers have no Commission to teach us anything but what Christ has commanded them. And when they teach any other Doctrine they come in their own name and not in Christ's...Though some plan and comprehensive Creed or Confession of Faith...may be useful and necessary, since the worst of Heresies may take shelter under the express Words of Scripture. Yet we are by no means to force these credenda upon any of differing Sentiments...We may not so much as shut out of Communion any such Dissenters, as we can charitably hope that Christ won't shut out of Heaven..[25]

In a personal letter written at the time of the overture Dickinson called it "the most glorious contradiction to subscribe chap. xx of the Confession which calls 'God alone the Lord of the Conscience' and then impose the rest of the chapters."[26] For while Dickinson's own views were quite in accord with the Westminster Confession, he was determined to oppose the investing of any man-made standard with the authority which he felt must be reserved for Scripture.

Therefore when the overture was published and circulated, Dickinson published some remarks about it, and did all he could to prevent its passage.

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25. quoted, Hanzsche, op. cit., p.73. The first sentence quoted reveals Dickinson's position on a broader issue than subscription itself. He believed that synods, presbyteries and sessions had no authority to legislate new regulations binding upon those who conscientiously opposed them; they must only enforce what is clearly taught in Scripture.
26. quoted, Schaff-Herzog Encyclopedia of Religious Knowledge, Vol. III, p.420.

(d) The Compromise.

Dickinson's opportunity came when he was placed on the synod committee to which the overture was referred to be considered before its presentation on the synod floor in 1729. The overture was so amended as to do away with the requirement of a word-for-word subscription, although a general agreement with the Confession was required as a safeguard of purity of doctrine.[27] The amended overture was then approved unanimously by the synod, and became known as the Adopting Act of 1729.

The specific provisions of the Adopting Act were as follows: the Westminster Confessions and both Catechisms were accepted by the synod as a declaration of its faith, and all ministers and candidates were asked to assent to these. However, the Act continued:

> in case any minster of this Synod, or any candidate for the ministry, shall have any scruple with respect to any article or articles of said confession or catechisms, he shall at the time of his making said declaration, declare his sentiments to the Presbytery or Synod who shall, notwithstanding, admit him to the exercise of the ministry within our bounds, and to ministerial communion, if the Synod or Presbytery shall judge his scruple or mistake to be only about articles not essential and necessary in doctrine, worship or government.[28]

Since the "essential and necessary" articles were never specifically enumerated, the result was that this decision was left to the synod or presbytery before whom the minister or candidate appeared. The synod or presbytery could thus act as a check on heresy, but the church would not be bound to the verbal acceptance of a human standard.

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27. Thompson, The Presbyterians, p. 67
28. quoted, ibid., pp.66-67

How great a part Dickinson took in the framing of the Adopting Act is in some question. Sweet[29] refers to Dickinson as having framed the Act, and while it was nominally the work of the committee, there is real evidence that Dickinson was the actual author of it. For instance, the Act's provision that the synod "admit to fellowship in sacred ordinances all such as we have ground to believe Christ will at last admit to the Kingdom of Heaven"[30] is almost identical with Dickinson's words in the sermon on Divine and Human Authority.[31] Also, the Act concludes with words that seem particularly expressive of Dickinson's spirit:

> And the Synod do solemnly agree that none of us will traduce or use any approbrious terms of those that differ from us in these extra-essential and not-necessary points of doctrine, but treat them with the same friendship, kindness and brotherly love, as if they had not differed from us in such sentiments.[32]

Whether Dickinson was the actual author of the document, as seems likely, or merely a member of the committee that drew it up, it is obvious that his influence was largely responsible for it. And thus it was Jonathan Dickinson who gave to the Presbyterian Church in America a method of preserving doctrinal accuracy without giving rise to the division and strife that probably would have come from a demand for unconditional subscription. Such a division, as Sweet remarks, "would have been fatal to its usefulness."[33]

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29. Sweet, Religion in Colonial America, p.266
30. quoted, Thompson, op. cit., p.65
31. quoted, infra, p.59
32. quoted, Thompson, op. cit., p.67
33. Sweet, Revivalism in America, p.74

4. Political Controversy with Anglicanism.

Hanzsche has called the attention of his readers to a mjor conflict in this period between the British Parliament and the American colonies, over the appointment of an American Anglican bishop.[34]

> If Parliament could tax the colonists without their having representation, Parliament could also send over a Bishop, create an established church, force all people by law to contribute to its support, and utterly destroy the very freedom of religion which the Presbyterians, Baptists and other Calvinists had striven for..The cry of "No Bishop" in the colonies became as widespread as the cry of "no taxation without representation."[35]

It is probable that much of Dickinson's theological controversy with the Church of England was intensified by the political friction between England and its colonies over this issue. It will be remembered that in Dickinson's pamphlet exchanges with John Beach, his main contention was not that Anglican practices not found in the Bible were wrong in themselves, but rather that they ought not to be imposed on the consciences of men.

Dickinson's church was once the scene of an official convention of New England Congregationists and middle colony Presbyterians,[36] called to discuss the possibility of the appointment of an American Anglican bishop; Dickinson is believed to have called the convention. This official declaration of opposition was a high point in American resistance to the principle of an established church, and Dickinson

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34. Hanzsche is the only authority being followed in the discussion of this phase of Dickinson's activity. His discussion occupies pp. 80-85 of Forgotten Founding Fathers.
35. Hanzsche, op. cit., pp. 80-81
36. Vid. Hanzsche, op. cit., p. 84, where the convention is mentioned, but the date is not given.

has been given considerable credit for working very early for the principle of the separation of church and state.

E. Conclusion.

Thus the influence of Jonathan Dickinson as a churchman has been manifold. He stood for vigorous and practical preaching. He educated theological students and helped to promote the early missionary concern of the American church. His activity in relation to the Adopting Act was decisive for the establishment of a freedom-within-orthodoxy which has been the mark of American Presbyterianism in its best and most Scriptural form. In line with the same concern for the individual's right to worship God as his conscience leads, Dickinson labored significantly to keep the church and state separate. In all these areas, directly or indirectly, his influence is still felt--even by many who would not recognize his name.

