

A DRAMATIC REVIVAL:
THE FIRST GREAT AWAKENING IN CONNECTICUT

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The Great Awakening of 1735-1745 was a reaction to a decline in piety and a laxity of morals within the Congregational Churches of New England. Itinerant evangelizing generated renewed enthusiasm and spread the message of revival throughout the churches of Connecticut. Although the Great Awakening stimulated dramatic conversions and an increase in church membership, it also provoked conflicts and divisions within the established church. As the movement became more radical and emotions less restrained, the subsequent factions which emerged from a difference in opinions concerning the Awakening led to the decline of the revival in Connecticut. The Great Awakening subsided around 1745 because proponents could not sustain enthusiasm, while the government of the colony began regulating itinerant preaching and persecuting New Light supporters of the

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Awakening. This striking revival of religious piety and its emphasis on salvation ultimately transformed the religious order of Connecticut.

The decline in piety among the second generation of Puritans, which stemmed from economic changes, political transformations, and Enlightenment rationalism, was the primary cause of the Great Awakening. During the eighteenth century, political uncertainty and economic instability characterized colonial life and diverted devout Puritans from religious obligations. The first Census in 1790 showed 1 million blacks and 4 million whites in the United States, and there had been a strong development of manufacturing and intercolonial trade. Although this transformation promoted an increase in the standard of living for many merchants and manufacturers in the growing towns and villages, fluctuations in overseas demand and European wars caused inconsistencies within the colonial market. The English government, moreover, was contending with the death of Queen Anne (1714) and the Jacobite effort to usurp King George I (1715 and 1745), and thus the political life of the colonists was also inherently unstable. Not only did economic and political change detract from religious life and the image John Winthrop outlined in 1630 of “a city upon a hill,” but the rationalism of the Enlightenment also challenged Orthodox Calvinism. Denouncing the idea of the “inherent depravity” of human nature, the Enlightenment emphasized the accumulation of knowledge through logic and reason. This trend promoted the introduction of math, science, law, and medicine into the college curriculums, which had been primarily focused upon theology and ancient languages during the 1720s.¹ Emphasis upon economic success, political developments, and rational thought pre-empted concerns for the soul and instilled a confidence in salvation despite a laxity of morals. Individual morals declined as Puritans within the community turned increasingly to Arminianism, the belief that preparation for heaven was easily managed and therefore less important, to justify their participation in secular affairs. The supporters of the Awakening pointed to the apparent degeneration of Puritan values to explain the need for revival.

In addition to secular causes of decline, compromise within the Congregational Church contributed to the weakening of religious commitment. To compensate for the decline in piety, which began as early as the middle of the seventeenth century, and to insure a steady, growing congregation, the Congregational Churches of Connecticut and Massachusetts adopted the Halfway Covenant in 1662, which ultimately led to further degeneration of Puritan influence. Prior to 1662, membership in the church required 'regeneration' and credible testimony of a specific conversion experience. The church baptized the second generation of Puritans as infants with the assumption that they would be converted later in life. As politics and economics superseded religion, however, the second generation of Puritans failed to experience an outward conversion. To sustain the population of the congregation, the church adopted the Halfway Covenant, which allowed the children of unregenerate Puritans to be baptized but forbade them to partake of the Lord's Supper and denied them suffrage. Isolating the third generation of Puritans from the traditional means of receiving God's grace, this Covenant furthered the degeneration of the church. In 1690, Solomon Stoddard, pastor of the church in Northampton, Massachusetts from 1669 to 1729, eliminated the Halfway Covenant and allowed the non-confederates, the "halfway members" of the church, to receive Communion. When Stoddard was ordained on September 11, 1672, he had already earned two degrees at Harvard, served as the college's first librarian, and preached for some time in Barbados. An educated and experienced leader within the community and among the clergy throughout New England, Stoddard believed in extending full Communion to all to assure the continued existence of the church.² Although the churches of the Connecticut Valley soon followed his example, the second and third generations of Puritans failed to demonstrate the same devotion and discipline that the original Puritans had practiced.³ John Whiting of Hartford expressed this sentiment and the need for revival in an election sermon of 1686, saying:

Is there not too visible and general a declension; are we not turned (and that quickly too) out of the way wherein our fathers walked?...A

rain of righteousness and soaking showers of converting, sanctifying grace sent from heaven will do the business for us, and indeed, nothing else.⁴

Many devout church members believed the Great Awakening of 1735-1745 was necessary to combat secular influences in the lives of the Puritans and reinstitute the authority of the Congregational Church.

