# The Great Awakening: An Historical Analysis

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The Great Awakening (a period of intense religious revivalism be-
tween 1730 and 1745) is analyzed as a mechanism of social change.
Even prior to the revival there were strains in American religion as
well as politics toward greater individualism, voluntarism, and de-
mocracy. The latent function of the revival was to prepare the way
for this new form of social order. As the structure began yielding to
the increased pressures toward individualism, the revival served as
a dynamic agent clearing away many of the ideological and institution-
al trappings that were blocking this transformation.

The period of religious revival falling between the years 1730 and 1745 in
Puritan New England is one of extreme change in social organization. The
task of this paper will be to analyze the Great Awakening as a mechanism
of social change. In one sense, the revival was symptomatic of the extreme
functional incompatibility between New England's dominant religious-
political institutional order and its emergent differentiated economic and
social substructure. The intensity and magnitude of the revival was indica-
tive of strains inherent in an attempt to maintain a religious-political order
which was basically incompatible with the material conditions of a colonial
frontier environment. The latent function of the revival was to prepare the
way for a moral and social order more in keeping with these material condi-
tions by clearing away many of the ideological and institutional trappings
that served to maintain the establishment of religion and its dominance
of the polity and the economy. In so doing, the revival gave great impetus
to a disposition toward individualism, voluntarism, and democracy already
at work in and around New England.

The general line of the theoretical argument in this analysis will be as
follows:

1. New England Puritan theocracy involved a medieval conception of
authority and was "mechanical" in its solidarity.

2. Isolation and the extreme hardships involved in survival served initial-
ly to maintain the imposed conception of authority and system of solidarity.

3. The same challenge of adaptation coupled with a strong Calvinist
work ethic tended to encourage heightened instrumental activity on the
part of the colonists.

4. Through these activities New England developed an increasingly vi-
able commercial economy that extended her involvement in the total colo-

nial economy, ended her isolation, and rendered her theocratic system of solidarity increasingly inapplicable.

5. A number of integrative problems developed which were symptomatic of rising dissension within New England.

6. Class antagonisms and regional hostilities increased and both contributed to and were symptomatic of rising conflict and strain within New England.

7. The Great Awakening was a socio-emotional reaction to the rising dissension and strain within New England.

8. Though manifestly the Great Awakening appeared reactive—a desperate attempt on the part of the traditionalists to reestablish the older theocratic moral order—its latent function was to destroy the old order, thus making it possible for a sectarian and denominational pattern more commensurate with democratic pluralism to emerge.

The theoretical model for the analysis is provided by Bales (1962, pp. 127–28) when he states:

> Looking at large scale systems in a very abstract way, one can form an idea of two "chains of events" or "series of strains" starting from opposite poles and proceeding in opposite directions, tending to cancel each other out, and each in its terminal effects tending to set off the opposite chain of events. One chain of events has its starting point in the necessities of adaptation to the outer situation and proceeds in its series of strains through changes in the division of labor, changes in the distribution of property, authority, and status and has its malintegrative terminal effects in the disturbance of the existing state of solidarity. The other chain of events has its starting point in the necessities of integration or reintegration of the social system itself and proceeds in its series of strains through a reactive . . . emphasis on solidarity which exerts a dissolving, undermining, equalizing, or curbing effect on the differential distribution of status, on differences in authority, differences in the division of labor with an ultimate terminal effect that may be maladaptive.

Bales's discussion seems to have great relevance in considering the events leading up to the Great Awakening. The explosiveness of the revival originated in the tension between the adaptive strains of a frontier situation and a traditional moral order imposed on such a situation. Bales's model has found wide application in the general action theory of Parsons and, as such, has had its greatest use in the functional analysis of institutional subsystems of society and the problems of social integration rather than social change (see Parsons 1951; Parsons and Shils 1951; Parsons et al. 1955; Parsons and Smelser 1956). However, the relevance of this model for the analysis of change in social systems has also been demonstrated in much of the work of Parsons and Bales (see Parsons, Shils, and Bales 1953; Parsons 1960).[1] Of specific relevance to this model as it is applied in this analysis is Boskoff's attempt to systematically apply a structural-functional per-

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[1] Though space does not permit an extensive review of this aspect of Parsons' work, nor is it particularly appropriate at this point, the influence of this body of theory on the present work must be acknowledged.

spective to the study of social change (Boskoff 1964, esp. pp. 218–25). David Lockwood's distinction between "social" or "normative" integration and "system" integration helps to clarify some of the latent institutional and structural effects of the Awakening (Lockwood 1964, pp. 250–53). Though much of this analysis focuses on the lack of normative integration resulting from confusion in the core norms and values of the dominant religious institution, the problem of normative integration is analyzed as dependent on a more general problem of system integration, that is, the degree of articulation between the normative patterns dictated by the religious institution and the material conditions and emergent structural arrangements dictated by the harsh realities of life in a colonial environment. As Lockwood (1964, p. 251) points out, "there is nothing metaphysical about the general notion of social relationships being somehow implicit in a given set of material conditions. Material conditions most obviously include the technological means of control over the physical and social environment and the skills associated with these means. . . . Such material conditions must surely be included as a variable in any calculus of system integration, since it is clear that they may facilitate the development of 'deviant' social relationships which run counter to the dominant institution patterns of the system."

