

CONTESTING THE TERMS OF SALVATION: THE MAKING OF AMERICAN CULTURE IN A TIME OF REVOLUTION*

Michael H. Hogan[†]

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* An earlier version of this paper was written under a grant from The Cole Foundation for the Renewal of the Culture. The author acknowledges this support with gratitude. I also acknowledge the assistance of Chelsea Odhner for her great help in the preparation of the manuscript.

[†]Address: mhhogan60@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

This essay is a study of the history of 18th century American religion from a New Church Perspective. The particular focus is the change in its doctrine of salvation (Soteriology) as the century progressed. There have been many, many studies of eighteenth century America and also quite a few on colonial American religion. However, I am unaware of any which take as its central problem the question of doctrinal change during this period. They have focused instead on the traditional areas of historical analysis, i.e., social structure, economic changes, struggles for political power and ideological conflicts. While these are vital areas of concern they are not my primary interest here. My primary purpose in this essay is to bring to the fore the theological changes occurring in Reformed Protestantism in America in the context of the Last Judgment (1757) and the founding of the New Church (1770). I believe these changes are essential in understanding those times, but also that they are pivotal in explaining the secular changes simultaneously occurring. There seems to be good reason to believe that in an intensely religious age, profound changes in the perceived conditions of eternal salvation would have a fundamental impact on human action. They would have a dynamic impact on all areas of symbolic life.

I have a secondary purpose in this essay as well. I intend it as an example of New Church historiography. My aim is to apply a New Church conception of historical development at the spiritual level to the natural activities of human beings in order to see if that enhances, deepens our understanding of those events. This essay can therefore be seen as a continuation of the work done in the recently published *The World Transformed: Swedenborg and the Last Judgment* (2011) in which New Church scholars applied a Swedenborgian framework to enhance understanding of their own areas of expertise. While reviewing that volume would be extremely worthwhile, it is not essential for reading this current essay. The core of the New Church perspective is provided here and will be presented throughout as we examine the concrete history of the relevant events. The method employed here involves substantial exposure to the original presentations and sermons of the participants. It is important to

understand their arguments in their own words. These issues were of vital importance to them and they worked very hard to be understood.

I wish to add a brief note on the chronology of this essay. Historical epochs or eras are always rough approximations of periods which historians use to orient themselves to the flux of real events. They contain similar and often related occurrences clustering over a certain time frame. American history is no different. The conventional terms for our time period are the First Great Awakening (1730s–1800) and the Second Great Awakening (1800s to the Civil War). In general I have no problem with these. But since I was focused on doctrinal criteria I have adopted a slightly modified scheme to order events. I have added a new first period, the Last Calvinist Revival and have dated it from 1734 (Edwards' Northampton experiences) to 1750 (Edwards' removal from his pastorate). In doing this, I am following my own analytical conclusions but also the suggestion of historian Jon Butler in "Enthusiasm Described and Decried," *Journal of American History*, 69, no. 2, September 1982. The second period, the First Great Awakening, I have dated from the 1740s until 1784. It begins with the civic and jurisdictional disruptions created by the emergence of evangelicalism in the Last Calvinist Revival. These disputes caused the greatest social upheaval of any movement in the colonies prior to the revolution. Historians Patricia Bonomi, Nathan Hatch, and the later Gordon Wood have focused on these events. This intense ferment continued through the doctrinal and political challenges of the 1760s and 1770s. This period ends with the return of the Methodists and the arrival of James Glen and the Writings in 1784. This periodization has much to recommend it as I hope my paper demonstrates. The third period, the Second Great Awakening (late 1780s to the Civil War) which witnessed the explosive growth of Free Will religions, is not treated here but I hope the groundwork has been laid for its analysis at a later time.

I

The Current State of Play in Historical Analysis and a contrasting New Church Framework for interpreting History after the Last Judgment

In the modern world all theories of historical change are constructed on a materialist model. They assume that there are no mystical or spiritual

variables in play in discussing historical events. Even in those cases where the actors themselves believe they are acting from religious and/or moral motives the assumption is that these motives are generated by causes that can be explained on the natural level. The two major traditions of historical analysis, the Weberian and the Materialist share this perspective although they weight the various factors differently. Materialist theory, here broadly conceived, emphasizes economic and political conflict as the “engine of history.” It views actors as primarily promoting their material interests in relation to other social groups. The former doctrines of revolutionary social change are no longer dominant in this approach, but this perspective sees the promotion of economic interests as the driver of cultural, social, and political action. The Weberian (Max Weber, 1856–1920) perspective focuses instead on ideological and ideational action. It does not assume that there is a causal relationship between the economic location of actors and the modes of self-understanding which they possess. It posits that unless we “*verstehen*” (sympathetically understand) the actual conceptual apparatus of the actor we will never accurately explain or predict human behavior.

Note that the essential difference between these perspectives derives from their different assessment of the relationship between physical interests and ideational self awareness. The Materialist perspective tends to see a close fit between these modes of experience. The Weberian perspective sees a looser fit between them with a greater analytical weight given to cultural, affectional, and psychological factors. These latter factors are not seen as functions of material interests, narrowly defined, but are somewhat independent of them. In fact, in certain historical instances they may even function against the material interests of the actor.

It should be clear at this point, however, that neither of these models has room for any causes outside the natural world of experience. There is no room for magic or mystery. There is only a dispute over the causal status of interests and ideas as they operate in the modern world. The notion of spiritual causation of historical processes is ruled out of bounds from the start. Max Weber summarized this point with great clarity. He stated that “intellectualization” means the knowledge or belief that if one wished, one could learn the natural basis of causality at any time;

That one can, in principle, master all things by calculation. This means that the world is disenchanting. One need no longer have recourse to magical means in order to master or implore the spirits, as did the savage, for whom such mysterious powers existed. Technical means and calculations perform the service. This above all is what intellectualization means. (Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and Spirit of Capitalism*, 139)

This is the state of play in the social sciences today. There are however some quasi-dissenting voices. They are quasi-dissenting because while expressing doubt about the adequacy of the “materialist neo-Darwinian conception of nature” they do not advance a theory that goes beyond its boundaries. The most cogent presentation of these doubts is provided by Thomas Nagel in his recent book *Mind and Cosmos* (2012). Nagel continues a tradition of modern epistemology, which includes Michael Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge* (1962), Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (1989), and David Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind* (1996). This school of thought holds that the existence of subjective consciousness (what I call the “qualia problem”) is not reducible, given the present state of science, to the bio-physical world. Something else is going on in that world to produce and sustain it. The problem has been brilliantly posed by Nagel:

As with the placement of consciousness and cognition in the natural order, the problem of value and the natural order has both a constitutive and historical aspect. The constitutive question is about nature: What kind of beings are we, if realism is true and we do indeed recognize and respond to values and practical reasons that are not just the products of our own responses? The historical question is about our origins. What must the universe and the evolutionary process be like to have generated such beings? Both these questions seem to require some alternative to materialist naturalism and its Darwinian application in biology, but what are the possibilities? (*Mind and Cosmos*, 112)

What are the possibilities indeed? Nagel posits his problem within the Realist framework, i.e. the Spiritual, broadly speaking, cannot be sought as an explanation of objects in the natural world. Nagel, however, is

prepared to entertain a teleological hypothesis which pushes at the boundaries of Realist assumptions.

The teleological hypothesis is that things may be determined not merely by value-free chemistry and physics, but also by something else, namely *a cosmic predisposition* to the formation of life, consciousness, and the value that is inseparable from them.

In the present intellectual climate such a possibility is unlikely to be taken seriously, but I would repeat my earlier observation that no viable account, even a purely speculative one, seems to be available, of how [the current biological environment] could have arisen by chemical evolution alone from a dead environment. (Ibid, 123, emphasis added)

The “present intellectual environment” is as Nagel suggests. If “teleological hypotheses” will not be taken seriously then what is the fate of an attempt to introduce frankly spiritual factors into the explanatory process? The question is, of course, rhetorical. But that is precisely what Swedenborg proposes to do.

In the following portions of this section I will present Swedenborg’s philosophy of history. It is a specific attempt to provide an explanation of the powerful spiritual forces that have driven human history since the Last Judgment in 1757. In the subsequent sections of this paper I will present an historical analysis of theological change in 18th century American religion based on Swedenborg’s model.

Swedenborg provides a complex, yet internally consistent model of creation. It sees the material universe as a creation of God that was endowed, at the very beginning, with a spiritual purpose. This purpose is the “creation of an angelic heaven from the human race” (*True Christianity* 66). This end was present in the Cosmos before any self-conscious life existed, and, it is present now in the human life-world as a guide and aid to human salvation. It therefore claims to be a spiritual teleological theory that explains all of the dimensions of the natural world.

This claim requires a modern restatement. The development and explicit presentation of this New Church teleology is an important challenge for the Swedenborgian intellectual community. There are many intriguing questions to be addressed. For example, does Swedenborg’s

concept of “conatus” share any similarities with Nagel’s notion of teleology? If it does, what are they? It would require linkages between the scientific, theological, and philosophical portions of this community to frame and advance these issues. Perhaps the Swedenborg Scientific Association is the appropriate organization to undertake this project. This work could provide an essential framework for human self-understanding.

One last comment on this topic. Thomas Nagel deserves high praise for his courage and intelligence. He will certainly be subjected to withering attack. He has crossed a red line in the materialist worldview by even suggesting a telos toward consciousness in the creation of nature. I hope he receives the support he needs to sustain his position. At this point, I return my attention to the focus of the current essay.

A presentation of the entire body of Swedenborg’s work is well beyond the scope of this paper. I have listed a number of his texts that describe his vision in full detail.¹ I mention them here only to indicate that the portions we will describe are part of a far greater whole whose aim is an explanation of the Creation itself. That portion of Swedenborg’s project dealing with the creation of matter and its guided evolution toward conscious forms will not be discussed here. Instead, we will focus on the unfolding of human history.

For Swedenborg, history is guided by the Lord’s desire to grant salvation to as many humans as possible. He does this out of love and his desire to share the happiness of the eternal Divine life with mankind. For this reason God makes accommodations for man throughout history. These accommodations have changed successively as the state of mankind has changed. New forms of spiritual order have been generated so that humans can *freely* choose to be saved according to terms that they truly understand. These forms of spiritual order, which Swedenborg calls Churches, have succeeded one another since the creation of mankind from the dust of the earth. There have been five Churches in human history. Each has been created after the previous one had been rendered ineffective by the corruption of some aspect of human activity or thought. These corruptions were profound and they prevented the Church from providing the kind of support that people on earth required to achieve salvation. When this critical state has been reached the Lord ends (consummates) that Church and founds another so that the changed state of humanity can

be accommodated. There have been five Churches in the history of mankind and therefore there have been three previous consummations. The creation of mankind was, of course, *de novo*.

The listing of these churches is as follows: 1) The Most Ancient Church or the Adamic Church which existed from the human beginning until its end by the Flood (in the spiritual world); 2) the Ancient Church succeeded it and coincides roughly with the millennia prior to the Jewish Church; 3) the Jewish Church then continued from the time of Abraham, Moses, and the Prophets until the time of Christ; 4) the Christian Church which endured from Christ's lifetime until the year 1757 when its doctrinal and moral conceptions forced the Lord to end it; and 5) the New Church, the last of the Churches which was created to accommodate to the modern form of mankind. This Church will not end. Its motto is, "Now it is permitted to enter intellectually into the mysteries of faith" (*True Christianity* 508).

One of the principle themes of Swedenborg's model is human freedom, or what he calls "freedom in spiritual things." This is a fundamental constituent of human life. It is a gift from God that is never taken away. It is the source of human rationality and the ability to make spiritual choices that have a direct bearing on eternal life. In effect, the Lord has placed the choice of heaven or hell in the hands of free human beings. However, since the whole of the natural world is biased against the choice of heaven, the Lord has designed a process which safeguards human freedom while providing the Divine means to overcome that world. This process is called Equilibrium. The Lord protects the spirit of man so that it is open to influences both from heaven and hell. These realms are permitted mediated contact with humans so that there is a balance of spiritual forces and freedom is preserved. It is a law of Divine Providence that salvation must be freely chosen and worked for by man. If the Lord removed his support, humans would tend to choose to serve themselves and the world rather than the Lord and the neighbor. Thus they would be on the road to hell. On the other hand, if in our day the Lord produced "signs and wonders" which would over awe mankind into belief, this would not be a free choice either. Spiritual equilibrium sustains spiritual freedom, which permits the truly rational choice between our alternatives. The Lord compels no one to be saved.

The eighteenth century was a desperate time for the Christian Church. This Church in its various branches had adopted beliefs and practices that interfered with the living of an internal, spiritual life. They focused primarily on the externals of faith, i.e. rituals, dogmatic disputes, worldly power, cultural prestige, and providing moral support to the legitimacy of their surrounding institutional life. They lost sight of their mission to provide the spiritual means to live a holy life for their members. The result of this tragic process was the entrance into the spiritual world after death, of millions of spirits whose influence was negative rather than positive. The character of the Christian Church at this period did not produce spirits deeply committed to the life of charity or love to the Lord. Swedenborg describes this process in the following terms:

So that we can be in freedom for the sake of our reformation, we are united in spirit with heaven and with hell. With each of us there are spirits from hell and angels from heaven. By means of the spirits from hell we encounter our evil, and by means of angels from heaven we encounter the good we have from the Lord. As a result, we are in a spiritual equilibrium—that is, in freedom. We need to be aware that our union with heaven and with hell is not directly with them but is mediated by spirits who are in the world of spirits. These spirits are with us, more from hell itself or from heaven itself. We are united to hell through evil spirits in the world of spirits, and with heaven through the good spirits there. Because of this arrangement, the world of spirits is halfway between heaven and hell and is at the point of balance. We can see from this where we get our freedom. (*Heaven and Hell* 599–600)

We can also see where a declining Church can create an imbalance in the spiritual world by reducing the moral quality of the spirits there. In addition, we can see how this state impacts the equilibrium necessary for the freedom of those still living on earth. Swedenborg discusses this below, using the metaphor of light and darkness. It is useful to see this not simply in terms of illumination but also in terms of energy.

Moreover, every church in the beginning is spiritual, for it begins from charity, but in the course of time it turns aside from charity to faith, and

then from being an internal church it becomes an external one, and when it becomes external its end is, since it then places everything in knowledge, and little or nothing in life. Thus also as far as man from being internal becomes external, spiritual light is darkened within him, until he no longer sees Divine truth from truth itself, that is from the light of heaven, for Divine truth is the light of heaven, but only from natural light. (*Last Judgment* 38)

When spirits in the world of spirits are no longer “internal,” i.e., no longer acting from pure interior motives but only acting from external ones, their positive impact is compromised. Their concerns are primarily for appearances; honor, reputation, and gain motivate them. This becomes part of their spiritual legacy to the living.

However, this is not the only, or even the major impact of a failing Church. Of even greater concern is the fact that the Lords primary contact with the human race passes through the world of spirits. This contact contains the Lords Divine love and wisdom that flows down from heaven and energizes and vivifies human actions for all mankind. This is the true source of rationality, creativity, and the desire for human freedom. Swedenborg is extremely specific about this process and its impact.

Before the last judgment was effected upon them, much of the communication between heaven and the world, thus between the Lord and the church, was intercepted. All enlightenment comes to man from the Lord through heaven, and it enters by an internal way. So long as there were congregations of such spirits between heaven and the world, or between the Lord and the church, man could not be enlightened. It was as when a sunbeam is cut off by a black interposing cloud, or as when the sun is eclipsed, and its light arrested, by the interjacent moon. Wherefore, if anything had been then revealed by the Lord, either it would not have been understood, or if received, still it would afterwards have been suffocated. Now since all these interposing congregations were dissipated by the last judgment, it is plain, that the communication between heaven and the world, or between the Lord and the church, has been restored. (*Last Judgment* 11)

Thus the Last Judgment on the Christian Church began a progression of changes, which restored spiritual freedom and ultimately the possibility of mankind's salvation, by utilizing the power within the human faculty of rationality. This was vitally important since by the mid-eighteenth century the Church passed from an internal to an external state. It passed from a life based on charity to a faith based on knowledge.

The effect of this Judgment was not restricted to the spiritual in man. Swedenborg asserts that the rational faculty is made up of several degrees, the highest of which is the spiritual. However in descending order come the intellectual and the natural that contain knowledge of the social life of man and the biophysical world. They derive their energy and analytical power from this influx into the life of the spirit. A quickening of the spiritual life reverberates through the other intellectual levels and the entire life of man is energized. Swedenborg describes the process in the following passage.

Our rational faculty is like a garden or flowerbed, like newly tilled land. Our memory is the soil, information and experiential learning are the seeds, while heavens light and warmth make them productive. There is no germination without these latter. So there is no germination in us unless heavens light, which is divine truth, and heavens warmth, which is divine love, are let in. They are the only source of rationality. Angels are profoundly grieved that scholars for the most part keep attributing everything to nature and therefore close the deeper levels of their minds so that they can see no trace of truth from the light of truth, the light of heaven. (*Heaven and Hell* 464)

Swedenborg's model thus provides several expectations for human intellectual life following a judgment. First there will be a gradual change in the doctrines which make up the Church because of the renewed freedom to analyze spiritual things. The freedom of the will in these pursuits is restored. Second, and derivatively, the entire range of cultural and scientific activities receives a new burst of energy and creativity. This multifaceted dynamic is a hallmark of this liberating judgment and should be visible across a number of seemingly discrete areas of human life.