To restore discipline to the churches of Connecticut, a group of ministers and laymen, selected by the General Court, drafted the Saybrook Platform, fifteen "Articles for the Administration of Church Discipline."⁵ Approved by minister and Governor Gurdon Saltonstall in 1708, the document was printed and distributed at the cost of the colony. The Saybrook Platform established control over the churches, calling for consociations in each county to oversee major ecclesiastical decisions such as ordinations, installations, and dismissals of Congregational ministers. The Platform also created an association of ministers to assist with consultations, the licensing of candidates, and the recommendation of supplies and pastors. The elimination of local power and the establishment of a hierarchy within the church contradicted the Puritan belief in the autonomy of the congregation, a belief which had stimulated both their rejection of the Anglican Church in the early 1600s and the Great Puritan Exodus. Attempting to unify the churches and establish moral discipline among the unregenerate, the Saybrook Platform created bitter controversies and caused divisions throughout the colony. New London County renounced the proposed articles, and New Haven County interpreted it minimally. In Fairfield County, however, because of a severe decline in piety and discipline, the consociation became a full-fledged court and thus helped to restore order to a degenerated society.⁶ Although the Platform did not succeed in every county, it heightened Puritan belief in man's inherent depravity and pointed to the need for revival.

Itinerant evangelists, primarily George Whitefield and James Davenport, spread the revival to churches in Connecticut, alarming conservatives and awakening spiritual concern. In the

fall of 1740, George Whitefield, a twenty-six-year-old evangelist who had stirred emotions throughout England, toured the seaboard of the Connecticut Valley and amplified the spirit of the Awakening. In his sermons, many of which were printed by his good friend Benjamin Franklin, he emphasized the irresistibility of grace and advocated justification by faith. In response to Whitefield's success in arousing sinners and instilling a concern for salvation, the Eastern Consociation of the County of Fairfield met on October 7, 1740 and voted to invite Whitefield to preach in several towns within the district. Acknowledging that "...the Life and Power of Godliness in [these] Parts is generally sunk to a Degree very lamentable," the Consociation requested that Whitefield share his ministry provided he did not denounce unconverted ministers or demand contributions for his orphan house in Georgia.⁷ In response to this invitation, Whitefield preached in New Haven on October 26 and Fairfield on October 28. In his journal Whitefield quoted the Governor as saying, with tears streaming down his aged face, "I am glad to see you and heartily glad to hear you." In Fairfield he "preached, in the morning, to a considerable congregation, and in the prayer after the sermon, [he] scarcely knew how to leave off."⁸ In a letter to Eleazar Wheelock on November 24, 1740, William Gaylord of Norwalk wrote,

I really desired his Coming and was heartily glad to See him, because I believe he excells in that which we (especially in these Parts) want most, I mean Zeal for God and compassion for immortal sins.

Yet in the same letter, Gaylord also declared that Whitefield

lays vastly too much Weight upon the Affection, Tears and Meltings etc. that appear in the Face of the Assembly, as an Argument of his success.⁹

Eleazar Wheelock, a New Light preacher from Lebanon and one of Connecticut's greatest proponents of the Awakening, served as the "chief intelligencer of revival news." Because he was the established minister of the North Society of Lebanon, Wheelock received only moderate criticism for his enthusiasm and his itinerant evangelizing. In 1741 he campaigned boldly throughout the colony, and that same year, he wrote 465 sermons to promote

the revival.¹⁰ In his letter to Wheelock, Gaylord emphasized Whitefield's powerful oratory and his ability to arouse emotion and enthusiasm among the unconverted members of the church. In hopes of experiencing a conversion, thousands of people travelled across the colony to hear Whitefield's sermons. Nathaniel Cole of Middletown, Connecticut described the riverbanks where Whitefield was preaching as "black with people and horses."¹¹ Clearly many churches eagerly anticipated Whitefield's sermons and earnestly desired conversion by the Holy Spirit. Although many conservatives opposed Whitefield's enthusiasm and emphasis on emotion, he succeeded in spreading the message of revival throughout the colony.

