America's God

From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln

MARK A. NOLL

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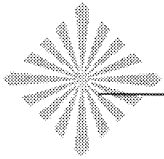

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To

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This book took much longer to finish than I had originally hoped. The result from trying to coordinate reading and writing over a long period is, I fear, a volume less tightly argued than it should be. Yet my greatest regret about this lapse of time lies in delaying the recognition conveyed by the dedication to a scholar, teacher, and friend who, more than any other, opened up to me the path of Christian learning and who has been there every step of the way.

Wheaton, Illinois M. A. N.
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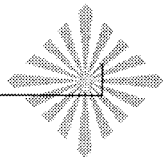

INTRODUCTORY

Christ took flesh and was made man in a particular time and place, family, nationality, tradition and customs and sanctified them, while still being for all men in every time and place. Wherever he is taken by the people of any day, time and place, he sanctifies that culture—he is living in it. . . . But to acknowledge this is not to forget that there is another, and equally important, force at work among us. Not only does God in His mercy take people as they are: He takes them to transform them into what He wants them to be.

—Andrew Walls, "Africa and Christian Identity," 1980

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I 

Introduction

Theology and History

This book is a contextual history of Christian theology. Its pages describe evolutionary changes in Christian doctrine that occurred from the 1730s to the 1860s, a period when theology played an extraordinarily important role in American thought, but the emphasis throughout is on the contexts—ecclesiastical, social, political, intellectual, and commercial—in which those changes took place. Because it features connections between theological development and early American history, the book often asks how religion influenced the early United States. Yet Christian theology, not the United States, is the primary concern.

The book's main narrative describes a shift away from European theological traditions, descended directly from the Protestant Reformation, toward a Protestant evangelical theology decisively shaped by its engagement with Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary America. It is not an exaggeration to claim that this nineteenth-century Protestant evangelicalism differed from the religion of the Protestant Reformation as much as sixteenth-century Reformation Protestantism differed from the Roman Catholic theology from which it emerged.

The changes taking place in American religious thought from the 1730s to the 1860s were part of a general shift within Western religious life. Other English-speaking regions were also experiencing the move from early-modern to modern religion marked by heightened spiritual inwardness, a new confidence in individual action, and various accommodations to the marketplace. Without attempting a full comparative history, this book will nonetheless suggest that the pace and direction of theological change in the United States

differed from what occurred in other largely Protestant countries of the North Atlantic region.

Western Protestantism in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries was moving from establishment forms of religion, embedded in traditional, organic, premodern political economies, to individualized and affectional forms, adapted to modernizing, rational, and market-oriented societies.[1] Theological manifestations of these changes can be described in several ways. They first reoriented specific beliefs: God was perceived less often as transcendent and self-contained, more often as immanent and relational. Divine revelation was equated more simply with the Bible alone than with Scripture embedded in a self-conscious ecclesiastical tradition. The physical world created by God was more likely to be regarded as understandable, progressing, and malleable than as mysterious, inimical, and fixed. Theological method came to rely less on instinctive deference to inherited confessions and more on self-evident propositions organized by scientific method.[2]

Theological changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries also involved a shift in meaning for key concepts that operated in both religious and political life, for example, "freedom," "justice," "virtue," and "vice." For theology, the process at work was the same as Gordon Wood once described for intellectual developments more generally: "Although words and concepts may remain outwardly the same for centuries, their particular functions and meanings do not and could not remain static—not as long as individuals attempt to use them to explain new social circumstances and make meaningful new social behavior."[3] In America as much was happening in theology from new meanings given to old words as from the introduction of new vocabularies.

The years from 1730 to 1865 witnessed theological debates that were every bit as contentious as those from earlier periods in the Christian West, and the specific theological questions receiving the most concentrated attention were also usually inherited from previous generations: To what extent was human nature incapacitated by sin? How did the fall of Adam and Eve affect later generations? How did God's grace work to rescue sinners? What was the best way to describe the atonement with God won by Christ on the cross? What should believers expect when attempting to live a Christian life? Could there be some kind of Christian perfection before eternity? But these questions were increasingly debated—among elites, among the people at large, and between elites and populists—in forms molded by the times.

Throughout this period, the theological spectrum in America was broadening considerably. Alongside well-publicized discussions at the center of public attention, the spectrum always included convictions going out of favor among the generality as well as beliefs espoused by prophets at the margins. Gender, race, and region contributed to the pluriformity of theology, as did diverse opinions on the wisdom of abandoning European styles of church-state establishment. Even with full attention to internal diversity, however, it is clear that the center of theological gravity was moving away from the norms of the European past toward norms defined by the American present. That movement was more rapid in the North and West than in the South, but in all

regions it was more pronounced than in other countries of the North Atlantic region, where varieties of Protestant evangelicalism were also on the rise.

A word, indeed, is necessary about the central place of evangelicalism in this narrative. For the period under consideration the most widely recognized religious voices for the American public were Protestant. From the 1790s and with gathering force in the decades leading to the Civil War, the most prominent Protestant voices were also self-consciously evangelical. If, however, developments affecting evangelical Protestants are central in this study, I do intend to fulfill the promise of the title and direct at least some attention to how American circumstances affected religious reflections among non-Protestant theists, especially Roman Catholics (but also deists and Jews), as well as among Unitarians and high-church Episcopalians who were Protestant but not evangelical. At the center, nonetheless, remains the incredible welter of Protestants who considered themselves evangelical or who have been treated by later historians as if they were. The most serviceable general definition for this modern evangelicalism has been provided by the British historian David W. Bebbington. It stresses four characteristics: biblicism (or reliance on the Bible as ultimate religious authority), conversionism (or an emphasis on the new birth), activisim (or energetic, individualistic engagement in personal and social duties), and crucicentrism (or focus on Christ's redeeming work as the heart of true religion).[4] But as Bebbington and all other students have noted, evangelicals always appeared in countless variations.

That evangelical hodge-podge must begin with the articulate Congregationalists and Presbyterians, who, because they published so much and occupied such elite social positions, have regularly been allowed to stand for the whole of American theology during this period.[5] That hodge-podge also included Methodists, the most numerous religious movement in America from the Revolution to the Civil War, but a tradition whose historiography until recently has been as weak as its life on the ground was strong. It took in Baptists, "Christians," Restorationists, and other sectarians whose theology promoted anti-formalist principles that vigorously contested the hegemonic formalism of Congregationalists and Presbyterians.[6] It included African Americans, who increasingly found a theological voice in antebellum decades. And it also involved intellectually self-conscious communities of European confessional Protestants—Lutherans, German Reformed, Dutch Reformed, and low-church Episcopalians—whose theologians shared a great deal with the formalist evangelicals but who nonetheless retained varying degrees of intellectual independence. Evangelical Protestants figured most prominently in the era's most dramatic theological transformations, but almost every group of American theists was touched by some of the elements defining those transformations.

A Social History of Theology

Pursuing what might be called a social history of ideas makes possible a connected narrative of causes and effects, or at least of plausible relations be-

tween circumstances and actions occasioned by those circumstances.[7] Thus, in what follows, social and political events are enlisted to help explain grand shifts in theological conviction. For example, I suggest that a revolution in late-Puritan understanding of the church during the 1740s allowed American patriots several decades later to harness Puritan notions of the covenant to support a largely secular political revolution. I argue that the antitraditional character of the Revolution's political ideology predisposed Christian thinkers of the early nineteenth century to the antitraditional intellectual principles of the Scottish Enlightenment. I try to show why evangelical conceptions of virtue and vice advanced so rapidly in a new republic created by leaders who did not embrace evangelical religion. And I offer an explanation for why in the decades before the Civil War so many evangelical Protestants in the North as well as in the South—but not evangelicals in Canada or the British Isles—were convinced that the Bible sanctioned slavery. Explaining changes of theological conviction by reference to political and intellectual events does not necessarily entail a reduction of religion to more basic secular realities. Rather, attempting to comprehend religion and society in the same narrative allows for a story with flesh and blood instead of a bloodless ballet of abstract dogmas.

A contextual approach to theological history is especially useful for explaining why Christian belief evolved along different lines in the predominantly Protestant United States than it did in Protestant Europe. In this effort, I am following the path of early foreign visitors to the United States, who frequently used social contexts to explain American religion. Most famously, Alexis de Tocqueville drew a telling contrast between the religious situations in France and America by referring to political circumstances: "On my arrival in the United States it was the religious aspect of the country that first struck my eye. As I prolonged my stay, I perceived the great political consequences that flowed from these new facts. Among us, I had seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom almost always move in contrary directions. Here I found them united intimately with one another: they reigned together on the same soil."[8] Yet de Tocqueville was far from the only outsider to describe American religion in terms of American society and vice versa. In 1832 Achille Murat, an exiled Bonapartist, whose religious ideal was a unitary society with an established church, nonetheless could not help but be impressed by "the thousand and one sects which divide the people of the United States. Merely to enumerate them would be impossible, for they change every day, appear, disappear, unite, separate, and evince nothing stable but their instability. . . . Yet, with all this liberty, there is no country in which the people are so religious as in the United States."[9]

At the end of the story told here, the surprisingly vigorous religious vision of Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address drew immediate reaction from Europeans knowledgeable about circumstances on both sides of the Atlantic. The émigré historian and theologian Philip Schaff, who was visiting his homelands in 1865, told German and Swiss audiences, "I do not believe that any royal, princely, or republican state document of recent times

can be compared to this inaugural address for genuine Christian wisdom and gentleness."[10] What Schaff and other foreign observers of the time noted makes for an important interpretive question: Why did Lincoln, though never a church member, use the Bible more freely in this speech and also address questions of theological significance more directly than his near-peers as heads of state in other Protestant lands who were dedicated members of Christian churches like William Gladstone in Britain or Abraham Kuyper in the Netherlands?

Comparisons

A social history of theology also hints at explanations for contrasts with specific European regions. In the early eighteenth century, the dominant Christian theologies in America were quite similar to the dominant theologies prevailing in Scotland, Northern Ireland, the Netherlands, and Switzerland.[11] As in colonial America, theology in these regions was primarily Calvinistic or Reformed or at least overwhelmingly theocentric. Methodologically, it was confessional, biblical, and even scholastic. Internal contentions lay mostly between inherited Reformed confessions and rationalistic anticipations of the Enlightenment. In all of these regions, as throughout the rest of Europe, theology was controlled by a learned elite operating under the protection of an established state church.

The situation in England was different primarily because of continuing reactions to the failed Puritan revolution of the mid-seventeenth century.[12] While a variety of post-Puritan and dissenting Protestant opinions paralleled the main emphases of Reformed Protestantism elsewhere in Europe, English religious thought at the end of the seventeenth century was dominated by a cautious monarchical church more wary of enthusiasm than eager to promote dogmatic particulars. England's dominant Anglican theology linked loyalty to the monarch, belief in God as designer of the universe, and the imperatives of social order. By the early eighteenth century, intellectual reaction to the traumas of a religiously inspired Civil War had pushed theology in a rationalistic, antienthusiastic direction, as much following the anticredal impetus of John Locke's *Reasonableness of Christianity as Delivered in the Scriptures* (1695) as the specific convictions of either Puritans or high Anglicans. If theology in the English colonies was marginally closer to the traditional Reformed theology on the European continent and Britain's Celtic fringe than to contemporary theology in England, those colonies joined Protestant Britain and Europe's Reformed Protestant regions in affirming substantially similar positions.

From the late seventeenth century and with accelerating force throughout the eighteenth, a new set of circumstances appeared in all of these areas.[13] These circumstances included a struggle for the control of religion between aristocratic elites and middle-order Protestants reasserting the priesthood of all believers. It was the era when pietism on the Continent and evangelicalism

in Great Britain emerged as powerful movements that (depending on one's perspective) opened a way to inward spiritual renewal or threatened to subvert society. It was also the period when Enlightenment understandings of the individual self, experience, and the burdensome past were taken up by all sorts, including most pietists and evangelicals as well as many confessional Christians.[14]

Yet by the early nineteenth century—and despite a relatively common starting point, common exposure to the new piety, and common appropriations of moderate forms of the Enlightenment—the American theological situation had come to differ markedly from Protestant patterns elsewhere.[15] In Scotland, the long sway of a Moderate party during the eighteenth century gave way in the 1790s to the rise of an evangelical party and a resurgence of confessional Calvinism; the result was to leave Scottish theology in 1840 remarkably similar to its status 150 years before.[16] In Northern Ireland, both traditional Calvinistic and traditional monarchical theologies were stronger in 1840 than they had been in the early eighteenth century.[17] In Holland and Switzerland a series of sharp divides had opened up between defenders of Calvinism and modern substitutes for Calvinism, between traditional biblical emphases and liberal philosophical concerns, and between pietistic theologians of the people and learned neologians at the universities.[18]

By the mid-nineteenth century, theology in England was in some ways drawing closer to theology in America, especially because of the vigorous evangelical movements inside and outside the Church of England that paralleled similar movements in North America. Yet important differences remained, especially because of the strength of the high-church Oxford Movement in England, the rapid advance of utilitarian thought, and the continued influence of Anglicanism as an established church. American theology had not yet witnessed anything like—from opposite ends of the religious spectrum—John Henry Newman's Anglo-Catholicism or John Stuart Mill's secular utilitarianism.[19] Similarly, the central role that the established churches of England and Scotland occupied in defining the morality of British economic life had no parallel in America.[20]

Until 1812 English-speaking Canada appeared ready to follow the United States in theology as in other cultural spheres. But the war beginning that year and an influx of British immigrants over the next two decades combined to promote a Canadian Protestantism distinct from that in the United States. Political and religious loyalty to British Methodists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and Baptists led to a Canadian Protestant theology that for the rest of the nineteenth century moved away from, rather than in harmony with, the American pattern.[21]

More than at the start of the eighteenth century, in other words, American theology by 1850 was distinct from theology in Protestant Europe. By contrast to Scottish and Northern Irish theologians, most Americans had moved further away from the convictions of confessional Calvinism. And by contrast to the Swiss and the Dutch, Americans, with only a few exceptions, remained more committed to the Bible and the experience of conversion as foundational religious authorities. Furthermore, by contrast to both English

and Canadian theologians, Americans were less traditional, less corporate, and less ecclesiastical, but also—in a difference with enduring effect—more effectively attuned to the convictions of the working and middle classes.