In order to get at some of these specific points, let us first examine some of the descriptive material pertaining to this period of history, the area, the movement, and the people involved in it. Then we will turn to an examination of the Great Awakening as a mechanism of social change.

THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE GREAT AWAKENING

Most historians date the beginning of the Great Awakening from the Northampton revival which began in the church of the great Puritan minister Jonathan Edwards in 1733, though actually it was a small ripple in comparison with the great wave that was to follow in 1740 with the ministry of George Whitefield.

Edwards was the grandson of Solomon Stoddard, himself a powerful minister who for sixty years had exercised a profound influence over his congregation in Northampton and the surrounding area. In 1727 Edwards left his post as a tutor at Yale and joined his grandfather in his church at Northampton. In 1729 Stoddard died, leaving the post to Edwards.

During the latter years of his life Stoddard had let things "slip" in Northampton, so the grandson reports (Ferm 1953, p. 165). He states: "Licentiousness for some years greatly prevailed among the youth of the town; they were many of them very much addicted to night walking, and frequenting the tavern, and lewd practices, wherein some by their example exceedingly corrupted others. It was their manner very frequently to get together in conventions of both sexes, for mirth and jollity, which they

called frolicks; and they would often spend the greater part of the night in them without any regard to order in the families they belonged to; and indeed family government did too much fail in the town."

By 1732, however, there was a marked change in the religious attitude of his people, especially the young people. Let us turn to Edwards' own report concerning *The Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls in Northampton* (see Ferm 1953, p. 166): "But two or three years after Mr. Stoddard's death, there began to be a sensible amendment of these evils. The young people shewed more of a disposition to hearken to council, and by degrees left off their frolics; they grew observably more decent in their attendance on the public worship, and there were more who manifested a religious concern than there used to be." By 1733 Edwards noted a quickening in the concern of his people about religion (Ferm 1953, p. 168): "a great and ernest concern about the great things of religion, and the eternal world, became universal in all parts of the town, and among persons of all ages. The noise amongst the dry bones waxed louder and louder [until] all other talk but about spiritual and eternal things was soon thrown by." The concern for religion grew to such a pitch that "worldly" affairs were in danger of being ignored (Ferm 1953, p. 169). "The minds of the people were wonderfully taken off from the world, it was treated amongst us as a thing of very little consequence: They seem'd to follow their worldly Business, more as a part of their Duty, than from any Disposition they had to it; the Temptation now seemed to lie on that hand to neglect worldly affairs too much, and spend too much Time in the immediate Exercise of Religion."

Edwards continues to report the manner in which the revival spread to other communities not only in Massachusetts but in Connecticut. According to Edwards's report, there were great "stirrings" in at least twenty towns as the revival followed the Connecticut River as it wound its course to the ocean.

These "ripples" of revival in 1734–36 seemed to indicate a general disposition toward religious awakening in New England—a disposition which would be tapped to a much greater degree by the dynamic itinerant minister George Whitefield in 1740. It is in this second revival that we get an idea of the extent and intensity of this mass movement.

Whitefield's journey through New England began at Newport, Rhode Island, September 15, 1740. His twenty-four-day journey took him along a path up the coast from Newport to Boston and from Boston to York, Maine, and back again along the same route (Gaustad 1957, p. 27).

Some notion of his general impact on the people will be gathered by noting how the attendance grew in his two visits in Boston. The Boston *News Letter* (see Gaustad 1957, p. 26) reports of his first visit:

> Last Thursday Evening the Rev'd Mr. Whitefield arrived from Rhode Island, being met on the Road and conducted to Town by several Gentlemen. The next Day in the Forenoon he attended Prayers in the King's Chapel, and in the Afternoon he preach'd to a vast Congregation in the Rev'd Dr. Coleman's Meeting-House. The next Day he preach'd in the Forenoon at the South Church to a Crowded Audience, and in the Afternoon to about 5000 People on the Common: and Lord's Day in the afternoon having preach'd to a great Number of People at the Old Brick Church, the House not being large enough to hold those that crowded to hear him, when the Exercise was over, He went and preached in the Field, to at least 8000 Persons.

It is interesting to note that by the time he was concluding his second visit, the crowds had so grown that his farewell sermon is reported to have reached some 30,000 people (Gaustad 1957, p. 27).

Following his return to Boston, Whitefield turned westward until he finally arrived at Edwards's Northampton. After an emotional weekend with Edwards and his congregation, he began the third portion of his journey, following the Connecticut River and the path of the "frontier revival" to New Haven, where he preached five time in three days, greatly affecting not only the town people but the student body at Yale (Gaustad 1957, p. 28).

The revival itself cannot be characterized only as "sweetness and light," for there were many who were antagonized by this man and even more by the men who followed him (see Heimert and Miller 1967).[2] Indeed, the ultimate impact of the revival was the disintegration of the Calvinist religion and its domination of all aspects of the political, social, and religious life in New England (Heimert and Miller 1967, pp. xliii–lxi). Nor can the revival be characterized by Whitefield's ministry in these particular towns, for its impact spread over the entire New England area like a fire blown to great proportions not only by the other "itinerants" excited by the zeal of his ministry but by the local ministers inspired to greater evangelical concern by the impact of the revival.[3] One of the itinerants, Gilbert Tennent, was described by Timothy Cutler as "a monster! impudent and noisy," who could do nothing but tell all his hearers "that they were damned! damned! damned!" "This charmed them," Cutler notes, "and in the most dreadful winter I ever saw, people wallowed in snow, night and day, for the benefit of his beastly braying; and many ended their days under these fatigues" (Gaustad 1957, p. 33). James Davenport, the arch-fanatic of the Great Awakening, prided himself on his ability to tell on sight who were damned, loudly proclaiming his judgments in public (Tracy 1892, p.

