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PERSPECTIVES OF PRO-REVIVALISM:
THE CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

by
LISA THURSTON BROWN

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

Department of History
Brigham Young University

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BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

PERSPECTIVES ON PRO-REVIVALISM:

THE CHRISTIAN HISTORY AND THE GREAT AWAKENING

Lisa Thurston Brown

Department of History

Master of Arts

The Christian History was a pro-revivalist magazine printed in Boston from 1743-1745 during what is known as the Great Awakening. It contained accounts of revivalism written by pro-revivalist ministers from throughout the American colonies, England and Scotland. These ministers believed that the Holy Spirit was being poured out upon the land in a shower of grace, causing unprecedented numbers of people to convert to Christ. In *The Christian History*, pro-revivalist ministers expressed their support for the revivals and shared their experiences. Thus the magazine has typically been viewed as religious propaganda advocating a single, polemical viewpoint. However, in spite of its pro-revival stance, *The Christian History* contains a spectrum of ideas pertaining to theology, religious history and the controversial issues that surfaced during the Awakening.

For instance, although revival supporters sought to defend the Awakening as an authentic outpouring of God’s grace, they did not all agree on how to handle the revivals. When it came to the “errors of doctrine” and “disorders of practice” that surfaced during the Awakening—things like Antinomianism, bodily manifestations and itinerancy—*Christian History* ministers responded differently. Though they sought to form a more uniform policy regarding these issues and others in a pro-revival ministerial meeting, in the end their opinions and reactions were shaped by their personal experiences with the revivals.

In spite of their differing views regarding errors and disorders, *Christian History* ministers evaluated and contextualized the revivals similarly. In their revival narratives they frequently drew upon the Bible to explain and support their pro-revival stance. Some also used historical precedents as tropes for demonstrating that aspects of revivalism were perhaps unusual, but not thoroughly new. Most, however, sought to legitimize the revivals by describing their positive social qualities. For example, they wrote how tavern-going and neighborly contentions decreased, whereas occasions for religious worship multiplied. These “good fruits” of revivalism, asserted *Christian History* contributors, showed that the Awakening had changed the “face” of society for the better and was therefore an authentic outpouring of God’s grace.

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Perhaps more important, however, are the various demonstrations of love and support I have received from family and friends over the last three years. I could not have completed my degree without help from so many others. My mother, Barbara Thurston, and my mother-in-law, Debbie Brown, have given countless hours in babysitting that, as much as I know they enjoyed, were invaluable to me. Likewise, I could never have survived graduate school without the friendship of my fellow classmate Cara Jones, whose proximity as my upstairs neighbor was more than just happenstance.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this thesis to my family—my loving husband Sam, my sweet daughter Madeline, and my new son Tyler. Sam’s love for learning has been an inspiration to me, and I am deeply grateful for all he’s done to help me spread my wings and expand my mind. He is my best friend and the love of my life. Lastly, Madeline and Tyler have been unknowingly patient with their mother, who hopes with all her heart that someday they, too, will find joy in education.

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Introduction

“If *this* Paper continues, and the ALMIGHTY will graciously please to help us; we hope to make it a *Magazine* or *Treasury* of the *most pious* Parts of our *new English History* from the Beginning.”¹
--*The Christian History*, 11 June 1743.

In the second quarter of the eighteenth-century, a spiritual awakening was said to be sweeping through the British empire, particularly in New England. From behind wooden pulpits, ministers proclaimed that God’s grace was being poured out upon the land, and many in their congregations claimed to feel the Holy Spirit’s influence in their lives. Conversion rates exploded as crowds gathered to listen to itinerant preachers call down God’s grace upon them. But not everyone agreed that what was happening was truly instigated by God. Divisions arose among clergymen as to the true nature of the revivals, and as the years progressed, each side felt increasingly compelled to defend the correctness of its position.

Thomas Prince, a prominent Congregationalist minister from Boston, was among those who believed in the legitimacy of the revivals and worked towards showcasing the many reasons why the spiritual awakenings were real. In response to suggestions made by other pro-revivalist ministers, Prince took it upon himself to oversee the publication of an evangelical magazine, which he titled *The Christian History*. Though he granted the editorship of it to his son, a recent Harvard graduate, he no doubt remained actively

¹ Thomas Prince, Jr., ed. *The Christian History: Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great-Britain & America* (Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1743-1745), 1:113. The magazine will hereafter be referenced as *CH*.

involved in its publication.² Every Saturday from March 1743 to February 1745, *The Christian History* was run off the press of Samuel Kneeland and Thomas Green in Boston. It was by far the longest running magazine of its day in the American colonies, totaling 104 issues that were bound together at the end of each year. Each issue was eight pages in length, making a sum of 832 printed pages aimed at establishing the authenticity of the Great Awakening as a divine manifestation.

Though Prince held editorial power over *The Christian History*, he was by no means the sole author. He solicited accounts of revivalism from others through a network of evangelical ministers that stretched across the Atlantic into England and Scotland. Over half of the magazine is therefore composed of revival narratives—accounts written by pro-revivalist ministers about what they believed to be manifestations of God’s grace in their communities. Conversion narratives had long been a common element in Puritan culture because Puritanism traditionally required the telling of one’s conversion story in order to gain church membership. But revival narratives were a new style of writing that focused on the conversion of entire communities rather than just individuals. They follow similar plotlines and patterns of development that recent

² Although Thomas Prince, Jr., who was affectionately called “Tommy” by his father, is formally credited with the editorship of *The Christian History*, the extent of his role is questioned. All historiographical and biographical sources indicate that Tommy’s part in the publication was minimal and heavily guided by his father’s hand, for Tommy lacked the social standing and connections both locally and overseas to be the primary force behind the magazine. This is also supported by various contemporaneous documents that attack the Rev. Thomas Prince for hiding behind his son in publishing *The Christian History*. See Charles Chauncy, 16 March 1743 in “Original Letters of Dr. Charles Chauncy,” *New England Historical and Genealogical Register*, vol. 10 (Boston: NEHG Society, 1857); Clifford Shipton, ed., “Thomas Prince, Jr.” *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*. vol. 10, 1736-1740 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1958) 533; Clifford Shipton, ed., “Thomas Prince” *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*. vol. 5, 1701-1712 (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1937), 356-357.

scholars have attributed to the first and most famous revival narrative, Jonathan Edwards' *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, first published in 1737.³

In addition to publishing revival narratives, *The Christian History* contains advertisements for sermons being sold by local printers, copies of letters from ministers in various communities, sermon extracts from both contemporaneous and deceased Puritan divines, and an account of the pro-revivalist ministerial convocation that met in July 1743 to assert the legitimacy of the revivals. Included with this account are the attestations of ministers who did not attend the convocation personally but who wanted to show their support of it.

All of the contributors to *The Christian History* were ministers, and most of them were from New England. However, a few were from Scotland and the colonial South, which lends *The Christian History* both a transatlantic and an inter-colonial scope. As the first issue of the magazine states, Thomas Prince intended to draw together accounts of revivalism from all over the British empire. He hoped to use the magazine as a means of creating spiritual unity across geographic boundaries. Likewise, he sought to establish spiritual unity throughout time by including passages of sermons and historical documents that could provide continuity between the events of his day and all of religious history since the Bible. Prince wanted the magazine to be a historical record of religious events that he felt were an important part of the story of Christianity.

Despite the profound importance Prince attached to the magazine, historians have paid relatively little attention to it. Generally it is only mentioned in passing as part of the larger phenomenon of the Great Awakening. The first modern scholar to examine

³ Jonathan Edwards, "A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God," in *A Jonathan Edwards Reader*, John E. Smith, Harry S. Stout, and Kenneth P. Minkema, eds., (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995).

Thomas Prince and *The Christian History* was John Edward Van de Wetering, whose 1959 doctoral dissertation focused on Prince and who also wrote an article about *The Christian History* a few years later. In both of these works, Van de Wetering treated the magazine as an instrument of clerical factionalism. He highlighted the role it played in creating the polemics of ministerial debate over the revivals, but he did not discuss its component parts in much detail.⁴

Nearly thirty years later, Michael Crawford briefly discussed *The Christian History* in his book, *Seasons of Grace*, which scrutinizes the transatlantic connections among Scottish, English and colonial evangelists during the Great Awakening. His work is representative of a recent trend in colonial American studies to examine the cultural and philosophical links between the mother country and her colonies during the first two centuries of settlement. Because *The Christian History* included accounts from Scottish ministers and was both patterned after and copied by magazines overseas, Crawford's study is useful. Crawford does not, however, give much analysis of the magazine itself because he is more concerned about the larger picture of transatlantic revivalism.⁵ Like Crawford, Charles Hambrick-Stowe emphasized the transatlantic nature of the magazine

⁴ In the eighteenth century, John Gillies used *The Christian History* as a primary source for his history of Scottish revivalism. He quoted large sections directly from the magazine, as did Joseph Tracy nearly ninety years later when he, too, compiled a history of the Great Awakening. Historian Frank Lambert notes that Tracy was the first to coin the phrase "The Great Awakening" and in so doing begin a historiographical trend that has portrayed the Awakening as a monumental event in colonial American history until only recently. See John Gillies, *Historical Collections Relating to Remarkable Periods of the Success of the Gospel, and Eminent Instruments Employed in Promoting it: In Two Volumes Compiled by John Gillies, One of the Ministers of Glasgow* (Glasgow: Printed By Robert and Andrew Foulis, 1754); Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards & Whitfield* (Edinburg: 1842; reprint, Guildford, Great Britain: Billing & Sons Ltd, 1976); Frank Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 5; John Edward Van de Wetering, "Thomas Prince: Puritan Polemicist." (Ph.D. diss., University of Washington, 1959); and "The Christian History' of the Great Awakening," *Journal of Presbyterian History* 44.2 (1966), 122-129.

⁵ Michael J. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace: Colonial New England's Revival Tradition in Its British Context* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

by showing how the “Spirit of the Old Writers” provided a link to the traditionalism of the “Old World.” He asserted that *The Christian History* was a fairly conservative undertaking by Prince, a conclusion based on his reading of Prince’s selection of seventeenth-century sermon extracts.

Aside from Hambrick-Stowe’s analysis of these extracts, the inner contents of *The Christian History* have not been explicitly explored. Rather, the complexities of the magazine’s component parts have been glossed over and misrepresented simply as examples of clerical factionalism.⁶ Most recently, historian Frank Lambert has built upon the arguments of Van de Wetering and Crawford in his 1999 study, *Inventing the Great Awakening*. Lambert uses *The Christian History* as supporting evidence for his assertion that ministers like Thomas Prince used to the printed word to impose their preconceived notions about the nature of revivalism and the reality of millennialism. They therefore “invented” a coherent storyline of spiritual awakening in order to persuade people of the movement’s legitimacy. Like Crawford, Lambert thus contends that because New England evangelicals were awaiting an outpouring of God’s grace, they eagerly believed one was occurring, despite what critics said. By using *The Christian History* to advocate their position, in addition to printed sermons and pamphlets, pro-revivalist ministers ventured into the blossoming world of colonial print culture. Their active use of the press

⁶ Charles Hambrick-Stowe, “Spirit of the Old Writers: The Great Awakening and the Persistence of Puritan Piety.” in Francis J. Bremer, *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993), 277-291.

drew much criticism from anti-revivalists, a fact which has contributed to the magazine's reputation as a polemical tool.⁷

Those few historians writing about *The Christian History* have therefore emphasized the controversial role of the magazine in fueling debates over the revivals. They have likewise stressed the biases of pro-revivalist ministers like Thomas Prince who supported and contributed to it. Though these aspects of *The Christian History* are admittedly important, they should not overshadow the magazine's value as a commentary on the revivalist impulse. Unfortunately, in the past they have. Crawford and Lambert, for example, argue that pro-revivalist ministers felt threatened by a perceived loss of power and status within society and viewed revivalism as one way to regain personal prestige. Evangelical ministers are therefore discredited as trustworthy sources, and works such as *The Christian History* are overlooked as merely examples of clerical fanaticism.

By first acknowledging the biases of the evangelical ministers like Thomas Prince, this study moves beyond a discussion of polemics to focus on the question of how pro-revivalist ministers responded to revivalism within their communities. It draws on digitized and microfilmed copies of the magazine, as well as other contemporaneous documents that deal with Great Awakening revivalism, such as newspaper accounts, journal entries, and sermons.

The Christian History is the largest compilation of pro-revivalist views about the Awakening available to modern scholars. As such, it is a rich source for an examination

⁷ Lambert focuses on how *The Christian History* was part of a print war that ensued between pro- and anti-revivalist factions. He demonstrates that pro-revivalists utilized print media to spread their message about revivalism far more than did anti-revivalists. Because of its long duration and the nature of its content, *The Christian History*, in particular, became a significant target of anti-revivalist criticism.

of the pro-revivalist ministers' experience. Though many of the revival narratives contained within it were also published separately or in other revival magazines, such as *The Glasgow Weekly History*, their placement within *The Christian History* alongside other narratives, letters and sermon extracts pertaining to Great Awakening revivalism multiplies their meaning and exposes the contrasting ways that revivalism was handled among pro-revivalist ministers. For when all was said and done, ministers were ultimately left on their own to accept, restrict, interpret and describe revivalism in their communities. As they did so, the "fruits" of revivalism—the descriptions of how society had changed thanks to revivalism—stand out in their accounts, showing that personal experience and interpretation, and not just doctrinal issues, were the most shaping factors of pro-revivalism in the Great Awakening.⁸

⁸ This view supports more recent trends in the historiography of Puritanism, which have revised Perry Miller's concept of a homogenous "New England Way." Miller, the leader of Puritan studies for much of the twentieth century, asserted that the Puritans who migrated to New England were non-separating congregationalists with similar theological and civic ideas. He asserted that from its inception the Massachusetts Bay Colony was thus a fairly uniform society, which underwent a process of declension in the late seventeenth-century as it became more secular in population and purpose. Miller's arguments dominated Puritan studies until historians such as Philip Gura began to reevaluate them. Gura asserted that from the beginning, Puritans were much more radical and diverse in their theological views than Miller proposed. Patricia Bonomi has also shown that colonial religion in the late-seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries was not undergoing declension at all; rather, religion was on the rise in some areas, and being healthily maintained in others. Likewise, in the pages that follow, I advocate a more heterogeneous and lively portrait of Congregationalism during the Great Awakening, especially within the pro-revivalist faction. See Perry Miller, *Orthodoxy in Massachusetts, 1630-1650: A Genetic Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1933); Philip F. Gura, *A Glimpse of Zion's Glory: Puritan Radicalism in New England, 1620-1660* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1984); Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

I. Underpinnings: Moving Towards *The Christian History*

“The Lord seems to have some great Event upon the Wheel just now; and I would fain hope, the Glory of the latter Days is not far off. The present Convulsions and Reelings among the Nations, as well as the stirring among the dry Bones in *Scotland, America*, and other Places, confirm me more and more in this Opinion.”⁹

--Rev. Hugh Kennedy, 26 July 1742.

Joshua Hempstead sat in disbelief. He had gone with his son-in-law to a Monday lecture “that was appointed at Capt. Breeds.” Hempstead frequently attended religious lectures in the homes of his neighbors and, on at least one occasion, hosted one himself. He had no reason to imagine that tonight would be any different, no reason, except that the world of religious worship seemed to be turning upside down.

And so he sat, waiting for the minister who was scheduled to lead the services to appear. But Mr. Allen never arrived, and so “after Long waiting” two young men arose and commenced the meeting. The problem was, they were no ordinary young men, they were two “of them Newlight Exhorters,” lay people who preached, prophesied and prayed according to the spirit they felt. They were a new breed, and they were trouble. In his diary Hempstead wrote that the exhorters “began their meeting,” a phrase that hints at his desire to distance himself and his religious tastes from theirs. He obviously could not have approved of what then followed; the group which had waited so patiently for Mr. Allen suddenly came to life:

⁹ In Thomas Prince, Jr., ed. *The Christian History: Containing Accounts of the Revival and Propagation of Religion in Great-Britain & America* (Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1743-1745), 1:291. The Reverend Hugh Kennedy was the minister of the Scots Church of Jesus Christ in Rotterdam, Scotland.

2 or 3 Women followed both at once & there was Such medley that no one could understand Either part until near night Mr Fish came amongst them and Soon began to Pray & one of the Women Speakers kept on praying & Exhorting at the Same time for Several mints till Length She grew Silent & Mr Fish had all the work to himself who made a Short Discourse & So Dismist us.¹⁰

It was chaos. Young men exhorting, women preaching and praying, people talking all at once. Even ministers, the men set apart to be guardians of the faith and protectors against excesses, were not doing things the way they should be done, the way they had always been done. They would preach with “no Text nor Bible visable, no Doctrine, uses, nor Improvement or anything Else that was Regular.” At one service, “it was difficult” for Hempstead “to distinguish between [the minister’s] praying & preaching for it was all Meer Confused medley.”¹¹ Somehow the order and regularity of religious worship had gone awry.

But not everyone felt that way. Hempstead himself wrote in his diary very positively, very excitedly about the large number of people who were “owning the covenant” thanks to “the Revival of Religion” that was said to be taking place.¹² But how, then, could one make sense of it all? Was there any balance possible among all the wild reports that were circulating? Would these strange and often outrageous events testify that religion really was no more than what humans made it? Or was there, perhaps, a way to bring it all to order?

¹⁰ Joshua Hempstead, *The Diary of Joshua Hempstead*, (New London, Conn.: New London County Historical Society, 1901) December 20, 1742, 402-403.

¹¹ Entry for March 27, 1743 in *ibid.*, 406.

¹² Entry for June 1741 in *ibid.*, 378-379; Wednesday July 22 and Saturday July 25, 1741, 380; *CH*, 1:1.

The Reverend Thomas Prince of Boston and other “pious and judicious People” thought there was.¹³ In the early 1740s, many ministers, including Prince, believed that the time for religious revival had arrived. In order to help foster the revivals, Prince sponsored the publication of *The Christian History*, a magazine designed to support the Great Awakening by showing how it was a legitimate religious phenomenon and not simply a cause or result of social or doctrinal chaos. Although modern scholars have occasionally referred to *The Christian History* as merely a factional publication representative of a single viewpoint, in fact included a much more diverse compilation of views dedicated to Calvinist theology, the history of Christianity, and the controversial issues that surfaced during the Great Awakening. These issues had been compounding over the decades among descendents of the Puritan faith until finally the tensions behind them erupted in the 1740s.

During the Great Awakening the Congregational churches became increasingly divided over whether or not the revivals were legitimate expressions of God’s will. To many they just seemed like dangerous signs of religious enthusiasm that corrupted traditional church doctrines and practices. Yet to others, like the Reverend Thomas Prince, the revivals were wondrous outbursts of the Spirit of God that brought people to Christ in large numbers never before seen at one time. The fact that so many people of all ages and from all walks of life were converted so swiftly, and with such intense spiritual experiences, convinced many ministers that a “great and general awakening” was underway.¹⁴ Through the blossoming realm of print culture, these ministers

¹³ Thomas Prince, *It being earnestly desired by many pious and judicious people* (Boston: T. Kneeland and S. Green, 1743).

¹⁴ *CH*, 1:158-159.

disseminated their views about the legitimacy of the Great Awakening. Though ministers had been publishing sermons for nearly a century in New England, Prince's weekly magazine was an innovative means whereby pro-revival supporters could read and write about how revivalism was taking shape throughout the British empire.

When *The Christian History's* first issue was printed in 1743, Thomas Prince was a highly respected minister who moved in Boston's highest social circles.¹⁵ He was fifty-five years old, the father of four children, and well-established as the co-pastor of Boston's Old South Church. Friend, and onetime Harvard roommate, Joseph Sewall, described him as having "an uncommon Genius" and the "Ornament of a meek and quiet Spirit" that endeared him to his congregation.¹⁶ But as a minister he had a reputation for intense scholarly thinking and historical study, causing one congregant to remark that his sermons "were sometimes too learned for the common people."¹⁷ Charles Chauncy once stated that he believed Prince to be the most learned man to ever live among New Englanders, excepting the late Dr. Cotton Mather, of whom Prince had been a close friend.¹⁸

¹⁵ The most comprehensive biographical account of Thomas Prince is a doctoral dissertation written by John Edward Van de Wetering, but several other biographical articles are likewise informative. [See Van de Wetering, "Thomas Prince: Puritan Polemicist"; Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 5:340-368; Theodore Hornberger, "Thomas Prince, Minister," *Essays on American Literature in Honor of Jay B. Hubbel* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1967); William B. Sprague *Annals of the American Pulpit*, vol. 1 (New York: R. Carter, 1857-1869), 304-307; William H. Whitmore, "Life and Labors of Thomas Prince," *North American Review* 91(Oct. 1860), 354-375].

¹⁶ Prince shared the pastorate with his best friend and former Harvard roommate, Joseph Sewall, son of the famous Judge Samuel Sewall. He was ordained on 17 October 1718. Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 5:341; Joseph Sewall, *The Duty, Character and Reward of Christ's Faithful Servants* (Boston: Printed by S. Kneeland, in Queen Street, 1758), 15-16.

¹⁷ In addition to this, Prince was said to preach "with but little animation or variety of modulation, from a small manuscript volume, on account of a defect of vision common to hard students, as to conceal his countenance, for the most part, from his audience." Benjamin B. Wisner, *History of the Old South Church*, (Boston: Crocker & Brewster, 1830), 24.

¹⁸ Charles Chauncy, in Shipton, *Sibley's Harvard Graduates*, 5:357.

Like Mather, Prince believed in “preaching Christ,” a mode of preaching that sought to engage people’s emotions, not just their minds, in the religious experience. It was an evangelical style, often referred to as “heart religion” because of its more emotional bent. Ministers who practiced “heart religion” viewed their society as a rapidly degenerating place sorely in need of God’s grace to be poured down upon it. Society was sick with the cancer of secular change that threatened religious vitality. Without Heaven’s help they would not be able to establish a righteous-enough society to sustain the millennial promise God had given them. Thus, as mid-century approached, evangelicals such as Prince looked increasingly for signs of religious revivalism to appear in their midst. They believed that all of history was pointing to their age as one of scriptural fulfillment. Thomas Prince therefore hoped that *The Christian History* would be a reliable historical as well as contemporary account of how God’s glory was descending upon the Earth.¹⁹

Prince and his contemporaries believed that the religion they practiced was directly descended from the Apostolic church of the New Testament, making them the legitimate heirs of Christianity. They believed that the Protestant Reformation had set in motion God’s will to reform the corruption that had overtaken Catholicism. Since that time the process of reformation had continued in a cyclical manner, inspiring their own ancestors, the English Puritans, to further the cause by arguing for the need of reformation in the Anglican Church as well. Thus eighteenth-century ministers like Thomas Prince, descendants of the New England Puritans, came to venerate their

¹⁹ As Prince noted in issue 15: “And if *this* Paper continues, and the ALMIGHTY will graciously please to help us; we hope to make it a *Magazine* or *Treasury* of the *most pious* Parts of our *new English History* from the Beginning.” Several issues of the magazine are consequently devoted to historical overviews of New England settlement, revival history, and Protestantism in Europe. See *CH*, 1:113.

ancestors who comprised the first generation of Puritan settlers to migrate across the Atlantic a century before.²⁰

Puritan theology was based on the principles of Calvinism that emphasized original sin, predestination, and salvation by grace. It recognized God's relationship with mankind as one based on covenants, but ultimately determined by grace. Puritans taught that in the Garden of Eden, Adam broke the Covenant of Works, or the promise to obey God's commandments and avoid sin. Consequently cast out of the Garden, Adam and all his posterity were damned until God showed mercy and gave them the Covenant of Grace. This covenant was invoked through the life and death of Jesus Christ. It allowed for a select few—those predestined by God—to be granted salvation in Heaven. Puritans believed that, in general, they were God's chosen people, just as the ancient Israelites had been. However, it was up to each individual to discover for him or herself whether or not he or she was one of the elect God had chosen to save. The devout thus spent their lives in anxious soul-searching, hoping to be granted the assurance of salvation one day. This assurance was to be gained through a strong sense of "justifying faith," faith nourished by the Holy Spirit's influence upon the mind while one was engaged in such devotional activities as praying, listening to sermons, or studying the Bible.²¹

Yet the doctrine of predestination did not, in mainstream Puritanism, release individuals from the original Covenant of Works. Though righteous living was not a

²⁰ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: The History of Puritan Idea* (New York University Press, 1963), 4-12; Charles Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety: Puritan Devotional Disciplines in Seventeenth-Century New England* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 246-247, 253-255; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 127-132.