However, while these changes can bring incredible richness to human life there are dangers in this process as well. The equilibrium of free choice has been restored but the essential spiritual choices must still be made. The natural world is the place where the human being chooses good or evil, heaven or hell. But in modern times the natural stakes have become much higher. The power of the human mind, driven by its enhanced rationality, has overtaken virtually all resistance that the natural world has to offer. This world is quickly becoming dependent on human will and intention. Swedenborg describes the situation in the following terms:

But as for the state of the church, this it is which will be dissimilar hereafter; it will be similar indeed as to the external appearance, but dissimilar as to the internal. As to the external appearance divided churches will exist as heretofore, their doctrines will be taught as heretofore; and the same religions as now exist will exist among the Gentiles. But henceforth the man of the church will be in a more free state of thinking on matters of faith, thus on the spiritual things which relate to heaven, because spiritual freedom has been restored to him. For all things in the heavens and in the hells are now reduced into order, and all thought concerning Divine things and against the Divine inflows from thence; from the heavens all thought which is in harmony with Divine things, and from the hells all which is against Divine things. (*Continuation of the Last Judgment* 73)

While all things in heaven and earth have been “reduced into order” the spiritual process of salvation continues. The evil loves of mankind continue; the urges to dominate and exploit continue. These are still encouraged and inflamed by influences from hell. The hells are constantly at war “against Divine things.” The combination of the hells’ continuing efforts to seek dominion over mankind and the vast increase in human technological capacity have created a very dangerous situation. For the first time, the existence of the natural world itself is directly implicated in the spiritual struggles of the human race. The violence and warfare of the twentieth century testify to the dangers involved. In addition to these threats there is the ongoing process of economic development that can also endanger the earths capacity to sustain human life. These challenges and

many more derived from them are also the inheritance of the Last Judgment as mankind struggles to transform its power into beneficial purposes. The increased energy available to us is not, in itself, sufficient to produce lasting human happiness or fulfill the Lords final purpose of creation.

However, God has foreseen this outcome and has provided a new revelation open to the rational understanding of man. No longer will the word of God be shrouded in mysteries and riddles. This new revelation supports the new cognitive structure of the modern age. It was designed to illuminate the spiritual state of man as he entered this world of freedom. Swedenborg addresses this in the following passage:

Hence it is, that after the last judgment has been accomplished, and not before, revelations were made for the new church. For since communication has been restored by the last judgment, man can be enlightened and reformed; that is, can understand the Divine truth of the Word, receive it when understood, and retain it when received, for the interposing obstacles are removed. (*Last Judgment 12*)

This revelation, contained in the theological works of Swedenborg (the Writings), was published in his lifetime up through 1771. These Writings are intended for the salvation of the human race in this time of the New Church. Their overall richness, while vitally important, is not the principle concern of this essay.

Instead, I will limit my focus to the major theological themes of this revelation and the New Church that it inaugurates. These themes became the guides for the cultural values which would inspire human action in the post Last Judgment age.

In reviewing Swedenborg's model of the history of the Churches, and of the Christian Church in particular, certain recurring factors stand out. The first is divine accommodation. Each Church served only as long as it aided in the salvation of mankind. When it no longer served that purpose it was terminated. These accommodations were manifestations of divine love. God really wanted as many as possible to be saved. The second factor was the Divine commitment to human free will, what Swedenborg calls "free will in spiritual things." As was indicated earlier, the entire structure

of the spiritual world was designed to provide the Equilibrium necessary to ensure human freedom. So seriously does God value freedom that it permeates all aspects of creation and supports each human being from birth to the last moment of his natural life. Swedenborg also denies the existence of Original Sin as a mortal defect on the human soul. His grounds are straightforward, “the sins of the father shall not be visited on the sons.” We inherit traits from our parents but they are not determinative of salvation. Humans have a partnership with God in Salvation. Clearly God is the dominant partner—he remains the Eternal Creator and Redeemer—but he does not impose salvation on the unwilling. He works with human beings to move through a process of repentance, reformation, and regeneration whereby people generate the conditions where the Lord can save them. Thus the Lord requires human agency in the salvation process. The essential energy for this capability is provided by the influx of divine life as a result of the Last Judgment. It is of the utmost importance in understanding Swedenborg that this connection between human intentions and divine response be understood. Salvation begins with the acknowledgement of the Lord followed by acts of repentance. It continues along its course through active human participation.

Swedenborg’s soteriology describes a proactive process. There are no strategic barriers in it. It is designed to be successfully completed by regular human beings sincerely interested in the life of heaven. There are no hidden tricks or qualitative disbarments. This process was presented to the human race in 1757 as the Christian Church was brought to its end.

The next section of the paper will describe the earthly state of a portion of the Christian Church just prior to its Judgment. Eighteenth century Christianity had long ago lost its unity. It was splintered into many pieces. The Judgment, while containing general characteristics for the Church as a whole, had specific impacts suited to the particular characteristic of a given area. The focus of this essay is the religion of the British colonies of North America in the 18th century. We will describe the religious culture and theology of this area and period. The aim is to detect some possible results of the Last Judgment at this time and to project somewhat into its future.

II

The Nature and Theology of Eighteenth Century Religion with special emphasis on its Calvinist basis

One of the greatest tragedies of modern European history has been the extensive period of religious wars that raged from the early 16th to the mid 17th centuries. During these 150 years of bitter struggle the Christian Church brutalized its cultural and spiritual inheritance. The strategic culmination of these struggles was the Thirty Years' War (1618–1648) which ravaged central Europe, particularly Germany. The devastation and loss of life in this conflict were comparable to those suffered in Europe during its two major wars of the 20th century.

When European statesmen gathered to end this carnage they wanted to remove religious strife as a major source of international conflict for the future. The treaty they devised (The Peace of Westphalia, 1648) attempted to do this by making permanent the temporary terms of the Peace of Augsburg of 1555. It assigned the control of religious conflict and regulation to the national states. The treaty encouraged the creation of national churches that would dominate the religious affairs of the particular country. These churches would control religious practice, under the authority of the secular government, permit a limited toleration of minority religions provided they upheld the civil order and refrained from interference with the religious affairs of other states. This complex system of controls, known by the general phrase, *cuius regio, eius religio*, "whose realm, his religion," generated the European state system as it entered the 18th century. On the whole, this system suppressed general European warfare up until the French Revolution and the Napoleonic Wars.

While this system was in effect, various religious establishments organized themselves in the various countries across Europe. In southern Europe and France, the Catholic Church dominated. In the north the various Protestant churches prevailed. In this paper we will focus on the Protestant state-church establishments since they had the greatest impact on 18th century American religious life.

In northern Europe the various Protestant churches took on certain aspects of the national culture. These led to differences in liturgy, language of worship and the manner of training and assigning ministers.

Despite these real differences the Protestant state churches adhered to a stated core of doctrinal belief. This core was generated in the Protestant Reformation, by John Calvin and Martin Luther, and it guided the Protestant cause during the subsequent 150 years of religious conflict. Other religious intellectuals contributed to it over the years but the contributions of Calvin and Luther remain fundamental.

There is an immense overlap between the doctrines of Calvin and Luther. This overlap was evident to Swedenborg as he grew up in the Swedish Lutheran Church. Some scholars argue that Luther was less extreme than Calvin in his doctrine of salvation. There is an element of truth in this but it would have been hardly noticeable to the average 18th century believer. Swedenborg, in *True Christianity* 464, sees sufficient commonality of doctrine between them that he combines their confessions in his analysis of Reformed Christianity. That is the approach of this paper. Thus the term Calvinism will be used to describe the core of religious doctrines prevalent in European Protestantism at this period. This practice is also supported by the fact that the national churches of the English speaking world proudly considered themselves Calvinist and imparted that doctrinal tradition to North America. It must also be kept in mind that the Dutch Republic, which gave shelter to the early Puritan refugees, maintained a stringent Calvinist establishment at this time. The Dutch continued to play a similar role of support to 18th century American churches.

What then were the sources of both people and doctrine for the colonies of North America? The principle source was from England itself. This stream was comprised mostly of Puritans and Dissenters; next were members of the Church of England. It must be emphasized that while there were major differences between these groups that they shared doctrinal essentials. The Thirty–Nine Articles of Anglicanism are heavily indebted to Calvinist influence, especially those areas concerning grace and salvation. Scots immigrants were overwhelmingly followers of the Scottish Kirk, the established Church of Scotland. This church was strongly Calvinist. Irish Protestants came primarily from Ulster and followed the doctrinal lead of the Scottish Kirk. Welsh immigrants came from overwhelmingly Calvinist traditions deriving from either Anglican or Dis-

senter traditions. But even within this condition of doctrinal uniformity there were great differences in institutional history. A recent comparison of the church going populations of the colonies versus England discovered that the percentage of Dissenters in the English population stood at about 10%, while that group represented almost 80% of the colonial church attendees (Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 2003, 27–50). This fact would have major consequences for the subsequent religious history of those two countries even though they shared many theological points in common. As a result, the structure of religious institutions in America was far more fragile than in England.

Keeping this situation in mind it is important to realize that the colonial religious establishments still sought to emulate the European model. They attempted to grant a single religion a supported status within their own borders. The Church of England was the established church in the southern colonies, i.e. Maryland, Delaware, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia. While in the North the Congregational Church (successor to the Puritans and Pilgrims) was established in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire. In New Jersey the Presbyterian Church (an offshoot of Scots Calvinists) enjoyed privileged position while a slightly subordinate position was accorded to the Dutch Reformed Church. In New York the Church of England, the Congregationalist (especially on Long Island), and the Dutch Reformed (in the Hudson Valley) vied for influence. Only in Pennsylvania and Rhode Island was this situation altered in that there was no predominant religious establishment. However, the major churches in these colonies also adhered to religious doctrines more or less in the Calvinist line.

The next, and most vitally important topic to be considered, is the theological nature of Calvinism. What did it believe about God, salvation, free will, and relations to the neighbor? Even accepting the fact that there were some differences in practice, the various colonial churches confronted their congregants with a solid and consistent doctrinal core of belief centered on Calvinism. What doctrinal context did it provide American Christians on the eve of the Last Judgment? In the following portion of this essay I will describe the structure of this system through its principle tenets and prepare the ground for the major challenges which Swedenborg's vision provided to it.

Calvinism as a doctrinal system was developed by Martin Luther and John Calvin in the early 16th century. This was a period of great turmoil in the Christian Church. These struggles led to the Protestant Reformation that fractured Western Christianity into two branches, Protestantism and Catholicism. While this process is of immense importance we can only deal with a small portion of it in this essay. Our concern is with the doctrinal conflict, and specifically with the doctrines that the Protestants championed and incorporated into their separated church structures. Luther and Calvin provided the intellectual and moral force to the Protestant movement. They articulated the doctrinal issues involved, provided a coherent scriptural foundation for them, and provided the moral force for separation from Catholicism by arguing that these positions were the real Christianity of Jesus and the Apostles. Without this latter claim, the conflict would never have reached its profound intensity. In effect both Luther and Calvin argued that the Catholic Church had interposed itself between God and the Christian people. They asserted that it had become a corrupt human institution which exploited its calling to generate power and financial gain. But more than this, it sought to take to itself the power to grant or deny eternal salvation. It did this in many ways but primarily through the use of confession and the sale of indulgences. The Protestants argued that confession had become a blatant form of extortion in which the Catholic Church withheld the forgiveness of sins pending the provision of goods and services for church use. Closely related to these activities was the practice of simony, i.e. the outright sale of church offices, bishoprics, and political positions under Vatican control. This was a favorite tactic of the Borgias to increase their wealth and power. Even more outrageous was the sale of indulgences, i.e. remission of sins in exchange for large donations for specific projects. This was a major issue at this time since the Vatican was engaged in the reconstruction of St. Peter's Basilica in Rome and was actively sending agents throughout Europe to raise the funds for this project. In fact, Martin Luther's first public act of protest was the posting of his Ninety-Five Theses on the doors of the Wittenberg Cathedral in anticipation of just such a visit from an emissary of the Pope in 1517.

The common thread running through all of these issues was the Catholic Church's claim to speak for God in matters of human salvation. This struck the Protestants as nothing less than blasphemy and they

would not tolerate it. How could a human institution, and a corrupt one at that, dare to claim this divine power? While the popular outrage over these practices was palpable, it lacked a focus. More important, it lacked a justification rooted in the legitimate Christian history of the protesters themselves. This deficiency Luther and Calvin set out to overcome. They realized that the most pure era of the Christian Church was the period when Christ ascended into heaven and the apostles set about to spread the “good news” and established the original church structures while the living memory of the Savior was still fresh in their minds. Here Luther and Calvin felt was the model of Christianity as yet uncorrupted by compromises with worldly concerns.

In pursuing these aims, they were seeking answers to two interrelated sociological problems. First they sought the original doctrine of salvation taught by the early apostles. This they believed they found in the doctrine of “salvation through faith alone in the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.” This explicitly avoided elaborate man-made structures and ceremonies. Second, they sought a specific ideology of separation from the dominant religious community of the time. For the early Christians that community was Judaism, for Calvin and Luther it was Catholicism. They noted that the early Christians came to separate themselves from the Temple observances and the Levitical laws in order to achieve a fuller sense of themselves as Christians. These two processes, salvation and separation, while they were contested in the early church, fused into a coherent approach to church formation in early Protestant thought. After much theological work, both Luther and Calvin identified the most consistent source of support for their project in the Epistles of St. Paul. The explications of Paul’s various letters, particularly to the Romans and the Ephesians form the cornerstone of traditional Protestant biblical exegesis. In drawing out the implications of these documents the doctrines of Calvinism were created.

Luther was the first to draw the outline of Reformed doctrine in his work *On the Bondage of the Will*, published in 1525. In this book he denies the humanist scholar Erasmus’ claim that humans possess free will about spiritual things. Luther argued that Adams fall incapacitated the human race from choosing the good because it was totally corrupted by sin. Thus only God, through the Holy Spirit could save mankind. He does this

without any input from humans. God chooses whom he will save and does this for his own reasons. This text provided the first modern argument for Predestination as the method by which God makes his choice. God's sovereign power is the only cause of mans salvation.

Calvin followed up on this argument and elaborated it into a fully formed doctrinal system. In the *Institutes of the Christian Religion* (originally published in 1536) he presents it. Over several editions he augmented it and in 1559 published the final statement of it. In Book Three of this edition he presents his completed doctrine of Predestination and Salvation by Grace Alone. This formulation rather than the milder Lutheran one became the prevailing religious tradition of the Dutch and English speaking worlds. It was this theology that dominated the established churches of the North American colonies of the 18th century.

What then were the major doctrinal points of Calvinism? The following summary was provided by Mary Fairchild at *Christianity.about.com*. She is an active Baptist evangelist.

- 1) *God's Sovereignty*—Gods sovereignty is unconditional, unlimited, and absolute. All things are predetermined by the good pleasure of Gods will. God foreknew because of his planning.
- 2) *Man's Depravity*—Because of the Fall man is totally depraved and dead in his sin. Man is unable to save himself and God must initiate salvation.
- 3) *Election*—Before the foundation of the world, God unconditionally chose some to be saved. Election has nothing to do with mans future response.
- 4) *Christ's Atonement*—Jesus Christ died to save only those given to him (elected) by the Father in eternity past. Since Christ did not die for everyone, but only for the elect, his atonement is wholly successful.
- 5) *Grace*—While God extends his common grace to all mankind, it is not sufficient to save anyone. Only Gods irresistible grace can draw the elect to salvation, and make a person willing to respond. This grace cannot be obstructed or resisted.
- 6) *Man's Will*—All men are totally depraved, this depravity extends to the entire person, including the will. Except for Gods irresistible grace, men are entirely incapable of responding to God on their own.

- 7) *Perseverance*—Believers will persevere in salvation because God will see to it that none will be lost. Believers are secure in the faith because God will finish the work he began.

These points have been succinctly summarized by Michael Marlowe as follows:

According to Calvinism, salvation is accomplished by the almighty power of the triune God: the Father chose a people, the Son died for them, the Holy Spirit makes Christ's death effective by bringing the elect to faith and repentance, thereby causing them to willingly obey the Gospel. The entire process (election, redemption, regeneration) is the work of God and is by Grace alone. Thus God, not man, determines who will be the recipients of the gifts of salvation. (Michael Marlowe, editor, *BibleResearcher.com*)

It is highly unlikely that many New Church people now in the 21st century are aware of the specific doctrinal points of Calvinism. This is probably also true of the majority of Americans. It is nonetheless the case that several major religious groups in America still officially hold to Calvinist doctrine. This is particularly so in the Southern Baptist and Presbyterian confessions. Many independent churches claiming a biblical foundation do as well. Be that as it may, Calvinism dominated 18th century American religion.