CHAPTER IV

DICKINSON AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

A. Introduction

One of Dickinson's main contributions to American Christianity was made in relation to the Great Awakening, the religious revival which swept the American colonies and reached its peak in 1740. In addition to his direct participation in the Awakening itself, Dickinson labored for peace during the denominational dispute which followed the Awakening, and which split the Synod of Philadelphia in 1741. Finally, he was one of a group of ministers which founded the College of New Jersey---now Princeton University---principally to supply the revivalistic churches of the Awakening with pastors. The present chapter will be concerned with Dickinson's work under these three headings, though a general survey of the Great Awakening will first be necessary for purposes of background information.

B. The Revival

1. Beginnings in the Middle Colonies.

Though the earliest signs of revival in the Middle Colonies occurred among the German Pietist groups in Pennsylvania, the most significant work was begun among the Dutch Reformed congregations of the Raritan Valley in New Jersey. In 1720 the churches of Raritan, New Brunswick, Six Mile Run and North Branch called from Holland an able young minister, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, who had come in contact with the Pietist movement. Frelinghuysen almost immediately aroused the

opposition of the wealthy and conservative members of his congregations by his forceful preaching.

> The pastor described regeneration as such a thoroughgoing conversion, such a crisis in the believer's experience, that almost none of his hearers dared claim they were converted. The result was that even his elders and deacons who sat with him at the table forebore to commune.[1]

Wertenbaker has described one incident in Frelinghuysen's ministry that shows something of the force of the young pastor's convictions:

> On one occasion, when he was administering the communion in the church at Six Mile Run, he exclaimed; "See! See! even the people of the world and the impenitent are coming, that they may eat and drink judgment to themselves!" Thereupon several persons, thinking that he had singled them out as unregenerate, returned to their seats.[2]

Many of his parishoners, living in "an age of security and, as a result, of comparative apathy,"[3] bitterly resented Frelinghuysen's preaching; many of the younger members of the churches, however, favored him, and all four congregations were disturbed by a spirit of division. The malcontents took their case to Domine Boel, junior pastor of the collegiate church of New York, who carried on a heated debate with Frelinghuysen and even visited his parish to organize the opposition. Many of Frelinghuysen's fellow ministers, however, supported him in his insistence upon an inward religion of the heart, as against mere formalism.

Meanwhile Frelinghuysen organized prayer meetings among his supporters, and even encouraged the preaching of lay exhorters.[4]

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1. Maxson, The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies, p.13
2. Wertenbaker, The Middle Colonies, p.93
3. ibid., p.91
4. Maxson, op. cit., pp. 17, 18

Interest in vital religious experience grew rapidly, and reached a peak in 1726, spreading beyond the Raritan Valley, with many professing conversion.

In the same year the English-speaking dissenters of the Raritan Valley, feeling the need of a minister to preach to them in their own language, called Gilbert Tennent, who had only recently completed his theological training under his father's tutelage.[5] Tennent assumed the pastorate at New Brunswick in 1727.

Frelinghuysen and Tennent soon became fast friends, and even conducted services together. Members of the Dutch churches subscribed Tennent's salary to encourage the less numerous English, and Frelinghuysen "gave him the use of his meeting-houses and of barns of adherents in which he was himself accustomed to preach."[6]

One result of their association was that Tennent, who already had been trained in the heart-searching method of preaching which his father employed, began to take on the still more pungent manner of Frelinghuysen, with the result that his effectiveness seemed to increase sharply. Both Frelinghuysen and Tennent, along with William Tennent Jr., John Cross, Samuel Blair and other "Log College" ministers in the area, continued preaching with fervent zeal, and the wave of revival continued until Whitefield's evangelistic journeys in 1739-1740 resulted in a still greater awakening.

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5. A. Alexander, Founder and...Alumni of the Log College, p. 26. William Tennent, a former Anglican priest from Ireland, embraced Presbyterianism and educated his sons to follow him into the ministry. His instruction was soon offered to others, and the "Log College" grew up at Neshaminy, Pennsylvania. Gilbert, the oldest son, completed his training in 1726 and probably stayed until 1727 as a tutor at the newly-founded Log College before settling in New Brunswick.
6. Maxson, op. cit., p.17.

2. Beginnings in New England.

As early as 1680 there had been periodic outbreaks of conversions under the ministry of Solomon Stoddard at Northampton, Massachusetts, but the general trend of New England Puritan life was away from the intense religious concern of the forefathers; furthermore, the people themselves recognized the fact:

> Many of the third and fourth generations, haunted by a sense of apostasy and by a feeling of religious inferiority, looked back with envy and guilt to the older, sterner forebears.[7]

The pastors continually upbraided their people for their growing religious indifference, and warned them to repent, lest God's blessing be withdrawn. The following quotation from Increase Mather in 1702 is somewhat typical.

> O New England, New England, look to it that the glory be not removed from thee, for it begins to go. O tremble, for it is going; it is gradually departing.[8]

This indifference has been traced to a growing formalism in the churches, the beginnings of a rationalism that questioned supernatural revelation, and the increased worldly goods which were being accumulated.[9] "Pietism, for good or ill," writes Gaustad, "rests most comfortably on those who are least comfortable."[10] Very often--though of course not always---those with a considerable amount of possessions claiming their attention have less of that attention to give to the things of God. And this apparently was the lot of many Puritans as their economic status improved. Laxity was further encouraged by the

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7. Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England, p.16
8. Mumey, History of Evangelism in the United States, p.24
9. Gaustad, op. cit., pp. 12-15
10. ibid., p.15

Half-Way Covenant and its more extreme offspring, Stoddardeanism, whereby those with no religious experience to relate were being admitted to baptism and to the Lord's Supper.[11]

Jonathan Edwards, Stoddard's grandson and his successor as pastor at Northampton, reported in 1729 that the people were "very insensible of the things of religion,"[12] but by 1733 he was able to say that the young people in particular were beginning to manifest some concern.

The turning point came in December 1734, when Edwards preached a sermon about justification by faith alone. He later wrote that the sermon

> proved a word spoken in season here; and was most evidently attended with a very remarkable blessing of heaven to the souls of the people in this town..This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town; so that in the spring and summer following, anno 1735, the town seemed to be full of the presence of God..Our public assemblies were then beautiful; the congregation was alive in God's service, every one earnestly intent on the public worship...the assembly in general were, from time to time, in tears while the word was preached; some weeping with sorrow and distress, others with joy and love, others with pity and concern for the souls of their neighbors.[13]

Over three hundred people professed their conversion to Christ during the following year, and the revival spread within Massachusetts and into Connecticut. Yet Gaustad notes that it

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11. ibid., pp. 10-12
12. quoted, ibid., p.17
13. quoted, ibid., p.18. It is important that Edwards described the revival as "this work of God", since no human means were brought to bear to induce it, except the preaching and prayer which had been going on all along. Edwards never tried to explain the revival in terms of any activity of his own; it was simply that, for His own reasons, God had been pleased graciously to pour out His Spirit upon men so as to make the preaching of the word effective. Dickinson exhibited the same attitude when the revival later broke out in his own church at Elizabethtown (vid. infra., p.75).

