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In the Wake of the Awakening: The Politics of Purity in Granville, 1754-1776

Gregory H. Nobles

In 1818, John Adams wrote that to understand the real meaning of the American Revolution, we must look into “the minds and hearts of the people” in the years before the war actually began — and partly, at least, to “a change in their religious sentiments.”¹ Adams was right to make special note of the importance of religion. Certainly in the largely rural, parochial, and disconnected society of the eighteenth century American colonies, the local church was of as much immediate concern to people as local government, and usually far more important to them than the doings of the Crown and royal governors. It is with good reason, then, that later historians have followed Adams’ lead by looking to the religious life of the colonies — especially the period during and after the Great Awakening — to find a barometer of popular thought. The Awakening, many argue, brought not only a heightened burst of religious activity and a new style of religious expression, but even more fundamental changes in the colonial character: new attitudes toward authority, a new sense of freedom and equality, even a new sense of self. As Richard Bushman has suggested, the awakened individual was “reborn. . . cleansed of guilt and joyful in the awareness of divine favor.” People so transformed were better able to challenge the leadership of their established rulers, to free themselves from the old restraints of society, and eventually (though perhaps unintentionally) to create a new society founded on a commitment to liberty, both religious and political.²

However encouraging it may be, this view of colonial religion tends to obscure the less “modern” aspects of religious sentiment. For many people the road from the Revival to the Revolution was not always so direct, nor was it travelled with such a reborn spirit of confidence and hope. Indeed, much of the recent work on American society in the eighteenth century, and notably that on New England, suggests that there was little reason for anyone to be especially confident or hopeful in the years between the Awakening and the Revolution. The traditional stability of community life was being under-

mined by a variety of economic and demographic changes, and in the minds of many people change seemed increasingly to breed uncertainty.³ In that sense it should not be surprising to see in the state of the church a reflection of the uncertain state of society. Religion was not just the domain of the minister, but of the community at large. Common people often used religion as a kind of social vocabulary, as a means of expressing their feelings about themselves and their immediate world. If we are to understand the significance of religion in the minds and hearts of pre-Revolutionary Americans, it is necessary to gauge religious sentiment not so much in terms of its unintentional contribution to the future — to the growth of pluralism or religious liberty, for instance — but in terms of a more conscious reflection on the present and past. In short, we must try to understand how people used religion in their own communities and on their own terms.

The purpose of this paper is to look closely at the religious life of one rural New England town, Granville, Massachusetts, in the two decades before the Revolution. Granville was settled just after the Great Awakening, and its church was formed, as one nineteenth century historian put it, “as a result of the preaching of George Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards.”⁴ Far from being “reborn . . . cleansed of guilt, and joyful,” however, the people of this post-Awakening town spent over twenty years torn by controversy over the admission standards of their church, going from Edwardsean to Stoddardean back again to Edwardsean practices. Implicit in this uncertainty over church purity, was also an uncertainty about the purity of the people themselves. The surviving church papers — an extensive collection of covenants, complaints, confessions, letters, and petitions written by members of the church — reveal a deep concern not just with theological distinctions, but with individual and collective behavior and with the symbolic role of the church in the community.⁵ People saw the church as an extension of themselves, and as they changed their church back to its old standards, so did they reveal a desire to change themselves. In that sense the religious concerns of the Granville residents suggest a more general insight into their minds and hearts on the eve of the Revolution; rather than striding hopefully into the future, they were trying almost desperately to restore part of the past.⁶

