

# Awakening Freedom:

Protestant Revivalism's Effect on the American Revolution

A Monograph

by

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2016

**REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE**

*Form Approved  
OMB No. 0704-0188*

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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 05-26-2016		2. REPORT TYPE Master'sThesis		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) JUL 2015- MAY 2016	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE  AwakeningFreedomProtestanRevivalism'sEffect on the American Revolution				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S)  MAJ DavidW. Carter,UnitedStatesArmy				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  U.S. Army CommandandGeneralStaff College ATTN: ATZL-SWD-GD Fort LeavenworthKS 66027-2301				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING/MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  AdvancedMilitary StudiesProgram				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION/AVAILABILITY STATEMENT  Approvedfor PublicReleaseDistributionis Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT  Contemporarystudiesof the AmericanRevolutiontendto focuson eitherpurely secularor religiouscausesSuchreductionistviews obscurethe complexinterconnectionbetweenreligion andcivil societyin colonial America. This studylooks at the periodof 18th centuryitinerantrevivalism, knownasthe GreatAwakening, andproposes that the revivalists'actionsandmessagescreatedan anti-authoritariamarrativeof equalityandpoweremanatingfrom the populacethat directly influencedthe colonists'willingnessto resistandtakeup armsagainstBritish authority. In a holistic approachthe studytracethe developmentof the anti-authoritarian narrativethroughthe actionsandsermons of the revivalists,coveragen the print media,musicandthevisual arts. Ultimately, the studyfinds that the narrativecreatedby the GreatAwakeningresonatedwith underlyinganti-authoritariantendencieswithin the colonistsandcrossedoverto dominatseculardiscoursein the periodleadingup to the AmericanRevolution.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS  Narrative,discoursemotivationto fight, rebellion,GreatAwakening,AmericanRevolution,Colonial America,revivalism,George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			MAJ DavidW. Carter
(U)	(U)	(U)	(U)	65	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (Include area code) 334-470-7671

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Monograph Approval Page

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## Abstract

Awakening Freedom: Protestant Revivalism's Effect on the American Revolution, by MAJ David W. Carter, 65 pages.

Contemporary studies of the American Revolution tend to focus on either purely secular or religious causes. Such reductionist views obscure the complex interconnection between religion and civil society in colonial America. This study looks at the period of 18<sup>th</sup> century itinerant revivalism, known as the Great Awakening, and proposes that the revivalists' actions and messages created an anti-authoritarian narrative of equality and power emanating from the populace that directly influenced the colonists' willingness to resist and take up arms against British authority. In a holistic approach, the study traces the development of the anti-authoritarian narrative through the actions and sermons of the revivalists, coverage in the print media, music and the visual arts. Ultimately, the study finds that the narrative created by the Great Awakening resonated with underlying anti-authoritarian tendencies within the colonists and crossed over to dominate secular discourse in the period leading up to the American Revolution.

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## Introduction

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

—Jonathan Edwards, *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

The government official could not understand what had happened, much less how. A group of radicals had defeated the government's military forces and taken possession of large tracts of territory. The group appeared to have grown out of a religious movement that, while disruptive to traditional religious practices and local norms, had never presented a threat to the government. Clearly, religious schools in the area had indoctrinated portions of the population over many years, but those so educated were entering a largely secular society as religious leaders. It was almost inconceivable that these leaders could convert a strong following to the group's religious views or incite sufficient numbers to result in war. Yet, apparently, they had.

Perhaps surprisingly, this scenario is not based on a contemporary conflict. Numerous areas around the world are currently experiencing turmoil seemingly motivated by religious factions. News media and policy makers are exploring how radical groups' ideas can inspire action leading to broad support and participation in political and military endeavors. Such questions are not new or peculiar to modern times. In fact, the opening scenario is based on the American Revolution. The British constitute the government forces and the colonists serve as the radicals that took over British possessions in North America. The religious movement is the protestant reformation and what came to be known as the Great Awakening. There were several religious schools operating in colonial times and relevant to this discussion with the most prominent being what we know as Harvard, Yale and Princeton.

The question remains what a group of Protestant revivalists have to do with the American Revolution, particularly since the colonies were experiencing a decline in piety during the late-

seventeenth and early-eighteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> To be clear, this monograph does not propose that God made the colonists do it, that religion was the only motivating factor for the war, or even that religion was a primary overt cause or motivation. Reality is far more complex than these simple single factor causes. Instead this monograph looks at how religious activities, themes and messages can lead and influence the broader population.

The focus for the analysis is the Great Awakening and the American Revolution. Specifically, this paper hypothesizes that Protestant revivalists' actions and messages during the Great Awakening created an anti-authoritarian narrative emphasizing equality, personal freedoms and rights that resonated with the broader populace, entered secular discourse and contributed both to the colonists seeking independence and being willing to fight. While historians have written often on the urges and ideas directly precipitating the Revolution, the underlying ideology, principles and socializing mechanisms were also found in the controversies surrounding the Great Awakening. Parrington's *Currents of American Thought*, Miller's *The New England Mind* and Heimert's *Religion and the American Mind* stand out as the most prominent efforts to discern the genesis of colonial ideology.<sup>2</sup> These often decade long studies go so far as to examine the syntax of word choices used by groups within colonial society to advance theorems as to how ideas and groups evolved. The studies conflict with one another and produce considerable controversy within academic communities. Their progeny have continued to delve into the topic

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<sup>1</sup> Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 19.

<sup>2</sup> See V. L. Parrington, *Main Currents of American Thought*, vol. 1, *The Colonial Mind, 1620-1800* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1927); Perry Miller. *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953); and Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966).



and deliver voluminous works expounding variations of the positions.<sup>3</sup> Rather than assert that any particular group was the progenitor of revolution, this paper assumes that colonial society was fractured between various religious and secular groups that responded to a common narrative developing at least in part from the Great Awakening. Thus, in essence, this paper is delving into how ideas and underlying tendencies can motivate action between groups. In reference to the colonists, ideas compelled an arguably irrational act in challenging the British military. Likewise, ideas on the proper function of government prevented the British from understanding the true nature of the colonists' protests.

In order to examine this phenomenon and provide support to conclusions, this paper will attempt to rely on original sources where possible while also considering critical analysis from multiple scholarly sources. For the biographies of the itinerant ministers, historians were chosen that appeared to provide both comprehensive coverage and critical commentary. Thus, Tyerman's biography of George Whitefield is preferred over Gillie's for example. For the section on newspapers, scans or images of original sources from *The Boston Gazette*, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, *The South Carolina Gazette* and *The Virginia Gazette* were studied and are presented as evidence of how the Awakening's controversies were represented in the news media. For quantitative analysis covering the full range of newspapers in the colonies, this study relies on the comprehensive work provided by Lisa Smith's *The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers*. In order to mitigate copyright concerns, figures in this paper are sourced from the

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<sup>3</sup> See Gordon S. Wood, "Religion and the American Revolution," in *New Directions in American Religious History*, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); Alice Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928); Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); C. H. Van Tyne, *The Causes of the War of Independence* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922); and numerous articles by Harry Stout and Mark Noll among many others.

Library of Congress' digital repository. However, ultimately the images were chosen because they visually represent the paper's flow as ideas forming in colonial controversy, becoming intertwined with secular concepts and leading to rebellion. Overall, the paper attempts to present a holistic study by examining the actions of itinerant ministers, sermons, newspapers, written polemics, music, art and government records. Though not as lengthy, detailed or, perhaps, ambitious as the seminal works referenced above, it is hoped that this study can provide another lens through which to view the colonists' decision to rebel against British authority.

The Great Awakening refers to a period between the mid-1730s and 1750 when evangelical ministers traveled the colonies as itinerant pastors preaching enthusiastic revival sermons. The actions of the itinerant pastors and their followers challenged traditional church practices and caused considerable controversy throughout the colonies. Some scholars dispute that a true awakening or revival across the colonies happened. These studies center on whether coherent revivals took place and what the true impacts to churches and their memberships were.<sup>4</sup> The analysis in this monograph is not concerned with whether or not a large number of people became devoted Protestant practitioners during the period or if new church houses were built. It is indisputable that itinerant pastors' actions caused controversy in the colonies and dominated the newspapers.<sup>5</sup> The scholars' skepticism of the Protestant revival's immediate effect increases the need to understand how the religious activities influenced the populace as a whole. This paper contends that several factors converged to allow religious ideas to have such a profound effect. First, the colonists were predisposed to have anti-authoritarian tendencies. The controversies arising from the Great Awakening amplified these tendencies and allowed the colonists to

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<sup>4</sup> See Jon Butler, "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretative Fiction," *Journal of American History* 69 (Oxford University Press, Organization of American Historians, 1982), 305–325; and Frank Lambert, *Inventing the "Great Awakening"* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>5</sup> Lambert, *Inventing*, 3.

actively participate in challenging the authority of local religious leaders. Thus refreshed, the colonists turned their anti-authoritarian views toward Britain in the 1760s when Parliament sought to impose new restrictions and burdens on the colonies.

This introductory section will present background for the analysis. An overview of the religious developments in the colonies from the seventeenth to eighteenth centuries will allow the reader to appreciate the significance of the events constituting the Great Awakening and understand the disruptive nature of the phenomenon in order to place the discussion in context. This section will chart the colonies' progress from small Quaker and Puritan enclaves to a largely secularized society. Within this society, the paper will present the rise of Calvinist Congregationalism and Presbyterianism as the predominant religious groups and the haunting specters of papists, Anglican bishops, and Arminianism. While serving primarily as an overview, the history reveals the latent anti-authoritarian tendencies of the population that settled the colonies. These tendencies pervaded colonial society and provided fertile ground for the narrative created by the Great Awakening.

The second section analyzes the activities of two major figures in the Great Awakening, George Whitefield and Gilbert Tennent, as a way of discussing why the Awakening was controversial. These two pastors provide a representative cross-section of the types of religious activities that occurred during the Awakening. This section will present a background for each of the pastors to show how they fit into the larger religious theologies or paradigms and describe their key contributions to the Great Awakening's broader narrative. The analysis will include the activities and travels of the pastors to provide an understanding of their reach and influence in spreading the narrative. The section will then look at key sermons to determine the overt themes and messages the pastors were intentionally disseminating throughout the colonies. The section will end with a discussion of the unintentional narratives created by the combination of their words and actions. The main point of this section is to present evidence of the disruptive effect

the itinerants' activities had in colonial society. The concepts of egalitarianism through grace and anti-authoritarianism are introduced as twin themes that intertwine to form the grand narrative arising from the Awakening. The examination sheds light on how the revivalists' activities promoted anti-authoritarianism and supported a more egalitarian, independent society.

Having established the local impact of the Awakening with communities directly connected to the revivals, the third section focuses on the impact media had in spreading narratives and influencing the broader populace. Newspapers were the predominant news source for the colonists. The papers also filled roles equivalent to modern day blogs or Facebook through publishing letters debating issues within the community. For purposes of analysis, this paper will present articles and letters from newspapers throughout the colonies as representative of the type of information that was published on the revivalists' activities during the Great Awakening. As with the Revolution to follow, the printers were essential in spreading the news and controversies of the revival across the colonies. During the Great Awakening, the printers' publications assisted in creating the anti-authoritarian narrative by serving as the primary means for debating controversies. Through filling this role, the media allowed the narrative to cross over from the religious audiences immediately involved with the revival to the broader population.

The fourth section of this monograph analyzes the role of music and visual arts in contributing to, spreading and memorializing the narratives from the Great Awakening in order to provide a different and supporting perspective to the study. The section begins with a discussion of the impact switching from Psalms to hymns had within the society as well as the messages contained within the hymns themselves. Occurring in large part during and supported by the Awakening, the change in music provided an additional source of controversy and amplified the twin themes of equality and anti-authoritarianism. The section then turns to visual art and presents an analysis of several pieces that demonstrate the controversies created by the revivalists and the growing linkage between the religious narratives and dissatisfaction with English rule.

The key themes within this section are how the music issues promoted egalitarian independence while the art demonstrates the confluence between religious and secular ideologies. This section serves as a corollary to the section on print media. In addition to being controversial in their own right, examining music and the visual arts provides a window into the minds of the colonists and allows one to see the connection between the religious narrative and secular society.

The final section looks at linkages between the religious activities, narratives and the actual willingness to fight in the Revolution. The analysis will include the religious justification of the rebellion and the confluence of religion within the civil government. Rather than rehashing the entire history of the conflict, the section will focus on key writings and events that demonstrate the impact of religion in rejecting Britain's authority and forming a rebellion. The section will end with a loyalist's analysis of the conflict tracing the heart of the rebellion back to the Congregationalists and Presbyterians at the center of the Great Awakening.

### Setting the Stage

In modern America, the events of the Great Awakening would not constitute a major news story. In order to understand why this group of traveling revivalists created such a disruption in colonial society, one must view the events in their historical context. The spark for the Great Awakening came from England and its theological or doctrinal roots can be traced back to the Protestant Reformation.

