

## Earlier Lives

ON JUNE 2, 1748, Jonathan Mayhew began a series of seven Thursday lectures at West Church. By the time they ended on August 25, they had established him as one of the leading critics of the Calvinist orthodoxy of his day. Just under a year after a controversial ordination on June 17, 1747, Mayhew had already been effectively ostracized by most fellow Boston clergy. According to a letter to his father of October 1, 1747, he could rarely get preaching assistance although “The People of my Parish seem to be well united—none having left us since my ordination. As to the Ministers of the Town, I have no correspondence save with one or two of them.” The practical implications were considerable. Not only was Mayhew’s workload increased because he could not participate in the usual round of pulpit exchanges, he was excluded from a Boston clergy association and from participation in the town’s regular Thursday Lecture. In his 1766 “Memoir of Dr. Jonathan Mayhew,” prominent parishioner and Massachusetts official Harrison Gray reported that the Boston clergy generally “treated him with great coolness and indifference for some Time,” and that neither the First nor Brattle Street churches subsequently “invited him to preach,” despite his strong connections with Chauncy at First. The ever-confident and energetic Mayhew assured his father that “thro’ God’s Goodness to me, I live very happily and contented” without such collegial support. He compensated for his lack of opportunities elsewhere by starting his own lecture series.<sup>1</sup>

Gray may have somewhat exaggerated the immediate popularity of Mayhew’s presentations when he reported that they were “attended by Gentlemen of the first Character in Town and Country: And by the generality of the Clergy of the Town of Boston and of the Neighbouring Towns. His Audience was always crowded.” The West Church member’s subsequent

1. Mayhew to Experience Mayhew, October 1, 1747, *MP* 23; Gray, “Memoir of Dr. Jonathan Mayhew,” 33, an edited reprint of *MP* 137, which includes a brief biography of Gray.

judgment that Mayhew's sermons "upon these occasions gave universal satisfaction" was certainly misleading. Mayhew's *Seven Sermons* were soon published in Boston (1749) and an edition was released in London in 1750. They went on to attract such acclaim overseas that they were instrumental, if not decisive, in the decision by the University of Aberdeen to award Mayhew an honorary Doctor of Divinity degree the same year. But the response in more orthodox Bostonian circles was much cooler. Akers noted that "with the exception of Chauncy and [Samuel] Cooper [of Brattle Street Church] and later Andrew Eliot [of New North], the Boston clergy treated him with a cold, stony silence." More populist reaction to Mayhew's ministry was much more forthright. An anonymous letter addressed to "The Rev. Mr. J—n M—w," which was published in the *Boston Evening-Post* of April 17, 1749 under the soubriquet "Philanthropos," entreated him rather disingenuously

to pursue your Design with Modesty, sound Sense and good Reasoning; the two last I'm convinc'd by the Share I have heard of your Sermons you will not be much at a Loss for, and the first you might attain by a good deal of Self-denial, and a little Attention to the Conduct of your Superiours in like Cases.<sup>2</sup>

What was Mayhew's main offense in his West Church lectures and elsewhere? According to "Philanthropos" and others who were less polemical in their criticisms, he had "lately assum'd the Dictator's Chair, and taken upon you to impeach of Weakness and Impie-[ty] the . . . religious Principles of your Country, and seem to think they stand in great need of Correction and Reformation, and that you are bound by virtue of your Office, and by your superiour Abilities qualified to undertake that Province." Mayhew had principally challenged Massachusetts orthodoxy in *Seven Sermons* by openly espousing Arminian teaching. This included an explicit denial of the classic reformed doctrine of the total depravity of humankind, as well as open advocacy of a more cooperative understanding of salvation, which required active human participation, rather than depending solely on sovereign and irresistible divine grace.<sup>3</sup>

2. Gray, "Memoir of Dr. Jonathan Mayhew," 34; Mayhew, *Seven Sermons*; Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 75; Philanthropos, "To the Reverend Mr. J—n M—w," 1. As Akers has argued, the award of such an honorary degree from a Scottish university generally depended on the recommendations and financial contributions of interested friends—in Mayhew's case, "a circle of [British] Dissenters" who were impressed by *Seven Sermons*, some of whose correspondence on this topic is to be found in *MP* 25–30 (*Called unto Liberty*, 77). On Eliot, see esp. Oakes, "Conservative Revolutionaries," 163–206.

3. "Philanthropos," "To the Reverend Mr. J—n M—w," 1. Marsden, *Jonathan*

The West Church minister was just twenty-six years old when he delivered his controversial Thursday lectures and began to establish his longstanding historical reputation as one of New England's most prominent and outspoken Arminians. But historians have often neglected to point out that he did not always hold such views. Both he and Chauncy have been so strongly identified in progressive theological terms that they have tended to become divorced, even in the most recent scholarship, from the traditionalist doctrines of their earliest years, which continued to shape elements of their thinking long after they had formally renounced the rigors of conventional Calvinism. But there is strong evidence that both were not only nurtured in New England orthodoxy, as might have been expected. Chauncy publicly maintained its major tenets for nearly four decades after his entry into ordained ministry in 1727. It was only in the course of the Great Awakening that the Boston ministers distanced themselves from more "enthusiastic" tendencies to adopt a more rationalist outlook, and it was not until the late 1740s and the publication of Mayhew's controversial lectures that either could be clearly identified with Arminianism.

### Mayhew's Early Calvinism

Mayhew's Calvinist heritage has been well documented, although the lack of historical detail about his education is one of the most striking features of his early biography. Born at Chilmark, Martha's Vineyard, on October 8, 1720, he was the seventh child of Experience Mayhew by his second wife, Remember Bourne. Experience was the great-grandson of the early settler Thomas Mayhew, who had ruled the Vineyard as "Lord of the Manor," as well as acting as missionary to the local indigenous population for some forty years. Soon after his father's death in 1689, Experience assumed control of the mission that was to be his life's work for the next sixty-five years. Although lacking any university education, he became a pioneer linguist and translator, as well as a published author and prominent missionary, who enjoyed the support of leading figures in the Boston Congregationalist establishment, through the Company for the Propagation of the Gospel in New England and other connections. In 1726 Experience sent Jonathan's older brother Nathan to school in Cambridge to prepare him for admission

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*Edwards*, 138, defined Arminianism in the following general terms: "For Edwards and his ministerial friends, 'Arminianism' usually referred both to the specific anti-Calvinist teachings attributed to Arminius and to broader trends to affirm the ability of humans to contribute to their own salvation." For a more detailed discussion and definition of eighteenth-century New England Arminianism, see chapter 2.

to Harvard. But there is no evidence that Jonathan enjoyed such an educational opportunity there or anywhere else, prior to his arrival at the college at the relatively advanced age of nearly twenty in 1740. All that can be safely assumed is that he had the benefit of his father's instruction and personal library, such as they were. What is known of Experience's theological position is that it was generally orthodox, albeit somewhat idiosyncratically and critically so.<sup>4</sup>

*Contra* Clinton Rossiter's exaggerated claim that Mayhew Sr. imparted to his son "a profound mistrust of religious and political Calvinism," Experience's writings indicate that his theology was consistent with Puritan tradition until the 1740s, by which time Jonathan was already at Harvard. His late departures from New England orthodoxy were significant, although they centered on a couple of fine points of doctrine, which he addressed in *Grace Defended* (1744), one of the two longest, if not the bestselling, of his six published works. Experience had been asking questions for some time and he had been engaged in an ongoing dispute in 1743–4 with Jonathan Dickinson, the future President of Princeton, over the narrow definition of human liberty in Dickinson's Calvinist treatise, *True Scripture-Doctrine* (1741). But the main purpose of *Grace Defended* was not to overturn reformed theology. It was "to remove some Things out of the Way," which Experience thought might "be dismissed from their Hypothesis, being no Ways necessary in order to the Support of the principle Articles in that [Calvinist] scheme," which he generally upheld.<sup>5</sup>

The major points on which he insisted were "that the Offer of Salvation made to Sinners in the Gospel, does comprise in it an Offer, or conditional Promise, of the Grace given in Regeneration" and that this "conditional

4. On Mayhew's family background and early education and upbringing, see Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 5–21. In addition to his published works, the major manuscript sources are *MP* and Mayhew, *Collection of Sermons*.