At several points in the book, I attempt to sharpen these international comparisons, although the claim will not be made that the history of specifically American events can explain comparative differences completely. General developments in Western intellectual history—especially a growing confidence in human reason (the Enlightenment) and a growing confidence in human sensibility (romanticism)—were at work variously among theologians in America as well as elsewhere. Historical developments in other countries affected local theologies as much as American events shaped American religious thought. Proper qualifications having been made, however, even this crude introduction is enough for stating a thesis: Broad trends in Western culture as a whole can account for some of the important differences between theology in America and theology in Protestant Europe, but they were not as influential as the specific social contexts in which Americans did their work.[22]

The American Synthesis

By the early nineteenth century, a surprising intellectual synthesis, distinctly different from the reigning intellectual constructs in comparable Western societies, had come to prevail throughout the United States. It was a surprise both because little in colonial history before the mid-eighteenth century anticipated its formation and because it came into being only as an indirect result of the American Revolution, the era's greatest intellectual as well as political event. The formation of this synthesis, in turn, explains much about what followed in the history of American thought from the early nineteenth century. Along with more distinctly religious factors, the plausibility, flexibility, and popularity of this synthesis at all social levels was a key to the remarkable Christianization that occurred in the United States, both North and South, during the period 1790–1865. How the creation and outworking of that synthesis imparted a distinctly American cast to theology is the story told by this book.

The synthesis was a compound of evangelical Protestant religion, republican political ideology, and commonsense moral reasoning.[23] Through the time of the Civil War, that synthesis defined the boundaries for a vast quantity of American thought, while also providing an ethical framework, a moral compass, and a vocabulary of suasion for much of the nation's public life. It set, quite naturally, the boundaries within which formal theological effort took place. Since the Civil War, the synthesis has declined in importance for both formal thought and public life, though not without leaving an enduring stamp upon the mental habits of some religious communities and episodic marks upon the public discourse.[24]

The synthesis was most visible in the links constructed between religion and public life. As an instance, the 1833 amendment to the Massachusetts

Constitution that did away with the last church establishment remaining from the colonial period nonetheless paused to affirm that "the public worship of God, and instructions in piety, religion, and morality, promote the happiness and prosperity of a people, and the security of republican government."[25] When these words were written, Alexis de Tocqueville had only just returned to France from his memorable tour of the North American continent, and he was making the same point descriptively rather than prescriptively: "I do not know if all Americans have faith in their religion—for who can read to the bottom of hearts?—but I am sure that they believe it necessary to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion does not belong only to one class of citizens or to one party, but to the entire nation; one finds it in all ranks."[26]

The synthesis operated just as manifestly at the intersection of theology and popular philosophy. Contemporaries who differed dramatically in their religious convictions were nonetheless linked tightly to each other by philosophical method. In the early nineteenth century, for example, serious differences divided Harvard's professor of logic and metaphysics, the Unitarian Levi Hedge; Yale's president and modified Calvinist Timothy Dwight; the upstart Restorationist Alexander Campbell, who was exploiting the open American environment to restore the primitive church of the New Testament; and the first professor of theology at Princeton Seminary, the conservative Presbyterian Archibald Alexander. Yet from these contentious corners of America's religious landscape resounded the same devotion to moral philosophical first principles. Dwight, in 1793, for example, set out an American credo that prevailed widely for at least the next two generations:

> The faculties, necessary to form a competent judge of all these facts, are the usual senses of men, and that degree of understanding which we customarily term Common-sense. . . . A plain man, thus qualified, would, as perfectly as Aristotle, or Sir Isaac Newton, know whether Christ lived, preached, wrought miracles, suffered, died, appeared alive after death, and ascended to Heaven. The testimony of the senses, under the direction of Common-sense, is the deciding, and the only testimony, by which the existence of these facts must be determined.[27]

It was the same for Alexander in 1808 when he defended the need for divine revelation by appealing to "self-evident principles to which every rational mind assents as soon as they are proposed . . . truths in morals, in which all men do as certainly agree as in mathematical axioms."[28] For Hedge in 1821 these same principles served as a basis for defending a position on the human will that Alexander would have found abhorrent: "The moral freedom of man is not a question of speculation, to be settled by abstract reasoning. . . . It is a question of fact to be decided by feeling. . . . We believe we are free, because we feel that we are so."[29] Three years later, Campbell demonstrated why the creeds that elitists like Dwight, Alexander, and Hedge defended were so preposterous: "To present . . . a sectarian creed composed, as they are all, of

propositions, deduced by logical inferences, and couched in philosophical language, to all those who are fit subjects of salvation of Heaven . . . for their examination or adoption, shocks all common sense."[30] These examples only hint at the weight of custom that by the 1820s had joined Protestant precepts securely to the principles of republican and commonsense reasoning.

This synthesis of religious, political, and philosophical principles was never monolithic in either public or religious spheres.[31] But even if each of its elements was contested, the confluence of the three interpretive systems and the cultural significance of that confluence was unmistakable. For the articulation of Christian theology, this synthesis was profoundly significant. The process by which evangelical Protestantism came to be aligned with republican convictions and commonsense moral reasoning was also the process that gave a distinctively *American* shape to Christian theology by the time of the Civil War.

Elements of the Synthesis

The Protestant evangelicals who came to dominate religious life in the early United States shared an emphasis on conversion, the supreme religious authority of the Bible, and an active life of personal holiness. They were the descendants of Reformed immigrants—English Puritans to New England, Scottish and Scotch-Irish Presbyterians to the middle and southern colonies, and low-church Anglicans to the Chesapeake. But nineteenth-century evangelicals were also the heirs of two full generations of revival, beginning with the Great Awakening of the 1730s and 1740s and continuing through local, episodic awakenings in nearly every region of the colonies-become-states.

By the time these evangelicals came to prominence, most Americans were already committed, as a result of the successful War for Independence, to a republican conception of politics. In this view, the exercise of political power could be sanctified by the virtue of people and magistrates, or turned into tyranny by the vices of rulers and ruled. Like the Protestantism of the early nineteenth century, this republicanism also existed in many varieties, some harking back to the classic tradition of civic humanism, others allied with a more modern liberalism, and still others featuring "Commonwealth," "country," or "Real Whig" elements.[32]

By the late eighteenth century most Americans likewise shared both a mistrust of intellectual authorities inherited from previous generations and a belief that true knowledge arose from the use of one's own senses—whether the external senses for information about nature and society or the moral sense for ethical and aesthetic judgments. Most Americans were thus united in the conviction that people had to think for themselves in order to know science, morality, economics, politics, and especially theology. For some Americans this certainty was rooted in formal study guided by thinkers of the Scottish Enlightenment who developed careful theories concerning "common sense."

For many others, including burgeoning numbers of Methodists and simple "Christians," it was a product of epistemological self-assertion that heeded no creed but the Bible.

For each aspect of the synthesis, as well as for the synthesis itself, variants abounded. Men and women often appropriated it differently.[33] In the South it took longer to convert traditional concepts like "honor" and "virtue" to evangelical norms, but that transformation did take place.[34] The remarkable thing, however, is not that differences existed but that they were confined within a fairly narrow range. The extent of the synthesis is suggested by its power among even Roman Catholics, whose fellow religionists in Europe remained securely opposed to all rapprochement with Protestantism, republicanism, and epistemological self-sufficiency.[35] To sum up a situation that many historians now take for granted: after the 1780s, republicanism (wherever found along a continuum from classical to liberal) had come to prevail in America; very soon thereafter, commonsense principles (whether defined in elite or populist terms) were almost as widely spread; and in the same post-Revolutionary period, Protestant evangelicalism (however divided into contending sects) became the dominant American religion.

The way in which evangelicalism and civic humanism merged during the Revolutionary period to form a Christian republicanism has been the subject of several solid studies in the last quarter century.[36] Although not as much attention has been paid to the marriage of evangelicalism and commonsense moral reasoning, the conjunction of the two is just as well established. As a result of much fine work, therefore, the presence—and, to some extent, the rise—of the synthesis is now thoroughly understood.

What for the most part has not been done is to show how unexpected, in the longer historical view, the emergence of the synthesis was; how much the American intellectual story differed from Protestant developments in parallel societies; how intimately the republican-evangelical-commonsense synthesis was woven into the fabric of American public life through the time of the Civil War; and how powerfully both this intellectual synthesis and Protestant participation in American public life shaped the writing of Christian theology. It is not my argument that the blending of evangelical Protestantism with republicanism and commonsense reasoning explains theological development exhaustively. Other influences did continue to have a powerful effect, including the enduring weight of theological tradition among many Catholics, Lutherans, and high-church Episcopalians, as well as in some of the more evangelical denominations. For almost all religious leaders, the Bible remained an ever-present resource, even when put to unexpectedly innovative uses.[37] Americans in the period 1790–1865 also continued to absorb European influences, especially from England, with the strongest impulses at first from the Wesleys, then from those who founded voluntary organizations to distribute the Bible or attack slavery, then from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's intuitive Anglicanism, and then from the Oxford Movement. By the 1830s currents from Germany and France were also affecting American theology.[38]

It is, however, indicative of the American character of theology between the Revolution and the Civil War that, even with a considerable expansion of creative biblical interpretations, almost all Scripture, whether traditional or newly recorded, was interpreted by hermeneutical canons arising from the same commonsense and republican conventions of thought. In addition, even with important influences from Europe fully acknowledged, there still was less theological borrowing from Britain and the Continent in the period between the Revolution and the Civil War than at any time before or since in American religious history.

Neither is it the contention of this book that Protestant contacts with republican politics and commonsense philosophy were the only relationships that influenced the writing of theology. The expansion of market economies, especially when linked to liberal principles about the rights of individuals, certainly became a theological as well as social factor in this period. Other systems of political thought affected theological reasoning as well, including Lockean liberalism, the traditions of the common law, and historic arguments defining a just war. Granting due weight to these other influences, it was still the case that the most distinctly American features of theology between the Revolution and the Civil War arose from the evangelical Protestant alliance with commonsense reasoning and republican ideology.

The Shape of the Book

In at least five respects, the American confluence of evangelicalism, republicanism, and common sense was an oddity in eighteenth-century Western societies. Sketching these circumstances introduces the main themes of the book.

1. A first curiosity concerns the religious history of the late-colonial period, particularly the Great Awakening and its effects. It is a story of unintended consequences. Leaders of the Awakening—from Jonathan Edwards in Northampton, Massachusetts, Joseph Bellamy in rural Connecticut, Gilbert Tennent in New Brunswick, New Jersey, and Samuel Davies in Virginia, to George Whitefield, who went everywhere—knew what they were after when they enlisted affective rhetoric to preach about intractable human depravity and supernal divine grace. They were trying to reawaken the church for the sake of the church itself, to reassert the sovereignty of God's divine love in conversion, to exalt the substitutionary, penal work of Christ as God's way of reconciliation with sinners, to demonstrate the necessity of conversion as a prerequisite for truly virtuous living, and by these means to check the worldliness promoted by the era's new forms of commerce and entertainment. Yet the pursuit of such goals had ironic consequences. The awakeners preached a higher, more spiritual vision of the church, yet the result was decline in the very notion of church and a transfer of religious commitment from the church to the nation. They focused on God's role in conversion yet brought about an exaltation of human activity in the process of salvation. They preached a traditional doctrine of the atonement yet opened the way toward redefining the work of Christ

as an outworking of governmental relationships rather than the assuagement of God's wrath. They rooted true virtue in supernatural conversion yet created conditions for a new concept of virtuous living as in principle available to every person by nature alone. The unintended theological consequences of the Awakening is the story told in chapter 3.

2. The evangelical Protestantism that rose to prominence in the early United States was descended from the colonial Awakenings, the Puritan movement, and the Protestant Reformation. More generally, it was an offshoot of the Western Christian tradition. But the republicanism that American evangelicals embraced so warmly in the second half of the eighteenth century had always been regarded with suspicion in that Western Christian tradition, it was not taken up by the early Protestants, it was only ambiguously related to Puritanism, and it was never promoted directly by the leaders of the Great Awakening. Rather, both contemporary observers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries and modern historians have viewed republican political views as much more closely connected with theological heterodoxy than with theological orthodoxy. That history of antagonism between republicanism and classical Christianity works counterintuitively against the later American assumption that there is a natural fit, even a supernaturally ordained harmony, between the Christian God and republican liberty. The singularly American marriage of republicanism with religion is the subject of the fourth and fifth chapters below.

3. It was almost the same for the alliance between evangelicalism and commonsense moral philosophy. The principal Reformers, the main Puritans, and supremely Jonathan Edwards stood unambiguously opposed to key elements of the eighteenth-century's "new moral philosophy"—especially the argument that the ability to make reliable moral judgments existed naturally in the whole human race. By contrast, the main Protestant traditions from early in the sixteenth century through the mid-eighteenth century, and not just the Calvinists, had taught a different doctrine: although God might provide a minimal moral consciousness to all humans by nature, genuine virtue could be practiced only by redeemed sinners who had been acted upon by God's grace in Christ and called into the church. Despite this Protestant heritage, by the early nineteenth century evangelicals had joined other Americans in taking up commonsense principles as their guide for ethics, metaphysics, and even the foundations of theology. How evangelicals made the transition from opposing to accepting the era's "new moral philosophy," how they embraced its conclusions along with an ardent devotion to newfangled scientific methods—and by so doing created the context in which "American theology" was written—is the subject of chapter 6.