[2] This edited volume (Heimert and Miller 1967) provides an excellent sample of sermons and other written documents of the Awakening and its aftermath. It is an excellent introduction to the positions and "rhetoric" of both those for and those against the Awakening.

[3] Unfortunately space does not permit us to become involved in the rich detail of the experience of each of these churches and communities. One may get a clear impression of the vast impact of Whitefield and the extent and intensity of the revival itself by turning to Joseph Tracy's volume on the subject (see Tracy 1892).

235). There were many other itinerants whose enthusiasm did not carry them to such excess: such men as Samuel Buell, Eleazar Wheelock, Daniel Rogers, Benjamin Pomeroy, John Owen, Timothy Allen, Jonathan Parsons, Nathanael Rogers, William Sturtleff, and, of course, Jonathan Edwards himself (Gaustad 1957; Heimert and Miller 1967). It was such men as these who determined the magnitude of the Awakening. The point that should be noted is that, in spite of the widespread primitivism manifested in the revival, it was not an anti-intellectual reaction, nor were its chief defenders particularly obscure people. As Edwards notes (see Ferm 1953, pp. 173–74), "the work in this town, and some others about us, has been extraordinary on account of the universality of it, affecting all sorts, sober and vicious, high and low, rich and poor, wise and unwise. It reached the most considerable families and persons, to all appearance, as much as others." (See Gaustad [1957, pp. 47–48] for further documentation of this assertion, especially as it pertains to the revival in the time of Whitefield.) Existing evidence seems to point to the Awakening as a mass reaction limited to no particular social stratum or group and not restricted to any particular geographical region. As Gaustad (1957, p. 52) observes: "The frontier was not now as in 1734–35 the stronghold of a movement which left the cities untouched. Nor did the coastal areas alone enjoy the showers from heaven, while the religious life of less accessible towns withered away. Whether the population was dense or sparse, the mode of living primitive or moderately luxurious, the class high or low, the economy agricultural or mercantile, the revival was there."

PURITAN SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The revival had many characteristics of a mass movement and vast and complex social antecedents, concomitants, and consequences. In this section, more attention will be given to the Puritan formula for social organization, showing the more important characteristics of the dominant religious-political institutional order.

The common folk image of the Puritans as the epitome of the flourishing American "spirit" is an inaccurate caricature. Early Puritan theory was not in the least progressive. On the contrary, it was essentially an elaborate restatement of a medieval ideal. Perry Miller observes that the orthodox colonies were societies "of status and subordination, with the ranks of man arranged in a hierarchical series, the lower obedient to the higher, with gentlemen and scholars at the top to rule and direct" (Miller 1942, p. 84). Indeed, for many years such medieval practices as fixing just prices, preventing usury, and prescribing wearing apparel according to social status were perpetuated by the spiritual and governing elite (Miller 1939, p. 429).

Elsewhere, Miller (1956, 1961) has dealt brilliantly with the particular admixture of utopian and materialistic interest that brought the Puritans

to the New World. Neither had they been driven out of England nor had they left in flight from persecution. They had entered into an explicit covenant with God in the formation of a civil and ecclesiastical social body. Miller (1956, p. 5) asks: "What terms were agreed upon in this covenant? Winthrop could say precisely . . . a pure Biblical polity set forth in full detail in the New Testament . . . a political regime, possessing power, which would consider its main function to be the erecting, protecting, and preserving of this form of polity. This due form would have, at the very beginning of its list of responsibilities, the duty of suppressing heresy, of subduing or somehow getting rid of dissenters—of being, in short, deliberately, vigorously, and consistently intolerant."

Miller (1939) elaborates at great length concerning the implications of the covenant doctrine for the Puritan moral and social order. The Puritans were bound, first, to God through a Covenant of Grace which signifies the way God recognizes the salvation imparted to those foreordained to receive divine, saving grace. Second, they were bound together as a body of "visible saints" who, having grace, were knit together in the form of a congregation. Those so bound had great authority, not only in religious but in social affairs, to call and ordain ministers, to rule on the membership of the congregation, to discipline, admonish, and, if need be, excommunicate. Third, as Ahlstrom (1961, pp. 241–42) notes: "Beyond church affairs the covenant became normative as a means of ordering civil affairs. . . . What all this meant in a practical sense was that Puritans thought about economic, political, and social problems in extraordinarily corporate terms. The Church consequently directed its attention not only to the problems of the individual before God but to the state before God."

In principle, therefore, the design of Puritan social organization captures many of the essential components Durkheim saw in a "religious society." Recall his statement (Durkheim 1951, p. 159): "Now, a religious society cannot exist without a collective *credo* and the more extensive the *credo* the more unified and strong the society. For it does not unite men by an exchange and reciprocity of services, a temporal bond of union which permits and even presupposes differences, but which a religious society cannot form. It socializes men only by attaching them completely to an identical body of doctrine and socializes them in proportion as this body of doctrine is extensive and firm."