5. Rossiter, "Life and Mind," 533; Experience Mayhew, *Grace Defended*, iii; Dickinson, *True Scripture-Doctrine*. See *MP* 17–19 for 1743–44 correspondence relating to disagreements between Experience Mayhew and Dickinson. Experience's other published works included *Discourse Shewing*, which attracted attention because of his account of Indian missions on Martha's Vineyard; *All Mankind*; *Letter to a Gentleman*, a response to a question raised by *Grace Defended*, and *Right to the Lord's Supper*. His most famous work, also related to Indian missions, was *Indian Converts*, reissued in 2008 as *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts*. While maintaining that Experience Mayhew "formally acknowledged the truth of the federalist view of man's native predicament," Smith also drew attention to Mayhew Sr.'s struggles with the traditional Calvinist doctrine of total depravity, and especially to his opposition to "the idea that the best actions of the unregenerate are sinful" (*Changing Conceptions*, 20–22, esp. 21). See, further, *Experience Mayhew's Indian Converts*, 1–76, esp. 1–16, where Liebman provides some helpful theological and biographical information.

Offer” was just as real as that of “Pardon of Sin, Justification, &c.” Experience thus asserted that spiritual regeneration, although still a sovereign gift of grace, effectively followed the exercise of faith with repentance that led to Christian conversion, rather than coming prior to it in order to facilitate it. He was well aware that in expressing that view, as well as his parallel contention that people’s inability to come to faith, which resulted from human “Corruption, Ignorance, Temptations,” and bad habits, could be overcome by suitable Christian “Instructions, Exhortations, and convincing Arguments,” he was differing from “most that are in the Calvinian Scheme.” But Experience did not see the difference as fundamental. He continued to assert his general allegiance to the *Westminster Shorter Catechism* of 1647 and his agreement with “the Writings of Calvinists,” as opposed to “the Principles of those who embrace or incline to the Arminian Hypothesis.” Mayhew Sr. also took pains to insist that “for many Years,” he himself was “otherwise minded” on the main point of argument in *Grace Defended*, which he only published in his seventies.<sup>6</sup>

This supports the view that while Jonathan Mayhew may have been encouraged by his father’s questioning of received orthodoxy, he was not schooled in overtly anti-Calvinist doctrine or sentiment at his home on Martha’s Vineyard before he left for Harvard in 1740. The first clear indications of more decisive liberalizing influences emerge from what is known of his time at the college, but they are matched by parallel indications of a profound spiritual awakening during the Great Awakening. Samuel Eliot Morison somewhat minimized the extent of what he termed “Harvard liberalism of the eighteenth century,” arguing that “there was just enough notion of academic freedom to give Harvard a name among strict Calvinists.” But his concise history of developments during the presidencies of John Leverett (1708–1724) and Edward Holyoke (1737–1769) provides significant evidence of intellectual transformation.<sup>7</sup>

Norman Fiering’s analysis of the tutorial influence of Leverett and William Brattle in the late seventeenth century, when they helped shift the emphasis “in nearly every discipline” of Harvard’s curriculum away from its “Aristotelian-Scholastic inheritance,” adds to Morison’s account. Although Leverett may have made “no important changes” to the substance of what was taught as president, Fiering also stressed the less tangible, but no less significant impact on students of the more “catholic” attitudes that he shared with a “moderate group” on the Harvard Corporation and with

6. Experience Mayhew, *Grace Defended*, ii–iv, 140, “Advertisement,” 140. See, further, 154.

7. Morison, *Three Centuries of Harvard*, 53–100 passim, esp. 83.

other influential figures, including long-serving tutor, Henry Flynt. The Latitudinarianism or “philosophical Anglicanism” of John Tillotson and like-minded Church of England clerics to which such leaders looked for “inspiration” may not have undermined their basic commitment to Calvinist doctrine, Fiering contended, but it left them more open-minded. It also facilitated “new forms of integration of reason and religion.” The works of Latitudinarians thus joined those of Isaac Newton and John Locke in moving Harvard in more critically minded, rationally and empirically questioning directions. After Holyoke became president in 1737, the college administration became more systematically proactive, introducing so much modernization, especially in the teaching of the natural sciences and related subjects, according to Morison, that “the undergraduate course at the end of Holyoke’s regime had little in common with that of Leverett’s day.”<sup>8</sup>

The Mayhew family’s financial resources were stretched and Experience had to secure government support before Jonathan could begin college in August 1740, shortly after being received into Communion at Chilmark Church. Placed eighth in his class in 1741, he was hardly a model student. Mayhew was fined for a number of disciplinary breaches and “degraded” for drinking just over a year into his Harvard studies. His financial needs remained pressing and his ultimate career plans undecided. In terms of Mayhew’s intellectual development, what emerges from the earliest of his unpublished papers is that although he was still immersed in traditional Puritan sources that remained part of the Harvard curriculum of the early 1740s, it was the work of more critical thinkers, including Anglican Latitudinarians, that most interested him. An “Alphabetical List of Books” and a “Book of Extracts,” both dating from 1741, show that alongside the writings of theological traditionalists like Cotton Mather, Mayhew possessed volumes by Enlightenment rationalists and natural scientists like the Church of England cleric William Wollaston. Among passages that the young Mayhew chose to write out in his commonplace book, extracts from a translation of Blaise Pascal’s *Pensées* and from English clergyman Thomas Burnet’s *Sacred Theory of the Earth* feature prominently. There is a suggestive citation from the works of Tillotson, together with other indications of what Akers described as Mayhew’s “interest . . . in the popular ‘physico-theology’ of the day.”<sup>9</sup>

8. *Ibid.*, 57, 89; Fiering, “First American Enlightenment,” 322, 329, 334. Morison described Leverett as “liberal in his attitude toward religion” (*Three Centuries of Harvard*, 54). See, further, Morison, *Harvard College in the Seventeenth Century*, 2:504–65, *passim*; Fiering, *Moral Philosophy*, 242–54. Cf. Fiering, *Jonathan Edwards’s Moral Thought*, 227–33 (on Edwards and Tillotson); Wilson, *Benevolent Deity*, 19. Leverett and Brattle became tutors at Harvard in 1685 and 1696 respectively.