I wish to reemphasize these doctrinal points so that there is no mistaking their content and implications. I will base this recapitulation on the final pronouncement of the Synod of Dort (1619), which was issued to prevent any ambiguity from arising as these points were integrated into the doctrinal creeds of the various national church establishments. They are called the TULIP points after the first letter of each statement.

The Five Points of Calvinism (*The Canons of the Synod of Dort* are reproduced in full at *Fordham.edu*, the five doctrinal points are highlighted).

- T. *Total inability/depravity*—the spiritual state of man after the Fall; dead to the things of God; not free, in bondage to evil nature.

- U. *Unconditional election*—Gods choice of certain individuals before the world began is based solely on his own sovereign will.
- L. *Limited atonement*—Christ’s sacrifice saves the elect only. The rest are left to suffer in hell for their sins (Reprobation).
- I. *Irresistible Grace*—Holy Spirit issues special inward call to the elect which they cannot refuse, always results in salvation.
- P. *Perseverance of the saints*—All who are chosen by God, redeemed by Christ, and given faith by the Spirit are eternally saved.

In focusing on the soteriology of Calvinism I have been emphasizing the doctrines preached to the people as they sought salvation. The old question posed to Paul, “What must I do to be saved?” is earnestly posed in each generation by Christians. It was posed by 18th century Americans as well, and it was the responsibility of the contemporary ministry to answer it. Later in this essay we will examine some of their answers in concrete sermons and essays. At this point, before concluding this section on Calvinism, I feel it necessary to briefly summarize Calvin’s analysis of why God created the universe in the first place. There is an intimate connection between the salvation of men and the purpose of creation. By providing this summary of his theology of creation we can gain additional insight into just what that connection was.

In my view, the most succinct modern summary of Calvin’s views on creation is provided by Randall C. Zachman in a 1997 article in the *Concordia Theological Quarterly* (vol. 61; no. 4). The following section is indebted to his analysis.

Calvin used three central metaphors in describing God’s purposes in creation: the theater of Gods glory, the living image of God, and the beautiful garment of God.

“The theater of Gods glory” is the metaphor most used in the secondary Calvinist literature. A recent Reformed scholar stated this point as follows, “for Calvin nature is a mirror, a painting, and a theater of the divine glory that reveals God” (Susan Schreiner, *The Theater of His Glory*, 121, 1991). Like all artistic productions it was meant to be witnessed by an audience. This audience is mankind that is expected to glorify God in the magnificence of his creation. Nature, of course exists for the support of

mankind but its essential purpose is to stimulate the glorification of the Lord himself.

The next metaphor is nature as “the living image of God.” Here the idea is that we are created to appreciate the wonders of God and to infer aspects of his Being by contemplating his glory in nature. Since God is invisible it is only through this mirror or image that we can catch a glimpse of God’s properties. When we realize that God created the entire universe *from nothing* (ex nihilo) our admiration of him will know no bounds.

Lastly, Calvin sees nature as “the beautiful garment of God.” This is similar to the previous image except that the term “garment” has a more intentional and intimate aspect. God chose to appear this way for us. As Zachman points out, “when we rightly contemplate the beauty of the richly ornamented garment of the world, our minds and hearts should be ravished with admiration so that our hearts are incited to praise God.” This art also brings home to us our utter helplessness in the face of God’s power and perfection. According to Calvin this process induces a profound love for God, a sense of total dependence on him, a complete faith in the workings of his will and the profound desire to glorify his holy being.

Thus we are left with the message that the creation exists for the greater glory of God and to manifest his divine properties. Jonathan Edwards, in sermon extracts which we will read later in this essay, provides clear examples of this teaching. George Whitefield does as well but in a far more muted style as we move into the 1760s. This concept of creation dovetails with Calvin’s theology of salvation (predestination and “faith alone”) to create an integrated conception of the divine plan and man’s place in it.

This was the doctrinal message of the Reformed churches that dominated Western Europe for more than two centuries before the Last Judgment. It was institutionalized within the established churches in the English-speaking world. This orthodoxy had great advantages in terms of funding, personnel, prestige, and training resources. It dominated the religious landscape of the American colonies. And yet its dominance would soon come to an end. There were many reasons for this outcome but surely the most important was the doctrinal challenge posed by the religious values and assumptions embodied in the Last Judgment. These values, contained in Swedenborg’s religious Writings, presented existen-

tial problems for Calvinism that it could not overcome. The next section provides a summary of Swedenborg's critique of Reformed Christianity and a narrative of some of the historical struggles it created.

III

The Swedenborgian Way of Salvation and how it differs from the Calvinist framework

Swedenborg, raised as a Swedish Lutheran, was intimately aware of the Reformed theology. His father was a Bishop and high ranking official of the church. Lutheran theology was the everyday experience of the Swedenborg household. As he entered into his spiritual calling Swedenborg received many revelations which severely criticized and condemned the official doctrines of his youth. He did not flinch from recording these revelations which were essential for the establishment of the New Church on earth. In summarizing his views on salvation I will be relying primarily on *True Christianity*, his last book which was published in 1771. I will conclude this section with Swedenborg's conception of God's purpose for creation. Throughout I will compare and contrast his positions with the relevant elements of the Calvinist doctrine of salvation.

In order to be certain that all who read his text have a clear understanding of Reformed teaching he presents a lengthy excerpt from the *Formula of Concord* of 1756. This was the most current statement of Lutheran doctrine available to him. I will not summarize it here since I have already presented identical material but I refer to it (*True Christianity* 464) for those who wish to read a formulation which Swedenborg himself chose as representative of this doctrine.

Original Sin, or the Fall of Adam, plays a crucial role in Calvinist soteriology. It is the fundamental event that sets the rest of the process in motion. It is the first of the five TULIP points codified by the Synod of Dort; i.e. total inability / depravity of man in spiritual things. Original Sin was so debasing that humans were absolutely incapable of salvation.

Swedenborg presents a different view (*True Christianity* 520–521):

We are all born with a tendency toward evils . . . Now, the reasons this is recognized is that church councils and leaders have passed down to us

the notion that Adams sin has been passed on to all his descendants; in this view, this is the sole reason why Adam and everyone since has been condemned; and this damnation clings to us all from the day we are born . . . Nevertheless it is clear that there is no such thing that we inherit from Adam. Adam was not the first human being. “Adam” and “his wife” are used symbolically to describe the first Church on this planet . . . Once people comprehend this teaching . . . they experience a collapse of their formally cherished opinion that the evil bred into us comes from Adam’s sin . . . My friend, the evil we inherit comes in fact from no other source than our own parents.

In the Calvinist system Original Sin is so devastating that it destroys the Free Will of mankind in all spiritual things. If any are to be saved it must be solely by the work of God through the Holy Spirit. Gods grace draws some (the elect, saints) to heaven and condemns the rest to hell (reprobation). This doctrine is Predestination, the U. (Unconditional election) of the TULIP points. It is clear that since he denies Original Sin, Swedenborg condemns predestination. He condemns it not only for its rank injustice but because it denies the existence of free will in man. Swedenborg holds that “free will in spiritual things” is a constituent quality of human beings and is the basis for their partnership with God in the work of salvation. Swedenborg articulates a radically different vision from the Reformed in the following comments (*True Christianity* 486–487).

Predestination is an offspring of today’s church. It is born from the belief that we are absolutely powerless and have no choice in spiritual matters. It arises from that belief and also from the notion that our conversion to God is more or less passive, that we are like a log, and that we have no awareness of whether grace has brought the log to life or not.

In other such teachings, it is said that we are chosen by the pure grace of God exclusive of any human action. We are told that our being chosen takes place where and when God wants—it is entirely up to him. From these teachings it is clear that the dogma of predestination has arisen from denial of free choice as a shoot arises from a seed.

How could we attribute more harmfulness or cruelty to God than by believing that he predestines some members of the human race to hell? It

would be believing in divine cruelty that the Lord who is love itself and mercy itself...would neglect to ensure through providence and foresight that those who live good lives and acknowledge God are not thrown into eternal fire and torment. The Lord is in fact the Creator and Savior of all. He wishes the death of no one. Predestination is the offspring of the faith of today's church; the belief of the new church, though, abhors it as something monstrous.

After this intense doctrinal statement Swedenborg permits himself one last personal observation: "It used to seem incredible to me that any Christian would ever come to such a deranged conclusion, let alone spread it around by word of mouth or bring it to light by publication."

Weaving itself like a bright thread through this (and other commentaries) concerning the Reformed doctrine of salvation is Swedenborg's concept of human free will. He rejects the notion of a passive, spiritually helpless humanity. Rather, he sees an active, vibrant mankind able to respond with vital energy to the spiritual demands of life. This concept of human power, of agency, stands in stark contrast to the Calvinist vision of a corrupted and enervated human soul.

Swedenborg expresses this vision quite succinctly in the following passage (*True Christianity* 485).

If we had no free choice in spiritual matters there would be nothing in us that would allow the Lord to form a bond with us. Without a reciprocal *partnership* with the Lord, reformation and regeneration would be impossible and therefore there would be no salvation. (Emphasis added)

At this point in Swedenborg's account a logical problem arises which is absent from the Calvinist model. How does Swedenborg explain how this partnership with God is achieved? The Calvinists deny that a relationship of this kind is possible. All power and efficacy are with God, there is no partnership so the question of human efficacy does not arise. Swedenborg admits that humanity is beset with hereditary limitations, in no way connected to "Adams sin," which still prevent the unaided achievement of salvation.

I will provide Swedenborg's response to this question and use it to discuss the concluding point of this section, i.e. the contrast between the Calvinist and Swedenborgian visions of God's purpose of creation.

Swedenborg prefaces his discussion of the existence of spiritual free will by noting the unreasonableness of the Reformed concept of free natural will which humans are said to possess while they deny that freedom to spiritual choices. He sees this as illogical. His argument is as follows (*True Christianity* 481–482).

People do not deny that we have free choice in earthly matters. Nevertheless, that free choice exists only *because* we have free choice in spiritual matters. The Lord flows into everyone from above or within with divine goodness and divine truth. (Emphasis added)

If we had no choice in spiritual matters, we would have no free choice in civic, moral, and earthly matters either, this stands to reason from the fact that the spiritual things . . . dwell in the highest region of the human mind, just as the soul dwells in the body. That is where such things live, because the door through which the Lord "comes into us" (Revelation 3:20) is on that level. Beneath them are civic, moral, and earthly concerns, which in human beings receive all their life from the spiritual qualities that reside above. *Because the life of the Lord flows in at the highest level and because our life consists of the power to freely think and will, and therefore speak and act, it follows that our free choice in politics and earthly matters comes exclusively from our spiritual freedom.* (Emphasis added)

Given this assertion that free will exists for man, and is essential to him, Swedenborg describes the process whereby it was established and maintained. He locates this process as follows: "Free choice originates in the spiritual world, where our minds are kept by the Lord. Our mind is the spirit within us that lives after death" (*True Christianity* 475).

Earlier in this paper, in the section devoted to Swedenborg's theology of history, I described how freedom is maintained. I quoted from passages in *Heaven and Hell* (599-600). This is the doctrine of Equilibrium in which the Lord structures the influences which operate on man so that there is a balance between them. This allows mankind the "free space" to make

spiritual choices with integrity. This requires constant attention by God and is indicative of the seriousness of his commitment to freedom as a means of encouraging a saving partnership with man. So seriously does the Lord regard this process that he ended the Christian Church when it failed in its primary task of leading men to salvation. He reordered the entire spiritual world rather than allow the vital Equilibrium of spiritual freedom to be endangered. After that reordering, i.e. the Last Judgment on the Christian Church in 1757, a fresh influx of spiritual life from the Lord poured into the souls of men, revivifying them and unleashing the spiritual energy that was being blocked by the failure of the Christian Church. Swedenborg provides a straightforward description of the mechanics of the process of equilibrium (after all, he was an engineer) in what follows (*True Christianity* 475-477).

Between heaven and hell there is a great gap . . . Into this intervening area evil in great abundance exhales from hell, and on the other hand, goodness, also in great abundance, flows in from heaven . . . The spirit of every human being is in this vast interspace for one reason: so that we will have free choice . . . The equilibrium [of this interspace] is spiritual . . . it is an equilibrium between heaven and hell, and therefore, between good and evil. All the people there are inwardly in partnership with angels in heaven or with devils in hell.

God set up this elaborate mechanism precisely to offset the worldly fixation of the human will which if left to its natural hereditary tendencies would favor the sensual over the spiritual. This was done, in providence, to deal with the disparity in power between God and man. The maintenance of Equilibrium preserves mans freedom in spiritual things while relying on the absolute sovereignty of God to sustain the process. Had this not been done the only consolation in creation for the vast majority of mankind would be to witness the Divine Glory of Creation before dying and suffering in hell for all eternity.

We now come to the final portion of this section. Why did God do this? Why did he so structure creation, from the beginning, to permit mankind to choose to enter a relationship with him? He offered a pathway to partnership with the Divine for finite creatures that, if followed, would

lead to eternal salvation. We now turn to address this question and through it locate the fundamental difference between Calvinism and the New Church.

We have commented previously on the Calvinist metaphors used to describe God's purposes for creation. The essence of this metaphor is the theater. It emphasizes the performance aspects of God's power and glory. Mankind serves as the perfect audience for this demonstration. Humans are the highest form of created life. They have intelligence, perception, language, rich sensory capacities and a measure of creativity. They can, in some small way, appreciate what they are witnessing. Man can feel its grandeur and sing its praises. Each of God's attributes can be celebrated by man. His excellence can be proclaimed. For Calvin this was the height of human natural happiness. Man, while not being able to create this sublime world, could at least experience it, as he saw traces of the Divine in the world around him. He was also able to live on the bounty of the world that God provided for him. He could in no way construct this world; it was God's gift. Unfortunately, the fallen nature of man determined that he would forever live in sin. After all, this fallen nature and the sin it induced would bring man to hell in the end. This was only just, an appropriate punishment for evil. God's justice is perfect in this regard. No blame attaches to God for this outcome. The temporary celebration of God's glory is the highest good available to the sinful and debased nature of mankind. However, God is merciful as well as just and he has permitted Jesus, his only begotten Son, to atone for the sins of a select few while leaving the rest to eternal and deserved punishment. God has chosen his elect, before the foundation of the world and now permits the Son to redeem them through his sacrifice. He permits the Spirit to visit them on earth and compel them to saving grace. They cannot refuse this and they have done nothing to merit it, but that is irrelevant before the sovereign power of God. They are saved, brought to heaven and dwell there forever. God's glory is manifested in the majesty of creation. God's justice is served by the natural life of man on earth and his deserved punishment for sin after death. God's mercy is shown by his free gift of salvation to his elect by the sacrifice of the Son and the instrumentality of the Holy Spirit. Lastly, his sovereignty is demonstrated by the fact that he does all of these things for his own reasons, to serve his own high purpose, in actions

which are not contingent on any other force or entity in the universe. This grand vision is the vision of Calvinism. It was the ruling, established vision of English speaking Protestantism in the 18th century.

Swedenborg's vision was vastly different. It represented the New Christian doctrines that entered the world in 1757 in immediate preparation for the Last Judgment on the Christian Church.

In answer to the question of the purpose of creation, Swedenborg answered that God created the world as an act of divine love. He presents this in the following terms (*True Christianity* 43).

The essence of love is loving others who are outside of oneself, wanting to be one with them from oneself. [Specifically] Gods loving others outside of himself is recognizable in Gods love for the human race. Gods wanting to be one with others, is recognizable in his partnership with the angelic heaven, with the church on earth, with everyone in the church, and with everything good and true that forms and constitutes an individual and a church. Gods love in his blessing others from himself is recognizable in eternal life, which is the unending blessedness, good fortune, and happiness that God gives to those who let his love in.

The appropriate metaphor for this vision is striving. The Latin term is "conatus," a word used often by Swedenborg. This spiritual partnership, motivated by love, requires intentional effort by those involved. In the Lords case, the entire structure of the spiritual world is constantly reordered to accommodate the spiritual needs of mankind. For their part, humans are constantly encouraged to declare their faith and engage in serious reflection on their spiritual state. This process can be lengthy and difficult as one moves through the stages of repentance, reformation, and regeneration. However, God is always present and provides the essential power for salvation. The most vital point to remember is that this process must be initiated and carried through by man. It is an act of "free will in spiritual matters." As Swedenborg pointedly reminds us, "The Lord compels no one to be saved." The contrast to the Calvinist system could not be more striking.

As I have worked my way through the Writings for clear summaries of their arguments, I have been searching for a single statement that

captures their essence. I have not found one that captures the richness of this system. There is one, however, which captures the core of Gods overall intentions (*True Christianity* 66).

From all this the truth becomes clear that the purpose of creation was [to provide for] an angelic heaven from the human race—humankind as a resting place for God to inhabit. And this is why human beings were created as forms of the divine design.

Creation as stated above describes the entire physical universe and all of its processes. It is not restricted solely to living entities. Thus the statement is an assertion of a spiritual teleology, alluded to by Thomas Nagel in the opening section of this paper. We will revisit the implications of this in future work.