> was far from general in New England, being limited to the River valley in Massachusetts and extending less than thirty miles to the east of that valley in Connecticut.[14]

Moreover, the force of this initial revival seems to have been spent by 1737,[15] so that it was not directly connected to the wider revival of the 1740's.

3. Whitefield's Evangelistic Tours.

On October 30, 1739, a young Anglican priest named George Whitefield, whose impassioned sermons had brought the distrust of the more conservative clergy in England, arrived in Delaware for the first of the evangelistic tours which were to be the occasion of the full flowering of the Great Awakening. He reached Philadelphia on horseback by November 2, and spent nine days there, preaching to large audiences. Then he began his trip to New York, passing through Burlington and New Brunswick on the way. He heard Gilbert Tennent preach in the Presbyterian church in New York, and testified that never before had he heard such a searching discourse.[16]

Whitefield had considerable trouble finding a place to preach in New York. Commisary Vesey closed the Anglican church to him, and Frelinghuysen's old antagonist Boel did the same at the Dutch Reformed church. Ebenezer Pemberton, the Presbyterian minister, offered Whitefield the use of his church, but the young Anglican hesitated for fear of the ill feeling which had existed between the Anglicans and the Presbyterians. He therefore began to preach in the fields, but

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14. ibid., p. 23
15. ibid., p. 24
16. Maxson, op. cit.,p. 49

when he heard that Commisary Vesey had already preached in the Dutch church, he accepted Pemberton's invitation. For four days he preached to large audiences, and then he returned to Philadelphia. On the way he passed through Elizabethtown, and Dickinson invited him to preach in the church there.

Something of the effectiveness of Whitefield's ministry may be estimated from the fact that daily religious services were held in Philadelphia for a year, with three such meetings on Sunday. Twenty-six prayer groups also began to meet, and the Awakening reached a high point, with revivals also appearing at Newark, in the highlands of New York, and in southwest Pennsylvania. Though Whitefield is regarded by most historians as the outstanding evangelist of the Awakening, there were many others active in the work; the Tennent brothers, Blair, Cross and others among the "Log College" graduates, and Dickinson, Pierson, Pemberton and others among the New Englanders in the region.

But all was not well. For Whitefield, after a hasty survey of the clergy in Philadelphia, had noted what he considered a low level of spiritual fervor, and had begun to pronounce ministers unconverted, and therefore no Christians at all. This, coupled with the emotional nature of Whitefield's preaching, aroused formidable opposition. Particularly offensive to the conservatives were the outcries, fainting and physical manifestations of emotion by those who were under conviction; these certainly occurred, but Whitefield and many other evangelists never encouraged them, and there were often instances where a preacher would try to quiet his hearers so that others could listen without distraction. As for Whitefield's hasty judgment and his tendency to censure other ministers, Maxson comments:

> This was due to the peculiar experiences of his brief career and was foreign to his generous nature. Therefore a larger experience in the world corrected this tendency in a very few years, but the wild-fire by that time had spread.[17]

Both counts of this description are true. The basic soberness of Whitefield's nature is manifest by the fact that he won and kept the respect of such men as Benjamin Franklin. And within a short time Whitefield showed a willingness to accept correction, and a Christian courtesy in the face of bitter attacks. On the other hand, it is also true that the "wild-fire" had already spread. Gilbert Tennent preached a rash sermon On the Danger of an Unconverted Ministry on March 8, 1740, at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, in the heart of the strongly conservative Donegal Presbytery. In this sermon he denounced all unconverted men who had entered the ministry for gain and were leading their sheep astray---this, by implication, would include most of the ministers of the Donegal Presbytery---and he approved the withdrawal of parishoners from these "dead" men, to "repair to the living." It was a hasty and bitter sermon which Tennent later regretted.

Meanwhile Whitefield began a second tour of the middle colonies in April, 1740, this time with added appeals on behalf of a projected orphans' institution and of the Christian education of Negro slaves.

Whitefield's third tour, from September 15 to October 29, 1740, was made in the New England colonies, beginning at Newport, Rhode Island. Gaustad calls this "the greatest single evangelistic tour in New England's history."[18] In its duration Whitefield preached at Newport,

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17. ibid., p.43
18. Gaustad, op. cit., p.25

Boston, Roxbury, Marblehead, Ipswich, Newbury, Hampton, Portsmouth, York and (on the return trip) Salem.[19] The response was so great in his "incredible"[20] week in Boston that Whitefield wrote to a friend:

> So many persons come to me under convictions, and for advice, that I have scarce time to eat bread. Wonderful things are doing here. The word runs like lightening. Dagon daily falls before the ark.[21]

On his return visit to Boston, Whitefield preached to some thirty thousand persons on a single occasion,[22] and then journeyed through Concord, Sudbury, Marlborough, Worcester, Leicester, Brookfield, Cold Spring and Northampton.[23] At Northampton he conducted Sunday services in Jonathan Edwards' church, and later wrote:

> Dear Mr. Edwards wept during the whole Time of Exercise.--- The people were equally, if not more affected, and my own soul was much lifted up towards God..I have not seen four such gracious meetings together since my Arrival.[24]

The tour was completed with preaching at Suffield, Windsor, Hartford, Milford, Stratford, Fairfield, Newark (Connecticut) and Stamford.[25] Thus in six weeks Whitefield preached in at least twenty-eight towns, to thousands of hearers; and his efforts were crowned with success as the surge of revival rose.

Following this tour Gilbert Tennent spent four months in New England seeking to further the revival, and no less an authority than

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19. Gaustad, op.cit., p.25
20. ibid., p.27
21. ibid.
22. ibid.
23. ibid.,p.28
24. ibid.
25. ibid.

Sweet has written, "The influence of his preaching upon the masses was even greater than that of Whitefield."[26]

For two years after Tennent's departure the revival continued, so that from 1740 to 1742 a total of fifty thousand new members were added to the churches, out of a total New England population of three hundred thousand.[27] This means that the Great Awakening directly touched one sixth of the entire population of New England.