A second, more radical New Light itinerant, James Davenport, followed Whitefield's example and travelled to congregations throughout Connecticut. He, too, believed in sudden, conscious conversion and employed five specific tactics to garner support and convey his message. Davenport attacked the unconverted ministry, declaring that unregenerate ministers were as damaging to spirits as "swallowing ratsbane or bowls of poison to their bodies."¹² Moreover, Davenport "exploited anticlericalism for evangelical purposes" and preached in locations subversive to the established order, places such as fields, orchards, or barns.¹³ Anticlericalism, the opposition to the influence of church and clergy in public affairs, emphasized the need for purity and revival within the church, a church untainted by the secular affairs of the colony. Davenport also employed loud music, often marching through the streets late at night, disturbing the peace, and attracting unfavorable attention. Davenport's final and most important tactic was his theatrical, encouraging oratory and his powerful, extemporaneous sermons. One incident that occurred in New London, Connecticut, clearly exemplified Davenport's radical tactics. On March 6, 1743, he convinced his followers that to be saved, they must burn their idols. Singing psalms and hymns, the participants in this outburst burned their books on the street. Captured by Davenport's rhetoric, the enthusiasts built a second bonfire comprised of petticoats, silk, gowns, short cloaks, cambick caps, red-heeled shoes, fans, necklaces, and Davenport's breeches.¹⁴

Although a moderate convinced them not to burn the pile, the threat of the fire illustrated the extent of Davenport's radicalism, a radicalism which characterized the stimulating effects of the Great Awakening on the unconverted. The bizarre events instigated by James Davenport shocked "Old Lights" and established clergy, disrupting the conservative order of the Congregational Church and the conventional system of Puritan values.

Itinerant preachers succeeded in converting hundreds of unregenerate Puritans and increasing church membership throughout the colony. The Great Awakening witnessed a revival of outward conversions which occurred in three stages: the recognition of sin accompanied by fear, distress, or anxiety, a further dependence upon God's mercy, and, finally, a relief from distress characterized by euphoric emotion.¹⁵ On July 8, 1741, Jonathan Edwards of Northampton, Massachusetts illustrated the second stage of conversion in his famous sermon delivered in Enfield, Connecticut, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in which he equated mankind with a spider held over a fire. Born into a family of Puritan ministers, Jonathan Edwards rejected the ideas of both his father and his grandfather, Solomon Stoddard. At age five, he read Latin and Greek, engaged in philosophical discussions, and read the theories of John Locke and John Calvin. In 1734 Edwards turned to Locke's theories that sensation was directly connected to learning and that words could be linked to sensory images. One of the first proponents of the Awakening, he employed vivid, passionate language to arouse compassion among his congregants and spread the revival message throughout the Connecticut Valley. To a shrieking, groaning congregation in Enfield, Edwards declared that "...there is no other reason to be given, why you have not dropped into hell since you arose in the morning, but that God's hand has held you up."¹⁶ Davenport, too, elevated emotions and inspired a dramatic number of conversions within the congregations of Connecticut. On July 23, 1741, one thousand listeners travelled to Groton to hear him preach, and the following day one hundred people from the town of Stonington claimed to have experienced an outward conversion.¹⁷ Moreover, in the outburst of enthusiasm in March of 1741 that followed the seven sermons

of Gilbert Tennent, a prominent evangelist from New Jersey, eighty-one people joined the Congregational Church of New London. The son of a Presbyterian minister, Tennent preached on the importance of a conversion experience, delivered sermons with powerful emotion, and inspired several important itinerant evangelists, including George Whitefield. Tennent travelled to Connecticut in 1741 because the conservative Philadelphia synod thwarted the spread of the Awakening in New Jersey.¹⁸ The itinerants therefore, stimulated emotional outpourings which ultimately led to an unprecedented number of conversions and a dramatic rise in church membership.