4. The ninth and tenth chapters explore another curiosity. By the 1830s and 1840s the synthesis of evangelicalism, republicanism, and common sense had become, not only the most powerful value system *in* the nation, but also the most powerful value system *defining* the nation. Abraham Lincoln's references to Americans as God's "almost chosen people" (1861) and to the Civil War as a contest where "both [sides] read the same Bible, and pray to the

same God" (1865) were among the most memorable of an endless parade of assertions about the Christian character of the United States.[39] The surprising thing about such ascriptions is not that nineteenth-century Americans regarded their nation in messianic terms, since this conceit was rooted in English ideas of national chosenness, Puritan assumptions about covenant with God, and the convictions of a wide range of Revolutionary and post-Revolutionary leaders (deists, the orthodox, sectarians) who believed that God had especially blessed the new United States.[40] The surprising thing was, rather, how evangelical these affirmations of national chosenness became in early United States history. The most important founding fathers were not evangelical. In the period when the colonies broke from Britain, evangelicalism was a marginal and declining influence among the political elites who called national assemblies, provided the most important written justifications for independence, and then drew up the Constitution. As a factor in the early religious makeup of the thirteen new states, evangelical impulses may not have been as weak as historians sometimes picture them,[41] but they were fragmented, indecisive, and inchoate, and they barely existed in most of the southern half of the new country. At the very time, in other words, when the United States came into existence, the evangelicalism that would soon play such a central role in the nation's dominant cultural synthesis, and play that role in the South as well as the North, was weaker than ever before or since. The problem that evangelical weakness in the founding era poses for understanding later American history is the subject of chapter 9. Chapter 10 treats the surge that carried evangelicals from cultural marginality in the Revolutionary years to dominance in the nineteenth century.

5. A last curiosity about the synthesis of evangelical Christianity with republicanism and commonsense moral reasoning is that the United States of America was the only place where it happened. To heighten the singularity of the American experience, chapter 4 expands at length on the English-speaking Protestant regions that by 1800 were either rejecting outright or forcefully suppressing republican convictions. Other chapters in the book pause to note the surprise—sometimes the indignation—of European visitors who found especially remarkable the link between America's evangelical Christianity and its political and intellectual institutions. Near the end of the book there is again brief treatment of theological development in other English-speaking Protestant nations in order to underscore the importance of context for the writing of theology. Those sketches both highlight the effect that American events worked on religious thought in the United States and further illustrate the general embeddedness of all such thought in its particular social settings.

Since this book is a history of theology as well as a history of the contexts in which it was written, we start with a brief summary in chapter 2 of the mostly traditional character of colonial American theology before 1750. At considerably greater length, chapters 7 and 8 survey the main lines of theological development during the Revolutionary period and the last decade of the eighteenth century. One more chapter provides additional scene-setting for explaining the distinctly American shape of theology in the nineteenth century—

chapter 11, which sketches the ideological transformations that allowed American evangelicals to appropriate republican and commonsense principles that most of their Protestant contemporaries in Europe continued to spurn.

Six chapters then follow on the full-blown American theology that emerged after the Revolutionary era. These chapters, which feature Calvinists and Methodists as the era's most influential religious forces, are alert especially to substantive shifts in convictions about basic theological issues, like the nature of sin, human will, the atonement, and true virtue. Where possible, however, these chapters focus most intently on assumptions of "common sense" in the nontechnical usage of the term—described by historian Thomas Haskell as "the comfortable certainties of 'what everybody knows.'"[42] Even more than alterations in doctrinal conviction, changes in these assumptions carry us directly to the places where deep cultural contexts exerted their most significant effects.

The next four chapters attempt a theological history of the Civil War, which was a much more actively religious struggle than the earlier War for Independence. The well-considered judgment of James McPherson is that the "Civil War armies were, arguably, the most religious in American history."[43] Specific details underscore how much America's public religion had changed from the 1770s to the 1860s. Although the most memorable hymns composed to mark the Revolution came from the Trinitarian Congregationalist William Billings, they featured an Old Testament God of Battles riding to the rescue of the American patriots, as in "Chester":

> Let tyrants shake their iron rod
> And slav'ry Clank her galling Chains
> We fear them not we trust in god
> New englands god for ever reigns.[44]

By contrast, although the most enduring hymn of the Civil War was written by a Unitarian, Julia Ward Howe, it nonetheless exalted the saving work of Christ:

> In the beauty of the lilies Christ was born across the sea,
> With a glory in his bosom that transfigures you and me:
> As he died to make men holy, let us die to make men free,
> while God is marching on.[45]

The book's account of developments between 1776 and 1865 is intended as an explanation for why formal religious thought, at the time of the firing upon Fort Sumter, was both more explicitly Christian and more explicitly American than at the time of the Revolution. Against this background, chapter 21 contrasts the surprisingly profound theological utterances of Abraham Lincoln with the disappointingly predictable statements from the prominent clergy of his day. If a broader contextual narrative is required for understanding this contrast, it is also critical for understanding the special problem of the Bible and slavery. During the generation that culminated in the Civil War, no society on earth was as preoccupied with Scripture as the United States.

And no comparable era in the history of Christianity ever witnessed so vigorous a defense of the simplicity of biblical interpretation. That defense, however, posed a drastic problem, since by 1860 a majority of evangelical Protestants, North as well as South, was concluding that the Bible sanctioned the kind of slavery then prevailing in the Southern states. To this majority it was self-evident from a simple reading of Scripture that slavery enjoyed a divine sanction of some kind, yet at the same time the minority of Americans who held that the Bible forbade slavery also felt their scriptural interpretations were simply self-evident. The great difficulty posed by this standoff was that, short of warfare, no means seemed to exist for adjudicating these self-evident, but conflicting, interpretations of Scripture. Another difficulty was that no body of Protestants elsewhere in the English-speaking world agreed that the Bible sanctioned slavery.

The story of how "simple" readings of the Bible led to such an impasse is far from simple. Chapters 18, 19, and 20 attempt an explanation by showing how thoroughly the American assumptions about interpretation had been shaped by republican, commonsense, and evangelical understandings of the world. This complex story of a hermeneutical conundrum reveals the tragedy, in the strict sense of the word, of the American biblical defense of slavery. Precisely the synthesis of awakened Christianity, republicanism, and common sense that enabled evangelicals to contribute so much to constructing the national culture prevented evangelicals from offering a scriptural Word from God to address the crisis that ripped apart the country that they, as much as any other group, had created.

The book's concluding chapter offers a brief recapitulation and assessment of the terrain it has traversed. It notes that the great military conflicts of the United States' founding century turn out to have marked a beginning as well as an end for the alliance of evangelicalism, republicanism, and common sense. The synthesis was created from the crucible of the Revolution. While the synthesis did not perish in the Civil War, it was greatly diminished because of that conflict; never again would it drive the nation and its thought as it had from the early days of the republic to the stillness at Appomattox.

At the outset I must plead guilty to some slipperiness in using interchangeably the terms "theology," "religious thought," and "writings about God and humanity." While the book covers mostly the discourse of acknowledged theological elites, I am more concerned about relating articulated religious beliefs to their social settings than in worrying about the question of who should be included or excluded. In the early years of the nineteenth century, a self-consciously professional study of theology did emerge from the church- and public-centered practices of earlier centuries. But even as this professional study led to increasingly formal debates among cognoscenti, those debates were never far removed from day-to-day concerns about social well-being and the moral health of the nation. This book could not have been written without the exemplary scholars who have focused with great acumen on the internal, formal development of religious ideas. But its aim is somewhat different.

Religious beliefs as expressed by the small fraction of all Americans who published, and whose works were then discussed, debated, contested, or ridiculed as part of the public record, are the focus here. Historical practice of recent decades has shown how rewarding it is to push beneath such an elite stratum in order to recover the voices of ordinary people. With full knowledge and approval of such work, I have nonetheless chosen to present my title as *America's God* rather than *Elite America's God* because of two historical convictions: that many nonpublishing citizens read, pondered, and considered themselves part of the circles of debate created by the published theology examined in this volume; and that during the years from 1730 to 1865, most residents in the United States, as well as outside, if they thought about "America" at all, did so in terms of the public realm of discourse that is the focus here.

It is appropriate to note also that scriptural quotations are taken from the King James Version, which was the Bible of choice for almost all Americans throughout the decades treated in this book. I have attempted to explain theological and political terms when they first appear, but a glossary has also been provided for the most important of such items.

A final preliminary word is in order to acknowledge that, as with other highly charged subjects, the historical study of theology cannot be carried out with ideological indifference. For that reason it is appropriate to state that I approach the study of (primarily) Christian theology in America as a professing Christian myself. Yet while not wanting to hide this personal stance, my hope for the book is that it might approach the ideal expressed by Caroline Walker Bynum in her remarkable study of the meaning of food for religious women in the Middle Ages. Bynum's *Holy Feast and Holy Fast* is, she wrote, "about then, not about now. . . . My commitment, vision, and method are historical; I intend to reveal the past in its strangeness as well as its familiarity. My point is to argue that women's behavior and women's writing must be understood in the context of social, economic, and ecclesiastical structures, theological and devotional traditions, very different from our own. If readers leave this book simply condemning the past as peculiar, I shall have failed. But I shall have failed just as profoundly if readers draw direct answers to modern problems from the lives I chronicle."[46] In trying to follow Bynum's lead, I want to tell the story of theology between Jonathan Edwards and Abraham Lincoln historically rather than with a theological ax to grind. It is of course impossible to neutralize theological standpoint, but I hope (for reasons that are in the end also theological) that in this book the historian wins out over the theologian.

2 

Theology in Colonial America

For understanding American theology at the time of the Civil War, it is necessary to begin at least a century and a half before. Religious beliefs and theological methods in the American colonies through the first half of the eighteenth century were vastly different from what they became in the next century. Sketching the main theological convictions of the major ecclesiastical traditions as they had developed in colonial America to about 1750 provides a basis for that contrast.[1]

The foundation of American theology was European theology. Until about 1750 the major theological voices of the colonies' major ecclesiastical traditions testified uniformly to the durability of inherited Protestant traditions. Congregational Puritanism provided far and away the most influential formal theology in the colonies, but almost all other varieties were also decisively stamped by their old-world origins. Those theologies were instinctively traditional, habitually deferential to inherited authority, and deliberately suspicious of individual self-assertion. The center of formal religion throughout the colonies remained the being, prerogatives, and actions of God, although this central affirmation was construed in different ways. Some theological traditions stressed God's provision of grace for personal salvation, some God's revealed will as the norm for churches, others God's general will as the foundation for social order, and still others God's appointed ministers as mediators of his guidance for humanity.

Such traditional theology was as fully articulated into its social and political contexts as later "American theology." Christian believers in colonial America, though overwhelmingly Protestant, still assumed that God had structured society like a pyramid and that contentment with one's created place was a godly virtue. The respect owed to pastors was an instance of the deference due to all whom God had placed in their superior stations. The colo-

nists' allegiance to written confessions was connected to the breakup of medieval Catholic authority and the search by Protestants for secure alternatives to the universal ideal of visible church authority. The construction of Puritan and Anglican establishments in the new world reproduced in separate colonial regions notions of godly uniformity that had competed with each other in England from the 1540s to the 1650s. The Puritan understanding of covenant as a theological device was as much a product of late-Tudor, early-Stuart search for intellectual and social order as were parallel understandings of constitution in politics and contracts in commerce. Similarly, Anglican notions of God-ordained social order shared Stuart aspirations for governance by divine right and then Newtonian conceptions of rule-governed cosmic order.[2]

Early theology in America differed from what came later not because it was disentangled from culture while the latter was entangled. The difference, rather, lay in the altered circumstances to which theologians spoke. For intellectual balance of trade, colonial theology enjoyed greater control over its own resources and so functioned as a net exporter of ideas, in contrast to the situation during the nineteenth century, when theology became a net importer of ideas. That kind of conclusion, however, is a judgment about what happened with respect to the circumstances of theology. It takes for granted that the writing of theology is always a contextual enterprise.

For all major colonial traditions, theological legacies from the old world remained definitive.[3] Following the drift of the English state-church after the Restoration of 1660, colonial Anglicans looked for theological guidance less to their confession from the Reformation era (the Thirty-nine Articles) and more to the sense of cosmic divine order that Anglican apologists held their church to embody.[4] This attitude, however, defined the most traditional theological order in North America, or at least the most "un-American," as protests against eighteenth-century attempts to install an Anglican bishop in the colonies would suggest. Colonial Presbyterians, Dutch Reformed, German Reformed, and Lutherans were expressly creedal churches, with confessions from the Reformation continuing to serve as official statements of belief. In the context of European debates with Roman Catholics, an increasing degree of Bible-centered radicalism can be observed in moving from the Lutherans' Augsburg Confession of 1530 to the Heidelberg Catechism of 1563 (primary standard for the German and Dutch Reformed), to the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession and Catechisms of 1646–1648. But in the new world, all of these confessions were roughly equivalent in both the doctrines they affirmed and the conservative stances they took on the promulgation of doctrine. If anything, colonial churches were noteworthy for taking such standards more seriously than did the churches they left behind.

The record of colonial Presbyterianism is particularly instructive at this point. Precisely at a time when English Presbyterians in the eighteenth century were moving away from strict allegiance to the Westminster Confession and a substantial number of Irish Presbyterians were doing so even more rapidly, colonial American Presbyterians concluded after serious debate that the

Westminster standards should remain a nonnegotiable floor of church doctrine.[5] In 1742 even the colonies' noncreedal, antiestablishmentarian Baptists adopted a confession of faith from the old world, the London Baptist Confession of 1689. This "Philadelphia Confession," as it became known in America, was a lightly edited version of the Presbyterians' Westminster Confession. Its straightforward Calvinistic assertions were every bit as traditional on predestination, divine sovereignty, the imputation of Adam's sin, and Christ's righteousness as those of the Baptists' establishmentarian opponents.[6] For all these traditions, formal theology remained a task of attaching the present to the past rather than opening the present to the future.