4. Dickinson as an Evangelist.

The foregoing survey of the Great Awakening in the middle colonies and in New England was intended to set Jonathan Dickinson's position in its proper background. What was Dickinson's part in this movement?

First of all it needs to be said that Dickinson was not originally as far committed to the revival as he later became. Sincerely evangelical though he was, he

> did not join at once with the revivalists, for he was too level headed to be swept along by such extreme leadership as that furnished by Gilbert Tennent.[28]

The reasons were probably twofold: Dickinson was cautious of a stress upon emotional reactions, and, what was more important, he could not countenance the attempt to read men's hearts and to declare, on scant evidence, that regularly ordained ministers were unconverted hypocrites.

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26. quoted, Muncy, op. cit., p.33
27. ibid., p.36. This is not to say, of course, that this entire increase is traceable directly to the labors of Whitefield and Tennent. The local pastors, notably Edwards, were also diligent in their preaching.
28. Sweet, Revivalism in America, p.74

And yet the earnestness of his desire to see his parishoners give themselves to Christ was so pronounced that he could not be averse to the revival in principle, though he was constantly cautioning against abuses. Probably his first definite act of commitment to the revival was his invitation to Whitefield to preach in his church as Whitefield was returning from New York to Philadelphia in 1739.[29] Seven hundred people heard the young evangelist, but Dickinson was disappointed with the depth of the results:

> I could observe no further Influence upon our People by that Address, than a general Thoughtfulness about Religion; and a Promptitude to make the Extraordinary Zeal and Diligence of that Gentleman, the common and turning Topick of their Conversation. I didn't know that there was any one Person brought under Conviction..[30]

There was, however, a growing concern among the young people of the congregation, and Dickinson invited Whitefield to preach again at the church in the spring of 1740.

The nearby church in Newark, at which Dickinson's friend Aaron Burr was pastor, was at the height of its revival in 1740 when Burr fell ill. Dickinson went to relieve his colleague, and for some time he led the Newark congregation in its hour of awakening. In Hatfield's opinion,

> These services prepared him for a similar work of grace among his own people.[31]

The work of grace suddenly flowered in Elizabethtown in June, 1740, after Dickinson had returned from a meeting of the synod. He preached to the young people of the congregation, with no particular intention of producing extraordinary results. What happened is perhaps best

29. Maxson takes this view; op. cit., pp. 50-51.
30. quoted, Hatfield, op. cit., p.340
31. ibid., p.342

described in his own words:

> I preach'd to them a plain, practical Sermon; without any Pathos or Pungency, or any special Liveliness or Vigour; for I was then in a remarkably dead and dull Frame, till enliven'd by a sudden and deep Impression which visibly appear'd upon the congregation in general.---There was no Crying out, or Falling down; (as elsewhere has happen'd) but the inward Distress and Concern of the Audience discover'd itself, by their Tears, and by an audible Sobbing and Sighing in almost all Parts of the Assembly. There appeared such Tokens of a solemn and deep Concern, as I never before saw in any Congregation whatsoever.[32]

Beginning at that meeting there arose a wave of conviction which brought many of the congregation to inquire anxiously after the salvation of their souls. Dickinson estimated that there were about sixty lasting conversions. He later wrote to his friend Foxcroft that in three months there had been more young people who had come to him for spiritual counsel, than there had been in the previous thirty years. But there were others of more advanced age who were also involved.

Besides preaching in his own church Dickinson did a considerable amount of preaching in other areas.[33] He was considered an excellent speaker and received many invitations to other pulpits, but never, so far as there is any record, did he intrude uninvited upon the parishes of other pastors---an offense which had brought much reproach upon some of the other revivalists.

5. Dickinson's Defense of the Revival.

Of far more widespread effect than his own evangelistic preaching,

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32. quoted, ibid., p.342. This account is part of Dickinson's letter to Foxcroft, the whole of which is added as Appendix III in A. Alexander, op. cit., pp. 265-270. This, and a second letter to Foxcroft, which Alexander partially quotes in the same place, are the sources of the information in the next paragraph.
33. vid. Muncy, op. cit., p.44, where Dickinson is mentioned along with Gilbert Tennent and others as a traveling evangelist.

however, was Dickinson's defense of the revival against the attacks of critics within the church. Mention has already been made of the tendency to over-emotionalism, the censoriousness of the revivalists toward the more conservative ministers, and their attempts to judge concerning the saved or unsaved state of other men; these factors had aroused a mounting hostility, especially on the part of those ministers whom the revivalists had accused of hypocrisy. Thus the real worth of the revival was being obscured while sincere men on both sides fought over side issues which were only incidental to the revival.

Dickinson's sermon, The Witness of the Spirit, preached in 1740 in Newark at the height of the revival there, contained a caution against censoriousness, which is said to have disturbed the Tennents:

> ...if we love the Image of Christ wherever we see it, or wherever we think we see it (FOR THERE CAN BE NO INFALLIBLE CERTAINTY IN THIS CASE), if we love the Brethren as Brethren...it is a witness for us, that we are born of God.[34]

In the same sermon he warned against trusting in emotional experiences as evidence of salvation; these may, indeed be an extraordinary witness of the Spirit if accompanied by a purification of heart and a new love to God, but otherwise they are "false & counterfeit, and are like to end in a dreadful Disappointment."[35]

Yet when the sermon is taken as a whole, Dickinson's sympathy with the revival is apparent. He was not afraid to remind men that "there is but a Step between you and Death, between you and the Fire that

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34. Dickinson, The Witness of the Spirit, p.15 (capitalization added to indicate the present emphasis)
35. ibid., p.21

shall never be quenched."[36] Though he discouraged excess emotionalism, he insisted upon a thorough sense of one's need and helplessness under the righteous judgment of God, as prerequisite to casting oneself upon the mercy of Christ. For he feared that a "conversion" brought about without this prior "conviction" would very likely be a shallow and unreal change of heart and life.[37] In this, and in the warmth of his exhortations, he was heartily at one with the other evangelists of the Great Awakening.