These New Light preachers heightened the Puritans' awareness of the depravity of human nature and inspired conversion experiences among Puritans throughout the colony. The events at the church in Lyme, Connecticut in 1735 illustrate the awakened sense of danger and concern for salvation among the unregenerate. The steep climb in church membership began in 1732, when fifty-two people joined the church within ten months. Although he had heard about the revival in Massachusetts, Reverend Jonathan Parsons did not believe or understand the Awakening until on March 29, 1735 he observed that "...a deep and general Concern upon the minds of the Assembly discovered itself at that Time in plentiful Weeping, Signs and Sobs."¹⁹ Yielding to the supplications of the congregation, Parsons began writing three sermons per week and preaching from old lectures. Sick of "vain Mirth and foolish Amusements" by April 1735, the inhabitants of Lyme, Connecticut formed religious societies within the existing church, studied the *Bible*, and conversed about religion. In lieu of the traditional feasting, dancing, music, and games of Election Day, May 14 (1735), the Congregationalists requested a lecture.²⁰ Parson's audience reacted with deep anguish, lamentations, and outcries: women were thrown into hysterics and several stout men fell "as though a cannon had been discharged, and a ball made its way through their hearts."²¹ After both George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent preached at the church in Lyme, the congregation continued to grow through the 1740s. Between June 1741

and February 1742 there were 150 conversions, primarily among the youth; however, three or four people were fifty-year-olds, two were nearly seventy, and one convert was ninety-three.²² Thus the Great Awakening touched the congregation at Lyme, terrifying some and comforting others through itinerant evangelizing and increased devotion to the church.

Despite the success of the New Light clergy and laymen, the radicalism and emotional excesses of the Awakening alienated conservatives, steady Christians, and settled ministers and split the colony into three factions soon after Whitefield's first visit in 1740. The "Old Lights," predominantly in New Haven County, opposed the Awakening and the reactions it produced while the "New Lights," located primarily in the eastern half of the colony, favored its stimulating effects on the churches. As the emotional excesses of the Awakening became more pronounced, however, the New Light faction split into two groups, the moderates and the radicals. Reverend Ebenezer Wight of Stamford declared to the Fairfield West Association that his church "had for a considerable time been sadly broken and divided."²³ The Old Lights sought rationalism in theology and substituted morality for religion. Solomon Stoddard, for example, preached that anyone with respectable morals who performed charitable tasks within the community could be baptized into the church. Although moderate New Lights saw a need for the revival but opposed its excessiveness, radical New Lights favored all aspects of the revival and went so far as to establish thirty or more separate churches in southeastern Connecticut.²⁴ The movement divided not only the laymen, but also the clergy of the Congregational Churches in the 1740s. Of the four hundred ministers in New England, 130 supported the revival and viewed conversion as necessary, and thirty of these ministers were considered violent by the Old Lights. When the conflict peaked in 1743, the Old Lights claimed that there had been no revival. The New Light clergy, on the other hand, supported the veracity of the Awakening and the effusion of the Holy Spirit, but cautioned radicals against enthusiasm and Arminianism, belief in justification through works.²⁵ The inherent

radicalism of the Great Awakening, therefore, divided both the congregations and the established clergy into two distinct factions.

The antirevivalists who viewed the movement as insincere found the errors of the Awakening to be many: enthusiasm, justification by faith, itinerant evangelizing, lay exhortations, ordinations, separation from the established churches, judgment of the unconverted, and emotional extravagance. Old Lights denounced enthusiasm, and the emphasis on emotional experiences, arguing that man was an innately rational being. They rejected the revivalist notion of salvation through faith and an understanding of “spiritual knowledge,” a knowledge which comes from self-examination and what Jonathan Edwards called a “sense of the heart.” Antirevivalists believed in justification through works and said that men could attain salvation through “time, exercise, observation, instruction” and the development of their talents. Although they de-emphasized the role of predestination and justification through faith, the Old Lights did not adhere to Arminianism, a sect based on justification through works which eventually gave rise to deism and rationalism. Old Lights continued to believe in the inherent depravity of human nature and the need for conversion by the Holy Spirit as a sign of salvation. They concluded, furthermore, that itinerant evangelizing, lay exhortations, ordinations of enthusiasts, and the creation of separate churches, were subversive to church order. Primarily conservative church members and established clergy, the antirevivalists felt threatened by the increase in lay participation and the competing churches. Accusations against the unconverted ministry further enraged both the accused and their loyal congregants, who argued that revivalists were discrediting the ideal of a “more perfect union” of God’s people in the colonies. The ordinations of new ministers challenged the roles of established clergy, many of whom feared they would lose their congregation to the younger, enthusiastic New Lights. Most importantly, however, the antirevivalists decried emotional extravagances and viewed conversion experiences as an abuse of human nature. Influenced by Enlightenment Rationalism, critics of the revival argued for a rational interpretation of the *Bible*.²⁶ One of the underlying issues