By the seventeenth century, religious theology and politics or polity in England were fractured. The Anglican Church remained dominant but coexisted with dissenting Calvinist and Puritanical congregations that wanted to reform the church. At the same time, the church fought against Charles I and his progeny in the monarchs' various attempts to either control the church throughout what would become Great Britain or force indulgence of separatist theologies and Catholicism. The resulting civil wars ended the ability of Catholics to rule in England and

weakened the power of the English monarchs while increasing the influence of parliament and the Anglican Church.<sup>6</sup>

During this period of infighting within England, the American colonies were being settled by a mix of fortune seekers and those wanting greater religious freedom. The first religious groups to populate the new world were the Virginian Puritans and the Dutch Pilgrims. Both groups essentially shared Calvinistic theology but differed in their desire for separatism from the Church of England. The Virginia colonists were, by design, representative of English society and established a Church of England in Virginia. Owing to a strong anti-Papist discrimination against Catholics in England, Catholics were not included among this group. These settlers did not want a formal separation from the official church. However, there were no bishops or other church officials and few ordained clergymen in the colonies so the political leaders often assumed church functions resulting in unified social, political and religious control.<sup>7</sup>

The Pilgrims landed in the new world shortly after the Virginians and shared basic Calvinist doctrinal principles with their Puritan brethren. However, the Pilgrims were defiant separatists from the Church of England. They were anti-authoritarian, individualistic Congregationalists who did not like nor trust hierarchical authority. As such, their primary religious goal in the new world was to obtain freedom to practice their own style of worship and, as a group, tended to be more tolerant of others' beliefs.<sup>8</sup>

With these groups spreading out across the new colonies, a migration of Puritans began in the 1630s. Archbishop Laud's church conformity campaign in England sought compliance

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<sup>6</sup> Cedric Cowing, *The Great Awakening and the American Revolution: Colonial Thought in the 18th Century* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1971), 2-30.

<sup>7</sup> Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957), 2-5.

<sup>8</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 30-39.

with official church rituals and a shift from Calvinism to Arminianism theology.<sup>9</sup> For purposes of this analysis, the key difference between the two theologies hinged on whether God had pre-destined an elect or chosen few to receive salvation and whether those so chosen could freely decide to accept this gift. Arminianism held that everyone was able to receive salvation and could freely choose whether or not to do so. Calvinism taught that only the pre-destined elect could receive God's grace and, once chosen, the elect could not resist this saving grace.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Laud created a large number of Puritan refugees who traveled to the new world to escape the reach of Laud and the king. The leaders of these refugees were well educated clergymen who viewed the colonies as an opportunity to establish a model of what the church should be as an example for the Church of England.<sup>11</sup> Their attitude demonstrated their belief in divine pre-destination or destiny and led to John Winthrop's declaration of building a "city upon a hill."<sup>12</sup>

With the death of Charles I and rise to power of Cromwell, who was a Calvinist, in 1649 the need for Puritans to escape to the colonies ended. While Cromwell ended persecution of the Puritans and instituted reforms beneficial to other religious groups, he did not usher in the Calvinist reforms as the Puritans had hoped. Consequently, the colonists continued on alone without the influence of new religious refugees and became increasingly more concerned with survival than theology.<sup>13</sup>

With congregations dwindling, seventeenth century clergy decided to modify church membership standards in order to revitalize attendance. Traditional Puritan doctrine required the

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<sup>9</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 8.

<sup>10</sup> David Harlan, *The Clergy and the Great Awakening in New England* (Ann Arbor, MI: UMI Research Press, 1980), 73-79.

<sup>11</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 9-11.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Winthrop, *Life and Letters of John Winthrop* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1971), 18-19.

<sup>13</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 12.

elect to publicly proclaim their unique salvation experience to join the church. With the decline in church attendance, the baptized children of first generation Puritans were reaching adulthood and having children of their own without ever meeting formal church membership requirements. The church extended partial membership to the children and grand-children of full members allowing the partial members to take communion and baptize their children but not vote. This “Half-way Covenant” constituted a controversial departure from previous doctrine. Despite extending church membership to a broader audience the reform did not reverse the church’s decline nor resolve the schism between those allowed to take communion and those prevented from doing so.<sup>14</sup>

The final step to open communion and church membership is attributed to Solomon Stoddard who preached at Northampton along the Connecticut River. Stoddard proclaimed that being among the chosen was unverifiable and that full church membership was available to all who maintained hope that they were among the elect. Stoddard used evangelistic sermons to deliver his message to the greatly increased body of potential members. Much to the chagrin of the traditional Puritans, Stoddard’s open message of grace seemed to work and his congregations expanded.<sup>15</sup> By the early eighteenth century New England was split between traditional Puritans in the East and Stoddardism in the West. Thus the scene for the Great Awakening was set with forms of Puritan Congregationalists and Presbyterians dominating the colonies with pockets of Quakers, Anglicans, and other religious groups spread throughout.

### **The Stars of the Show – Personalities drive the Awakening**

The phenomena known as the Great Awakening developed in response to the evangelical ministers who traveled the colonies challenging traditional religious practices and creating controversy. While numerous pastors and laymen were inspired to start their own revival

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<sup>14</sup> Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 10-12

<sup>15</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 41-45.



ministries, this monograph focuses on the actions of two key individuals: George Whitefield, an Anglican, the catalyst for and celebrity face of the Great Awakening and Gilbert Tennent, the Presbyterian Son of Thunder. This section explores the background, actions and sermons of these individuals and examines the controversies they created. While their overt message certainly added to the narrative discourse of the Great Awakening, the unintended messaging arising out of the revival's controversial nature may be the most important theme for this analysis. These complementary messages run throughout the Awakening themes and will become ever more apparent in the subsequent discussions of the media and the arts. The narrative created by the actors in this section is responsible for creating an anti-authoritative fervor that will soon result in the colonists rejecting British impositions on colonial life. The same ideas and tendencies underlying the controversies presented in this section motivated military action and were completely misunderstood by the British.

#### George Whitefield – The Grand Itinerant

Whitefield was born at the inn owned by his parents in Gloucester, England on December 16, 1714. As his father passed when he was two, Whitefield was raised by his mother. He attended St. Mary de Crypt school where he became involved with theatrical productions. As a teenager, he worked in the inn first for his mother and eventually for his older brother, who had taken over the business. At age 18, Whitefield obtained a position of servitor at Pembroke College, part of Oxford University.<sup>16</sup> This appointment allowed him to attend classes at the college, where he initially studied science before switching to religious studies, which he continued until 1736.

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<sup>16</sup> George Whitefield, *A Short Account of God's Dealings with the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, A.B. Late of Pembroke-College, Oxford, from His Infancy to the Time of His Entering into Holy Orders* (London: W. Strahan, 1740), in L. Tyerman, *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 1:3-15.

While at the college, Whitefield formed a friendship with John and Charles Wesley, who were known as the methodists for their methodical lifestyle and practice of worship. Whitefield joined the Wesley's Holy Club at Oxford and adopted the methodical lifestyle they demonstrated. The group met nightly from six to nine to pray, study the Greek Testament and discuss ministry plans. They also took communion once per week and fasted twice per week. For their efforts, members of the Holy Club were ridiculed as Bible Bigots or Bible Moths by the other students at the school.<sup>17</sup> Undeterred, the members of the Holy Club depended on each for support while continuing their devotion and religious studies.<sup>18</sup> Whitefield continued ministering with the group and in 1736, with the Wesleys preaching in Georgia, he assumed the leadership of the Holy Club. Clergy began to take notice of his ministries and later that same year Whitefield was ordained as a clergyman at the age of 21.<sup>19</sup>

Following his ordination Whitefield preached at Oxford, Gloucester and London, where his reputation began to grow. He was content to stay at Oxford; however, in December 1736 he received an invitation from John Wesley to come serve in Georgia. Whitefield decided to accept the invitation and began preparing for his first missionary journey across the Atlantic.<sup>20</sup>

Whitefield spent the following year handing over his ministries to other clergy and preaching on a

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<sup>17</sup> J. F. Hurst and James Richard Joy, *John Wesley the Methodist: A Plain Account of His Life and Work* (New York: Eaton & Mains, 1903), 73.

<sup>18</sup> John Gillie, *Memoirs of the Life of the Reverend George Whitefield ... Faithfully Selected from His Original Papers, Journals and Letters : Illustrated by a Variety of Interesting and Entertaining Anecdotes ... with a Particular Account of His Death and Funeral : and Extracts from the Sermons ... to Which Is Now Added an Extract from Mr. Whitefield's Tracts* (Falkirk, Scotland: Printed by T. Johnston for W. Burnes, 1798), 13.

<sup>19</sup> Whitefield, *A Short Account*, in Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:40-44.

<sup>20</sup> Tyerman, L. *The Life of the Rev. George Whitefield* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1876), 1:58-63. Tyerman's biography of Whitefield provides the most complete account of his life and works, contrasting Whitefield's Journals and other writings with critical commentary. Many details of Whitefield's revival travels are presented in this two volume set that are omitted from other works on Whitefield. Thus, this section relies heavily on Tyerman's work to trace Whitefield's activities.

traveling basis around London, Bristol and Gloucester. His preaching style and evangelical message resonated with the public and he was repeatedly asked to preach in congregations, clubs and assemblies as he traveled.<sup>21</sup> He began preaching nine times a week in London and became so popular that he had to take a carriage through the streets in order to avoid the masses of people that wanted to hear him speak. With this popularity came the beginnings of controversy as the resident clergy began complaining that the churches were so crowded with visitors from the general public that there was no room for the members. Likely furthering the clergies' animosity was Whitefield's willingness to associate with dissenters from the Anglican church. Finally, on December 28, 1737 Whitefield boarded a ship and began his journey to the colonies.<sup>22</sup>

Whitefield's first trip to Georgia was short. He arrived in May 1738 and spent a few months in Savannah and the surrounding areas preaching, ministering to the poor and becoming acquainted with his parishioners. He was well received and left under far better circumstances than John Wesley, who was pursued by Savannah's chief magistrate and had charges pending before the grand jury for numerous ecclesiastical affronts. Whitefield departed in September 1738 for London in order to receive ordination as a priest and to collect funds to build an orphanage in Savannah.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:64-83.

<sup>22</sup> Whitefield, *A Short Account*, in Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:84-87.

<sup>23</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:130-148. Note that many commentaries indicate that John Wesley was charged before a grand jury for using improper hymns while at Savannah. While it is true that the bill included this charge along with others, it appears from the journal of William Stephens, the secretary for the Trustees of Georgia, that the matter actually involved a scorned admirer of Wesley's. Wesley had been dating the niece of Mr. Causton, Savannah's Chief Magistrate. Wesley's Moravian friends convinced him to forgo marriage for spiritual reasons and Wesley broke off his relationship. The young lady married another man and was subsequently denied communion in the church pastored by Wesley. Mr. Causton saw fit to file an extensive list of charges against Wesley soon thereafter. William Stephens and Allen D. Candler, *A Journal of the Proceedings in Georgia, Beginning October 20, 1737. By William Stephens, Esq; to Which Is Added, A State of That Province, As Attested Upon Oath in the Court of Savannah, November 10, 1740* (Atlanta, GA: Franklin Print. and Pub. Co., 1906), 14-21.

Upon his arrival in London in December 1738, Whitefield found that the situation had changed. Where before he was adored and welcomed into pulpits on a regular basis now it seemed most pulpits were closed to him. During his absence Whitefield's *A Short Account*, which was an auto-biographical account of his life and conversion experience, and his journal of the voyage from London to Savannah had been published. Foreshadowing events to come in the colonies, Whitefield's detractors took advantage of his absence and seized upon objectionable language within the publications, which tended to proclaim both Whitefield's youthful immorality and his special relationship with God, to publish their own pamphlets condemning his doctrine and actions. Through his association with the Wesleys, he was further chastised for promoting the doctrine of salvation by faith alone without regard to works, which was at odds with established Anglican doctrine. Denied the churches as a venue, Whitefield began preaching in alternate locations and held services within private societies across London.<sup>24</sup> Eventually, because of this difficulty obtaining permission to preach in a church, Whitefield held a service for about two hundred people on a hilltop in Kingswood and subsequently several churches opened their doors. As a result, Whitefield was called before the Bristol Chancellor's Ecclesiastical Court and threatened with excommunication. Altogether there appear to have been over forty pamphlets or tracts published by Anglican detractors antagonistic toward Whitefield in just 1739 alone.<sup>25</sup> His open defiance of the established clergy and continual practice of preaching outside of a church house was earning Whitefield a significant degree of notoriety.

In November 1739, Whitefield arrived in Philadelphia and began his second stay in America. Whitefield wasted no time in beginning his ministry in the colonies and preached eleven times in the first week. The following week Whitefield left Philadelphia for New York.