Dickinson's main effort in support of the revival was made in a book entitled A Display of God's Special Grace, which was published in 1742. It was done in the form of a dialogue between a defender of the revival and an inquirer who proposed the various objections that various people held against it. In this book Dickinson maintained that expressions of emotion should be controlled but are often unavoidable when the Spirit of God has impressed a man with a sense of his need of Christ, or with a sense of joy at the knowledge of having received Christ; that while rash judgment of others is to be avoided, it is the part of mercy and love to exhort one who seems on good evidence to be unconverted, and to urge him to receive Christ and to enter upon eternal life; and above all, that the revival must

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36. ibid., p.29
37. Dickinson maintained this principle against the doctrine of Zinzendorf, the Moravian leader, who believed that a saving faith could be equated with heartfelt assurance that Christ had died for one, without any previous conviction or terror of God's wrath. (On the contrary, Dickinson distinguished sharply between faith and assurance, claiming that one could have saving faith without the assurance of salvation. Conversely, the assurance of some is a false assurance, because it is not rooted in faith in Christ as Saviour.) Vid. A Display of God's Special Grace, pp. 85 ff.; Familiar Letters, pp. 169-185; and The Witness of the Spirit, pp.26-27

be a genuine work of God because no merely human agency could possibly have produced the deep and lasting changes wrought in the lives of many who were converted during its course. Dickinson closed the book with a refutation, still in dialogue form, of the "antinomian" errors of an unknown opponent whom he later acknowledged to have been intended as a representation of Zinzendorf.

The book was at first circulated anonymously; later, when its author became known, his reputation added greatly to its popularity. The fact that one as eminently learned and level-headed as Dickinson had endorsed the revival, helped convince many that it was no excessive venture, but a genuine work of God. President Green said of the book: "No contemporary publication was probably as much read or had as much influence."[38]

Rev. Andrew Crosswell attacked the book for what he considered an unfair representation of Zinzendorf and the Moravians, and also for Dickinson's claim that the evidence of justification must be sought in sanctification. Dickinson replied with a defense of the original volume.

Thus Dickinson supported the Great Awakening both by example and by argument. His very willingness to admit the extremes to which the revival had been carried by some, left the critics very little with which they could take issue. And by insisting upon the more important areas in which the Awakening was genuine and necessary, he sought to remove the prejudices which some held against it. Hatfield could honestly write that "the Revival had no truer friend, no abler

38. quoted, Hatfield, op. cit., p.344

advocate."[39]

C. The Schism of 1741

1. Its Causes and Relation to the Awakening.

There were two primary causes of the discontent among conservative ministers which eventually produced a rupture of the Synod of Philadelphia in 1741. Both were directly connected with the Great Awakening.

The first objection was to the emotionalism which often characterized the revival meetings:

> Their preaching the terrors of the law in such a manner and dialect as has no precedent in the word of God...and so industriously working on the passions of weak minds, as to cause them to cry out in a hideous manner, and fall down in convulsion-like fits, to the marring of the profiting both of themselves and others, who are so taken up in seeing and hearing these odd symptoms, that they cannot attend to or hear what the preacher says..[40]

This picture is drawn by the revival's opponents and is thus probably not quite fair. But it is a fact that there were emotional excesses, which Dickinson himself recognized and sought to discourage.[41] On the other hand, there have been many who have claimed that the religion of the conservative churches was a purely formal affair, limited to a reception of orthodox doctrine and morality, without any really vital response to God; and that therefore, there had to be an

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39. ibid., p. 341
40. The Protest of 1741, quoted by Webster, op. cit., p.170
41. Even Dickinson, however, thought that the normal pattern included a period of anguish over one's own sinfulness, before the sinner would be led to despair of saving himself and to take refuge in Christ as the only hope of salvation. That this period of anguish would produce external signs of distress, Dickinson expected; he only sought to keep them within bounds so that they would not distract others.

awakening, even if it took a somewhat extreme form.[42]

It is somewhat difficult to determine the character of those who opposed the revival. Were they, for the most part, enemies of true and deep religious experience, or were they sincere men who opposed only the unwarranted excesses that accompanied the revival? Webster is the only historian here consulted who openly favored the Protesters of 1741 and defended their actions as just. Hanzsche[43] and Nichols have tended to condemn them as malicious, while Brynestad[44] considers them sincere, if mistaken. For the most part, the present writer is inclined to accept this last opinion, especially in view of the fact that it is easy for a relatively mild reservation to harden into outright opposition once battle lines are drawn and one is forced to take a side. Probably no one description will fit all the members of the party.

Even more intense was the debate over what Nichols calls "the accusation made against the Awakening everywhere...censoriousness."[45] Mention has already been made of Whitefield's early tendency to judge of the spiritual state of other men, and openly to denounce those whom he deemed unconverted. Gilbert Tennent was an even more vocal

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42. So, among modern churchmen, Hanzsche, op.cit., p.129, and Nichols, "The First Synod of New York," Church History XIV, No. 3., December 1945, p.246
43. Hanzsche, op.cit., p.129
44. Brynestad, op.cit., p.219
45. Nichols, op.cit., p.244

firebrand, though he later retracted some of what he had said.[46] These and other revivalists stirred the counterattacks of those whom they had criticized.

Itinerancy was the result of this antagonism, for a revivalist who judged another minister unconverted would often preach in the other man's parish---or even in his pulpit---without invitation. Often, too, the difference between the two parties in a local church split the church in two, though in many cases this might have happened even if no itinerant evangelist had made a visit. Therefore an act was passed by the synod in 1737, and revised in 1738 and 1739, whereby

> ministers and licentiates were prohibited from preaching in any parishes but their own, when there appeared to be danger that their preaching would cause divisions among the people.[47]

A final point of friction was the issue of education, which may or may not be considered as an outgrowth of the other issues, depending upon the point of view of the observer. The Presbyterian Church had a tradition of a trained and educated clergy. But there were no colleges in the middle colonies for the training of ministerial candidates. Some came from Yale and Harvard in New England, and others from Scotland. Local candidates who did not have the means to travel

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46. Tennent's change of heart is seen in a letter written to Dickinson in 1742: "I cannot justify the excessive heat of temper which has sometime appeared in my conduct..The late method of setting up separate meetings upon the supposed unregeneracy of pastors is enthusiastical, proud, and schismatical..The practice of openly exposing ministers who are supposed to be unconverted, in public discourse, by particular application of names and places, serves only to provoke them instead of doing them any good, and declares our own arrogance." quoted, Webster, op.cit., pp.190-191.
47. Tracy, A History of the Revival of Religion, p.63

abroad, or even to meet the expenses of education at Yale or Harvard, sometimes solved the problem by receiving private instruction from some established minister. Dickinson instructed many in this way.