of the Awakening was whether or not conversions were indeed a manifestation of the Holy Spirit upon God's chosen people or whether the emotional outbursts were merely expressions of deep human sentiment. Because they did not believe in the veracity of the revival or the conversion experiences, Old Lights disparaged New Light activity in order to maintain authority and preserve order within the established church communities.

Because the Congregational Church dominated all aspects of colonial life during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the formation of separate churches posed a tremendous threat to the established order of the colony. Ministers were the leaders of the community, usually serving for life. The average tenure of the New London County ministers, for example, was 43.4 years, and seventy-four percent of these ministers served for the duration of their lives, dying in office. The meeting house was both the church and the political center of the town, the location for society meetings. Regardless of whether or not they attended the Congregational Church, colonists paid mandatory property taxes to the Congregational Church to fund both the minister's salary and the construction of the meetinghouse. Until the Great Awakening sparked divisions within the churches, the Congregational Church of Connecticut monopolized the religious life of the colonists.²⁷ When New Lights began challenging the traditional establishment, however, separate churches destroyed the harmony of the religious order of Connecticut and stimulated religious intolerance.

Separatists, those who wanted to establish a pure communion comprised solely of converts of the revival, emerged from the New Lights faction and established churches throughout the colony. In Windham County, separatists Elisha and Solomon Paine, who were influenced by the revival in 1721, aspired to establish a school for lay exhorters during the climax of the Awakening in 1740-1741. By 1745, however, Elisha Paine's enthusiasm offended both Old Lights and New Lights, and the ministers of Windham County wrote a letter criticizing Paine's life and the excesses of the movement. Subsequently, Paine was sentenced to

prison for his extravagances, and his vision of a separate, pure church and school was never realized.²⁸ The attempts to create a separate church in New Haven were more successful, however. Inspired by Davenport's attack on pastor Joseph Noyes in 1741, several people issued fourteen articles of complaint and prompted a meeting of the consociation on January 25, 1742. The County Court granted the dissenters, sixty persons led by James Pierpont, Jr., permission to establish a separate church, which became known to Old Lights as the "Tolerated Church" of White Haven.²⁹ Finally, one of the earliest and most significant separations occurred in New London after the preaching of Gilbert Tennent and James Davenport in 1741. On November 29, 1741, five prominent members of the established church, John Curtis, John Hempstead, Peter Harris, and Christopher and John Christophers, absented themselves from church and began meeting in the home of John Curtis. One hundred and fifteen individuals of diverse geographic and occupational backgrounds eventually formed the New London Separate Church. The separatists, however, were notably younger than the congregationalists; the average age of the male separatist was 25.3 as compared to 45.3, and, similarly, the average age of the female separatist was 29.8 as compared to 41.8.³⁰ Most of the separatists, moreover, were of a lower social and economic standing than the established church members, and most had no strong connections to the Congregational Church. Previously rejected by the Old Light ministerial association, Timothy Allen formed the nucleus for the Separatist Church by establishing the Shepherd's Tent, an organization which prepared students for itinerant careers and rejected traditional colleges. In May, 1742, however, when the Connecticut Assembly outlawed itinerancy, Allen was sentenced to prison, and the New Lights of New London became isolated from the established community.³¹ Although the Separatist Churches enjoyed only limited success as a result of government persecution, they underscored the divisions inspired by the Great Awakening and the radicalism of the New Light faction.