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<sup>24</sup> Gillie, *Memoirs*, 33-34.

<sup>25</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:283-285.

Enroute he met Gilbert Tennent and began an association that would last throughout the Awakening. Once in New York, Whitefield preached both in church houses and outdoors to a receptive audience, tellingly he was refused the pulpit at the one Anglican church that he encountered. Mid-November Whitefield returned to Philadelphia where he preached a number of sermons and met Benjamin Franklin.<sup>26</sup> Franklin noted that Whitefield was refused pulpits by the local clergy and began preaching outdoors to enormous “multitudes of all sects and denominations.”<sup>27</sup> Whitefield then began travelling through Maryland, Virginia and the Carolinas on his way to Georgia. Hundreds of people followed Whitefield on horseback to hear him preach and the attendees at his sermons numbered in the thousands. Whitefield reached Savannah on January 10, 1740 and began building his orphanage. Soon Whitefield began creating trouble because of his blunt outspokenness on issues he perceived as being ungodly. First, he wrote an open letter to the newspapers in the colonies through which he traveled complaining about the treatment of slaves. Later he preached a sermon in Savannah highly critical of the local clergy and forbade the former minister of Savannah from assisting Whitefield in administering the sacrament.<sup>28</sup> Whitefield soon began to receive rebukes for his offenses. Reverend Alexander Garden of Charleston published a series of pamphlets criticizing Whitefield’s theology, accusing him of wicked slander, and insinuating that Whitefield treated his orphans cruelly.<sup>29</sup> Eventually Reverend Garden empanelled an Ecclesiastical Court and charged Whitefield with failing to use the proper form of prayer prescribed in the Anglican communion book. Whitefield disputed the

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<sup>26</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:319-338.

<sup>27</sup> Benjamin Franklin, *Memoirs of Life and Writings of Benjamin Franklin*,” vol I (London, 1818) quoted in Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:338-339.

<sup>28</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:353-355.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:361-364.

court's authority, but Garden ruled anyway denouncing Whitefield and proclaiming him suspended from his duties.<sup>30</sup>

Notwithstanding Garden's ruling, Whitefield continued travelling throughout the colonies preaching in churches, meeting houses and open fields as they were available. In September 1740 Whitefield traveled to Boston for the first time. Ironically, Whitefield, an Anglican minister, was shunned by the Anglican clergy and welcomed by the Congregational clergy, who were dissenters from the Anglican church. Whitefield stayed in the Boston area for about a month and was welcomed into all the churches except for the Anglicans. He continued to be well received and preached a farewell sermon to a crowd of 23,000 before his departure. Leaving Boston, Whitefield traveled to Northampton and preached with Jonathan Edwards, the town minister and influential contributor to the discourse surrounding the Great Awakening.<sup>31</sup>

Whitefield began his third voyage to the colonies in August 1744 and landed in New York on October 26. In the three years he had been away, Whitefield's detractors had gained momentum and set in motion obstacles to hinder the itinerant revivalist's work. His immediate opposition came from three sources. First, Reverend Timothy Cutler, former president of Yale College and current rector of Christ Church in Boston, penned a letter accusing Whitefield of creating dissension and confusion within the church and community. Cutler offered that Whitefield was vain and that he and Tennent had taken large sums of money from the people with their evangelical proselytizing.<sup>32</sup> Whitefield's second opponent was Reverend Charles Chauncy of First Church in Boston. Chauncy published several pamphlets critical of Whitefield and his religious practices. Chauncy specifically complained about Whitefield's itinerancy and intrusion

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<sup>30</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 1:398-400.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 1:407-426.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:120-124.

in other ministers' parishes. He stated that the disruption was such that Connecticut had passed a law prohibiting itinerant preaching and thereby requiring the local clergymen's consent to preach. Chauncy further decried Whitefield's theological teaching and apparent conceit.<sup>33</sup> Whitefield also managed to receive rebukes from the Congregational Ministers and Laymen of Massachusetts and the leaders of Harvard College. The ministers took issue with several theological issues in Whitefield's sermons as well as the disorder caused by his itinerancy.<sup>34</sup> Harvard began by criticizing Whitefield's impulsive enthusiasm, slanderous writings, conceitedness, and arrogance in writing that most of the men of Harvard were unconverted or that their light had become dark. The Harvard letter ends with a complaint about itinerant pastors and requests other ministers to make a stand against Whitefield's mischiefs.<sup>35</sup> Several other letters and pamphlets were published by various groups and individuals complaining of similar matters.

Despite these obstacles Whitefield stayed in Boston for three months preaching and publishing works. Over the next year Whitefield resumed his travelling itinerancy and worked his way south through the colonies. Whitefield did not stay in any area long and made several trips around the colonies during this period before setting sail for England in June of 1748.<sup>36</sup>

Whitefield's travels throughout the colonies exposed a large number of people to his gospel message. His unconventional style of preaching in open air settings, his patronage of all religious groups that professed a similar love of Christ, and the inclusive tone of his sermons created an egalitarian feeling of increased access to God and the ministry. From the beginning of his career Whitefield created controversy within his own Anglican denomination and, through his

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<sup>33</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 2:125-129.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 2:130-132.

<sup>35</sup> Edward Holyoke, et al, *The Testimony of the President, Professors, Tutors and Hebrew Instructor of Harvard College in Cambridge against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and his Conduct* (Boston:T. Flect, 1744).

<sup>36</sup> Tyerman, *The Life*, 2:130-182.

brash sermons and writings, he soon alienated large numbers of established church clergymen across England and the colonies. The theological disputes, accusations and complaints between Whitefield and his detractors took place in the pulpit and in the media. Both sides produced polemics chastising the other in venues freely accessible to colonists far removed from the immediate controversy. This served to increase awareness of Whitefield's actions and, seemingly, to increase his reputation among the common people within the colonies. Significantly, for our purposes, the manner by which the disputes were handled broadcast Whitefield and his follower's challenge to established religious and political authority throughout the colonies. Whitefield's continuous subversion of traditional church practices and authority promoted anti-authoritarian attitudes among the populace. Whitefield was a veritable rock star in the colonies and set an influential example for the colonists to follow. His actions made it acceptable for common men to challenge the authority of the church, while his message told the colonists they could commune with God just as well as the church leaders.

#### Gilbert Tennent – The Son of Thunder

Gilbert Tennent was born February 5, 1703 in Ulster, Northern Ireland to William and Katherine Tennent.<sup>37</sup> Gilbert's parents are significant owing to the strong influence their religious beliefs had on the future revivalist. William Tennent was a clergyman that began his ministry with the Presbyterians in Scotland. Around the time of Gilbert's birth, William switched to the official Anglican Church of Ireland because of family pressure and official discrimination against Presbyterians in Ireland. Katherine came from a long line of Presbyterian dissenters and likely strongly objected to William's conversion. By 1718, William had grown thoroughly disillusioned

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<sup>37</sup> Milton J. Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder: A Case Study of Continental Pietism's Impact on the First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1986), 2.



with the Anglicans and immigrated his family to Philadelphia where he immediately requested to rejoin the Presbyterian church. William received tentative support from the local Synod and began servicing various congregations in New York and Pennsylvania. In 1735 William purchased 100 acres of land in Warminster, Pennsylvania, where he settled his family and built a religious school known as the Log College, which served as an incubator for Presbyterian revivalists.<sup>38</sup>

Not much is known about Gilbert Tennent's childhood other than the tumultuous travels of his parents. He was apparently well educated by his father and received a master of arts degree from Yale College in 1725.<sup>39</sup> After finishing his degree, Gilbert was licensed as a minister by the Philadelphia Presbytery and admitted as a probationer in the Presbytery of New Castle. Much as Whitefield had, Gilbert began his new ministry by causing controversy among the established religious leaders. Gilbert received a call to serve a congregation in New Castle, Delaware, which he for unknown reasons ignored. Gilbert instead accepted a call from New Brunswick, New Jersey and began work there in the fall of 1726, while being officially reprimanded for the New Castle affair.<sup>40</sup>

Belying his later thunderous sermon exhortations, Gilbert began his career at a loss for how to motivate his congregations. Gilbert's frustrations led him to form a relationship with Thomas Frelinghuysen, a nearby Dutch Reformist domine and pietist.<sup>41</sup> Frelinghuysen heavily influenced Gilbert's preaching style and theological thoughts. Controversial due to the candid, blunt nature of his assessments and sermons, Frelinghuysen taught Gilbert the preaching of terrors to jar listeners into conversion. Frelinghuysen also taught that ministers were God's

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<sup>38</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 2-5.

<sup>39</sup> Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 32-33. See also Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 9-10.

<sup>40</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 11-12.

<sup>41</sup> Cowing, *The Great Awakening*, 58.

mouthpiece and had a duty to warn people of their impending damnation. Accordingly, unconverted or false ministers were a scourge that led to the unconverted remaining lost.<sup>42</sup>

The confluence of theology and techniques Gilbert learned from his father and Frelinghuysen proved to be highly effective. Gilbert's ministry became successful and he is credited with sparking a series of revivals in the area during the late 1720s. Gilbert's blossoming career began during a period of conflict within the colonial Presbyterian Synod. Two groups, known as subscriptionists and anti-subscriptionists, were at odds over how much control the Synod or appointed committees had over the individual practices of churches and ministers. The subscriptionists proved to have the most influential members and succeeded in convincing the Philadelphia Synod to pass an adopting act in 1729 that began formalizing the power of the Synod over the presbyteries, presumably for the purpose of unifying the teachings and practices of the church. Tennent did not oppose the subscriptionists and was not actively engaged in the debate.<sup>43</sup> However, as the Synod amassed power and control, it was only a matter of time before Tennent's revival program and blunt assessments would create conflict.

Tennent and his followers in the New Brunswick presbytery first ran afoul of the subscriptionists' growing power over matters relating to itinerant preaching and the ordination of ministers. The subscriptionists within the Synod sought control over both matters in order to protect members of their party already in pulpits and to ensure future members shared their beliefs. Both matters were debated in the 1738 and 1739 Synods and were won by the subscriptionists, who clearly held the majority and the power.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 16-22.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 27-38.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 48-54.

George Whitefield's appearance in 1739 bolstered the revivalists and gave Gilbert hope that more members of the Synod could be persuaded to support the revival program within the Presbyterian church. Gilbert met Whitefield in November 1739 and quickly formed a friendship with the Anglican revivalist. Gilbert volunteered to accompany Whitefield on his tour of the middle colonies and assist him with finding areas in need of spiritual awakening. Whitefield accepted the offer, giving Gilbert the opportunity to push the revival into areas likely to garner support within the Presbyterian community.<sup>45</sup> Whitefield's revivals were, of course, a great success and served to influence a number of Presbyterian ministers to support the revival program. Whitefield's success also influenced Tennent. Accompanying Whitefield during his sermons allowed Tennent to witness the power of strong oratory to influence the congregations and to hear Whitefield echo Tennent's condemnation of unconverted ministers.

The frenzy from the revival tour led Tennent to become more vocal and polemic in his messages. On March 8, 1740, Tennent stepped into a situation forming his greatest controversy by preaching a sermon entitled *The Danger of An Unconverted Ministry* at a Presbyterian church in Nottingham, Pennsylvania.<sup>46</sup> The church was in the process of choosing a new minister. Two of the candidates were revivalists and three were subscriptionists.<sup>47</sup> Tennent's scathing attack was intended to convince the congregation to support the revivalist ministers but went well beyond any of his previous sermons on the topics. Tennent's exhortations against unconverted ministers included that they were "uncomfortable to gracious souls" because the ministers did not have a

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<sup>45</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 59-64.

<sup>46</sup> Lambert, *Inventing*, 240.

<sup>47</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 64.

true love for Christ or divine authority.<sup>48</sup> Their ministries were dangerous because they could not have a true understanding of the Bible's doctrines and practices. As a result, the unconverted ministers were poor guides for the people to follow. Gilbert then reasoned, with the above being true, people had no reason to support or stay within a church pastored by an unconverted minister.

If the ministry of natural Man be as it has been represented; Then it is both lawful and expedient to go from them to hear Godly Persons...To bind Men to a particular Minister, against their Judgment and Inclinations, when they are more edified elsewhere, is carnal with a Witness; a cruel Oppression of tender Consciences, a Compelling of Men to Sin...To trust the Care of our Souls to those who have little or no Care for their own, to those who are both unskilful and unfaithful, is contrary to the common Practice of considerate Mankind, relating to the Affairs of their Bodies and Estates; and would signify, that we set light by our our Souls and did not care what became of them. For if the Blind lead the Blind, will they not both fall into the Ditch?<sup>49</sup>

Tennent's sermon delivered three messages to the Presbyterian leadership and subscriptionists in general. The charge against unconverted ministers and associating non-revivalist members of the subscriptionists with this group, though controversial, was not new. However, the sermon made clear that unity was not an overriding purpose of ministers or the church. Further, by empowering individuals to make the decision as to which minister to support, Gilbert challenged the authority and assumption of power by the subscriptionist controlled Synod. If church splits resulted then, although regrettable, it was ultimately good for the people to find a Godly minister.