When the "Log College" of William Tennent was opened, it soon became known as an available source of the requisite general and theological education---and furthermore, as a training-ground in the revivalistic preaching style of its founder. At any rate, the opponents of the revival soon turned their hostile attention upon the "Log College" graduates, many of whom were becoming important proponents of the revival over a wide area of the colonies; they were sent, in Wertenbaker's words, "from Massachusetts to the Carolinas."[48]

In 1738 the New Brunswick Presbytery was erected, consisting of "Log College" graduates, with Gilbert Tennent as moderator. But in the same year the Synod of Philadelphia approved an overture from the Presbytery of Lewes, Delaware, as follows:

> That every student who has not studied with approbation, passing the usual courses in some European or New England college, approved by public authority shall, before he be encouraged by any Presbytery for the sacred work of the ministry apply himself to this Synod, and that they appoint a committee of their number yearly, whom they know to be well skilled in the several branches of philosophy and divinity and languages, to examine such students in this place, and finding them a public testimonial from the Synod which, till better provision be made, will in some measure answer the design of taking a degree in college.[49]

Thus most of the strength of the "Log College" group was concentrated in the New Brunswick Presbytery, and then the power of ordination was taken out of the hands of the presbyteries. Ordination was made

48. Wertenbaker, Princeton 1746-1896, p.12
49. quoted, Hanzsche, op.cit., p.48

contingent upon the approval of the synod's committee, which could be staffed almost entirely by conservatives.[50] Gilbert Tennent complained that this was intended to prevent the "Log College" from training men for the ministry.[51] The New Brunswick Presbytery proceeded to license, and in due time to ordain, John Rowland, a graduate of the "Log College", without the synod's examination. This, of course, was in direct defiance of the synod's authority, and raised again the question of whether or not the synod had legislative power. Dickinson, it will be remembered, had denied this.

The tension in all these areas was inflamed in the synod of 1740, in which Samuel Blair and Gilbert Tennent read papers on the floor of the synod,[52] charging the opposing ministers with "remissness...and with some, much worse than bare remissness too"[53] in the controversy over itinerancy. Tennent's paper added a charge of serious doctrinal error against those who taught that "self-love is the foundation of all obedience."[54] The synod adopted a minute admonishing its members "seriously to consider the weight of their charge,"[55] but declined to receive and investigate charges against particular men by Blair and Tennent. There can hardly be any doubt that this direct accusation left the conservatives angrier than ever, and helped to precipitate

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50. This is not, however, the way the plan was put into effect, at least at first. Two committees were appointed for that year; the one north of Philadelphia contained a majority of ministers who favored the Awakening: Dickinson, Pierson, Pemberton and G. Tennent, as against only three conservatives. Vid.Webster, op. cit., p.138
51. ibid.,pp.139-140
52. They had offered to read these papers in a closed session of the ministers, with the spectators barred; but the synod declined. Vid. Webster, op.cit.,pp.151-152
53. from a later explanation by, Blair, quoted by Tracy, op.cit.,p.54
54. from Tennent's paper, quoted, ibid.
55. quoted, Webster, op.cit.,p.152

the rupture of the synod in the following year.

2. The Protest of 1741.

On May 27, 1741, the synod met again. "They did not meet as brethren,"[56] for the old irritations were about to produce a crisis. The first few days were spent in preliminary business; then, on Monday, June 1, the die was cast.

Robert Cross, acting as the spokesman for the conservative ministers, read a document to the effect that the revivalists

> have at present no right to sit and vote as members of this synod, having forfeited their right to be accounted members of it for many reasons..We protest that if, notwithstanding of this our protestation, these brethren be allowed to sit and vote in this synod, without giving suitable satisfaction to the synod, and particularly to us, who now enter this protestation, and those who adhere to us in it, that whatsoever shall be done, voted or transacted by them, contrary to our judgment, shall be of no force or obligation to us..[57]

The reasons given for the exclusion of the revivalists were: (1) their alleged denial of the idea "that presbyteries have any right to oblige their dissenting members," and other "heterodox and anarchical principles"[58] which they held; (2) their licensing and ordaining men without the synod's approval; (3) their divisive, uninvited intrusions upon other men's congregations; (4) their rash judgment of others, especially as exemplified in Gilbert Tennent's sermon on the Unconverted Ministry, and in the papers read the preceding year by Blair and Tennent; (5) their refusal to identify God's

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56. ibid., p.163
57. quoted, ibid., p. 168. The protest was signed by twelve of the twenty-six ministers present.
58. quoted, ibid., p.168. According to Tracy, op.cit., p.71, Blair denied that they held these principles. The entire protest, with its list of grievances, is quoted verbatim by Webster, op. cit., pp. 166-173.

call to the ministry with the regular ordination of the church, and their denial of the saving benefit of the gospel if preached by unconverted ministers; (6) their causing terror and emotional demonstration by those who hear their preaching; and (7) the belief of some of them, that all who are truly converted are assured of their salvation,[59] and can tell of the time and manner of their conversion. Also censured in this last point was the revivalists' belief "that a gracious person can judge of another's gracious state otherwise than by his profession and life."[60]

The reading of the protest was the occasion of great confusion in the house; the New Brunswick ministers tried to speak in their own defense, but could hardly be heard. The synod was almost equally divided between the revivalists and the protesters, and since the protest had explicitly barred the possibility of their staying together as one body, the New Brunswick men moved for a vote, with the majority party to be considered the legitimate synod. The revivalists were found to be slightly in the minority and withdrew to meet separately the next day.[61] It was the beginning of a schism that was to last until 1758.

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59. Dickinson's denial of this idea has been noted; according to Brynestad, op.cit., p.218, Gilbert Tennent also denied that all converted persons have full assurance of their salvation.
60. quoted, Webster, op.cit., p.170. According to Tracy, op.cit., pp.60-61, the issue of whether or not a converted person could judge of another's salvation apart from his profession and life (this latter being merely the avoidance of open scandal) was central in the dispute: "Most of their controversies grew out of this fundamental difference.." (p.61)
61. The New Brunswick Presbytery at first regarded itself as a separate Presbyterian Church, but later claimed that, having been excluded illegally, they were still legitimate members of the Synod of Philadelphia.

3. Dickinson's Attempt to Mediate.

The New York Presbytery, of which Dickinson was a member, had not been represented at the synod in 1741; this was a frequent occurrence because of the difficulties of travel,[62] and Webster's opinion that the New Yorkers probably stayed away deliberately, in view of the impending crisis,[63] is hardly tenable in view of the fact that in 1742 more ministers of the New York Presbytery attended the synod, than ever before.[64]

Dickinson was elected moderator in 1742, and moved that a conference be held with the New Brunswick men, with a view to bringing the two groups together again. A committee of four of the protesters, four of the absentees of the preceding year, and Andrews, who had been moderator at the time of the division, was selected, and met with a delegation from the New Brunswick Presbytery. Dickinson was a member of the synod's delegation. But the conference could reach no decisive agreement upon the issue.