9. On Mayhew’s Harvard career and the financial arrangements that were made

Around the same time that Mayhew recorded such influences, however, other sources supply further evidence that the religious revival associated with the Great Awakening was making a similarly profound impression on him as on other Harvard contemporaries. It was soon after Mayhew's arrival that itinerant English evangelist George Whitefield first enraptured the college, preaching to an estimated seven thousand people in Harvard Yard. His brief visit was followed to similar effect by that of the fiery Pennsylvania Presbyterian, Gilbert Tennent. The impact was apparently such that contemporary observers enthusiastically reported a spiritually transformed student body. "The College is a new Creature," wrote Benjamin Colman of Brattle Street Church rather breathlessly to Whitefield in the spring of 1741,

the Students full of God, and hope to come out Blessings in their Generations, and how to be so now to each other. Many of them are now we think truly born again, and several of them happy Instruments of Conversion to their Fellows. The Voice of Prayer and Praise fills their Chamber; and the Sincerity, Fervency, and Joy, the Seriousness of their Heart sits visibly on their Faces. I was told Yesterday that not Seven of a Hundred remain unaffected.

On June 8, 1741, Colman, who later became more critical of the Awakening, wrote with the news that "the overseers of our Colleges have appointed a Day of Prayer and Humiliation with thanksgiving, for the Effusion of the Spirit of God on the Students who are seriously disposed to attend; and are bright Examples to their Instructors." In his diary a few months earlier, Flynt commented on the general spiritual revival in his students and named Mayhew among a group of thirty who "prayed together, sung Psalms, and read good books." Two of Mayhew's letters to his brother Zechariah from the same period indicate the deep impression that the Great Awakening initially made on him.<sup>10</sup>

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to provide for it, see Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 18–29, esp. 29. On his receipt into Chilmark Church, see Homes, "Diary," 165. Mayhew's "Alphabetical List of Books" and "Book of Extracts" are found in *MP* 9 and 10 respectively, citing, among other works, Pascal, *Thoughts on Religion*; Burnet, *Sacred Theory of the Earth*, originally published in 1690 as *Theory of the Earth*, an English version of Burnet, *Telluris Theoria Sacra*; Wollaston, *Religion of Nature*. Fiering listed Wollaston with Tillotson as among those "philosophical Anglican" or Latitudinarian authors necessary for the historian to read "to gain an essential understanding of the major currents of religious and philosophical thought in New England from 1685 to 1735" ("First American Enlightenment," 331). With Benjamin Whichcote, others included two authors whom Mayhew later cited in his published works, Gilbert Burnet and Benjamin Hoadly.

10. Colman, "Extract of a Letter," undated, but clearly from 1741, 197–8, esp. 198; Colman to Whitefield [?], June 8, 1741, 202–3; Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 30–32, esp. 32, citing Flynt, *Diary*.



On December 26, 1741, Mayhew described the revival as a powerful spiritual visitation. He also told how his recent delivery from illness had apparently resolved any questions about his future vocational direction. He would now pursue ordained ministry. “But what shall I render to the Lord for all his Benefits?” Mayhew asked. “He would write a Law of Gratitude on my Heart and encline me to devote my Spared Life, yea all the Powers and Faculties of my Soul, to his Service.” Exactly three months later, Mayhew sent his brother a four-page account of a seventy-mile trip “to the Eastward,” where he was “induced to go by an earnest Desire . . . to see and get a right Understanding of Affairs there with Respect to Religion.” His conclusions were overwhelmingly positive. “The Spirit seems to set the Word home in a very extraordinary Manner,” he noted, with remarkable effects, both physical and spiritual, on those who had previously paid little attention to religion. He described a deep conviction of sin and its consequences among those affected, especially “young Persons,” followed by joyful release, conversion and commitment. “Nor is it strange that they should rejoice with Joy unspeakable and full of Glory,” Mayhew commented,

when they are enabled to see the Sufficiency there is in Christ, and his Willingness to receive them, when they are enabled to set open the everlasting Doors of their Hearts for this King of Glory to enter, and when the Spirit witnesseth with their Spirits that they are the Children of God, when they see themselves rescued from Destruction . . . ; when they have a glimmering Prospect of those Mansions above, and some Prelibations and Foretastes of the Joys of the New Jerusalem.

Mayhew expected his letter to come “like good News from a far country and cold Water to a thirsty Soul” to his younger brother, as he read “of the Conquests and Triumphs of the Redeemer’s Grace.” He also took the opportunity to make a series of personal exhortations, urging Zechariah to be comforted and encouraged and to look forward to the afterlife. “Surely there are Joys in Religion which neither the Sensual & carnal World, nor the self righteous Pharisee know any Thing of,” Mayhew wrote. So he exhorted Zechariah to “beware of Hypocrisy” and to join him in being “over jealous over ourselves & each other with a godly Jealousy.”<sup>11</sup>

Although he was far from unusual in doing so, one of the most interesting questions about Mayhew’s early years is how he moved from such positive views of the Great Awakening to aggressive criticism not only of its first leader, but eventually of what he came to decry as religious

11. Mayhew to Zechariah Mayhew, December 26, 1741 and March 26, 1742, *MP* 14 and 15.



“enthusiasm” generally. Sadly, there is no relevant personal testimony from the crucial five-year period before Mayhew wrote to his father in a very different tone on October 1, 1747. “As to Mr. Whitefield, when he was in Town,” he observed very dismissively after a visit to Copp’s Hill in Boston to hear Whitefield deliver a farewell sermon,

there were many Persons that attended his preaching; but chiefly of the meanest sort, excepting those that heard him from a Principle of Curiosity—I heard the last Sermon he preached, which was a very low, confused, puerile, conceited, ill-natur’d, enthusiastick, &c. Performance as ever I heard in my Life.

In seeking to explain such a dramatic change of mind, Akers cited the instrumentality of Mayhew’s father and the authorities of Harvard, where he remained in residence for another three years following his graduation in 1744. Initially hopeful that Martha’s Vineyard might also benefit from religious revivalism, Experience was so provoked by reading Whitefield’s early autobiography of 1740 that he composed his own critical, albeit unpublished, “Letter to a Minister of the Gospel.” Meanwhile at Harvard, those who had so warmly welcomed the evangelist in 1740 had grown so cold in their opinions of him just four years later that the whole faculty endorsed a devastatingly critical document published as *The Testimony of the President, Professors, Tutors and Hebrew Instructor of HARVARD COLLEGE in Cambridge, against the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield, and his Conduct*. To what extent Mayhew was actually moved by such influences remains unclear. Experience’s objections obviously did not hinder his son’s early enthusiasm for Whitefield. But it would seem reasonable to assume that Mayhew’s change of position on the Great Awakening was affected by the shift in opinion at Harvard and his aversion to the perceived excesses of revivalism only seems to have grown.<sup>12</sup>

For example, in the first of two unpublished sermons on Matthew 3:8–9 on the theme of repentance written in December 1762, Mayhew had strong words for preachers in his “Remembrance” who had denied the converted status of life-long church members lacking testimony of a textbook evangelical conversion process. “The preachers of such doctrine as this,” he contended, who included both Whitefield and Tennent, “were the men that kept the whole country in an alarm for many months, if not years together,

12. Mayhew to Experience Mayhew, October 1, 1747, *MP* 23; Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 35–39; Experience Mayhew, “A Letter to a Minister of the Gospel Containing Some Queries on Several Ministers in the Rev’d Mr. George Whitefield’s Account of his Own Life, Published in the Year 1740,” *MP* 8, critiquing Whitefield, *Brief and General Account*; Holyoke et al., *Testimony*.

coming in a sad succession one after another, like Messengers with evil tidings; which people yet, delighted to hear, even to distraction.” But what he found even more disconcerting was that

many persons of age & experience, and before accounted both good & wise, were the encouragers and upholders of such preachers; and not only taught the common people, by their own example, to run after and almost to adore them; but had strange ambition to ape them in all their follies, their crude & extravagant conceits—wonderful instruction indeed!