Tennent continued to participate with and support Whitefield during the revival tours. As Tennent's reputation and influence grew, so did his detractors. The Nottingham sermon was published the same year in Philadelphia newspapers and in Boston in 1742.<sup>50</sup> The sermon was referenced in disparaging articles for years to come. More pamphlets and articles began

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<sup>48</sup> Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, Considered in a Sermon...Preached at Nottingham, in Pennsylvania, March 8. Anno 1739* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1740), in *Religious Enthusiasm and the Great Awakening*, David S. Lovejoy ed. (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1969), 48.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 51.

<sup>50</sup> Gaustad, *The Great Awakening*, 35.

disparaging Tennent's itineracy, his alleged abandoning of his own church to seek fame and his encouragement of lay ministers, who were causing controversy throughout the colonies. Tennent also continued to oppose and ignore the Synod's rules on itineracy. The schism erupted in May 1741 when the subscriptionists convinced the Synod to exclude Tennent's New Brunswick contingent from the Synod, effectively excommunicating them from the larger church. This split highlighted the extreme controversy created by Tennent, Whitefield and the other revivalists among the traditional clergy. The event was broadcast throughout the colonies via newspapers and spurred the creation of numerous paper and pamphlet wars.<sup>51</sup>

Perhaps even more than Whitefield, Tennent's contribution to the Awakening's antiauthoritarian message was an unwanted and incidental consequence of what he believed to be the best way of presenting the Gospel message to unbelievers. Regardless of his intent, Tennent's career stoked controversy and challenged authority from the very beginning. Once he became known as a revivalist and associated with Whitefield, the paper and pamphlet coverage of his controversies and splits within the Presbyterian Synod exposed the matter for all the colonies to examine. Like Whitefield, Tennent's constant challenge of the traditional practices and authorities created a strong anti-authoritarian message. Tennent's advocacy that individuals choose which ministers to support or church to attend placed the power back at the base of the pyramid. It further empowered individuals to freely challenge authorities and find scriptural justification for doing so. By freeing these anti-authoritarian tendencies and unleashing the forces of individualism, Tennent was laying the ground for challenges to monarchical authority to come in the Revolution.

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<sup>51</sup> Coalter, *Gilbert Tennent*, 82-85.

### **Media coverage – Delivering the narrative to the Masses**

Having established the controversy revivalists created within religious groups, this section will explore how debates over the controversies were spread to the broader populace and allowed the Great Awakening to form a coherent narrative. Printers and the media they produced were the primary means of disseminating news throughout the colonies. If not for the printers, the Great Awakening would likely have been reduced to a series of small local revivals. Instead the print coverage of Whitefield, Tennent and the other revivalists served as the most effective means of publicizing the revival and debating the associated controversies.

The printers relied on two primary products to make income: pamphlets and newspapers. Pamphlets were multi-page booklets created by folding the printer's paper and loosely binding into the requisite size for the intended writing. Pamphlets gave authors a chance to provide an in-depth and one-sided opinion on issues. Many pamphlets were argumentative attacks and responses between advocates on either side of a controversy. Others were used to publish sermons or speeches for consumption by a broader audience. Newspapers, on the other hand, typically consisted of four pages and were printed weekly. In order to fill the issues, printers relied on letters from the community, reports from travelers and republishing articles from other papers or pamphlets.<sup>52</sup>

Historians recognize that print media was essential to the colonists' success during the American Revolution. The pamphlets allowed the colonists to clarify and coalesce behind a unified view of independence and constitutional issues. The newspapers and their practice of exchanging stories served to bind the colonies together while allowing patriots to broadcast their

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<sup>52</sup> Robert G. Parkinson, "Print, the Press, and the American Revolution," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of American History* (August 2015), accessed January 13, 2016, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780199329175.013.9>.

message throughout the colonies.<sup>53</sup> While used to great effect by the patriots, this system or phenomenon did not originate with the Revolution. A few decades earlier, these same methods were used to thrust the Awakening's itinerant pastors into the colonial limelight.

During the time of the Awakening there were fifteen papers spread throughout the colonies' major cities.<sup>54</sup> These papers reported on events in England as well as the local area and heavily relied on the practice of reprinting articles from other papers with little or no editing.<sup>55</sup> As during the Revolution, colonial newspapers served as the key source of news or information for the colonists and, by 1740, printers published one weekly paper for every 125 colonists. The papers were distributed in towns, sent to outlying subscribers through postal services, and shared in local communities. George Whitefield and his fellow revivalists burst into the news in 1739 and dominated the papers for the next decade. From 1739 to 1748, colonial papers printed 1598 items related to the Great Awakening. Historian Frank Lambert theorized that the revivalists used the newspapers to publicize their efforts and essentially invented the Great Awakening out of a series of local revivals.<sup>56</sup> Whatever the revivalists' and printers' motivations, no other topic or event, not even the war between England and Spain, received such prolific coverage during this time, demonstrating the amount of controversy and interest generated by the revivalists.<sup>57</sup> Such broad coverage of the revival allowed the Awakening's narrative to spread far beyond the immediate participants.

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<sup>53</sup> Parkinson, "Print, the Press," 1-2.

<sup>54</sup> Lisa Smith, *The First Great Awakening in Colonial American Newspapers: A Shifting Story* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 4.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 13,15.

<sup>56</sup> Lambert, *Inventing*, 253-257.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 3-4.

The newspaper coverage began with a flurry. Seventy-five items on the revival were published during the first two months of Whitefield's first revival tour.<sup>58</sup> As with Whitefield's reception, the tone of coverage shifted throughout the period. Initially the coverage was predominantly positive. However, when Whitefield returned to England, the focus shifted to other revivalists, such as Gilbert Tennent, and the revival's detractors began to make an impact in the papers. This can also be seen in the amount of article reprints versus original content. Reprints accounted for 30 percent of revival articles between 1739 and 1748. The high mark for reprints was 1739 with such articles accounting for 55 percent of the reporting. With the rise of controversy in 1741-1745, reprints dropped to 23 percent as both sides of the controversy published their viewpoints and engaged in paper wars.<sup>59</sup> Reprinting key articles assisted in the formation of a common picture of the revival and its controversies throughout the colonies allowed common narratives to develop.

Initially the tone of coverage was positive and primarily focused on Whitefield's travels. Many of the reports gave Whitefield's itinerary and helped interested colonists learn where they might attend his services. For instance, *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, printed by Benjamin Franklin, published the following notice shortly after Whitefield's arrival for his first revival tour.

Last Week the Rev. Mr. WHITEFIELD landed from London at Lewes Town in Sussex County, where he preach'd; and arrived in this City on Friday Night; on Sunday, and every Day since he has preach'd in the Church: And on Monday he designs (God willing) to set out for New York, and return hither the Week after, and then proceed by Land thro' Maryland, Virginia and Carolina to Georgia.<sup>60</sup>

In the next issue, Franklin published an advertisement for Whitefield's journals and included the following itinerary:

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<sup>58</sup> Smith, *Newspapers*, 17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 08, 1739.



On Thursday last, the Rev. Mr. WHITEFIELD began to preach from the Court House Gallery in this City, about six at Night, to near 6000 People before him in the Street, who stood in an awful Silence to hear him; and this continued every Night, 'till Sunday. On Monday he set out for New York, and was to preach at Burlington in his Way going, and in Bucks County coming back. Before he returns to England he designs (God willing) to preach the Gospel in every Province in America, belonging to the English. On Monday the 26th he intends to set out for Annapolis.<sup>61</sup>

These notices were not confined to one paper or limited to the areas where Whitefield was physically present. Near this same time the Virginia Gazette printed:

We hear from *Philadelphia*, That the Reverend Mr. *Whitfield* (the celebrated Preacher) was arrived therefrom *England*; and had preach'd in that City 19 Times, and at *New York* 8 Times; that vast Numbers of People stock'd to hear him; and the Churches not being large enough to contain the Hearers, he had preach'd in the open Fields to 8 or 10,000 People at a Time. He preached at several other Places, on his Way to *Maryland*; and last *Friday* he preached at *Annapolis*, before the Governor, several of the Council, and a great Number of People.

This Evening the Rev. Mr. *Whitfield* arrived here, on his Way to *Georgia*. We hear he is to preach at our Church on *Sunday*; and on *Monday* goes on his Journey.<sup>62</sup>

Such notices were regularly published and served both to inform and entice the public. By reporting the large audiences at previous sessions, the articles would excite potential viewers in future locations and contributed to Whitefield's rising fame.

By no means, however, were all the articles printed during this time positive or even neutral toward Whitefield as his reputation had preceded him from England and the seeds of controversy had already been sown in the colonies. Pamphlets and letters began appearing discrediting his preaching and casting dispersions on his character. These often developed into paper wars as the detractors and defenders engaged in a battle of words within the local papers. An example of this struggle is seen in *The South Carolina Gazette* over the summer of 1740. The July 18, 1740 issue, printed during the ongoing Ecclesiastical Court action prosecuted by

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<sup>61</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, November 15, 1739.

<sup>62</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, December 14, 1739.

Reverend Garden against Whitefield, contained a lengthy letter disparaging Whitefield.

Representative portions of the letter include:

I am sensible the Reasons here offered affect me only as a Member of the Church of England, and one who thinks himself happy in continuing so. But such Reasons will be so far from discouraging those of a different Way of thinking, they that have gained him the Bulk of his Hearers, and if I mistake not, will continue to do so. All who are not steady Members of that Church upon sound Reasons, and Christian Principles, all who dissent from or oppose it, will for those very Reasons hear and encourage him; all who have a Grain of Enthusiasm will be drawn after him by a kind of simpatherick Power: Especially if this enthusiastick Turn be not balanced by a *right* and *steady Judgment*...

You may perhaps have observ'd or heard that when a *Comet* appears (which you know is a disorderly kind of a *Star* with a *silaze*, that crosses and interferes with the Paths & Motions of the regular Stars, Planets and other Heavenly Bodies) what Crowds are collected, and stand whole Mornings and Evenings a Gape, and a Ghastr at the new surprising Sight!<sup>63</sup>

That same issue contained an announcement informing readers where they could hear Whitefield preach the following week. The reaction and response to the derogatory letter swiftly appeared in the next issue.

THE extraordinary *Comet*, which appear'd in your last Gazette, and which, to repeat a *polite* Expression, SNUFF'D the Moon, has I must own collected and entertain'd vast Crowds, for many Mornings and Evenings successively, and drown'd many of them in Tears, in the loudest Call to prepare for Judgment both Temporal and Eternal. --- But your learned *Astronomer* seems much affected, lest while we gaze at his *blazing Star*, we neglect the regular Stars and Planets; the *greater* and *lesser* Lights of Heaven, which, he imagines, appear little to the *new Phantom*, only because they are so far above him...

And thus it would be happy for us, if all our *slow* and *orderly* Planets were transform'd into *Comets* of more Speed and Lustre. --- As to Mr. WHITEFIELD'S Character, ... I mean his extraordinary Christian Spirit, and Behaviour towards his most profess'd Opposers, breathing out *Prayers* for them; which could not be utter'd with more Pathos and Appearance of Love and Forgiveness, had he been then going to a SACRAMENTAL TABLE.<sup>64</sup>

The author then proceeded to extoll Whitefield's virtues in a lengthy Psalm that was modified to apply to the revivalist. This is extraordinary, as will be discussed in the section on music, in that

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<sup>63</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, July 18, 1740.

<sup>64</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, July 25, 1740.

the author modified scripture to glorify Whitefield and published it in a secular publication. This in itself would be considered controversial and potentially blasphemous. That the author felt secure to do so indicates the growing divide between the new thoughts on independence in religion and the traditional old order. As in the previous issue, the printer included an itinerary for Whitefield's sermons. This time the paper also included an update on the Ecclesiastical Court action that seems to be partial to Whitefield.

The Reason of his not coming to preach at the Places appointed the beginning of this Week, was his being cited to appear before Mr. Commissary Garden and some others of the Clergy, to answer to Articles of Impeachment, *For not using the Form of Common Prayer in Charlestown Meeting-houses where he has preached*. He appear'd three times at the judicial Place in the Parish Church of St. Philips, and many attended to know the Issue of the Tryal. On Tuesday the first Day of his appearing, he scrupled the Authority of the Court. On Wednesday he enter'd a Recusatio Judicis. On Thursday that being repell'd, he appeal'd *Apud Aola* to his Majesty in the High Court of Chancery. So that all further Proceedings on that Affair are entirely put a Stop to.<sup>65</sup>

These early publishings served primarily to publicize Whitefield and the revival. As Whitefield's fame grew, more people were drawn to hear the revivalist speak creating a feedback loop where Whitefield's fame encouraged more people to become involved, leading to more sensational revival reports, increasing the revivals reach and Whitefield's fame, and thereby drawing more people to participate. The derogatory posts foreshadowed the following years in the colonies and began to hint at the controversy and disruption the revival was causing. The written debates began to divide the colonists into camps supporting either the new or old religious order and desensitized the populace to criticizing or defying traditional authorities.