> The ejected brethren would submit it to the consideration of none but those who had not signed the protest; and the Protesters answered that they, with those who adhered to them, were the synod, acted as such in the ejection...and...would not be called to account by absent members or any judicature on earth, though they were willing to give the reasons of their conduct to their absent brethren and the public..[65]

Dickinson, Pierson and Pemberton then protested to the synod that the exclusion, having been accomplished without any trial and without even a formal vote to exclude the New Brunswick men, was "an illegal

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62. Maxson, op.cit., p.75
63. Webster, op.cit., p.165
64. Maxson, op.cit., p.88
65. Webster, op.cit., p.193

unprecedented procedure, contrary to the rules of the gospel and subversive of our constitution."[66]

In 1743 the Presbytery of New York protested as a body, in an overture which asked that the exclusion be rejected as illegal, that there be a free interchange of pulpits within the synod (while separatist meetings were to be discouraged), that examination by the synod's committee be required of all ministerial candidates who had not studied at least a year in a recognized college in New England,[67] and that the differences between the parties be buried.[68] The synod, however, rejected this overture, whereupon Dickinson, Pierson and Pemberton declared

> that the New Brunswick Presbytery and their adherents had as much right to sit in Synod as they themselves had, and that so long as these brethren were excluded they could not see their way clear to sit as members.[69]

This step was apparently inevitable, for Dickinson and the rest of the New York ministers, while they were still officially a part of the Synod of Philadelphia and had some grievances against the practices of the excluded party, were basically more in sympathy with the New Brunswick Presbytery, than with the synod.

True to their word, the Presbytery of New York was not represented at the 1744 meeting of the synod, but in 1745 Dickinson, Pierson and

66. quoted, Brynestad, op.cit.,p.224
67. This was, of course, a conservative position on the education issue, and may have been intended to attract conservative support. The overture proposed, however, that if a candidate were willing to study a year in New England, but could not meet his expenses, these should be defrayed from a synod fund. Vid. Webster, op.cit.,p.206.
68. The overture is outlined in S.D. Alexander, The Presbytery of New York, p.11
69. ibid.

Pemberton appeared with a request that the synod appoint a committee to draw up an overture to remove the differences between the synod and the Presbytery of New York. This was done, but no agreement was reached. At this point the Presbytery of New York

> asked Synod to erect another Synod under the name of the Synod of New York; and their reason...was to avoid any appearance of opposition, and that the two Synods might act in concert and maintain a spirit of love and brotherly kindness to each other.[70]

The synod granted this request with expressions of Christian charity but, in Wertenbaker's words, "the bitterness attending the separation was too deep-seated to be cloaked by empty words."[71] Thus, at least temporarily, the attempt of Dickinson and the New York Presbytery to mediate the dispute ended in failure, and the New York ministers came to feel that they, too, must separate from a body with which they could not conscientiously agree.

4. The Formation of the Synod of New York.

In September, 1745, several months after the withdrawal of the Presbytery of New York from the Synod of Philadelphia, twenty-two ministers met in Elizabethtown to organize the new Synod of New York. Nine were members of the Presbytery of New York (Dickinson, Pierson, Pemberton and Burr among them); nine were from the Presbytery of New Brunswick (Gilbert and William Tennent among them), and four were from the Presbytery of New Castle (Charles Tennent, Samuel Blair and his brother John, and S. Finley). The plan of union included adherence to the Westminster Confession as prescribed in the Adopting Act of 1729;

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70. ibid., p.12
71. Wertenbaker, The Middle Colonies, p.180

the resolution of questions of discipline and order by majority vote;[72] and the willingness to receive into communion any minister who was trained, orthodox, regular in life and "diligent in their endeavors to promote the important designs of vital godliness."[73]

Dickinson was elected moderator of the new synod, and immediately he and Pemberton were chosen to approach the Synod of Philadelphia to seek a reunion. The latter synod admitted that the New York proposals "seem fair,"[74] but hesitated to take further action until the "dividers of our churches...declare against the late divisive, uncharitable practices."[75]

5. Accomplishments of the Synod of New York

At the time of the formation of the new synod Dickinson had only about two years left in his earthly span, so that many of the accomplishments of the synod are not directly connected with his efforts. Those interested in studying these accomplishments will find a helpful article by R.H. Nichols in Church History, wherein he summarizes these achievements in terms of expansion,[76] education (S. Blair, Finley and Robert Smith, all of the New York Synod, founded important academies), mission activity among the Indians, and the supply of six ministers for the lately-begun wave of revival in

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72. Any member who conscientiously objected to a decision in discipline and order which the majority considered essential, was to withdraw peaceably. Vid. Webster, op.cit., p.216
73. ibid.
74. ibid., p.219
75. ibid.
76. "So active...were the Synod and its presbyteries that whereas in 1745 there were twenty-two ministers in the Synod, in 1758, at the end of its separate life, there were seventy-four, of whom practically all were pastors of churches, signifying a very rapid growth". Nichols, op.cit., p.248. On the contrary, the Synod of Philadelphia had approximately the same number of ministers in 1758, as in 1745.

Virginia. Samuel Davies, sent by the synod to Virginia, was one of the leading figures in the establishment of the legal right of dissenting ministers to preach in that Anglican--controlled state. Nichols calls Dickinson and Davies the "two greatest men of colonial Presbyterianism."[77]

D. The College of New Jersey

1. The Need.

As early as 1739 there had been an effort within the Synod of Philadelphia, originated by Dickinson and Pemberton, to found a college for the education of candidates for the ministry; at that time the attempt was defeated, but in 1743 an academy was established at New London, Pennsylvania. After the two divisions of 1741 and 1745, however, the Synod of New York was in urgent need of some institution to train the new generation of ministers. The "Log College" was by this time virtually out of existence, and both Yale and Harvard were sympathetic to the Synod of Philadelphia. If there were those among the revivalists who disparaged the desirability of an educated ministry--and there is reason to believe that the revivalists were not as contemptuous of education as they have occasionally been represented---surely Jonathan Dickinson realized that the situation called for action.