Though status according to the Puritan formula was ascribed and fairly well fixed at birth, the covenant doctrine also involved the implicit idea of contract. "Men should obey civil laws . . . not merely because the rules were right but because the men themselves had agreed to obey them" (Miller 1939, p. 429). The idea of contract as interpreted by the Divines had a very narrow meaning and shows in one sense an early recognition of the extreme vulnerability of a theocracy in a frontier situation. Contractu-

alism as applied in these early contexts was almost a "theoretical trap, a ruse for convincing men that they were engaged to support whatever learned ministers and magistrates could show was just, right, and honest" (Miller 1939, p. 429). It testifies to how unsure the theologians and magistrates were of the extent to which their utopian order could be maintained in terms of religious devotion alone. As Miller (1939, pp. 430–31) observes:

> the contractual idea presented priceless opportunities to inspire in men an energetic devotion to orthodoxy and to provide the state with a clear right to punish heresy and sin as well as crime and injustice. . . . They [the Divines] could hardly have realized the extent to which they were testifying that theology had lost its self-confidence, that even they, for all their religious devotion, were no longer ready to rest their case solely upon faith. They had to secure the aims of faith by providing that men had rationally consented to them in a covenant, and that magistrates and ministers were to expound them by logic. They believed they had thus shown the findings of reason to be one with the tenets of faith. They could not foresee, even in 1660, how short the time would be, once men had commenced thinking in this fashion, until the findings of reason would suffice of themselves, until the compact and the deductions of logic would provide the content of political wisdom, and the politicians would no longer be obliged to heed the requirements of faith.

Essential to the effective operation of "covenant theology" as a basis for social organization were several specific points of doctrine. Perhaps most important was the doctrinal emphasis upon the depravity of man, the sovereignty of God, and the ordering of the Church strictly in accordance with biblical prescriptions (Ahlstrom 1961, p. 239). Many of the searching questions always before the Calvinist, which Weber saw as the motivating force behind the Protestant ethic, hinged on these doctrines (Weber 1958). With the doctrines of the sovereignty of God and the depravity of man came the Puritan's perpetual anxiety concerning his state of grace. If such anxiety was not enough of a motivational spur to piety in an individual sense, these same doctrinal considerations instilled in the Calvinists an intense awareness of the total community and collective obligations. The sovereign God of the Calvinists was not removed from human and natural events. He was a living presence who had a considerable stake in the efforts of the colonists. After all, New England was to be the new capital of the Reformation. Any event—an attack of smallpox, a famine, an earthquake—was not merely an effect of natural law; it was an act of God initiated for intelligible reasons. "Afflictions do not just happen, but are sent from on high; public calamities are moral judgements upon a sinful people. . . . The moral status of people is therefore written out in events: if they are sinful, they suffer; if they are virtuous, they prosper" (Miller 1942, p. 41). Thus in these doctrines we find a basis for the extreme collective involvement of the Puritans and perhaps a basis for understanding why Puritan theology played into and helped maintain the mechanical social order. In a sense, every fast day or day of humiliation called in response to some collective calamity or event involved not only a period of intense self-scrutiny but an inventory of the collective conscience. As long as the harsh environmental realities

of frontier life coincided with the Calvinist's pervasive sense of depravity and sin, the pulpit could be used as an effective instrument of social control. As long as a collective identity could be maintained through a pervasive sense of mission, social solidarity within a fixed scheme of status could be obtained. As Miller states (1956, p. 6):

> A society dispatched upon an errand that is its own reward would want no other rewards; it could go forth to possess a land without ever becoming possessed by it; social gradations would remain eternally what God had originally appointed; there would be no internal contention among groups of interests, and though there would be hard work for everybody, prosperity would be bestowed not as a consequence of labor but as a sign of approval upon the mission itself. For once in the history of humanity . . . there would be a society so dedicated to a holy cause that success would prove innocent and triumph not raise up sinful pride or arrogant dissension.

But how long can any collective order maintain a condition of total mobilization? What happens to zeal when the wolf is no longer at the door? These are the next questions to which some attention must be given.

ADAPTATION AND THE ATROPHY OF PUBLIC MORALS

Noble designs, even if successfully incorporated, imply eventually a return to the ordinary. As Miller (1956, p. 14) states: "Many a man has done a brave deed, been hailed as a public hero, had honors and ticker tape heaped upon him—and then had to live, day after day, in the ordinary routine, eating breakfast and brushing his teeth, in what seems like protracted anticlimax. A couple may win their way to each other across insuperable obstacles, elope in a blaze of passion and glory—and then have to learn that life is a matter of buying groceries and getting the laundry done."

In a sense this clearly indicates the "glory" that awaited the Puritans in their theocratic "errand into the wilderness." The designs of the "errand" may have been, in Winthrop's terms, to "improve their lives to do more service to the Lord, to increase the body of Christ, and to preserve their posterity from the corruptions of this evil world"; but the exigencies of the situation contained other designs: the clearing of rocky pastures, the building of homes and communities, the providing of food, etc. Miller observes that hardly a generation had passed before the first sign of flagging zeal appeared among the people (Miller 1939, p. 471). John Cotton's disparaging comments on the younger generation in the 1640s was followed in the next three decades by a rising lament over "the waining of primitive zeal and the consequent atrophy of public morals" (Miller 1939, p. 471). These "jeremiads," or woeful exhortations concerning waning piety, grew to such a pitch by 1680 that the pulpits of New England churches rang with hardly anything else than these disclaimers (Miller 1939, p. 471).