Granville was little more than a small country village in the 1750s, a new township in the remote southwest corner of Hampshire County. It had been settled largely by people from Durham, Connecticut, who had broken away from the Old Light ministry of Nathaniel Chauncy and had established a new church under the Reverend Moses Tuttle, a son-in-law of Jonathan Edwards. The Granville people eventually fell into a dispute with Tuttle over the ownership of some church land, and he was dismissed in 1752.⁷ But in 1754, even while they were without a permanent minister, the members of the church affirmed their commitment to Edwardsean religion and drew up a formal covenant for the church. “We agree,” they began, “that grace is of absolute necessity in order to a right Receiving the Lord’s Supper, and we find no Divine Rules for the rong receiving of it.” Without referring directly to Edwards,

they were nevertheless adopting the position he had lately espoused at Northampton — a return to the old standards of church membership and sacramental purity in which grace, one's personal conviction of conversion and salvation, would clearly distinguish the righteous from the rest. Lest anyone mistake their meaning or conviction, the Granville people pointedly denounced the theological compromises of New England's past: "As for that that is called the halfway covenant," they wrote, "we see no Scriptural warrant for it. . . As for the Stodarian principal we will have nothing to do with it."⁸

This firm declaration of principle put the Granville church clearly outside the dominant ecclesiastical norms of Hampshire County. By the 1750s most local ministers had little or no interest in reviving the spirit of Jonathan Edwards. Years earlier, of course, beginning with the "Surprising Work of God" Edwards described in Northampton in 1735 and rising again with the Great Awakening in 1740-41, Hampshire County had been the scene of intense and widespread religious revivals; indeed, the Great Awakening has traditionally been closely identified with Hampshire County. But by the mid-1740s the Awakening seemed to have burned itself out, and the county clergy watched it die with some degree of relief. Too often excitement had turned to excess, and the good order of both church and society had been threatened by the apparently ungoverned passions of the soul. Moreover, standards of spiritual purity had too often been used as a means of censuring both ministers and magistrates. In 1745 sixteen Hampshire clergymen joined in urging George Whitefield to stay away from their neighborhood. They accused Whitefield of being "deeply ting'd with Enthusiasm" and of exhibiting "a very censorious spirit by Slandering the Ministers and Colleges in this Country. . . [and] having caus'd Division and Offences contrary to the Doctrine which we have learn'd of Christ."⁹ A few years later, in 1750, members of the Hampshire Association of Ministers played a crucial role in driving Edwards away from Northampton. Edwards himself had grown disenchanted with the Awakening, seeing too the widespread evidence of emotional excess and false religion. But rather than reject the revival he sought to renew it. His return to the old standards of church purity and strict admission practices represented an attempt to recreate a sense of spiritual urgency in his people, to force them again to look deep into their souls. For most of his ministerial colleagues, however, Edwards' new position seemed only to bring up the old problems of social discord, generating divisions among people and attacks on their leaders. Rather than accept Edwards' theological conservatism, then, they leaned toward the greater social conservatism of his grandfather Stoddard. By the early 1750s most ministers in the county made quite clear their antipathy toward trying to distinguish sinner from saint; they offered admission to all and hoped to keep everyone united under the clear leadership of ministerial authority.¹⁰

Even at Granville, in fact, the adherence to Edwards' strict standards did not have a long life span. For reasons that are not altogether apparent, the

church changed completely in 1756, only two years after the framing of the original covenant. A church meeting in October of that year declared that "all the Votes formerly Past by this Chh relating to Discipline Shall be Null & have no binding influence into our after Proceedings." The insistence on proof of grace and sacramental purity seems to have been discarded, and the church began to admit new members without any testimony of spiritual rebirth.¹¹ Perhaps in a growing town like Granville the influx of new settlers created pressures on the church to accept saved and unsaved alike, if only to deal with the realities of population. Or perhaps the townspeople, who had already gone several years without a settled minister, simply found it impossible to find anyone who would agree to be minister to a church according to Edwardsean practices, especially if doing so meant becoming an outcast among the other members of the county clergy. Whatever the reason, by October of 1756 the church had adopted new principles of government, and within the next two months it had secured a new minister.

