

# Christianity in a Growing Nation

## Tin Man or Scarecrow Religion?

In *The Wizard of Oz*, the Tin Man didn't have a heart; he wanted to see the Wizard of Oz to ask for one. The Scarecrow, on the other hand, wanted to see the Wizard because he needed a brain.

Sometimes Christians remind us of the Tin Man or the Scarecrow. One group of Christians centers their faith in their mind, avoiding their heart. Other Christians center their faith in their emotions, or heart, but they don't want to think too much about the application of their faith to their daily lives. In your life in Christ, do you tend to be more of a Scarecrow or a Tin Man?

## With a Thankful Beginning

Many of the earliest immigrants to North America came from England, where they practiced the Protestant religions of that nation. These early settlers were mindful of God's guidance, power, and direction in their lives. The very first thanksgiving in America was observed not by the Pilgrims in 1621, but on December 4, 1619, by a group of 38 English settlers as they landed at the Berkeley plantation site on the James River near what is now Charles City, Virginia. Most likely, this first American thanksgiving was prompted both by the heart and by the mind since the group's charter required that the day of arrival be celebrated annually in gratitude to God. This observation involved only worship. No feasting took place.

## Religion in the New World

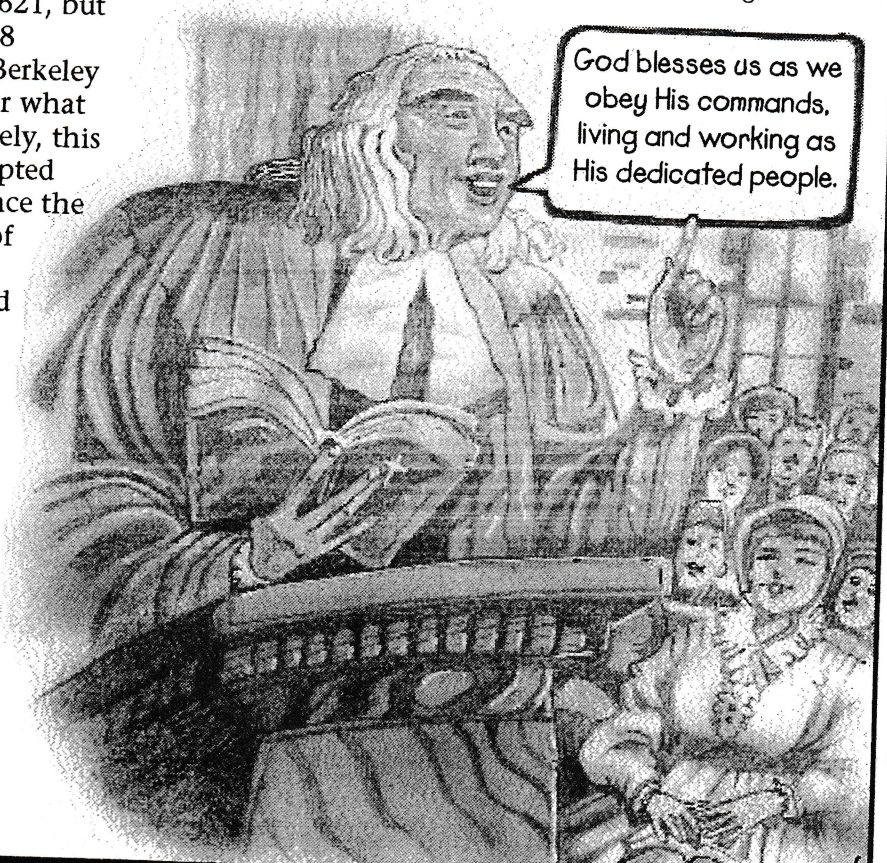
Many people left England to settle in America, seeking religious freedom and economic opportunities. These early colonists were devout in their faith, and the church was a central part of their life and society. As they worked to establish a new life for themselves in a new location, various

groups also reached out to the native Americans with the Good News of Jesus.

Unfortunately, many who came to the New World seeking freedom to worship as they pleased were not willing to extend the same right to others. Instead, Puritan leaders insisted upon compliance to high standards of behavior. The Puritans established a tradition of personal piety, thrift, and hard work as evidence of God's presence in their lives. These qualities later came to be known as the Protestant work ethic.

Those who refused to follow the Puritans' established doctrine and practice were often expelled from their colony. Clergyman Roger Williams, for example, was forced to leave the Massachusetts Bay Colony when he objected to some of the religious practices found there. He founded the colony of Rhode Island.

In response to the Puritan emphasis on thinking and living the proper Christian life, Presbyterian minister William Tennent and his four sons, who were also pastors, began to call for personal pietism as proof of faith among





established church members. Their teachings opened the door for itinerant revivalists such as George Whitefield of England and Jonathan Edwards of New England, who traveled from town to town, calling people to show their faith through their actions and emotions. These revivals grew into what is referred to as the Great Awakening. William Tennent founded the Log College in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, to train pastors in the revival style of preaching. Some of the pastors trained by Tennent at the Log College went on to establish Princeton University.

As those living in the east moved west, new communities grew and became established. Christian congregations developed. Some appealed mainly to emotions; others appealed to knowledge and application of faith. Others aimed at a balanced approach.

Many newly arriving immigrants brought their religious beliefs with them and built their communities around their church. One of these groups left an area of Saxony in Germany in 1838–39 in a desire to escape religious pressures there. In America, they settled in and around St. Louis, Missouri. Later they joined with other immigrant groups to found what is today known as The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. It became known for its firm doctrinal position, a strong educational system, and active work in missions.

### **Does God Want Scarecrows or Tin Men (and Women)?**

God's desire is that we will follow His Word as the authority for our teachings (doctrines) and practices. From His Word we know that the Holy Spirit works through that Word and the Sacraments to bring and keep us in the true and saving faith in Jesus. But faith in Jesus involves developing a personal, ongoing relationship with Him. When we come to faith, we get to know Jesus in the same way as we get to know any person. We learn to laugh with Him, express our

sadness and frustrations to Him, and receive His comfort, encouragement, and counsel. Relying on God's Word and the Sacraments, the Holy Spirit helps us find a balance between being a Tin Man (Woman) and a Scarecrow.

### **Heart and Brain**

1. Read Matthew 22:34–38 and 1 Corinthians 6:19. God doesn't ask us Christians to "disconnect our minds" and live our life in Christ only on emotions, nor does He call us to ignore our feelings and only believe with our thoughts. God wants every part of who we are, including our abilities to both think and feel. Draw a picture on a separate piece of paper that describes the emotional (Scarecrow) part of your faith and the intellectual (Tin Man or Woman) part of your faith. Write a paragraph below to explain how you keep the two balanced in your life in Christ.

2. What role do fellow believers play in the lives of those who profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior? See Hebrews 10:23–25.

### **To Review and Remember**

Jesus replied: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment." *Matthew 22:37–38*