What the divines did not realize was that the motivational spur they placed under the Puritans through their "jeremiads" was one of the primary

sources of the heightened instrumentality which ultimately worked against the form of social organization they sought to maintain: "the more the people worked in the right spirit, the more they transformed the society into something they never intended; the more diligently they labored on the frontier, in the field, in the counting-house or on the Banks of New-foundland, the more surely they produced what according to the standards of the founders was a decay of religion and a corruption of morals" (Miller 1942, p. 92). Weber saw the effects of the same phenomenon when he noted the extent to which Calvinists in England were motivated by anxiety over their state of "grace" into heightened instrumentality. This instrumentali-ty, accompanied by the extreme asceticism of the Calvinists, was to Weber the primary "push" behind the industrial revolution (Weber 1958). The effect of this self-abasement was similar in Calvinist New England. As Miller (1961, p. 337) suggests: "In Puritan New England we have a won-derful fusion of a political doctrine with the traditional rite of self abase-ment which, out of the colonial experience, had become not what it might seem on the surface, a failure of will, but a dynamo for generating action."

The analysis of these denunciations and woeful exhortations as they de-veloped through the years provides a neat chronology of the economic growth of New England. What were called sins are "recognizable as mani-festations of social change . . . [and] testify that, in the course of the cen-tury, by the very necessities of its predicament, the society became in-creasingly involved in the work of settlement . . . [and so] emerged by slow and insensible degrees into the now familiar outlines of a commercial and capitalist economy" (Miller 1942, p. 92).

Erikson (1966) similarly analyzes a number of concerted attempts to identify and denounce particular types of sins during this period as indi-cating heightened confusion and disorientation accompanying social change. The Antinomian controversy of 1636, the Quaker persecutions of the 1650s, and the witchcraft hysteria of 1692 were three more or less concerted at-tempts by the Puritans to "clarify their position in the world as a whole, to redefine the boundaries which set New England apart as a new experiment in living" (Erikson 1966). Similarly, the Great Awakening can be analyzed as another intense period of "boundary" redefinition arising from the in-creased functional incompatibility between the dominant religious institu-tion and the emergent economic and social substructure of a commercial and capitalistic New England. What are some of the more important strains inherent in this incompatibility revealed in the "jeremiads" and periods of concern with deviance which Erikson analyzes?

THE STRAINS APPARENT IN THE JEREMIADS

One of the more immediate strains apparent in the "jeremiads" was the threat of increased diversity and individualism to the established religious

order. These dispositions were hardly compatible with orthodoxy. This seems to be the main question at issue in the Antinomian controversy Erikson discusses. "Ann Hutchinson . . . seemed to advocate a kind of religious enthusiasm which was simply not possible among an orthodox company of saints. . . . If saints are joined to God by a covenant of grace, she asked, why is it necessary for them to accept the discipline of an earthly church? If God bestows His grace directly on the recipient in a *private* moment of conversion, why should that gift be ratified by an official of the church who himself may not be chosen?" (Erikson 1966, p. 85 [emphasis mine]).

A strain toward individualism and diversity demands increasing religious freedom and toleration. This seems to have been the main issue in the Quaker persecutions. "The Quakers challenged the very notion of an orthodox community by pressing for religious toleration as a basic civil right" (Erikson 1966, p. 108). Though neither the Antinomian controversy nor the Quaker persecutions had a profound or immediate effect on the amount of religious freedom and toleration allowed in New England, both confrontations acknowledged the widening gulf between reality and theory and signified that men were conscious of the discrepancy while they were unable to cope with it.

With increased individualism and diversity, another integrative problem that became quite visible in the traditional order was the basis of assigning rank: "When the advance of husbandry and the increase of trade was dispersing the society and dividing the classes, husbandmen and traders were constantly encouraged by the code of Puritanism itself to do exactly those things that were spoiling the Puritan commonwealth. They worked in their callings, and they created multiplicity instead of unity; they waited upon God for the reward and they became social climbers instead of subordinates; they took advantage of their opportunities and they brought about laissez-faire instead of sumptuary regulation" (Miller 1942, p. 92). Preachers and magistrates became less influential, while merchants and businessmen increased their influence. Class lines that once were drawn on the basis of inherited status were now being redrawn on the basis of wealth.

It is difficult to evaluate the importance of the witch trials of the 1690s. It is perhaps no accident that these hysterical reactions corresponded fairly closely to the period of most intense and widespread denunciation of Puritan "dead-heartedness" by the priests and scholars. Both may signify the agonized profession of a society that knew it was doing wrong, but could do nothing about it. Both were, in a sense, "social purgations, enabling men to make a public expiation for [or projection of] sins they could not avoid committing, freeing their energies to continue working with the forces of change" (Miller 1949, p. 92). Sin, like the witch, was in the very

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"fabric" of the society. By purging these impurities the Puritans could continue the business of colonization.