Colonial Puritanism was in a theological class by itself.[7] The Puritans of New England possessed the colonies' most articulate and widely published theologians. They were the one group of colonists who aspired to establish an entire society on the basis of their theology, and the only ones to have partially succeeded. By the 1740s Puritan theology was indeed breaking apart into divergent strands of pietists, rationalists, and conservatives. Yet into that decade, an identifiably Puritan tradition survived in New England, where theology retained the major Calvinist emphases as these had been defined in the founding generation by John Cotton (1584–1652), Thomas Hooker (1586–1647), and Richard Mather (1596–1669). Significant variations might exist, but an Augustinian-Calvinist picture of the fallen human condition, of merciful divine sovereignty in redemption, and of the self-authenticating all-sufficiency of divine revelation still prevailed. Through the first third of the eighteenth century, Puritan theologians assumed that there was a given (rather than constructed) character to human nature, the world, and God's ways of reaching out to the world. They took for granted that the central religious task was to orient the self to the prerogatives of God as those prerogatives had been revealed in Scripture.[8]

In the first decades of the eighteenth century, these themes were the leitmotifs of two notable theological landmarks. First was Samuel Willard's *Compleat Body of Divinity* (1726), an extensive exposition of the Westminster Shorter Catechism, 50% longer than Calvin's *Institutes*, which a demanding public finally succeeded in bringing to print eighteen years after its author's death. Willard (1640–1707) was a Boston preacher and sometime acting president of Harvard College, whose substantial interest in ethical questions indicated his acquaintance with the new moral philosophers. But in its substance Willard's theology carried on the emphases of his Puritan predecessors, especially in its depiction of how human nature was morally crippled by sin and in its account of God's sovereign action in salvation. "Philosophy," he wrote in the *Compleat Body*, "tells us, that life-actions require life in the agent. And spiritual actions must derive from a spiritual life; gracious actions must flow from grace. Call this an habit, or a virtue, or a principle; it must be an ability to do these things, which it had not naturally, but must be given it."[9]

The second landmark was the remarkable corpus of published theology from Cotton Mather (1663–1728), a neurotic dynamo who at the height of his energetic career accounted for a quarter to a third of all religious works pub-

lished annually in the colonies. As the long-time colleague-pastor to his father, Increase, at Boston's Old North Church, Mather shared his age's fascination with the new science, proposed countless reforming schemes, and cultivated the kind of piety that would later mark evangelical religion. Yet by insisting on the supremacy of scriptural revelation over all other forms of knowledge, by defending predestination as a comfortable doctrine for the spiritually anguished, and by urging cooperation between leaders of church and state, Mather offered a grand recapitulation of the Puritan theological enterprise. His words from a 1715 funeral sermon nicely illustrate both the exuberant orthography he affected and the traditional Puritanism he championed: "The *goodness* of One who is a *Good Man*, begins with a deep Apprehension and Acknowledgment of his *Badness*. . . . 'Tis a *Regeneration* that makes a Good Man. . . . But having dug this *Low* for the *Foundation*, we must then see to it that there be the *Rock* in the Foundation. What I mean is, *A Faith* which brings us into an *Union* with our SAVIOUR. . . . Our Saviour has told us, Jn. XV 5. *Without me, you can do nothing.*"[10]

The sustained power of such theocentric convictions is suggested by the fact that Benjamin Colman (1673–1747), the era's most productive preacher-theologian after Mather, but an individual of very different temperament, maintained them as well. Colman, who unlike Cotton Mather had lived in England and enjoyed firsthand contact with fashionable Dissenters of the day, was the first pastor of Boston's Brattle Street Church, a congregation founded by the city's educational and mercantile elite for the express purpose of offering a refined refuge from the Mathers' rigorous piety (and from the Mathers). Colman enjoyed expatiating on the splendors revealed by Newtonian science, and he displayed a weakness for liturgy that greatly distressed Cotton Mather. Yet in his picture of human nature turned aside from God because of sin, his ascription to God of the entire motive power in redemption, his denial of a universal moral sense, and his reliance upon the Scriptures as the sole source for the saving knowledge of God, Colman was a thoroughly traditional Puritan. For all his intellectual sophistication, he was the key Boston pastor promoting the early works of Jonathan Edwards. For all his refinement, he was the one who invited George Whitefield to preach in Boston. Colman's patronage of these younger Calvinists was part of his larger effort to rejuvenate the Puritan inheritance.[11]

Jonathan Edwards

The work of Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) attested most fully to the vigor of the Puritans' inherited Calvinism. Twentieth-century students are partially correct in drawing attention to the modernity of Edwards's intellectual universe, for he was influenced by the sensationalist epistemology of Locke's *Essay on Human Understanding*, he marveled at the lofty regularities portrayed in Newton's science, and he accepted the affectional emphases in the new moral philosophy of his age. But if he was the colonial American who

most deeply engaged the new era's thought, he was also the colonial American who most thoroughly repudiated it.[12]

Because Edwards cast such a long shadow over the theological history of the next century, it is important to outline the main convictions that shone through a body of work remarkable for its cohesion, its reflection of scriptural study, its alertness to contemporary science, and its skill at restating historic Calvinism in the philosophical vocabulary of the eighteenth century.[13] While studying theology after his graduation from Yale College in 1720, Edwards underwent a conversion during which, as he later put it, "there came into my soul, and was as it were diffused through it, a sense of the glory of the divine being."[14] To communicate this divine glory became the burden of his life as pastor and theologian.

As the minister of the established Congregational Church in Northampton, Massachusetts, Edwards guided intense seasons of revival in 1734–1735 and again in 1740–1742. Yet in 1750 he was dismissed from his pulpit in Northampton when he disrupted long-established community practices by insisting that children make a creditable testimony of saving faith before being admitted as full members. This personal crisis (and also domestic crisis, since Edwards had a large family) became a theological opportunity when he moved to a parish in frontier Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Preaching to a congregation of native Americans and a small colonial church freed time during which the treatises were completed for which he later won theological renown. Edwards died on 22 March 1758, from an inoculation against smallpox, only weeks after beginning his service as president of the College of New Jersey in Princeton.

The unifying center of Edwards's theology was the glory of God depicted as an active, harmonious, ever-unfolding source of absolutely perfect Being marked by supernal beauty and love. The cast of his mind was relentlessly intellectual—"many theorems, that appeared hard and barren to others, were to him pleasant and fruitful fields, where his mind would expatiate with peculiar ease, profit and entertainment," was the way his friend and student Samuel Hopkins put it.[15] As a result, his theological convictions were worked out in response to abstruse metaphysical questions as well as in the biblical exposition that was his main business as a preaching minister. As a thinker, Edwards most resembled two other philosophically inclined Christian intellectuals of his era, the French Catholic Nicholas Malebranche (1638–1715) and the Anglican George Berkeley (1685–1753). Although the three did not respond to each others' work, they shared a commitment to philosophical idealism as the necessary counter to what they perceived as the materialist drift of their age.

Edwards's career as a publishing theologian began with his *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, a work first written as a letter to Benjamin Colman in 1736 to explain the course of revival in Northampton. Soon the rather breathless tone of this work gave way to more discriminating analyses in *Some Thoughts concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New England* (1743) and *A Treatise on the Religious Affections* (1746). These works drew upon

Edwards's experience in the revival to argue that true religion was a matter of the affections, or what might today be called habitual inclinations at the core of a person's being. *Religious Affections* detailed at length the kinds of religious emotions that were largely irrelevant to a determination of true spirituality (e.g., those manifesting a particular intensity). Rather, true spirituality could be shown by twelve "marks" of affectional attachment to God, of which the last and most definite was consistent Christian practice.

The view of salvation that lay behind Edwards's analysis of revival was consistently Calvinistic. He held that the root of human sinfulness was antagonism toward God. Living faith involved much more than facts about God; it required a new "taste" of divine beauty, holiness, and truth. The fullest treatment of this soteriology came in 1754 when he published *A Careful and Strict Inquiry into the Modern Prevailing Notions of That Freedom of Will, Which Is Supposed to Be Essential to Moral Agency, Virtue and Vice, Reward and Punishment, Praise and Blame.* Here Edwards argued that the "will" was not a discrete independent faculty but rather a description of the person acting on his or her choices. To "will" something was to act consistently with one's character and in accord with the strongest motives on and in a person. The minute care with which Edwards attacked the notion of self-determining human faculties and with which he linked volition to character made this work a landmark for theologians in America, Scotland, and Wales for over a century.

A posthumously published treatise, *Original Sin* (1758), expanded on the view of human nature present in *Freedom of the Will.* By suggesting that all humanity took part seminally in Adam's fall, Edwards hoped to show that individuals were both responsible for their own sinfulness and bound by a fallen nature until converted by God's sovereign grace. Edwards's exposition in this work established the terms for discussing fallen human nature that later New Englanders debated with endless variations for a full century, but that Presbyterians could never quite understand.

The burden of Edwards's thought is shown unmistakably by the last book he prepared for publication, *Two Dissertations. (I) Concerning the End for Which* GOD *Created the World. (II) The Nature of True Virtue.* (Edwards died in 1758; it appeared in 1765.) Although this was not the last book Edwards hoped to write, it did provide an unusually fitting capstone to his theological career. Its thesis broadened central themes from his earlier writings on revival and on the controversial doctrines of traditional Calvinism. For ethics it argued again what he had previously asserted for the inner spiritual life in his *Treatise on Religious Affections* and for conversion in his *Freedom of the Will*—no truly good thing, strictly speaking, exists that is not always and everywhere dependent upon God. Edwards's own statements contain the sharpest possible antithesis to what would become American convictions in the generations after his passing. Against the exaltation of human happiness as the central concern of life, he argued in the first dissertation, "All that is ever spoken of in the Scripture as an ultimate end of God's works is included in that one phrase, 'the glory of God.'" Against the construal of virtue as ei-

ther disinterested public service or private female purity, the second dissertation asserted, "'Tis evident that true virtue must chiefly consist in love to God; the Being of beings, infinitely the greatest and best of beings."[16] Paul Ramsey, the leading modern authority on Edwards's ethical writings, defined succinctly the bond between the two dissertations: "The 'end' for which God created the world must be the 'end' of a truly virtuous and holy life."[17] The lengths to which Edwards was pushed in his brilliant renovation of Calvinist theology may have been a sign of that theology's insecurity as much as of its strength. It is nonetheless important that, in the same years when traffic began to increase between traditional Reformed theology and the new vocabulary of republican liberty, New England witnessed its most subtle and most able restatement of inherited Calvinist convictions.

Presbyterians

Outside of New England, the most articulate theologians were Presbyterians, the denomination that was spread most widely in the colonies and that most assiduously promoted the old-world ideal of the learned minister. Some of the leaders of colonial Presbyterianism came from late-Puritan Yale College, but most received their education privately from veteran pastors like the renowned William Tennent (1673–1746) of Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, whose tutelage rivaled the century's colleges in intellectual depth and theological acumen. The intellectual leaders of colonial Presbyterianism, though approaching the twin ideals from different directions, tried to advance both traditional theology and the era's new evangelical piety. The four most important were Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747), Gilbert Tennent (1703–1764), Samuel Finley (1715–1766), and Samuel Davies (1723–1761), who among themselves accounted for about a third of the nearly 500 works published by Presbyterians in the colonial era. They were popular not just because of their own energy but because other Presbyterians read what they wrote.[18]

The provenance of these four illustrate the regional and ethical mixture that contributed to the vitality of colonial Presbyterianism. Gilbert Tennent was born in County Armagh, Ireland, and was trained by his father, William, who had been educated at Edinburgh and served as a minister of the Church of Ireland before migrating to America and becoming a Presbyterian. Dickinson was born in Massachusetts and educated at Yale before taking a Presbyterian church in Elizabethtown, New Jersey. Davies was the son of Welsh immigrants to Delaware and gained renown as the founder of Presbyterianism in Virginia. Finley was born in Ireland, immigrated to Philadelphia, probably studied with William Tennent in Neshaminy, and itinerated for a brief period as a revivalist before settling in Nottingham, Maryland, where he conducted a distinguished classical academy alongside his church. Tennent, Dickinson, and Finley in 1746 became founding trustees of the College of New Jersey, while Dickinson, Davies, and Finley later served as presidents of that mostly Presbyterian enterprise.

The theology promoted by these prominent leaders was more directly pietistic than old-world Presbyterianism, as indicated by the hymns Davies wrote as one of the colonies' first published poets. In this verse he sounded similar themes to what the Presbyterians were proclaiming in their sermons:

> Pardon from an offended God!
> Pardon for sins of deepest dye!
> Pardon bestowed through Jesus' blood!
> Pardon that brings the rebel nigh!
> Who is a pard'ning God like thee?
> Or who has grace so rich and free?[19]

Colonial Presbyterian theology was also sometimes more sectarian than the theology of Scotland's established Kirk. Gilbert Tennent's 1740 sermon "The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry," which he preached at Nottingham, Maryland, a few years before Finley arrived, called upon listeners to leave churches where they considered the pastors to be unredeemed. Tennent later recanted this outburst, but even the tempered revivalism that all four practiced revealed a flexibility toward ecclesiastical order with only a few parallels in the Scottish or Irish homelands.