²¹ Charles Lloyd Cohen, *God's Caress: The Psychology of Puritan Religious Experience*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 15, 9; Charles Hambrick-Stowe discusses devotional activities like personal Bible study as one of the "secret exercises" that, for Puritans, "were the most powerful channels through which grace might flow." See Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 156, 158-159.

necessary step towards obtaining salvation, it was nevertheless seen as an indicator of one's elect status. As historian Edmund Morgan explains:

God in his mercy had chosen to save a few, and to them He gave saving faith. They belonged to his real, his invisible church. To make the visible church as much as possible like the invisible, the later Congregationalists argued that the visible church in admitting members should look for signs of saving faith. . . . Men, being human, would make mistakes, and the visible church would therefore remain only an approximation of the invisible; but it should have in appearance the same purity that the invisible church had in reality.²²

This meant that individual righteousness was more than simply a matter of personal obedience. It was also an important link between God and the community, since the collective righteousness of community members contributed to the fulfillment of the covenant God had made with churches. Churches, Puritans believed, were the means established by God through which mankind could partake of ordinances such as baptism and communion that would help them in their quest to discern divine grace.²³ Once an individual had received an assurance of salvation, he or she was formally admitted to the church and became a “covenanting” member.

The idea of a covenant relationship with God did not just apply to an individual's relation to God; it extended to society as well in the form of churches. The first Puritan settlers in New England believed they crossed the Atlantic to establish a covenant society with God through their community churches. They hoped that by leaving behind the wickedness of Old England for a time they could eventually return to redeem it as God's chosen land. But political upheavals in England during the mid-seventeenth century

²² Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 34.

²³ See Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, Chapter 4 for a discussion of various church ordinances such as baptism, communion, and covenant renewal exercises.

seemed to make this an impossible goal, and most New England Puritans focused more on developing the divine destiny of their own land. They depicted themselves as modern-day Israelites sent out to cultivate the wilderness during their pilgrimage back to Christ. When political turmoil erupted in the latter decades of the seventeenth-century and threatened to again disrupt their divine destiny, ministers called the people to repentance to avoid what they perceived as God's wrath. But then Providence intervened, or at least some New Englanders saw it that way, by placing the Protestant rulers William and Mary upon the English throne in 1689. Under their leadership, Puritans envisioned a second chance at fulfilling their covenant with God to establish a model society.

Political controversies were not the only ones to plague New England Puritanism, throw its doctrines into question, and set the stage for religious turmoil in the 1740s. Even from the very beginning, New England Puritans struggled to balance different branches of belief that were often at odds with one another, and which were never fully resolved by the time of the Great Awakening.²⁴

²⁴ For instance, Edmund Morgan discusses the separatist impulse inherent in Puritanism among the first generation settlers in his biography of John Winthrop. Morgan shows that just as Winthrop struggled to live within the world, but not be part of it, so did New England Puritanism as a whole. Many of the first generation settlers, prior to their departure from England, had leaned more towards complete separatism from the Church of England. Roger Williams, for example, was one of these who later caused controversy in Massachusetts because of his separatist ideas. But even more mainstream Puritans in the New World had to be wary of separatism. The unique social and ecclesiastical conditions of the Massachusetts Bay Colony made it easier for separatism to be prevalent, since "the men who came to New England had shown, by so doing, that they were unwilling to tolerate evils that other men found tolerable." Separatism was thus a danger to the stability of the colony from the very beginning. See Morgan, *The Puritan Dilemma: The Story of John Winthrop*, 2nd ed., (New York Addison Wesley Longman, Inc. 1999, orig. ed. 1958), 65-73 102-118.

Puritanism was therefore never a totally coherent religious movement.²⁵ This was partly due to the fact that Puritanism lacked any kind of formal ecclesiastical structure beyond the congregation and its minister. One of the main complaints Puritans had made against the Church of England was that it was becoming too Catholic in its organization. Anglican bishops, they argued, had too much political influence over Protestant England, like the pope and his priests did over Catholic Europe. Thus Puritans originally steered clear of any kind of centralizing bodies, aside from individual congregations, avoiding presbyterianism as well as episcopalianism.²⁶

Nevertheless, declining church membership rates gradually led ministers to meet together in informal synods to address the membership problem. As pointed out by Edmund Morgan, the membership problem was rooted in how narrowly the first generation of New England settlers had chosen to define church membership requirements. By the late 1640s, “an increasing number of children who had been baptized in New England churches were coming of age without a religious experience and starting families of their own.” The Cambridge Synod of 1648 chose not to address the situation, and so throughout the 1650s most churches took an ambivalent stance towards the status of these persons. As the first generation of members began dying, however, ministers felt an even more pressing need to resolve the membership problem.

²⁵ Historian Stephen Foster has convincingly demonstrated that New England Puritanism was a product of the unique religious climate in late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century England. His work reminds us that Puritanism cannot be strictly defined as having its own unique theological and social characteristics, but should be instead considered a “*movement*: a loose and incomplete alliance of progressive Protestants.” This more accurate assessment of Puritanism underscores why the Great Awakening was a period filled with such volatile religious opinions and tensions. As a movement, Puritanism was constantly undergoing a process of cultural redirection that often did not reflect the more static ideals of doctrine and theology. See Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1991) 5.

²⁶ Morgan, *Puritan Dilemma*, 67-69.

A synod of thirteen Massachusetts ministers and four from Connecticut met in 1662 to address the issue. They subsequently proposed new membership requirements known today as the Halfway Covenant, which allowed the grandchildren of full church members to be baptized and participate in all church ordinances except the partaking of communion, even if their parents had not become full church members themselves. Although it seemed to alleviate the problem of church membership, the Halfway Covenant planted the seeds for further church splintering and ministerial factionalism as the years progressed.²⁷

For example, some ministers like Solomon Stoddard in Northampton, Massachusetts, believed that membership requirements should be relaxed even more than the Halfway Covenant proposed. Stoddard eventually did away with all membership requirements in his congregation and allowed anyone to partake of communion. He believed that by doing so, people would feel God's grace more upon the land and within their lives.²⁸ The formation of what later became Thomas Prince's church, the Third Church, or Old South, was also an early fruit of the disagreements over the Half-Way Covenant; the Third Church was formed in 1669 after Boston's First Church congregation split over the issue. The majority of the original congregation opposed the measure, whereas a dissenting minority supported the Covenant and consequently

²⁷ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 129-138; Francis Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment: New England Society from Bradford to Edwards*, Rev. ed. (Hanover, New Hampshire: University of New England Press, 1996), 161.

²⁸ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 48, 105-108; Stoddard's views hark back to the beliefs of one of the leading Puritan divines of the first generation, Thomas Hooker. Hooker believed in "preparationism," the idea that conversion was a two-part process. The first stage was preparation for conversion during which a person's soul was worked upon by the Holy Spirit. The second stage followed conversion and reflected a person's continual spiritual growth. Hooker felt that persons in the first stage should be allowed to partake of communion alongside those who had already undergone a conversion experience, since, as a sacred ordinance, it would aid them in feeling the Holy Spirit and growing in grace. [See Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 106-108; Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 80-81.

seceded to form their own congregation, the Third Church, which was much more evangelically oriented.²⁹ Likewise, the members of Boston's Brattle Street Church relaxed their views of the church covenant system towards the turn of the century. Yet they did so out of sympathy for the growing popularity of Enlightenment ideas and not, according to historian Patricia Bonomi, because they wanted to promote the doctrine of free grace as did Solomon Stoddard and members of the Old South.³⁰

The rise of scientific thinking and Enlightenment ideas at the end of the seventeenth-century corresponded with a growing movement among religions to emphasize morality over grace. As historian Francis Bremer notes, "Religion was becoming more rational, and preachers increasingly described the conduct expected of men in a way that could be interpreted as meaning that man could influence his own fate."³¹ Rationalists emphasized moral conduct as being enough for spiritual salvation, thereby discarding the principles of faith and grace as the key ingredients for glory. They thus championed the power of the individual to direct his or her destiny through reason and understanding, without having to depend upon the intangible power of God's grace.³²

²⁹ Mark A. Peterson explores the "life" of the Old South from its creation in 1669 to the Great Awakening in his book *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England*. Peterson contrasts the spiritual vitality of the Old South with that of the Westfield church, which was established in opposition to the Halfway Covenant at about the same time. He concludes that the evangelical impulse of the Old South drew upon the blossoming market economy of Boston in a way that fostered a healthy religious culture as opposed to that of Westfield, where both the spiritual and material economies declined. See Peterson, *The Price of Redemption: The Spiritual Economy of Puritan New England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997); Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 152-165; Van de Wetering, "Thomas Prince: Puritan Polemicist," 9.

³⁰ Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven*, 62.

³¹ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 228.

³² Richard Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690 – 1765* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1970), 180-181.

In contrast, many people felt that this turn towards religious rationalism threatened to minimize the power of God in people's lives. A theological debate thus ensued in the first three decades of the eighteenth century between those who professed "rational religion" and those who sought "heart religion." Heart religion was characterized by a belief in millennialism and a new style of preaching that emphasized the importance of God's grace in facilitating salvation. Adherents of heart religion viewed history as a series of cycles in which God's grace was being alternately poured out, and then withheld, until the need for spiritual regeneration rose again. They believed that eventually the millennium would be ushered in by one of these outpourings of grace.³³

As they reviewed world history, eighteenth-century evangelicals came to the conclusion that it was again time for an outpouring of God's grace. Numerous seasons of revival had passed through various New England communities over the years, but never had a season of grace swept the land with such widespread, lasting effects. The closest thing to a more general spread of revivalism had occurred in 1727 after an earthquake rocked New England. Thomas Prince was among twenty ministers who thereafter published sermons about the significance of the earthquake in bringing people back to God. They claimed the earthquake was a physical manifestation of God's displeasure with His covenant people, and that unless serious regeneration occurred, more terrible

³³ Historian Michael Crawford shows that Reformed ministers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries preached that God alternately poured out and withheld his Spirit in cycles. Yet Crawford believes that in the eighteenth century, the societal influence of ministers was in decline, which consequently became a factor in the development of eighteenth century revivalism. Specifically, Crawford asserts that the clergy looked to a "doctrine of human impotence" and a "doctrine of means" in order to compensate for their own feelings of failure. These doctrines held that salvation could only come through God pouring out his Spirit upon the land by way of his ministers. See Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 20-22, 52-53.

destructions would be unleashed upon the land.³⁴ However, though many people followed the ministers' warnings and religious concern swelled within the churches for a time, it was not too long before clergymen were again lamenting the decay of righteousness in their parishes.

Evangelists thus continued to look for an outpouring of grace to occur, and in 1735 Jonathan Edwards claimed that one had transpired in his Northampton congregation.³⁵ He wrote an account of the revival in a letter to Benjamin Colman that eventually became one of the most famous publications of the Great Awakening period. Colman forwarded the letter to English evangelists John Guyse and Isaac Watts, who excitedly oversaw the first publication of the narrative in 1737. Thousands consequently became familiar with the Northampton revival over the next few years as printed editions of Edwards' *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* circulated widely throughout the British empire. It became the prototype for a new genre of religious writing, the revival narrative, in which authors described how God's grace transformed entire communities from places of religious decay into havens of surprising spiritual

³⁴ Ibid., 114; Thomas Prince, *Earthquakes the Works of God & Tokens of His Just Displeasure* (Boston: D. Henchman, 1727); Thomas Prince, *An Improvement on the Doctrine of Earthquakes, Being the Works of God, and Tokens of His Just Displeasure* (Boston D. Fowle and Z. Fowle, 1755).

³⁵ Edwards was the grandson of the famed evangelist Solomon Stoddard of the Connecticut River Valley, in whose parish several notable religious revivals had taken place over the course of his sixty-year ministry. At Stoddard's death, Edwards became the shepherd of his grandfather's flock, a job that left him with big shoes to fill, but that also allowed him to inherit valuable friendships among more established clergymen. These friendships placed Edwards right in the heart of eighteenth-century evangelism and created international connections for him among evangelist ministers. Among those with whom he became closely acquainted with was the Reverend Thomas Prince, who co-wrote the preface to Edwards' first published sermon, and whose daughter Sarah consequently formed an intimate, lifelong friendship with Edwards' daughter Esther. George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003) 124-125, 142-147, 322-323. Esther's personal diary and letters to Sarah have been preserved and compiled in a single publication. See *The Journal of Esther Edwards' Burr, 1754-1757*, Carl F. Karlson and Laurie Crumpaker, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1984).

power. For evangelicals, the amazing events described in Edwards' narrative heightened their expectations and excitement for an outpouring of God's grace to occur.³⁶

Just as the impact of Edwards' *Faithful Narrative* was beginning to wear off, evangelicals' feelings of anticipation were again renewed by remarkable stories coming from across the Atlantic in 1739 about a young preacher named George Whitefield. Whitefield, it was rumored, drew crowds of thousands in England who were powerfully affected by his preaching. And although he was an ordained Anglican minister, he did not conform to orthodox Anglican ideas or practices, a fact which ignited the contempt of his superiors, but which excited evangelicals who noted that he preached their reformed doctrines of saving grace.³⁷ The famed itinerant traveled to Georgia in 1738 to establish an orphanage, preached to thousands in Philadelphia in 1739, and made a sweeping preaching tour of New England in 1740 that ignited the countryside with religious fervor.³⁸ Jonathan Edwards wrote that in Northampton, "the congregation was extraordinarily melted by every sermon" that Whitefield preached there.³⁹ Many of his

³⁶ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 172-173; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 54, 127-129; Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 27, 54-58.

³⁷ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 202; John Willison wrote that Whitefield "is thoroughly Calvinist and sound in the *Doctrines of free Grace*, in the Doctrine of original Sin, the new Birth, Justification by CHRIST, the Necessity of imputed Righteousness, the Operations of the HOLY GHOST, &c." [CH 2:284]. Similarly, Thomas Prince noted that Whitefield's "Doctrine was plainly that of the *Reformers*; Declaring against putting our *good Works* or *Morality* in the Room of *Christ's Righteousness*, or in their having any Hand in our Justification, or indeed Pleasing to God while we are totally unsanctified, acting from corrupt Principles, and unreconciled Enemies to him." CH, 2: 380; See also CH, 2:282-286; 2:289-290; 2:362-363 for instances of how Whitefield's doctrines were defended by revivalists.

³⁸ Thomas Prince was an avid supporter of George Whitefield, and devoted several issues of *The Christian History* to letter extracts from and about Whitefield's travels and doctrines. For Prince, Whitefield was the turning point in all of New England revival history, but especially so in Boston itself. See CH, 1:35: 274-280; 1:36: 281-284; 2:89:288; 2:90: 297; 2:97: 358-360; 2:98:361-368; 2:99: 369-374; 2:100: 379-383.

³⁹ CH, 1:368.

contemporaries, as well as modern historians, have therefore called him the catalyst for the spirit of revivalism that spread across the land.⁴⁰

Adherents of rational religion, however, were skeptical. They viewed what others termed “signs” of legitimate revival as evidence of religious “enthusiasm,” a quality they greatly disdained because it connoted religious excess.⁴¹ Some of the excesses they cited as examples of enthusiasm, and not the Spirit of God, included the weeping, wailing, and bodily contortions of congregants who listened to evangelists preach. They asserted that the physical effects produced no more than “Confusions,” “*disorderly Tumults* and *indecent Behaviors*.”⁴² Pro-revivalists, on the other hand, sought to prove that physical manifestations of emotions were the natural result of the inner-self undergoing the proper stages of the conversion process, and were therefore doctrinally justified.⁴³

Further argument against bodily effects—things like people crying out during sermons, fainting, trembling, or convulsing—was the fact that they often were associated with the enthusiastic sermonizing of unauthorized preachers. Anti-revivalists sharply criticized the itinerant preachers who traveled from place to place “preaching Christ,” whether or not they had formal clerical training, or even the permission of the resident minister. A minister’s proper role and calling was disrupted and threatened by traveling preachers who technically held no authority over congregations, although they claimed to have the power of God. And as if to add insult to injury, many itinerants were simply lay

⁴⁰ See Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, Chapter 3.

⁴¹ See David S. Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985).

⁴² “The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches,” in Richard L. Bushman, ed., *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745* (New York: Atheneum, 1970), 127-128.

⁴³ *CH*, 1:159-160; 1:188-189.

persons who felt inspired by the Spirit to take up preaching—or “exhorting,” as it was often called. They were responsible, anti-revivalists claimed, for many of the separations that were occurring between congregations and their ordained ministers, the ultimate betrayal of the church covenant given by God to mankind. All of these “disorders,” anti-revivalists believed, pointed to the illegitimacy of the Great Awakening, an assertion that placed them directly at odds with those, like Thomas Prince, who sought to promote the revivals.⁴⁴

The publication of Prince’s *Christian History* occurred at the high point of the revivalism controversy and was seen by some as a factional tool. In May 1743, only two months after the first issue of *The Christian History* was published, New England ministers had gathered at their annual meeting to discuss the legitimacy of the revival movement and how to deal with some of the beliefs being preached.⁴⁵ Many were questioning the emotionalism of the revivals, which often resulted in unusual actions by affected persons, and the issue of itinerancy and whether it was right for outside preachers to hold sway over established congregations. The ministers drafted a statement of policy regarding the Awakening in an attempt to formulate a more unified view of

⁴⁴ “The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches,” 128.

⁴⁵ The General Convention of Congregational Ministers in Massachusetts was an annual meeting held in Boston. It originated as an informal gathering of ministers who were visiting Boston on the opening day of the colonial legislature, but gradually became a more formalized convention. The ministers would discuss pertinent topics, listen to a sermon, and often contribute money to a worthy cause such as missionary work among the Indians. In 1743 the convention decided to discuss the disorders of the Awakening. Though the convention’s title implies that the ministers were all from Massachusetts, they most likely were not. In a letter describing the events of the convention, the Reverend Joshua Gee noted that the “Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches” would probably not have passed were it not for the affirmative votes of ministers from colonies other than Massachusetts. See Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards & Whitefield* (Edinburg: 1842; reprint, Guildford, Great Britain: Billing & Sons Ltd, 1976), 286-302.

what was happening and how it should be interpreted.⁴⁶ Prince and others disagreed with the underlying tone of the statement because it seemed to discredit the legitimacy of the revival movement, in which they believed. Unsatisfied, they held another conference of pro-revivalist ministers in July. In the July meeting, at which Prince served as scribe, the attendant ministers created an alternative policy statement that supported the Awakening. For instance, they accepted the conversion narratives of people who had experienced bodily seizures or physical manifestations of God’s Spirit because, they argued, the affected persons had afterwards been able to cite a passage of scripture as having started the physical reaction.⁴⁷

Shortly before this meeting, Charles Chauncy, the most vocal anti-revivalist, wrote a vehement attack on the pro-revivalist faction called *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*. In it Chauncy criticized not only the enthusiastic excesses of the revivals, but the behavior of ministers like Prince who encouraged it.⁴⁸ Chauncy’s pamphlet was a direct response to a treatise by Jonathan Edwards published a few months earlier. Edward’s work, *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England*, called upon pro-revivalist ministers to use all their means—both spiritual and financial—to help promote the revivals. Specifically, Edwards proposed that a “history could be published once a month, or once a fortnight . . . by one of the ministers of Boston, who are near the press and are most conveniently situated to receive accounts from all parts” as a way in which pro-revivalist ministers might help to educate people about the “progress” of the revivals. Two months later, on March 5,

⁴⁶ “The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches,” 128.

⁴⁷ *CH*, 155-166.

⁴⁸ Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable thoughts on the state of religion in New-England : a treatise in five parts* (Boston: Printed by Rogers and Fowle, 1743).

1743, the first issue of *The Christian History* appeared. Though in magazine and not book form, *The Christian History* was Prince's way of simultaneously fulfilling Edwards' proposal and a suggestion made by the Reverend William Cooper three years previously that ministers should exchange and compile revival accounts similar to Edwards' *Faithfull Narrative*.⁴⁹

Twenty-four revival narratives from the American colonies, as well as four from Scotland, comprise the bulk of *The Christian History*.⁵⁰ But there were also other notices of Great Awakening events, such as the visits of George Whitefield to New England, and numerous letters exchanged between ministers discussing the Awakening on both sides of the Atlantic. Approximately a fourth of the magazine is also composed of sermon extracts from reputable Puritan ministers of the seventeenth- and eighteenth-centuries that create a sense of doctrinal and historical continuity.⁵¹ That Prince intended *The Christian History* to be more than just a contemporaneous account of the Great Awakening is consistent with his decision to publish and distribute an index of each year's issues "for those who may be disposed to preserve and bind them."⁵² He wanted the magazine to be a lasting record of the revivals and an index helped to make it a more accessible historical source.

⁴⁹ C. C. Goen, ed., *Jonathan Edwards: The Great Awakening* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 515, 529; William Cooper, *The New England Weekly Journal*, 3 June 1740.

⁵⁰ This accounts for all American revival narratives but one that were printed between 1741 and 1745. The twenty-fifth and final one, by John Rowland, was later published in John Gillies *Historical Collections*. Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 184-1855; John Gillies, *Historical Collections*, Vol. 1, chapter V.

⁵¹ Charles Hambrick-Stowe argues that Prince and other New Light ministers reprinted seventeenth-century devotional manuals, sermons, and treatises in an effort to reinforce the legitimacy of the Great Awakening. They wanted to reveal the continuity of the movement with past Puritan doctrines and events and thus give it a more solid defense against criticisms that it was dangerously revolutionary. See Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spirit of the Old Writers," 277-291.

⁵² *CH*, 1:2.

Prince greatly valued collecting historical sources. He is noted by historians today for his immense collection of seventeenth and eighteenth century “Books, Pamphlets, Maps, Papers in Print & manuscripts either published in New England, or pertaining to its History, & public Affairs.”⁵³ But though his personal library was not typical, his dependence upon the written word as an authoritative explanation of the world was.