2. The Establishment of the College.

Dickinson, Burr, Pierson and Pemberton, along with three laymen,[78]

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77. ibid., pp.240, 249.
78. William Smith, a jurist; Peter Van Brugh Livingston, a merchant; and William Peartree Smith, an outstanding patriot.

"first concocted the plan and foundation of the college."[79] The four ministers drew up a charter and submitted it to Governor Lewis Morris of New Jersey. It is not known whether the Presbytery of New York had officially endorsed this action, but surely it was highly favored throughout the presbytery.

Morris, an Anglican, was unwilling to grant a charter for a dissenter college, but he died on May 21, 1746, and John Hamilton became President of the Council, and acting governor. Hamilton was favorably impressed, especially because the college gave promise of great usefulness to the state as well as to the church:

> Though our great intention was to erect a seminary for educating ministers of the Gospel, yet we hope it will be a means of raising up men in other learned professions---ornaments to the State as well as the Church. Therefore we propose to make the plan of education as extensive as our circumstances will admit."[80]

The charter was granted on Oct. 22, 1746, and when the Anglicans claimed that Hamilton, being only acting governor,had exceeded his authority, Governor Belcher secured a firmer charter for the college.

It is interesting that not one of the original trustees was a graduate of the "Log College", six coming from Yale and one from Harvard. But the spirit of the Awakening was in them, and in August, 1747, Gilbert Tennent, William Tennent, Samuel Blair, Richard Treat and Samuel Finley were invited to become trustees.

The actual founding of the college was thus a group action rather than the work of one man. But it seems safe to assume with Sprague

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79. Dickinson's own words, quoted by Wertenbaker, Princeton 1746-1896, p.15.
80. Princeton Library MSS, quoted, ibid., pp. 19, 20

that Dickinson "no doubt...had more to do in originating the College of New Jersey, than any other man."[81] His election to its presidency was apparently a foregone conclusion, since for scholarship and for actual experience in the art of educating candidates, he was easily the outstanding member of the group.

The college opened in May, 1747, in Dickinson's manse. Some eight or ten students entered; there were six in the first graduating class. Dickinson himself, assisted by Rev. Caleb Smith, instructed the students.[82]

Thus began the college that was to become Princeton University. Before long "its graduates were filling pulpits from the Hudson to the James and the Roanoke."[83] The list of its presidents in those early years includes some of the most renowned names in the history of the Awakening---Dickinson, Burr, Edwards, Davies and Finley---and the school stayed firmly in the tradition of vital faith in Christ, combined with a resistance to extreme emotionalism. In 1754 Gilbert Tennent could write of the college:

> Enthusiasm on the one Hand, and Prophaneness on the other, are equally guarded against, and meet with the severest Checks.[84]

3. Dickinson's Death and the Removal of the College to Newark.

The first year of the college had not finished half its course when

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81. Sprague, op.cit., p.15
82. The reader is referred to Wertenbaker, Princeton 1746-1896, for a fuller account of the college's beginnings.
83. Wertenbaker, The Middle Colonies, p.181
84. Gilbert Tennent, A General Account, etc., p.5. A description of the school's method is found on the same page. "They proceed not so much in the Method of a dogmatic Institution, by prolix Discourses... as in the Socratic Way of free Dialogue, between Teacher and Pupil, or between the Students themselves, under the Inspection of their Tutors." How much of this was due to Dickinson's influence, during his brief presidency, is unknown.

Dickinson died, on October 7, 1747, of pleurisy. He was sixty years of age.

Aaron Burr, Dickinson's longtime friend and colleague, assumed the presidency of the infant college, which was transferred to Newark so that Burr could carry on the work of the college with minimum distraction from his pastoral activities. It was later transferred to Princeton, New Jersey, its present site.

E. Summary

What then can be said of Jonathan Dickinson's role in relation to the Great Awakening? The very fact that so many pages of the present chapter have been given to action in which Dickinson was not directly involved is an indication that he was not one of the major figures of the revival in the sense in which Whitefield and Tennent were. He has been called a "moderate" evangelical, but not so as to imply any moderation in his zeal for Christ, or for the salvation of men; rather, it indicates that he was neither so spectacular nor so controversial a figure as were some of the other evangelists. But he worked in his relatively quiet way to preach the message of the revival, to defend it from harmful criticism, and to secure its blessings to the church while he sought to counteract the division that its mixed reception had produced. Even his caution against abuses was a stabilizing influence which served, as he had intended, the revival's best interests. In the newborn Synod of New York he was the acknowledged leader of those who were seeking to reorganize themselves so as to carry the work of the Awakening effectively forward. Again, in

connection with the college, his main concern was to train men to continue the proclamation of a vital Christian faith. Surely it is safe to say that if God had not raised up a Jonathan Dickinson to do the work which he did, the Awakening and the church itself would have been far poorer for it.

CONCLUSION

AN EVALUATION OF JONATHAN DICKINSON'S IMPACT UPON AMERICAN CHRISTIANITY.

The keen intellect and level-headedness of Jonathan Dickinson was an important factor in the religious history of the colonies. In a day when skepticism was threatening Christian belief, he systematized and defended the faith in a manner that held a special appeal for his times, and can still be consulted with profit today.

Probably the one part of his contribution that modern historians would appreciate more than any other is his statesmanship; with the subscription controversy threatening to confine the church into a narrow mold, and then with the dispute over the Awakening threatening to split the church entirely, he acted with calm and firm judgment. In the first of these crises he was quite successful, and the principles of the Adopting Act, through which he recommended that doctrinal clarity be tempered with Christian charity, are still among the guiding principles of the Presbyterian Church today. In the second dispute he may seem to have failed, at least in that he was not able to reconcile the two parties of the 1741 schism; yet he was one very decided evangelical whom the conservatives felt they could trust, and it may well be that his influence was used of God to prevent the rift from becoming more permanent than it was.

Finally, in his direct relation to the Awakening itself, he was a living example of firm and heartfelt faith coupled with sense and intelligence. Those who stigmatize fervent devotion as excessive

emotionalism may be sobered by the sight of one of the most accomplished scholars of the colonies, the president of what was to become one of the great American universities, earnestly pleading with men to give their hearts to Jesus Christ. By his example, then, as well as by his considerable accomplishments, Jonathan Dickinson was a mighty instrument in the hand of God.

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Note: No attempt has been made to standardize punctuation and capitalization in the quotations used herein. The earlier usage was to capitalize all nouns; later reprinters have changed Dickinson's

usage to conform to modern practice. The quotations appear as they are in the editions that were used.

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