Unlike his teachers in the Harvard *Testimony*, whom Akers perhaps too readily identified among “‘regular lights’ who understood both the power and danger of revivalism,” Mayhew was not prepared to “presume to say, that some” of those preachers “did not mean well . . . ; or that they might not, in particular cases, do some real good.” His main burden was to stress “the more direct tendency, and the far more common [negative] effects, of such irrational, and anti-scriptural preaching.”<sup>13</sup>

Mayhew delivered this verdict at least fifteen years after he had originally changed his mind about the religious revival. In the summer of 1748, when the recently ordained West Church minister gave the *Seven Sermons*, there is clear evidence that his thinking, which now embraced elements of Arminian doctrine, had also changed significantly in other ways. But although his theological journey may have been relatively short in duration, there is no reason to believe that it was any less significant than the progression from Calvinism to Arminianism that was to take many years longer for his friend and colleague, Charles Chauncy.<sup>14</sup>

### Chauncy’s Defense of Tradition

Chauncy was born fifteen years before Mayhew, on January 1, 1705, and in rather more comfortable circumstances. His father Charles was a Boston merchant and his mother Sarah the daughter of Judge John Walley of the Massachusetts Supreme Court. Despite his father’s death when he was just six years old, a significant inheritance in 1712 seems to have enabled the family to continue their previous lifestyle. Chauncy apparently entered the Boston Public Latin School that same year in preparation for Harvard, where he matriculated in 1717. He graduated from college four years later

13. Mayhew, “Sermon 1 on Matthew 3:8–9, December 1762,” in *Collection of Sermons*, 25–7; Akers, *Called unto Liberty*, 38.

14. Mayhew, *Seven Sermons*.

and spent a further three years in residence, in the course of which he took his AM in 1724. Although Clifford Shipton and Griffin have unearthed various biographical details, little is known of Chauncy's time at Harvard. But a clear personal influence to emerge from his student years was Edward Wigglesworth, who was installed as Hollis Professor of Divinity in 1722. Chauncy would later cite one of Wigglesworth's works, a 1724 defense of Congregationalist polity against the claims of the Anglican John Checkley, in two of his own writings. Wigglesworth also featured prominently among eminent New Englanders whom Chauncy commended to Stiles in 1768, and in very glowing terms.<sup>15</sup>

How much Wigglesworth's independent, but irenic, spirit of mind had already shaped Chauncy's thought by the time he entered ordained ministry in 1727 remains unclear. But despite competition for the prestigious position, his progress from Harvard to assistant minister of Boston's traditionalist First Church under Thomas Foxcroft was relatively smooth. According to the church's records for June 12, 1727, Chauncy was selected to assist Foxcroft by a congregational vote of sixty-four to forty-three over his nearest rival, his acceptance was announced publicly a couple of months later, and he was officially ordained on October 25 of that year. As he steadily established himself at First Church, Chauncy engaged in a four-year period of private study in the 1730s that would eventually lead to his extensive publications on episcopacy. But he remained relatively free from the public controversy that was to be such a feature of his later ministerial career. In 1728 he married the well-connected Elizabeth Hirst, granddaughter of Judge Samuel Sewall, and they began to build a family before her premature

15. Griffin, *Old Brick*, 13–23; Wigglesworth, *Sober Remarks*, was a response to Checkley, *Modest Proof*. Chauncy cited it in *Validity of Presbyterian Ordination*, 45–46, 86–87; *Appeal to the Public Answered*, 8, 42–43. Chauncy assessed Wigglesworth as follows: “he was one of my best friends and longest acquaintance[s], and had courage to speak honourably of me in the new-light time, when it was dangerous to do so . . . He lived at college some years before there was an opportunity for his being chosen into the Professorship; all which time I had the pleasure of being many times a week in company with him, and since that time I familiarly corresponded with him by speech or writing till he died. He is highly deserving of being remembered with honour, not only on account of his character as a man of learning, piety, usefulness in his day, strength of mind, largeness of understanding, and an extraordinary talent at reasoning with clearness and the most nervous cogency, but on account also of his catholic spirit and conduct, notwithstanding great temptations to the contrary. He was one of the most candid men you ever saw; far removed from bigotry, no ways rigid in his attachment to any scheme, yet steady to his own principles, but at the same time charitable to others, though they widely differed from him. He was, in one word, a truly great and excellent man” (“Sketch of Eminent Men,” 160). Older biographical accounts of Chauncy include Ellis, *History of the First Church*, 187–208, passim; Johnson and Malone, *Dictionary*, 2:42–3; SHG, 6:439–67; Sprague, *Annals*, 8:8–13.

death in 1737. As early as 1731, Chauncy's sermons were attracting enough attention to warrant publication. Six of them were published in the 1730s, including four fairly traditional funeral homilies, an Artillery Election sermon and a general Sunday sermon advocating the need to partake in Communion. Following a near-fatal stroke in 1737, Foxcroft's incapacitation temporarily left Chauncy as sole minister of First Church. Despite the inevitable burden of such responsibilities, he also found time to court his second wife, Elizabeth Phillips Townsend, whom he married in 1739.<sup>16</sup>

Although he subsequently moved in different directions, there is every reason to believe that when Chauncy was first ordained and Cotton Mather, perhaps the most vigorous contemporary defender of Puritan tradition, gave him the customary "right hand of fellowship," the twenty-two-year-old assistant minister was as orthodox in his Calvinist theology as his senior colleague Foxcroft was to remain throughout his career. There is also evidence from his works that Chauncy maintained that position publicly at least until the publication of *Twelve Sermons* in 1765, although the seven years of intensive private studies that led to his eventual departure from it began as early as 1752. The most compelling way to demonstrate the extent of Chauncy's early orthodoxy is to show how he publicly upheld, for nearly the first forty years of his ordained ministry, the doctrines traditionally associated with "five-point Calvinism." In other words, he more or less explicitly affirmed the key Calvinist tenets defined by the 1618–19 Synod of Dort and championed by the vast majority of New England Congregationalists in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries as definitive of reformed orthodoxy: total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace and the perseverance of the saints.<sup>17</sup>

16. Pierce, "Records," 39:149–50; Griffin, *Old Brick*, 26–35; Chauncy, *Man's Life, Early Piety Recommended; Nathanael's Character; Character and Overthrow; Prayer for Help; Only Compulsion Proper*. Chauncy was married three times altogether. Following his second wife's death in 1757, he wed Mary Stoddard in 1760. See Griffin, *Old Brick*, 107–8.