We have now come to the end of this section. It is clear that these systems, set in motion “before the foundation of the world,” produced vastly different effects and expectations. The following sections of this paper will describe the contact points between them as they interacted in the religious life of 18th century America.

IV

American Calvinism at High Tide: Jonathan Edwards’ contributions from 1731–1750

Writing history is a messy business because human history itself is a messy business. The trends and variables within it are often obscured by the uniqueness of the actors and events. The general direction of things only becomes clearer with the passage of time. Complex stories are constantly unfolding but the historian must be constantly searching for the dominant themes and leading motivations. I have done this with 18th century American religion. There were many outstanding divines at this time, e.g. James Davenport, Gilbert Tennent, William Tennent, Jr., Samuel Buell and Theodore Freilinghuysen just to name a few. But I have chosen to focus on only two to serve as examples of Calvinist doctrine and evangelical preaching: Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield. They

represent their doctrines with great clarity. They also were the two most influential preachers of this period. I will utilize their work extensively.

An additional factor was emerging at this time. Calvinism faced an internal theological challenge. Since its emergence in the early sixteenth century it had confronted opposition from some of its ministers over the issue of predestination. This challenge was formalized in the writings of Jacob Arminius (1560–1609) a Professor of Theology at the University of Leiden. It was therefore called Arminianism. Edwards and Whitefield and the established churches regarded it as a terrible heresy and condemned it harshly. Briefly, Arminianism held that God offered mankind “prevenient grace” (sometimes called “preventing grace”) which mitigated the impact of Original Sin and permitted humans to freely reach out to God and begin the process of salvation. It therefore implied that God needed mans assistance in saving souls. The orthodox felt that this was preposterous and insulting to Gods omnipotence. In addition, they argued that this doctrine reopened the door to various Catholic doctrines which they opposed. God is all-powerful , they asserted, He does not need the help of a man or a church to choose those who are to be saved. Even so, Arminianism cropped up periodically in the early years of the Reformation. Each time, however, it had been successfully marginalized. Finally, a synod of the clergy was convened (the Synod of Dort, 1618–1619) to bring an end to this controversy. It formally condemned it as a heresy and declared anathemas against it adherents. Arminian ministers were expelled from Holland and the five basic tenets of Calvinism (the TULIP points) were reaffirmed. This seemed to settle the matter for the next 120 years. Arminianism would occasionally surface but be quickly suppressed. However, as we shall see, its reemergence, just prior to the Last Judgment, proved very difficult to subdue, On the contrary, it helped to prepare the way for the transformation of Christianity.

A characteristic of American Calvinism from its beginnings was its openness to “outpourings of the Spirit.” Since salvation was exclusively Gods work it could not be called forth by human effort. Yet its effects could be witnessed by men. The Holy Spirit would often come to individuals without warning and they would immediately show physical “signs of election.” Shouting, fainting, singing, bodily contortions, and fervent prayer, among other things, were taken as signs of salvation. Early

18th century New England was on the lookout for these events and fervently hoped for them. When and if these things happened news spread quickly and expectations grew that a large-scale visitation of the Spirit was at hand. Often, people would then travel to the affected towns to pray and hope to be saved as well. The normal routines of life would be suspended during these events. This psychological sensitivity was a vital part of the cultural structure of this period. It is extremely important to keep this in mind as we review the subsequent events of Edwards' life.

In 1727 Jonathan Edwards was ordained and became assistant pastor at Northampton, Massachusetts under his grandfather Solomon Stoddard. Within two years however, Rev. Stoddard died and Edwards became pastor in 1729. He became known as a scholar and in 1731 was asked to give a doctrinal address in Boston. He did and it was subsequently published. It became the cornerstone of his views and a key document of the Calvinism of his time. He took on the big issues early in his career. This address was influential. I have reproduced the major points.

The address was entitled, "God Glorified in Mans Dependence." It is an exegesis of 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 which preaches, "He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord."

Edwards makes it clear that God alone brings about salvation. There is nothing of human effort in it. He says "that man should not glory in himself, but alone in God; that no flesh should glory in his presence." The allusion to "no flesh" refers to the Arminians who presume to allow humans some participation in this process. He then proposes the two principal points of the address, "First, that there is an absolute and universal dependence of the redeemed on God for all their good. Secondly, that God hereby "is exalted and glorified in the works of redemption." Edwards elaborates on these points as follows:

The grace of God in bestowing this gift is most free. It was what God was under no obligation to bestow. He might have rejected fallen man, as he did the fallen angels. It was what we never did any thing to merit; it was given while we were yet enemies, and before we had so much as repented. It was from the love of God who saw no excellency in us to attract it; and it was without expectation of ever being requited for it. And it is from mere grace that the benefits of Christ are applied to such and such

particular persons. Those that are called and sanctified are to attribute it alone to the good pleasure of Gods goodness, by which they are distinguished. He is sovereign, and hath mercy on whom he will have mercy. (*sermonindex.net* Edwards)

He concludes his address with the following exhortation to his audience. The beneficiaries of salvation must have

a sensible acknowledgment of absolute dependence on God in this affair . . . it is by this means that God hath contrived to glorify himself in redemption; and it is fit that he should at least have this glory of those who are the subjects of the redemption. Faith is a sensibleness of what is real in the work of redemption . . . Faith abases men and exalts God; it gives all the glory of redemption to him alone. It is necessary in order to saving faith that man should be emptied of himself, be sensible that he is wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked.

He then returned to Northampton to continue his work. He remained in that position for nearly the next twenty years. However, he returned to the themes of this first address throughout his career. Its core belief was essential to his faith and to Calvinism in general. He devoted a formal sermon to it later in his pastorate. It was also published and added to his reputation as the leading theologian of the colonies. It is entitled, “God’s Sovereignty in the Salvation of Man.” I have extracted its major points as follows:

It is agreeable to God’s design in the creation of the universe to exercise every attribute, and thus to manifest the glory of each of them. *God’s design in creation was to glorify himself, or to make a discovery of the essential glory of his nature.* It was fit that infinite glory should shine forth; and it was God’s original design to make a manifestation of his glory, as it is. (p. 8, emphasis added; this passage is the key statement of Edwards’ vision of God)

How does God manifest his glory “so all the attributes of God reflect glory on one another? The glory of one attribute cannot be manifested, as it is,

without the manifestation of another. One attribute is defective without another, and therefore the manifestation will be defective. Hence it is the will of God to manifest all his attributes." It should be noted here that Edwards attributes God's actions as deriving solely from God's properties. God is driven by the logic of his own existence to do the things that he does. Neither the will nor intentions of any other being are determinative of God's actions. The reality of the last point is made clear in Edwards' discussion of the nature of God's sovereignty.

The more excellent the creature is over whom God is sovereign, and the greater the matter in which he so appears, the more glorious is his sovereignty . . . For the nobler the creature is, still the greater and higher doth God appear in his sovereignty over it . . . So the glory of God's sovereignty appears in that he is sovereign over the souls of men, who are so noble and excellent creatures. God therefore will exercise his sovereignty over them. And the further the dominion of any one extends over another, the greater will be the honour . . . So God's sovereignty over men appears glorious, that it extends to every thing which concerns them. He may dispose of them with respect to all that concerns them, according to his own pleasure. His sovereignty appears glorious, that it reaches their most important affairs, even the eternal state of condition of the souls of men. Herein it appears that the sovereignty of God is without bounds or limits, in that it reaches to an affair of such infinite importance. God, therefore, as it is his design to manifest his own glory, will and does exercise his sovereignty towards men, over their souls and bodies, even in this most important matter of their eternal salvation. He has mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardens.

I am unaware of a more extreme statement of God's sovereignty than this. God has complete dominion over man "and all that he has" and many dispose of these things, "according to his own pleasure." His dominion is over "men, over their souls and bodies, even to this most important matter of their eternal salvation." This dominion is non-negotiable, it determines who shall be saved and who shall be damned.

An important incident occurred at Northampton during the winter of 1734–1735 that thrust Edwards into the religious history of America. He

had become concerned about the laxity of various young people in his congregation. Additionally, in the Autumn of 1734 a popular young woman had suddenly passed away and this gave rise to some pain and questioning in the town. He had also heard rumors of problems in some neighboring communities and decided it was necessary to address the spiritual state of the community. In November of 1734 he delivered two sermons under the joint title of *Justification by Faith Alone*. These sermons, taken together, cover fifty-nine single spaced pages. They are doctrinal throughout. There is no discussion in them concerning any personal issues involving the congregation. They do contain a forceful restatement of Calvinist doctrine about the necessity of justifying faith and the dangers of “trusting in our own righteousness, is a thing fatal to the soul, is what the scriptures plainly teach us.” He concludes by saying that believing doctrines contrary to justification “is of a pernicious and fatal tendency.” During his last sermon several people fell down and began to pray for salvation. In the weeks following, others had similar experiences, especially young women. This phenomenon spread to neighboring towns in the Connecticut River valley and Edwards’ reputation as an evangelist spread with it. Altogether, several hundred people were affected. The phenomenon faded in the Spring of 1735. Edwards produced a public account of these events and it was published throughout the colonies and Great Britain (Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, 1737). It became a model for subsequent revivals. The Calvinist clergy touted these occurrences as an “outpouring of the Spirit” and worked for more of them. Perhaps these reactions were the result of the frustrations of deeply religious people who sought a more profound experience of the divine. In any case, the publicity spread and the Last Calvinist Revival became famous. As effective as *A Faithful Narrative* was in promoting evangelism, it literally paled in comparison to the sensational events that followed it in 1739.

There have been many significant moments in the history of American Christianity but certainly one of the most electrifying was the impact of George Whitefield’s preaching. He was an ordained Anglican deacon with strong Calvinist beliefs. He was also the most gifted orator to speak in America during the eighteenth century. He had inaugurated the practice of outdoor preaching in England in February 1739 and was a great success. His fame spread and thousands came to hear him. In the summer of 1739

he decided to preach in America and arrived in Delaware in the Fall of that year. Throughout his life he never accepted a permanent pastorate but preferred "itinerancy." He would travel through the country and preach where opportunity offered—sometimes he was invited, sometimes not. In addition to these gifts, he was an extraordinary self promoter. He had a manager, a team of advance men to make arrangements, advertising to arouse interest, and he kept a journal about his experiences which he would share with the press (see Frank Lambert, *Peddler of Divinity: George Whitefield*, 2002, as well as the older more critical biography by Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist*, 1991). Yet, in spite of this entourage, Whitefield was a genuinely earnest preacher of the gospel.

He arrived when the Edwards' revivals had reached a low ebb and the evangelical cause appeared to be waning. Almost instantly he turned this around. He preached in New Jersey and Pennsylvania throughout the rest of the year to great success. He inspired young enthusiastic clergy to take up the cause as he moved on. He proceeded slowly into the south in early 1740. But the most memorable part of his visit was yet to come. Whitefield was invited to speak in New England and arrived there in October, 1740. The effect was dazzling and intense. Thousands swarmed to see him and welcomed his message of evangelical Calvinism. He even visited Edwards' church in Northampton, Massachusetts and conducted an emotional service there. As 1741 opened he returned to the Middle Atlantic states and the south. Again his sermons were a brilliant success. In the Spring of 1741 he returned to England in triumph. He had completed the most important preaching tour in American history.

There is a great irony in all of this, however. The long term effect of this tour, as well as the five others he gave until his death in 1770, was extremely unsettling. The causes of this upset go to the heart of Calvinist doctrine. An extended analysis of this phenomenon is beyond us in this essay but a summary of it is necessary. Whitefield preached brilliantly and effectively. His content was troublesome however. The historian Thomas Kidd summarizes some of Whitefield's views:

His approach stirred controversy everywhere he went, especially concerning the operations of the Holy Spirit, the authority of established ministers and the right of itinerancy. Eventually many ministers would

rue the eager welcome Whitefield received in America in 1739 and 1740.
(Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 54)

In addition to the above issues, Whitefield seemed to imply that congregants could separate themselves from churches that they regarded as impure or doctrinally soft. In fact many of his followers did just that. A recent study of this phenomenon (Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism*, p 36–67) found that in the twenty-five years after Whitefield’s initial visit “literally hundreds” of separate congregations were founded on these grounds. By 1746 the unified structure of New England Congregationalism had been shattered. This conflict was extremely bitter. In the Middle Atlantic states a similar phenomenon occurred immediately after Whitefield’s visit in 1740. The Presbyterian Church divided in a formal schism by 1741. Whitefield did not really intend to instigate these things. However by suggesting that an “unconverted minister” could not preach the gospel, or that itinerant ministers could compete directly against settled ones, or that “doctrinal visions” could accompany conversion, he was undermining the basic structure of 18th century American religion. By the 1760s Baptist settlers, led by Whitefield converts, had settled in Virginia and North Carolina where they challenged the legitimacy of the Church of England establishments.

The very power of Whitefield’s skills aggravated these conflicts. This process unsettled the religious establishments in virtually all of the colonies. Disestablishment and freedom of conscience in worship became watchwords in this struggle. The important thing to keep in mind about the situation was that it was not primarily a doctrinal dispute. Doctrinal issues, i.e. free will, predestination, election, grace alone, did not fully emerge until the 1760s. When that happened the tensions grew even worse.

These factors have led me to redefine the period called the First Great Awakening. I believe this was a period of conflict and intensity that began in the mid 1740s and continued into the mid 1780s. Its content was not strictly religious however. Rather it consisted of social and political conflicts within American Protestantism generated by the Last Calvinist Revival. In effect I am suggesting that the structures Calvinism had created could not withstand a Calvinist challenge. The inherent instability and

volatility of Calvinist doctrine made it almost impossible for that doctrine to ground itself in stable forms. It was constantly vulnerable to “eruptions of the Spirit;” doctrinal challenges to its leadership and movements to purify its membership. Whitefield inadvertently unleashed this process, and in so doing, opened up the possibility of a renovated American religious life.

V

The First Serious Challenge to the Calvinist Model of Salvation: The Wesley-Whitefield exchange 1740–41, with Edwards’ response

It would be difficult to find any two people in the past three hundred years who have worked harder to spread the Christian church than John Wesley and George Whitefield. Both were ordained Anglican ministers and gave their lives to preaching the word of God as they understood it. Whitefield was converted in 1735 and devoted the remaining thirty-five years of his life to evangelization. It is said that in the course of his ministry he preached over 18,000 sermons in Great Britain and America. Early in life the stage attracted him. He was talented but unsatisfied with the role of a settled clergyman in the Church of England. Early on he realized that his acting background was excellent preparation for preaching. He sought to reach as many people as possible and decided to speak in whatever venue was available. He pioneered the practice of outdoor preaching and often attracted thousands of listeners to hear his individual sermons.

John Wesley was a more scholarly and deliberate man. He spoke in the open as well, but his style was more subdued. He also preached thousands of sermons in his career that lasted from his conversion in 1738 until his death in 1791. While Wesley lacked Whitefield’s oratorical skills, he excelled as an organizer. Wherever he preached he left behind a network of converts whom he would organize for future work. He was so thorough and methodical that his detractors came to call his followers “Methodists.” He did not strenuously object and the name stuck. Whitefield on the other hand did not organize his followers. After he spoke in an area he would leave it to the local clergy or itinerants to follow up on the excitement he created. Within a few short years of their ministries each had a large

following and a tremendous respect for one another. They had become friends.

There was however, a major problem. They differed on a key point of Reformed theology: the doctrine of predestination. Whitefield was a strict Calvinist (like Edwards) whereas Wesley was Arminian.

There had been rumors of a rift between them but their friends had hoped it would remain private. There were fears (subsequently justified) that a public conflict would fracture the evangelical community in Britain. However, the difference was too important to be contained. In the Fall of 1739 Whitefield embarked on his second of seven preaching tours of the colonies. He stayed for over a year. The tour was very successful and he was celebrated from Georgia to Massachusetts. In the meantime Wesley was being pressed for his views by many eager and anxious people with a vital interest in the matter of salvation. Eventually at the end of 1739 Wesley gave his views on predestination in a sermon in Bristol, England. It was published in early 1740 to great interest. Now the pressure grew on Whitefield to respond. He did so when he returned to England. His article was published in 1741. This exchange was the first serious confrontation over this issue between major figures of the English church. It had profound effects on the Reformed Church in the time immediately preceding the Last Judgment. I will first provide an account of Wesley's sermon, "Free Grace," from 1740. Then I will outline Whitefield's "Letter in Answer to Mr. Wesley's Sermon" from 1741.