With Whitefield's departure for England in 1741 the tone and focus of the reporting changed. Supporters of the revival switched their publishing to other revivalists such as Gilbert Tennent. Opponents, meanwhile, clarified their positions and published articles condemning the disruptive effect of the revival on communities and challenging Whitefield's motivations. In

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<sup>65</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, July 25, 1740.

1742, negative articles outnumbered positive and neutral ones for the first time.<sup>66</sup> Opposition and criticism of the revivals began to coalesce around three themes: the revivals were causing church splits and disorder, the revivalists and their followers were irrational, and the effects of the revival were dangerous.<sup>67</sup> This shift in tone is readily seen in the papers. For example, the August 12, 1742 issue of Franklin's *Gazette* devoted the entire front page to revival issues and included three separate articles related to various controversies. The paper led with a re-printed letter from various pastors in Boston and Charles-Town protesting the conduct of revivalist James Davenport. Davenport was, perhaps, the most controversial of the pastors that grew out of the revival and was eventually determined to be mentally unstable. In the subject letter, the pastors complained primarily about Davenport's practice of challenging other ministers' spiritual state and conducting religious activities outside places of worship.

And in particular, by the Account he gave us of his judging some Reverend Ministers of the Gospel on *Long-Island* and in *New England*, to be in an unconverted State, it did by no means appear to us that he had Reason and Righteousness on his Side in so doing. --- Nor do we see into his scripture Warrant for thinking himself called of God to demand from his Brethren from Place to Place, an Account of their regenerate State, when or in what the Holy Spirit of God wrought upon and renew'd them.

We judge also that the Rev. Mr. *Davenport* has not acted prudently, but to the Disservice of Religion, by going with his Friends singing thro' the Streets and High-Ways, to and from the Houses of Worship on Lord's-Days, and other Days; and by encouraging private Brethren to pray and exhort in larger and smaller Assemblies of People gather'd together for that Purpose: A Practice which we fear may be found big with Errors, Irregularities and Mischiefs.<sup>68</sup>

The second half of the front page was consumed with a letter from Gilbert Tennent. Within the letter Tennent appeared to regret the divisiveness of the revival and, presumably, his actions as he was instrumental for carrying on Whitefield's work when Whitefield returned to England.

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<sup>66</sup> Smith, *Newspapers*, 23.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 26-27.

<sup>68</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 12, 1742.

Interestingly, Tennent added a postscript longer than the actual letter, condemning the practices of Davenport. This letter indicates two things. While perhaps intended as a private letter, Tennent's comments show the pressure placed upon him as a revivalist preacher by the traditional church leaders. The postscript attests to the fact that the revival has spread beyond the control of the original leaders. Imitators of Whitefield were moving throughout the colonies preaching according to their own motivations and theology and in ways in which Tennent did not approve.

I Have had many afflicting Thoughts about the Debates that have subsisted for some Time in our Synod; I would to God, the Breach were heal'd, if it was the Will of the Almighty. --- As for my *own* Part, wherein I have mismanag'd in doing what I did; --- I do look upon it to be my Duty, and should be willing to acknowledge it in the openest Manner. --- I cannot justify the *excessive heat of Temper* which has sometimes appear'd in my Conduct. --- I have been of late (since I return'd from *New England*) visited with much spiritual Desertions, Temptations, & Distresses of various kinds, coming in a thick and almost continual Succession...

The Practice of *openly exposing Ministers*, who are supposed to be unconverted in publick Discourse, by particular Application of such Times and Places, serves only to provoke them, (instead of doing them any Good) and to declare our own Arrogance. It is an unprecedented, divisial, and pernicious Practice: It is a Lording it over our Brethren, a Degree superior to what any Prelate has pretended since the coming of CHRIST (so far as I know) the *Pope* only excepted; tho' I really don't remember to have read, that the *Pope* went on at this Rate.

The sending out of *unlearned Men* to *teach others*, upon the Supposition of their Piety, in ordinary Cases, seems to bring the Ministry into Contempt; to cherish *Enthusiasm*, and bring all into Confusion: Whatever fair Face it may have, it is a most perverse Practice. The Practice of *singing in the Streets*, is a piece of *Weakness*, and *enthusiastical Ostentation*. I wish you Success, *dear Sir* in your Journey: My Soul is grieved for such *enthusiastical Fooleries*. They portend much Mischief to the poor Church of GOD, if they be not seasonably check'd....<sup>69</sup>

The paper artfully continued to build on the next page with a letter regarding the split in the Presbyterian Synod. The split had occurred the previous year when traditional Presbyterian leaders excluded revivalist leaders from participation in the Synod and created a paper war at the time discussing the issue. The breach in the church Tennent refered to above is likely referring to

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<sup>69</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 12, 1742.

this situation. The current letter continued to protest the exclusion and blamed the old order for causing division and acting in unscriptural manners.

WE therefore declare and protest, that those Members of the *New Brunswick* Presbytery, and their Adherents, that were excluded by the last Year's Protest, are to be own'd and esteem'd as Members of this Synod till they are excluded by a regular and impartial Process against them, according to the Methods prescribed in sacred Scripture, and practised by the Churches of the *Presbyterian* Persuasion.<sup>70</sup>

Within these three articles, Franklin, a printer disposed to reporting favorably on Whitefield, combined three controversies arising from the revival: Davenport, Tennent's reflections and the Presbyterian Synod split. While he had printed some negative material about the revival in the past, there were no corresponding positive or neutral element to be found in this issue. The articles themselves display the contention within the colonies over revival activities. Davenport was the essence of anti-authoritarianism. He constantly challenged the traditional authority of the old order ministers and received much coverage in the papers because of it. Publishing Tennent's letter was likely done to detract from his status as one of the principal participants in the revival and a surrogate for Whitefield. Meanwhile, the discussion regarding the Synod split both goes to the heart of the divisiveness issue and illustrates how the new order of religious thinkers were challenging the old order as being the ones causing trouble.

This issue ignited a new war in the paper over the next several months. The September 2, 1742, issue of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* contained multiple articles regarding the controversies written in response to the August 12 publication. The first letter, from members of the traditional Synod, juxtaposed the protests of Davenport against the actions of the revivalists to justify the exclusion of the revivalists from the Synod. The lengthy letter then dissected Tennent's letter line by line and blamed him, along with Whitefield, for the problems enumerated by Tennent. Next, Tennent published a response in the issue walking back or clarifying some of the comments from

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<sup>70</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 12, 1742.

his previous letter. Finally, an interesting letter to the Moravian leadership requested that an English speaking pastor from the sect be sent to Philadelphia to rescue the congregation from “Presbyterian slavery.”<sup>71</sup> The debate or war continued in the October 21 and December 8 issues with proponents of both sides submitting lengthy letters condemning the practices of the other. Such controversy or wars within the paper were by no means unusual and marked the reporting of the revival throughout the colonies. The battles continued until the waning days of the revival and new topics captured the public’s attention.

The importance of printers and their newspapers in spreading the message of the revivals throughout the colonies cannot be overstated. The newspapers essentially created the phenomenon we know as the Great Awakening. They were also instrumental in creating the anti-authoritarian narrative of the Awakening and socializing the narrative to the broader public. Each paper war that occurred took a local example of challenging authority and broadcast it throughout the colonies. By printing letters, the papers allowed common men to participate in the debate and in essence begin challenging authority themselves. These same techniques were seen again in the lead up to the Revolution. The Tories and Whigs took the place of the old and new religious factions and held paper wars debating the relationship of the colonies to England. Clearly, the power and impact of the press was established in the colonies and its full attention was focused on the revivalists during the Great Awakening.

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<sup>71</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, September 2, 1742.

## **Artifacts and Memorabilia – Memorializing the Controversy**

I am credibly inform'd, that a certain Gentlewoman miscarry'd at the ungrateful and yelling Noise of a Deacon in reading the first Line of a Psalm: and methinks if there were no other Argument against this Practice (unless there were an absolute necessity for it) the Consideration of its being a Procurer of Abortion, might prevail with us to lay it aside.

—James Franklin, *New-England Courant* (February 17/24, 1724)

In addition to oratory and writings, the arts have always served as an important medium for people to express their beliefs and record significant events. Once created art remains as an enduring artifact to the message the artist wanted to convey. In this section both music and visual arts from the colonial era are examined in order to show their contribution to the anti-authoritarian narrative arising from the Great Awakening. The attention given to music focuses on hymns and the controversy created by departing from simply reciting psalms as part of worship. As with the revival sermons, the hymns furthered the narrative on two levels. The overt message of the hymns reinforced the inclusiveness of the church and a more individual relationship with God. The controversy created by the use of hymns added to the anti-authoritarian themes running throughout the Great Awakening. In visual arts, this section examines several examples of political art. As with modern political cartoons, these works also portray a satirical or allegorical depiction of societal issues and would have served to spur discussion of the controversies depicted. Together the hymns and visual arts illustrate the full panoply of issues discussed thus far. The controversy over how and what to sing displayed anti-authoritarianism and placed the power squarely with the congregation over the church leaders. At the same time, modified Psalms and hymns promoted the idea that it was acceptable for individuals to personally create ways to worship and express themselves, further empowering the individual as equals under God. Within the drawings, viewers get a sense of the disruption caused by the revivalists and see how the focus of the anti-authoritarian feelings begins to shift from religious leaders to secular authorities.



## Music – The disharmony of Psalms and Hymns

The singing of hymns such as Amazing Grace in a Protestant church probably does not appear to be a controversial topic to a modern reader. However, in pre-Awakening colonial congregations such man produced music could be considered blasphemous. Hymns such as this or even singing Psalms by note caused considerable controversy. The battle to reform the singing practice in churches clashed over both what to sing and how to sing it. An examination of the controversy shows that the Great Awakening served to usher in reforms of both areas and provides insight into how the process unintentionally contributed to the overall narrative.

Singing in colonial era Puritan congregations was restricted to approved Psalms out of collections referred to as Psalm-books, Psalmodies or psalters. The manner of singing was referred to as the Usual way and involved a process called lining-out. In the Usual way a clerk or church member would sing a line of a Psalm and then the congregation would repeat the line. There was no standardization in how the lines were sung other than how the individual member had learned it or felt like singing it. The process would continue until the congregation had finished the Psalm.<sup>72</sup> The end result was not very harmonious and resulted in many churches eliminating singing altogether.<sup>73</sup> John Wesley lamented that, in the congregations that attempted to sing, the congregants “at first droned out, two staves at a time, by “a poor humdrum wretch”, and then “bawled out” “by a handful of wild, unawakened striplings” “who neither feel nor

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<sup>72</sup> Linda R. Ruggles, “The Regular Singing Controversy,” *Early America Review*, accessed February 23, 2016, <http://www.earlyamerica.com/early-america-review/volume-2/regular-singing-controversy>.

<sup>73</sup> Louis F. Benson, “Dr. Watts’ ‘Renovation of Psalmody’,” *Princeton Theological Review*, no. 10.4 (Philadelphia: MacCalla & Co, 1912), 606.

understand” what they “scream”, while the congregation is “lolling at ease, or in the indecent posture of sitting, drawling out one word after another.”<sup>74</sup>

Unfortunately for the ministers and others subjected to the practice, the Usual way of singing had become tradition in the churches and efforts to change the tradition met with resistance. Opponents prepared arguments against the reform with essays such as Hammet’s “Promiscuous Singing No Divine Institution; Having neither President nor Precept to support it, either from the Musical Institution of David, or from the Gospel Dispensation. Therefore it ought to be exploded, as being a humane Invention, tending rather to gratify the carnal Ears of Men, than to be acceptable and pleasing Worship to God.”<sup>75</sup> Ministers, who were in many cases leading the effort to convert to Regular or by note singing, were placed in a position of having to convince their congregations of the appropriateness of the reform. Reverend Thomas Symmes of Boston published essays promoting Regular singing and listed seven common objections used by opponents:

(1) That it is a New Way, an Unknown Tongue. (2) That it is not so Melodious as the Usual Way. (3) That there are so many Tunes, we shall never have done learning. (4) That the Practice of it give Disturbance; Roils and Exasperates men’s Spirits; grieves sundry good People, and causes them to behave themselves indecently & disorderly. (5) That is Quakerish and Popish, and introductive of Instrumental Musick. (6) That the Names given to the Notes are Bawdy, yea Blasphemous. (7) That it is a Needless way, since their good Fathers that were Strangers to it, are got to Heaven without it.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Louis F. Benson, “The Hymnody of the Methodist Revival,” *Princeton Theological Review*, no. 11.3 (Philadelphia: MacCalla & Co, 1913), 423. Quoting John Wesley. Interior quotes present in original.