17. Pierce, "Records," 39:152. On Cotton Mather's participation in Chauncy's ordination service, see Griffin, *Old Brick*, 9–10. In the 1740s, Foxcroft publicly defended (also against Chauncy) the Calvinist Great Awakening evangelist George Whitefield, for example, and in two published sermons from the 1750s he upheld the doctrine of "imputed righteousness." See Foxcroft, *Some Seasonable Thoughts; An Apology; Humilis Confessio; Like Precious Faith*. Possible tensions between Chauncy and Foxcroft, especially after the advent of the Great Awakening, on which they took opposing views, have not been explored by historians. On Chauncy's early Calvinism, see, further, Wright, *Unitarianism in America*, 56–57. McNeill provided a helpful definition of "five-point Calvinism," as upheld by the Synod of Dort: "The canons of the synod assert: (1) that election is founded on God's purpose 'before the foundation of the world' [unconditional election]; (2) that the efficacy of Christ's atonement extends to the elect

In his first three published funeral sermons, for example, Chauncy clearly identified human “Tempers” as “perverse & depraved . . . since our Fall from GOD” and human nature as “corrupt.” The biblical character of Nathanael, whom he took as an example in a funeral sermon for Judge Nathanael Byfield in 1733, was undoubtedly “a real good man; a true Saint and faithful servant of the most high,” but he could not be “perfectly and indefectively” so. In such a sense, “there is not a just man upon earth, that doth good and sinneth not.” Some ten years later, in his pivotal Great Awakening sermon, *Enthusiasm Described* (1742), Chauncy did not hesitate to warn his hearers that they were inherently vulnerable to sin, including the enthusiastic excesses of revivalism. As a result of original sin, they were “in a corrupt state” following “the fall,” which had “introduc’d great weakness into your reasonable nature.” His *Seasonable Thoughts* (1743) likewise offered an extensive analysis of human excess at a time of religious revival, as did many of his later sermons. In *Earthquakes a Token* (1755), delivered the Sunday after Boston’s “terrible earthquake” of November 18, 1755, Chauncy was in no doubt about the major precipitating cause. Sin had not only infected humanity in the form of total depravity, as Chauncy consistently warned his hearers in the first thirty years of his public ministry. It had also, he argued throughout his career, affected the earth itself—irretrievably so until its final restoration in the purging flames of the “Day of God’s wrath,” according to the millennial vision presented in a 1756 Thursday Lecture sermon “Occasioned by the late EARTHQUAKES in Spain and Portugal, as well as New-England.”<sup>18</sup>

only [limited atonement]; (3) that the Fall has left man in a state of corruption and helplessness: his gleams of natural light are of no value for salvation [total depravity]; (4) that regeneration is an inward renewal of the soul and of the will and is wholly a work of God, ‘powerful, delightful, astonishing, mysterious, and ineffable’ [irresistible grace]; (5) that God so preserves the elect, ever renewing their repentance, patience, humility, gratitude, and good works, that, despite their sins, they do not finally fall away from grace [perseverance of the saints]” (*History and Character*, 265). On eighteenth-century New England understandings of Calvinist doctrine, see chapter 3.

18. Chauncy, *Man’s Life Considered*, 14; *Early Piety Recommended*, 4; *Nathanael’s Character*, 5, 6, citing Ecclesiastes 7:20; *Enthusiasm Described*, 18; *Seasonable Thoughts*; *Earthquakes a Token*, 15–23; *Earth Delivered*, 13. Among transgressions that had offended God prior to the 1755 earthquake, Chauncy saw some particularly obvious causes for divine indignation: “The sins included in the term, uncleanness, have so offended God, as that he has testified his anger against them by an earthquake . . . We might do well to esteem ourselves warned of God against uncleanness . . . Sabbath-breaking is likewise a sin, God has threatened to testify against by shaking the earth . . . Pride is another sin God has testified his anger against by earthquakes.” Also threatening were “unrighteousness,” “drunkenness,” which was “an awakening consideration . . . to the people of New-England,” and, worst of all, “Enmity to Christ” (*Earthquakes a Token*, 16–17, 19–22).

Chauncy left no doubt in his earlier sermons of his convictions that those who died faced a truly eternal reward or punishment in heaven or hell according to their possession or lack of saving faith in Christ. He warned hypocrites in *Nathanael's Character* (1733), for example, that they were “persons whose portion it will be to dwell with devouring fire, to dwell with everlasting burnings:—’Tis against this kind of sinners that our SAVIOUR has said, Wo unto you;—for ye shall receive the greater damnation.” In *New Creature Describd* (1741), his first major Great Awakening account of Christian conversion, he told those attending the Thursday Lecture of June 4, 1741, in remarkably Edwardsean terms: “There is nothing betwixt you and the place of blackness of darkness, but a poor frail, uncertain life. You hang, as it were, over the bottomless pit, by the slender thread of life; and the moment that snaps asunder, you sink down into perdition.” In another Awakening sermon, *Unbridled Tongue* (1741), Chauncy’s imagery was equally graphic. In 1755, he warned those reeling from a Boston earthquake that “while we refuse to have this man [Christ] to reign over us, and express our disregard to him by our unbelief and disobedience, we are in danger not only of judgments in this world, but of the damnation of hell.” Faced with such a predicament, there was ultimately only one place to turn, Chauncy told those at a lecture on January 22, 1756, and that was to Christ. There were obvious means to pursue, such as repentance. But “the plain truth is, there is no safety, no security for us . . . but by making him [God] our friend thro’ Jesus Christ.” Moreover, even at such a relatively advanced juncture in his theological development, just two years before he tentatively began to express open reservations about Calvinism, Chauncy was careful to qualify such a statement with a clear acknowledgment of the primacy of divine grace in human salvation. Turning to God in Christ must be “as God pleases,” he stressed, and “that moral change . . . which will render us meet objects of the divine favor” needed to be “introduced in us.” It could not be secured by human effort.<sup>19</sup>

The Calvinist doctrines of unconditional election and irresistible grace were consistent features of nearly half of Chaucy’s published works despite a

19. Chauncy, *Nathanael's Character*, 16, citing Isa 33:14 and Matt 23:14; *New Creature Describd*, 20; *Unbridled Tongue*; *Earthquakes a Token*, 23; *Earth Delivered*, 24. Cf. Chauncy and Foxcroft, “To the Reader”; Edwards, *Sinners*, e.g., 16. See esp. Chauncy, *Unbridled Tongue*, 8, 12, citing Isa 33:14 and Rev 21:8: “Multitudes will be condemned, at the great and last judgment, for their hypocrisy; for their seeming to be religious, while they had really no religion at all . . . But if you are yet unmoved, O turn your thoughts to the bar of the coming judgment, and reflect, seriously reflect, on what will then be the awful doom of all those, who only seem to be religious. They shall be sent away to dwell with devouring fire; yea, they shall dwell in the hottest place of that lake, which burneth with fire and brimstone.”

parallel and growing emphasis on human free will that was to become more prominent over time. While consistently calling people to salvation, he was thus equally clear during the first half of his public ministry that “of our selves we can never turn to God, or serve him to his acceptance. The assistances of divine grace are absolutely necessary hereto.” Chauncy acknowledged the possibility of saving, “Death-bed Repentance,” but only “thro’ the Uncovenanted Mercy of GOD.” In society generally, “when a people are become generally corrupt and wicked, the powerful interposition of God, and this only, will be effectual, to restrain them from vice, and bring them back to the practice of religion and virtue.” Physical compulsion was never appropriate to enforce Christian belief or practice and since God had created people as “rational, free Agents, they can’t be religious but with the free Consent of their Wills.” But there was no doubt for the Calvinist Chauncy, just as there would ultimately be no question, rather paradoxically, for the Arminian and universalist Chauncy more than forty years later, who held the decisive hand in the process of conversion:

God himself does not . . . go about to make men religious. He uses Violence with no Man; forces no One, contrary to his Will, to betake himself to a religious Course. Whenever he draws Men to a Life of Holiness, ’tis with the Cords of a Man, and with the Bonds of Love. i.e. in a Way suted to their Character as Men; in a Way adapted to their Make as free Agents. He does not make Use of the Methods of Force, turning Men from Sin to himself, whether they will, or no; but so manages the Affair, as to gain the free and full Consent of their Wills.<sup>20</sup>

In that sense, divine grace, however adapted to human nature, was ultimately irresistible. Moreover, salvation was the direct result of God’s unconditional election and predetermination. One of the main reasons why “Joy” could justifiably be termed “the Duty of Survivors” on the death of pious friends and relatives, Chauncy informed those mourning Lucy Waldo in 1741, was that “they are gone to dwell with Patriarchs, Prophets, and Apostles; with their pious departed Friends, and Progenitors; and with all, whom GOD, in all Ages, from the Days of Adam, has been selecting from among Men, and preparing to be Heirs to the future, eternal Inheritance.” Grace was thus paramount and the connection between divine “selection” [or election] and human conversion unbreakable, because the latter came not by force of will but by the sovereignty of God. It involved people’s eyes being opened “to see the force of the great motives of christianity” and “their

20. Chauncy, *Early Piety Recommended*, 6. Cf. 9, 11; *Man’s Life*, 27; *Prayer for Help*, 13; *Only Compulsion*, 10–11.



stubbornness” being “hereby . . . overcome.” A sinful humankind, Chauncy told those at the Boston Thursday Lecture of June 4, 1741, could only be God’s abject debtor:

’Twas not by your own works of righteousness, but according to his mercy, that GOD has saved you by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost . . . Look upon the DIVINE SPIRIT, as sovereign in the kingdom of grace; and realise that he may dispense the grace of GOD, as to whom he will; so where he will, and in what way or manner soever he will.

He repeated the theme in other Great Awakening publications. “He that has an immediate access to our Spirits can certainly work upon them,” he told the people of First Church on a 1741 day of prayer “to ask of GOD the effusion of his SPIRIT” and, “in a reasonable way,” to “influence them both to will and to do of his own good pleasure.” God was nothing less than “the author of conversion” in the sense that “the change signified by conversion or the new creature, is the work of GOD.”<sup>21</sup>

An overarching emphasis on the ultimate sovereignty of God was to remain a paramount theme for Chauncy. But in his earlier years, he interpreted it within a clearly identifiable, Calvinist theological framework, which involved allegiance not only to the doctrines of total depravity, unconditional election and irresistible grace, but to the centrality of Christ’s atonement and to the inevitable perseverance of all true Christians in saving faith for eternity. There is no definitive evidence that Chauncy embraced the doctrine of a limited atonement, whereby Christ died to pay the price only for the sins of the “elect,” rather than for those of the whole world. But such a position would have been entirely consistent with the commitments to an orthodox Puritan Christology and to a thoroughly reformed understanding of justification by grace through faith which are unmistakable throughout the works of his first thirty-five years as a published theologian.<sup>22</sup>

21. Chauncy, *Joy*, 12; *New Creature Describ’d*, 9, 34, 38–9; *Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost*, 11, 17, 18. In seeking to define “the Work of god” in 1743, Chauncy again went back to Calvinist basics: “’Tis in one Word, That Work of divine Grace, which is sometimes, called the New-Creation; sometimes the New-Birth; sometimes the Spirit’s Renovation; sometimes Conversion, or as ’tis otherwise express’d, a being turned from Darkness to Light, and from the Power of Sin and Satan unto god” (*Seasonable Thoughts*, 5).

22. “Justification by faith” is here understood as by “Protestant theologians,” according to a definition of “justification” from the *New English Dictionary* (1901) cited in *OED Online*: “an act of grace in which God accounts human beings righteous, not owing to any merit of their own, but through imputation of Christ’s righteousness, as apprehended and received by faith.”

In defining the character of a “Godly man” in *Prayer for Help* (1737), Chauncy stressed possession of faith as “an active living principle, suitably exciting and moving the several passions and affections of his mind,” confidence in the “faithfulness and veracity” of the Bible, and submission to God’s providential sovereignty. But he laid major emphasis on belief in Christ’s atonement and on “salvation in none but in Christ.” In *Only Compulsion Proper* (1739), Chauncy reminded his hearers how God “has even parted with his own dear and only begotten Son. He spared him not, but delivered him up, to shed his Blood on the Cross; and by this Means has got ready for our Acceptance a Provision of Mercy, equal to the Needs of our Souls.” Five years later, at the installation of Thomas Frink as minister, he gave a classic exhortation to justification by faith. “We must be Men in CHRIST, justified in his Righteousness, and sanctified by his SPIRIT,” he told members of Plymouth’s Third Church, “or nothing will prevent our being doom’d, at the great and last Day, to a Departure from CHRIST among the Workers of Iniquity.” “It is on the Account of CHRIST’s Righteousness that we are justified and saved,” Chauncy later repeated, “and it would be highly injurious to his Merits to suppose otherwise.”<sup>23</sup>

If Chauncy’s 1756 affirmation that “there is no safety, no security for us . . . as God pleases, but by making him our friend thro’ Jesus Christ” was remarkable enough, his doctrinal statements in two sermons of 1744–5 were even more striking from one who has since been placed near the pinnacle of eighteenth-century American theological progressivism. “And he was careful, not only that his Aims and Principles might be good,” Chauncy said at the funeral of First Church deacon Cornelius Thayer, “but that he might also place his Dependance right; not on his own Works of Righteousness, but the Merits of the LORD JESUS CHRIST.” “The Scripture ever takes notice of three Things with Reference to the Affair of Man’s Redemption,” Chauncy told Massachusetts ministers assembled in Annual Convention on May 31, 1744:

The first is the Grace of GOD purposing it. It’s particular in its Care to fix our Thoughts on the Good-will and free Mercy of GOD, as the true, original, eternal Source of this Blessing. Next to the Grace of GOD, it gives all due Honour to the Merits of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. ’Tis with a View to him, for his Sake, and on his Account, that the Sinner is spoken of as justified and saved. These great Gospel Favours are granted to him, not for any Works of Righteousness which he has done, but in

23. Chauncy, *Prayer for Help*, 2–3; *Only Compulsion*, 19, alluding to Romans 8:32; *Ministers Exhorted*, 6, 21.

Consideration of the mediatorial Performances and Sufferings of the LORD JESUS CHRIST. This Righteousness of the Redeemer is considered as the Ground and Reason, that on the Account of which he is interested in the Mercy of GOD to eternal Life.