Colonial New England was a remarkably literate society in comparison to other places during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.⁵⁴ This stemmed mainly from Puritanism’s emphasis on the Bible as the ultimate religious authority. As Protestants, Puritans believed that all people should be entitled to read the Bible in a common language, and not have to rely on priests to interpret the scriptures from Latin or Greek. They felt that Christianity had become corrupted because people had not been allowed to read the word of God for themselves, and so every effort was made in Puritan society to encourage people to read and study the Bible on their own. Proper Bible study was seen as an essential part of the conversion process, since it was through scripture that people

⁵³ [Thomas Prince], Prince’s Will 1747, Boston Public Library, Boston, Massachusetts; Approximately 3800 titles once belonging to Prince are now housed in the Prince Collection of the Boston Public Library. Among them are such rarities as the only two surviving copies of the first book printed in the American colonies, the *Bay Psalm Book*, though Prince actually had five copies of the *Bay Psalm Book* at the time of his death. When he died, he donated his library to the Old South Church, where some of the collection was likely destroyed during the British occupation of Boston from 1775-1776. See Peter Knapp, “The Rev. Thomas Prince and the Prince Library,” *American Book Collector*, 22, no. 2 (1971): 19-22. Prince loved to peruse his personal library as well as those of his neighbors. It was “commonly said that when he set himself down to work in a library, he lost all sense of time and remained until his host dug him out to feed him or to send him home to Mrs. Prince.” Shipton, *Sibley’s Harvard Graduates*, 5:349.

⁵⁴ Kenneth Lockridge’s study of New England literacy is a foundational source for this assertion, though it is problematic. Lockridge bases his findings on signatures given in wills, and argues that by 1700 New England had virtually achieved universal male literacy. He notes that female literacy was considerably less overall because there were significantly fewer female signatures than male signatures given in probate records. See *Literacy in Colonial New England*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1974), 42-43; E. Jennifer Monaghan argues that Lockridge’s method of analysis ignores the importance of reading in Puritan women’s lives. She asserts that although women might not have been able to write, they were likely more literate than Lockridge’s study concludes. See Monaghan, “Literacy Instruction and Gender in Colonial New England,” *American Quarterly* 40:1 (March 1988): 18-41.

could come to know Christ and recognize whether or not they were one of his elect. The Bible was a pure text, direct from God, untarnished by man's frailties or the flow of time. It was simultaneously historical and contemporary in its meanings and applications. As historian David Hall has pointed out, the standard of authority that the Bible therefore represented to New Englanders tended to extend to printed texts as a whole. People wanted to read "godly books" that utilized the plain language, metaphors and narrative style of the Bible.⁵⁵ Sermons and other religiously-oriented texts, which were produced largely by ministers who drew on Biblical conventions of style, were thus the primary publications of the colonial world until the mid-eighteenth century.

Thomas Prince was, in fact, among the most prolific ministers of his day in terms of published sermons, turning out a total of thirty-three over the course of his life. He also produced an ambitious, two volume work entitled *The Chronological History of New England*, and a new edition of hymns. Thus when it came to overseeing *The Christian History*, Prince was no stranger to navigating the growing field of print culture.⁵⁶

Many in his generation were likewise beginning to see a new power in the printed word. Newspapers had risen steadily in popularity and importance since the beginning of the century. Yet the magazine was also taking form right about the time that Prince

⁵⁵ David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment: Popular Religious Belief in Early New England* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 24-31.

⁵⁶ Thomas Prince, *A Chronological History of New England in the Form of Annals* (Boston: Kneeland and Green, 1736). Though it was intended to be a history of New England, Prince began the first volume with the Garden of Eden story and only reached the year 1630. He later wrote a second volume that extended the chronology to the year 1633. His book of hymns found more favor with the public, however, and was used for the first time the Sunday following his death. The Reverend Elisha Callender wrote to a friend, "It gives me great concern that Mr. Prince's Chronology has been so ill-received. I look on it as an honour to the country, as well as to the author, and doubt not but posterity will do him justice. . . . I wish, for his sake, he had taken less pains to serve an ungrateful and injudicious age, lest it should discourage his going on with his design. I hope it will not, and hope you will encourage him; for, sooner, or later, the country will see the advantage of his work and their obligation to him." William B. Sprague, *Annals of the American Pulpit*, 1:305.

began *The Christian History*. Two magazines, *The General Magazine and Historical Chronical, for All the British Plantations in America* and *The American Magazine, or a monthly View of the Political State of the British Colonies*, preceded *The Christian History* in date of first publication by two years, but they did not even come close to rivaling it in longevity. Even so, because of its religious content and purpose, *The Christian History* is generally not considered by historians to be a true ancestor of the modern American magazine.⁵⁷

But however it is classified today, *The Christian History* was to its contemporaries a form of religious propaganda. As historian Frank Lambert has shown, it was part of a print war that ensued between pro-revivalist and anti-revivalist ministers during the Great Awakening. Ministers were beginning to capitalize on the power of the press, a power later harnessed effectively by American revolutionaries, but which was still somewhat novel and innovative in the 1740s. Pro-revivalists, according to Lambert, proved the most adept at utilizing printed means in the American colonies, producing over double the number of published materials as anti-revivalists for the years 1739-1745.⁵⁸ Many of these publications, including *The Christian History*, were printed and

⁵⁷ One exception is Lyon N. Richardson who devotes a chapter specifically to *The Christian History* in his *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1789* (New York: T. Nelson & Sons, 1931). Sources that do not include *The Christian History* in their histories, but which provide helpful information regarding the birth of the magazine and the development of American print culture include John Tebbel, *The American Magazine: A Compact History* (New York: Hawthorne Books Inc., 1969); Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1741-1850* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1966); John Tebbel and Mary Ellen Zuckerman, *The Magazine in America, 1741-1990* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); James Playstead Wood, *Magazines in the United States: Their Social and Economic Influence* (New York: Ronald Press Company, 1949).

⁵⁸ Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 214. That ministers were recognizing the power of printed materials for the sake of propaganda is evident in *The Christian History*. For example, a letter written by the Reverend John Willison of Dundee, Scotland, and published in the magazine revealed Dundee's desire for more pro-revivalist accounts to be sent to Scotland "because of the many Papers publish'd here to Discredit" the revivals "as if it was Delusion and Diabolical." *CH*,1:211.

sold by Samuel Kneeland and Thomas Green of Boston. Both were members of Prince's congregation at the Old South Church, where Green was also a deacon.⁵⁹

There were several advantages to issuing *The Christian History* on a weekly basis rather than just collecting similar information and printing it in book or pamphlet form, though on the surface this arrangement gives the magazine a rather disconnected quality at times. The first advantage was the ability that Prince and his son had as editors to revise, clarify or restate important points in subsequent issues. For instance, in the earlier issues of the magazine, Prince had compiled a history of New England revivalism from sermon extracts and various other accounts. Chronologically he had overlooked an instance of revival in Windham, Connecticut, that the Reverend Thomas Foxcroft promptly reminded him of, and so an account of the revival was included in the next issue of the magazine. In introducing the Windham account, Prince explained to his readers that "it cannot be expected, we should go on in so exact an Order as if we had them all in our Eye at the Entrance of our Undertaking." So when anything "Remarkable" was discovered to have been "omitted," he promised to "look back a little and recover what we had unhappily over-look'd."⁶⁰

Similarly, the weekly format of *The Christian History* allowed Prince and the magazine's supporters to use it as an active forum for debate. They could, if needed, respond to contemporaneous events and criticisms in a relatively quick manner. For example, the pro-revivalist ministers' meeting was held Thursday and Friday, July 7-8, 1743. Prince inserted an account of it, along with several attestations "At the desire of

⁵⁹ M.A. Yodelis, "Boston's First Major Newspaper War: A 'Great Awakening' of Freedom," *Journalism Quarterly* 51 (Summer 1974): 207-212.

⁶⁰ *CH*, 1:129.

several of our Customers,” beginning in the next issue of *The Christian History* on Saturday, 16 July, 1743, just one week later. As more attestations to the meeting arrived over the next few weeks he was able to continue printing them, making viewpoints known publicly that perhaps never would have been otherwise.⁶¹ This was perhaps the magazine’s greatest strength, for it allowed many revival supporters an opportunity to voice their personal experiences and opinions about the Great Awakening.

But not everyone heralded this quality of the magazine. Charles Chauncy wrote in a letter dated shortly after the magazine’s first issue that it was already an object of controversy:

The Weekly Christian history, by Mr. Prince’s son, or rather by the father of the son, I suppose you have seen an account of in the public prints. Few among us like it. Many of Mr. Prince’s parishioners are much troubled at it. I believe tis not much encouraged, and I hope will drop off itself: Otherwise it may produce another paper; and this may be the means to perpetuate a spirit of bitterness.⁶²

Though the magazine lasted nearly two years after this statement was made, it was not free from the continued contempt of anti-revivalists. As time passed, Prince and his *Christian History* came under even sharper attack by local newspapers, particularly *The Boston Evening-Post*, which charged Prince with encouraging clerical divisiveness,

⁶¹ CH,1:155.

⁶² Chauncy, “Original Letters of Dr. Charles Chauncy.”

doctrinal change and religious chaos.⁶³ Due to these attacks, *The Christian History* was officially retired in February of 1745.

In essence, *The Christian History* was a culminating example of the trends and tensions that were manifested in the Great Awakening period but had been building for over a century. The magazine was created in response to the differing opinions that Congregationalist ministers had about the nature of the revivals. Prince and the other contributors to *The Christian History* believed that the revivals were authentic outpourings of God's grace. For instance, in *The Christian History* Prince quoted a sermon of John Cotton, one of the most orthodox ministers of the first generation, in which Cotton said, "*If this be not the Work of GOD'S Spirit (in the Substance of it) then Conversion is a Delusion, and we must throw away our Bibles.*"⁶⁴ By using Cotton's statement, Prince was arguing that the nature of the Great Awakening, and the way people should respond to it, was an issue of black or white—the revivals should either be accepted and promoted, in spite of their eccentricities, or Christianity as a whole was a delusion and should be discarded.

Yet for others, the questions of how to interpret and respond to the revivals could not be answered so simply. The unusual characteristics of Great Awakening

⁶³ Thomas Fleet's *Boston Evening-Post* carried several critical commentaries on Prince's magazine. For instance, the week after *The Christian History* was first published, Fleet's newspaper described it as a "*Party Paper . . . design'd only for the Uses of special Friends.*" A year later, *The Boston Evening-Post* carried a column written by an unidentified subscriber to *The Christian History*. In the front-page column, the author explained that he no longer wished to subscribe to *The Christian History* because "the Paper appears to be of pernicious Consequence." He felt that the magazine only served to "multiply [factions,] Schisms, and Confusions in all the Churches of the Land." Another article published some later expressed even harsher sentiments against Prince and *The Christian History*. The unnamed author charged Prince with hypocrisy because he had signed the "Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches" and yet had gone to "much Pains to contradict the Judgment of *that* venerable Assembly, as well as *his own*, in so publick a Manner." *The Christian History* was then blamed explicitly for the "*Spirit of Disorder, Enthusiasm and Separation in the Land.*" See *The Boston Evening-Post*, 7 March 1743; 27 February 1744; 5 September 1743; Van de Wetering, "Thomas Prince: Puritan Polemicist," 337-364.

⁶⁴ *CH*, 1:269.

revivalism—things like bodily manifestations of the Spirit of God, itinerant preaching, and high conversion rates—prompted many to question whether or not the revivals were truly directed by God. Thus the ministers from all over New England who met together in May 1743 to discuss the revivals and determine how to handle them. Yet the results of their meeting did not satisfy many, including Thomas Prince, who then helped to organize and promote a second ministerial conference geared towards a pro-revivalist interpretation of revival events. This conference was thus an open manifestation of the theological disagreements New England ministers had—disagreements that had been fermenting over the decades.

Thomas Prince and his pro-revivalist peers believed that the Great Awakening was unquestionably a divine outpouring of grace. They consequently defended the legitimacy of the revivals with firm resolution, though they did not agree on everything associated with Great Awakening revivalism. The questions and tensions that caused ministers to split into pro-revivalist and anti-revivalist factions likewise surfaced amongst pro-revivalists themselves. *The Christian History*, as the single most complete compilation of pro-revivalist writings about the revivals, reveals this fact, and therefore cannot be simply viewed as an organ for pro-revivalist propaganda. That it was propaganda, in the sense of promoting a dominant idea, there is no doubt. Thomas Prince was quite adept at utilizing the blossoming realm of print media in order to disseminate the belief that the revivals were God's work. But *The Christian History* was also a diversified collection of opinions regarding church doctrines and practices that made it more than just a factional tool. How the magazine's contributors responded to and wrote about revivalism in their communities indicates that pro-revivalist culture struggled to

agree on the “disorders” of the Awakening. Personal experience became their guiding stars, ultimately keeping pro-revivalists from establishing a united front against their critics. *The Christian History* thus hurt the pro-revivalist faction not so much because of its factionalism as a “*Party Paper*,” as its critics and later historians have claimed, but because it was a “*Party Paper*” without a very unified party behind it when it came to handling the “errors of doctrine” and “disorders of practice” that were controversial issues during the Great Awakening.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ *The Boston Evening Post*, 7 March 1743; “The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches,” 127-128.

II. Problems: Pro-revivalists and Personal Experience

“Tis probable one may call that Disorder and Confusion which another calls lovely and beautiful, and endeavors to promote.”⁶⁶
--Rev. Jonathan Russell, 30 June 1743.

It was no ordinary Sunday in New London, Connecticut. The townspeople were returning solemnly to their homes from worship services when “a great Noise and Out cry,” accompanied by swirling columns of “ascending Smoak,” diverted them “to one of the most public Places in the Town.” There, to their absolute astonishment, they found a raucous crowd “encompassing a Fire which they had built in the Street, into which they were casting Numbers of Books, principally on Divinity, and those that were well approved by *Protestant Divines*.” But perhaps even more surprising to the pious onlookers was the audacious behavior of the crowd. As the sacrificial pages were consumed by the flames, they shouted, “*Thus the Souls of the Authors of these Books, those of them that are dead, are roasting in the Flames of Hell!*” They then told the spectators that they must repent or face the same fate in Satan’s fiery furnace. No doubt, this was one bonfire that New Londoners would not soon forget.

But one fire was not enough to get the point across. There were still sins to be purged. “*Heresy*” had burned, but so must “*Idolatry*.” And better to destroy it now, some thought, than to leave it to an angry God on judgment day. So the next day the book-burning crowd gathered again around the smoldering ashes. But this time they

⁶⁶ *CH*, 1:174. The Reverend Jonathan Russell was the pastor of the Congregational church in Barnstable, Massachusetts.

threw more than books into the flames. By the urging of their leader, James Davenport, many in the mob “fell to stripping and cast their Cloaths down at their Apostle’s Feet.” After all, if books were sources of idolatry, why not clothes as well? Still, a few hesitated before tossing their garments into the blaze. One man summoned the courage to tell Davenport “that he could scarce see how his disliking the Night-Gown that he had on his Back, should render him, guilty of Idolatry.” Nevertheless, the man soon succumbed to the intoxication of his “Apostle’s” command: “strip he must, and strip he did.”

Finally, a young woman in the crowd had had enough. She yanked Davenport’s own breeches out of the flames and threw them back at him, horrified that he was standing in front of the blaze in his underclothes. Encouraged by her daring actions, another man turned to the half-dressed Davenport and suggested “that he tho’t, *the Devil was in him.*” Taken aback for a moment, Davenport paused before agreeing, “That he *was under the Influence of an evil Spirit, and that God had left Him.*” And so the religious sacrifice was over, for the time being. Nevertheless, it left many in New England wondering if God had ever been there in the first place.⁶⁷

Among the doubters were anti-revivalist ministers who argued that the spread of revivalism was not a result of an effusion of God’s Holy Spirit upon the land, but merely a result of religious enthusiasm. Yet even those who supported the revivals were concerned over the disorderly conduct of many revival participants. Like their anti-revivalist peers, some revival supporters feared that religious excesses, if left unrestrained, would lead to the decay of traditional Calvinist doctrines. Anti-revivalists pointed to such events as Davenport’s bonfires as evidence that religious chaos already

⁶⁷ *Boston Weekly Post-Boy*, March 28, 1743.

characterized the pro-revivalist faction. Pro-revivalists, in response, sought to legitimize their support for the revivals by drawing the line between what was doctrinally acceptable and unacceptable behavior. It was not, however, an easy line to draw, since much of it relied on personal interpretation of traditional doctrine and the scriptures, and perhaps more importantly, on personal experience. Evidence of this conflict appears in *The Christian History*. Though the contributors to the magazine all supported the revivals, their writings reveal how pro-revivalists differed in their views on several controversial issues, in spite of their desire to be a unified group.

In an effort to be more unified, many contributors to *The Christian History* expressed their desire for a statement of ministerial testimony to be made against the errors of doctrine and disorders of practice that surfaced during the revivals—things like Antinomian principles, itinerant preaching, and strange, bodily manifestations of the Spirit of God. The Reverend Jonathan Russell of Barnstable, Massachusetts, was one who desired such a statement. In a letter published in *The Christian History* he acknowledged the need for “proper Testimony” to be given “against the Errors, Disorders and Confusions that have prevailed in many Places.” But, he asked, “*What are the Disorders, &c. which are to be testify’d against?*” For, as he noted with sharp insight, “’Tis probable one may call that Disorder and Confusion which another calls lovely and beautiful, and endeavors to promote.”⁶⁸

This problem of perspective was essentially the heart of the dispute between anti-revivalists and pro-revivalists during the Great Awakening. Though each faction proclaimed that it was practicing the purest Calvinist principles, interpretation of those

⁶⁸ CH, 1:174.

principles was nevertheless highly subjective. Because of this, personal perspective was also a significant contingent force within the pro-revivalist faction itself, as the pages of *The Christian History* reveal. Pro-revivalist ministers contributing to the magazine therefore expressed a spectrum of ideas about major issues of the revivals, such as itinerant preaching. Although the magazine is typically seen by historians as a fairly consistent explication of the pro-revivalist viewpoint, *The Christian History* in fact attests to the difficulty pro-revivalists had in establishing a coherent platform for pro-revival support. As the Reverend Russell noted, it was often difficult to determine what was a “disorder” and what was not, even within the pro-revivalist camp.

For anti-revivalists and pro-revivalists alike, the “errors” and “disorders” of the Great Awakening were the hottest topics of debate. Anti-revivalists used examples of “disorders” as leverage for their criticisms against the revivals, while pro-revivalists struggled to create plausible explanations for them that were doctrinally sound. Members from both sides of the debate had met in May 1743 and produced the “Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches,” which outlined what were considered errors of doctrine and disorders of practice that ministers should avoid countenancing or promoting.⁶⁹

As to errors of doctrine, the “Testimony” renounced the practice of following “*secret Impulses*” upon the mind “without due Regard to the *written word*.” This meant that church members were not to act upon any spiritual feelings or thoughts they might have unless they could trace them directly to the scriptures. Since the Bible was God’s word, it was the only means through which the Holy Spirit could legitimately flow.

⁶⁹ Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, 286-302.

Without it, there was no standard of authority whereby to prove whether or not one's actions and beliefs were in harmony with God's will. In an effort to douse further criticism of the Awakening, pro-revivalists specifically emphasized the need for scriptural "Regard" in their "Testimony."⁷⁰ They also proclaimed that "none are converted but such as know they are converted, and the time when," and criticized the "Antinomian and Familistical Errors which flow" from these and other misinterpretations of the doctrines of salvation. Like secret impulses, conversion could only be legitimized when it originated from involvement with the scriptures, a traditional doctrine that was challenged by other branches of Congregationalism such as Antinomianism and Familism. With respect to "*Disorders in Practice*," the ministers listed itinerancy, lay exhorting, church separations, the unrighteous judging of others' hearts, and the bodily manifestations and outcries that sometimes accompanied people feeling distressed about their sins.⁷¹ These disorders of practice were the most controversial characteristics of the Awakening that had turned religion into a fiery dispute between factions.

Six pro-revivalist pastors from York County, Massachusetts, who jointly wrote a letter published in *The Christian History*, reiterated much of what the May ministerial conference had "complained of" as errors and disorders in their own statement of belief

⁷⁰ James Davenport's book burning affair is one of the most well-known incidents of people following "secret impulses" that occurred during the Awakening. It is not the only one, however, nor perhaps the most extreme. In South Carolina, a man named Hugh Bryan claimed that he did for "many days' converse with an invisible spirit." The spirit commanded Bryan to seek out "a certain tree" from which he could obtain a rod to "smite the waters of the river," so that, like the Red Sea, "they should be divided, so that he could go over on dry ground." Though Bryan eventually found the tree he was seeking, he was unsuccessful in making his Biblical crossing and was barely saved from drowning by his brother who had followed him there. Though wet and cold Bryan remained out of doors most of the night, having been convinced by the spirit "that, if he went home that night, he should be a dead man before morning." Nevertheless, Bryan finally did go home, "and, finding himself alive in the morning, concluded that the spirit, which had lied to him twice, must be the 'father of lies.'"⁷⁰ See Tracy, *The Great Awakening*, 240-241.

⁷¹ "The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches," 127-128.

about the Great Awakening. For instance, they supported a stance against all the errors of doctrine that had been listed in the “Testimony,” likewise asserting that they judged them to be “contrary to the pure Doctrines of the Gospel.” But they did not include itinerancy in their list of disorders of practice, though they quoted almost directly from the “Testimony” in their renunciation of all other disorders.⁷² Though some might call this a mere oversight, it was not. Like most pro-revivalists they supported the “Testimony of the Pastors” in many ways, but not all—particularly not with respect to what were termed disorders of practice. Their more moderate viewpoint is thus typical of the many viewpoints expressed within the pages of *The Christian History* by other pro-revivalist ministers. *Christian History* contributors were against any errors in doctrine that might bring upon them charges of Antinomianism or other such doctrinal impurities. Yet they struggled not to censure everything that revival critics pointed to as disorders of practice, for too much censuring was equivalent, in their eyes, to an open denial that the spirit of revivalism had sprung from the Spirit of God. But just what disorders of practice they chose to accept, and how they sought to reconcile them with traditional belief, varied among *Christian History* writers, making the magazine a complex compilation of pro-revivalist views, and not the simplistic, factional tool it is often portrayed as being by modern historians.

Doctrinal errors were the disorders that pro-revivalist ministers feared most. Among New England Puritans and their descendents, any doctrinal interpretation or practice seen as departing from traditional Calvinist belief was subject to the label of “enthusiasm,” or religious extremism. It was a loaded charge, connoting heresy and

⁷² CH, 1:175.

summoning distasteful cultural memories such as Anne Hutchinson's antinomianism and the radical missionary methods of the early Quakers. Religious enthusiasts, it was feared, carried with them the seeds of both spiritual and social dissolution. During the Great Awakening years, critics repeatedly leveled the accusation of enthusiasm against the revivals.⁷³ Pro-revivalists contributing to *The Christian History* tried to distance themselves from this accusation. They not only expressed serious concern about the dangers of Arminian and Antinomian principles, but desired more guidelines that would help them deal with the disorders that resulted from such doctrinal extremes.⁷⁴

Avoiding doctrinal extremes was often a tricky task for Puritans. As historian David Lovejoy has noted, Puritanism was ideally a system in which the doctrines of "the sovereignty of God and man's responsibility" were held in delicate balance.⁷⁵ The tension between these fundamental doctrines was therefore both what characterized mainstream Puritanism and what threatened to undermine it. Nevertheless, various branches of Puritan belief had always existed; among them were Arminianism and Antinomianism, two somewhat opposite ways of approaching the salvation question. During the Great Awakening, a time when orthodoxy was linked so sensitively to the issue of legitimacy, ministers from the pro-revivalist and anti-revivalist factions

⁷³ Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World*, 178, 187.