Along with a measure of innovation, however, colonial Presbyterianism remained solidly committed to the high Calvinism of its Westminster Confession and Catechisms. Transplanted New Englanders like Dickinson chafed under the necessity of subscribing to the confession, but unlike similar resentment in England and Ireland, Dickinson's antisubscriptionist views were fueled by an activistic pietism rather than an incipient rationalism. Colonial Presbyterians did eventually go into schism because of differences over revivalism. But that schism, which lasted from 1741 to 1758, featured a division between those who felt that the Westminster Confession could be maintained alongside an emphasis on revival opposed to those who maintained the conservative belief that Presbyterian confessionalism was damaged by revival. Like the Moderate-Popular conflict in Scotland and the New Light–Old Light conflict in Ireland, the colonies' Old Side–New Side schism revealed contrasting attitudes toward Presbyterian traditions. But unlike the Scottish, and even more unlike the Irish, American Presbyterians remained actively committed to the traditional Calvinism of the Westminster standards. With their New Light Congregationalist associates of New England, the leading Presbyterian New Side ministers were their denomination's chief revivalists as well as their most effective proponents of traditional Reformed theology.[20]

Anglicans

The colonies' foremost Anglicans in the first decades of the eighteenth century were the Virginia commissary James Blair (1656–1743), founding president of the College of William and Mary, and Thomas Bray (1658–1730), a missionary to the colonies with the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel

in Foreign Parts, who served briefly in Maryland and then provided support for American causes after returning to England. While Blair and Bray were not Calvinists, these Anglican leaders nonetheless promoted a traditional teaching that exalted divine grace as the key to salvation. Their general point of view—described by historian J. F. Woolverton as "low church obedience to moral law"—identified them as pious Anglican traditionalists rather than early devotees of an Age of Reason.[21]

The colonies' leading Anglican thinker of the eighteenth century, Samuel Johnson, faced as many obstacles in promoting his religion against Puritan theological order as Blair and Bray experienced in their struggle against the forces of Southern social disorder. Johnson (1696–1772) was born in Connecticut, where he enjoyed a Puritan education. He completed his work for a B.A. at the very new Yale College in 1714, two years before Jonathan Edwards entered as a student.[22] Unlike Edwards, who became a champion of this historic Calvinist tradition, Johnson and several other young ministers scandalized all New England in 1722 by joining the Anglican church. As a rector in Stratford, Connecticut, and then as president of New York City's King's College (predecessor of Columbia University), Johnson read widely in the most up-to-date philosophical works of the day and produced a steady stream of sermons, polemical tracts, and philosophical investigations. His *Elementa Philosophica*, published by Benjamin Franklin in 1752, was the colonies' first philosophy textbook. For such efforts, Johnson became the obvious choice to head the Anglicans' new American college. When he arrived in New York to take up that position in 1754, "no other Anglican priest," as a historian of early Columbia puts it, "could touch Johnson's reputation as an intellectual, educator, and religious leader."[23]

Johnson's works are especially important, since his convictions so stoutly opposed both the Puritans' Calvinist past and the contemporary efforts of Jonathan Edwards to renovate traditional Calvinism. Johnson, thus, was an Arminian who consistently defended a freedom for human volition that contradicted Calvinist predestination. In a sermon from 1751, for example, he drew the contradiction sharply: "We are intuitively certain from looking into ourselves, that our soul or spirit is indeed a principle of free activity or has a power given it of God of freely exerting and determining itself."[24]

Yet if Johnson was no Puritan Calvinist, neither did he embrace the era's up-to-date convictions about God and humanity. In fact, he took an intellectual stand against the rising metaphysics of his day that aligned him almost exactly with Edwards. Both, that is, protested against what they perceived as materialism latent in the popular uses of Newton's mechanical view of matter. Where Johnson followed Bishop George Berkeley in holding that the universe was an immaterial reality conceived by the mind of God, Edwards came to nearly the same conclusions through independent theological reasoning. So God-centered was Johnson's universe that many of his theological assertions accorded as well with Edwards's Calvinism as his ontology accorded with Edwards's metaphysics. As an example, the discourse in which Johnson defended free will was entitled "A Sermon on the Entire Dependence

of the Creature upon God." Apart from its brief comments on the will, it bears an uncanny resemblance to Edwards's 1731 exposition "God Glorified in the Work of Redemption, by the Greatness of Man's Dependence upon Him, in the Whole of It." In his sermon Johnson could affirm that "it was from the exertion of the Almighty will and power of God, that we at first came into being, and . . . it is from the continued exertion of the same Almighty will and power of God every moment that we continue to exist, to think and act." To understand God and the world aright was to see an important reality—"it is literally true that we have no sufficiency of ourselves, to think or do any thing as of our selves, but that our sufficiency is of God." That reality, in turn, was of "great use . . . to promote in us true humility which is the foundation of every other virtue. How should it beget in us the deepest and most abasing sense of our own impotence and nothingness, that God may be all in all?"[25] Johnson's reference to "virtue" in traditional theological terms, no less than his fixation upon God as the ever-active re-creator of human life, bound his theological concerns much more closely to Edwards than either, as spokesmen for antagonistic churches, could have acknowledged themselves.

That degree of intellectual accord between Johnson and Edwards is especially important for gauging the character of colonial theology at the midpoint of the eighteenth century. Johnson, unlike Edwards, was neither a genius nor a Calvinist. Yet that so much of his theological discourse moved in the same direction as Edwards's, and that these two were widely recognized as the leading lights of the dominant churches in the colonies, says much about the classical character of theology on the eve of the Revolutionary era.

During the first half of the eighteenth century, clergymen throughout the colonies encouraged human striving toward God, but only fringe theologians held that humans assisted in their own salvation. Natural theology (or the effort to reason from contact with the physical world to the character of God) was beginning to assume a new prominence, but it still functioned mostly within a framework constructed by notions of active divine providence. Believers and nonbelievers alike were enjoined to follow God's law, but the leading theologians described law-keeping more as a reflection of divine glory than as a path to human happiness. In New England, all citizens were reminded of their covenant duties, but ideas of covenant were still dominated by conceptions of divine grace. Theologians looked to the inbreaking of the millennium, but as a gift of God's mercy instead of an accomplishment by redeemed humanity.

Sectarians and Awakeners

In the pre-Revolutionary period even the major voices of sectarian movements were overwhelmingly traditional. The New Jersey and Pennsylvania Quaker John Woolman (1720–1772) is a good example of a theologically astute outsider whose views—especially on revelation and personal Christian respon-

sibility—set him apart him from the Protestant mainstream defined by Congregationalists, Anglicans, Presbyterians, and the Continental Reformed churches. Yet before being recorded as a Friends minister in 1748, Woolman underwent a season of conversion marked by at least some of the same experiences that more traditional Protestants expected. This conversion moved him, however, to embrace the Quaker doctrine of the Inner Light of Christ, a teaching far too subjective for leaders of the main colonial denominations. The phrases that Woolman employed to describe this experience were, however, surprisingly similar to words Jonathan Edwards also used for a similar experience at about the same age in his own life. For Woolman it meant being drawn "to love God as an invisible, incomprehensible being" and "to love him in all his manifestations in the visible world."[26] In the 1750s Woolman embarked upon the public activity for which he continues to be admired, particularly his opposition to slavery and his support for the decision by Pennsylvania Quakers to withdraw from the government of Pennsylvania during the French and Indian War in order to preserve the Quaker peace testimony. In these actions Woolman was guided by examples from, as he put it, "faithful Friends in early times." Motivation for this activity rested, in other words, on traditional Quaker theology, and there is no indication that modern notions of "liberty" or of a natural moral sense influenced his convictions in the slightest.[27]

The continuing power of a religion with scant room for the intensely this-worldly preoccupations of republicanism or the optimistic universalism of moral-sense philosophy was demonstrated at midcentury by the convulsive religious excitement of the Great Awakening. This movement was promoted by preachers—Theodorus Frelinghuysen, Gilbert Tennent, and especially George Whitefield—who affirmed a traditional theology. The presence of what Ruth Bloch has called a "vast reservoir of ethnic immigrant Calvinism" aided its rapid spread, and it featured self-conscious efforts to promote what Charles Hambrick-Stowe has styled "traditional themes and old titles."[28] Whatever its long-term consequences, the revival had the immediate effect of drawing Americans *closer* to their Reformed theological partners in Britain. The revival also became the occasion for the century's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, to restate the precepts of Calvinism with rigorous force. To be sure, by 1740 some colonists were questioning Calvinistic certainties, and Protestant theology had certainly moved in the direction of activism, moralism, and even individualism during the its first American century. At the same time, theology in the American colonies remained classically theocentric. The colonies' main theological traditions were Reformed Protestant. Its most visible, influential, well-articulated, and enduring monument was the covenantal Calvinism of Puritan New England.

This theological inheritance did not vanish in the century or more that followed. It did, however, fragment, and its broken pieces were recombined with a whole range of new intellectual associations. The result was an evolution of theology that can be explained, though not exhaustively, by examining the political and intellectual landscapes through which it passed.

A generation ago, Edmund Morgan summarized a significant portion of eighteenth-century intellectual history in a single limpid sentence: "In 1740 America's leading intellectuals were clergymen and thought about theology; in 1790 they were statesmen and thought about politics."[29] The narrative that follows attempts to explain how that transition from 1740 to 1790 occurred. It also hopes to illuminate a story that stretched beyond 1790 to at least 1865, when America's leading statesman could expound a complex, subtle theology while its leading theologians were being consumed by politics.

3

The Long Life and Final Collapse of the Puritan Canopy

The creation of American theology required first the displacement of European theology. The transition that mattered most for the future United States took place in New England, and the event that most clearly symbolized that transition was the dismissal of Jonathan Edwards from his Northampton, Massachusetts, pulpit in 1750. The views of God and humanity that Edwards preached as a leader of the colonial Great Awakening were aimed at the rejuvenation of traditional Protestant piety. Yet Edwards's strongly held opinions on the church had the effect of shaking American theology loose from that kind of piety. From the revivals arose new evangelical churches, activities, instincts, and ways of expounding Christian doctrine. Before that rise could occur, older expectations for church and theology inherited from Europe had to give way. A process that ended with an intimate union between evangelical Protestant religion and Revolutionary politics began with disruption in the historic colonial churches.

One consequence of that disruption was an accelerating pace of exchange between the language of hereditary Protestantism and the languages of civic and intellectual culture that earlier had been antagonistic to orthodox belief. As Protestants began to edge toward republican and commonsense commitments, they moved away from Puritanism as a protective theological canopy. Under that canopy New Englanders had pursued their reflections, not only about God, self, and society, but also about how thinking itself should proceed. The disintegration of Puritanism as a comprehensive life system was the first critical move toward an American theology.

Several plausible explanations have been offered for that disintegration. It appears, alternatively, as the fracture of an integral society torn apart by guilt at the outmigration of land-starved sons,[1] the collapse of clerical hegemony,[2]

the incorporation of New England into Britain's burgeoning market economy,[3] or the replacement of local ecclesiastical authority focusing on outward observance with personal religion concentrated on inward piety.[4] For a history of theology, however, it is more appropriate to describe the disintegration of Puritanism as an exchange of integrating concepts. Given up was the covenant, a long-lived and explicitly biblical construct for linking together God, self, church, and society. In its place came a mixed set of modern alternatives that used social or political, but not primarily theological, categories to unify existence. The disintegration of the Puritan theological canopy decisively altered the intellectual balance of trade for theology. Once the Puritan way of holding together God, self, and society fragmented, other means, which were not as tightly rooted in classic Protestantism, took over those integrative functions.

Puritan theology had never been an exclusively religious construct. Contemporary understandings of contract, compact, and corporation—as well as surges of English and Scottish nationalism—had influenced the early Puritans as they constructed their covenant theology from biblical materials.[5] Patterns of reasoning from the new science, especially the empirical ideals of Francis Bacon, affected the Puritans as they traced what the Westminster Confession of 1646 called those "good and necessary consequences" that "may be deduced from Scripture" for the ordering of life.[6] Yet in England for roughly the century before the Restoration of the monarchy in 1660, and in Congregational New England until the early eighteenth century, Puritan thought flowed primarily from theological springs. The disintegration that occurred in America from the 1730s was ironic, since it was caused in part by a revival of the same sort of experiential Calvinism that had first inspired the Puritan vision of a total Christian society.

That disintegration—the ground-clearing phase anticipating a new American era in Protestant theology—is the subject of this chapter. The replacement of the Puritans' integrated covenantal theology by Christian republicanism and Christian common sense preserved many aspects of the Puritan synthesis, and it did not immediately redirect the course of theology in America. By the beginning of the nineteenth century, however, and in conjunction with the social, economic, political, and religious consequences of the Revolution, the exchange of integrating canopies had momentous theological effects.

But why, for a study pointing toward theology in the United States during the nineteenth century, pay so much attention to only one religious tradition, and that from only one American region? The answer is that New England, though representing only a minority of Americans (32% of the population in the thirteen colonies in 1740, only 23% in the sixteen states at 1800), exerted an influence far beyond its size on the intellectual culture of the new United States. Puritanism is the only colonial religious system that modern historians take seriously as a major religious influence on the Revolution.[7] During the War for Independence, a vibrant Christian republicanism from New England, compounded of remnant Puritan messianism and Real Whig political analysis, persuaded other colonists to think that the new nation in its entirety

might be specially elect of God like a new ancient Israel. In the generations after independence, New Englanders led the way in writing the history of the new nation. As illustrated most clearly by the influential works of the Boston brahmin George Bancroft, they found the temptation irresistible to write American history as New England's story—cultural *and* religious, moral *and* political—writ large.[8] Historians of Christianity, as illustrated by Robert Baird's pioneering church history *Religion in America* (1843), did the same, despite Baird's own midstate and Presbyterian origins.[9] Well into the new century, the number of religious publications from New England dwarfed the number appearing from other regions of the country.[10] A modern historian of Puritanism, Stephen Foster, has succinctly explained why the Puritan heritage carried such intellectual weight in the new republic. In Foster's account, New Englanders entered the contest over national self-definition with "disciplined intellectual skills and organizational talent." Most important, "in an intensely Protestant country they had inherited what was still the most highly articulated and comprehensive vision." So long as Protestant Christianity remained the default religion for most Americans, whether they practiced it actively or not, New Englanders would be in the lead. They "used the same language as the rest of the country with, in effect, a more complete grammar inherited from a Puritan past."[11] Only the South resisted the culture-defining sway of New England, and that resistance was woven into a culture that gave a distinctive shape to Southern theology throughout the entire antebellum era.