Few might have provided a more cogent summary of the orthodox, Calvinist plan of salvation.<sup>24</sup>

Chauncy's view of Christ's crucifixion entailed an equally reformed understanding of his death as both expiatory sacrifice for human sin and substitutionary propitiation of God's wrath. In his first published sermon, he described "the Terms of Salvation" as "bro't down to our present fallen State," "thro' the LORD JESUS CHRIST, who obey'd the Law, and suffer'd the Penalty of it, for us and in our stead." In an ordination sermon delivered two years after his open advocacy of more Arminian positions, he clearly maintained such a view of the atonement. The "great doctrine of 'remission of sin,'" was "founded," he argued "on the 'propitiation' made . . . by the 'blood of Christ; when he was nailed to the cross.'" This, Chauncy contended, was "the grand point aimed at, by the wisdom of God, in the sufferings and death of his son Jesus."<sup>25</sup>

Chauncy also argued that there was no way of losing Christian salvation once it had truly been received. In *Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost* (1742), he went to some lengths to define faith as a divine gift whereby "we are justified freely of GOD's grace, without the deeds of the law." But he also saw it as a crucial work of the Holy Spirit that by the Spirit's "influence," Christians "are kept from falling, and preserved through faith unto salvation." Seeking to distinguish, in *Seasonable Thoughts* (1743), between genuine works of God and false claims to such, Chauncy reiterated his clear affirmation of the perseverance of the saints:

The Influence of the SPIRIT does not consist in sudden Impulses and Impressions, in Visions, Revelations, extraordinary Missions, and the like; but in working in Men the Preparations for Faith and Repentance, by humbling them for Sin, and shewing them the Necessity of a SAVIOUR; then by effecting such a Change in them, as shall turn them from the Power of Sin and Satan, and make them new Creatures; and in fine, by carrying on this good Work begun in them, enabling them to grow in Grace, and patiently continue doing well, 'till of the Mercy of GOD, thro' CHRIST, they are crowned with eternal Life.<sup>26</sup>

24. Chauncy, *Earth Delivered*, 24; *Comelius's Character*, 28, citing Romans 3:24; *Ministers Cautioned*, 31–32.

25. Chauncy, *Man's Life*, 6–7; *Sermon Preached May 6, 1767*, 30.

26. Chauncy, *Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost*, 38, 20–21; *Seasonable Thoughts*, 218.

If Chauncy's early theology can be characterized as anything, therefore, it deserves the label "Calvinist." There is consistent evidence from his first sermons through to those published in the mid-1760s that when he exhorted his readers, as he did in his major Great Awakening treatise of the 1740s, that "now is the Time, when we are particularly called to stand up for the good old Way, and bear faithful Testimony against every Thing, that may tend to cast a Blemish on true primitive Christianity," he had more in mind than the simple defense of traditional, Congregationalist polity that was often associated with such discourse. He was urging commitment to reformed orthodoxy in general and this theological inheritance centered on the primacy of divine grace: "'Tis one of the most obvious truths," Chauncy told his church members in a 1757 discourse that otherwise focused on the need for good works, "that all that we have, and are, we derive from God . . . it must forever be acknowledged, that an admission to blessedness in heaven is a reward of grace, and not of debt."<sup>27</sup>

Yet despite his doctrinal traditionalism, Chauncy also faced, like Mayhew and many others, a significant turning point during the Great Awakening of the early 1740s. Moreover, the public positions that he adopted towards the revival movement not only came to divide him from many fellow Calvinists, they subsequently contributed to his historical portrayal as a heterodox theologian much earlier than he actually was.

Griffin carefully reconstructed the series of events and influences over the two years that followed Whitefield's first arrival in Boston on September 17, 1740, which seem to have led Chauncy from initial silence through critical questioning to outright opposition to the perceived excesses of the Great Awakening. Through his public disagreement, in 1740–1741, with the recommendations of church councils that two of his more open-minded colleagues, Samuel Osborn of Eastham and Samuel Mather of Boston's Second Church, be dismissed from their pulpits for heterodox teaching, Chauncy became personally, if not doctrinally, isolated from the ecclesiastical mainstream. As a minister of one of Boston's leading churches, he was also caught up in the increasingly contentious church politics of the early 1740s in other ways and he was distressed by a growing polarization between those who supported and those who questioned or rejected the Great Awakening. Despite such pressures, Chauncy showed considerable restraint in his initial sermons on revival themes. A chronological analysis

27. Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, 337–38; Chauncy, *Charity*, 8. On Puritan "primitivist" discourse, see esp. Bozemann, *To Live Ancient Lives*. The context of Chauncy's call in *Seasonable Thoughts* to "stand up for the good old Way" and defend "true primitive Christianity" makes it clear that Chauncy had in mind what he called, 339, "good Doctrine" generally, not just traditional polity.

of his works shows how he began, in such publications as *New Creature Describ'd* (1741), *Unbridled Tongue* (1741), *Gifts of the Spirit* (1742) and *Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost* (1742), by formulating relatively cautious and often indirect critiques of revivalist practice, in which his major focus was on outlining what he saw as sound biblical principles in relevant areas. It was only when provoked by a troubling personal encounter with the extremist itinerant, James Davenport, and when faced with the publication of the most significant pro-Awakening treatise by Jonathan Edwards in 1742, that Chauncy became a major critic of the Great Awakening.<sup>28</sup>

In a letter to Davenport prefaced to the publication of *Enthusiasm Described* (1742), dated July 17, 1742, Chauncy initially described his recent confrontation with the evangelist in rather measured tones. “When you came to my house, some days ago,” he wrote, “to enquire into the reason of the hope that was in me, my intention was, to deal plainly and faithfully with you: And I believe, you do not think, I was wanting on that head.” But it clearly caused deep offense to Chauncy that Davenport, who had already been denied access to the pulpits of Boston ministers because of his “enthusiasm,” should have personally challenged him about his salvation. In the main body of his work, Chauncy then showed no hesitation in detailing not just some of Davenport’s key errors, as he saw them, but those of the revival movement in general. Chief among them were lack of spiritual discernment, undue emotionalism, failure to respect traditional boundaries between clerical and lay spheres of ministry, and the general social disorder promoted by some revivalists. The publication of Edwards’s first and highly influential defense of the Great Awakening in *Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival of Religion in New-England* (1742) elicited a much more thorough and carefully researched exposition on similar topics. Chauncy has sometimes, and arguably unfairly, been seen by scholars as offering a rather pedestrian critique of the Awakening compared to the more compelling apologetics of Edwards. But it was *Seasonable Thoughts* (1743), with its comprehensive five-part analysis and detailed reporting of events, that really established Chauncy’s position as the most prominent critic of mid-eighteenth-century American revivalism.<sup>29</sup>

28. Chauncy, *New Creature Describ'd*, *Unbridled Tongue*, *Gifts of the Spirit*, and *Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost* were originally preached as sermons on June 4, September 10, December 17, 1741, and May 13, 1742 respectively. See Griffin, *Old Brick*, 46–70, passim, esp. 48–50, 58–59, for helpful accounts of the “Osborn affair” and Samuel Mather’s dismissal. See, further, Osborn, *Case and Complaint*, 22–23; Stiles, *Extracts from the Itineraries*, 304.