⁷⁴ The term "enthusiasm" is typically used by historians of the Great Awakening to connote behavioral excesses, and not doctrinal errors like Arminianism. In general, such is also the case with the writers of *The Christian History*. When used by *Christian History* ministers, the term usually appears in the context of strange behaviors like fits of frenzy, fainting or crying out. However, its usage is not strictly limited to behavioral contexts in *The Christian History*. Several instances occur when authors use the word in a way that links it, explicitly or implicitly, to doctrinal excesses such as Arminianism and Antonimianism. See *CH*, 1:179; 1:195; 2:65, 67-68; 1:407; 2:309.

⁷⁵ Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World.*, 62; See also Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 16-19; Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 26.

challenged each other's position with charges of Arminianism and Antinomianism. The terms were used as derisive labels to underscore the incorrectness of the other's position.

Christian History ministers often linked anti-revivalists with Arminianism.

Arminianists believed that the Covenant of Works was more important in salvation than the Covenant of Grace. They were moralists who argued against the doctrine of original sin that was so foundational to mainstream Calvinism. They believed men could only be punished for their own sins, and so held within themselves the power to enact their own salvation through good works.⁷⁶ In the eyes of pro-revivalists, these beliefs threatened to undermine the foundations of Calvinism that depended on upholding the doctrine of man's depraved nature, for if man had power to influence his fate he would no longer feel dependent upon God. *Christian History* ministers thus viewed those with Arminian leanings as "dead Formalist[s]" who lacked the power of God's grace in their lives.⁷⁷

In return, pro-revivalists were frequently accused of practicing Antinomianism, a version of Puritanism that was associated with religious enthusiasm, since Antinomians characteristically believed grace was the principal factor in obtaining salvation.⁷⁸ This belief nullified the need for good works and removed moral responsibility. The elect could therefore sin all they wanted and not be held accountable, an attitude that not only undermined Puritan religion but also threatened to undermine Puritan society in general.⁷⁹ It was for this reason that Anne Hutchinson and John Wheelwright had been banished from the Massachusetts Bay Colony in 1637 during the infamous Antinomian Crisis.

⁷⁶ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986) 223-224.

⁷⁷ Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 40; *CH*, 1:186.

⁷⁸ *CH*, 1:186.

⁷⁹ Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World*, 36-37.

Their unconventional beliefs endangered the stability of a homogenous “city on a hill,” or so thought the civil magistrates who banished Hutchinson, as well as the congregants that excommunicated her. But although society was far less homogenous by the time of the Great Awakening, the underlying threat of doctrinal and social chaos was just as feared as it was in the days of the first generation.⁸⁰

The contributors to *The Christian History* expressed these fears repeatedly. The Reverend David Hall of Worcester wrote that he had had “*Fears, lest some at this Day run into Antinomian and familistical Errors; and that others would fall into enthusiastick Phrensies, Evils by all Means to be watched and guarded against.*” But, he asked perceptively, “Who in this Life is out of Danger?”⁸¹ After all, it seemed only “natural and easy,” wrote the Reverend Jeremiah Wise, for people “that have been in the Extream of *Arminianism*, to run into the contrary Extream of *Antinomianism*,” like a pendulum swinging in a clock. Likewise, he pointed out, the controversy surrounding the revivals made it easy for people to promote “*Arminianism* under Colour of discountenancing *Antinomianism.*”⁸² This last observation attested to the difficulty ministers were having in maintaining a balance between the two extremes. It was easy to go too far in either direction, even unintentionally. Nevertheless, it was part of a minister’s job to testify against disorders of doctrine and to help clarify cloudy issues. Pro-revivalist ministers could not, therefore, simply ignore the problems that were surfacing as a result of doctrinal disorders.

⁸⁰ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 63-67; Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World*, 73.

⁸¹ *CH*, 1:186.

⁸² *CH*, 1:170.

Christian History contributors pointed to this duty frequently in their letters of support for a ministerial convocation to be held as a means for creating a more uniform, pro-revival policy. Virtually all of them asked that “due *Testimony* against all *Errors* and *Disorders*” be borne, with some like the Rev. John Rogers of Kittery adding the plea, “*Oh that something may be said against ARMINIANISM as well as ANTINOMIANISM.*”⁸³ Others like the Reverend David Hall proposed explanations for the existence of these disorders in the Awakening. He saw them as the result of excessive zeal combined with “*Smallness*” of “*Knowledge* and *Experiences.*” His solution was for wiser, more experienced persons—referring implicitly to ordained ministers—to guide individuals new to Christ through the conversion process.⁸⁴ But even as simple and conventional as this answer was, it was more than just a rote repetition of the traditional view. The proper role of a minister in the conversion process was a distinct point of controversy during the Great Awakening, when itinerant preachers were invading the bounds of parishes and then claiming that established preachers were themselves unconverted. Hall’s solution was his way of aligning himself against the radicalism of religious enthusiasm, a task that the July 1743 ministerial convocation also wanted to accomplish, while preserving support for the revivals at the same time.

Ministers who could not attend the July meeting of ministers, such as Hall, wrote letters expressing support for the revivals that were later published in *The Christian History*. The letters reveal that pro-revivalists had high expectations for the July conference. They hoped that the meeting would act as a balm to heal “every Thing of a

⁸³ *CH.*, 1:169, 1:178.

⁸⁴ *CH.*, 1:186.

threatening Aspect upon these Churches.”⁸⁵ But even though a statement of policy was written and published by the attendant ministers, it could not be enforced or encouraged at the local level beyond what ministers themselves chose to implement. It all boiled down to a matter of personal opinion: how far away from mainstream Calvinism one thought proper was purely a matter of perspective. As Jonathan Parsons noted in his revival narrative, there was still in his congregation “that which an Arminian wou’d brand with very black Marks; but a *Calvinist* who has *really* felt the Power of the Gospel in his heart wou’d approve of.”⁸⁶ The disorders of doctrine were therefore left unsolved by the ministerial conference, beyond a general recommendation that people not avoid Arminianism by retreating “to the opposite side of *Antinomianism*.”⁸⁷

The disorders of practice that were complained of during the Awakening were, on the other hand, easier for the ministers to address in theory, if not any easier to manage in actuality. Though ultimately related to doctrinal questions, the disorders of practice that surfaced during the Great Awakening period were particularly exceptional—and thus so controversial—because they were relatively new issues for ministers to deal with on such a large scale. Thousands of people throughout the American colonies, Scotland, and England claimed to have experienced similar, irregular effects as a result of spiritual awakening—things like overwhelming anxiety, trembling, and fainting. Thomas Prince worked hard to show in *The Christian History* that some of what were considered “disorders” had long been apparent in Christianity. But many contemporaries of the Great Awakening viewed them as subversive and heretical practices that had no place in

⁸⁵ *CH*, 1:192.

⁸⁶ *CH*, 2:155.

⁸⁷ *CH*, 1:162.

religious worship. The anti-revivalists were therefore not alone in proclaiming the incorrectness of many aspects of the revivals. Many pro-revivalists, as is evident in *The Christian History*, likewise felt that what were becoming hallmark characteristics of revivalism were truly “errors” of practice, while others maintained that irregular behaviors should not be censured if they produced good results in people’s lives. The opinions expressed within Prince’s magazine thus reveal a range of what was considered acceptable religious behavior with respect to the issues of crying out, bodily manifestations, lay exhorting, and itinerant preaching among revival supporters.

Christian History contributors frequently cited people crying out in anguish of soul during sermons as the first indicators that revivalism was emerging in a congregation. Many modern scholars have written about how Puritanism as a faith and lifestyle created feelings of great anxiety in people as they sought to discover if they were one of God’s elect.⁸⁸ In general, Puritans described conversion as a process with specific, though not always explicitly recognizable, stages. The stages leading up to an actual conversion experience were preparatory phases in which an individual became aware of his or her sinful state. The influence of the Holy Spirit, whether imparted through personal Bible reading or listening to the spoken Word of God, was an essential element in causing a person to come under “convictions,” or sorrow for sin. In this state a person felt deep and painful emotions that would eventually cause him or her to undergo a spiritual quest for relief. Talking with one’s minister, praying, attending religious

⁸⁸ Charles Hambricke-Stowe, for instance, notes that anxiety over the state of one’s soul served a beneficial purpose—it drew Puritans to question deeper, and thereby grow closer to God. This positive view of the role of anxiety stands in sharp contrast to that of Elizabeth Reis, WHO argues that women were more susceptible to charge of witchcraft because they felt more intense feelings of anxiety and self-doubt over their spiritual state. Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 89; Elizabeth Reis, *Damned Women: Sinners and Witches in Puritan New England* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997).

meetings, and reading the scriptures were all ways the distressed were encouraged to cope with their despair and eventually find comfort in Christ. Their moment of relief—the moment of “justification”—was for some an intensely spiritual moment, but for others a more drawn-out process that could take years. After being justified an individual lived on in a state of “sanctification.” Being in this state did not guarantee that one was destined to receive eternal glory, but hinted at it, since a person who was not one of God’s elect would likely not perform good works and live a holy life. Nevertheless, the sanctified were not exempt from sin and would be expected to continue repenting and striving to avoid evil.⁸⁹

Once they determined themselves converted to Christ, Puritans typically related their conversion experience to their minister, and often to the congregation as a whole, whose job it was to judge whether or not the claim of conversion was justified.⁹⁰ During the Great Awakening, however, the conversion process became “telescoped,” as historian David Lovejoy has noted.⁹¹ What had once been typified as a lifelong process was now occurring for hundreds within a matter of days, weeks, or months, depending on how long the spirit of revivalism permeated their communities. Pro-revivalist ministers, eager for revival to get underway in their congregations, sought out any recognizable manifestation of God’s grace. Physical manifestations were the easiest way for ministers to penetrate the emotions of people’s hearts, and are therefore the primary way that *Christian History* writers discovered revival in their parishes.

⁸⁹ Cohen, *God’s Caress*, 75-110; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 19-22; Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 68-70.

⁹⁰ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 88-92; Hambrick-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 87, 130.

⁹¹ Lovejoy, *Religious Enthusiasm in the New World*, 181.

During the Great Awakening many churchgoers experienced feelings of distress and anxiety as a result of listening to a revival sermon and openly displayed their grief. Some would cry aloud, “*What shall I do to be saved?*”⁹² while others, in more extreme cases, were affected physically—entering into trances, experiencing visions, undergoing bodily contortions and fainting spells, or other such dramatic behaviors. Anti-revivalists condemned all of these physical manifestations, citing them as evidences of mere enthusiasm. Pro-revivalists, on the other hand, struggled much more with judging whether or not these manifestations were valid evidence of the divine. In general, unlike the anti-revivalists, they did not want to openly condemn all physical effects because they believed the effects were tangible evidences of God’s grace being poured out upon the populace. But how could they be accounted for? What were the acceptable limits of bodily responses, and how should affected persons be handled?

Contrary explanations were given by *Christian History* ministers for why the spiritually distressed reacted physically to their emotions. For instance, the Reverend Benjamin White of Gloucester acknowledged that some of the physical manifestations were “so new, strange, violent, that ‘tis hard to conceive they are the Effects of the HOLY SPIRIT’s Operations.” Instead, he believed that some of them, at least, were merely the “natural Effects of human Frailty.” Others, he candidly conceded, were possibly the “Effects of an enraged Devil,” just as the anti-revivalists asserted.⁹³

⁹² Though many different phrases were uttered by the distressed, this particular phrase was used most often by pro-revivalists because of its reference to Acts 16:30, where Paul and Silas were set free from prison by a divinely instigated earthquake. Their astonished jailer, upon finding them alive and well, fell trembling at their feet and asked, “Sirs, what must I do to be saved?” Pro-revivalists used this story often as an example of how sinners are brought into a state of repentance by an act of God’s will.

⁹³ *CH*, 2:43.

Ironically, it was the preaching of anti-revivalists, claimed Jonathan Parsons of Lyme, that prompted crying-out in at least three separate instances. According to Parsons, two ministers of his acquaintance who were against people crying out unintentionally preached sermons that caused numerous listeners to become openly distressed. Parsons questioned one of them as to why he thought the crying out had occurred. The minister responded by saying that he believed the people had become distressed because they gained “a clear regular Sense of their Sin and Danger,” a necessary step in the conversion process. This response indicated that the minister had had a change of heart regarding the reasons for outcries based on personal experience. His story was a useful tool for Parsons to show that physical distress was a legitimate sign of spiritual awakening because it was simply a natural part of conversion.⁹⁴

Among pro-revivalists in general, this was the most common explanation given in support of the spectrum of physical manifestations. Describing how they were natural to the conversion process allowed supporters to fit them neatly into doctrinal limits. James Robe argued that those who had not experienced the need to cry out themselves should not judge others who had, for in so doing they revealed themselves as “Strangers to the Doctrine of Conversion.”⁹⁵ This charge was a particularly inflammatory one. In the early stages of the Great Awakening some of the leading revivalist preachers had sharply criticized anti-revivalists as ministers who had not experienced true conversion themselves. They were therefore unfit to preach and lead others towards Christ, an accusation that had created many separations of congregations from their pastors. Since it was traditionally seen as the minister’s job to judge whether or not people had

⁹⁴ *CH*, 2:159-160.

⁹⁵ *CH*, 1:91-92.

experienced a real conversion, the accusation of being unconverted was an insult that undermined ministerial authority. It increased the tension and discussion over the question of how to tell whether or not conversions were real.

Many of the conversions that occurred during the Great Awakening were intensely emotional experiences. For some they also occurred unusually fast. Pro-revivalists defended the conversions in spite of these irregularities, maintaining that because the converted still underwent the proper stages of conversion, the extreme levels of emotionalism and speed were irrelevant issues. But anti-revivalists argued that many of the conversions that resulted from the revivals were false. They believed that the emotional nature of many people's experiences made their conversions suspect. This debate over the proper role of emotions in conversion had existed between Congregationalist ministers since the early eighteenth-century. More rationally-minded ministers believed that the Holy Spirit worked in men through their minds and not their emotions. Evangelicals, on the other hand, increasingly emphasized religion of the "heart" in an effort to counter the growing trend towards rationalistic preaching. They believed that the emotions, or "affections," were more inclined to lead people towards repentance, as well as help them experience God's love.⁹⁶ As long as people were able to give a rational account of their experiences that included references to scriptures, pro-revivalists were generally willing to accept the experience as real. This had been the consensus reached at the July 1743 ministers' meeting, and the majority of those who contributed to *The Christian History* likewise supported it.⁹⁷

⁹⁶ Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 228; Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 52-54.

⁹⁷ *CH*, 1:160.

Nevertheless, the writers of *The Christian History* were increasingly careful to point out in their narratives that the nature of conversion did not exist in “passionate Feelings.”⁹⁸ Several case studies were given in which the converted did not experience any physical effects at all in order to underscore the point that conversion was ultimately an inward change, even if sometimes accompanied by outward manifestations.⁹⁹ Additionally, many ministers wrote that they had cautioned their congregations against crying out and other physical effects, asking churchgoers to refrain as best they could from openly expressing their feelings of distress or joy.¹⁰⁰ These were efforts on their part to once again counter the danger of mere enthusiasm that were being leveled against them by critics. They wanted to minimize the reasons for controversy and keep people mindful that conversion required not just emotional outburst, but a true “Change of Life.”¹⁰¹ The Reverend William Shurtleff, for example, wrote that his congregation had been “taught from the Beginning, that they ought always” refrain from crying out “when it could be done without great Inconvenience to themselves,” so that they would not “needlessly obstruct the Attention of others.” He feared that one person’s emotional outburst could rouse the emotions of others who might then undergo a false conversion experience.¹⁰²

But not every *Christian History* contributor held such a conservative viewpoint. The Reverend James Robe argued strongly in favor of leaving the distressed in public view for a number of reasons. In his congregation the members were “more disturbed”

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ *CH*, 1:188; 1:189.

¹⁰⁰ *CH*, 1:248; 1:266; 1:387; 2:45; 2:110; 2:167.

¹⁰¹ *CH*, 1:160.

¹⁰² *CH*, 1:387.

by the removal of the distressed than they were relieved by it. A few even got up and left the meeting to go “gaze upon” the afflicted. Also, Robe felt strongly that ministers should be available to help the distressed work through their emotions and in his church there were simply not enough ordained ministers to do so during the meetings. The distressed would thus have to wait until the meeting was over in order to talk with a minister, so why not let them stay in the meetinghouse? But perhaps more importantly, Robe believed that seeing their neighbors “under spiritual Terrors and Distress” created a domino effect among others. It was no different, Robe argued, than “*punishing Crimes publicly* to make others afraid to commit them.” The distressed were thus “*one of the Means* the Lord was pleased to *make Use of* to bring beholders to consider their own State and Way.”¹⁰³

Robe believed no practice should be censured which “hath a Tendency to awaken secure Sinners,” an argument which was likewise used by other contributors to *The Christian History* in defense of itinerant preaching. The practice of itinerancy was also one of the hallmark characteristics of the Great Awakening, just as it was one of the most hotly contested “disorders of practice.” Itinerant preachers were not ordained to preside over specific congregations, but traveled from pulpit to pulpit, preaching repentance and rebirth. Sometimes they were invited to preach by established ministers, but when not formally welcomed, they often preached in private houses and open fields. The success of more prominent itinerants such as Gilbert Tennent inspired hundreds more to take to the road during the early 1740s and proclaim the gospel, with or without the

¹⁰³ *CH*, 1:34-38. As part of his defense for leaving affected persons in public view, Robe included an anonymous letter in his narrative from a woman who pleads with him to leave the spiritually wounded in sight. She argues that removing “the Wounded into a Corner” will offend God, who has chosen to make them public spectacles by imparting his Spirit upon them.

consent of the presiding minister.¹⁰⁴ This practice ignited the contempt and condemnation of many in the ordained ministry because it disrupted the functions of an orthodox clergy.

Part of the problem was that some itinerants, called lay exhorters, had no formal religious training, but merely set out to preach because they felt inspired to by the Spirit. Traditional doctrine upheld the need for well-educated, pious men who were ordained to the priesthood to be the spiritual mediators between God and the lay community. Allowing the unordained, much less the uneducated, to assume the roles and responsibilities of God's special servants was dangerously subversive to the beliefs and practices of the church, and in several communities resulted in bitter divisions between church members and their regular pastors. Gilbert Tennent, one of the more famous itinerants, argued that many in the regular clergy had never experienced God's grace and were themselves unconverted. Many lay exhorters picked up on this argument and used it against the ranks of the ordained ministers to challenge their authority. In several communities, congregants supported the claims of the exhorters and separated from their pastors in order to form new churches with leaders they felt had personally experienced God's grace.

The pro-revivalist ministers' meeting of 1743 explicitly stated its position against "*unscriptural*" church separations and the lay exhorters who were often seen as their causes.¹⁰⁵ They pled for church congregations to do all in their power "to follow the

¹⁰⁴ The initial surge of itinerants consisted of recent graduates from Harvard and Yale who were inspired to become itinerant preachers by Tennent's visit to New England in 1741. Stout, *The New England Soul*, 200.

¹⁰⁵ *CH*, 1:163; Benjamin Bradstreet of the Annisquam Parish in Gloucester, Massachusetts, wrote in his letter of attestation supporting the convocation that the church separations were like unto the unrighteous separations of tribes among the House of Israel. See *CH*, 1:188.

things that make for Peace,” rather than foster contentions and disputations within their communities. This applied, likewise, to the lay exhorters whom they warned not to “invade the Ministerial Office” and begin preaching. Such an act, they asserted, “is very contrary to Gospel Order, and tends to introduce Errors and Confusion into the Church.”¹⁰⁶

The ministers who wrote into *The Christian History* supported this directive, with the exception of Joseph Parks. Parks related that he had been against lay persons preaching until he attended a meeting where people exhorted and prayed together. He felt “strengthened and lifted up by their Means” and concluded that “the Power of God appeared accompanying them.” Based on this experience, he concluded that “*the true Grace of God* must not be opposed, but encouraged where-ever God was bestowing it, and however he was sending it.” Many in his community were angered by his open approval of the exhorting practice, but he simply ignored their criticisms. He continued to attend lay meetings and even allowed some “Exhorters” to aid him and other ministers in lecturing “among *English & Indians*.”¹⁰⁷

Despite the ministerial convocation’s denunciation of lay exhorting, it expressed its support for “*able, sound and zealous Preachers of the Word*” to preach from others’ pulpits, provided they had an express invitation to do so. Some itinerants, the ministers acknowledged, were “remarkably bless’d” by God to help forward the spirit of revivalism and should therefore be allowed to do so.¹⁰⁸ Because of this statement, pro-revivalists are typically portrayed as eager supporters of itinerancy. However, many among those

¹⁰⁶ CH, 1:63.

¹⁰⁷ CH, 1:206-207.

¹⁰⁸ CH, 1:63.

whose writings were published in *The Christian History* were not. For them, itinerancy was still a controversial issue that they struggled to both accept and defend, despite the efforts made by the convocation to present a more unified policy. How *Christian History* writers felt about the issue, and how they responded to itinerants, particularly the more well-known ones like George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport, indicates that pro-revivalists were mixed in their views about whether or not itinerancy was a true disorder of practice. Their personal experiences with itinerants shaped how ministers felt about them, indicating that factors such as an itinerant's popularity or ill repute did not guarantee how he would be received. What ultimately mattered was whether or not an itinerant aided the spread of revivalism in a particular parish.

For example, William Shurtleff of Portsmouth recommended caution when judging any of the so-called "Disorders" that people were concerned about. He felt that issues should not be "*magnified in an undue Manner,*" but be considered carefully. With that said, he expressed his desire to "be careful" when choosing to exclude itinerants from his pulpit because itinerants had done good things for his parish in the past, but also because he did not want to be held responsible for using "*such an absolute and despotick Power*" by keeping them out. Thus ministers, in his view, should not be as active in asserting their authority over the religious practices of their congregations as some people thought. It was ultimately God's responsibility to bless or not bless the work of itinerants, and Shurtleff feared that he would offend God more by keeping itinerants out than by allowing them in.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁹ CH, 1:173-174.

Outside influence was a significant factor to several revivalist ministers in how they accepted and promoted itinerancy. For instance, the Reverend Ivory Hovey of Rochester acknowledged that he was hesitant to accept itinerancy until he read and heard the explanation of the ministers from York County who supported it. These six ministers agreed with the ministerial convocation's view that lay exhorters were "of pernicious Consequence," but that itinerants were acceptable as long as they were invited by the presiding minister.¹¹⁰ James Robe wrote that as the spirit of revivalism started to increase in his parish, he "embraced every Opportunity of stranger Ministers coming to the Place to give Sermons to the People." He started holding more meetings during the week so that people could hear these visiting ministers and be awakened. Like many of the writers in *The Christian History*, Robe repeatedly placed the credit for the igniting of revivalism upon others.¹¹¹ This admission shows that revivalist ministers felt a great need for outside help to encourage revivals in their congregations. Ironically, in so doing they implicitly conceded their own lack of importance as the person ordained to preside over the spiritual affairs of their flocks, while at the same time they conscientiously sought to preserve the efficacy of their traditional roles and responsibilities from intrusion by those who did not have the proper authority.