<sup>75</sup> Ruggles, “Regular Singing” quoting the title of John Hammet’s 1739 essay.

<sup>76</sup> Thomas Symmes, *Utile Dulci, or, A Joco-Serious Dialogue, Concerning Regular Singing: Calculated for a Particular Town (Where It Was Publicly Had, on Fri., Oct. 12, 1722) but May Serve Some Other Places in the Same Climate* (Boston: Printed by B. Green, 1723), 11-12.

Symmes and other ministers attempted to counter these arguments by appealing to the historicity of Regular singing. They proposed that Regular singing was the way hymns were meant to be sung, had been sung by David and were being sung in heaven.

A further issue involved finding suitable Psalm-books to permit singing by note. Fortunately for the ministers, Reverend Isaac Watts, the “Father of English Hymnody,” was ready to introduce his work. Watts believed the problem resided within the Psalmody itself and proposed a new standard for Church Song. The Psalmody should be evangelical, freely composed, and express the thoughts and feelings of the singers.<sup>77</sup> If congregations wanted to use verbatim Psalms, they should be respectfully read in prose as any other scripture would. For singing, he proposed a two-part system of imitation Psalms and hymns. He modified the Psalms to bring the New Testament gospel message into the wording. He also modernized the language to be representative of the congregations that would be singing the verses. The hymns were intended to be spiritual songs that borrowed from God’s word to cover the full range of Christian topics and supported the minister’s sermons.<sup>78</sup> Watts published several volumes of Psalms and hymns in the early eighteenth century and found a welcome audience among the independent European congregations. His work was published in the colonies as well but met with much slower adoption.

Watts’ works inspired numerous other hymn writers to adopt the art and ultimately revolutionized the music in Protestant churches worldwide. For purposes of this paper, the most notable persons influenced by Watts were John Wesley, Charles Wesley and George Whitefield who studied and used Watts’ works in meetings of the Holy Club at Oxford University. All three of these future ministers were influenced to produce their own collection of hymns and use them

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<sup>77</sup> Louis F. Benson, “Dr. Watts’ ‘Renovation of Psalmody,’” *Princeton Theological Review*, no. 10.3 (Philadelphia: MacCalla & Co, 1912), 401.

<sup>78</sup> Benson, “Dr. Watts,” no. 10.3, 403.

in their ministries. Charles Wesley became perhaps the most prolific English hymnist producing over 8000 hymns during his lifetime. His brother, John, administered the hymns and music into a coherent system that remains instrumental in the Methodist church today.<sup>79</sup> The Wesleys brought the hymns with them to Georgia in 1735 and published their own hymn book in Charlestown in 1737. The introduction of Wesley's hymns into the colonies is significant because the style of their hymns were much more fervid and evangelical in nature than Watts' and eventually promoted the Arminian position of universal redemption.<sup>80</sup> The drastic departure from Calvinist thought on the elect to the newly inclusive gospel message is apparent in the first stanza of Charles Wesley's 1746 "Spirit of faith come down."

Spirit of faith come down,  
Reveal the things of God,  
And make to us the Godhead known,  
And witness with the blood:  
'Tis thine the blood to apply,  
And give us eyes to see,  
Who did for every sinner die,  
Hath surely died for me.<sup>81</sup>

This new generation of evangelical ministers gave the hymn a new life among colonial churches. Whitefield used Watts and Wesley's hymns as part of his preaching tours in the colonies. Combining well with his extemporaneous style of preaching the hymns were readily adopted in his services and served as an influential example to encourage their more widespread

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<sup>79</sup> Benson, "Methodist," 423-424.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 432. The inclusion of Arminian theology in the hymn book marked a point of contention between Whitefield, a Calvinist, and the Wesleys. The division effectively ended their joint ministries, dividing revival efforts into two camps, Whitefield with the doctrine of election and the Wesleys with universal redemption.

<sup>81</sup> John Wesley and Charles Wesley, *Hymns of Praise and Thanksgiving, for the Promise of the Father* (London, 1801), 29. The cover indicates that the pamphlet was created by the Wesleys and sold by G. Whitfield. However, the publication date is after their deaths and it is unlikely Whitefield would have sold a volume containing Arminianist hymns.

adoption.<sup>82</sup> The attendees of the revival service found the hymns matched their new found evangelism and overcame their preference for tradition. Edwards and Gilbert both noted the increased acceptance of hymns during the Great Awakening in both the church houses and out in the streets or public meeting areas. This is not to say the Regular way of singing and the use of hymns or revised Psalms ceased to be controversial. Congregations decided the issue on a church by church basis with some voting to flip back and forth between old Psalm books and the new hymns multiple times. Adoption of the new Psalms and hymns likely did not become prevalent until some time after the American Revolution.<sup>83</sup>

As with the revivalists' sermons, the reform of church music added to the narrative in two manners. The first involves the actual message of equality in the new revised Psalms and hymns. The practice of incorporating the gospel message into Psalms and writing new hymns personalized worship and gave the impression of participants having a more intimate relationship with God. In particular, the Arminian themes in the Wesleyan hymns communicated a theme of equality among men in God's eyes. The second addition to the narrative came from the controversies created over adoption of changes to the music and singing styles. The polemics advanced by both sides of the issues on whether to sing in the Usual or Regular way would both serve to raise awareness of the controversy and tend to make people choose sides in the debate. In regard to the singing style, the debate was between the congregations and their ministers. The ministers were unable to exert control and force the congregations to accept the new style. The congregations denied the authority of ministers and church leaders to make such decisions, effectively held power at the individual level and only allowed changes to be made through votes by the congregants. With regard to hymns, the same congregational approval was required.

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<sup>82</sup> Louis F. Benson, "The Hymnody of the Evangelical Revival," *Princeton Theological Review*, no. 12.1 (Philadelphia: MacCalla & Co, 1914), 61.

<sup>83</sup> Benson, "Dr. Watts," no. 10.4, 608-610.

However, the issue also showed a willingness to defy Puritan instruction or tradition on the appropriate manner to worship. Both issues reveal an anti-authoritarian trend that would have been evident to both congregants and secular onlookers. Significantly, both issues also involve the empowerment of individuals to the detriment of traditional authorities. Unlike previous generations, power among the colonists is seen as flowing from the bottom up. These power distinctions will become decisive leading up to the Revolution.

#### Visual Art – Four windows into the colonial mind

Art takes many forms, fills different roles and can serve multiple purposes within a society. This section focuses on visual arts that further the narratives leading to the American Revolution through either adding to the controversies created by the Great Awakening or by revealing the attitudes within the artist consistent with those narratives. The pieces of art considered within this section would be classified as low art in modern times. This style of art is commonly used by activists and revolutionaries to promote their positions and evoke an emotional response from viewers.<sup>84</sup> Art is ideological in that the artist has a message intended to be conveyed by the work.<sup>85</sup> Art can be used for instrumental purposes beyond the mere aesthetic of the work. It can be used as an agent of propaganda or, when supported or promoted by those in power, an agent of social control.<sup>86</sup> As such, art is a form of communication and can be used to manipulate or propagandize audiences.<sup>87</sup> In order to be effective or understood, the artist and the

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<sup>84</sup> Alec Dunn and Josh MacPhee, *Signal 01 A Journal of International Political Graphics* (Oakland, CA: PM Press, 2010).

<sup>85</sup> Judith H. Balfe and Margaret Jane Wyszomirski, *Art, Ideology, and Politics* (New York: Praeger, 1985), VII-VIII.

<sup>86</sup> Arnold W. Foster and Judith R. Blau, *Art and Society Readings in the Sociology of the Arts* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1989), 15.

<sup>87</sup> Foster, *Art and Society*, 9-12.

audience must share social-psychological predispositions and conventions of interpretation.<sup>88</sup>

Thus, in the images within this section, the artists used symbols and representations that were familiar to the audiences at the time even if they seem obscure to modern readers.

The works chosen for this analysis depict the controversies caused by the Awakening and the transition of associating thoughts on religion to secular topics. The first two works were created by opponents to George Whitefield and illustrate the controversies the traditional religious establishment accuse the revivalists of creating. The next image indicates the convergence of religious and secular thoughts in opposing English authority. The final image makes the transition to use religious imagery to support war against England. Implicit throughout these images is the sense of anti-authoritarianism and independence.

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<sup>88</sup> Balfe, *Art, Ideology and Politics*, 1.



Figure 1. Enthusiasm Display'd or the Moor-Fields Congregation.

Source: The Library of Congress (1739), accessed November 17, 2015, <https://lcn.loc.gov/2006680550>.

Figure 1 was published in 1739 by C. Corbett and depicts a scene disparaging George Whitefield. Whitefield is standing on the shoulders of a masked woman labeled Hypocrisy and a janus labeled Deceit. Hypocrisy is holding a text, possibly Whitefield's journal or sermons, indicating it was sold by Hutton.<sup>89</sup> Deceit is taking money from a woman while another woman is apparently waiting in line with her worldly possessions.<sup>90</sup> In the lower right of the image a

<sup>89</sup> James Hutton was Whitefield's publisher in London.

<sup>90</sup> Janus is a god from Roman mythology representing change or transitions.



woman labeled Folly is holding a jester's staff, accompanied by a monkey, and writing on a document labeled Journal. In the lower left a woodcock or bird, representing the public, is trapped in a snare. The text below the image asserts that Whitefield is following in the tradition of Kirk of Knox and George Fox. John Knox was a 16<sup>th</sup> century Scottish minister whose sermons prompted riots. He was instrumental in the Scottish Protestant reformation and the creation of a new church called the Kirk.<sup>91</sup> George Fox was a 17<sup>th</sup> century preacher who founded the Quakers. He believed that anyone called by the Holy Spirit could be a minister, with no need for religious education, that church rituals could be ignored and that a church building was not necessary for worship. Fox preached in public places such as markets and fields and made tours through Britain, Europe and North America.<sup>92</sup> As a whole the image promotes the idea that Whitefield was using his enthusiastic evangelism to create dissension and accumulate wealth by deceiving the public.

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<sup>91</sup> James Stevenson McEwen, "John Knox," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Knox>.

<sup>92</sup> Henry J. Cadbury, "George Fox," *Encyclopedia Britannica Online*, accessed February 15, 2016, <http://www.britannica.com/biography/George-Fox>.



Figure 2. Dr. Squintum's Exaltation or the Reformation.

Source: The Library of Congress (1763), accessed November 17, 2015, <https://lcn.loc.gov/93509794>.

Figure 2 is another derogatory depiction of Whitefield at a later point in his ministry. The image was produced in 1763 and sold by E. Sumpter. Within the image demonic creatures fill Whitefield's head with ideas, take money from under Whitefield's stool and stoke the fires of hell. PHEME or FAME, the Roman god of rumor and gossip, listens to Whitefield and then spreads his message through a trumpet. Whitefield's black hatted followers are seen accosting women selling fruit and a butcher, while others are either apprehending or propositioning a bare-chested prostitute. The text below implicates Whitefield as a Methodist villain, though Whitefield

and the Wesleys had parted theologically by this point, who is using the call of reformation to justify his actions, create turmoil and grow rich off the people.



Figure 3. An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America.

Source: The Library of Congress (1769), accessed January 20, 2016, <https://lccn.loc.gov/99401080>.

Figure 3 was published in the Political Register in 1769. The image depicts the controversy over the Archbishop of Canterbury's plan to send Bishops to the colonies. Such an act was antithetical to the beliefs of the Presbyterian and Congregationalist majority in the colonies who viewed the act as an attempt to assert control over colonial religious practices. In the image a Bishop is attempting to flee by ship from a mob. The colonists are throwing copies of

Locke, Sydney and Calvin's works at the Bishop. The captions state "No Lords Spiritual or Temporal in New England," "Liberty and Freedom of Conscience," and "Shall they be obliged to maintain Bishops that cannot maintain themselves." The image depicts the connection in the colonists' minds of their religious foundations and the secular theorists on proper government. The captions display the anti-authoritarian narrative this paper has traced throughout the Great Awakening.



Figure 4. The Hanging of Absalom.

*Source:* Library of Congress (c. 1770), accessed November 17, 2015, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/religion/vc006408.jpg>.

Figure 4 is believed to have been created by Faith Turnbull around 1770. Faith was the wife of Reverend Jonathan Trumbull, the Governor of Connecticut and the first colonial Governor to side with the rebels in the American Revolution. The image depicts the biblical scene of Joab killing Absalom while Absalom's father, King David, sits playing a harp unaware of his child's plight. The significance of the image to this analysis is the depiction of the figures. Absalom is a colonist being killed by Joab dressed as a British redcoat. King David is King George III. The imagery, coming shortly after the Boston Massacre, is a powerful reflection of the colonists' sense of being persecuted by British forces while the King, oblivious to his subjects' travails, did nothing.