The fearful projections of the witch hunts were, in one sense, a prelude to the hysterical agonies of the Great Awakening. Both reactions were symptomatic of the increased psychological cost of attempts to integrate an old set of religious ideas with a new set of economic and social conditions. Both were symptomatic of increasing confusion and disorientation as the colonists were exposed to and entertained a bewildering array of new political ideas, economic alternatives, and ethical choices. It is in the dark that ghosts are seen. Similarly it is in the height of confusion and uncertainty about major political and social objectives that "the Devil [gave] up his more familiar disguises . . . [and] crouched in the very heart of the Puritan colony" (Erikson 1966, p. 158).[4] The significance of the Great Awakening in this context of confusion and disorientation is clearly illustrated by Heimert and Miller (1967, pp. xxiii–xxiv) when they state:

> When the revival erupted in 1740 it was almost everywhere greeted as the harbinger of the millennium, but the fervor of the welcome reflected decades of confusion and discontent within particular communities. Throughout the 1730's the church and religion had been struggling to preserve their social and intellectual primacy. . . . Congregations were racked by internal dissensions over ministerial qualifications or requirements of church membership, and communities were aroused by the manner in which the increasing wealth of the colonies was being divided. Whether or not they were directly involved in the pursuit of gain, or caught up in partisan animosity, nearly every American was confronted with a bewildering variety of personal options and ethical choices. Many questions were being asked, but few had been answered satisfactorily, not even in the minds of the clergy.

## POLITICAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXT OF THE REVIVAL

According to Gaustad (1957, p. 15), "by the time the eighteenth century was under way, New England had become a mixed multitude religiously. The dominant religious group, Congregationalism, was losing its monopoly and its integrity as was the dominant theology, Calvinism." Not only were Anglicanism, rationalism, deism, and the "new philosophy" making inroads into high places in New England, but pietistic and evangelical sects such as the Quakers and Baptists were gathering many converts among the lower classes, who, being satisfied neither by the "dead preachings" of the established church nor by Newtonian demonstrations that the design of the universe proved the existence of God, longed for a more emotional religion of the "affections" (see Hofstadter 1962). Also, the new "secular" politics of such editors as Benjamin Franklin and an increasing number of

[4] Though space does not allow detailed commentary in the context of this paper, Philip Slater has made a number of interesting comments on the process of displacement as it ties in with the religious evolution of small groups (Slater 1966, pp. 1–23, 80–81). Though in quite a different analytical context, many of his statements about displacement in groups seem quite relevant to a clearer understanding of the Salem witchcraft phenomenon. See also Geertz (1964, p. 64) for an interesting discussion of "loss of orientation" as it relates to the development of new ideologies.

political and economic pamphleteers not only challenged the authority of the church and its ministers but threatened the intellectual primacy of religion in political affairs (Heimert and Miller 1967, pp. xxiii–xxiv).

The implications of these changes in religion and politics suggest strongly that New England was rapidly moving from a state of homogeneous Puritanism to heterogeneous "colonialism." Erikson (1966, p. 157) expresses these changes well when he states:

> the Puritan planters could look around them and count an impressive number of accomplishments. Here was no record of erratic providence; here was a record of solid human enterprise, and with this realization, as Daniel Boorstin [1953] suggests, the settlers moved from a "sense of mystery" to a "consciousness of mastery," from a helpless reliance on fate to a firm confidence in their own abilities. This shift helped clear the way for the appearance of the shrewd, practical, self-reliant Yankee as a figure in American history, but in the meantime it left the third generation of settlers with no clear definition of the status they held as the chosen children of God.

Erikson's latter point is critical in considering the social import of the Awakening. The decline of piety prior to the Awakening seems to indicate that the bonds that once united members in a highly integrated religious community were greatly diminished, even those within the church assuming the more individualistic, rationalistic, colonial character. When one considers the implications of such a development for members of a church that originally was, to such a great extent, authoritarian in matters of doctrine and polity, so highly integrated, almost "mechanical" in solidarity, it seems that Durkheim's notions concerning the psychological conditions of egoistic suicide are highly relevant at this point (see Durkheim 1951, p. 158). Slowly cut off from the integrative bonds of a highly solidary religious community by a broad cultural transformation, the psychological impact of increased freedom could only be disturbing to the Puritans. After all, it was hard enough to face the possibility of nonelection while in the midst of a highly integrated religious community. Though it was possible to reduce this anxiety to a degree in heightened instrumentality necessitated by survival in a hostile environment, the immediate and urgent problems of survival were only temporary. Increased success in adaptation occurred concomitantly with a reduction in the binding legitimacy of the theocratic moral order—religion was becoming increasingly an individualistic concern. When this outlet of heightened instrumentality diminished as the immediate challenges of survival were overcome, the less immediate integrative concerns and needs began manifesting themselves. Thus, psychologically, the Great Awakening seems to be a manifestation of the integrative needs of isolated and confused individuals who have turned their thoughts back to the dreadful God of their forefathers in a desperate search for new direction in life. Socially, the integrative strains observable in the Awakening are an indication of the failure of the old moral order to relate to the emergent structural patterns of individualistic, heterogeneous colonialism. The end result

of the revival is a marked social transformation signifying the beginning of the establishment of a new moral order based on a differentiated, functionally interdependent system of social solidarity. Niebuhr (1961, pp. 30–31) has said similarly: "It may be that American Protestantism with all the evidence of antinomianism that abounds in it, like the Democracy with which it is associated, represents not so much a movement from order to disorder as one from the order of authority to the order of freedom, or from the mode of life primarily interested in structure to one primarily directed toward action."