In addition to the divisions caused by the establishment of separate churches, the emotional extravagance of the itinerants

ultimately led to increased opposition to the revival. The tactics of James Davenport, for example, alienated not only members of the established church but also his friends and colleagues. Although lower classes continued to believe in him and God's salvation, Davenport's fanaticism heightened class conflict and disrupted congregations throughout Massachusetts and Connecticut. In his rebellion against the ministry, Davenport attacked conventional education and even denounced reading the *Bible*. Therefore, on July 20, 1742, the grand jury of Suffolk County indicted him for committing heresy and serving as an instrument of Satan and then exiled him from Massachusetts on the grounds of insanity.³² Davenport returned to Connecticut where he continued to preach until the crisis which occurred at Christopher's Wharf, New London on March 6, 1743, the infamous bonfire. This incident furthered the decline of the separatist movement and embarrassed New Lights, who claimed that anarchy did not have to result from the revival. Influenced by Reverend Eleazar Wheelock, Davenport ultimately recanted his principles and admitted to his emotional enthusiasm.³³ Other itinerants such as George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent also contributed to a rising opposition and the decline of the New Light influence. Whitefield charged that ministers had "in a great measure lost the old spirit of preaching" and claimed that universities were places of darkness. In these accusations and other radical teachings, Whitefield alienated the upper classes and the ministers of established congregations. Similarly, Gilbert Tennent opposed learned ministers and thus insulted and threatened the tradition of an educated ministry.³⁴ In denouncing conventional education and the established ministry, the itinerants not only inspired divisions between Old Lights and New Lights, but they also increased conflicts between social classes. The Awakening, moreover, became a struggle of power between the established clergy and the itinerants, who ultimately disrupted unity within the Congregational Churches of Connecticut. The conflicts and divisions which emerged from the radicalism and excesses of the Great Awakening led to its inevitable decline in the early 1740s.

To preserve their role as leaders of the church and to reestablish organization and unity within the congregation, several ministers began attacking New Light radicals. The Great Awakening challenged the tradition of deference within the colony of Connecticut. The attacks on the prominent members of society and the rise of the lower classes in challenging the hierarchical order weakened the social order of the colony and promoted both social mobility and democracy. In the winter of 1742-1743, as people were questioning the verity of the Awakening, Reverend Charles Chauncy attacked the extravagances of the revival. A liberal from Boston and a former advocate of the Great Awakening, Chauncy wrote *The Late Religious Commotions in New England* (March 1743) in which he denounced the excesses of the revival as sacrilegious. Later that year, in *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New England*, Chauncy stated that true religion was not “shriekings and screamings, convulsion-like tremblings and agitations, strugglings and tumbings.” True joy, Chauncy claimed, came instead from sober and obedient Christian living.³⁵ Reflecting on the enthusiasm in New England, Chauncy observed that “the plain Truth is, an enlightened Mind, not raised Affections, ought always to be the Guide of those who call themselves Men.”³⁶ Moreover, the Associated Ministers of the County of Windham addressed the errors of the revival in a letter written to the people of several societies in Windham in 1745. Religious revivals, they claimed, were works of God manifested in signs of the Holy Ghost, signs such as frights, terrors, recognition of sin, joy, and comfort. They wrote, however, that many people had been deceived by these outward experiences, becoming instruments of Satan. In the letter, the ministers denounced five principal beliefs to which New Lights adhered, and they stated that it was not the will of God to separate the converted from the unconverted. They denied the opinion that saints knew one another and could recognize “true ministers” by inward feelings. In an effort to protect their own role within the community, the ministers denounced the beliefs that one need only to be a Christian to preach the Gospel and that there was a greater presence of God at meetings led by lay-preachers. Finally, the ministers said that God

had not disowned the ministry and their churches or their ordinances in the years of the Great Awakening.³⁷ Chauncy and the ministers of Windham articulated the opinion of ministers throughout the colony, and the success of his work and that of others helped to further the weakening of the revivalist movement.

As the radicals encountered opposition from Old Lights, New Lights, and the established ministry, the colonial government began to regulate New Light activity and persecute dissenters. In 1743 the Connecticut Assembly revoked the Toleration Acts of 1708 and 1727, which had increased the privileges of dissenters and granted New Lights the rights to worship as they pleased. The Assembly further prohibited formation of new churches without express approval from the Connecticut legislature and thus thwarted establishment of Separatist churches within the colony.³⁸ In "An Act for Regulating Abuses and correcting Disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs," the government claimed that itinerant preaching had caused divisions which destroyed the ecclesiastical constitution established by the laws of the colony and prevented the growth of piety. This piece of legislation prohibited itinerant evangelizing, lay preaching, and the licensing of ministers without permission from the Saybrook Platform. It also stated that ministers who preached outside of their own congregation could not collect a salary and that any foreigner who preached the Gospel would be exiled from the colony.³⁹ This Act and the revocation of the Tolerance Act led to excommunications from the church, arrests, and the imprisonment of church members for attending Separatist Churches or failing to pay taxes to the established churches. Several revivalists were expelled from Yale for participating in New Light activities and still others were removed from official positions.⁴⁰ Clearly, the restrictions against New Light activity, especially the elimination of itinerant evangelizing, an influential aspect of the movement, and the persecutions of dissenters helped to suppress the Great Awakening less than ten years after it had begun.