In "Free Grace," Wesley gets directly to his point. "Call it therefore by whatever name you please: election, pretention, predestination or reprobation, it comes down to the same thing. The sense of all is plainly this—by virtue of an eternal, unchangeable, irresistible decree of God, one part of mankind are infallibly saved, and the rest infallibly damned; it being impossible that any of the former should be damned, or that any of the latter should be saved. But if this is so, then is all preaching in vain?" (umc.mission.org/WesleySermon128, p. 2). This is a truly valid question that must occur to anyone who has read a Calvinist sermon. Wesley pushes on, "How unacceptable a thought is this, that millions of men, without any preceding offense or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings! How peculiarly uncomfortable must it be to those who have put on Christ? To those who, being filled with mercy,

tenderness and compassion, could ever 'wish themselves accursed for their brethren's sake!' This doctrine tends to destroy Christian holiness, happiness, and good works but also hath a direct tendency to overthrow the whole Christian Revelation" (ibid, p 3). At this point, the modern reader begins to perceive a certain inclination toward Wesley. I believe this feeling was true in the 1740s as well. Something in the moral sense of the times was changing. Perhaps something akin to a star rising in the east. At this point in his sermon, Wesley calls on St. Paul (a very bold move) to support his position. "The same Lord overall is rich in mercy to all that call upon him (Romans 10:12). But you say, 'No, he is such only to those for whom Christ died.'" Wesley then moves to conclude his message in terms that can neither be misunderstood nor withdrawn. Predestination

is a doctrine full of blasphemy, of such blasphemy that I should dread to mention but that the honour of our gracious God and the cause of his truth, will not suffer me to be silent. I will mention two of the horrible blasphemies contained in this horrible doctrine: 1) this doctrine represents our blessed Lord Jesus Christ as a hypocrite, a deceiver of the people, a man void of common sincerity. For it cannot be denied that he everywhere speaks as if he were willing that all men should be saved. [This doctrine] represents him as mocking his helpless creatures by offering what he never intends to give. 2) It represents God the Father as worse than the devil; more false, more cruel, more unjust . . . to doom his creatures whether they will or not to endless misery is to impute such cruelty to him greater than that of the great enemy of God and man . . . the devil!"

These are powerful words and they resonated within the world of the Reformed as it was quickening to a new sense of spiritual life. His final statement reads like a call to arms from the earliest days of the Reformation. "This is the blasphemy clearly contained in the horrible decree of predestination! And here I fix my foot . . . Whatever it means besides, it cannot mean that the God of truth is a liar" (ibid, p. 5).

As the Calvinists feared, these words struck a responsive chord in the popular religious imagination. There was great clamor to hear more. There was also anger among Whitefield's followers and many of the

clergy. After all, this was not just another Oxford don with fond memories of Erasmus. This was John Wesley, one of the most important evangelical divines of the century. He must be answered. Whitefield was the most suitable and well known minister to make the response. He was sent a copy of the sermon in America while on tour and composed his response in Georgia at the end of 1740 just before his return to England. It was published in the Spring of 1741 to an expectant public. Whitefield was simultaneously condescending and combative. He looked down on his colleagues shorter preaching experience and the depth of his religious conversion, but he could not ignore the main challenge which Wesley posed. I will present Whitefield's major points below.

First of all, Whitefield defined where he stood and by what authority he stood there (the following excerpts are from *Whitefield's Letter to Wesley*, 1741):

I frankly acknowledge: I believe in the doctrine of reprobation, in this view, that God intends to give saving grace, through Jesus Christ, only to a certain number, and that the rest of mankind, after the fall of Adam, being justly left of God to continue in sin, will suffer that eternal death which is its proper wages.

This is the established doctrine of Scripture, and acknowledged as such by the 17th article of the Church of England as Bishop Barnet himself confesses. Yet dear Mr. Wesley absolutely denies it. (p. 6)

The derisive use of "dear" in this statement was not lost on Wesley. Whitefield continues on with a number of scriptural arguments until he decides to make things more personal. Wesley had confided to close friends that he felt his conversion experience in 1738 lacked the same intensity of those of others he knew. He felt incomplete about it and hoped he would be further transformed. This being said, however, he still believed the Holy Spirit had truly saved him. Whitefield was obviously aware of Wesley's remarks and used them against him in the letter.

And if I must speak freely, I believe your fighting so strenuously against the doctrine of election and pleading so vehemently for a sinless perfec-

tion are among the reasons or culpable causes, *why you are kept out of the liberties of the gospel, and from that full assurance of faith which they enjoy, who have experimentally (personally) tasted, and daily feed upon Gods electing, everlasting love.*" (p. 14, emphasis added)

This impugning of his religious standing was not lost on Wesley either. Whitefield's use of this argument implies a certain Gnosticism among holders of election. Edwards also held that the non-elect truly could not grasp the main points of the "free grace, faith alone" position. He felt that their sensibilities were simply too "vulgar" to grasp the divine truth of it (see his extensive discussion on these points in the work *Freedom of the Will*, 1754, 149ff).

But Whitefield continues on to his most important point attempting to counter Wesley's claim that predestination is unjust.

Says the dear Mr. Wesley, "How uncomfortable a thought is this, that thousands and millions of men, without any preceding offence or fault of theirs, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings?"

But who ever asserted, that thousands and millions of men, *without any preceding offence or fault of theirs*, were unchangeably doomed to everlasting burnings? Do not they who believe God's dooming men to everlasting burnings, also believe, that God looked upon them as men fallen in Adam? And that the decree which ordained the punishment first regarded the crime by which it was deserved? How then are they doomed without any preceding fault? Surely Mr. Wesley will own Gods justice in imputing Adams sin to his posterity. And also, after Adam fell, and his posterity in him, God might justly have passed them *all* by, without sending his own Son to be a savior for any one. Unless you heartily agree to both these points, you do not believe original sin aright. If you do own them, then you must acknowledge the doctrine of election and reprobation to be highly just and reasonable. For if God might justly impute Adams sin to all, and afterwards have passed by all, then he might justly pass by *some*. Turn on the right hand, or on the left; you are reduced to an inextricable dilemma. And, if you would be consistent, you must either give up the doctrine of the imputation of Adams sin, or receive the amiable doctrine of election, with a holy and righteous reprobation as its

consequent. For whether you can believe it or not, the Word of God abides faithful: “The election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded” (Romans 11:7). (p. 14)

Here, plainly stated is the salvation doctrine of Calvinism. It hinges on the sin of Adam and the subsequent fallen state of humanity. It dismisses “prevenient grace” of the Arminians and Wesley as of no consequence. It is then able to condemn the non-elect as if they were actual sinners, brimming with evil and enemies of God. These people may be seated next to you in church but that makes no difference to Gods justice. They are still “sinners in the hands of an angry God.” Thus Whitefield feels no guilt in their suffering but sees it rather as a cause to experience Gods glory.

This uncompromising statement of orthodox doctrine certainly satisfied Whitefield’s followers. He then advised Wesley on some appropriate theological reading and offered prayers for his spiritual wellbeing.

He closes with a final admonition to Wesley and an unadorned summary of his position.

Dear Sir, for Jesus Christ’s sake, consider how you dishonor God by denying election. You plainly make salvation depend not on Gods *free grace*, but on mans *free-will*. And if thus, it is more than probable, Jesus Christ would not have had the satisfaction of seeing the fruit of his death in the eternal salvation of one soul. Our preaching would then be vain, and all invitations for people to believe in him would also be in vain.

But blessed be God, our Lord knew for whom he died. There was an eternal compact between the Father and the Son. A certain number was then given him as the purchase and reward of his obedience and death. For these he prayed (John 17:9), and *not for the world*. For these elect ones, and these only, he is now interceding, and with their salvation he will be fully satisfied.” (p. 17)

Wesley declined an opportunity to offer a formal reply. He disdained the style of Whitefield’s letter as inappropriate for the weighty issues involved. He stated that the tone of the letter was more like the invitation to a “boxing match” than a doctrinal dispute. In any case, his views were

unaffected and he continued to vigorously pursue the growth of Methodism in Britain and America for the next fifty years.

Contemporaries had mixed views on the outcome of this exchange but history records a decisive victory. The evangelical historian Iain Murray writing in the 20th century offers the following clear assessment (preface to 1960 edition of *Whitefield's Journals*):

The outcome of Whitefield's return to England in March 1741 and the publication of his reply to Wesley, was an inevitable separation. *Henceforth the evangelical forces engaged in the revival movement were divided, and a new party of Arminian evangelicals emerged for the first time in British church history.* Due to the eminence of the Wesley's, this new form of evangelical faith has exerted a widespread influence even down to the present day. The contemporary strength of this influence can be judged from the manner in which George Whitefield, with his great predecessors the Reformers and Puritans, have been forgotten; indeed, it would not be too much to say that Whitefield's views, as expressed in [his letter to Wesley], would appear to many to be quite alien to the evangelicalism that is commonly believed in today. (Emphasis added)

We will return to the significance of Murray's conclusion a bit later in this essay. For the present, however I wish to focus on an American response to this conflict.

When Whitefield was on his famous tour of the colonies in 1739–41, he made it a point to visit Jonathan Edwards and his congregations in Northampton. He had heard of the "outpouring of the spirit" there in 1734–'35 and had also read Edwards' published account of it which was internationally circulated. While there he preached in Edwards' church and praised Edwards and his congregation for their work in promoting the "work of the Spirit." This brought an emotional response from the congregation and a tearful one from Edwards. It was obvious that Whitefield and Edwards were of one mind on theological essentials. After Whitefield left and returned to England and published his letter to Wesley, Edwards delivered his most iconic sermon on the themes of salvation and divine sovereignty. He amplified Whitefield's concepts in his own style in a way designed to advance their common cause. It was an important event

in American cultural history and remains the most widely known of the vast corpus of Edwards' writings. I have provided excerpts from it and a brief commentary below. It is entitled *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*, delivered in 1741.

The sermon was based on Deuteronomy 32: 35, "Their foot shall slide in due time." It contains Gods warning to the Israelites concerning the inevitable outcome of their backsliding. Edwards sees the theological point of it that man, by his own weight of sin, is drawn down to hell. He expressed this in the following words (reformedsermonsarchives.com/Edwards/):

The observation from the words that I would now insist upon is this: "There is nothing that keeps wicked men at any moment out of hell, but the mere pleasure of God." By the mere pleasure of God, I mean his sovereign pleasure, his arbitrary will, restrained by no obligation, hindered by no manner of difficulty, any more than if nothing else but Gods mere will has in the least degree, or in any respect whatsoever, any hand in the preservation of wicked men for one moment.

These wicked men bear the sinful nature of fallen men, the offspring of Adam. There is no injustice in condemning them. In fact the opposite is the case.

They *deserve* to be cast into hell; so that divine justice never stands in the way, it makes no objection against Gods using his power at any moment to destroy them. Yea, on the contrary, justice calls aloud for an infinite punishment for their sins. (Emphasis in original)

Edwards now brings his point home:

God is a great deal more angry with great numbers that are now on the earth; yea, doubtless, with many that are now in this congregation, who maybe are at ease, than he is with many of those who are now in the flames of hell.

He then cautions people not to be deceived about easy solutions to this problem:

Whatever some have imagined and pretended about promises made to natural mans earnest seeking and knocking, it is plain and manifest, that whatever a natural man takes in religion, whatever prayers he makes till he believes in Christ, God is under no manner of obligation to keep him a moment from eternal destruction.

The eye of the modern reader will be drawn to the phrase “till he believes in Christ” and give it a modern interpretation, i.e. that the choice to believe may lead to salvation. This is not what Edwards means. The Calvinist grants no power whatever to mans choices in spiritual things. Edwards’ real meaning is actually “till he is brought to believe in Christ by the undeserved grace of the Holy Spirit.” With this meaning in place the text provokes a profound spiritual anxiety.

Edwards increases the psychological pressure in the congregation by listing certain lurid examples of what lies ahead for the sinner. I have presented these in the same rapid order that Edwards did in his sermon:

The bow of Gods wrath is bent, and the arrow made ready in the string, and justice bends the arrow at your heart, and strains the bow, and it is nothing but the mere pleasure of God, and that of an angry God, without any promise or obligation at all, that keeps the arrow one moment from being made drunk with your blood.

And further:

However you may have reformed your life in many things, and may have religious affections, and may keep a form of religion in your families and closets, and in the house of God, it is nothing but his mere pleasure that keeps you from being this moment, swallowed up in everlasting destruction.

And further, Edwards presents the striking image that has defined this sermon for generations:

The God that holds you over the pit of hell, much as one holds a spider, or some loathsome insect over the fire, abhors you, and is dreadfully provoked: his wrath toward you burns like fire; he looks upon you as worthy of nothing else, but to be cast into the fire; he is of purer eyes than to bear to have you in his sight; you are ten thousand times more abominable in his eyes, than the most hateful venomous serpent is in ours.

At this point in the sermon, the psychological state of the congregation must have been desperate. However, Edwards has one more dimension to add to this experience that acutely increases its pain: it is not private.

You shall be tormented in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb; and when you shall be in this state of suffering, the glorious inhabitants of heaven shall go forth and look on the awful spectacle, that they may see what the wrath and fierceness of the Almighty is; and when they have seen it, they will fall down and adore that great power and majesty.

The “no exit” quality of this experience was very distressing to the sincere believer. Many were driven into depression and despair. There were several reports of suicide. A relative of Edwards killed himself at this time. These incidents led to a moderation of the clergys’ techniques and by 1743 much of the acute excitement faded away. However, there were separate “outpourings” in New England into the early 1750s.

I have provided extensive contemporary material on this controversy so that the reader may have first hand access to it. Our personal reactions to these documents are vital to understand if we are to gain an insight into the great changes in religious sensitivity which occurred in the mid-eighteenth century. Both Whitefield and Edwards were famous men, at the top of their careers. They were both supremely confident in their opinions and they were supported by the religious establishments of the time. Yet, within a very short period their views were contested and largely overcome. This process would continue to the present day when as Iain Murray has said these views “have been forgotten . . . and are quite alien to what is commonly believed.”

The great majority of the readers of this paper reject the positions of Whitefield and Edwards. Murray's term "alien" fits this reaction quite well. We must ask, however, what is alien about them?

I suspect there are several answers. First the image of God is counter to what is held today. Our God is a loving God who cares deeply about his creation and seeks our eternal happiness. Second, the God of today is just. He does not condemn for evils that we have not consciously chosen. Original sin has virtually no meaning today. Additionally, our God is available to help us. He responds to prayer and is a partner in the salvation process. All of these things are true and they are part of the religious consciousness of all of us. We are the heirs of the Last Judgment and the beneficiaries of its wondrous vision. We see the established religions of the 18th century through that vision and that is what makes them alien. We are living the spiritual transformation that occurred at that time.

There is another transformation which happened then which needs to be stressed. When we put ourselves into the position of the people in Edwards' church what do we feel? I believe that we feel trapped, helpless, and without value. I further suggest that we feel these things deep in our self-conscience. They infect our sense of efficacy and power. They breed an inertia and religious fatalism. The choice between "free-grace" and "free will" is the difference between the passive and the active. Any change in religious principles must also change the self-understanding of human beings themselves. The active must emerge in man for these modern religious sensitivities to live and be enacted. The modern social science term for this approach to life is called "agency." Agency is an active approach to the human situation. It seeks to transform human institutions, political arrangements, religious beliefs, and psychological structures in order to maximize human fulfillment and happiness. It also is a true legacy of the Last Judgment since it empowers human beings to exercise their full powers in all aspects of human life. It is the Lords gift to us. But it is also a disruptive gift and therefore a challenge. Once human agency is unleashed it is constantly questioning and questing. I believe if we examined our own reactions to Edwards' and Whitefield's work we would discover a profound hostility to the individual passivity and social stasis reflected in their vision. We would demand more, we say, we would not

be content with this. We could create something better. In other words we would be reacting from the perspective of Agency: to confront and rearrange. We have hit upon a profound historical truth embedded in our personal reaction. We experience the dynamic force which entered the world in this period and has been revolutionizing human life ever since that time.

We will continue to follow the unfolding of this process in the next sections of this paper.

VI

The circumstances of Edwards' dismissal from Northampton in 1750, its meaning and impact: the end of the Last Calvinist Revival

There are few instances in American history in which an event of great cultural significance has been virtually ignored by mainstream historians. The forced separation of Edwards from his pulpit in Northampton, at the vote of his congregation, is certainly one of them. Why this event has been ignored I do not know, but I believe it would reward serious analysis.

But our present concern is the facts of the case and what these tell us about the broader sweep of events in this period. For the following account I have relied on a number of sources, but I am particularly indebted to the recent work of George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (2004).

As this essay has made clear, Jonathan Edwards was a first rate religious intellectual. There are many contemporary theologians who regard him as the finest philosopher of religion that America has ever produced. Early on in his career Edwards seemed to be aware of his strengths and weaknesses as a pastor. He therefore concentrated on scholarship and sermon writing rather than the pastoral visiting and community fellowship which other pastors considered part of their responsibilities. Many in his congregation therefore considered him somewhat distant and aloof. This was not a major issue for most of his tenure but it became crucial toward the end as the following incidents will show.

In addition to being a scholar, Edwards was an earnest believer in the permanent power of saving grace in the natural lives of the elect. In this he was a true Calvinist. He felt that if he worked hard enough and preached effectively enough the Holy Spirit would visit Northampton frequently

and save his people; and that through this work, salvation would spread in all directions throughout New England, bringing true Godliness in its wake and bringing mankind closer to the day when the Millennium would come and Christ would return in Glory to the world. He, and other ministers like him, were ever watchful for the “signs” of that coming day. This is a common motivation of evangelicals even in our times.