For understanding the history of Christian theology in America, it is necessary to begin before there was an America settled by Europeans. The prehistory of American theology includes a long-standing Western Christian assumption about the unity of all spheres of life under God, a somewhat narrower set of Protestant convictions about how traditional Western Christendom needed to be reformed, and still narrower patterns of belief associated with the Reformed or Calvinistic wing of the Reformation. It was a version of this Reformed Protestantism that the Puritans brought to New England. Given such background, it is possible to understand why the colonial revivals both rejuvenated religion and destroyed an older theological understanding of social integration, and by so doing fostered conditions generally propitious for the migration of political languages into theological speech.

Reformed Theology as a Renewal of Christendom

The importance of Puritanism for American theological history is more easily grasped if it is regarded as an English Protestant extension of Christendom. After the legalization of Christianity in fourth-century Rome, after its promotion by Constantine (ruled 312–337), Theodosius (379–395), and lesser Christian emperors, and especially after the rise of the papacy as a civil force (manifest at least by the pontificate of Leo I in the mid-fifth century), the pattern of Christendom was in place that survived with vigor for at least thirteen centuries. In this pattern, thinking about Christianity and thinking about

social and political realities were always overlapping exercises. Europeans (and their colonial offspring) simply took it for granted that Christian truth and truth about the civil order were integrally connected.[12]

Despite what some later interpreters clamed for the major Protestant reformers as nursemaids of liberty, they did not question the necessity of civil and religious integration (and also coercion to enforce religious conformity).[13] In the sixteenth century, only radicals beyond the pale doubted the propriety of Luther's reliance on the prince as "a bishop of necessity" or Calvin's assignment to the magistracy of jurisdiction over the First Table of the Law.[14] Throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, incipient nationalism, nascent capitalism, and the New Learning challenged the traditional European synthesis of religion and society more directly than did the religious teachings of the major Protestant reformers, but even these modernizing forces did not sunder what Christendom had joined together.

In 1553, a full lifetime before the Puritan separatists stumbled onto Massachusetts's rocky shore at Plymouth, a crucial moment occurred for later theological development in America. In that year the Roman Catholic Mary Tudor succeeded her Protestant younger half brother, Edward VI, as England's monarch. About 300 of the Protestants who in the previous decades had worked to reform the English church went to the stake. Another substantial group embarked for the Continent. For later developments in America, it was critical that these exiles found a refuge on Reformed rather than Lutheran soil.[15]

To that time, the Protestant movement in England had been an eclectic mixture, taking as much from Lutheran as from Reformed influences, but also marked by a full spectrum of indigenous English influences from Wycliffites and Lollards on the left to pious Catholic promoters of the New Learning on the right. When Protestants left England during the reign of Catholic Queen Mary, however, they went to Reformed cities like Strasbourg, Frankfurt, or Calvin's Geneva. Lutheran lands, to which at least some of the refugees may have been drawn, were closed. Following Luther's death in 1546, internal theological strife had badly disrupted his movement. At the same time, the Lutheran princes were suffering serious military reverses in struggles with the Holy Roman Emperor, Charles V, who was also a first cousin of Mary Tudor. Divided politically by doctrinal and personal strife, weakened politically by defeat at the hand of the emperor, Lutheran Europe was hardly in a position to welcome refugees from Britain.

The situation was quite different among the Reformed. Although Calvin had only shortly before won out over his opponents in Geneva, he welcomed the British eagerly. Churches and schools were put at their disposal. The aid he offered scholars seeking to improve upon William Tyndale's earlier translation of the Scriptures led to the immensely influential Geneva Bible. The reception in Strasbourg, Frankfurt, and other cities under Reformed influence was almost as warm.[16] When Mary died in 1558 and was succeeded by her discreetly Protestant half sister, Elizabeth, most of the refugees returned home. As they did so, the "thorough" English Protestants immediately began to agitate for the same sort of reforms they had witnessed on the Continent. Even

more, these advanced Protestants promoted a distinctly Reformed understanding of how to renovate (but not replace) the historic unities of Christendom.

What this Reformed cast of mind meant for narrow theological issues did not make much difference. International Protestantism—whether Lutheran, Reformed, or Anglican—hovered around a narrow range of theological opinions. Lutheran-Reformed differences on whether Christ's resurrected body was, strictly speaking, in heaven (Reformed) or everywhere (Lutheran), on whether the *communicatio idiomatum* between Christ's human and divine natures involved extensive exchange (Lutheran) or more modest exchange (Reformed), or on whether the Ten Commandments should be taught first as preparation for grace (Lutheran) or later as gratitude in response to grace (Reformed) were only moderately significant issues. Within both camps a spectrum of opinions existed, and theological differences between major figures during the first generations, as between Luther and Calvin themselves, were never earthshaking.[17]

In the broader application of theology to life, however, Reformed and Lutheran differences were more significant.[18] Lutherans held that God worked in the world through diverse means—through the church and its proclamation of salvation, but also through the structures of state, economy, and family, which God had created as relatively autonomous agents of his authority. The critical matter was that Lutherans saw *two* kingdoms through which God ruled the world. The effect of this two-kingdom theology was to segregate forms of reasoning; adepts in the church concentrated on formal theology, while lay practitioners in the world accepted prudential, practical reasoning as the way to order society.

The Reformed, by contrast, were both more medieval and more modern—more medieval because they insisted that God exercised his sovereignty over the world as an organic unity, more modern because they derived principles for that ordering from Scripture as opposed to tradition. God elected individuals to salvation; he incorporated them into his body, the church; through them he then exercised his providential control over the world as a whole. The Reformed attacked Catholic dogma, but they reasserted a Catholic kind of Christendom by insisting that God's rule should encompass everything.

This Reformed approach had a much greater effect on how theology was applied than on how theology was formulated. By comparison with other Christian traditions, the Reformed invitation to exert oneself in the world for the glory of God was more engaged and less ironic than the Lutheran, less ascetic and altogether more confident about the redeemable goodness of human institutions than the Anabaptists, more democratic and less monastic than the Catholics, and more material and less liturgical than the Orthodox. The Reformed of every rank in society were expected to function as theologians, since social, political, economic, and artistic spheres of life were also God's concern. From this broad mandate came an outpouring of Reformed practical theology. Expressed in their own categories, the Reformed promoted the authority of Scripture over every sphere of life, the God-given dignity of work, the sacredness of all vocations (not just the religious), the possibility

that institutions could be sanctified to God, the employment of material means for godly ends, and the use of the mind as a spiritual exercise.

In practical terms, the Reformed commitment to the theological significance of everyday life led to the development of something like Protestant metaphysics, Protestant epistemology, Protestant science, Protestant politics, Protestant social and economic theory, Protestant art, and Protestant poetics.[19] The development of these Reformed spheres of intellectual and cultural activity never occurred without substantial influence from sources not specifically religious. In Switzerland, the southern German regions, Hungary, Holland, and the British Isles, the Reformed perspective could be used to mask economic or political aggression. More commonly, it emerged from a complicated mix of sacred and secular motives.[20] Yet wherever sufficient Reformed strength existed, the assumption also existed that biblical Christianity had something fairly definite to say about everything.

Rarely in the Geneva of John Calvin or Theodore Beza, John Knox's Scotland, or the Huguenot fortresses of southern France did Reformed Protestants pause to contemplate the magnitude of their self-appointed tasks. Rarely did the self-denying principles of their own theology check the hubris of the elect. They did not usually act as if they believed what their own theology said about the huge gap between divine omniscience and human finitude, nor did they seem to really believe their own claim that even believers continued to abuse the gifts of God for idolatrous, selfish ends. Rarely were the Reformed as sharp-eyed to catch their own compromises with worldly reasoning as they were to pounce upon the inconsistencies of Roman Catholics, Lutherans, or rival Reformed communities. But for the sake of theological construction, the Reformed enjoyed the great advantage of believing that all influences shaping thought were themselves theological influences. So long as this conviction remained in place, the Reformed remained in control of their own theology.

When, however, in the inevitable flow of events, the white heat of reforming zeal cooled, or when the reach of the Protestant Internationale exceeded the capacity of Reformed agitators actually to convert their own societies, the Reformed approach generated its own special difficulties. Reformed theologies that shaped culture were singularly susceptible to being shaped by currents within cultures, especially at those moments when the intellectual energy of the wider society began to match the religious energy of the church. The Reformed eagerness to treat culture as a theological construct and to shape culture in accord with theological principle depended on a comprehensive understanding of culture—a steady bifocal gaze at the new birth of persons alongside the kingdom-possibilities of society. The genius of Reformed Protestantism was its ability to keep both possibilities in view. The ever-present threat to Reformed Protestantism was its proximity to the world.

Contrasting attitudes toward the relationship between redeemed selves and the broader society produced contrasting perils. From the one side, some who were nurtured by Reformed faith eventually welcomed the blurring of faith and society and slid easily into an accommodation to the world. Such ones—like John Locke and the Unitarian Presbyterians of late seventeenth-century

England, or Protestant rationalists who emerged in Holland, Switzerland, and France—retained certain aspects of Reformed morals, ethos, or even religion, but only as subordinate matters in larger worldviews constructed in part to defend against Reformed enthusiasm.[21] From the other side, Reformed Protestants who felt the expansion of worldly concerns as a threat instead of an opportunity reacted in the opposite direction and sought the blaze of personal faith, even if it meant burning up the comprehensive social arrangements that early Protestants saw as their reasonable service to God.[22] The movements of pietistic and evangelical revival of the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries took this latter course.

Either move—toward secularization or revival—imperiled the integral Reformed approach to life in the world. By threatening the integrating framework, both perils also threatened the ability of the Reformed to control their own theology. The secularist move was the more obvious threat, for how could life-transforming doctrine be drawn from Scripture once Scripture was supplanted by other authorities?[23] Yet the pietistic, evangelical move could be almost as destructive. Individuals and communities accustomed to think about the world religiously—who regarded politics, social relationships, economics, and all other spheres of life as religious domains—did not abandon life in the world when they became pietists or evangelicals. Rather, awakened piety could divert attention from larger questions of worldview and then allow secular forces to do their work unimpeded. Within Reformed circles, a revitalization of heart religion rarely closed the borders to the larger world, but such revivals often left those borders unattended.

Incidents in the History of the Puritan Covenant

Whether or not the preceding paragraphs describe a universal religious situation, they do describe the intellectual history of the Puritans. Despite notorious difficulties of definition, it is possible to follow the best recent authors and to characterize Puritanism as a religious movement combining medieval commitments to the unity of society with Reformed Protestant views of personal salvation, that is, Calvin's soteriology with Erasmus's Christendom.[24] These complementary convictions drove the Puritans to push for ecclesiastical reform, what Patrick Collinson has styled the search for "'a further reformation,' the logical completion of reconstituting the national church, which in their view had been arrested halfway."[25] Stephen Foster finds the continuity of Puritanism in a set of attitudes linking God, self, church, and society: "At each point in the movement's history the same central Puritan vision endured: the magistracy guaranteed the social conditions under which the laity, part volunteers and part conscripts, pursued their individual destinies in a collective context interpreted and mediated by the clergy."[26]

This breadth of view explains why Henry Parker could write in 1641 that there were "Puritans in Church policy, Puritans in religion, Puritans in State and Puritans in morality."[27] It also explains why Puritanism could erect a

canopy for theology as well as defend a set of specific theological convictions. When efforts to reform England and the English church were checked, some Puritans began to think about the possibility of a gathered church, a communion in which the purity of grace was realized even before the imperfections of English nation and church were burned away.[28] This tendency would inspire Congregationalists in New England and a plethora of Puritan denominations in revolutionary England (1642–1660). But it was never more than a tendency. Except for a very few Separatists, the longing for a pure church never replaced the equally strong drive to reform the entire nation. Nor were Puritan Independents (Congregationalists) ever separatistic in the way that Roman Catholic monks or Anabaptist sectarians were separatistic. The search for gathered or called-out churches sharpened Puritan zeal for comprehensive reform because it existed alongside of, rather than as a replacement for, zeal to reform the nation.

By the early seventeenth century, English Puritans had developed the major themes that came to fruition in New England: the centrality of the new birth, the assumption of a unified society, and the church as the central link between personal religion and national reform. Above all and integrating all was the covenant, a motif at once profoundly biblical and profoundly flexible.[29]

The chief recommendation of the covenantal system was that it explained both divine grace and human obligation by reference to encompassing biblical narratives. From the Old Testament, Puritans drew on God's unconditional choice of Israel and the conditional privileges entailed by obeying God's law. In the New Testament, they found the demonstration of a new promise, or covenant, from God in Christ. As proclaimed in the works of many Puritan divines and as summarized in doctrinal standards like the Westminster Confession, the covenantal system worked powerfully to knit the world together. All people were spiritually incapacitated by the sinfulness of Adam and their own sinful deeds and so could not live up to the original standards of God's righteousness (the covenant of works). But God in mercy sent his Son to pay the moral debt and vicariously to incur God's righteous anger for those who had broken covenant. On the basis of Christ's work, God established a covenant of grace with the elect, setting forth the condition of salvation as faith in Jesus and providing the faith to fulfill that condition. The believer's part of the bargain was to love God and obey his law, a task that by faith in Christ could be approached with hope of success.

As covenant themes developed in early New England, it seemed natural that the first work of faith should be covenanting with God and other believers to form individual churches.[30] The notion of a particular church covenant emerged only slowly from the practice of England's comprehensive national church, and New England Puritans instinctively maintained that national element, even as they created particular churches. The church covenant—mediating between regenerate persons and societies populated with sinners as well as saints—became a focal point for tension in New England. As ways of interpreting particular church covenants changed, so did the implications of church membership.