Not every member of the July 1743 convocation had approved of its favorable stance towards itinerants. Of the sixty-six ministers who signed the resulting statement, nine wrote "*To the Substance, Scope and End*" next to their signatures. This phrase indicated that the ministers concurred with the "Testimony, excepting that Article of

¹¹⁰ CH, 1:191; Ch 175.

¹¹¹ CH, 1:38. In at least one instance, this was done by the author to intentionally remove self-aggrandizement. See CH, 2:90.

itinerancy, or Ministers and others, intruding into other Ministers Parishes without their Consent, which great Disorder [they] apprehend not sufficiently testified against.”¹¹² Some of them feared that the convocation’s conclusion “was in Danger of being *construed and perverted to the great infringement of Christian and humane liberty of Conscience.*” Other ministers, however, felt that the issue of itinerancy should only be allowed in “ORDINARY CASES: Leaving it to the serious *Conscience* both of *Ministers* and *others* to judge when the Cases are *ordinary* or *not ordinary*.”¹¹³ Once again, ministers were left to follow their own viewpoints regarding a controversial issue. Like other disorders of practice, personal opinion was the best measuring stick pro-revivalists had for dealing with itinerancy, since no formal statement of policy had been formed. Though pro-revivalist ministers had tried to establish some guidelines in the July ministerial meeting, these guidelines were nevertheless more fluid than they were perhaps intended to be. In the end pro-revivalists could do no more than recognize that personal opinions, experiences and interpretations of the events would be the ultimate shaping forces of the revivals.

In general, most contributors to *The Christian History* felt that the most “ordinary” and acceptable cases of itinerancy were not really cases of itinerancy at all. As the Reverend John White of Gloucester, Massachusetts explained about his congregation:

Properly speaking we have had *but one Itinerant Preacher* with us: Yet several eminently able and zealous Servants of the Lord, *settled Ministers*, have occasionally preached to our Congregation; and have greatly assisting in promoting this Good Work. God has blessed their Labours among us. *And it is my hearty Desire, that*

¹¹² CH, 1:164-166.

¹¹³ CH, 1:198.

*the Kingdom and Interest of our Lord may be promoted, and Converts multiplied, although by other hands.*¹¹⁴

The ministers felt that allowing already ordained and settled ministers to visit their parishes to preach was the best solution to the question of itinerancy. As was pointed out previously, most of the ministers whose narratives were published in Prince's magazine, like John White, invited other ministers to their pulpits frequently, and it was most often during the sermons of these visiting clergymen that congregations were first awakened and revivals sustained. Nevertheless, allowing visiting ministers to preach was still a controversial issue because it was linked to the question of itinerancy. Not every ordained minister who preached at the invitation of another pastor was tied to a specific congregation, and hence had no regular flock to tend or typical ministerial duties to keep him busy. His role as a minister was therefore somewhat ambiguous, in spite of having been ordained, and this could be dangerous. George Whitefield was a prime example. He was an ordained Anglican minister, but he was criticized by anti-revivalists for some of his itinerant-like practices, such as preaching in the fields to congregations rather than in a regular meetinghouse.¹¹⁵ He was also credited with inspiring the itinerant movement, for hundreds of young men, though not ordained to the ministry, followed his example of taking to the road to preach the gospel. For pro-revivalists, Whitefield was by definition one of the "ordinary" cases of itinerancy, but he nevertheless received some mixed responses from *Christian History* writers and their congregations.

Thomas Prince was one of Whitefield's greatest supporters. Beginning in 1738, word of Whitefield's successes in London began to reach New England. Two years later

¹¹⁴ CH, 2:46.

¹¹⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life*, 202.

the young Anglican “of flaming Piety” arrived in Boston and preached in a manner that won him the admiration of thousands, including Prince.¹¹⁶ Though others were not so charmed by Whitefield’s doctrines and style, Prince remained an avid supporter of Whitefield, dedicating several issues of *The Christian History* to defenses of Whitefield’s doctrines and news of his travels. He even centered an overview of New England history, as well as his own narrative of Boston’s revival, on Whitefield’s first arrival there in September 1740.¹¹⁷ In Prince’s eyes, George Whitefield was the key instrument in igniting Great Awakening revivalism.

The majority of ministers who contributed to *The Christian History*, particularly those from Scotland, concurred with Prince’s view of Whitefield. Scottish evangelism had burgeoned since the beginning of the century when, under the Act of Union in 1707, Scotland was legislatively united with England, and hence became more Anglicized. Scottish Calvinists hoped that revivalism would counter the spread of Arminian teachings that were associated with the Anglican Church. News of the Whitefieldian revivals in London, as well as the revivals in New England, raised their hopes for a revival of religion to take place in their communities as well. Historian Michael Crawford notes that the Scottish evangelicals read of the revivals from Whitefield’s *Journals* and a London-based evangelical magazine, *The Christian’s Amusement*, which later became *The Weekly History*, and was sponsored in large part by Whitefield himself. As a result, Crawford asserts, Scottish ministers came to view Whitefield as the central figure of revivalism, an argument that is supported by the comments written about Whitefield by

¹¹⁶ CH, 2: 358-360.

¹¹⁷ CH, 1:113.

Scottish contributors to *The Christian History*.¹¹⁸ The Reverend John Hamilton, for instance, wrote that Whitefield “is really the most assiduous servant Preacher of the Gospel I ever knew, and has something extremely uncommon about him.”¹¹⁹ Several letters about Whitefield’s character and influence, originally printed in the *Glasgow Weekly History* but reprinted in *The Christian History*, likewise praise him as “an eminent *Instrument* in reviving” a concern for religion.¹²⁰ But perhaps most significant is the fact that Whitefield was in Cambuslang, Scotland, when communion was administered twice in one summer, though typically it was administered only once per year. According to the Reverend William McCullouch, Whitefield preached to a crowd of about 30,000 people on the day of the first communion service. It was such a success that Whitefield suggested a second communion be given, an event which occurred a month later and drew crowds of 40,000 to 50,000 listeners. The Cambuslang revival was thus seen as the apex of Scottish revivalism, thanks to Whitefield’s influence.¹²¹

Despite this clear support, for a handful of *Christian History* contributors “The Grand Itinerant” was not so grand after all. Though Prince and others credited him with much of the success of the revivals, Whitefield did not receive the same kind of adulation from other *Christian History* writers. To them he was an “ordinary” preacher in more ways than just as an acceptable itinerant. His preaching, so widely praised by some and pointed to as inflammatory by others, did little to inspire their congregations to “melt.”¹²² Rather, his influence on these congregations was minimal, and even intentionally played

¹¹⁸ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 57-58, 157-163.

¹¹⁹ *CH*, 1:10:78.

¹²⁰ *CH*, 1: 276-284.

¹²¹ *CH*, 1:294-299.

¹²² *CH*, 1:368.

down, revealing that, unlike Benjamin Colman, William Cooper and Thomas Prince, not every pro-revivalist minister felt that Whitefield was the “Wonder of the Age.”¹²³

Instead, some ministers had personal experiences with Whitefield that tempered, in their minds, the famous itinerant’s role in the revivals.

For instance, in the Reverend Hall’s congregation, a few “People were brought under *Conviction*, by hearing the Word from [Whitefield],” but not many. In fact, the feeling of general “Hardness of Heart” and “melancholly” in Hall’s parish remained so great after Whitefield’s visit that it caused Hall to seriously contemplate leaving for “some Place where they had *no Minister*.” Hall had been hoping with “*a most ardent Thirst*” for months prior to this that a revival would take place in his parish. He was clearly disappointed when, after all his efforts and the preaching of the famous Whitefield, little changed within his flock. It was not until the following spring when he “was upon the Point of despairing of Success among my own People” that revivalism finally began to take shape.¹²⁴

The Reverend Oliver Peabody also noted that Whitefield’s presence in his community did little to alter the course of revivalism there. He included a postscript to his letter of attestation to the revivals in which he explicitly sought to downplay the significance of Whitefield’s visit to Natick:

p.s. I would particularly remark that some with whom I have conversed date their Convictions which have been still carried on without any great Intermission, before ever Mr. *Whitefield* came hither. And also that about fifteen Years ago we had something like this, at Natick.¹²⁵

¹²³ CH, 2:366.

¹²⁴ CH, 2:164-165.

¹²⁵ CH, 1:184.

John Seccomb of Harvard also stressed that the revivals in his area were not connected to Whitefield's visit. With pride he stated that the revivals had "not been carried on *violently*, nor by *Strangers*" in his parish. This included Whitefield specifically, for, as he continued to explain, "religious Concern began a Year before Mr. *Whitefield's* coming into the Country; And after he preached in *New-England* very few of this People did ever hear him."¹²⁶ Clearly Seccomb felt that Whitefield's importance in the revivals had been exaggerated, as did Peabody and Hall. For them, Whitefield's role in the Great Awakening was not one of paramount significance as it was for other pro-revivalists.

The role of another itinerant, Gilbert Tennent, was likewise disputed in the personal experiences of various *Christian History* contributors. Tennent was one of three sons of William Tennent, Sr., a Presbyterian minister from Scotland who emigrated to Pennsylvania in 1718. In Pennsylvania, William Tennent had established his own theological seminary, derisively called the "Log College" by more formally educated pastors, from which his sons graduated and went on to become ordained Presbyterian ministers of the evangelical bent. During the Great Awakening the Tennent sons, William and Gilbert, helped to foster revivalism throughout the Middle Colonies, but Gilbert became widely known in New England as well. For some he was a rousing evangelical preacher, but to others he was a dangerous enthusiast—particularly after he preached his 1740 sermon *The Dangers of an Unconverted Ministry*, in which he asserted that ordained ministers who had not experienced conversion by the Spirit were unworthy of their positions as pastors.¹²⁷ No *Christian History* contributor admitted to intentionally

¹²⁶ *CH*, 2:19.

¹²⁷ Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 57-62, 240; Bremer, *The Puritan Experiment*, 229-230.

keeping Tennent away from his pulpit. He was thus implicitly considered by these ministers to be of the more “ordinary” itinerants that they accepted, if not with the same kind of zeal that they did Whitefield. But like Whitefield, Tennent received mixed reactions from *Christian History* authors.

In the east parish of Lyme, Connecticut, Tennent preached two sermons that helped to initiate the revivals there. Though only “two or three were *deeply* wounded,” the resident minister, George Griswold, noted that it was from this time forward that “a great (if not general) *Awakening*” arose within the community. Within two weeks’ time the revivals were underway and a feeling of religious “Concern” had enveloped the congregants.¹²⁸ In Boston, Tennent’s preaching likewise caused people “to yet be much more awaken’d about their Souls than before.” Though initially his preaching did not “come up to” Thomas Prince’s “Expectation,” Tennent’s personable manner with Prince in private conversation altered Prince’s view. Prince found him to be “a Man of considerable Parts and Learning” who had “as deep an Acquaintance with the experimental Part of Religion as any” he had ever spoken with.¹²⁹ Given Tennent’s unorthodox background, it is not surprising that Prince held some initial reservations. Yet in getting to know Tennent more personally, Prince had a change of heart.

Tennent’s personable manner likewise impressed Prince’s brother-in-law, Peter Thacher, pastor of the church at Middleborough. Prior to Tennent’s visit, Thacher felt as the Reverend David Hall had—that his congregation was not seeming to progress in the gospel, and so he was pondering whether he should move to another pastorate. Shortly after making his decision to leave, Tennent visited the area and Thacher “rode *six Miles*

¹²⁸ CH, 2:106.

¹²⁹ CH, 2:384.

out of Town to meet with him.” Based on rumors he had heard about Tennent, Thacher was predisposed to be critical of the itinerant, until he heard him preach and spoke with him privately. To Tennent’s empathetic ear Thacher unloaded all his feelings of “Discouragement in the Ministry.” The attentive itinerant was “tenderly affected” and offered these parting words of comfort: “*oft’times ‘tis darkest a little before Day, the rising Sun will bring Light.*” The words were prophetic, for “from that Day,” Thacher later wrote, his “People were more inclined to hear” the word of God. Tennent was thus instrumental in reviving the disheartened soul of Peter Thacher, as well as the religious concern of his congregation.¹³⁰

Tennent’s words were not so powerful in other communities, however. In Lyme’s west parish the Reverend Jonathan Parsons found Tennent’s preaching to be “very dull.” He even thought that the itinerant “wou’d have had nothing, almost to say,” for the congregation did not seem to have “much Sense of what was deliver’d.” Parsons acknowledged, though, that Tennent did “preach the Truth,” and that the sermons he preached there were “not wholly in vain” because a few congregants did undergo conversion experiences as a result of his preaching.¹³¹ Josiah Crocker expressed similar feelings of indifference towards Tennent’s sermons. He wrote that though many people attended a sermon that Tennent preached despite short notice, “the *Effects* of his Preaching were not deep and lasting upon the Minds of many of the People.” Though “Some were filled with *Wonder* as if they had heard strange Things to Day, and some were bro’t under *Concern* of Soul,” the impressions were not “deep and abiding

¹³⁰ CH, 2:88.

¹³¹ CH, 2: 134.

excepting upon *one* or *two*.”¹³² Likewise, although Tennent delivered “*eight sermons* to general Acceptance” that seemed to awaken people in Plymouth, Reverend Nathanael Leonard did not credit him with igniting the revivals there. Rather, he believed the preaching of the Reverend Croswell the following year was more influential in fostering a spirit of revivalism.¹³³ Thus Tennent was not an inspiring itinerant in the eyes of at least three *Christian History* writers, even though he was also not deemed totally unacceptable. He was simply tolerable, an “ordinary” case for itinerancy, but not an “extraordinary” preacher.

In one instance, however, Tennent ignited the animosity of a congregation. He preached several sermons in Westerly, Rhode Island within a few months of each other that “especially roused up the People, and filled some with great Wrath.” For some time prior to his visit the congregants and the resident minister, Joseph Parks, had been increasingly at odds over the revival movement. Many congregants felt Parks was “wild” in his “Notions about Religion” and so were greatly displeased with his bringing Tennent there to preach. Tennent’s final sermon there “raised the Prejudices of People against” Parks for “concurring in the same Testimony.”¹³⁴ It was one instance where Prince’s advice that ministerial and congregational viewpoints should jointly direct a community’s involvement in the Great Awakening was not heeded. As the presiding minister, Parks held the implicit authority to judge whether or not the revivals were proper, and how the controversial issues surrounding them should be handled. But at the same time, the

¹³² *CH*, 2: 326.

¹³³ *CH*, 2: 314-315.

¹³⁴ *CH*, 1:204.

situation showed how much congregations were likewise feeling empowered to direct what would and would not be tolerated.

Such was the case in New London, Connecticut, where the influence of James Davenport caused many congregants to separate from the established church and deny the authority of the regular ministry. Davenport was an ordained minister turned itinerant; he was considered an enthusiast, one who took things too far too many times in his efforts to foster revivalism. In New London for example, he challenged the leadership of the Reverend Mr. Jewet, among others, by asking him to give “an Account of his Experiences of the Work of GOD’S SPIRIT upon his heart.” When Jewet refused, Davenport publicly asserted that Jewet was “unconverted.” This charge caused many of Jewet’s followers to become uneasy about his qualifications to be their spiritual leader and to consider separating from him.¹³⁵

As in New London, Davenport challenged the authority of the Boston ministry. During a visit there he “stayed at his lodgings” rather than attend the afternoon Sabbath exercises because he believed the presiding minister was “unconverted.” In so doing he “greatly alarm’d” the rest of the Boston clergy, including Thomas Prince, who then proceeded to issue a formal “*Declaration*” censuring Davenport for several aspects of religious enthusiasm. These included acting under “sudden *Impulses*,” calling several New England ministers “unconverted,” inappropriately “*singing thro’ the Street and*

¹³⁵ Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf point out that Davenport’s condemnation of ordained clergymen was initially inspired by George Whitefield. However, whereas Whitefield hoped to inspire ministers to recommit themselves to preaching the New Birth, and thereby revive their congregations and maintain the authority of the ministry, Davenport’s attacks on established clergymen were intended to undermine ministerial authority and in so doing catalyze conversions. His methods for revival were thus inversions of what Whitefield and other revivalists aimed to accomplish. As Stout and Onuf show, this is particularly evident in the town of New London where Davenport’s influence and leadership in the revivals contributed to a breakdown of social order rather than a revival of it. See Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, “James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London,” *The Journal of American History*, 70.3 (Dec. 1983), 556-578; *CH*, 2:115-116.

Highways, to and from the Houses of Worship on Lord's Days and other days," and encouraging lay persons to "pray and exhort [i.e. like Ministers]." ¹³⁶ Nearly two years later Davenport wrote a statement of "Confession and Retractions" in which he answered for all of these charges that had been leveled against him, asked the pardon of those he offended, and lamented being a cause for so much anti-revivalist criticism to be sounded against the Awakening in general. Prince published these remarks in issues eighty-two and eighty-three of *The Christian History* to show that good feelings had again been restored between Davenport and the Boston ministry, but he nevertheless cited Davenport's conduct as the reason why Boston's revival received so much criticism. ¹³⁷

In contrast to the negative impact Davenport's behavior had upon Boston, a few other *Christian History* contributors viewed Davenport's conduct in their communities as beneficial and inspiring. These ministers accepted Davenport as an "ordinary" itinerant, though many of their pro-revivalist peers did not. For instance, Joseph Parks was initially prejudiced against Davenport based on the negative rumors he had heard about him. When he finally heard Davenport preach in Stonington he "heard nothing extraordinary, but the wholesome Truths of the Gospel." With such a typical sermon being given, Parks "expected no extraordinary Effect" and was therefore caught off guard when suddenly "there was a Cry all over the Meeting-House." After some investigation Parks found the cry had come from someone in "A deep Conviction of Sin." This convinced him that the effects of Davenport's preaching were good, all part of "the Lord's Doing" and not the result of Davenport's oddities. ¹³⁸ Likewise, George Griswold wrote how Davenport's

¹³⁶ CH, 2:407-408.

¹³⁷ CH, 2:236-241; 2:407.

¹³⁸ CH, 1:205.

ministry among the Natick Indians of Connecticut created an interest in religion among them that had never thrived before in spite of the efforts of past preachers. His preaching “*awakened*” several of them and thereby contributed to a swelling number of conversions within the tribe.¹³⁹

It was this positive effect upon the Indians that led Jonathan Parsons to withhold passing severe judgment on Davenport, even though Davenport did not have a positive effect on Parson’s community of West Lyme. Parsons admitted that Davenport’s visit to West Lyme “was the Occasion of much *Hurt*” to the progress of revivalism. He regretted allowing Davenport to preach at his pulpit because “many Prejudices were stir’d up and and increas’d against the Revival of Religion thereby.” Yet he did not necessarily blame Davenport. Rather, he felt the “Fault” lay with ministers who chose to admit Davenport “into their Pulpits.” Essentially this statement reiterated the advice of Parsons’ peers that ministers should use their own good judgment in determining cases of “*ordinary*” and “*not ordinary*” itinerancy. But even after having a negative experience with Davenport, Parsons was torn as to whether Davenport was “*ordinary*” or not. After all, in spite of the bad feelings Davenport created among many in West Lyme, he also “was a great Blessing to many Souls . . . *especially* to the *Mohegan* and *Nabauntunc* Tribes of Indians.” Likewise, Parsons acknowledged that the “*separate Meetings*” Davenport held in which lay persons exhorted and prayed were not as “odious” a practice as many asserted. Even though Parsons decided not to encourage these meetings, he attended one

¹³⁹ CH, 2:113.

and judged that “there was much of the gracious Presence of God with many Christians that Day.”¹⁴⁰

Parsons thus learned through personal experience that there was much good mixed in with what others called bad. Unfortunately, this insight did not bring greater clarity to the problem of dealing with disorders of practice, such as those that had resulted from Davenport’s influence. On the contrary, it merely added a new perspective to the situation that needed to be reconciled with all the rest. Like his pro-revivalist peers, Parsons handled the situation as best he knew how—he decided what he could and could not tolerate as legitimate aspects of revivalism. His conclusions were tempered by his personal experiences in a way that shaded his opinions differently from those of his peers. Among pro-revivalists, his views of the revivals were therefore just another shade on the spectrum.

Such was case with all the other contributors to the *Christian History*. The very nature of revivalism, with its emphasis on highlighting the “good fruits of the Spirit of God,” made it difficult to ascertain where the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable behavior should be drawn. In general, pro-revivalists agreed that “disorders of doctrine”—those that strayed too far from traditional Calvinist beliefs—were dangerous and should be avoided at all costs. Exactly how to avoid them when it came to the day-to-day realities of revivalism was another question. Pro-revivalists strove to form and present a unified viewpoint that answered for the “disorders of practice” that had become tense issues of debate among ministers, but in the end were unable to really do so, as is evident in *The Christian History*. Within their own ranks, pro-revivalists felt differently

¹⁴⁰ CH, 2:154-155.

about what was a true “disorder” and how it should be handled. Specifically, when it came to the issue of bodily manifestations of the Spirit—through crying out or physical effects—*Christian History* contributors were at odds. Some rejoiced in them as the first signs of legitimate revival in their congregations, while others cautioned their congregants to avoid them if at all possible. Similarly, *Christian History* ministers were divided over the issue of itinerancy. Though few expressed support for the practice of lay exhorting, which was often associated with itinerancy, they were mixed in their views of when itinerancy was “ordinary” and when it was not. Most believed that “settled ministers”—those who were already ordained and established in the ministry—were acceptable guest preachers, but even this distinction did not always hold true. As is evident in *The Christian History*, pro-revivalists still reacted differently to the more prominent traveling preachers of the day: George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport.

In the end, all their differences of opinion kept pro-revivalists from forming a unified front with which to combat the criticisms of their anti-revivalist opponents. Reconciling so many different experiences and perspectives was simply too complicated a task. Yet in spite of their splintered views regarding “disorders of practice,” pro-revivalists who contributed to *The Christian History* were consistent in how they chose to interpret the revivals. Not surprisingly, they relied heavily upon scriptural references and interpretations as the foundations for their pro-revival views. Similarly, they turned to historical precedents as a way to further legitimize the issues involved in the Great Awakening. But the most common theme that they used in their narratives was an emphasis on the “fruits” of the revivals—the social and cultural aspects of revivalism as

proofs of its authenticity. Thus, even though pro-revivalists could not resolve their differences over the “disorders” that surfaced during the Great Awakening, they found common expression in how the revivals had changed society for the better.

III. Solutions: Legitimizing Revivalism

“Spiritual Things are now treated and felt as Realities.”¹⁴¹
--Rev. Peter Thacher, 30 June 1743.