The new minister was a young Yale graduate, Jedediah Smith of the class of 1750. Like most small town ministers, he did not leave a large collection of published sermons and tracts by which we can judge his mind or his method. One young observer, however, wrote many years after Smith's death that he was

an evangelical preacher. . . He used to make at times, considerable impression on my mind. He used zealously to call upon the youth to remember their Creator. He would preach to us the dreadful state of the damned, and the necessity of being born of God. . . I remember that Mr. Smith was very pointed against vice and immorality.

But for all his emphasis on vice, immorality, and damnation, Smith was an evangelical preacher of the Stoddardean stripe, and it was with that understanding that he took the job at Granville. Described in general as a man of "remarkable piety, pleasantness, and affability," he seemed altogether a good choice to lead the church in its newly chosen direction.¹²

During the two decades of his tenure, however, Reverend Smith would need all the piety, pleasantness, and affability he could muster. From the beginning of his ministry the Granville church was marked by division, dissent, and a growing uneasiness in the town over the purity of the church and its people. The old concerns were not dismissed as easily as the old covenant. Between 1756 and 1776 the church underwent a long period of uncertainty and eventual reversal, coming back full circle to its original covenant of 1754 and the Edwardsean emphasis on strict standards and sacramental purity. Far more than a mere doctrinal dispute, this transformation bespoke a process of intense communal introspection, almost a kind of purgation of the collective soul.

The first problems came immediately with the change in the church cove-

nant in 1756. In October of 1757 a group of five dissidents brought their complaints to Reverend Smith and the church: "Although we Covenanted together to walk according to the [Cambridge] Platform," wrote the unhappy members, "now we think you have warpt off in Some Points." They went on to list several grievances, chief among them the lax method of admission that had so recently been adopted by the church. Two other complaints had less to do with the new practices of the church than with the special concerns of two spiritually awakened souls. Thomas Gillet expressed his annoyance that "the Chh suffers not the Brethren to use their gifts in Publick." Gillet was doubtless something of a lay exhorter, and he felt constrained by the church's unwillingness to hear him. And if his special talents were not enough, his wife Elisabeth was said to have

heard a Voice which seised her mind as the Voice of Christ making such Discoveries to her that She was perswaded that the Seperates or those so called was of Christs Chosen Number.

In general, however, the position of the five dissidents was that they felt themselves spiritually saved and therefore deserving of sacraments they would not extend too readily to other questionable church members. They made it clear that in breaking the covenant of 1754 the church had undermined its own purity, and if they were to save their own they would have to break with the church.¹³

The reference in the church papers to "Seperates or those so called" brought a disturbing element into the controversy. Throughout New England "Seperate" had become a term of extreme disapproval, even slander. Because Separates put personal purity before church unity, because they set themselves apart from their apparently unsaved neighbors, they seemed to endanger the order and harmony of the community. Moreover, their self-righteous assurance and unfettered religious intensity led them to attack established authorities on the grounds of spiritual impurity, thus reviving the most disruptive aspects of the Awakening. The most common words associated with Separates were "arrogant" and "disorderly," but there were also more imaginative descriptions. Reverend John Ballantine of Westfield referred to the Separates in the region as "grievous wolves. . . [who] do not spare ye flock when ye shepherd is with them." Reverend Edward Billing at Greenfield compared Separates to the Familists and other radical sects of the Reformation. A more scathing critique came from members of the Congregational church at Ashfield, who described the Separate group in this community as

a receptacle for scandalous and disorderly christians. . . a sink for some of the filth of Christianity in this part of the country. . . Thus pride, vanity, prejudice, impurity, & uncharitableness seem to have originated & supported a sect so pure they cannot commune with ordinary Christians. . . these people have no stability, and their covenants no perpetuity.