Although the Great Awakening only lasted from 1735-1745, it not only increased church membership but also stimu-

lated education and promoted a separation of church and state. As itinerants inspired New Lights to study the *Bible*, converts focused increasingly on education in lieu of games, music, and other forms of entertainment. The Great Awakening influenced the founding of prestigious universities, including Princeton, Dartmouth, Brown, Rutgers, Washington and Lee, and Hampden-Sydney.⁴¹ Because tolerance, one of the results of the Awakening, was associated with atheism, the Standing Order ended the Holy Commonwealth, or church-state.⁴² Thus, the Great Awakening affected not only affairs within the church, but it also transformed the colonial government and had a profound impact on secondary education.

The Great Awakening, furthermore, effected significant social leveling and led to increased religious tolerance within the colony of Connecticut. The Awakening underscored the inherent depravity of the human soul, teaching that all were sinners in the eyes of God, regardless of class. Common emotional experiences united the rich and the poor under a common self-consciousness, and lay participation increased dramatically.⁴³ James Davenport claimed that the right to speak out was a gift from the Holy Spirit, and a new, informal language of worship emerged as the congregation gained a voice in religious affairs. Because the revivalists taught that joy and salvation were available to all laymen, regardless of class, there was an infusion of democracy into the churches which ultimately led to an increase in democracy and social mobility within the community.⁴⁴ Moreover, the divisions inspired by the Great Awakening and the subsequent decline of the Congregational monopoly, presented other denominations with the opportunity to establish new churches. Ironically, the Great Awakening promoted religious tolerance as the Congregational Church split into Old Light and New Light factions and new denominations, such as the Baptist Church, attracted new members. The Awakening also established voluntarism, asserting that religious affiliation was not an obligation but a right that men and women could freely exploit. Ultimately, the persecuting acts such as itinerant regulation and the Saybrook Platform were eliminated from revised government legislation. With the challenges to the

social order and the monopoly of the Congregational Church, new Tolerance Acts were passed in 1777 and 1784.⁴⁵ The consequences of the Great Awakening, therefore, were not limited to the religious life of the colony, but rather influenced the lives of colonists throughout Connecticut.

The first Great Awakening in Connecticut, which occurred nearly two hundred and fifty years ago, dramatically affected the lives of the colonists and the religious life in Connecticut. A reaction to a laxity in morals within the church, the Great Awakening spread through the words of itinerant evangelists and stimulated theatrical conversions and a powerful commitment to the church. Although the movement ultimately subsided as excesses alienated established members of the church, its repercussions extended beyond colonial borders and the year 1745. All religions depend on revivals to awaken piety and perpetuate a steady, devout populace. The Great Awakening of 1735, though all-encompassing and dramatic, was one in a number of recorded revivals throughout church history. In the western and southern frontiers, Americans experienced the Second Great Awakening from 1800-1840, a revival which also emphasized emotion as opposed to reason, and stressed salvation as opposed to predestination.⁴⁶ Even today, Billy Graham's "Youth for Christ Crusade" and his evangelistic campaigns throughout the United States echo the religious movements which occurred more than two centuries ago. Religious history is not a linear progression of events, but a circle of recurring incidents, a cycle of peace and disorder, of silence and awakening. A common core of beliefs, beliefs in democracy, manifest destiny, or salvation, form the foundation for a dynamic American society. According to religious historian William G. McLoughlin, awakenings and ideological crises redefine this core of beliefs, enabling Christians to emerge as revitalized, confident citizens. Each new manifestation of the Holy Spirit empowers the rising generations to understand the nature of redemption.⁴⁷ The Great Awakening not only influenced the lives of those converted, but also affects the lives of Americans today.