“’Twas a Day never to be forgotten,” reminisced the Reverend Jonathan Parsons of West Lyme in 1741. This particular October 11, he believed, was their “*Pentecost*.” The meetinghouse was filled with congregants that day, nearly 300 of whom filed up to the communion table. As they did so, “God pour’d out his Spirit in a wonderful measure.” Parsons stepped down from the pulpit to break the bread and then assured the people that as they partook of it they would “be Welcome, to the rich Treasures of his Grace which were open and free to all that wou’d come.”

No sooner had the words left his lips than “several of the Church cried out” in anguish of soul “whilst many Scores were dissolving to Tears.” Parsons glanced around the room, viewing “a considerable number” in obvious distress, but also many others “who began to put on Immortality, almost, in the Look in their Faces” as they approached the communion table. Their joyous faces made him think of Heaven, “where the shining Hosts of Angles and glorified Saints are for ever before the Throne of God, in the lowest Prostration crying, Holy, holy, holy Lord God.”

The line of communicants, some full of anxiety, others full of joy, returned reverently to their pews and prepared for the sacrament cup to be passed around. As they waited, Parsons noticed that many who had been full of anxiety “appear’d to be in a

¹⁴¹ CH, 1:171. The Reverend Peter Thacher, brother-in-law to Thomas Prince, was the Congregational church pastor in Middleborough, Massachusetts.

Calm. . . . Their looks were changed from Anguish to Pleasure and Admiration, Love and Humility, and the Like.” There was no doubt in Parson’s mind that the Holy Spirit was working upon his congregation with an intensity never known there before. “The House of the Lord,” he wrote, “was full of the Glory of God.” Several members “had the full Assurance of Faith” that they had sought for many years. Others, Parsons noted, were brought under a serious “Law-Work,” a state of saving conversion that was confirmed by “their pious Life and Conversation” as time passed.

The power of that Pentecostal day did not cease once the meetinghouse was emptied and the congregants had gone home. Rather, it continued to be evident in the community in the ways that church members behaved. They continued to attend church, held their own private religious meetings and found the “Influences and Effects” of the Spirit in “the Closet, the Field, the Shop, and the *Kitchen*.” A particularly noticeable change occurred amongst the youth, the largest group of West Lyme residents to be affected by the revival. “They left their Sports, and grew sick of their youthful Amusements,” yet they were not the only ones to be motivated to live more religiously. Many others of middle and old age were “turned from Darkness to Light, from the Power of Sin and Satan unto God.”

Nevertheless, Parsons lamented, with time “the Work” did not continue to progress as powerfully in his community as it had in the first eight or nine months. There were instances of strife and criticism between church members who opposed revivalism and those who supported it. Though approximately 180 persons had been converted, God’s Spirit was no longer as prevalent in the community. People returned to their old vices and bad habits. All Parsons could do now was express his wish that all the new

converts would be patient for the cycle of spiritual outpouring to come full circle again. They must “wait still for the Rain, and cry earnestly for the latter Rain, that God wou’d give them enlarg’d Measures of Grace, and fill them with spiritual blessings” in another season of grace.¹⁴²

Parsons’ account of the revival at West Lyme is typical of the narratives written by other *Christian History* contributors. These narratives follow a simple plot line first popularized by Jonathan Edwards’ *A Faithfull Narrative* about the 1735 revival in Northampton.¹⁴³

1. A community undergoing spiritual decline is “awakened” by an outpouring of God’s grace.
2. “Remarkable” spiritual experiences occur and an astonishing number of people—particularly the youth—experience grace and are converted.
3. As a result, a visible change takes place in the community as people abandon their sins for a more religious lifestyle.
4. The revival and its effects reach their climax, but unfortunately it doesn’t last. Society slowly returns to a more secular state of mind, though most of the converts stay true to their professions of faith.

Though not always so explicitly followed, the basic plotline of the revival narrative is simple yet dynamic. Communities undergoing revival are always left better off than they were before, even if the revival period is very brief or not particularly eventful.

¹⁴² CH, 2:146-152.

¹⁴³ Michael Crawford describes the shared structure and common elements of revival narratives in his book *Seasons of Grace*. He believes that the narratives were patterned after Edwards’ *A Faithfull Narrative* in style and content. Frank Lambert agrees with Crawford on this point, but also contends that the similarities in revival narratives were a result of a circular letter Thomas Prince wrote to solicit narratives from pro-revivalist ministers. This letter gave specific instructions as to what revival narratives should discuss. For instance, it asked for “*remarkable Instances of the Power and Grace of God*” on four distinct groups: youths, immoral people, opponents of revivalism who changed their minds, and people who had always been good church members. See Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 185; Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 144-145; and Thomas Prince, *It being earnestly desired by many pious and judicious people*.

While this structure was common to revival narratives, it was not the only way that *Christian History* contributors described revivalism in their communities. For instance, they all turned to the scriptures to explain the revivals and find support for their pro-revival stance. In the pages of the Bible—particularly the New Testament—they found parallels to the events of their day. Referring to these Biblical accounts, *Christian History* authors found ways to interpret such things as the bodily manifestations of the Spirit that sometimes occurred within their congregations. Many, especially Thomas Prince, also used historical precedents as important tropes for demonstrating that what was “unusual” was in fact not new. Once again, bodily manifestations were a controversial issue that pro-revivalists sought to legitimize this way. But they also used history as a tool for dismissing anti-revivalist criticisms of the revivals, as well as a method for contextualizing the Great Awakening in the whole of world history.

Biblical and historical precedents were quite traditional methods that eighteenth-century ministers used to assert the validity of their viewpoints. It is therefore not surprising that *Christian History* writers incorporated these methods into their revival accounts. What is particularly significant, however, is the third way these pro-revivalist ministers sought to legitimize the revivals—by emphasizing the positive cultural effects that the revivals had upon their communities. Though measuring the religiosity of a society based on behavior was not a particularly innovative method of analysis, *Christian History* contributors invoked this method with the intention of proving the divine origins of the Great Awakening. They referred to societal changes as the “good fruits” of the Spirit of God, describing in detail how the “face” of society had been altered thanks to

revivalism. Shared characteristics in their descriptions ultimately reveal that religion on the common level was, to them, the most important aspect of authenticating revivalism.

One of the most basic beliefs of eighteenth-century Congregationalists was that the Bible was the pure word of God. It was therefore the most authoritative source and the one to which pro-revivalist ministers first turned to interpret the Great Awakening. Because these ministers believed they were the theological descendents of the primitive church established by Paul, they alluded to New Testament stories frequently when making parallels between the ancient Apostles' experiences and their own. For example, when George Whitefield first arrived in Boston, Reverend Colman gave a sermon that described Whitefield's reception among the people as akin to the Apostle Paul's reception in Galatia. Like Paul, Whitefield's fame had raised the "Expectations" of the people so much that they looked on him as "an *Angel* of God for JESUS sake."¹⁴⁴ Similarly, when describing why people who had begun to progress toward conversion did not follow through with it, Thomas Prince referred to apostasy in the early Apostolic church:

After they have escaped the Pollution of the World through the Knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, [they] are again entangled and overcome; their latter End is worse with them than in the Beginning; and it has happened to them according to the true Proverb, 'the Dog is turned to its own Vomit again, and the Sow that was washed to her wallowing Mire.' 2 Pet. ii. 20,--22.¹⁴⁵

Prince also noted that some of the negative aspects of the revivals—the rash judging of the state of other people's souls, specifically—were likewise evident in Biblical times. He asserted that "Even the Apostle *Paul* himself" "would have been carried away by the

¹⁴⁴ CH, 2:383-384.

¹⁴⁵ CH, 2:400.

natural Bias” had not the Lord given him a thorn in his side to preoccupy him.¹⁴⁶ The Bible, a perfect text, thus became an important source for explaining the imperfections of the Great Awakening.

In addition to providing scriptural parallels, the Bible was used by some *Christian History* contributors to show that the Great Awakening was a fulfillment of scriptural prophecy. The Reverend Syms from Scotland wrote that the Awakening had the characteristics of latter-day glory described in the Bible. Noting that the Awakening had spread to every part of England and Wales, he quoted the scripture “*The Glory of the Lord shall cover the Earth like the waters of the Sea.*” He tempered his implicitly millennial vision of the Awakening, however, by commenting that “What shall be the Issue of so great and glorious Appearance one may not be safe in determining.”¹⁴⁷ An unnamed minister from England that Prince quoted in the *Christian History* was more explicit in linking the Awakening to millennialism. This minister declared that “The Night of Slumber is far spent, and the Day is at Hand” when the Lord will return to Zion. He then listed several millennial scriptures from both the New and Old Testaments to support his claim and give reference to the events that would take place when Christ returned again to Earth.¹⁴⁸

Whether or not other *Christian History* contributors believed strongly in the Awakening as an aspect of millennialism is not clear. Historian James Davidson explains that while many of the accounts contained in *The Christian History* close with statements expressing desire for the millennium to come in language reminiscent of the book of

¹⁴⁶ CH, 2:405. Prince’s reference is to 2 Corinthians 12.

¹⁴⁷ CH, 2:102.

¹⁴⁸ CH, 2:51. References to Mal. 4:1, Isaiah 24, 2 Thes. 1:7-9, Matt 25: 11-12, Isaiah 25: 7-9, Matthew 25: 10, 2 Thes. 1:10, Titus 2:13,14.

Revelation—“Even so come LORD JESUS, come quickly!”—more specific details of millennial thought are absent. The magazine’s writers do not, for instance, speculate on which millennial prophesies had been fulfilled or to what extent.¹⁴⁹ Nevertheless, though more detailed analysis of millennial prophesies is missing, contributors to *The Christian History* often referred to an implicit aspect of millennial thought in their interpretations of the revivals—the role of the Devil in countering righteousness.

A common belief among Christians is that, prior to the millennium, the Devil’s influence in the world will grow stronger as he tried to prevent mankind from accepting Christ. Eighteenth-century revivalists often portrayed the Devil’s role in the Awakening this way. They believed that it was only natural that the Devil should try to oppose the Awakening because it was God’s work.¹⁵⁰ For example, the Reverend Peter Thacher began to fear that God was displeased with his community because revivalism had not yet occurred there and the congregants were hard-hearted. Gilbert Tennent told him that it was Satan’s doing, not God’s, and “’Tis a good Sign” for it meant that revivalism was about to start. His words proved prophetic for Thacher’s congregation, which shortly thereafter began to awaken.

But while the Devil’s opposition was ultimately a good sign, it also was cause for alarm. Once revivalism started to peak in his congregation, Jonathan Parsons became fearful of a counterattack by Satan:

Now I tho’t the People in great Danger, and especially those that
were most deeply wounded. I knew, in all Probability, that Hell

¹⁴⁹ Davidson feels that because of this, the magazine fails to make “explicit and well-defined connections between the revivals and the larger work of redemption described in the Revelation” in a way that makes the Great Awakening appear truly “Great.” See James West Davidson, *The Logic of Millennial Thought: Eighteenth-Century New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 122-129.

¹⁵⁰ *CH*, 1:162; 1:187; 2:355.

was in an Uproar; the Prince of Darkness [saw] his Kingdom shaking, and he was in great Danger of losing many of his obedient Subjects. . . . I dare not sit in my Study the next day . . . but spent my Time among distress'd Souls.¹⁵¹

John Willison expressed similar sentiments in a preface he wrote for the Edinburgh edition of Jonathan Edwards' *Faithfull Narrative*, a portion of which was published in *The Christian History*. Willison warned that "Satan may transform himself into an Angel of Light," so people must be wary when participating in revivalism lest they get caught up in devilish acts of enthusiasm. The Devil's "permitted Agency," Benjamin Bradstreet likewise pointed out, was the reason for some of the "Irregularities & Disorders" that had occurred in the Awakening.¹⁵² Because of this, people must beware of Satan's tactics—especially his ability to "sow *Tares* in the Lord's *Field* among the *good Wheat*," wrote Eliphalet Adams.¹⁵³

The Biblical parable of the wheat and the tares was a frequent scriptural reference for *Christian History* contributors. Though they rarely cited the scriptural passage directly (Matthew 13:24-30), they incorporated its language into their own. In the New Testament parable, Jesus describes a man who planted a field of good wheat that was contaminated with tares by his enemy while he slept. Upon waking and discovering this, the man commanded his servants not to remove the tares from the field until harvest time when it would be easier to separate the fully grown stalks of wheat from the tares. The story was a metaphor for how the kingdom of Heaven on Earth—the church—would be corrupted until the time of the millennium when God's elect—the wheat—would be harvested to Heaven, and the unregenerate—the tares—would be eternally damned.

¹⁵¹ *CH*, 2:138.

¹⁵² *CH*, 1:187.

¹⁵³ *CH*, 1:135.

Because of the large number of conversions taking place during the Great Awakening, pro-revivalists viewed the Awakening as a time of pre-millennial spiritual harvest. They therefore countered anti-revivalist criticisms of the “disorders” of the revivals by drawing upon the parable of the wheat and the tares. The parable illustrated that the church would be full of imperfect persons and practices at the same time that it was progressing towards a purified millennial state. The Reverend David Hall referred specifically to this aspect of the revivals when he stated that “*Some Irregularities*” and “*Some Imprudences*” had occurred. “But *what is Man that he should be perfect?*” he questioned. He then continued, “There may be also *some high Pretenders* to the Work of *Conversion* in this remarkable Day, that may turn out *Counterfeits*: and such *Tares* have been among the *Wheat* hitherto and will be to the End: so that neither is this to be wondered at.”¹⁵⁴ Daniel Putnam likewise shared this opinion and used it to lambast any who used the disorders of the revivals as evidence that the revivals were not directed by God: “Can we not distinguish between that which is of God and that which is *not*? Shall we say there is *no Wheat* because there are *Tares* and *Chaff*? *The Work proves itself.*”¹⁵⁵

An excerpt from a history of German Pietism inserted by Prince into *The Christian History* substantiates Hall and Putnam’s view that the church will always be a mixture of wheat and tares until the millennial day. In this excerpt the author acknowledged that many religious “Excesses and Abuses” occurred among the early followers of Martin Luther, as well as among the German Pietists, simply because “Tares were sown among the good Wheat” by the Devil.¹⁵⁶ The Reformation was thus viewed

¹⁵⁴ CH, 1:185-186.

¹⁵⁵ CH, 1:182.

¹⁵⁶ CH, 2:282.

as a continuing process of church purification, or separation of the wheat from the tares, until Christ's second coming would make the division both explicit and permanent.

In the meantime, however, ministers were responsible for identifying whether converts in their congregations were “wheat” or “tares” in their efforts to keep the earthly church as pure as possible. It was a task that required clergymen to talk at length with converts about their conversion experiences and then to judge whether or not the experiences had merit. Congregationalist ministers believed that a true conversion experience must be scripturally based—that is, originate from a person's encounter with God's word either through reading the Bible or listening to a sermon expounding the scriptures. The reason for this was that they believed the Bible to be God's pure word to mankind. As such, it was a means whereby the Holy Spirit could work upon the soul and bring it to Christ. Without the Spirit's influence, true conversion could not occur.

Christian History contributors were therefore careful to link their explanations of how conversions were happening during the Awakening to the scriptures, and thus to the Holy Spirit. Often, the language they used to describe the conversion process was scripturally based and specific scriptural passages or stories that supported their viewpoint were given. This was particularly the case with how they explained bodily manifestations of God's Spirit.

Christian History ministers frequently pointed out that they had personally talked with the converts in their parishes and that these converts were “real from Scripture Marks and Evidences they” gave of their experiences.¹⁵⁷ In so doing, they created support for their assertion that the Awakening was a result of God's Spirit being poured

¹⁵⁷ CH, 1:30.

out upon the people. With so many complaints of “enthusiasm” being leveled at the Awakening by critics, it was essential for pro-revivalists to give as much evidence as they could that the revivals were God’s doing and not man’s. Though the ministers acknowledged that from time to time persons who had claimed conversion proved to be “Imposters or such as have lost their Impressions,” for the most part they asserted that the majority were “*true Scripture Converts*” who had undergone a legitimate conversion experience.¹⁵⁸

A legitimate conversion experience started when a person either heard or read something from the Bible that motivated him or her to begin evaluating his or her spiritual state. The next step was to undergo intense feelings of shame for sin, called “convictions” by *Christian History* writers. As the word implies, a person in a state of “convictions” was being emotionally brought to justice for his or her crimes against God. Feelings of deep anxiety, remorse, and guilt characterized those “under convictions.” But so, too, did a spark of the Holy Spirit, since it was that Spirit that initiated a person’s desire to repent. *Christian History* contributors therefore referred to persons in this state as also undergoing a “law work,” a phrase that connoted the necessary presence of the Holy Spirit in the conviction phase. It originated from the Old Testament book of Jeremiah, in which the Lord states that He will put His “Law into their inward Parts, and write it in their Hearts,” but gained further meaning for evangelicals when applied to Paul’s life. In a treatise entitled *Of New Light, or Spiritual Illumination* that was included in the *Christian History*, John Wilson explained that the Apostle Paul, prior to his conversion to Christianity, had been taught strictly “in the Doctrine of the Law, at the feet

¹⁵⁸ CH, 1:78.

of *Gamaliel*.” His learning was thorough with respect to the law of God, but still incomplete, for he was “destitute of the Spirit of Grace. . . . He wanted the *inward Light of the Spirit* to cure his blindness, and remove his prejudices.” Then the Holy Spirit worked upon him and brought him to a true understanding of God’s law that required salvation by grace. For evangelicals, Paul’s experience gave Biblical authority to the argument that obeying God’s laws meant nothing to the conversion and salvation process unless the Holy Spirit also provided grace. For as Wilson further expounded, conversion was not just an “external Revelation,” but also an “internal Illumination” caused by the “Spirit of Grace.”¹⁵⁹

Christian History contributors wrote that the revivals were causing many to undergo a “law work” more penetrating than ever before. The Reverend Haly of Muthel, Scotland, wrote that in his congregation, “a Work of the Law has been most severe.” Some people’s “Convictions have been deep, cutting, & for some Time abiding, not as we have formerly observed,” while for others the “Law-work has been carried on by Degrees,” causing them to reach extremes of despair in their convictions and joy in their finding Christ.¹⁶⁰ Similarly, people in George Griswold’s parish were experiencing a “*Law-Work* in the Heart” that was deeper than usual. But once through this stage they “received Comfort” and “Joy . . . higher than formerly Persons had.”¹⁶¹ The presence of the Holy Spirit was thus stronger in the converted during the Awakening period, according to Haly and Griswold. In their estimate it affected people more intensely than

¹⁵⁹ See Jeremiah 31:33; *CH*, 2:71.

¹⁶⁰ *CH*, 2:184.

¹⁶¹ *CH*, 2:108.

it had in prior times, an observation that underscored their belief that the Great Awakening was truly God's work.

Although ministers like Haly and Griswold gloried in the fact that people's emotions were reaching extremes, other ministers were suspicious of it. Extremes in emotion could lead to extremes in behavior and during the Great Awakening the physical manifestations of people claiming to be in a state of conviction were viewed with distrust by anti-revivalists and pro-revivalists alike. Eager to show that the physical effects of the Spirit of God were scripturally based, and not just the result of enthusiasm, *Christian History* writers who defended them linked them to Biblical accounts of how the Holy Spirit affected people in ancient times.

A common scriptural reference used to show the Spirit's influence was Acts 2, the account of Pentecost in the early days of the Church. Pentecost was the day traditionally set aside by the Jews to celebrate the harvest. Following Christ's crucifixion and resurrection, the Apostles had assembled together on the day of Pentecost. As they met, the Spirit of God was poured out upon them, causing them to speak in tongues, to the wonder and astonishment of all who came to behold them. As a crowd gathered, Peter prophesied that "in the last days" God would again "pour out" his Spirit upon "all flesh" in a similar manner. There would be great "wonders in heavens above, and signs in the earth beneath"; people would have visions and dreams, and prophesy of remarkable things.

Many *Christian History* revivalists believed that day had come, or was, at least, nearer than ever before. The Reverend Jonathan Parsons, as was noted at the beginning of this chapter, described one particular Sabbath in his parish as a second "*Penticost.*"

Similarly, in John White's congregation, the first sign of revivalism made White think specifically of the second chapter of Acts. "My Eyes never saw such Transactions; my ears never heard such Expressions," he wrote. "And thus it was when the HOLY SPIRIT was poured down, *Acts 2:2*. . . . And thus it was with us."¹⁶²

The large numbers of conversions that were occurring made the Awakening a time of spiritual "harvest" like the day of Pentecost recorded in Acts, when three thousand individuals converted to Christianity. *Christian History* ministers also called times of revival, when large numbers of conversions had likewise occurred, the "harvest." For example, the earthquake of 1727 was termed a time of harvest, as were the revivals that had occurred in the Connecticut River Valley under Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards.¹⁶³ However, the use of the word "harvest" had particular significance for the Great Awakening because of its specific reference to Pentecost. To the Reverend James Robe it meant working quickly to gather in as many souls as possible, since the harvest season would not last long:

I looked up and saw what I never saw before, *the Fields already ripe unto Harvest*. I heard the Lord *of the Harvest* commanding me to *put in my Sickle and reap*: I considered that *I had now an Opportunity put in my Hand that was not to last long, the Harvest being the shortest Time of Labour in the whole Year*. And therefore I resolved to bestir myself and attend *wholly* to this very Thing.¹⁶⁴

For evangelicals like Robe, the New Testament account of Pentecost also reinforced the idea that the Holy Spirit could affect people's bodies in unusual ways. Not only were the

¹⁶² *CH*, 2:146; 2:44.

¹⁶³ See *CH*, 1:42; 1:112. Edwards' account of the 1735 revival in Northampton was unmistakably linked to the Pentecost in numbers of conversions. Like the Biblical account, Edwards claimed three thousand persons had been converted during the 1735 revival period there.

¹⁶⁴ *CH*, 1:42.

Apostles infused with the Spirit of God so that they could speak in tongues, but the multitude who listened to Peter preach had their hearts “pricked” so much that it caused them to cry out “What shall we do?” *Christian History* ministers interpreted this as being physically able to feel and give voice to spiritual pain.¹⁶⁵ In their narratives they commonly use the phrase, “*What shall I do to be saved?*” to describe the exclamations that escaped the mouths of their congregants. To them it was a cry that was “common in the *Apostles’* Time, and no doubt will be so again, and much more abundant, as the Glory of the latter Day approacheth.”¹⁶⁶

Other Biblical stories used by *Christian History* contributors also demonstrated how inner feelings could be manifested physically. Paul’s conversion was a prime example. Paul, a persecutor of Christians, was traveling to Damascus when suddenly he heard the voice of Jesus asking him, “Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?” Astonished and afraid, Paul fell to the earth “trembling.”¹⁶⁷ When he arose, he discovered he had lost his eyesight. It was not until he met with Christian disciples that it was restored. Paul’s experience was definitely dramatic, but not viewed by *Christian History* ministers as extreme. Neither was the way that the Roman governor, Felix, “trembled” before Paul, nor the manner in which the jailer that guarded Paul’s prison “came trembling” to him after an earthquake shook open the prison doors.¹⁶⁸ With scriptural evidences such as these, William Shurtleff was “sometimes fill’d . . . with Surprise” that anybody “should think it strange, and even a Thing incredible,” that people could physically display their

¹⁶⁵ Acts 2:37; *CH*, 1:9; 1:234; 1:388; 2:129.