Even Jonathan Edwards was careful to dissociate himself from these extreme people who had distorted both his doctrine and his intent.¹⁴

Had the dissidents at Granville seemed only “scandalous & disorderly,” it might have been easier for the church to dismiss them with all the disdain reserved for Separates elsewhere. Certainly Thomas and Elisabeth Gillet, with their claims of exceptional powers of the spirit, could be identified with the more irrational side of Separatism and perhaps assigned to the lunatic fringe. But the main figure among the Granville dissidents was one of the most prominent men of the town — David Rose, leader of the first group of settlers from Connecticut, selectman, deacon of the church. Deacon Rose was not a man to be dismissed lightly, nor was he a man to dismiss his fellow townspeople lightly. Though his break with the church cost him his positions as selectman and deacon, he remained closely tied to the life of the town. Indeed, his own wife continued to be a member in good standing of the Granville church up to the time of her death in 1775. Rose would normally send his servant, a young black man named Lemuel Haynes, to accompany Mrs. Rose to church, and when they returned the erstwhile deacon would get Haynes to report on the doings at Reverend Smith’s church. Moreover, Rose often served as a kind of informal counselor for many people who sought his advice on secular and religious matters or perhaps sought his solace in times of grief. In a sense David Rose was not “separate” from the town at all. He remained a respected and useful member of the community, a keen observer of its church, and a visible reminder of its past.¹⁵

Perhaps because of the prominence of David Rose, the church at first dealt rather gently with the dissidents. On the one hand the church insisted that there was “no weight in those grievances or allegations” of its having unjustly deviated from the original covenant: the dissident members had been present for the vote on changing church policy, and even if they had voted against the change they were still bound by the collective decision. What was done. But recognizing the sensitive and serious nature of the disagreement, the church still agreed to send a committee to “take Some further Pains” in bringing the unhappy five back under the good governance of the church. Indeed, the tone of the church seemed remarkably conciliatory, full of kind words and gentle reminders of duty. In a surprising admission of guilt, the Granville church even accepted blame for “so much Coldness deadness Slothfulness & Ereligion among us.” Their past conduct may have been “Sensurable,” but they only asked the absent members to be tolerant. The new covenant of the church had bound members to avoid “Sinfull Stumbling Blocks & Contentions,” and in light of that agreement the Separates were urged to “return with meekness humility faith & true repentance in the temper & order of the Gospel to your Lot & standing in the house of God according to your Covenant in which you did Solemnly Engage.”¹⁶

By making explicit the tension between purity and unity the church seemed to go to the heart of the problem of Separatism. For those remaining in the

church the communal integrity of that body must have precedence, and a covenant denouncing "Sinfull Stumbling Blocks & Contentions" only served to underscore the importance of maintaining order. But for the separating members it was a question of integrity of another sort. Faced with an institution that had deviated from its earlier standards into coldness, deadness, and slothfulness, they could only see salvation outside the church. In their terms, any conflict between personal and institutional standards would have to be considered irreconcilable. They refused to return to the church.

The church then returned to them, but this time with a much less conciliatory tone. A second letter to the dissidents avoided any mention of guilt on the part of the church and issued a truculent warning. The regular church members accused the five of "Sins of ignorance Error & Ereligion . . . the Conterary Spirit of Censoriousness Contempt Jalousy" and urged them to avoid the sin of arrogance, "Judging not Lest ye be Judged." "We do also Give it in Charge," the letter concluded, "that you Deseist from all Contempt Discord Debate rangling & Dispising Your Brethren." Although the letter warned of "Strong Delusions & . . . False Doctrines," explicit questions of doctrine were not precisely the point. Here again it was more the stance of the Separates, the "Contempt, Discord, Debate, rangling, & Dispising," that disturbed their fellow townspeople. When the Separates still resolutely refused to be brought back into the church, the church finally decided to keep them out, formally and for good. In May of 1763 the five dissident members were excommunicated.¹⁷

For the Granville church itself, however, the excommunication of the Separates hardly brought an end to its troubles. The questions they had raised could not be altogether shut out by the meeting house doors. During the next few years the people of Granville repeatedly turned inward to the church to examine their standards of behavior, both personal and communal, and they had little reason to be content with what they saw. The earlier admission that the church was guilty of "Coldness deadness Slothfulness & Ereligion" may simply have been a ploy to cajole the Separates into returning. But for some people it increasingly became a dismaying possibility.