Edwards had participated in two revivals by the time the first incident took place. The 1734–35 revival had in fact begun in Northampton; the 1740–43 revival had started with Whitefield’s brilliantly successful tour of America in 1740. However, both eventually passed without the kind of long term transformation Edwards had expected. He was particularly upset toward the end of 1743 when “normal” life began to reemerge. He felt that the large scope of that recent revival would be truly transformative. He was becoming more and more aware of “backsliding” in his area when an incident occurred in early 1744 in his own parish that he could not ignore.

This became known as the Bad Book incident. Several young unmarried men had managed to obtain a Midwifery manual, used locally to help deliver babies. In it, there were descriptions of various birth related processes with sketches to guide the practitioner. It was alleged that these young men used this text to “taunt” and “humiliate” several unmarried women of the parish. Edwards was enraged by this and demanded a list of all involved. He was given the list that included the names of everyone, the innocent as well as the guilty. He then announced that he would hold a community meeting immediately after church on the following Sunday. He recruited several prominent parishioners to serve as a Board of Inquiry into this event and addressed his congregation after the service. Here he made a crucial mistake. After describing, in general terms, the nature of the offense, Edwards read the entire list of names to the congregation. He described them as witnesses for the Inquiry and that each would be required to testify. The congregation was outraged; less by the offense than by Edwards’ comingling of the names on the list. Who was being accused and who was not? As can easily be imagined the families of the young women were particularly furious. Had their daughters been involved in pornography or worse? Edwards lost control of the situation and was put on the defensive. This shocked him deeply since he was only

trying to “get to the bottom of things and root out the evil.” Eventually cooler heads took over the inquiry and calmed things down. Some reprimands were issued and the matter was allowed to drop. For Edwards, however, this was a debacle. His credibility and discretion were compromised and few wished to confide in him in the future. He was thought to be insensitive and highhanded. This reputation would cling to him in the end. A final important note on this incident should be made. The leading layman who stepped to Edwards’ defense to salvage the situation was Colonel John Stoddard. Col. Stoddard was the militia commander for western Massachusetts and highly respected in Northampton. He was also the surviving son of Rev. Solomon Stoddard, Edwards’ grandfather and predecessor. It became clear by this event that the prestige of his uncle, Col. Stoddard, was the important political foundation for Edwards’ pastorate. This reality would be highlighted when more substantive crises beset the congregation.

Toward the end of the seventeenth century the Puritan vision of a “community of saints” was in trouble. Simply put there were not enough “saints” to sustain the “community” (the cause of this crisis has been ably discussed by Edmund Morgan, *The Puritan Family*, 185–186). A “saint” was defined as someone who had a clean conversion experience, i.e. was visited by the Holy Spirit and was assured salvation. The experience was said to be unmistakable and left no doubt in the believers mind. As the years after the founding passed, fewer men and women in Massachusetts reported this experience. This had grave consequences for religious and civil life since the one was a requirement for the other.

From Edmund Morgan’s perspective the Puritans had two options to address this problem. They could undertake a large evangelization campaign to bring fresh converts from outside the community. This would mean tapping new recruitment sources in the colonies and in Europe. Alternatively, they could intensify their effort at “internal evangelization.” This option involved increased birth rates and doctrinal education, but more importantly, it increased pressure on their children to pursue election and become saints themselves. They chose the latter. From Morgan’s point of view, this turning toward internal, family resources was a fatal blunder for the Puritans: it placed too much emphasis on community dynamics instead of the “workings of the Spirit” to renew the

community. In addition, it was a betrayal of their original intention to spread “true Christianity” among the ungodly.

As an additional accommodation to the problem, the Puritans instituted the Half-Way Covenant. By this arrangement, church membership (the key to community participation) could be offered to the children of any baptized member of the church. That church member did not himself need to be “saved” to have his child baptized. In addition to this, the Covenant permitted baptized but not elect members to take Holy Supper. It was reasoned that the Holy Spirit could use that experience as a “converting ordinance” and grant saving grace to the communicant thus converting him. One of the main supporters of this accommodation was Solomon Stoddard himself. Most influential members of the congregation supported it also, including Col. John Stoddard, Edwards’ leading adherent.

However, Jonathan Edwards was opposed to it. He at first remained quiet about his stance, but by the mid 1740s he grew more vocal. He regarded the Half-Way Covenant as a corruption of the original Puritan compact. He stated that only the converted, i.e. “saved,” could bring forward their children for baptism. In addition, he would not offer Holy Supper to those who were only baptized. They needed to be “saved” as well. He could not have chosen a worse time to bring this issue to a head. Shortly before he declared his formal position, Col. John Stoddard died. As we know, Col. Stoddard was both the son of Solomon Stoddard, an author of the Covenant, but also Edwards’ greatest ally in the congregation. Only a deep concern for the ebbing of the recent revivals fervor could have prompted Edwards to declare himself so shortly after the Colonels death in 1748. The outrage in the congregation was profound. Many felt it was an insult to both Rev. and Col. Stoddard, who had supported him for years. Also, many felt that there was no need to change the rules and disrupt the church. Many earnest people would now be disallowed Holy Supper and could not have their children baptized. There were intense calls for his removal or resignation. Edwards refused to back down. He insisted that a pastor had the right, on principle, to make whatever changes were necessary to insure doctrinal purity. The years of 1748–49 were times of painful conflict in Edwards’ church and life.

Coinciding with this struggle was another dispute that came at this time. It ultimately brought these matters to a conclusion. For four years, 1744-47, no candidate had presented himself for admission to the church. At this time, congregational churches in the area were admitting an average of twenty-five per year. The congregation was aware that their church was moving in the wrong direction. The crisis came at the end of 1748 when a candidate did present himself for full admission based on a conversion experience. Edwards would not accept his experience at face value and proposed to examine the applicant on a series of doctrinal points. Early the next year, 1749, the candidate refused this exam and protested. This was a direct challenge to Edwards' pastoral authority and added more reasons for the congregation to question Edwards' fitness to lead. The members saw this as another instance when Edwards' placed his own judgment above the people and their religious traditions. The cumulative effect of these controversies was devastating to Edwards' ministry.

Finally in early 1750 the membership issues related to his alteration of the Half-way Covenant were reviewed by the local clergy, Edwards' peers for the twenty years he had been at Northampton. They voted against him and referred the matter to the congregation for final resolution. The Northampton congregation was one of the most prosperous and influential in Massachusetts. It was home to the "outpouring of the Spirit" in 1734-35 that triggered similar events across New England over the years. It was known throughout the English Protestant world as a revival center. Its pastor was a renowned evangelist, second only to George Whitefield in reputation. This was the same congregation which Whitefield himself had visited not ten years before to commend them and their pastor for their zeal.

Yet all of these things were of no avail for Edwards in these conflicts. The congregation took its vote; it voted against him by 230 to 23. Thus his relationship to them was dissolved after twenty-one years and he was forced to seek another position.

This fully human story combines doctrinal issues with interpersonal drama and high stakes. It was both principled and pathetic. It also provides a foretaste of the religious/political struggles to come between prominent prestigious pastors and their newly energized congregations

seeking increased participation in the organized life of religion. Evangelical historians tend to downplay or ignore this incident. However, this event was noted by his contemporaries, both lay and clergy alike. If someone of the stature of Jonathan Edwards could be toppled by the ordinary members of his congregation than surely the established structures of religion could be vulnerable to ongoing serious challenge.

With Edwards' dismissal from his pulpit we come to the end of what I have called the Last Calvinist Revival. Already on the horizon there were doctrinal and political challenges that would dwarf the emotions and political impact of this Revival. To them we turn in the next section.

VII

The struggle for religious Agency; its fundamental contribution to the American revolutionary movement, 1740s–80s

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in American colonial religious history. The older focus on Enlightenment ideas and the revolutionary elite has left large gaps in the narrative. It falls short of fully explaining the passion and commitment of the revolutionary forces that successfully engaged the power of the leading European nation in an eight and a half year military/political struggle. The crux of the problem was summed up by Perry Miller: "A pure rationalism . . . might have declared the independence of the folk, but it could never have inspired them to fight for it" (*The Shaping of American Religion* I, 343).

This problem has shifted the focus of scholarship away from the leadership and more toward what is now called "the popular sources of revolutionary energy." This shift does not ignore the reality of elite motivation and ideology. Rather it attempts to describe the popular, cultural, and religious motivations of the bulk of the population. The larger question then becomes the circumstances and understandings which combined to undertake a successful revolution.

This new literature has grown quite large and, to my mind, extremely fascinating given my own focus on the impact of the Last Judgment. Again, similar to what has been said at previous points in this essay, an extensive analysis of that work is beyond the scope of this paper. Perhaps the future will offer that opportunity. I have however, provided in an

endnote a listing of recently published material that addresses the question of popular motivations in fruitful ways.² They were all useful. In this section, I have relied on three texts in particular which have been most helpful; Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism* (2003), Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening* (2007), and James E. Block, *A Nation of Agents* (2002). Noll and Kidd are both leading scholars of colonial American religion and have a personal sympathy for evangelicalism. The Block book is a different kind of analysis, attempting to combine sociology with history in very suggestive ways. I wish to present his analytical framework before moving on to the historical events of this period so that the reader will understand how it fits into the broader structure of my analysis.

When I first wrote about the impact of the Last Judgment in a paper for the Cole Foundation in 2005, I suggested that the influx available to mankind at the time of the Last Judgment was profound and powerful. I proposed (following Swedenborgs lead) that while it entered human beings as a spiritual force it enlivened every layer of human sensibility since all of these received their life from the divine. I hypothesized therefore that if we examined the post 1757 world we would see dramatic development across a wide range of cultural/economic areas, while the physical world itself was unchanged. The Symposium at Bryn Athyn College in 2007 and the set of essays published as *The World Transformed* in 2011 were based on this idea. I believe these efforts advanced our understanding. Nevertheless, I wanted to take this analysis a step further. I wanted to understand *how* the Judgment transformed *man*, who then transformed the world. I contended that changes in human agency enabled humans to unleash both spiritual and social energy to reconstruct nature; but I did not describe the mechanism. I believe Blocks perspective takes us closer to an explanation.

Briefly, Block contends that mid-18th century American religious life was undergoing a crisis. Its doctrinal and institutional structures no longer satisfied the genuine, popular longings for religious experience and fulfillment. As a result the churches were subject to severe challenges in the decades before the revolution. These struggles provided people with the motivation and the opportunity to transform the colonial religious establishments. Their movement coincided with the political crisis of the time and eventually joined forces with it to provide the vital energy necessary to mount a successful revolution. I find this model appealing and consis-

tent with the historical events of the period. These events have been subject to a new focus by the recent scholarship I have referred to. I will use Blocks work as an organizing metaphor for the analysis that follows.

There are two problems that effect Blocks analysis that we cannot address in this essay. First, his model is naturalist and while it addresses religious issues he does not grant the spiritual any causal weight. He credits the Puritan revolution of the previous century as providing the energy for the events he describes. I dissent from this view obviously, in part because the scale of the transformations begun here is simply too vast for such a limited source. Second, he takes his analysis into twentieth century intellectual history, a stretch in my view, and far beyond the explanatory power of his original insight. However, within our area of immediate interest I believe his approach is quite useful.

While the dramatic incidents of personal salvation dropped dramatically in the late 1740s and 1750s the institutional repercussions of them continued. The Northern colonial church establishments, i.e. the Congregationalists and the Presbyterians were seriously divided. They split into parties based on their reaction to the new emotional preaching style of the evangelicals. Among Congregationalists, traditional members called the Old Lights, favored traditional worship formats, clergy led preaching, decorum in the church, and a strict respect for parish boundaries. They strongly opposed itinerant pastors using emotional methods to disrupt their congregations. The New Lights behaved very differently. They wanted people to feel religion in their hearts, especially the experience of being saved. They regarded many Old Light pastors as cold and intellectual because they had not been touched by saving grace. This accusation touched a nerve in the Old Light clergy and the dispute grew bitter. Under the leadership of several younger pastors like Joseph Bellamy and Samuel Hopkins, the New Lights would stage outdoor meetings near Old Light churches and draw the disaffected to them with vigorous and enthusiastic services. This threatened the religious order of Massachusetts and Connecticut where the Old Light churches were state supported. These disputes grew so bitter that they occasionally led to separations where groups of worshippers would separate from the church to establish a worship environment more in line with their conscience. It is important to re-emphasize that the differences between these parties were not doctrinal.

Both were Calvinists. The differences concerned freedom of worship and the use of state power in religious affairs. These events were often accompanied by legal action and state intervention which went on for years. Another complication for Congregationalism was the emergence of an Arminian-leaning faction led by Charles Chauncey which by the 1750s and 1760s began to have influence in the larger eastern towns. These doctrinal disputes soon complicated this situation.

Among the Presbyterians there were extreme divisions as early as 1741. This led to a schism between the Old Sides (traditionalists) and the New Sides (evangelical). The colonies primarily affected were New Jersey and Pennsylvania. Again, the issue was not doctrinal (both sides were Calvinists). The disputes centered on the emotional content of worship, the freedom of ministers to cross traditional church boundaries in response to religious need, the accusation that a cold clergy was “cold to Christ,” and the right of separation if the worshippers desired it. In this religious “marketplace” the Old Sides suffered badly. As Noll points out “[from 1741 to 1758] the number of Old Side ministers declined from twenty-eight to twenty-three, while the number of New Side clergy climbed from twenty-two to seventy-three” (Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*). Two principle reasons for this development, besides the worship experience itself were the number of talented young clergy driven to the New Side position such as William Tenent, Gilbert Tenent, Samuel Finley, and Samuel Davies. They provided the energy for this movement. The second reason was a very large immigration of Scots-Irish into Pennsylvania and Delaware at this time. These Ulstermen were very receptive to New Side worship practices.

The impact of Samuel Davies is particularly important to the argument of this essay. All during the colonial period the colonies of the south (Maryland, Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, and Georgia) maintained the Church of England as their established church. This was provided by royal decree in their founding charters and could not be changed while Great Britain ruled them. These colonies took this structure quite seriously, particularly Virginia. Other religions attempting to practice there were regulated, banished, or harassed by the government. As the evangelical/separatist movement spread it entered these Crown colonies and ran into conflict with the established church. It was here that some of

the most bitter struggles for freedom of worship and relief from church taxation were waged. This struggle continued for over thirty years right up to the revolution itself. One of the main architects of this struggle was Samuel Davies. Under his leadership the number of Presbyterian churches in Virginia rose from 160 in 1740 to 600 in 1776. These numbers, while impressive, only hint at the effort and endurance of these worshippers as they sought and secured the space necessary to conduct worship as they chose. These clashes over religious order in Virginia sorely disrupted the society during the prewar period but they paled before the challenge presented by the Baptists after the 1760s.

The Baptists had their greatest strength in New England in the 1730s. At that time they functioned under severe legal difficulty as the established Congregational church of Massachusetts and Connecticut taxed and harassed them. When the Last Calvinist Revival reached its peak in the early 1740s the Baptists responded with enthusiasm. Their leader, Isaac Backus, saw this period of excitement and distraction as a prime opportunity for expansion. The Baptist worship style was emotional rather than intellectual, they permitted lay preaching and they were hostile to state funding and oversight. This period of the 40s and 50s saw explosive growth for them in New England since their practices satisfied a deep, spiritual need in the population. This was especially true for the poorer and more marginalized people outside of the Congregational elites. The conflicts between the Old Lights and New Lights in New England, and the Old Sides and New Sides in the Middle Atlantic States provided the perfect medium for Baptist growth. Their combination of mass appeal and hostility to the established church order fueled their growth. They quickly became the fastest growing denomination during this period. While their doctrinal position was Calvinist their emphasis on "heart religion" tended to deemphasize doctrinal issues. In the 1760s they entered Virginia and the other southern colonies in a major way. This immediately triggered a hostile response from the Anglican establishment and Baptist growth was contested throughout the South. Again, just as in the north, their populist, anti-establishment religious politics and their "soul satisfying" worship gave them great appeal. They also discovered that in Virginia they had been preceded a few years earlier by the General Baptists (Arminian) who came directly from England. Both groups focused on the back-country

where there was greater freedom from government control. The northern Baptists with their greater numbers began to dominate and by the 1770s the frontier south was home to an evangelical Protestantism which was openly hostile to the Anglican religious elite and committed to disestablishment. Since the southern Anglican churches derived their legitimacy from the British connection the seeds of secular conflict were easy to discern. I hasten to add however that there was nothing automatic in the political outcome of this struggle. Many local conditions complicated loyalties on both sides and it would take eight years of revolutionary war to resolve this issue.

While this period (the 1740s and 1750s) saw widespread religious conflict, it was primarily restricted to political issues like state support, the right of separation and forms of worship. However, the 1760s saw a more personal area of conflict: the doctrine of individual salvation itself. I will briefly outline instances of these conflicts and draw some conclusions from them.