¹⁶⁶ *CH*, 1:36-37.

¹⁶⁷ Acts 9:4-8; *CH*, 1:9; 1:234.

¹⁶⁸ Acts 24: 25; 16:26-29; *CH*, 1:9; 1:234; 1:388.

inner turmoil. Even the anxiety of Heman, which caused him to become “distracted” and lose his mental powers for a time, was considered understandable. Two persons in Josiah Crocker’s congregation “were so over-power’d as to lose the Free exercise of Reason” for a few hours. “Yet is this so anti-scriptural,” he asked, “as to warrant us to conclude the Persons were not under the *Convictions* of the *Holy Spirit*, tho’ *distracted by divine Terrors*, as *Heman* was?”¹⁶⁹ Citing scriptural accounts of physical manifestations of the Spirit of God was thus a primary way *Christian History* revivalists supported the issue of bodily effects and countered the criticisms of their opponents.

In addition to using scriptural references to defend bodily manifestations, *Christian History* contributors also relied on historical precedents to bolster their arguments in favor of physical effects. James Robe related that a century previous, revivalism had swept through western Scotland. It began in the town of Stewarton in 1625 and reached a climax in the town of Shotts five years later. Bodily manifestations of the Spirit of God attended the revivals there during the interim years. For example, people would become so terrified of their sinfulness that they would fall over during sermons and have to be carried out of the meetinghouse. Physical effects such as this became so common that those who opposed the revivals began calling the bodily effects the “*Stewarton Sickness*” in order to emphasize the impure nature of the revivals. But for Scottish evangelicals of the eighteenth century, the revivals of 1625 – 1630—particularly that at Shotts—were hallowed events. Thus, Robe questioned why similar events in their day should be disdained: “The Similitude and Likeness of this Work amongst us unto

¹⁶⁹ Psalms 88:15; *CH*, 2: 354; 1:9. Thomas Prince later used Psalm 88:15 as the foundational text for a sermon he gave in 1756. See *The Case of Heman considered*, (Boston: Printed and sold by S. Kneeland, in Queen-Street, 1756).

that referred to, seem evident: and can these bodily Effects mentioned be just Grounds of Objection against this Work now, and not also against the other?”¹⁷⁰

Thomas Prince agreed with Robe that if physical manifestations of God’s grace had occurred in the past, they should be accepted now. To elaborate on this view, Prince included approximately twenty pages in *The Christian History* devoted to a history of outcries and bodily manifestations from “*Extracts from several Authors.*”¹⁷¹ Though not all pro-revivalists were in favor of supporting bodily manifestations and outcries in their congregations, as was noted earlier, Prince held editorial power that enabled him to construct a positive view of the controversial issue based on historical precedent.

The historical incidents of bodily manifestations cited in *The Christian History* occurred primarily in the seventeenth century, though a couple of examples from the eighteenth century were also included. The first five came from New England ministers, including Prince himself. In short paragraphs they describe people weeping, crying out, trembling and experiencing other “*visible Effects of the Word*” during church meetings.¹⁷²

¹⁷⁰ CH, 1:8. Nevertheless, Robe felt there were limits to be considered when making comparisons between past and present issues. He used a second historical example to show that just because something happened in the past did not necessarily make it a legitimate precedent. Robe noted that many critics of the Great Awakening used the Camizars, French Protestants persecuted after the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1698, as a negative example of religious enthusiasm. The Camizars were known to have had “frequent bodily Agitations, Convulsions and extraordinary Motions” that anti-revivalists in the mid-eighteenth century equated with the bodily effects occurring during the Great Awakening, but Robe staunchly denied the efficacy of this comparison. He wrote that the Camizars had “pretended to Inspiration,” prophesying of events that never came to pass. Robe also asserted that the Camizars were under a “supernatural Power, without their own Will and influence of their natural Powers.” Consequently they were unable to remember the things they had done and said while under this power’s influence. In contrast, the people in his congregation, he argued, were put under bodily distress in a “*natural Way*, from the great Fear of God’s Wrath wherewith their Minds are seized because of a State of Unbelief they are deeply convinced of.” They were able to give “*a rational Account of themselves*” afterwards, and did not lapse back into their affected states later. In Robe’s eyes, there was “no such Likeness” between the Camizars and Great Awakening revivalists; critics who said there was had not bothered to adequately delve into “the History of those people” before comparing them to Great Awakening. See CH, 1:11-13.

¹⁷¹ CH, 1:215.

¹⁷² CH, 1:216-217.

One of the instances of trembling relates specifically to the Indians, a noteworthy selection indicating that Prince felt it important to demonstrate that bodily effects of the Spirit of God could occur even amongst the “heathen Indian.” The level of Christian knowledge already present in a person was thus a moot point. What was important was that the Holy Spirit caused feelings of sorrow for sin that could sometimes be manifest physically.¹⁷³

The other historical instances included are longer segments quoted primarily from English ministers, but also include one from Alexander Webster of Scotland, and one from Joseph Sewall of Boston. The segments are linked together by editorial comments from Prince that explain the source and reputation of the author. Many of them relate stories in which ordinary people, affected by the preaching of a minister, are so overcome by their emotions that they react physically—by weeping, crying out in distress or joy, fainting, or trembling. For example, one story from a treatise by the Reverend Thomas White of London tells of “that precious Saint Mrs. *Drake*,” who had a “Fit of sudden, extream, ravishing, unsupportable Joy” on her deathbed as she finally tasted of God’s grace. In her moment of rapture she suddenly fixed her eyes “towards the House Top” and began uttering exclamations of joy “with an extraordinary Swiftness” for a quarter of an hour. Then, almost as unexpectedly as she had begun, she stopped and lay back in her bed, turning calmly towards the astonished minister at her bedside. She told him that in her morning prayer she had asked God “to reveal Christ unto me” once before her death. Her prayer had been amply answered and she had been unable to contain her exclamations. Similarly, the congregants in Joseph Kentish’s parish were rarely able to

¹⁷³ CH, 1:216.

stop themselves from crying out “*I am the Man, Guilty! Guilty! What shall I do to be saved! For the Lord’s Sake pray for me!*” during Kentish’s sermons. A third story related how a young woman had fallen over as if dead, so great were her feelings of joy. For days she lay at home speaking “singularly ravishing Expressions” of “*exceeding Joys*” that people from all around came to hear.¹⁷⁴

Each of these stories show that people moved upon by the Holy Spirit could not refrain from openly displaying their feelings, whether of joy or fear. This was precisely the point of a sermon segment by Thomas Cole included in the history of outcries. Cole cites Acts 2:37—the verse describing how Pentecostal participants cried out “*What shall we do?*”—and then laments that more people do not do likewise in his day. Rather, “Hearers are more unconcern’d, in a more drowsy Frame.” But Cole argues that more “*public Conversions*” like the ones in Acts are exactly what the church needs:

Had we more of *these New-Births* in our Congregations, we should have more of *these Out-cries*; which would be very awakening to us all. . . . Should God come upon any of you with a *thorough Conviction of Sin*, and give you a *real sight of Christ* as your only Saviour, *you would not be able to contain your selves* under this marvelous Light.¹⁷⁵

An excerpt from a sermon by Richard Baxter likewise emphasizes that people filled with the Spirit should be free to express their emotions. The reasons for this, in Baxter’s view, are twofold. First, the full purposes of God are unknown to mankind, so man should be slow to “make Light” of them, or impose his own judgments of what is good or bad. Second, a real understanding of the terrors of Hell and the Joys of Heaven would be so

¹⁷⁴ CH, 1:220-223.

¹⁷⁵ CH, 1:219.

great that people would be unable to contain themselves if they took the time to truly discover them.¹⁷⁶

Though these extracts from sermons by Cole and Baxter do not give specific examples of physical manifestations, Prince no doubt included them because they were discourses given by respected men of the seventeenth century. In this way they were historical tracts, though for Prince's purposes they were used to underscore a contemporary point: that bodily manifestations were legitimate reactions to the Spirit's influence.¹⁷⁷ The final extract was taken from a sermon given by Joseph Sewall in February 1742, just a year and a half prior to its inclusion in *The Christian History*. Sewall's sermon addresses some of the specific concerns that surfaced during the Great Awakening with respect to the Holy Spirit's influence. Again citing Acts 2:37, Sewall reiterated the belief that outcries were natural responses to the "*Finger of God*." Yet he cautioned people not to "*indulge themselves*" in them "when there is *no real Necessity* for it." Also, he admonished people who have experienced God's grace not to make judgments upon the spirituality of others, just as those who had not experienced it should not be critical of those who had.¹⁷⁸ In addressing these behaviors, Sewall made his view

¹⁷⁶ CH, 1:232.

¹⁷⁷ Charles Hambrick-Stowe contends that Prince's use of seventeenth-century manuscripts and printed sermons was a way of asserting the traditionalism of the Great Awakening. This argument counters the historiographical notion that the Great Awakening was a turning point in American history, as it shows that Prince's *Christian History* was a more conservative trend in New Light religion than is generally believed. Based on the evidence Hambrick-Stowe gives for this assertion, his classification of *The Christian History* is fair. However, Hambrick-Stowe does not adequately take into account that the inclusion of sermon extracts into the magazine was largely the result of Prince's editorship. The conservative nature of *The Christian History*, based on these extracts, is therefore more a characterization of Prince's views than of pro-revival culture as a whole. See "Spirit of the Old Writers: The Great Awakening and the Persistence of Puritan Piety," in *Puritanism: Transatlantic Perspectives on a Seventeenth-Century Anglo-American Faith*, ed. Francis Bremer (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society, 1993).

¹⁷⁸ CH, 1:234-235.

of bodily manifestations of the Spirit of God relevant to contemporary events and criticisms of the Awakening. By including this segment of Sewall's sermon in his history of outcries, Prince made it applicable to larger interpretations of religious history. Not only had physical manifestations happened in congregations throughout the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, but they had never been, and currently were not, evidences of social disorder or religious enthusiasm. Rather, they were part of God's plan for the world, a plan that would build to a climax during the Great Awakening years. Summing up the history of outcries, Prince wrote:

And they seem to have been given before hand as a few sprinkling and previous Drops of Divine Influence; to intimate what should more abundantly and commonly be in the following Age, when its diffusive Showers should come down again upon the parched World.¹⁷⁹

Thomas Prince, like many others in his day, believed that outpourings of grace occurred cyclically. Periods of grace were followed by seasons of religious decline, much like the seasons of the year.¹⁸⁰ Cycles of grace were not, however, static. Each successive season brought the world closer to the millennial day, though periods of decline were expected to occur. It was all part of a process begun with the establishment of the Apostolic church in New Testament times and destined to end in millennial glory. As Prince asserted in *The Christian History*, seasons of religious reformation occur in which God raises up leaders who have the “*primitive apostolic Spirit*.”¹⁸¹ In this case Prince was specifically referring to George Whitefield as a chosen vessel of God. A gentleman from New York likewise wrote that Whitefield prayed “in the same Manner . .

¹⁷⁹ CH, 1:232.

¹⁸⁰ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 20-22; Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 22-25.

¹⁸¹ CH, 2:369.

. that the first Ministers of the *Christian Church* prayed.”¹⁸² Obviously, Whitefield was a celebrated figure in their eyes, but not because of who he was. It was what he represented that really mattered: a new cycle of grace was underway that renewed the purity of the New Testament church, a purity that would bring the world closer to millennial glory.

According to historian Michael Crawford, Thomas Prince believed in a form of chiliasm, or millennialism, which combined the global spread of the gospel with the beginning of the millennium. In a 1740 sermon, Prince expressed his views, noting that the Church had begun in Jerusalem and would continue to spread westward until it enveloped the world. As Crawford notes, Christianity had already reached America and some of Asia in Prince’s day. Thus Prince expected the millennium to be just on the horizon, a belief reinforced to him by the “extraordinary” events of the Great Awakening.¹⁸³

Prince’s millennial views are reflected in the compilation of several historical sections of *The Christian History*. For instance, Prince included a section in the magazine devoted to the “Revival of Religion” in the Far East—places such as the East Indies, Palestine, Syria, Mesopotamia, and Egypt. His source for the history was a sermon given by the Bishop of Oxford that describes how the Gospel was introduced to those areas at the beginning of the eighteenth century.¹⁸⁴ Prince acknowledged that the “Accounts seem not to relate so much to the vital Part of Christianity as to the Doctrinal,” but were inserted to “excite” readers about the “small beginnings of the REDEEMER’S

¹⁸² *CH*, 2:360.

¹⁸³ Crawford, 131-132.

¹⁸⁴ *CH*, 2:28-36. Also included in the Bishop’s sermon was a brief section on religion in Salzburg and Georgia. *CH*, 2:36-37.

Kingdom in those Parts of the World” that would soon “[encompass] the Earth.”¹⁸⁵ In another historical section of *The Christian History*, Prince inserted the preface to a book about Augustus Hermannus Franck, one of the founders of German Pietism.¹⁸⁶ The twenty-page insert describes how Franck’s work was a continuation of the Protestant Reformation started by Luther—all part of separating the wheat from the tares in anticipation of the end of the world.¹⁸⁷ Thus in Prince’s view, events in world history were pointing towards a future filled with an unusual season of grace, a future Prince believed was at hand during the Great Awakening years. For as he commented in the magazine, “Considering the present state of Things in the Christian World, how can we expect any great Change for the better, but in a way that shall be extraordinary?”¹⁸⁸

To Prince and his contemporaries, New England history likewise seemed to point to an “extraordinary” future. New England history was one of Prince’s passions, and so it is not surprising that he included a lot of it in *The Christian History*. The first section dedicated to New England history appeared in issues eight, nine and ten with the intent of giving the “less knowing reader” an overview of the original settlement of New England, and the subsequent “*great and lamented Decay of Religion in the succeeding*

¹⁸⁵ *CH*, 2:28-29.

¹⁸⁶ Pietism in Germany emerged in the latter-half of the seventeenth-century. Much like English Puritanism, it sought religious reform in the established church and stressed pious living. Francke’s most famous book was *Pietas Hallensis*, from which Prince inserted extracts into *The Christian History*, describes Francke’s involvement in establishing religious societies and charitable institutions such as an orphanage. Michael Crawford notes that Cotton Mather and Francke corresponded for a number of years, and believes that Francke influenced Mather towards an increased emphasis on personal piety rather than logic in his religious views. See Michael Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 65-67; and “Origins of the Eighteenth-Century Evangelical Revival: England and New England Compared,” *The Journal of British Studies* 26.4 (Oct. 1987): 383-384.

¹⁸⁷ *CH*, 2:281.

¹⁸⁸ *CH*, 2:369.

Generations.”¹⁸⁹ Some of the history Prince wrote himself, but other parts he quoted from sermons given by “some of our most famous *Writers*, who were the Eye-Witnesses thereof.”¹⁹⁰ Two overall themes emerge from Prince’s writings and sermon selections: first, that New England was established as a religious beacon by men of the purest principles whose piety was to be revered and imitated; second, that the eventual decay of religiosity among the people was a result of worldly interests—notably trade—superseding the primary purpose of New England’s establishment: religion. As a result, New Englanders had better repent and return to the glorious righteousness of the first generation or they would be in danger of losing God’s favor.¹⁹¹

The historical section was interrupted at this point by the insertion of accounts of revivalism in Scotland that Prince had just received. It was picked up again, however, in issue fourteen, with the further purpose of showing that righteousness followed by religious decline in New England were preparatory elements to the “surprising REVIVAL” of religion during the Great Awakening. For the next four issues Prince pieced together a history of revivalism in New England divided into two sections: revivalism prior to George Whitefield’s arrival there in 1740, and revivalism since. In the pre-Whitefield history, he included extracts of accounts describing the revivals of 1680, 1705, 1721, and 1735-36, the last one being taken directly from Edwards’ *A Faithfull Narrative*. Nevertheless, his post-Whitefieldian history section was left undeveloped at this point, since he had not received “a sufficient Number of fresh Accounts” of contemporary revivalism with which to construct a seamless narrative of

¹⁸⁹ CH, 1:59.

¹⁹⁰ CH, 1:64.

¹⁹¹ CH, 1:59-77.

post-1740 revivalism. In the last issues of the magazine, however, Prince prefaced his own narrative of the Great Awakening in Boston with a history of Whitefield's arrival there. Clearly he believed that Whitefield was the catalyst of the Great Awakening, a belief reflected in his attempts to ultimately structure all of New England history around Whitefield's 1740 preaching tour.

From this standpoint the Great Awakening becomes the pinnacle event in New England's history, as well as all of Christianity's history. Whether or not other contributors to *The Christian History* agreed with Prince's conception of Whitefield as the spark that lit the fire, they concurred that the Great Awakening was a climactic moment in religious history. This is evident in the way that they describe the revivals in their areas. For instance, Jonathan Edwards wrote a second narrative about revivalism in Northampton for *The Christian History* that described the 1740-41 revivals there. In it he asserted that the 1740-41 revivals were even "more remarkable" and "more pure" than the "preceeding Season" of revivalism in 1735-1736, for which he and Northampton had become so famous.¹⁹² In light of how influential *A Faithfull Narrative* had become by then, his assertion is therefore quite significant. It reveals Edwards' desire to portray the Great Awakening as a truly unique event that surpassed all other revivals of modern Christianity in terms of authenticity and religiosity. Viewing history from a linear standpoint, the Great Awakening thus became an upwardly surging trajectory of righteousness in the eyes of *Christian History* ministers.

But while *Christian History* writers used history as a way to portray the continuous progress of Christianity in terms of purity and world-wide growth, they also

¹⁹² *CH*, 1:372, 379. Other ministers made similar comparisons between the Great Awakening and prior times of revivalism. See *CH*, 1:263.

used it to show change over time. Both were narrative tropes that created a storyline in which the Great Awakening was a climactic moment. Nevertheless, by describing the discontinuities of religion in the histories of their parishes, *Christian History* contributors set the stage for the social aspects of religion to become the most emphasized element of revivalism.

As Michael Crawford and Frank Lambert discuss in their studies of the Great Awakening, the revival narratives printed in *The Christian History* follow similar patterns.¹⁹³ For instance, the writers generally include a history of their parishes at the beginning of their narratives. In these histories they assert that, prior to the Great Awakening, religion had been in a state of decline in their congregations. Josiah Crocker, for example, wrote that the “*State of Religion*” in Taunton had been “very dark and awful.” All sorts of irreligious practices were common in the community, even on Sundays—“*Tavern-haunting, Divisions and Animisities, Contentions . . . Merry-makings and Frolicks* (so vulgarly called) were much pursued and attended.” With so much iniquity prevalent in Taunton, Crocker lamented that “Thus had the People degenerated from the primitive Piety of their *Ancestors!*”¹⁹⁴ This assertion, much like Prince’s declension history of seventeenth-century New England, prepared the way for revivalism to be portrayed as a truly revolutionary event, which is exactly what Crocker and others did.

After noting how bad conditions in society had been prior to revival, *Christian History* writers proceeded to emphasize how the Great Awakening had produced

¹⁹³ Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 183-185; Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 144-150.

¹⁹⁴ *CH*, 2:323-325. For accounts of how other communities had been in a similar state of religious decline see *CH*, 1:3-5, 1:18-20, 1:238, 1:253, 1:383, 1:397, 1:412, 2:88, 2:105, 2:163-165, 2:300, 2:313.

wonderful changes in their communities. Drawing upon Christ’s teachings in the New Testament that good and evil can be identified by their “fruits,” *Christian History* ministers commonly asserted that the revivals in their parishes had produced “good fruits,” as was evident in the ways that society had changed for the better as a result.¹⁹⁵ To underscore this, revival narrative writers went into great detail describing the positive effects of the revivals upon their communities. Ultimately their point was to show that the revivals were divinely inspired and not the inventions of men, as their critics claimed. But by placing so much emphasis on the societal effects of the Great Awakening, *Christian History* contributors established a new standard whereby to judge whether or not revivalism was legitimate. Though they still relied on Biblical and historical precedents for support, good behavior—the “fruits”—became their best measuring stick for identifying and defending the revivals as the “Work of God.”

John Seccomb, for example, wrote in his revival narrative that two things convinced him that the revivals were God’s doing. First, conversions in his parish had occurred in the traditional way—people listened to an ordained minister preach and were thereby brought under convictions. God had thus made “Use of the *usual Means*; to rouse sleepy Sinners by the *small Voice*.” Secondly, and more importantly in Seccomb’s eyes, were the “*good Fruits and Effects*” that the revivals had yielded in society. People were more humble, kind, and charitable towards one another; “many are *better Husbands, better Wives, better Parents, better Children, better Masters, and better*

¹⁹⁵ One of the scriptural passages *Christian History* ministers drew upon to understand the “good fruits” of was Matthew 7:15-20. In this passage, Christ tells his disciples how to recognize good things from evil things by comparing them to trees producing fruit: “Ye shall know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes of thorns, or figs of thistles? / Even so every good tree bringeth forth good fruit; but a corrupt tree bringeth forth evil fruit. / A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither *can* a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit is hewn down, and cast into the fire. / Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them.”

Servants, &c.” There was less contention and jealousy within the community as well, further evidence for Seccomb that the revivals were an authentic outpouring of God’s grace.¹⁹⁶

Seccomb’s experience was one replicated in dozens of parishes described by other *Christian History* contributors. Changes in people’s behavior created “A new Face of Things” in the towns.¹⁹⁷ James Robe referred to these societal changes as the “*General*” fruits of the revivals, as they extended “unto the *Body* of the People” and demonstrated “the *visible Reformation*” people had made.¹⁹⁸ The “fruits” of revivalism thus included specific benefits to the secular community, as well as to the church community.

The secular aspects of social change included things like less drinking and tavern-going on the part of townspeople. Ministers whose flocks consisted of Native Americans, for instance, were quick to point out that as a result of the revivals the Indians had decreased their alcohol intake. Notably, spiritually-awakened Indians in Westerly replaced their desires for alcohol with the desire for a school to be built. Undoubtedly this exchange of wants was seen by pro-revivalist ministers as a progressive and civilizing result of revivalism, since alcoholism was the “Sin which so easily besets them.” Likewise, George Griswold noted that even the Niantic Indians not converted by the revivals had decreased their drinking and Sabbath-breaking habits. The positive effects of revivalism thus extended beyond the bounds of church-goers and aided the moral reformation of society as a whole.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ *CH*, 2:19-20.

¹⁹⁷ *CH*, 1:253.

¹⁹⁸ *CH*, 1:52.

¹⁹⁹ *CH*, 2:27; 2:114.

Native Americans were not the only ones *Christian History* ministers delighted in seeing abandoning the bottle. In their narratives, the image of an empty tavern was a favorite employed by *Christian History* ministers. Nathaniel Leonard asserted that in his community the taverns were virtually empty of patrons for months after the height of the revivals there. In Boston the taverns were “less frequented” as well. Thomas Prince wrote about conversing with a man whose job it was to clear the taverns of customers on Saturday nights. Prior to the Awakening, the man claimed that “they were wont to find many [in the taverns], and meet with Trouble to get them away.” But since the revivals “he found them empty except of lodgers.” Similarly, tavern-goers seemed to suddenly vanish in Worcester, where the Reverend David Hall presided, after a powerful election sermon was delivered. This was a particularly significant occurrence that Hall’s readers would immediately have noted, since election day was “generally a Day of *great Diversion* through[out] the Province.” But in Hall’s view the youths and older people who typically frequented the tavern had been inspired to change their “wanton Pastime” for something better, a more orderly society. This idea could be no better underscored than in the fact that the taverns were emptied of merrymakers on the very day that civil government, the most fundamental aspect of social order, was being reestablished.²⁰⁰ Much like the Native Americans in Westerly, the tavern-goers of Worcester were thus exchanging vice for virtue in a way that supported social stability.