## THE REVIVAL: AN AGENT OF SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION

How is it that the Great Awakening had, ultimately, an integrative effect in New England? After all, the revival broke the Congregational church wide open. Few churches were left totally unaffected by the heat of partisan controversy. Few people remained who did not have strong polarized attitudes concerning the psychological and social effects of the Awakening. As Gaustad (1957, p. 62) suggests:

> The anti-revivalists saw the Awakening as throwing New England into "Convulsion and Heat of Contention," as endorsing and encouraging persons who are "subversive of Peace, Discipline, and Government," as causing the churches to become "Dens of Disorder, Confusion, Noise and Clamour," and as sowing the seeds of "Discord, Intrusion, Confusion, Separation, Hatred, Variance, Emulations, Wrath, Strife, Seditions, Heresies, &c." The proponents of the revival, on the other hand, viewed this religious concern as a "Sweet Season" wherein "the Power, Grace & Love of God, are wonderfully displayed," as an occasion for "giving Glory to God . . . for his Grace . . ." and a means whereby "diverse thousands have been awakened."

To answer this question adequately some consideration must be given to the major institutional changes that came about as a result of this heated polarization and confrontation within the church.

One of the more immediate consequences of the revival was the seemingly unbounded seditious energies it released. "The most obvious of the pressures being resisted, as also one of the clearest consequences of the revival, was the challenge of the awakened to religious establishments" (Heimert and Miller 1967, p. xlvi). It is quite important to see not only the new directions to which these energies were pointing New England but also the kinds of changes that took place within the established church as it sought to strengthen itself to resist these pressures more effectively. Both the action and reaction are important in understanding how the Great Awakening facilitated the emergence of a new basis of solidarity.

As one reads the pronouncements of the leading proponents of the Awakening, such as Edwards and Tennent, and the arguments of the leading apologists of the establishment, such as Chauncey, it is clear that, at least on the surface, one of the main theological issues manifested in the Awakening was the place of emotion in the religious experience. Against Chauncey's

arguments[5] that the revivalists, more often than not, did great harm to the human constitution through the extreme emotional reactions involved in conversion experiences, Edwards[6] sought to delineate clearly the role of the "affections" in the religious experience (see Hofstadter 1962, pp. 55–81).

These debates have become quite important landmarks in the post-Awakening intellectual history of this country in that they show the extent to which Calvinists, whether proponents or opponents of the Awakening, were "casting off from the safe moorings of Puritan theology" and placing increased theological emphasis on the nature and will of man rather than the will of God (Heimert and Miller 1967, p. xlii). The revivalists, on the one hand, show the quickening of an evangelical disposition in the colonial mind. To Edwards, "man's happiness and his holiness were not achieved through study or by way of a mechanically progressive growth in wisdom, but from a heartfelt 'concent' to the 'divinity of divinity . . .' " (Heimert and Miller 1967, pp. xxxix–xl). By reacting to the "perversity of the passions" in the revival, its opponents, on the other hand, were to give new impetus to human reason as both a means of grace and the basis of human happiness. As Heimert and Miller (1967, p. xli) point out: "Such a rationalism, soon to be developed in the classrooms of Harvard and Yale as a general philosophy, was the distinguishing mark of the Liberal religion of eighteenth-century America. Over the next decades Liberals refined their scheme of salvation, in which 'time, exercise, observation, instruction,' and the improvement of one's 'capacities,' were the means of grace—and the only way, as well, for man to pursue his worldly happiness."

In addition to the theological and doctrinal revolution that the Awakening introduced, there were also new conceptions of the role of the church in society. One of the most conspicuous effects of the Awakening was the destruction of the traditional New England parish system (Gaustad 1957, p. 114). Separation of New Lights from established congregations led to a proliferation of new churches and conceptions of church organization. Out of the separating spirit of the revival "emerged the notion of voluntarism, the assumption that church affiliation was not an obligation to be forced on men but a privilege that must be freely exercised" (Heimert and Miller 1967, p. xlvii; see also Miller 1965, pp. 40–43). This new impulse toward voluntarism tended to undermine the very idea of an established church. "Members of the schismatic churches challenged the propriety of public taxation for ministerial support, violated the traditional rules of ordination and 'right hand of fellowship' association, protested against admitting the

[5] See Charles Chauncey, "Enthusiasm Described and Cautioned Against" (1742), and "Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion" (1743), in Heimert and Miller (1967, pp. 228–67, 291–305).

[6] See Jonathan Edwards, "The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit" (1741), and "A Treatise concerning Religious Affections" (1746), in Heimert and Miller (1967, pp. 204–14, 516–40).

unconverted to communion, objected vigorously to cold formal, 'dead' preaching, and practiced a spontaneous, zealous personal religion" (Gaustad 1957, p. 114). With the greater salience of "voluntarism" and religious liberty within the schismatic churches came a new emphasis on the power and role of the laity in church affairs. The church itself was not so much a structured hierarchy dictating and governing the will of the people as it "served" the community as it was a means of spreading the gospel. In a practical sense this meant that as the church became more an evangelical force it became less a political structure. Indeed, the New Lights viewed the true church as "transcending denominational, as well as local allegiances, and sought, during the Awakening, to create what the itinerant Samuel Finley called a 'party of Christ,' in which were united the gracious of whatever persuasion" (Heimert and Miller 1967, p. xxxiv). Lay exhortation and "itinerancy" were common practices among the New Lights, as among the "New Side" Presbyterians of Pennsylvania and the Middle Colonies earlier (Hofstadter 1962, pp. 66–69). The significance of this growing emphasis on voluntarism and on the laity can be overdrawn, but it does suggest that the Awakening was a basis for the liberation of the will of the common man from the authority of an established religious-political order and the growth of a broadening national consciousness. It also shows the emergence of a denominational pattern of church organization more consonant with a pluralistic democratic political order.