- 1) *The Introduction of Wesleyan Methodism into the Colonies*. Even though Wesley had blanketed the British Isles with circuits of itinerants bringing Methodism to most of the country (they had established forty-nine circuits by 1765) they had made no formal attempt to reach out to America. However several Methodists had immigrated here in the early 1760s and began to preach. These efforts saw some success but were uncoordinated in America and completely unknown in England. Finally in 1769 one of the itinerants, Captain Thomas Webb, communicated directly to Wesley and induced him in the same year to send trained itinerants from England. These arrived shortly and enjoyed immediate success. The Free Will doctrine of salvation was extremely appealing in America. The contrast with Calvinism was stark and electrifying. The Wesleys increased their presence in America the next year, in 1770 after they heard of Whitefield's death in Massachusetts. John Wesley wasted no time in filling the vacuum left by his old adversary. The initial success of Methodism was remarkable until the revolutionary crisis came to a head in 1774–75. John Wesley was a supporter of Great Britain in the struggle and his followers were suspected of Loyalism. This led to the virtual suspension of Methodist evangelization and all but one of the itinerants (Francis Asbury) re-

turned to England. As soon as the war was over (1784-85), the Methodists returned in full with results that we will describe shortly.

- 2) *The Emergence of Exhortation as Part of Calvinist Services.* This is a subtle but vitally important development. We must remember how important the Sovereignty of God principle was to Edwards and earlier generations of Puritans. God saved for his own reasons, "the power of man availeth not." By the mid 1760s however, a new style of preaching had begun to penetrate Calvinist sermons. I have chosen a sermon by Samuel Buell, delivered in Easthampton, New York in 1764 to illustrate this phenomenon. Buell preaches, "We must look beyond Means and have our expectations upon God only." He told the congregants, "again and again to Give God the Glory, all the Glory, if he should now condescend to grant a marvelous Out-pouring of the Spirit." Immediately, "there appeared to be a most surprising Effusion of the Holy Spirit." This "effusion" was attested to by the actions of the congregation subsequent to Buell's appeal.

The historian Thomas Kidd identifies the subtle but real shift in emphasis:

The episode revealed Buell's conflicted attitude toward "means." He, like Edwards, tried to put all the causal weight of revival on God, but Buell's exhortations seemed to function as a summons: insistence of the sovereignty and glory of God brought the remarkable effusions of spirit. (Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 278)

I have noticed other clear instances of "exhortation" in the later sermons of George Whitefield himself just before his death. The following are clear examples of this practice. I have chosen two excerpts from his sermons. The first, entitled "On Regeneration," follows:

Are ye new creatures in Christ, or no? . . . is it our daily *endeavor* to become such? In short, do we renounce our own righteousness, take up our crosses and follow Christ? If so, we are in that narrow way which leads to life; the good seed is sown in our hearts, and will, if duly watered and nourished by a regular persevering use of all the means of grace, grow up into eternal life. (Emphasis added)

The second example, from the sermon “Of Justification by Christ,” uses exhortatory images more common in the 19th century than those by a Calvinist minister of the 1760s. In portraying Jesus’ love for us Whitefield urges us to

cry out. Behold how he loved us! When he not only fulfilled the whole moral law, but did not spare to shed his own most precious blood for us. And can any poor truly-convicted sinner, after this, despair of mercy? What, can they see their Savior hanging on a tree, with arms stretched out ready to embrace them, and yet, on their truly believing on him, doubt of finding acceptance with him? No, away with all such dishonorable, desponding thoughts. Look on his hands, bored with pins of iron; look on his side, pierced with a cruel spear, to let loose the sluices of his blood, and open a fountain for sin, and for all uncleanness; and then despair of mercy if you can! No, only believe in Him, and then, though you have crucified him afresh, yet will he abundantly pardon you; “though your sins be as scarlet, yet shall they be as wool; though deeper than crimson, yet shall they be whiter than snow.”

It seems to me that both of these ministers and others were responding to an urgent demand from their audience for some specific path to salvation, i.e. something over which the hearers had some clear control. While the clergyman may have written a Calvinist text, he was giving an Arminian (Free Will) sermon. He was calling for an active response to his fervent invitation. This phenomenon became so widespread in the 19th century that it became quite difficult to infer the doctrinal basis of a sermon simply by listening to it. Edwards did not have this problem.

- 3) *The indigenous emergence of Free Will denominations during the 1770s.* This was a truly novel phenomenon in which individuals would experience Arminian (Free Will) visions and then share these with others. They then founded their own churches. A significant example of this was the case of Henry Alline of Nova Scotia. Thomas Kidd provides the background on Alline:

By the revolution one began to see cracks in the Calvinist evangelical edifice. Rising antiauthoritarianism made rejection of Calvinism possible, signaling the centrifugal theological impulses coming in the next generation of American evangelicalism. Alline served as a critical precursor to anti-Calvinist, doctrinally individual evangelicalism [which would predominate in the 19th century]. (Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 312)

While his story is fascinating we cannot tell it here but some of his remarks deserve repeating. About Calvinism Alline wondered why:

All the world must be sent to hell and be punished with all that could be inflicted on them for [Adams] sin, excepting here and there one, that God had picked out, and the rest, though they were invited to come to Christ, and a sham-offer of salvation made them, yet there was none for them, neither did God intend to save them, when he made them the offer. (*ibid*, 311)

After his vision and conversion he expressed his beliefs as follows.

He came to believe that God lovingly allowed all to choose or reject salvation. God did not cause people to be saved. "The very nature of God is a Freedom of Choice and therefore God cannot redeem those that will not be redeemed or save them without their Consent." (*Ibid.*, 315)

Alline went on to a successful career evangelizing in the Maritimes and Northern Maine. When he died he was eulogized as the "apostle of Nova Scotia."

Another Arminian (Free Will) convert during this period was Benjamin Randel of New Hampshire. He had a vision and converted in 1776. The essence of his vision was the following:

A bible was then presented before the eyes of his mind" which he realized "ran a perfect connection with the universal love of God to men—the universal atonement in the work of redemption, by Jesus Christ, who tasted death for every man—the universal appearance of grace to all men, and with the universal call of the gospel. (*Ibid.*, 315)

Clearly Randel's mystical experiences confirmed his faith in his anti-Calvinist, free will convictions. He went on to found the Free Will Baptists and established over 300 churches in northern New England by the early 19th century. They became the most active denomination in this part of the country.

These and similar developments, collectively called the New Light Stir, continued the trend in American religion away from the passivity, self-negation, and pessimism of the Calvinist tradition. One can see the diffuse impact of the values of the Last Judgment in this transformation of the American psyche. The net effect was to increase the individuals sense of worth. It empowered him to reorder his social conditions accordingly. "The pursuit of happiness" became a legitimate goal for human action and the divine influx provided the power to carry it out. After all, if man was free to enter a partnership with God to achieve salvation, what was impossible?

Another source of upset within colonial society at this time was the growing agitation for independence from Great Britain. This emphasized political agency rather than religious agency, but the two became linked in the 1760–1770s period.

- 4) *Growing convergence of religious and political critiques of the Colonial situation, producing a common language of dissent.* By the mid 1760s the Baptists under Isaac Backus had decided that the best way to disestablish religion in the colonies was to separate from England. Of course, separation came easily to Baptists, but their recent experience in the south where they ran afoul of the Anglican establishment brought these views into sharper focus. As a result, when the war broke out no denomination was more active in support of the Patriot cause than they were.

Many other evangelicals came to this position at this time as well. A prominent example was John Cleaveland, the pastor in Ipswich, Massachusetts. In 1764 Cleaveland was a seasoned revivalist who had twenty years experience as a pastor during these conflicted times. He expressed his view in language which clearly resonated with the broader political discourse around him. He believed that "people followed their consciences and hurried to those churches where God was at work. Breaking down traditional structures was called for

when conscience called for it. Spiritual edification of individuals was a great responsibility of churches, and any person has a right to seek his edification where he thinks he can best attain it . . . His using his right can be of no injury to any Man, because it is his inalienable Right" (ibid., p 272). Cleaveland then argued that churches which prevented this were "Prisons, in which the Rights, Liberties, and Consciences of their Members are fast bound in chains." He insisted that the pursuit of happiness was an inalienable religious privilege. By the early 1770s these sentiments had become widespread. Another statement to this effect was made by the Presbyterian Minister and signer of the Declaration of Independence, John Witherspoon who observed:

The public interest of religion or . . . zeal for the glory of God and the good of others would elicit Gods blessing on America . . . When the manners of a nation are pure, when true religion and internal principles maintain their vigour, the attempts of the most powerful enemies to oppress them are commonly baffled and disappointed. (John Witherspoon, *The Dominance of Providence*, 553)

The historical record is clear. While many established clergy and their followers remained neutral or professed loyalty to the Crown, the evangelical community largely supported the Revolution. Thomas Kidd summarizes the situation as follows:

In their narratives, the leaders transformed the local practice of revivals into public appeals for the rights of individual conscience and reasonable enthusiasm. Narrating revivals became a tool for legitimizing radical evangelicalism. In their printed accounts of the 1760s revivals, one sees the maturation of radicals who tried to establish their definition of the evangelical movement in the Anglo-American public sphere. The practical experiences of the 1760s revivals helped the former radicals articulate two key tenets of the revolutionary age: the freedom of private judgment, and the liberty to separate from established powers. The revivals of 1762-65 were historically crucial, therefore, in mainstreaming the radical tendencies of the evangelical movement, in building a foundation of evangelical populism and democratization in America, and in helping

align the movement with the incipient Patriot cause. (Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 268)

James Block has a slightly different analysis of this process but I think he makes a crucial contribution to our understanding. Block asks which kind of “freedom” the evangelicals had in mind. He argues that their conception was far removed from anarchy or antinomianism. It aimed to create space for collective community practices with a Christian basis. He expresses this as follows.

Freedom was understood in effect as agency not “negative liberty from authority” but positive liberty toward the goal of a dedicated Christian life. (James Block, *Agency*, 375–390)

Thus the result of the unification of the religious and republican value systems was not chaos. Rather, it was an explosion of innovations and productivity. This energy inspired an astounding economic and cultural growth that successfully contested the Revolutionary War and continues to drive the direction of world history down to the present day.

This brings us to a brief account of several extremely important events in American religious history that occurred in the 1780s. These events bring to completion some trends that were evident before the war while pointing powerfully to the future.

VIII

The Reintroduction of Wesleyan Methodism to America: Free Will religion and the creative power of American Culture, 1784–85; James Glen brings the Writings to America; the end of the First Great Awakening

The end of the Revolutionary War in November of 1783 brought significant changes to the landscape of American religion. First, it witnessed the political triumph of the Baptists and their separation-leaning evangelical allies. Virtually all limits on their ability to preach and organize as they wished were removed. Second, the cause of the disestablishment of religion in general was dramatically advanced. This

was strikingly clear in the Southern Crown colonies where the destruction of the “British connexion” automatically ended the supremacy of the Church of England. However, it was also partly true in Massachusetts and Connecticut where the Congregationalist establishment had supported the Revolution. Here the process was delayed until the early 19th century but eventually the forces of disestablishment were successful. It is of more than antiquarian interest to note that these structural developments in the United States mark the first time in the English-speaking world that the corporate patriarchal (society as a family) model of public life was decisively repudiated. This model, most recently articulated by Sir Robert Filmer in his political treatise *Patriarcha* (1680), was the source of the doctrine of the Divine Right of Kings and the rationale for Established Churches since the High Middle Ages. Lockes work *Two Treatises of Government* was written specifically to counter Filmer. The outcome of the Revolutionary War brought a conclusive end to this debate, at least in the United States. The third significant development for American religion after the war was the return of a renewed Wesleyan Methodism into the mainstream of American life. We will focus on this important event in this last section of this essay.

Mark Noll provides some basic statistics to describe this impact:

Important as Baptist action was, the great engine behind what has been called “the phenomenal advance of evangelical Protestantism” that began in the mid 1780s was Methodism. After the end of the War, Methodists regrouped under Asbury...In 1780 there were forty-two itinerants ministering to 8,500 society members in twenty-one circuits. Ten years later it was 227 itinerants for almost 58,000 society members in 101 circuits. Almost one-fifth of the new society members were African American. (Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 214–16)

While the 19th century is beyond the scope of this essay I have included historian Thomas Kidds description of Methodist growth into that period to show its continued trajectory.

Having been largely absent from the first decade of American evangelism, the Wesleyan Methodist flooded the American religious landscape

and by the Civil War it became the largest American Protestant denomination. In 1770, Methodists had a paltry twenty churches in America. By 1860, that number had swelled to just under 20,000. (ibid, 217)

What can account for this astounding growth? In the first place, credit must be given to the organizational genius and energy of John Wesley. There really was a “method” to Methodism; anyone interested in church growth should study it. One should also point out the hymns of his brother Charles which were an integral part of Methodist worship and meetings. These hymns were attractive, accessible, heartfelt, and lent an air of appropriate festivity to the religious gatherings.

However, there were other elements which from the view point of this essay, were even more vitally important.

I shall list these elements and then comment on them in appropriate detail. First, the resolution of the Loyalism problem and the Wesleys continued adherence to the Church of England. Second, the explicit repudiation of Calvinism in the published Methodist Articles of Religion released to accompany the founding of the American Methodist Church in 1784. Thirdly, the creation of Methodist bishops in America to speed the ordination of ministers to fill the exploding demand for clergy. (Previously, Methodist ministers were required to go to England for proper ordination). Fourth, the increased emphasis in John Wesley’s sermons on free will in spiritual matters. These sermons (one of which I discuss below) drove home Wesley’s Arminian views but also point to the damage the doctrine of Original Sin does to an actual Christian life. The clear congruence of these views in the emerging construction of a new type of civilization in America will be obvious throughout this discussion.

The “Loyalism problem” compromised the position of Wesleyan Methodism in the colonies since the early 1770s. John Wesley never separated from the Church of England and opposed any of his itinerants who did so. When Methodism first came to America in the 1760s, this was not a problem. The itinerants were few and not in contact with the Wesleys. This changed in 1769 when John Wesley was informed of the possibilities for growth in the colonies. He immediately sent several official representatives to develop this opportunity. They established the first official “cir-

cuit" in America. The situation became even more promising in 1770 when news of George Whitefield's death reached Wesley. Whitefield had been the leader of the rival Calvinist Methodists and his death left a leadership vacuum to be filled. This offered a golden opportunity to spread the doctrine of Free Will to a larger audience. The effect in the colonies was immediate. Wesley's newly arrived itinerants had immediate success in spreading their doctrine of active participation in salvation among the very receptive Americans. This increased visibility however, caused a problem for Wesley as the revolutionary crisis deepened. He was a committed opponent of American independence and he had stated this publicly. By 1775 he was forced to withdraw his itinerants from the colonies (with one exception) and return them to England to await developments. His delicate relationship with the Church of England and the British government dictated this move.

The success of the American Revolution solved Wesley's problem. The colonies severed all relations with England including those to its Church. Wesley could no longer be accused of divided loyalty and claimed that he had only followed his conscience in adhering to his country. He now encouraged Americans to follow theirs and be loyal to the United States. He even issued written instructions that required all itinerants sent from England to recognize the legitimacy of the United States of America. This deft move in 1784 opened the way for Methodism to reemerge as a force in America where its doctrines had already found great resonance.

The second crucial factor in Methodism's development in America was John Wesley's decision to found a new religious organization specifically for America, the American Methodist Church. This was completely distinct from the Church of England and would have its own leadership. But even more significant he radically revised the Thirty-Nine Articles of Anglicanism and eliminated all articles that elevated Calvinism to the level of doctrine in the church. This new document, the Methodist Articles of Religion, became the official creed of this separate church. These revisions were consistently along Arminian (Free Will) lines and were in accord with his actual beliefs. More importantly, they reflected his assessment of what the Americans were coming to believe already. This was the first doctrinal change generated within Christianity as a result of the Last

Judgment. In effect, Wesley was striving to articulate a doctrine based on disestablishment and free will, which could be embraced now and in the future.

I wish to enlarge on this vital point with some specific examples. These go to the heart of the salvation process. I will use the numbers of the original thirty-nine articles and provide Wesleyan changes.

Article IX On Original Sin: Wesley maintains the first portion stating only that the *natural* state of man, who happens to be an offspring of Adam, is inclined to evil. He deletes the entire remainder of the article which connects this nature to the Fall of Adam such that “every person born into this world...deserveth Gods wrath and damnation.” Thus Wesley transforms Original Sin from the Sin of Adam and the Fall of Man, deserving Gods eternal punishment, into a tendency for man to act on natural hereditary weaknesses.

Article X Of Free Will: Wesley does not change this article but emphasizes the Arminian reading of this important conditional phrase, “without the grace of God by Christ preventing us.” This is the Arminian concept of “prevenient grace” whereby we are offered a preliminary opportunity to desire and work for salvation, even though our natural inclination is against it. Thus *we* can turn to God to begin the salvation process which Gods power enables us to complete. We are not totally dependent on the Spirit to save us unconditionally.

Article XVII Of Predestination and Election: Wesley deletes this article entirely. It no longer has a role to play in religion since Original Sin and the Totally Depraved Human Will have been substantively discarded.