New England Puritans followed English precedent and consistently viewed their whole society as standing in covenant with God. Since the head (magistracy) and heart (clergy) of society participated together in the covenant of grace, New Englanders did not doubt that the society they constructed was also a sacredly covenanted community. References to Israel, like John Winthrop's justly renowned sermon aboard the *Arbella* in 1630, were never casual: God had called out not only persons but a people with whom he sustained a "more neare bond of mariage . . . wherein he hath taken us to be his after a most strickt and peculiar manner which will make him the more Jealous of our love and obedience soe he tells the people of Israell, you onely have I knowne of all the families of the Earthe therefore will I punishe you for your Transgressions."[31] The history of New England through the mid-eighteenth century unfolded within the framework provided by these covenants. They defined both limits beyond which the society could not stray and the issues that Puritans contested endlessly among themselves.

The covenantal system was critical for early New England theology in two ways. It first provided biblical language for the basic doctrines of the faith. To be lost without God meant condemnation under conditions spelled out in the covenant of works. To be reconciled with God through the work of the Son meant to experience God's loving power of election displayed in the covenant of grace. To be accepted by the community of the faithful was to live in church covenant. To follow God's law was to keep covenant. To support holiness in society was to improve the national covenant. Finally, to participate in ritual church renewals and to hear the festal preaching of the jeremiad that occurred with increasing regularity over the last third of the seventeenth century was to renew the covenant collectively. The Puritans employed a theological vocabulary that extended far beyond the language of covenant, but covenant always remained basic to expressing their faith.

Second, it also provided an expansive vocabulary for embracing large-scale social, political, and even economic realms. Because the sense of social cohesion was expressed in terms of covenant, Puritans always were ready with doctrinal explanations for political and social events. Large-scale tumults (from epidemics or earthquakes to rises in prices, disputes within the colonial assemblies, and conflict with Britain), as well as large-scale blessings (from full harvests to military victory to resolution of disputes with the mother country), took place, respectively, because humans broke covenant or because God was faithful in keeping covenant. With the vocabulary of covenant so prominent in analyzing the ailments and progress of New England, and with the narrowly doctrinal meanings of Puritan theology so tightly secured to covenantal language, the covenantal way of talking about political, social, economic, and intellectual affairs protected the theological dogmas of Puritanism. The reach of covenantal language—from the individual through the church to society as a whole—constituted the Puritan canopy for theology narrowly defined.

The effort to build a commonwealth where all levels of organization were shaped by divine reality—the effort that never could succeed in England—

achieved remarkable success in New England's first century. Improvisational creativity by early leaders established the beachhead. The crucial institutional bond between truly Christian churches and a hopefully Christian commonwealth was provided by constituting the male church members and the voters (freemen) as the same group.[32] Neither the entrance of elected deputies into the legislative and executive realms (1634) nor the formal erection of a bicameral general court (1641) altered the resolve to maintain personal faith and social well-being in tandem. As a later Puritan would phrase it with specific reference to the integrating device: "The Covenant of Grace is cloathed with Church-Covenant in a Political visible Church-way."[33]

Maintaining the covenant-based New England Way required steering around major obstacles. The "erroneous and very dangerous" opinions of Roger Williams struck provokingly at the synthesis—by denying that a supposed national covenant gave magistrates any rights over either conscience or Native Americans—but were effectively excised.[34] The "antinomian" threat was graver from the confident assertion of Anne Hutchinson that law-keeping was secondary for those who were saved by grace. Massachusetts's governors were appalled by even the slightest hint that grace could be defined as opposing the good works necessary for a godly society; they were opposed just as resolutely to the private meetings (or conventicles) that Hutchinson sponsored and that they interpreted as undermining the comprehensive authority of the Puritan churches. Hutchinson's activities were, indeed, heading toward a sectarianism contradicting the comprehensive Puritan vision, yet just as truly they arose from the Puritans' basic understanding of God's relation to the world. As the history of Jonathan Edwards and the Great Awakening would show, Hutchinson's kind of grace-inspired conventicalism, rather than Williams's moral scrupulosity, was always the most volatile threat to the Puritan scheme. Yet Williams and Hutchinson found out what later American dissidents would also discover: to strike at the reigning sacred synthesis anywhere was to call it into question everywhere. Their banishments showed both friends and foes of the New England Way that firm discipline was required to protect the covenant people.

The need to improvise a Half-Way Covenant after only one generation in the new world revealed faults within the New England Way, but also the capacity of Puritan leaders to maintain the tension between, as Robert Pope once wrote, "a moral, covenanted society" (including every citizen) and "truly reformed churches" (made up only of the elect).[35] The questions before specially called synods in 1657 and 1662 had the potential of unraveling the Puritan synthesis: How should baptized adults who did not make a profession of personal regeneration be treated? More important, what about baptism for the children of those in church covenant who had not yet professed regenerating faith? The twin ideals of the great experiment—churches made up of genuine believers and a society subject to the covenant of grace and the law of God—were coming into conflict.

The New Englanders were up to the challenge. In 1662 a synod decreed that the children of church members were always to be "personally under the

Watch, Discipline and Government of that Church." Baptized adults who did not relate a personal experience of salvation could not participate in the Lord's Supper, which was reserved as a sign for those who stood in the covenant of grace. But they could bring their children for baptism, and so continue to participate in ecclesiastical and social covenants.[36] Concern for the comprehensiveness of the Puritan vision prevailed, yet substantial encouragement for personal holiness remained. By preserving the Lord's Supper and admittance as full church members to the professedly regenerated, the new birth remained a crux. By keeping most of the rising generation officially in the church, the sacredness of society survived. A small, adroit adjustment in what it meant to take part in the church covenant preserved the covenantal bonds linking God with individuals, churches, and society. It also preserved the canopy for Puritan theology, which in its major points remained pretty much the same after the Half-Way decision as before.

Reaction to the synod's decision in 1662 presents an instructive contrast to developments eighty years later in the Great Awakening. At both times wholehearted proponents of the covenant of grace protested against anything that might detract from the centrality of personal salvation. In the decades following 1662, that sectarian thrust was contained within the larger Puritan framework. In the 1740s the framework cracked and could not be repaired.

To father Increase (1639–1723) and son Cotton Mather (1663–1728), who were the principal spokesmen for the New England Way during the half century from 1675 to 1725, the Half-Way system, when joined to periodic renewals of the covenant, preserved the integrity of New England—spiritual, civil, ecclesiastical, and covenantal.[37] By contrast, Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) of Northampton, Massachusetts, in the Connecticut River Valley, weighed the original Half-Way synthesis, despaired of its shortcomings, and proposed radical revisions in order to rescue what in his mind were two separate desiderata: the integrity of the gospel and the divinely ordained prerogatives of a Christian nation.[38]

In the face of a century of English and American efforts that had made churches the practical link in covenantal theory, Stoddard declared in 1700, "The doctrine of the particular churches [founded as covenantal institutions by adherents claiming to stand in the covenant of grace] is wholly unscriptural, [it] is the reason that many among us are shut out of the church, to whom church privileges do belong."[39] Instead of particular church covenants, Stoddard held that a national covenant existed whenever any people subscribed in the aggregate to the Christian religion. Stoddard's ecclesiology and his reinterpretation of the covenant were based on the assumption that New England was a Christian nation, or in his terms, "the Commonwealth of Israel."[40] According to Stoddard, the national covenant allowed, even required, all citizens to partake of the Lord's Supper. The title of his most famous polemic was *The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God, under a Pretence of Being in an Unconverted Condition.* It argued that since the Lord's Supper was a seal, not of personal regeneration, but of the truth of God's revelation in Christ and of God's willingness to covenant with Christian nations, it was

appropriate that all in such a national covenant take part in it for their own good.[41]

Stoddard's proposals were important because they anticipated later conditions in American theology, especially in his willingness to jettison the cohesion of covenants in order to preserve individual aspects of the Puritan system. Stoddard's proposals kept the language of covenant to describe personal salvation and to show how God cared for nations. But by pulling church order out of the system of interlocking covenants, he moved away from the Puritans' historic integration of theology and society. These moves anticipated the change that came about during the Great Awakening when Stoddard's grandson, Jonathan Edwards, though repudiating the specific innovations of his grandfather, joined Stoddard in greatly de-emphasizing the integrated system of covenants. One can quibble with Patricia Tracy's chronology, but her sense of Stoddard's significance for a much broader history could not be more insightful: "The unquestioned linkage of Calvinist church and intrusive state that was particularly Puritan in America ended with the reign of 'Pope' Stoddard in Northampton."[42]

Observed from the perspective of 1700, Stoddard represented only one more episode in the Puritan effort to seek heart religion and social wholeness together. Observed from the perspective of 1800, however, Stoddard had singled out for special attention the very parts of the Puritan synthesis that would soon fly apart. By abandoning the covenant as a unifying rationale for New England in order to preach the gospel more effectively, Stoddard prepared the way for the all-out evangelism of his grandson, Jonathan Edwards. By continuing to stress the ideal of a unified, Christian commonwealth, he anticipated those who opposed the social divisiveness of Jonathan Edwards's revivalism.

During the late 1760s and early 1770s, New England ministers and a few laymen once again picked up the debate on who, properly speaking, should be the members of a truly Christian church. Joseph Bellamy, a follower of Edwards and a defender of the church as a body of the regenerate, quoted Stoddard in support of his evangelistic efforts. Bellamy's opponents, who argued for unregenerate membership in order to preserve a society in covenant with God, also appealed to Stoddard.[43] Both sides were correct. The difference was that a debate once internalized within a single person later divided the New England clergy in two.

The Great Awakening

Despite Stoddard's influential life and the considerable publicity given to both his revival "harvests" and his ecclesiastical innovations, New England church life followed the path of the founders as defended by the Mathers. Modifications of the original scheme won out over the radical steps that Stoddard urged. These modifications included the Half-Way Covenant, periodic mass renewals of the covenant, Cotton Mather's proposals in his influential *Bonifacius* (1709)

for a systematic doing of good, and efforts by ministers to formalize their collective authority in the Massachusetts Proposals (narrowly defeated in 1705) and Connecticut's Saybrook Platform (successfully implemented in 1708). The development of the New England Way in the nearly forty years between the publication of Stoddard's *Doctrine of Instituted Churches* (1700) and Jonathan Edwards's *Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (1737) has received little attention.[44] Doctrinal orthodoxy continued to prevail, although somewhat more thinly and less passionately than earlier. Some three-fourths of New England churches continued the Half-Way practice, thus maintaining the great Puritan tradition of integrating self, church, and society in covenant with God.[45] At the end of the seventeenth century, New England's best-known minister after the Mathers, Samuel Willard of Boston, published a series of works that exhibited the continuing force of covenantal thinking:

(1680) *The Duty of a People That Have Renewed Their Covenant with God. Opened and Urged in a Sermon Preached to the Second Church in Boston in New-England, March 17, 1679–80; after That Church Had Explicitly and Most Solemnly Renewed the Ingagement of Themselves to God, and One to Another.*

(1682) *Covenant-Keeping the Way to Blessedness; or, A Brief Discourse Wherein Is Shown the Connexion Which There Is between the Promise, on God's Part, and Duty on Our Part, in the Covenant of Grace; As It Was Delivered in Several Sermons Preached in Order to Solemn Renewing of Covenant.*

(1690) *The Doctrine of the Covenant of Redemption. Wherein Is Laid the Foundation of All Our Hopes and Happiness.*[46]

The Puritan canopy still prevailed.

After the start of the new century, the contexts for theology in New England were, to be sure, undergoing substantial change. The formulation of dogma could not be insulated from the great changes of the era, which included an increasingly commercial spirit; a gathering consternation over difficulties in finding land within traditional towns for the rising generation and the concomitant spectacle of young people hiving off into unsettled areas; the beginning of politics outside the scope of the churches; a growing longing for English books, fashions, styles, and demeanor; the spiraling prestige of Newtonian science; and a broadening influence for new philosophies from Britain.[47] Yet amid these social and intellectual changes the main representatives of the traditional theology—either in formal discourses or week-by-week sermons—betrayed little interest in refitting dogma to fit the changing times. Rather, they seemed to be expecting that traditional theology would comprehend the world as it changed about them.[48]

It was into such a situation—into a society undergoing significant social and intellectual evolution but, for theological purposes, still securely within the Puritan framework—that the Great Awakening came. Jon Butler is correct to question whether the Awakening should be considered a neatly defined and easily localized event. But if the Awakening is understood as a renewal of pietistic popular Calvinism—anticipated in the mid-1730s by the

preaching of Jonathan Edwards and other ministers who sought a renewal of traditional piety, fanned into a Two-Years' Wonder (1740–1742) by George Whitefield, and then continuing in widely scattered local revivals—then the notion of a Great Awakening remains indispensable.[49] In the more general history of American religion, the Awakening marked a transition from clerical to lay religion, from the minister as an inherited authority figure to self-empowered mobilizer, from the definition of Christianity by doctrine to its definition by piety, and from a state church encompassing all of society to a gathered church made up only of the converted.

More specifically for a history of theology, the Awakening was the moment when Puritanism—the colonies' strongest traditional form of Protestant theology, as well as its most consistent effort at comprehensive Christian thinking—gave way as a total intellectual system. In particular, the unifying understanding of the church as a covenantal institution joining covenanted individuals into a covenanted society collapsed into competing ideals of the church. Each of the new competitors broke in some way the integrating force of earlier Puritanism, and none could provide an explicitly religious substitute for the doing of theology. The theological history that followed the Awakening retained many Puritan elements, but it no longer proceeded under the Puritan canopy.