For a few people, in fact, the Separates posed too sharp a contrast to ignore. When they examined the behavior of their church toward the Separates, they began to feel uneasy and even guilty; the church had formally undermined its own unity and rejected one of its most respected members. A group of church members wrote a letter lamenting "our Conduct and Dealings with our Christian Brethren call'd the Seperates." They had acted harshly "without Sufficent grounds," and now they felt compelled to "ask forgiveness of God and our Censur'd and all Christian Brethren and everyone whom we have Griev'd or offended." Several others admitted they thought the Separates "more eminently in the truth & order of the Gospel than their Censurers." Having reached that conclusion they went one step further and declared that "we think it our Duty to Join with to assist Strengthen and build up in the

cause of Jesus Christ with them.”¹⁸ It is impossible to say exactly how many people actually broke with the Granville church in the 1760s to join with Deacon Rose and his followers — perhaps a dozen or two — but certainly some people in Granville were beginning to see in the Separates a comforting alternative to the established Granville church.

Even those who refused to go the way of the Separates had good reason to question the state of their church. It was becoming both the source and the scene of local conflict. By the mid-1760s, Granville was no longer a small community but rapidly becoming a good-sized and fairly prosperous town: between 1750 and 1765 the town had grown from around 300 people to 678, and during the next decade it would grow by another two-thirds, to over a thousand; by the time of the Revolution it was the fifth largest town in Hampshire County and ranked sixth on the county tax list.¹⁹ With this steady growth and expansion came obvious signs of strain on the corporate unity of the town, most of which tended to touch on the affairs of the church. There was, for instance, the almost inevitable struggle over the location of church services. At the direction of the town meeting, Reverend Smith began holding half of the services in the eastern part of town, half in the western, and in the end, hardly anyone seemed satisfied with the result. On a more individual level the church also served as a kind of small claims court for personal quarrels, the main forum for dispute and discipline; throughout the 1760s it heard a sizeable number of cases dealing with a wide variety of social transgressions as Granville residents brought each other before the church to settle bad debts or personal scores, to expose lies and to correct slander. One minor town official was forced to deliver to the church a three-part confession for drinking too much, committing fornication, and falsifying tax records — all, presumably, on different occasions. Confessions of fornication were in fact fairly common, and one town resident even suggested that Reverend Smith and his wife had had a child “too soon.”²⁰ Taken together, the various complaints and confessions recorded in the church papers describe a community beset by conflict, deceit, backbiting, and immorality — in short, a fairly common New England town of the mid-eighteenth century, but still one that was falling far short of the ideals of harmony and love. Perhaps in coming before the church the people of Granville showed that they could be contrite as well as contentious. But in doing so they also made their private failings a matter of public concern, a reminder to the other members of the church of the spotted purity of the community.

Eventually, the major concern of the church came to center on a single figure, Luke Hitchcock, one of the rising young men of the town. He became almost a symbol of Granville’s troubled state. Hitchcock was not one of the original settlers of the town, but by the late 1750s he had become perhaps the town’s most prominent citizen, chosen selectman in 1758 when he was just thirty years old, then deacon of the church a year later.²¹ In a sense he replaced David Rose as the single leader of both church and town government. Rose — the founder, deacon, almost the patriarch of the town — cut himself

off from official leadership when he broke with the church. Hitchcock — sixteen years younger than Rose and apparently somewhat more relaxed in his religious views — seemed more to embody the kind of youthful, tolerant leadership a steadily growing town like Granville might need in the years ahead. But in the years ahead a growing number of doubts about his character both as a leader and as a man led the people of Granville to turn away from him and look back to the standards they had known in the past under the leadership of David Rose.