All together Wesley deletes fifteen of the Thirty-Nine Articles of the creed of the Church of England. The remainder of the deletions and revisions do not concern us in this essay. There is one, however, which is vital. In Article XXXVII On The Civil Magistrate loyalty to Great Britain and the British Crown are required. Wesley deleted this article entirely and substituted the following:

The President, the Congress, the general assemblies, the governors, and the councils of states, as delegates of the people are the rulers of the United States of America . . . and by the constitutions of their respective states. And the said states are a sovereign and independent nation and

ought not to be subject to any foreign jurisdiction. (Article 23, Methodist Articles of Religion)

By adopting these principles into the founding document of the American Methodist Church, the Wesleys simultaneously resolved old problems and positioned themselves for new challenges. In 1784, this document was sent to America along with a set of superintendents who were to lead the church independent of the Wesleys. They joined Francis Asbury, who had remained in America during the war, to constitute the formal founding of the American church at the "Christmass Conference" held in Baltimore in December, 1784. Here an assembly of American Methodists ratified the Articles of Religion and officially elected Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke as the superintendents of the church.

The third factor which contributed to the rapid spread of Methodism in the new United States was the centralization of leadership under Francis Asbury. Within a short time after being elected Superintendent, Asbury was offered the title of Bishop by the church. He accepted and went on to a long and fruitful career. It is a truly astounding fact of American religious history that America calmly accepted a Bishop as head of a major American religion just two years after the end of the Revolutionary War. Those familiar with Carl Bridenbaugh's account of the bitter struggle in the decade before 1776 over an Anglican Bishop for America will marvel at the easy acceptance of Bishop Asbury. However, the real conflict over an Anglican bishop had to do with its political implications. Americans were essentially indifferent to the titles people gave to the heads of their churches so long as those titles entailed no political authority. However, Americans fiercely opposed what Swedenborg called "Babylonish" churches, which combined religious and secular power. This was what the disestablishment movement was all about. Bridenbaugh succinctly summarized the stakes of the earlier struggle as follows:

This contest [over an American episcopate] in truth, was far more than the customary religious strife. It was a *Kulturkampf* between the dissenting bodies and the Church of England. The Anglicans aimed at nothing less than the complete reordering of American society. (Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, 1962, xiii)

Bridenbaugh is alluding to the social vision of the High Church proponents of an American Bishop under the Church of England. They favored a society far closer to Filmer than to Locke. This reduction of tensions over Episcopal organizations even applied to the post-war appointment of a Bishop for the former Church of England congregations in November, 1784. It must be said however, that various personal issues retarded acceptance of this change for several decades. But in the Methodist case the restructuring went smoothly and Asbury's competent and energetic management of Wesley's system led to unprecedented growth.

Bridenbaugh's important work was published in 1962, more than fifty years ago. Yet there is little mention of it in modern American historiography. This is a true theoretical oversight. The Bishop controversy was the single most powerful linkage between the popular and elite discourses. It was the clearest expression of popular emotional involvement with an inter-colonial political issue. Evangelicals genuinely feared re-absorption into the established church. Their myths and memories were founded on that separation. The agitation over this issue especially after 1766 was intense. I hope that the new concern among historians of 18th century religion eventually refocuses on this one issue where the real anxieties of the average worshipper were specifically concerned with the "British connexion."

The fourth and I believe, most important reason for the phenomenal spread of Methodism in America was the content of its doctrine. This same case can be made for other Free Will religions that came later, but I want to focus on Methodism because of the power of its initial impact. As I have done earlier in this essay, I will utilize material from an original sermon given contemporaneously to illustrate its doctrinal intent. Wesley gave this sermon in 1785 shortly after he had sent his superintendents and creedal statement to America. This important sermon was given to reinforce the change in doctrinal emphasis that Wesley intended for Article X of the Thirty-Nine Articles. This article, as mentioned above, concerned free will. As you will remember Wesley did not change the wording in this article but re-emphasized the concept of "preventing grace" (prevenient grace) which fundamentally altered its Calvinist rendering. This change was vital to communicate without ambiguity since it highlighted the

pathway to salvation. It also stressed the reality of a loving and caring God who truly desires that all should be saved.

Wesley takes as the text for his sermon, (whose formal title is *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, umcmission.org/Sermon/Wesley#85), a portion of Paul's epistle to the Philippians 2:12-13, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling. For it is God that worketh in you." Wesley makes it clear from the outset that the power of salvation rests with God, it is his work and the glory of it should be to him. The crucial question, he argues, is how we "get in the way" of his grace. Is it the mysterious choice of a distant God who chooses the beneficiaries for his own sovereign purpose and then compels them to be saved? Or is it something else?

Here Wesley introduces the notion of a loving God who desires the best outcome for man. This God is constantly showering men with his affection which creates general desire for moral conduct even in the natural man. Of course man may not attend to this, he may even repudiate it if it occurs to him. But he may also grasp on to this hint of a better and deeper life. Wesley explains:

If God worketh in you, then work out your own salvation. The original word rendered, *work out*, implies the doing a thing thoroughly. *Your own*, for you yourselves must do this, or it will be left undone forever. *Your own salvation*: Salvation begins what with is usually termed (and very properly) preventing grace; including the first wish to please God, the first dawn of light concerning his will, and the first slight transient conviction of having sinned against him. All these imply some tendency toward life; some degree of salvation; the beginning of a deliverance from a blind, unfeeling heart, quite insensible of God and the things of God. Salvation is carried on by *convincing grace*, usually in Scripture termed *repentance*; which brings a larger measure of self-knowledge, and a farther deliverance from the heart of stone. (Wesley, *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*, 2)

Wesley has filled the space between God and man with divine love rather than an infinite gulf. This love is constantly surrounding man and

stimulating and empowering his highest aspirations, until man, on his own, reaches out and desires God to fill his life with faith and grace.

Later in the sermon, Wesley confronts the questions of Agency head on. Why should a man continue to participate in this process—is not Gods power sufficient?

Yet this is no excuse for those who continue in sin, and lay the blame upon their Maker, by saying, “It is God only that must quicken us; for we cannot quicken our own souls.” For allowing that all the souls of men are dead in sin by *nature*, this excuses none, seeing there is no man that is in a state of mere nature; there is no man, unless he has quenched the Spirit, that is wholly void of the grace of God. No man living is entirely destitute of what is vulgarly called *natural conscience*. But this is not natural: It is more properly termed *preventing grace*. Every man has a greater or less measure of this, which waiteth not for the call of man. Every one has, sooner or later, good desires; although the generality of men stifle them before they can strike deep root, or produce any considerable fruit. Everyone has some measure of that light, some faint glimmering ray, which, sooner or later, more or less, enlightens every man that cometh into the world. And every one, unless he be one of the small number whose conscience is seared as with a hot iron, feels more or less uneasy when he acts contrary to the light of his own conscience, So that no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath. (Ibid., 3)

Notice that doctrinally, Original Sin has disappeared. There is no debasement of the nature of man which prevents him from understanding his predicament. He has been given the means, by an all-loving God, to take the first step on the road to salvation. But he must keep at it. As Wesley says above, echoing St. Augustine, “no man sins because he has not grace, but because he does not use the grace which he hath.”

Where does Wesley take this conception of salvation? How does he answer the age old question, “Master, what must I *do* to be saved?” (emphasis added). His response is partnership with God.

God worketh in you; therefore you *must* work: You must be “workers together with him,” (they are the very words of the Apostle) otherwise he will cease working. The general rule on which his gracious dispensations invariably proceed is this: “Unto him that hath shall be given; but from him that hath not,—that does not improve the grace already given,—“shall be taken away what he assuredly hath.” (So the words ought to be rendered.) . . . He will not save us unless we “save ourselves from this untoward generation;” unless we ourselves “fight the good fight of faith, and lay hold on eternal life;” unless we “agonize to enter in at the strait gate,” “deny ourselves, and take up our cross daily,” and labour by every possible means to “make our own calling and election sure.” (ibid, 3)

Such a message of efficacy and empowerment at the deepest level of our self-consciousness was the message that resonated with the post-Last Judgment flow of American culture.

This vision of Wesley’s is, of course, congruent with Swedenborg’s. Wesley and the Methodists upheld other, more traditional Christian doctrines, i.e. the Trinity, Christ’s atonement for sins, etc. But in this vital area, they were consistent with the new doctrines detailed in the Writings.

Although this essay in no way presents itself as an analysis of Wesleyan theology, it is clear that there was real development from the 1740 sermon on *Free Grace* to the 1785 presentation *On Working Out Our Own Salvation*. While *Free Grace* presents an impassioned condemnation of “predestination,” *On Working Out Our Own Salvation* presents a far richer and more systematically developed soteriology. Is it possible to detect the influence of Swedenborg in this process? Wesley was aware of Swedenborg since 1771 when he was sent a copy of *True Christianity*. I am assuming that other portions of the Writings were available to him in subsequent years. We also know that Wesley’s judgment of Swedenborg grew more hostile as the years went by. I believe we need to take a fresh look at what generated this animus. Perhaps certain aspects of the Writings paralleled Wesley’s views so closely that he was concerned about being associated with some of Swedenborg’s more radical claims. I believe we can see an analogous situation arising for Kant whose earlier positive reaction to Swedenborg was repudiated in *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*. These topics take us

far from the subject of this essay. However, they are worth pursuing at another opportunity since the negative reactions of both Wesley and Kant closed the doors to the Writings from timely penetration into both the religious and secular intelligentsia. This outcome requires a serious examination.

The Methodist message of free will was a vital part of the work of salvation for the average person. When joined with the legal principle of disestablishment, it propelled the growth of American religion into the 19th century. Other groups flourished in this cultural religious milieu as well and made their own contributions to the religious energy of post-revolutionary America. Mark Noll expresses this in the following terms:

Dissident Methodists, Free-Will Baptists, African Americans and those who were caught up in Nova Scotias New Light Stir were all motivated by what they took to be the principles of Gospel renewal, “true Christianity” and authentic scriptural authority. Their willingness to follow these principles, even if leading to a break with forms of Christianity established by law, precedent, designated authority or racial traditions, added a new dimension to the history of evangelicalism. (Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism*, 223)

Noll’s main point about these “new” religious movements, which were now moving forward, is that they were motivated by what they regarded as “principles of Gospel renewal and ‘true Christianity.’” This was not antinomian anarchy as some of the traditionalists feared. This burst of freedom was self-bounded by the long history of Christian ethics and social practice. This is what gave it its staying power. Obviously this movement spawned some bizarre offshoots but these never sidetracked it from its main direction, i.e. giving a meaningful, salvific religious experience to anyone who wanted it.

These features of American religious development were not lost on one of the most acute observers of this period. James Block sums up how this process appeared in secular terms. He attributes the energy of this development as follows:

The theological splits among and within denominations...were given the similar backgrounds among many participants, more a reflection of beliefs about the human ability to direct the enormous changes and order the profound uncertainties in the new republic. By overcoming Calvinist proto-agent limits on human initiative and then resisting the expansive individualism of sectarian self-authorization, the dominant popular movement was able to clarify and consolidate the dynamic integration of its agency values: a voluntarist privileging of individual human initiative with absolute constraint rooted in Gods unqualified authority. (Block, *Agency*, 382)

Thus he sees the energy for this activity stemming from changed beliefs "about the human ability to direct the enormous changes." One can certainly agree with this statement as far as it goes. But what underlay the changes in human attitude? We will not find discussions of "divine influx" or the "Last Judgment" in modern social science, nor should we expect to. It is our responsibility to open this conversation to include these possibilities.

We now come to the event that, I believe, truly marked the end of the First Great Awakening (pun intended). In June of 1784 James Glen, a member of Robert Hindmarsh's society in East Cheap, London, introduced the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg to America.

These Writings contained the revelations concerning the events in the spiritual world that had an indirect, yet dramatic impact on the natural world. Also they provided a spiritual guide to the living of a truly Christian life in this new world. These Writings were initially provided between 1749-1756 to ground the world through divine revelation as the Last Judgment itself unfolded.

The story of the New Church, as it made its way in the dynamic world of American religious life is a story for another day. It must be told in the context of what historians call the Second Great Awakening that proceeds from this point until the Civil War. Perhaps, in the future, that story can be told as well.

I have attached a conclusion to this essay to round out my thoughts and present some ideas for future projects that might be undertaken.

IX

Conclusion and some suggestions for the future

As I indicated in the Preface to *The World Transformed*, New Church history is absolutely unique. It attempts to provide a coherent account of past events that are both seen and unseen. A vital portion of the story we are attempting to tell will be out of natural sight yet it is a real element in the chain of causes that generate human action. This realm we call the spiritual world. Our guide to it is the Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg. In this essay, I have attempted to portray the real impact in the natural world following the monumental events in the spiritual world. These events, collectively called the Last Judgment on the Christian Church, fundamentally altered the direction and flow of divine influx (energy) into the natural world, thus changing its spiritual reality. I contend that as the spiritual events have a specific form and intention, that events in the natural world would be similarly impacted. The Lord reordered the spiritual world to provide mankind the spiritual freedom necessary to choose heaven on its own. This was in line with Gods original purpose of creation: “to create an angelic heaven from the human race” (*True Christianity* 66).

This was done without cataclysmic impact in the natural world so that mans “freedom in spiritual things” would be unimpaired. What this essay has attempted to do is to describe, in a limited way, the manner of the human adjustment to the changed spiritual reality. I chose some areas of doctrine to be my focus because of their obvious importance. I could have chosen others. In fact, in *The World Transformed*, various New Church scholars chose a variety of areas of human life to analyze. I hope this process continues since the possibilities for future research are virtually endless. I return to the analysis of James Block to give a sense of the opportunities:

Agency, with its precise combination of voluntarist empowerment and authoritative limits, offered an optimistic and highly individualized social and spiritual message that reflected its increasingly successful economic and social proponents. Typically this upwardly mobile cohort who flocked to the new movement were the rising new entrepreneurs, merchants, traders, professionals, public officials, and master artisans who

were leading the commercial transformation in towns and cities. Amidst their prosperity and faith in individual enterprise and choice, these groups were slowly stepping forward from denominational hierarchy and theology to undertake full individual responsibility for their religious lives. They were increasingly convinced of the beneficent role for human and specifically individual effort as reflected in progressive theology with its “resolution to escape from the trammels of ‘inability,’” and in “energetic schemes of social and economic improvement.” A theology was wanted that not only vindicated their successes to date but also legitimated their continued striving in all facets of life. (Block, *Agency*, 383)

Block has broadened his focus to include the political, economic, and moral impact of the “agency idea.” His approach is definitely in line with my original concept. However, the advantage of New Church history over Block’s approach is the centrality of the spiritual dimension in our causal model. The virtually limitless power of spiritual influx into human agency is something Block ignores. Also, his model is completely America-centered. The Last Judgment was a universal spiritual event; therefore, we should see its impact on an international scale. We have only just begun to think in these terms but several scholars in *The World Transformed* have begun to explore this approach.

Lastly, I have included a brief description of four research projects that I believe are worthy of attention for the future. Others come to mind, of course (and some of these have been mentioned in the text), but those below appear as logical extensions of the present work, or, continuations of the efforts of New Church scholars of the past generation.

- 1) The Spread of the New Church in America in the context of the Second Great Awakening—“This project would follow the progress of Agency-Free Will religious groups up until the Civil War. This is a truly rich area of study with a great deal of historical material available. We could utilize traditional intellectual history techniques since there were many New Church participants in the major events. I suggest a special focus on early New Church ministers, e.g. Hargrove, Powell, Weeks, etc., who are in danger of being forgotten by us, and who do not deserve to be.

- 2) The Growth of the New Church in England with special interest in political (anti-slavery, Reform Bill of 1832, etc.) and economic (Lancashire, Manchester, entrepreneurs, etc.) matters. It would be a pleasure to work with a combination of British New Church groups to access the necessary historical material.
- 3) This paper has focused on doctrinal changes in America which were congenial with the general direction of the Last Judgment and particularly Swedenborg's critique of Calvinism. Not all American religions repudiated Calvinism at this time however. The majority of Southern Baptists clung to the TULIP principles into the 20th century. No spiritual judgments can be made regarding this situation but economic judgments could be. Was there any observable correlation between the "inability" and "debased nature" doctrines of Southern Baptists and the indices of modern economic development among them? What impact could this have had on the receptivity of the South to New Church doctrines?
- 4) The New Church has had an interest in looking at the historical changes that have accompanied previous Church transitions. The change from the Most Ancient Church to the Ancient Church was the subject of a conference of New Church scholars only a few decades ago. There have been exciting recent developments in secular Anthropology / Archeology which have shed new light on this general time period. I believe it is time to revisit this transition in the light of these developments and take a new look at applying the New Church doctrines involved.

I will end this essay with a stirring reminder from Carl Bridenbaugh on the centrality of religion to the American historical experience.

We shall also see that the epoch-making mental change, that we call the American Revolution, occurred in a religious atmosphere. It is indeed high time that we repossess the important historical truth that religion was a fundamental cause of the American Revolution. (Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre*, xiv)

High time indeed!

ENDNOTES

1. Major Works of the Theological Writings of Emanuel Swedenborg:

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Heaven and Hell, (1758)
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