¹ Mary Beth Norton, A People and a Nation (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1990) pp. 76-79, 94-98

² Patricia J. Tracy, Jonathan Edwards, Pastor (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979) p. 22

³ C.C. Goen, Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962) pp. 3-5

⁴ M.H. Mitchell, The Great Awakening and Other Religious Revivals in Connecticut (New Haven: published for the Tercentenary Commission of Connecticut by the Yale University Press, 1934) p. 2

⁵ Alan Heimert, The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1972) p. xxxi

⁶ Goen, p. 2

⁷ Invitation to George Whitefield from the Eastern Conso- ciation of Fairfield County, October 7, 1740 as quoted in Richard L. Bushman, The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740-1745 (Williamsburg: Kingsport Press, 1969) pp. 23-24

⁸ George Whitefield's Journals (Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1960) pp. 480-481

⁹ William Gaylord, letter to Eleazar Wheelock, 24 Novem- ber 1740 as quoted in Bushman, pp. 39-40

¹⁰ Edwin Scott Gaustad, The Great Awakening in New England (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1957) p. 45

¹¹ Diary of Nathaniel Cole, 23 October 1740 as quoted in Heimert, p. 44

¹² James Davenport, as quoted in Monroe Stearns, The Great Awakening, 1720-1760 (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1970) p. 44

¹³ Harry S. Stout and Peter Onuf, "James Davenport and the Great Awakening in New London," Journal of American History 71 (1983) p. 566

¹⁴ David S. Lovejoy, Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1969) p. 68

¹⁵ Goen, p. 12

¹⁶ Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God" as quoted in Monroe Stearns, The Great Awakening, 1720-1760 (New York: Franklin Watts, Inc., 1970) pp. 34, 38

¹⁷ Goen, p. 20

¹⁸ Stearns, p. 10

¹⁹ Jonathan Parsons as quoted in Heimert, p. 190

- ²⁰ Jonathan Parson's Journal, April 1735, as quoted in Heimert, p. 196
- ²¹ Jonathan Parson's Journal, July 1741, as quoted in Stearns, p. 38
- ²² Joseph Tracy, The Great Awakening (New York: Arno Press, 1969) p. 145
- ²³ Reverend Ebenezer Wight as quoted in Estelle S. Feinstein, Stamford from Puritan to Patriot (Stamford: Stamford Bicentennial Corporation, 1976) p. 155
- ²⁴ Mitchell, p. 15
- ²⁵ Goen, p. 31
- ²⁶ Alan Heimert and Perry Miller, "The Great Awakening: Jonathan Edwards," Intellectual History in America: Contemporary Essays on Puritanism, the Enlightenment, and Romanticism ed. Cushing Strout (New York: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1968) pp. 37-39, 45
- ²⁷ Bruce C. Daniels, The Connecticut Town: Growth and Development: 1635-1790 (Middletown: Wesleyan University Press, 1979) pp. 111-115
- ²⁸ Heimert, pp. 399, 410
- ²⁹ Goen, p. 86
- ³⁰ Stout and Onuf, p. 562
- ³¹ Goen, pp. 570-572
- ³² Stearns, p. 44
- ³³ Stout and Onuf, pp. 556-578
- ³⁴ Stearns, p. 43
- ³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 46
- ³⁶ Heimert and Miller, p. 38
- ³⁷ The Associated Ministers of the County of Windham, letter to the People of Several Societies of Windham, 1745, as quoted in Heimert, pp. 400-406
- ³⁸ Daniels, p. 101
- ³⁹ "An Act for Regulating Abuses and correcting Disorders in Ecclesiastical Affairs" published by Charles J. Hoadly, ed., The Public Records of the Colony of Connecticut, VIII (Hartford, 1874) pp. 454-457, and reprinted in Bushman, p. 58
- ⁴⁰ Mitchell, p. 17
- ⁴¹ Stearns, p. 55
- ⁴² Mitchell, p. 20
- ⁴³ Goen, p. 28
- ⁴⁴ Stout and Onuf, p. 570
- ⁴⁵ Mitchell, p. 18

⁴⁶ Norton, p. 206

⁴⁷ William G. McLoughlin, Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1978) pp. xii-xv

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