29. Chauncy, *Enthusiasm Described*, i–ii, citing part of 1 Pet 3:15; ii–viii; *Seasonable Thoughts*; Edwards, *Some Thoughts*. Edwards’s other major work arising out of the Awakening was *Religious Affections*, which can partly be seen as a response to

Since Chauncy produced no fewer than ten separate works in connection with Great Awakening controversies over a period of just four years, it is not surprising that “this labour . . .” as he told Stiles more than twenty years later, “in addition to my ministerial work . . . broke my constitution.” But there is no evidence that it also signaled a break in Chauncy’s commitment to, still less an Arminian attack on, reformed orthodoxy. In that sense, scholars like Perry Miller and Barney Jones, who acknowledged Chauncy’s Calvinism at the time of the Awakening, made an important point. Chauncy’s controversy with Edwards and other revivalists is better viewed as addressing issues of contention within a broadly shared theological framework than as proof of his departure from it. The First Church minister had no problems with seeking a revival of religion per se or with understanding that in traditional terms. He specifically wrote of the need for spiritual renewal in at least four of his Great Awakening publications and his conventional understanding of the process of conversion was just as evident in *New Creature Describ’d* (1741) as in his work of nine years earlier, *Early Piety Recommended* (1732). If anything, as Miller and Harry Stout have suggested, Chauncy’s theological anthropology was more traditionally Puritan than that of Edwards and he saw his major role in *Seasonable Thoughts* (1743) as a defender of Protestant order and orthodoxy against revivalist excesses.<sup>30</sup>

It is clear from the attention that he devoted to them in all his Awakening publications that his major critique of the revival centered on its theological “enthusiasm,” which he found fundamentally unbiblical, and on the social and ecclesiastical disorder to which it allegedly gave rise. While still allowing ample scope for the kind of religion of the heart, for which he actively called throughout the Great Awakening, Chauncy, like Mayhew, thus emerged from the early 1740s as a champion of a more rational religion and social order. His leadership as an anti-revivalist controversialist gave

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Chauncy’s *Seasonable Thoughts*. Edwards’s earlier *Faithful Narrative*, first written in a letter of 1736, did much to provoke local and international interest in the evangelical revival movement, but was a more specific account of events at his own church in Northampton, Connecticut.

30. Chauncy, “Sketch of Eminent Men,” 162; Gaustad, “Charles Chauncy”; Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards*, 177–78, 185–86; Barney Jones, “Charles Chauncy and the Great Awakening,” 497–98; Stout, *New England Soul*, 203–7, esp. 206–7; Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, e.g., iii–xxx, 337–38, 366. In addition to works already cited, Gaustad affirmed the authenticity of the following by Chauncy: *Letter from a Gentleman*; *Ministers Cautioned*; *Ministers Exhorted*; *Letter to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*. He rejected, however, the attribution to Chauncy of *Letter to the Reverend Mr. George Whitefield*, *Publicly Calling*, of which he thought Nathaniel Appleton the more likely author, of *Wonderful Narrative*, and of four other more questionable works. See, further, Lippy, *Seasonable Revolutionary*, 24–27.

him a unique standing in the growing community of “Old Light” traditionalists, on which he was to build for years. It also encouraged later scholars like Heimert, in his revisionist study *Religion and the American Mind* (1966), to position him, with Mayhew, at the heart of a new movement of “Liberalism.”<sup>31</sup>

Heimert’s main thesis was that “evangelical religion,” not a more “rationalist” creed, truly “embodied” and presented a “radical and even democratic challenge to the standing order” in colonial and revolutionary America. In support of this argument, the Harvard scholar offered broad-brush definitions of key theological/intellectual movements, and especially of “Calvinism” or “evangelicalism” versus “Liberalism” or “rationalism,” which he posited as competing schools of thought following the Great Awakening. Historians were initially very skeptical, if not outright dismissive of Heimert’s categorizations. Yet despite their reservations, his “evangelical/liberal” distinction has since become a fairly common frame of reference for describing New England Congregationalist clergy of the latter half of the eighteenth century. In ways that Heimert might never have imagined, because “evangelicals” generally embraced a more traditionalist theology than “liberals,” the former have also come to be identified as “conservatives.” In the process, figures like Chauncy and Mayhew, who both featured in Heimert’s study as almost archetypal “liberals,” have sometimes been disconnected from their Calvinist heritage.<sup>32</sup>

31. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind*. In *Seasonable Thoughts*, Chauncy especially critiqued as disorders associated with the Great Awakening: itinerancy (36ff.), abnormal physical and emotional effects (76ff.), judgmentalism (140ff.), false impressions of religious influences (178ff.), the illegitimate rise of lay exhorters and preachers (226ff.), confusion in worship (239ff.), and what he called a “Spirit of Error” giving rise to various doctrinal excesses (242ff.). Chauncy wrote of the need for religious revival, for example, in *New Creature Describd; Gifts of the Spirit; Out-pouring of the Holy-Ghost*.

32. Heimert argued, for example, that the “evangelical impulse,” which embodied “radical and emphatic definitions of liberty and equality,” became “the avatar and instrument of a fervent American nationalism.” By contrast, “Liberals’ adaptation of traditional covenant theology to social contract theory combined with their advocacy of individualism and “enlightened self-interest” to encourage the protection of the sociopolitical status quo, even when faced with the prerevolutionary challenges of growing British imperialism (*Religion and the American Mind*, 12–14, 16–17, 270). Although Heimert raised significant issues that have since taxed scholars for more nearly fifty years, initial reviews of his work were mixed. Among key assessments, see: Bailyn, “Religion and Revolution”; McLoughlin, “American Revolution”; Mead, “Through and beyond the Lines”; and much more recently, Wood “Religion and the American Revolution.” Heimert clearly viewed Chauncy and Mayhew as “Liberal” social reactionaries. He hypothetically suggested, for example, that “for Mayhew to have made a different contribution to the uprising of 1775 it would have been necessary for him to overcome his aversions to violence, revivals, awakenings, and popular enthusiasm.”



But as has been seen, especially in the case of Chauncy, whose Calvinism fundamentally shaped his theological outlook for more than fifty years, this is misleading. There is strong evidence that neither Mayhew nor Chauncy began to reject key elements of New England orthodoxy until the late 1740s, when the former made his Arminian positions clear in *Seven Sermons* (1749), and that Chauncy did not openly reveal any questioning of it at all until 1758. The Great Awakening undoubtedly prompted both to reject what they came to see as the excesses of revivalist enthusiasm and to identify with a more rationalist approach to religion. But well beyond the religious revival movement, the decisive decades of major intellectual change for both Boston ministers were to extend from the late 1740s through the 1760s, when their more critical tendencies were finally to find theological expression. Even then, the retiring Chauncy took much longer to express his shift to Arminianism than Mayhew, and he might never have published the full extent of his personal transformation at all, had he not lived into his late seventies and found, in the tumultuous period of the early 1780s, a “seasonable” time to unveil it to his contemporaries.

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He also described Chauncy as “the greatest Liberal of all” (*Religion and the American Mind*, 291, 418). On Heimert’s influence and subsequent historiography, see also, Goff, “Revivals and Revolution.” The “evangelical”/“liberal” or “rationalist” frame of reference was echoed by Stout, for example, who explicitly adopted Heimert’s distinction between “rationalist” and “evangelical” preaching styles, even while continuing to stress strong elements of doctrinal continuity among those who adopted them (*New England Soul*, 218–22). Holifield distinguished between “Arminians,” “moderate” or “Old Calvinists,” and “Edwardsean” revivalists (*Theology in America*, 127–28).