This emergent pattern of denominationalism, religious freedom, and pluralism can be more clearly seen in the latter half of the eighteenth century, when doctrinal differences and specific denominational loyalties of those within the evangelical fold became more established. There was a healthy competition among congregations for new converts, but there was also heated contention concerning what sainthood compels a man to do. Edwards, as the most important spokesman for the Calvinist "New Lights," believed that "God had called on his American people to will a reorganized society into being. For Edwards, the ultimate test of sainthood was whether a man was so acting as to 'promote God's historical program'" (Heimert and Miller 1967, p. l). Man does not wait passively for God to establish His kingdom; man wills it through a progressive improvement of the human condition. The Separates, on the other hand, felt there was little else for man to do but wait for God "to punish the wicked by intervening in history with the terrors of the Last Judgment" (Heimert and Miller 1967, pp. l–li). Out of this controversy between the New Lights and the Baptist, Moravian, and Separate sects was to come eventually a new unity at least among these schismatic churches, with Edwards's conception of "experimental" religion becoming the dominant expression of post-Awakening evangelical Protestantism. In the latter years of the eighteenth century the spirit of "experimental" religion, if not its theology, was to be captured by Wesley

and Asbury in the Methodist frontier revivals (Clebsch 1968, pp. 183–85; Hofstadter 1962, pp. 95–104). Still later it was captured by the Finneys, Beechers, and Moodys as they sought not only to renew individuals but to kindle the national spirit in the waves of revivals that swept the frontier intermittently through the first half of the nineteenth century (Miller 1965, pp. 10–11).

The unity that was captured in "experimental" religion and revivalism was a quickening sense of national purpose and involvement. This was not the uniformity of an orthodox company of saints, or even the imposed stability of an established denomination, but a heightened sense that people, churches, colonies, though diverse and indeed at times in contention, were still members of a single society. Crude, uncultured, anti-intellectual though it was,[7] the "religion of the heart" forged a new kind of solidarity out of diversity. Heimert and Miller (1967, p. lix) capture this well when they point out:

> these evangelicals argued not so much with each other as for the attention of the American mind and, in so doing, actually attested to the death of the old notion of religious uniformity, and the birth of a new ideal of unity. . . . The conception of religious liberty was so taken for granted that it had hardly ever to be stated. Therefore, in this open field, the very competition among the denominations . . . becomes, to the analytical eye, not so much a manifestation of individuality, [as] . . . an almost unconscious, method of maintaining some perverse form of solidarity.

Thus, in the Great Awakening and the other awakenings that followed it, we see the gradual emergence of a heterogeneous nationalism characterized by individualism, voluntarism, and democracy. The particular character of American religion as well as politics found its shape in the agonies of the Awakening. As Jamison (1961, p. 194) states: "From the Awakening the principles of individualism and religious voluntarism became ever more solidly entrenched in the American scheme of things, and the transference of these principles to the political order was the inevitable concomitant. The democratization of religion went hand-in-hand with the extension of political responsibility to the masses of Americans."

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

This analysis has attempted to explicate the general theoretical notion that "one generally conceivable source of tension and possible change in a social system is that which arises from a lack of fit between its core institutional order and its material substructure" (Lockwood 1964, p. 252). A number of specific points related to this observation have been made in this paper.

First, the adaptive requirements of the colonial environment in New England, along with certain doctrinal points of Calvinist theology, facili-

[7] See Hofstadter (1962) for a thorough documentation of this thesis.

tated the development of a set of social patterns and relationships that constituted an increasing threat to the existing religious-political order.

Second, a number of specific structural strains, among them strains between orthodoxy and individualism, between authority and voluntarism, between uniformity and religious toleration and diversity, were revealed in the "jeremiads" of the priests and scholars of the religious establishment and show the manner in which the emergent social patterns of the frontier situation threatened the imposed institutional order.

Third, the very use of the "jeremiads" (and the increased frequency of their use) testifies not only to the nature of the "strains" in the system but also to the diminished success of the spiritual and governing elite in maintaining the religious institutional order in the face of these new structural patterns.

Fourth, the fearful projections of the witch trials and the hysterical reactions of the Great Awakening indicate strongly that diminishing structural integration eventually contributed to extreme confusion and disorientation in the normative system of the colonists. Both movements were in a sense socio-emotional reactions in the face of this increased confusion.

Fifth, the Great Awakening was a social movement of such magnitude and extensity as to disrupt the traditional religious institution, facilitating the emergence of a functionally differentiated religious order more compatible with a behavioral disposition toward individualism, voluntarism, and democracy and a new institutional dominance residing in the polity and the economy.

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