Both music and the visual arts reveal the common narratives running through the Great Awakening. The musical controversies, accentuated by Whitefield's use of singing hymns during his revival sessions, show the anti-authoritarian attitude of the Congregationalists and the concept of equality under God. Figures 1 and 2 depict the level of controversy created by Whitefield and the itinerant pastors as well as the efforts of their opponents to discredit the movement and maintain the status quo. The remaining images visually depict these narratives crossing over from religious disputes to governmental affairs. The colonists refused to accept bishops without the colonists' assent much as the Congregationalists refused to accept changes in church music without the congregation's assent. Both issues reveal anti-authoritarian demands of democratic or popular control against the wishes of their leaders. It is fitting to end with a depiction of King George III as a bad leader while the colonists are persecuted as the next section will make the transition into Revolution.

### **From Revival to Revolution – Refocusing the Narrative**

Contemporary histories of the American Revolution tend to posit that the conflict was based on the secular notions of natural rights or preservation of common law and the rights embodied therein. Contrary views see the revolution as being primarily concerned with religion

and the concepts of grace and original sin. Historian Bernard Bailyn's study of the ideological sources of the revolution determines that, in fact, both religious and secular ideology or theories were intertwined with a sense of anti-authoritarianism in the minds of the colonists.<sup>93</sup> Bailyn, however, places the source of the anti-authoritarianism in the English Civil War. While the English people and the Protestant denominations were certainly influenced by the English Civil War, the more proximate demonstration of this tendency and the one heavily publicized to the colonists was the Great Awakening. This paper does not dispute that the colonists' motivations included a mix of secular and religious ideologies. Indeed, the fascinating part of this endeavor is how the enlightenment and religious narratives intertwined to result in the colonists being willing to not only resist English authority but to take up arms in active revolt.

The time between the end of the Great Awakening and the start of the Revolutionary War was eventful for the colonists. The French and Indian War consumed the colonies' attention for a time. Only to be replaced by England's attempts to re-assert control over the colonies in the 1760s. These attempts to exert authority rekindled passions within the colonists and quickly fed the printers a steady source of articles and pamphlets to debate the new controversies between the colonies and England. It is through these publications that we can trace the evolution of the colonists' thoughts on independence and see the influence of religion and religious leaders on the process. In the end, this paper contends that the anti-authoritarian narrative from the Great Awakening emboldened the people to question their King's authority. The ongoing publications by ministers provided justification for actively resisting said authority. The final step of promoting taking up arms involved ministers using their pulpits and colonial leadership invoking religious traditions to rally the colonists in support of the revolutionary cause.

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<sup>93</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1967), vii-viii.

This examination will begin by looking at influential sermons published on the topics of resisting authority and independence. These sermons provided the justification for opposing the divine appointment of the monarch and were repeated in varying forms throughout the years leading up to the war. Following this survey, the section will look at key historical events leading up to the war and examine how the events were perceived in light of the colonists' cultural tendencies. Next the section will present examples of the colonial leaders using religion in their efforts to negotiate the controversies and difficulties presented by the path to independence. The section concludes with an examination of a prominent loyalist's view on the cause of the rebellion.

### Justifying the Rebellion

The first major publication to impact on this issue occurred on the heels of the Great Awakening in 1750. The Reverend Jonathan Mayhew of the West Church in Boston gave and then published a sermon on the anniversary of King Charles I's beheading.<sup>94</sup> Mayhew was appalled at the Anglican practice, instituted with the reign of Charles II, of commemorating this date with fasting and a spirit of repentance. Within the sermon, Mayhew justified the resistance and, ultimately, killing of Charles I on the grounds that he was a tyrant. In so doing, he had to overcome the scriptural principles of obedience and non-resistance to civic leaders. After beginning with a presentation of the duty to obey, Mayhew logically led his listeners to the conclusion that civic leaders only retain their Godly rights when they are working for the public good. If, instead, the leaders are promoting evil or serving as tyrants, the people no longer have

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<sup>94</sup> Jonathan Mayhew, *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers With Some Reflections on the Resistance Made to King Charles I ... the Substance of Which Was Delivered in a Sermon* (Boston: Printed and sold by D. Fowle, 1750, reprinted by Hall et Goss, 1818), 28.

such an obligation. “Common tyrants, and public oppressors, are not entitled to obedience from their subjects, by virtue of any thing here laid down by the inspired apostle.”<sup>95</sup> After introducing the concept of justified opposition to the King, Mayhew proceeded to make it a Christian’s duty to resist.

It follows, by parity of reason, that when he turns tyrant, and makes his subjects his prey to devour and destroy, instead of his charge to defend and cherish, we are bound to throw off our allegiance to him, and to resist...What unprejudiced man can think, that God made ALL to be thus subservient to the lawless pleasure and phrenzy of ONE, so that it shall always be a sin to resist him...It would be stupid tameness, and unaccountable folly, for whole nations to suffer one unreasonable, ambitious and cruel man, to wanton and riot in their misery. And in such a case it would, of the two, be more rational to suppose, that they that did NOT resist, than they who did, would receive to themselves damnation.<sup>96</sup>

Indeed, according to Mayhew, resistance was not just a duty, failure to resist was a damnable sin. In concluding his remarks, Mayhew opined that overthrowing Charles I was not rebellion but “a most righteous and glorious stand, made in defence of the natural and legal rights of the people....”<sup>97</sup> Though not intended to turn colonists against England, Mayhew’s sermon came at a pivotal point following the challenges to authority inherent in the Great Awakening. The discourse added to the anti-authoritarian narrative and gave the colonists added justification for questioning the actions and authority of their civil leaders. Mayhew’s logic was critical in that it not only authorized resistance but actually made it a sin not to resist. The principles introduced by Mayhew would gain new life following 1763 and would resound in the coming controversy between the colonies and England.

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<sup>95</sup> Mayhew, *Unlimited Submission*, 28

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid.*, 33, 37, 40.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid.*, 40.



Mayhew's concepts were repeated throughout the lead up to the revolution in articles and sermons justifying resistance to England's authority.<sup>98</sup> The final evolution in the thought is clearly seen in the 1776 Election Sermon given by Samuel West. Election sermons were official events given annually on the anniversary of the founding of the Massachusetts colony. West's sermon, occurring when it did, naturally focused on the war. West began by asserting the need for good governance as necessary for the peace and safety of man.<sup>99</sup> He then discussed the duty of obedience to our government while exploring Locke and the nature of proper civil governance. He concluded that "the end and design of civil government cannot be to deprive men of their liberty or take away their freedom; but, on the contrary, the true design of civil government is to protect men in the enjoyment of liberty."<sup>100</sup> Accordingly, "it follows that tyranny and arbitrary power are utterly inconsistent with and subversive of the very end and design of civil government, and directly contrary to natural law, which is the true foundation of civil government and all politic law."<sup>101</sup> West followed with the concept that government's power comes from the people, that all men are by nature equal and that men have the right to assemble together to vote on laws and regulations. In these opening pages West is combining Mayhew's concepts with political theorists and laying the foundation for justifying the colonies' resistance against England. As Bailyn opined, the secular and religious are intertwined and cannot be reduced to

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<sup>98</sup> For intermediate examples see Samuel Cooke's election day sermon of 1770, William Gordon's sermon of thanksgiving before the General Court on October 22, 1774, and Samuel Langdon's election day sermon of May 31, 1775 among many others. Samuel West's sermon was chosen for this analysis for its proximity to the Declaration of Independence and the exceptional manner in which West incorporated the theories of Locke with his religious pronouncements.

<sup>99</sup> Samuel West, *The Election Sermon*, May 29, 1776 in John Wingate Thornton, *The Pulpit of the American Revolution: or, The Political Sermons of the Period of 1776. With a Historical Introduction, Notes, and Illustrations* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1860), 268.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid.*, 274.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid.*

either a purely secular or religious argument.<sup>102</sup> West continued to follow Mayhew in outlining the duty to resist tyrants. However, West went well beyond Mayhew in his analysis of governments, the monarchy and specific acts against the colonies. Nowhere is the difference in tone and exigency of the situation clearer than in West's conception of the colonists' duty to resist:

It would be highly criminal not to feel a due resentment against such tyrannical monsters. It is an indispensable duty, my brethren, which we owe to God and our country, to rouse up and bestir ourselves, and, being animated with a noble zeal for the sacred cause of liberty, to defend our lives and fortunes, even to the shedding the last drop of blood.<sup>103</sup>

West's comments show the progression from Mayhew's justification of a historic event to the application of concepts against a current ruler. West is actively promoting the duty of the colonists to fight against the English tyranny. More importantly, for this examination, West, a minister, is giving the sermon in a government proceeding while justifying rebellion by bringing secular theories of government under the auspices of religious doctrine.

### The British as Tyrants

The question then becomes what could have prompted the colonists to brand the English government tyrants? Following the Great Awakening the English and the colonists fought together to defeat the French in the French and Indian or Seven Years War. Once the war ended, England began attempting to assert more authority over the colonies and imposed several measures on the colonies to raise revenue.<sup>104</sup> While the road to the revolution goes through many such events, this paper will focus on two that occurred after 1763: The Stamp Act and the attempt to install bishops in the colonies. These controversies are representative of the broader

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<sup>102</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, vii.

<sup>103</sup> West, *Election Sermon*, 307.

<sup>104</sup> Bernhard Knollenberg, *Origin of the American Revolution: 1759-1766* (New York: Macmillan, 1960), 75-85.

precipitating acts leading to the war. They also serve as the spark that inflamed the colonists' anti-authoritarian notions and turned the focus of Mayhew's justification against England.

These two acts, once again, serve as intertwined artifacts of religious and secular controversies that formed a narrative focusing the colonists' attention on the looming threat of England imposing its will to the detriment of the colonists' freedoms. The first event concerns the installation of bishops and the Church of England's ecclesiastical authority in the colonies.

Archbishop Secker and the colonial Anglicans had long schemed to send a Bishop to the colonies. For the Anglicans this was a common sense matter, as many church decisions and authorizations had to be made at the bishop level. Consequently, the Anglicans had to travel abroad in order to conduct certain forms of church business. Following the French and Indian War, Secker sent word that he thought the time was right to get approval for his plan. Rumors of Secker's ambition were leaked to the colonists and a paper war developed in 1763 with Jonathan Mayhew serving as the leading voice for the colonists.<sup>105</sup> The written battle continued until 1765 with Mayhew accusing the Anglicans of seeking to install an episcopal sovereign and establishing a tyranny that would end liberty in the colonies.<sup>106</sup> The colonists feared that a bishop would bring the English ecclesiastical government with him. This would have empowered ecclesiastical courts with jurisdiction over family law and moral offenses such as adultery and some forms of defamation. Additionally, the colonists would have potentially been required to fund the large annual salaries of the bishop through their tax dollars. Figure 3 in the previous section depicts the combination of these issues. The majority Congregationalist and Presbyterian colonists had no desire to submit to the ecclesiastical jurisdiction of Church of England and the colonists refused to have taxes imposed on them to support the bishop and his entourage.

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<sup>105</sup> Knollenberg, *Origin*, 75-85.

<sup>106</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 96-97.

During this same period England took several other actions that agitated the colonists. Despite ending the French and Indian War, the British kept a large number of troops garrisoned in the colonies ostensibly to defend against Indian raids. However, the troops were ill suited and ill positioned for this mission and raised questions among the colonists as to the true purpose of the troops remaining. The British also began enforcing numerous trade and settlement restrictions that had long been disregarded.<sup>107</sup> The most infuriating actions however began in 1763 when Parliament started considering new tax levies on the colonies. Among these new levies was a stamp tax that immediately prompted strong protests from the colonists. The Stamp Act imposed duties on a variety of commercial and legal documents, including newspapers and pamphlets. In some cases, the tax amounted to an ad valorem increase of 200 percent.<sup>108</sup>

As with the other taxes, the colonists protested the tax as being unlawful since the colonists had no representation in Parliament. However, the fear and mistrust of this proposed tax ran far deeper. The effect of the tax would hinder and, in some cases, prevent the colonists from receiving news and effectively using the printers as communication tools within the colonies. It would also serve to financially harm the poorest members of society while enriching governmental agents who were viewed as unproductive persons living off of society.<sup>109</sup> Despite protestation by the colonists, the Stamp Act was passed and scheduled to take effect in November 1765. As the effective date approached, mobs began harassing and intimidating government agents that were charged to implement the tax. The effectiveness of the harassment in causing agents to resign combined with the colonists' refusal to comply with the act caused a cessation of

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<sup>107</sup> Knollenberg, *Origin*, 221-225.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-227.