Jonathan Edwards's Ecclesiology as the End of the Puritan Canopy

Much of the book that follows uses Jonathan Edwards—especially what Edwards thought he could take for granted—as a benchmark against which to measure theological change. Here, however, it is important to see how convictions and practices that Edwards himself promoted actually accelerated such changes. The critical matter was not Edwards's theology of God, humanity, or salvation; it was rather what he held about the nature of the church and the relationship of the church to society that created a substantially new context for the writing of theology. The removal of the Puritan theological canopy can be described as an episode in political or intellectual history. It was a time when other ordering concepts, especially notions of republican liberty and universal moral reason, replaced the Puritan understanding of Christendom as the integrating context for theology. But the change was also an episode in church history. Even while external colonial contexts were changing, so also was Puritan theology evolving internally. The decade of the 1740s witnessed the first significant interchanges between historic republican and Christian vocabularies. It also witnessed the publication of Jonathan Edwards's views on the church. For the future history of theology, the latter was as important as the former.

Edwards dealt with the subject of church membership, and also the relationship of church and society, in two works, one written shortly before, and the other shortly after, he was dismissed from his Northampton church in

1750.[50] The dismissal occurred when Edwards abandoned his grandfather Stoddard's practice of open communion and instead began to insist that candidates for church membership (and the privilege of communion) offer a convincing statement of saving faith. The dismissal itself was tangible evidence that incompatible understandings of the covenant could no longer be held together.[51] In his two published works, Edwards's key move was to repudiate a long history of New England thought by shifting emphasis on covenant away from the complex nexus of person, church, and society to a simpler bond between the converted individual and the church.

Edwards's argument hinged upon demonstrating that there was no "visibility" to Christianity apart from actual Christianity, no participation in the institutions of God's gracious covenant without actually partaking of that covenant. As Edwards saw it, a visible saint professes "the religion of Jesus Christ," in which "piety of heart" is "vastly the most important part of that religion, and is in effect all"; a saint professes no "religion and virtue that is the result of common grace . . . but saving grace"; a saint is one in whom the heart, the key to real Christianity, is converted; a saint professes a "saving interest in [Christ] and relation to him"; and a saint is one who knows that "there is only one sort of sincerity which belongs to that covenant [of grace]; and that is a gracious sincerity."[52]

Edwards's technical exercise in definition was also his battle cry: those who were not in his sense visible saints were not saints at all. As he would later argue in *Freedom of the Will* and *Nature of True Virtue*, here he also contended that there was no permanent goodness or morality in a life that was not regenerate.[53] The antithesis was stark: "There are two competitors for the kingdom of this world, *Christ* and *Satan*; the design of a public profession of religion is, to declare on which side men are."[54]

Since there could be no equivocation concerning saintship, there could also be no equivocating about the church.[55] Edwards's great stress on conversion had thrown up a sharp ecclesiastical question—"Whether, according to the rules of Christ, any ought to be admitted to the communion and privileges of members of the visible church of Christ in complete standing, but such as are in profession, and in the eye of the church's Christian judgment, godly or gracious persons?" Edwards's answer was unequivocal: "None ought to be admitted as members of the visible church of Christ but visible and professing saints."[56] Edwards did not assume that hypocrisy would vanish under his plan, but he did maintain that those who hypocritically answered to the name of visible saints brought damnation upon themselves; moreover, they did not destroy the visible holiness of the church so long as their hypocrisy was dealt with when discovered. By contrast, the professedly unregenerate had to be excluded, since, in words that echoed John Winthrop's sermon from 1630, "the bond of Christian brotherly love" demanded that members be actually Christians.[57] In a word, Edwards's ecclesiology reflected his belief that the effects of true grace were tangible, visible, and reliably discernible.

With this conception of the church, Edwards could not countenance his grandfather Stoddard's desire to welcome the professedly unregenerate to the

Lord's Supper. In that rite, as Edwards understood it, Christ's people shared what Christ had actually accomplished for them. Nor should the professedly unregenerate—no matter how they have been deceived into considering themselves Half-Way members or "visible" members by national covenant—expect baptism for their children, since "the baptism of infants is the seal of those promises made to the seed of the righteous." The sacraments, both baptism and the Lord's Supper, were expressly "covenant privileges."[58]

By defining the sacraments in this light, Edwards overturned a century's evolution of covenantal thought. For him, baptism and the Lord's Supper sealed the covenant of grace, strictly defined, not a Half-Way Covenant or a national covenant. Edwards's words repeated Solomon Stoddard's attack on the integration of covenants but switched the categories: "The New Testament informs us but of one covenant God enters into with mankind through Christ, and that is the covenant of grace." This covenant, in which grace is given to the recipient and the recipient pledges to love and obey God, takes place in the heart and is confirmed through the sacraments, which "by their own act publicly confirm and seal this covenant."[59] No basis exists for postulating an "external" as opposed to the "internal" covenant. The notion of an "external" covenant is a fiction that greatly obscured the reality of God's truly gracious dealings with humanity: "The New Testament affords no more foundation for supposing two real and properly distinct covenants of grace, than it does to suppose two sorts of real Christians."[60]

Outraged responses to this reasoning were not surprising. In Northampton and other New England towns, covenant privileges, no matter how modified by traditional Puritan qualifications, had become crucial for family well-being and social wholeness.[61] Opponents of revival did not usually take offense at what Edwards and like-minded ministers preached about sin and salvation, since with only a few exceptions most of these opponents also preached a Calvinism stressing the traditional requirement for repentance and grace. Yet they were deeply offended by the threat that Edwards represented to New England families and society as a whole.

The sense that Edwards was undermining something very important led his Northampton opponents to seek a champion. The champion they found turned out to be Edwards's cousin Solomon Williams (1700–1776) of Lebanon, Connecticut.[62] Williams, as it happens, had supported the revival in its early days. On the visible purity of the church, however, Williams could not follow his learned cousin. Rather in an orgy of his own erudition, Williams's *True State of the Question concerning the Qualifications Necessary to Lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments* argued that both external and internal covenants were valid, that Edwards confused entering "into Covenant, with keeping Covenant," that the Lord's Supper sealed not the covenant of grace itself but an "engagement to fulfill it," and that the undisputed reality of hypocrisy invalidated Edwards's attempt to segregate the regenerate from the unregenerate.[63]

Behind these essentially theological arguments, however, lay a concern for the traditional New England community. Williams introduced his essay

by taking for granted that Edwards's plan would disrupt society: "I apprehended the reviving that Dispute was needless, and that it would be attended with unhappy Consequences, especially at a Time so divided, and distracted, as the present State of the Country is: when *Arminian*, *Independent*, *Antinomian* Errors, if not worse, are spreading, and propagated with so much Diligence, and Zeal." Later Williams tried to tar Edwards with the brush of "the *Anabaptists*, and *Independents*," accused him of aiding the Church of England and "the independent Antinomian Separations," and even linked him with "the Romish priests" who tyrannize their congregations.[64] Williams's readers in 1751 knew that Arminianism meant the Church of England (and a few liberal clergymen in Boston). Tutored by the colonists who were beginning to exploit the categories of Real Whig political reasoning, more of their fellows were coming to think that the Church of England constituted as grave a threat to the civil and religious liberties of New England as did the Roman Catholic Church.[65] They knew that Anabaptism meant the kind of civil disorder that had ravaged Münster during the Reformation. And they had to look no farther than neighboring towns to see Separates and Baptists following the logic of Edwards's scheme to its apparent conclusions in an antinomian disregard for the laws of Massachusetts and Connecticut.[66] Edwards may have scored technical points by his own theological erudition, but the abrogation of interlocking covenants was too dangerously revolutionary. The gravest threat posed by Edwards was to society; to contain this threat Williams entered the literary battle.[67]

It is necessary to state matters clearly about Edwards's concern for society. In some respects, Edwards remained a traditional Puritan who believed that God, self, church, and society were intimately interconnected. Like his grandfather Stoddard he could speak (at least into the 1740s) of New England as a people in covenant with God.[68] Yet Edwards also departed from the Puritan heritage by failing to use the covenant—or any other biblically derived metaphor—as an integrating platform linking God, self, church, and society. It is not true, as H. Richard Niebuhr and Perry Miller both contended, that Edwards had no interest in politics. But both Niebuhr and Miller, though shaky on details, were correct on the main point—Edwards's vision for a virtuous society sustained no organic theological relationship to his vision for regenerated hearts and a purified church.[69]

Rather, when Edwards spoke of religion, his vision contracted. Late in his time at Northampton, he even began to question the time-honored notion, which he had once preached routinely, that New England was a covenanted people. Since the New Testament, he wrote in 1749, "informs us but of one covenant God enters into with mankind through Christ, and that is the covenant of grace," and since the "covenant with the patriarchs contained other things that were appendages to that everlasting covenant of grace . . . [such as] those that annexed the blessing to the land of Canaan, and the progeny of Isaac and Jacob," it was a delusion to think that New England as a whole enjoyed a special covenant with God. Whatever Edwards had thought earlier, by the late 1740s he held that Israel was a type of spiritual blessings to

come in the gospel, not of other geographic countries or national peoples that would arise under God's special blessing.[70]

Edwards's farewell sermon at Northampton on 1 July 1750 illustrates his single-mindedness in defending the covenant of grace. In this memorable performance he maintained that his entire ministry, including promotion of the ecclesiastical policy for which he was being sacked, was based on "the gospel-covenant." In contrast to Williams who feared for the prosperity of society if Edwards's practice prevailed, Edwards feared for society if erroneous doctrine should take hold.[71] For Edwards, ecclesiastical and social covenants were as the moon in the glance of the midday sun of the covenant of grace.

Of course, as a well-bread scion of the New England Way, Edwards denied vehemently that he was a sectarian, or a "separate," bent on destroying the social order. In prefaces to the *Humble Inquiry* and the farewell sermon, Edwards denounced "unjustifiable *separations* . . . *censorious outcries* against the standing minister and churches in general . . . [the] assuming, self-confident, contentious, uncharitable *separating spirit*; . . . with [its] many other extravagant and wicked ways."[72] In the heat of the controversy over church membership, however, Edwards's defense of an exalted covenant of grace certainly appeared to be sectarian, and by the standards of New England's Puritan history, it was. As displayed sharply in *Humble Inquiry* and *Misrepresentations Corrected*, the covenant for Edwards no longer served as an all-embracing theological rationale. To make the covenant more powerful for the church, Edwards was willing to relinquish its all-purpose functions for society. It was precisely this move that also spelled the dissolution of Puritan theology as the all-purpose guardian of thought.

Broader Significance

In its wake the Great Awakening left at least five distinct ecclesiastical factions in New England, each of which appropriated a different aspect of the covenant. Separatist and Baptist radicals followed out Edwardsean themes to what they considered logical conclusions and applied the covenant only to themselves and their gathered churches. New Light non-Separates like Edwards maintained formal allegiance to an integrated system of covenants but came to deny that membership in the social covenant conferred ecclesiastical privileges under the covenant of grace. Old Calvinist traditionalists, unwilling to chose between the covenant for individuals and the covenant for New England, defended the standing order as an adequate protection for the health of both religion and society. Rationalistic Congregationalists and latitudinarian Anglicans opted for the social covenant at the expense of the personal covenant of grace and sought to create a haven from the strife generated by revivals. Somewhat later a party of moderate Calvinists self-consciously altered Edwards's views on human nature and divine purpose in order to preserve his goals for evangelism and church renewal.

Significantly, Jonathan Edwards made his most forceful practical arguments about the nature of the covenant at exactly the time when the general effects of revivalistic Calvinism and the general drift of New England history were pushing toward new forms of thought. If the covenant was breaking apart as the prime metaphor for theological integration, it did not mean that New Englanders abandoned the search for intellectual integration as such. What surfaced as a replacement for the covenant was a mélange of themes, forged together by the fervor of the new evangelical piety and the heat of political conflict. In particular, the revival's shaking effects were the occasion for New Englanders to seek other means for shoring up the weakened canopy of biblically oriented covenant theology. For many, the answer was some form of republican political theory, which seemed to be, as elsewhere in the Atlantic world, in the words of Alasdair MacIntyre, "the project of *restoring* a community of virtue."[73]

The new trope of theological integration has been called "civil millennialism," "the sanctification of American Nationalism," or "Christian republicanism."[74] Whatever it is called, this new integrating construct retained aspects of the Puritan covenant, especially the conviction that God actively punished evil and directly rewarded piety. But after 1750—in the wake of increasingly republican perceptions, accelerating participation in the crisis of empire, and fragmenting force of the Puritan covenant—evil increasingly came to be styled "vice" and piety "virtue." As these new usages prevailed, concepts from political ideology and political economy secured a place in the language of theology, and forces were unleashed that led to the displacement of clergymen as supreme intellectual authorities. Vestiges of the older Puritan usage continued to bestow a diffuse aura of sacred earnestness on public spokesmen who could enlist covenantal vocabulary for their own purposes. With the theological covenant in disarray, however, new languages, defined by the needs of the mid-eighteenth century instead of the early seventeenth, were reestablishing the bond between private faith and public life.

Jonathan Edwards's works of 1749 and 1752 appeared in a brief interlude between the two imperial wars that did give a tremendous impetus to the new political ideology. For the general public, Edwards's reasoning about the church was much less urgent than news about the battles and negotiations of these wars. For what happened after he passed from the scene, ideologically as well as theologically, Edwards was not responsible. Certainly the power of his reasoning about the covenantal bond between redeemed individuals and a purified church cut through a measure of ambiguity that had grown up around the notion of covenant in New England's history. Certainly as well, one can imagine a counterfactual history in which New Light churches, taking their cue from Edwards, strictly maintained his covenant of grace and so stopped speaking of social and political affairs as if they shared in the history of salvation. If New Light clergy did continue to regard the imperial conflicts of the eighteenth century as pertaining to the history of salvation and did not turn aside to the kind of sectarianism adumbrated in Edwards's ecclesiastical works, it is a function of their histories and not of Edwards's.