Another way *Christian History* writers portrayed an increase in social stability was by noting that feuds and contentions within their towns had decreased since the revivals. Their descriptions portrayed communities as harmonious and peace-filled

²⁰⁰ CH, 2:315; 2:398; 2:397; 2:166-167.

places where commitment to the communal good supplanted self-interest. Jonathan Edwards wrote that since the revivalism of the 1740s had swept through Northampton “*A Party-Spirit*” had “ceased” to foster divisions among the people. In town meetings especially, Edwards observed that people went out of their way to “*Guard*” their tongues and “avoid Contention and unchristian Heats.” The problem of social divisions, which beset Northampton for upwards of thirty years, was thus easily resolved as a result of the Great Awakening. This was also the case in Somers, according to Samuel Allis, who wrote that “Quarrels and Contentions between Neighbour and Neighbour which have subsisted for many Years, and no Means could effect a Reconciliation, are now at an End: and there is seemingly an hearty Love and Affection for each other.” Along similar lines, William Shurtleff noted that people who had dealt dishonestly with their neighbors in the past had acknowledged their wrongs and made restitution. In sum, *Christian History* ministers portrayed their towns as places of brotherly love and peace as a result of revivalism. Their friendly descriptions countered the negative reputation the revivals had acquired as instigators of factionalism. The church separations that had occurred in some communities, as well as the split in the ministry that was becoming increasingly apparent, made people nervous. *Christian History* ministers sought to allay their fears by showing how revivalism had increased, not decreased, social unity.²⁰¹

Unity was a theme *Christian History* contributors applied to the church community as well as the secular. One way the Northampton congregation showed greater unity was by holding a covenant renewal exercise. When a Congregational church was organized its members wrote a statement of covenant that embodied the

²⁰¹ CH, 1:381; 1:410; 1:390.

spiritual and communal ideals of the church body. As historian Charles Hambrick-Stowe has observed, “The making of the church covenant was the primary ordinance upon which the others were built.” In the latter decades of the seventeenth century, a time when war, politics, and declining church membership rates all threatened the stability of Congregationalism, churches began to hold renewal services as a way of inspiring congregants to repent and remember their spiritual obligations. During the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards’ congregation participated in a covenant renewal ceremony in order to feel spiritually inspired and socially unified. It is noteworthy that the covenant drawn up by Edwards, and entered into by congregants aged fourteen and above, said very little about the doctrines their church espoused. Rather, it focused almost exclusively on the ways that people promised to behave towards one another. These behaviors included kindness and honesty towards neighbors, making restitution for wrongs, paying off debts, and not holding grudges or participating in gossip. Unity was thus emphasized in relationships between neighbors and not, interestingly, in man’s relationship with God.²⁰²

In addition to promoting good relationships with neighbors, the Northampton church covenant addressed family relationships. Those who signed the covenant agreed to “to perform *Relative Duties*, required by Christian Rules, in the families we belong to.” One duty of families was to hold regular family devotionals and prayers. Though family worship had always been strongly encouraged in New England society, it was a practice that eighteenth-century ministers felt had declined. As in Northampton, the Great Awakening spurred greater participation in family devotional activities according to

²⁰² CH, 1:374-378; Hambricke-Stowe, *The Practice of Piety*, 127, 131-132.

Christian History contributors. Joseph Parks, for instance, asserted that prior to the Awakening, not one household out of hundreds in his community had held regular family worship exercises. In the wake of revivalism, however, Parks observed many parents establishing regular devotional activities in their homes, including the Indians in his area.²⁰³

Just as people began to worship more as families, they also sought more opportunities for “Sermons and social worship.” Not surprisingly, *Christian History* ministers rejoiced in the fact that people wanted to hear more sermons. It was further evidence, in their minds, that the Spirit of God was being poured out upon the land and creating an insatiable appetite for spiritual growth among the people. Traditionally, Congregationalist churches had sponsored a weekly lecture night where sermons were delivered in addition to Sunday services. During the Great Awakening, however, lectures were frequently given more than just once a week, and often combined with local religious meetings—called religious societies or prayer societies—that were held in people’s homes.²⁰⁴

The formation of prayer societies was mentioned in over half of the revival narratives published in *The Christian History* as part of the “fruits” of the revivals. A few scholars have noted the establishment of prayer societies during the first part of the eighteenth century, but little has been written concerning their role in the Great Awakening. Based on the accounts of ministers published in *The Christian History*, it is evident that prayer societies were seen by pro-revivalists as significant elements of

²⁰³ *CH*, 1:378; 1:207; 2:25.

²⁰⁴ *CH*, 1:249; 1:240.

revivalism. Their existence indicated that revivalism was flourishing in a community and showed that people were united in their religious pursuits.

The predecessors of religious societies were reform societies begun in England during the late 1670s. They arose out of a movement to involve single, young men in fraternal organizations that promoted moral conduct. After the Glorious Revolution, which weakened the power of the Church of England, local reform societies became an increasingly popular way for the church to exert its influence over the common people. In 1690 the Society for the Reformation of Manners was created, followed by the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts in 1701. These organizations sought to promote stricter social codes of moral living, as well as spread the influence of religion throughout the world. But as John Walsh has asserted, it was the smaller, local religious societies that “aimed quietly to revitalize [religion] from within.”²⁰⁵

By 1700 there were forty such societies established in London. Three years later Cotton Mather wrote a treatise praising the existence of reform societies in England and calling for their creation in New England as well. In his treatise, *Methods and Motives for Societies to Suppress Disorders*, Mather suggested how reform societies should be organized and implemented in local communities. He believed they should be composed of seven to seventeen members, include a minister and magistrate, and have elected “Stewards, whose office it shall be, to dispatch *Business and Messages*.” Societies should “Study *Secrecy*,” meaning they should conduct their affairs privately without the general knowledge of the surrounding community. Mather believed that “a Small

²⁰⁵ John Walsh, “Religious Societies: Methodist and Evangelical 1738 – 1800) in *Studies in Church History*, eds. W. J. Sheilds and Diana Wood (Published for the Ecclesiastical History Society by Basil Blackwell, 1986): 280; Richard P. Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil, and the Godly: The Reformation of Manners in Orthodox New England, 1679 – 1749* (University Park, PN: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 202-203. Michael Crawford, *Seasons of Grace*, 39-41.

Society may prove an incomparable and invaluable Blessing to a Town.” It could become an influential force for good by encouraging “Wholesome Laws,” the election of “faithful” public officials, the practice of “*Family-Worship*,” good schools and books, and succoring the needy. A “Reforming Society” could also serve as a link between the local minister and the congregation. It could alert the minister of “the Condition of the People” and suggest ways to advance “Piety in the Flock.” Mather asserted that by doing all these things, “Reforming Societies” would ultimately “raise *this World*” from a degenerative state into millennial glory.²⁰⁶

For the next thirty years religious reform societies prospered in New England and spread throughout the countryside. By the 1730s they had begun to decline, until the religious excitement of the Great Awakening popularized them again. As historian Richard Gildrie has noted, religious societies were thus a link between the earlier reform movement and the Great Awakening.²⁰⁷

In the eyes of *Christian History* ministers, however, religious societies were more than just a link to the past. In many places they were a completely new phenomenon. But whether they were new or simply re-established, *Christian History* contributors viewed them as important indicators of current religious vitality in a community, as well as valuable conduits for the spread of revivalism. Even more than the other “fruits” of the revivals, religious societies proved that people were truly hungering after religion. Though ministers gave weekly sermons and lectures, the established means of the church

²⁰⁶ Cotton Mather, *Methods and Motives for Societies To Suppress Disorders* (Boston, 1703), 2-12.

²⁰⁷ Gildrie, *The Profane, the Civil and the Godly*, 204-207.

to teach the gospel and foster communal unity were simply not enough. People wanted more and so took it upon themselves to organize religious societies.²⁰⁸

Thomas Prince noted that this was the case in Boston, where several extra lectures had been set up during the week that were still not enough to satisfy the peoples' cravings for religion. People began meeting frequently in prayer societies, which soon totaled about thirty, just in Boston alone.²⁰⁹ James Robe wrote that those from his parish who attended the nearby revival in Cambuslang proposed reinstating prayer societies upon returning home, an act which Robe viewed as an early sign of revival starting to surface in his congregation.²¹⁰ Often the youth were the first ones to initiate prayer societies. In John Seccomb's congregation, for instance, the youth began meeting together to read the Bible, sing and talk about religion. The resulting "visible Reformation" in their countenances inspired older persons in the community to likewise form a prayer society.²¹¹

As Cotton Mather had suggested in 1703, religious societies were ideally presided over by a minister, though not always at every meeting. In some places, (as in Scotland) there were simply too many societies for the number of available ministers to oversee them all.²¹² Prayer societies were generally organized according to gender and age, but

²⁰⁸ The religious societies of the Great Awakening likely differed from the societies established at the beginning of the eighteenth century in that they were geared specifically towards religious edification. The earlier religious societies, as described by Mather, were more reform-minded organizations intended to promote social reform through civil, as well as ecclesiastical, means. Social reform through civil government is not present in *Christian History* accounts of religious societies. Rather, these societies were described as purely aimed towards religious practice and instruction.

²⁰⁹ See *CH*, 2:395.

²¹⁰ *CH*, 1:21.

²¹¹ *CH*, 2:14.

²¹² *CH*, 2:101.

also by race, in some instances.²¹³ James Robe admitted that in Dundaff he allowed men and women to meet together in one society. He felt that this was not inappropriate, since most of the men were married, and the “Women need much the Instruction that they may have . . . from the Prayers and Conference with the Men.”²¹⁴

Among the youth, prayer societies were especially popular and beneficial.²¹⁵ In many *Christian History* narratives an explicit connection is made between the societies and the improved behavior of the youth. Prayer societies were wholesome activities that replaced “*Frolicks and merry Makings*,” the “Nurseries of Impieties and Debaucheries.” In Wrentham, Massachusetts, the youth had given up their inappropriate activities for two years, replacing them with religious society meetings that helped them grow spiritually. A young men’s society, for example, was “much frequented” and caused the attendees “to Gain in spiritual Knowledge thereby.”²¹⁶ For years prior to the Great Awakening the Reverend Benjamin Bradstreet had tried unsuccessfully to get the youth in his parish to form a religious society. Yet once the spirit of revivalism began to affect his congregation the youth formed into two societies that met twice weekly, and consequently changed their behaviors. Those who had been guilty of “*Quarrelling, Swearing Drinking, &c*,” were “*wonderfully reformed*,” and began “*hungering and thirsting after the Righteousness of CHRIST*.”²¹⁷

²¹³ For example, in Gloucester, Massachusetts, there were nine different religious societies established, one of which was a “Society of *Negroes*.” African Americans in Boston also formed religious societies, as did Native American boys in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. See *CH*, 2:44; 1:152; 2:397.

²¹⁴ *CH*, 2:179.

²¹⁵ See *CH*, 1:44; 1:255; 2:122; 2:136; 2:326.

²¹⁶ *CH*, 1:241-242.

²¹⁷ *CH*, 2: 326; 1:188.

Young men were not the only ones pro-revivalists felt benefited from prayer societies. Stereotypically marginal groups—lower-class laboring whites, Native Americans, and African Americans—were likewise lauded for joining prayer societies. In Glasgow, Scotland, George Muire described excitedly how there were somewhere between twenty-four and thirty prayer societies established. A few were composed of lower-class “Country People,” the “Plowmen, Lads, and other illiterate persons” who Muire felt were improving much by their participation in a religious society. Native American boys in Houssatonnoc (Stockbridge, Massachusetts) were likewise on the road to social betterment, according to John Sargeant. The boys lived with “*English Families*” under the sponsorship of Isaac Hollis of London. One of the boys, in particular, was making “*extraordinary Progress*” in his religious education. His zeal, Sargeant hoped, would one day qualify him “to be a *Preacher of the Gospel*” among his tribe, for at that time he was “very helpful” in promoting a religious society among his peers. John White similarly noted that the behavior of several African Americans who belonged to a religious society in Gloucester had changed. “In their meetings,” he wrote, “[they] behave very seriously & decently,” an observation that underscores a contemporary perception of African Americans as flippant and uncouth. Thomas Prince implied this same characterization of African Americans in Boston. He wrote how several people who had been absent from Boston during the height of the revivals returned to find it changed for the better. They noticed that “even the *Negroes & Boys in the Streets* surprisingly left their usual rudeness,” many of whom Prince knew had “form’d into *religious Societies*.”²¹⁸

²¹⁸ CH, 2:44; 2:397.

At a typical prayer society meeting, people would gather to pray, listen to a sermon or exhortation, sing, and discuss the scriptures or “other good books.”²¹⁹ Societies met anywhere from once a week to daily, depending on what the members themselves decided. Conversions and spiritual awakenings frequently resulted from society meetings. James Robe, for example, believed that the majority of adults in his parish were awakened at prayer society meetings.²²⁰ Sometimes crying out and bodily manifestations occurred at society meetings. Such was the case in Lyme, where Jonathan Parsons preached to a society of youths. “Great numbers cried aloud in the Anguish of their Souls,” Parsons wrote. “Several stout Men fell as tho’ a cannon had been discharg’d, and a Ball had made thro’ their Hearts. Some young Women were thrown into Hysterick Fits.”²²¹ Parsons viewed these physical reactions as indications that many who attended the meeting were thereby brought into a state of convictions. Prayer societies were therefore seen as an effective means whereby congregants could be put on the path to conversion.

In Scotland prayer societies took on a particularly active role. The societies in Edinburgh printed and distributed “Memorials,” or accounts of religion in their communities, “thro’ the Nation [in order] to excite” others about religion. One of these Memorials was reprinted in *The Christian History*. It describes how that particular prayer society wanted to have a special day of thanksgiving for the recent outpouring of grace. The members proposed holding it on February 18, 1744, and encouraged other societies

²¹⁹ CH, 2:338; 1:272; 1:296.

²²⁰ CH, 1:29.

²²¹ CH, 2:136.

to join them in “giving Thanks” on that day or another if “more convenient.”²²²

Similarly, the prayer societies in Cambuslang were instrumental in implementing the second communion services that were held there in August 1742. Though the suggestion to hold a second communion service was found “very agreeable” to the presiding minister, William McCulloch, the prayer societies were consulted before a final decision was made. Then, in preparation for the event, all of the prayer societies met regularly at McCulloch’s house, and once even stayed until one o’clock in the morning praying together. Their preparatory efforts contributed to the “Power and special Presence of God” that attended the communion service and that made it even more remarkable an experience than the first communion given that summer.²²³ Prayer societies were therefore portrayed by *Christian History* writers as mediums through which revivalism was actively spread and maintained. They were both products of God’s grace and instruments whereby it was produced.

Religious societies and the other good “fruits” of the Great Awakening were central aspects of the revival accounts published in *The Christian History*. They highlighted the social benefits of revivalism as applied to both the secular and church communities. In noting these benefits, *Christian History* ministers found a tangible means whereby to assert the legitimacy of the Awakening as an outpouring of God’s grace. For if God’s Spirit were truly upon the land it was only natural, in their minds, that the earthly world would become more like Heaven. Peter Thacher felt that his town of Middleborough had experienced this intersection of the divine and the secular during the revivals. He told Thomas Prince, his brother-in-law, that the changes in people’s

²²² CH, 1:87.

²²³ CH, 1:295-297.

behavior made Middleborough “like a Heaven on Earth.”²²⁴ Given this kind of divine “fruit,” *Christian History* ministers felt there ultimately could be no doubt that the revivals were authentic.

In the eyes of *Christian History* ministers, the societal “fruits” that resulted from the Awakening were therefore the best indicators of the revivals’ authenticity. Critics could interpret both scripture and history differently, but it was hard to argue with what was visibly improved in everyday life. Virtually every account of local revivalism published in the magazine mentions, in some way, how society had changed for the better as a result of the Great Awakening. The “general fruits” of the revivals included things like less drinking and tavern-going, less feuding and factionalism, youths abandoning their “frolics,” family devotional exercises established, and more sermons being given with greater attentiveness on the part of worshipers. The establishment of prayer societies, in particular, was earmarked as evidence that people were hungering after religion, and changing their behavior as a result.

All of these good “fruits” of the revivals made *Christian History* ministers feel that the “*external Reformation*” of their towns overshadowed the controversies surrounding the Awakening and served as the ultimate proof that the revivals were an authentic outpouring of God’s grace. The Reverend David Hall expressed it thus:

Moreover, that it is the blessed work of the great *Jehovah*, I do certainly know. . . . Now if that *Faith which Works by Love*, and which commands the Heart & Life into the Ways of Obedience, be the Fruit which cannot grow upon Thorns, but upon the Heaven-born-Plants, form’d and sealed by God’s own right Hand; this is then the Work of God. For I am sure *these three Years* since the Work took place powerfully amongst us, I have had the Comfort of

²²⁴ CH, 2:92.

beholding more Appearance of such like Fruit than ever before in all my Life.²²⁵

The visible “fruits” of the revivals within society were thus the most confirming evidences *Christian History* revivals used to determine and assert that the revivals were real. As The Reverend Peter Thacher wrote, “To conclude, where *the Work* is deep and effectual, it appears with *fervent Devotion* in and to all the *Acts of social Communion* with God.”²²⁶ The societal “face” of religion therefore became the greatest argument *Christian History* ministers made to show that the revivals were God’s work.

²²⁵ *CH*, 1:243; 2:170.

²²⁶ *CH*, 1:415.

Epilogue: Finding Balance

*“The Work proves itself. And those who have experienc’d it on their own Souls, doubtless are best able to say how it is.”*²²⁷
--Rev. Daniel Putnam, 30 June 1743.

The light from a dimming sun glistened through the windows of the Portsmouth meetinghouse. It was the last Friday in November 1741. For the previous three days the Portsmouth congregants had begun to experience a revival of religion in their town. Though they had heard of “a remarkable Work of God’s Grace going on in many Parts of the Land,” revivalism did not come to Portsmouth until after the congregants had joined together in fasting “to seek for the like Blessing.” That blessing came in a most unexpected way.

Beginning on Wednesday of that week, the people of Portsmouth had started to awaken. First “*One* cried out in a Transport of Joy,” then “*Others* discover’d a great deal of Distress.” As the days passed, the congregants grew increasingly eager to hear sermons and more inclined to linger after the preaching was done. But that “Friday was the most remarkable Day that was ever known among [them]. The whole Congregation seem’d deeply affected” by the three sermons that were given that day. People were crying-out, and experiencing emotions “that could not but put a great many in Mind of the *Appearing of THE SON OF MAN . . . when they shall see Him coming in the Clouds of Heaven, in Power, and Great Glory.*”

²²⁷ CH, 1:182. The Reverend Daniel Putnam was the pastor of the Congregational Second church in Reading, Massachusetts.

Suddenly, a blaze of light filled the windows of the meetinghouse. Someone called out that “CHRIST *was coming in judgment.*” Filled with astonishment, and not knowing what else to think, many of the congregants “were put into the deepest Distress,” whilst “great Numbers” of others “had *their Convictions* hereby strengthened and confirmed.” Soon, however, it was discovered that the fiery light originated not from a display of heavenly glory, but from the “Chimney of a House that stood near” to the meetinghouse. It had caught fire and “blaze[d] to an Uncommon degree.”

Nevertheless, the experience profoundly affected many in Portsmouth. When the minister, William Shurtleff, went out the next day he noticed the unusual “*Seriousness* that appear’d in the Face of almost every one” he encountered. “*One Family after another*” called him in from the street to pray “to God on their Behalf,” for virtually every household contained “some poor wounded and distress’d Soul.”

As time passed, many Portsmouth citizens began to rethink the chimney fire incident, some going “so far as to pronounce the whole of it a Scene of Enthusiasm, and to look upon all as a Delusion.” They were believers turned critics, some as a result of their own ponderings about the incident, the rest thanks to the “Insinuations and Persuasions of others.” Their critical attitudes saddened Shurtleff, but it did not diminish how he felt about the remarkable occurrence. He was confident that the chimney fire was more than coincidence; it was the “Beauty of DIVINE PROVIDENCE” on display.

Shurtleff’s unshakable belief was rooted in personal experience. He had been there, experienced the blazing moment, and seen the expressions on people’s faces the day after the fire. He knew that criticism of the event was inevitable, both from some who had been there but also from those who had not. Relating the story to a larger

audience held risks that he openly acknowledged. “Derision” and “*wicked Jestings*” about the Portsmouth chimney fire were bound to be “entertained by a great many of the Humourists of the Age.” But in spite of what they might say, Shurtleff knew what he had felt and seen, and would not deny it.²²⁸

For the other pro-revivalists whose stories were published in *The Christian History*, personal experience was also the most significant factor in how they responded to Great Awakening revivalism. The desire to purify self and society was at the heart of everything related to the Awakening—from explanations of its causes, effects, and purposes to the disputes that arose between ministerial factions.

As *The Christian History* reveals, pro-revivalists handled various aspects of the Great Awakening differently. They were not, for instance, all comfortable with people crying out things like “*What shall I do to be saved?*” during sermons. While some ministers rejoiced to hear their congregants vocalize their emotions publicly, others were hesitant to encourage the practice in their parishes. Because Congregationalist doctrine did not explicitly condone or condemn outcries or other controversial aspects of the revivals, such as itinerancy, ministers exercised personal judgment in how they handled these “errors of doctrine” and “disorders of practice,” based on their experiences with them. As a result, *Christian History* ministers often responded to various aspects of revivalism very differently from each other, making the magazine more than just a factional tool.

Their differences notwithstanding, however, pro-revivalists were consistent with each other in how they defended and described revivalism. Unquestionably, they wanted

²²⁸ CH, 1: 385-386.

to highlight the various reasons why they believed the revivals were legitimate. To do so, they drew upon scriptural and historical precedents to show that the controversial aspects of the Great Awakening were neither new nor particularly unusual. They also painted a positive portrait of revivalism in their communities by describing how the Awakening had changed the “face” of their towns. The socially visible effects of the revivals were therefore emphasized by *Christian History* ministers as the most indisputable evidences that the Awakening was an authentic outpouring of God’s grace.

Asserting that the Great Awakening was divinely instigated was thus a very complicated undertaking for pro-revivalists who contributed to *The Christian History*. It pressed them to balance differences in doctrinal interpretation with the realities of personal experience, a task that New England ministers had never been able to accomplish. *The Christian History* was therefore a very complex compilation of pro-revivalist views about theology, history and personal experience. Although the magazine was arguably a factional instrument of social change, just as scholars such as Frank Lambert have portrayed it, *The Christian History* was even more: a tangible expression of the tensions that had always characterized religious belief in Puritan New England.

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