<sup>109</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 99-102.

trade in the ports and a back log in the legal system. As a result of the strenuous protests, Britain rescinded the law in March 1766.<sup>110</sup>

The combination of these two controversies provoked serious concern or fear within the colonists. It appeared as if Britain was attempting to subjugate the colonists both religiously and civilly. In the opinion of the colonists they were being unjustly forced into servitude.<sup>111</sup> However, these offenses were also violating a pervasive ethic of the colonists held over from the colonies' Puritan forefathers and long since becoming part of the fabric of colonists' values. Termed the Puritan Ethic by historian Edmund Morgan, the social norms prescribed that people should be productive members of society, thrifty and frugal. Moreover, the ethic taught that men should expect times of adversity through which one must persevere and continue to work for more prosperous times. While these values were certainly still held by the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, the values were also readily apparent in the writings of colonial Anglicans and supposed deists such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson.<sup>112</sup> With the influx of British customs and tax agents, not to mention the prospects of a bishop, the colonies were beginning to see a large influx of non-productive members that existed to live off the work of other people. The thought of an ever growing number of unproductive government workers was both unsettling and offensive to the colonists' ethics.<sup>113</sup> This same ethic along with the ever present anti-

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<sup>110</sup> Knollenberg, *Origin*, 228-237.

<sup>111</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 103.

<sup>112</sup> Edmund Morgan, "The Puritan Ethic and the Coming of the American Revolution," *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ser. (January, 1967) in *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack Greene (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 236-238. It is unfortunate that the scope of this paper does not permit a full discussion of the writings of American patriots such as Samuel Adams, Thomas Paine, Patrick Henry and George Washington. While their individual religious beliefs are debatable, their writings all either allude or make direct reference to Biblical principles in justifying and prosecuting the war against Britain.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 238.

authoritarian theme is seen in the colonists' refusal to comply with tax, choosing to simply go without imported goods and suffer legal burdens instead.

### Intertwined Government and Religion

Whatever one's beliefs about the religious status of America's forefathers, there is ample evidence that the colonial leaders relied on religious authority leading up to and during the revolution. The continental and colonial congresses regularly proclaimed days of fasting and prayer. Such practices were in accordance with the predominant religious beliefs that difficult times were in response to sin or a type of trial. Extraordinary by today's standards, Congress' statements evince a type of sermon and appeal to religious sentiments that in order to overcome challenges and receive God's blessing, one must show repentance.<sup>114</sup> The text of the Continental Congress' proclamation of June 12, 1775, illustrates the concept well.

This Congress, therefore, considering the present critical, alarming and calamitous state of these colonies, do earnestly recommend that Thursday, the 20th day of July next, be observed, by the inhabitants of all the English colonies on this continent, *as a day of public humiliation, fasting and prayer; that we may, with united hearts and voices, unfeignedly confess and deplore our many sins; and offer up our joint supplications to the all-wise, omnipotent, and merciful Disposer of all events; humbly beseeching him to forgive our iniquities, to remove our present calamities, to avert those desolating judgments, with which we are threatned, and to bless our rightful sovereign, King George the third, and [to] inspire him with wisdom to discern and pursue the true interest of all his subjects, that a speedy end may be put to the civil discord between Great Britain and the American colonies, without farther effusion of blood: And that the British nation may be influenced to regard the things that belong to her peace, before they are hid from her eyes: That these colonies may be ever under the care and protection of a kind Providence, and be prospered in all their interests; That the divine blessing may descend and rest upon all our civil rulers, and upon the representatives of the people, in their several assemblies and conventions, that they may be directed to wise and effectual measures or preserving the union, and securing the just rights and priviledges of the colonies; That virtue and true religion may revive and flourish throughout our land; And*

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<sup>114</sup> Perry Miller, "The Moral and Psychological Roots of American Resistance," from "From the Covenant to the Revival," in James Ward Smith and A. Leland Jamison, eds., *The Shaping of American Religion* (Princeton, 1961) in *The Reinterpretation of the American Revolution*, ed. Jack Greene (New York: Harper & Row, 1968), 251-252.

that all America may soon behold a gracious interposition of Heaven, for the redress of her many grievances, the restoration of her invaded rights, a reconciliation with the parent state, on terms constitutional and honorable to both; *And that her civil and religious priviledges may be secured to the latest posterity.*<sup>115</sup> [emphasis added]

The Congress then proceeded to recommend that all Christians assemble for public worship on the day of fasting and ordered that the proclamation be published in both newspapers and handbills.<sup>116</sup> The message to the colonists was clear; their hardships and dispute with Britain were not simply political but ordained by God because of the colonists' sin. Only through prayer and sincere repentance would they be delivered from the ordeal.<sup>117</sup>

The Continental Congress depended on religion in other matters as well. When it came time to raise a military force to actively oppose the British, the clergy were considered to be an indispensable part of the organization. In the *Rules and Articles* published by the Congress to guide the Army, the second article stated "It is earnestly recommended to all officers and soldiers diligently to attend Divine Service...."<sup>118</sup> Likewise the Navy was instructed "The Commanders of the ships of the Thirteen United Colonies are to take care that divine service be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays, unless bad weather or other extraordinary accidents prevent it."<sup>119</sup> Apparently, the Navy needed a little more Godliness than the Army. The importance of religion in justifying the war, motivating participation and providing comfort to the citizens was not lost on the colonial leaders. Though beyond the scope of this paper, history is

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<sup>115</sup> *Journals of the Continental Congress*, June 12, 1775. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, The Continental Congress issued such proclamations annually from 1775 to 1782, for examples of the colonial governments' use of calls to religious activities see fast day proclamations from the Virginia House of Burgesses on May 24, 1774, and the Massachusetts Provincial Congress on April 15, 1775.

<sup>117</sup> Miller, "Psychological Roots," 255.

<sup>118</sup> *Rules and Articles, for the better Government of the Troops...of the twelve united English Colonies of North America* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1775), Art. 2.

<sup>119</sup> *Rules for the Regulation of the Navy of the United Colonies of North America* (Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1775), Art. 2.

replete with the actual contributions of clergy in the prosecution of the war as chaplains, commanders, and commentators.

#### A view from the loyalists blaming religion

The importance of religion's contribution to the American Revolution was apparent to the people actually involved in the conflict. The final stop in this paper's examination is the writing of Joseph Galloway on the reasons for the colonies' rebellion. Galloway, a friend of Benjamin Franklin, had been the Speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly and a member of the first Continental Congress in 1774. He advocated for plans to restore unity between Britain and the colonies.<sup>120</sup> When those plans were rejected, he chose to remain loyal to Britain. In 1780, Galloway published a pamphlet covering over 130 pages explaining to Parliament his views on the source of trouble in the colonies. Galloway traces the source back to the founding Puritan colonists who came to America searching for a place to establish their own religious and civil community. These aspirations and religious convictions led to the contemporary Congregationalists and Presbyterians, which had joined together following the Stamp Act in order to increase their power and influence.<sup>121</sup>

It was these men who excited the mobs, and led them to destroy the stamped paper; who compelled the collectors of the duties to resign their offices, and to pledge their faith that they would not execute them; and it was these men who promoted, and for a time enforced, the non-importation agreement; and by their personal applications, threats, insults, and inflammatory publications and petitions, led the assemblies to deny the authority of Parliament to tax the colonies, in their several remonstrances.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> John E. Ferling, "Joseph Galloway: a Reassessment of the Motivations of a Pennsylvania Loyalist," *Pennsylvania History*, no. 39.2 (1972), 163-186.

<sup>121</sup> Joseph Galloway, *Historical and Political Reflections on the Rise and Progress of the American Rebellion: In Which the Causes of That Rebellion Are Pointed Out and the Policy and Necessity of Offering to the Americans a System of Government Founded in the Principles of the British Constitution, Are Clearly Demonstrated* (London: Printed for G. Wilkie, 1780), 53-55.

<sup>122</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.



Later, when the Tea Act was passed, Galloway asserts the Congregationalists and Presbyterians again conspired to prevent the act from taking affect. However, they were unable to move the general populace since the act actually lowered the price of tea. Accordingly, the group used “every fiction and phantom of oppression...in order to lead them into mobs” to destroy the tea.<sup>123</sup> Galloway contends that the group filled the newspapers and pamphlets with seditious articles in order to persuade the other colonists to join the group’s views. Once the Continental Congress convened, the Congregationalists and Presbyterians formed a large party that pushed for measures to incite rebellion and used mob pressure to subvert or silence the loyalists.<sup>124</sup> The group continued to scheme and manipulate through the use of inflammatory material in the papers and the pulpits.

If the pulpits of the sectaries in England in 1641, resounded with sedition, the pulpits of the Congregational Independents and Presbyterians, from Nova Scotia to Georgia, rung with the same flagitious doctrines...in the four New England Provinces, there were only twelve among five hundred and fifty dissenting ministers, and in all the other Colonies a still less number, who declined the rebellious talk.<sup>125</sup>

It should come as no surprise that the Congregationalists and Presbyterians were viewed as leading the charge for independence. This same group welcomed George Whitefield at the start of the Great Awakening to the chagrin of Anglican leaders. They consistently demonstrated their anti-authoritarian beliefs of power coming from the people and zealously argued both sides of the controversies springing from the revivalists’ activities. Having freshly sharpened their anti-authoritarian rhetoric in debates over religion and man’s relationship with God, it only seems natural that they would oppose new and unwanted impositions of authority from a remote government once such opposition was deemed scripturally appropriate.

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<sup>123</sup> Galloway, *Historical and Political Reflections*, 59.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 66-68.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 110-111.

## **Shaping Ideas into Narratives to Compel Action**

The interconnection of religious and secular ideas in colonial America and how these ideas influenced the American Revolution is a fascinating topic that has inspired numerous scholars. This study sought to contribute to the discourse surrounding this phenomenon by providing a holistic look at the impact of the Great Awakening in forming a narrative leading to rebellion. The study began with an assertion that the Great Awakening's twin narrative of equality and anti-authoritarianism spread beyond the confines of religious thought and contributed to the colonists being willing to fight for their independence from the British. In support of this thesis, the study looked at religious activities within the Great Awakening, coverage in the news media, music, visual art, and colonial government's use religious appeals.

The examination of itinerant pastors revealed that revivalists created a firestorm of controversy with the traditional or old light religious authorities, disrupted existing churches and impacted the communities where the revivals took place. A narrative was created by both their message and their actions. The message of grace, preached to all who wanted to listen regardless of denomination or status as an elect, promoted a sense of religious egalitarianism further leveling the power structure in a society already dominated by congregationally controlled sectaries. Almost every action the revivalists took seemed to challenge traditional religious authority. Itineracy encroached on the authority of resident ministers in communities while also challenging the power of ordaining authorities to determine who was qualified to preach. Likewise, ecumenical services given in fields and locations other than formal churches challenged the very legitimacy of sects versus a unified body of believers and expanded notions of where worship could take place, further reducing religious leaders' control.

Having created a narrative, the revivalists would likely have been of only limited local effect absent some means to spread the controversy to a broader population. The print media filled this role and essentially created the Great Awakening by bombarding colonists with

continual publications reporting on the revivals and debating the controversies. Newspapers and pamphlets were the medium of choice for both publicizing the revivals and disseminating polemical arguments over the related controversies. The widespread circulation of print media allowed colonists far removed from the actual revival to view and participate in the debates challenging the authority and legitimacy of the traditional church leaders.

The study provided evidence that music provided an additional source of controversy within the churches. The internal debate on whether to use Psalms, modified Psalms or hymns again presented a situation where church leadership's authority was challenged by congregations' individual power. Beyond this, the controversy extended to how such music should be sung or recited. The situation was exacerbated both by revivalists promoting the use of hymns during their itinerant ministry and the egalitarian messages contained within the hymns themselves.

Art, by its nature, causes people to consider the implications of the subjects depicted. This study presented several examples arranged to represent the overall structure of the paper. Within this section art demonstrated a visualization of the polemics produced to challenge the revivalists that serves as both a representation of and a contributor to the anti-authoritarian narrative. Art is then presented that evinces the interconnectedness of civil and religious ideas within the colonists' minds and the transfer of the anti-authoritarian narrative to British rule.

The final section focused on this interconnected transference of ideas. With debates on challenging authority still fresh, the colonists were presented with justification for challenging monarchical authority. The section then presented writings showing the interconnection between civil and religious ideas and focusing anti-authoritarian resistance in response to incursions by the British government.

This paper recognizes the complexity of colonial society and societies in general. While not presuming to promote religious thoughts over the contributions of the enlightenment and frontierism to the overall colonial mind, the evidence presented in this study shows that the

narrative created by the Great Awakening outlived the revivals themselves. Owing to the proximate nature of the revivalists' controversies in time to the imposition of control by the British, this paper asserts that the Great Awakenings' narrative was in fact a central part of developing the colonial ideas of rebellion and choosing to take up arms against the British.

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