It was primarily Hitchcock's position as leader in the church that caused the greatest difficulty. He had been only one of four candidates seeking to fill the deacon's post vacated by David Rose, and even though he finally won the honor, there were those who questioned his ability. Hitchcock became involved in an argument with one of the losing candidates, James Burt, and accused his opponent of having "the Spirit of the Divil In Carnate" in him and being "Led about by a Spirit of Delusion." Finally a council of neighboring ministers had to be called in to settle the matter, after which both Burt and Hitchcock apologized and confessed to the church their sins of slander and contentiousness.²²

But if James Burt seemed willing to drop the matter, his wife was not. Margaret Burt became the champion of her husband, the scourge of Luke Hitchcock. Throughout the 1760s she kept up a steady attack on Hitchcock, accusing him not only of slandering her husband but also of saying unkind things about other people, making a false confession to the church, and generally being a man of questionable honor. In 1762 the charges brought against Hitchcock by Mrs. Burt were dismissed by the church with the comment "no proof."²³ At that time, of course, the church was directing its energies to dealing with the Separates, and Deacon Hitchcock was no doubt seen more as a leader against the dissidents than as a source of disorder himself. It was not until the Separates were excommunicated, after the people of the town had begun to have doubts about their actions, that the more specific doubts about Luke Hitchcock became widespread. Margaret Burt renewed her attack in 1765, and other people seemed to join her. Several people accused Hitchcock of lying about one thing or another, and a few simply refused to continue taking communion with him.²⁴ Questions about his personal standards of purity had clearly spread beyond the Burt family and were beginning to divide the church.

In the summer of 1769, Deacon Hitchcock was again before the church for a public hearing. There were eight charges brought against him, mostly questions about his personal honesty and integrity. It was said, for instance, that he had claimed to have paid off an old debt that was still outstanding, that he had sold some wool that was not his to sell, and that he had failed to pay his school taxes for two or three years. There even arose some old complaints dating from his selection as deacon in 1759 — that he had not told the church he knew his wife to be "intemperate in using Liquor," or that he in private con-

versation contradicted and renounced his confession for slandering James Burt. Once again, no one was able to prove all the charges, but his reputation was severely damaged. Several people in town began circulating a letter called "Advice to Dcn Luke Hitchcock to Leave the office of a Deacon." For a man of such dubious integrity to hold the highest lay office in the church seemed only to be another stain on the purity of the congregation as a whole, and it was evident the church would continue to be torn by self-doubt as long as Luke Hitchcock remained deacon. He understood the weight of the sentiment against him. In July of 1769, complaining that he felt the church members in "Error and Transgression" in their attitude toward him, Hitchcock nonetheless resigned his office.²⁵

But the resignation of Luke Hitchcock was apparently not enough to cleanse the troubled spirit of the Granville church. In November of 1769, just a few months after Hitchcock stepped down, the church made a remarkable reversal: "after some debate the Chh Voted that all Baptised Persons only outwardly Clean & Doctrinally taught may not own their Covenant & have their Children Baptised." The vote was to give up the Halfway Covenant. Several months later the church made its position even clearer when it denied admission to a man and woman recently moved to town "because he was of the Stodardian principles." Finally in August of 1770 the church affirmed its objections to Stoddardean principles by voting to reject the doctrine of the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance; it also voted to reject the application for admission of anyone who believed differently.²⁶

Quite simply, the Granville church was returning to the position it had held some fifteen years before. The strict Edwardsean standards of the covenant of 1754 had been dropped by the church in 1756, but once again they seemed necessary and desirable. The initial controversy over adopting the more relaxed standards of Stoddardeanism had destroyed the unity of the church, and the excommunication of the dissidents left a lingering uneasiness among many in the church. Throughout the 1760s the repeated public confessions of sin and the growing concern over the sins of Deacon Hitchcock only increased that sense of uneasiness. It may have seemed likely to many that the Separates had been right after all. There is no certain evidence incidentally, that David Rose and his followers had any direct involvement in forcing the shift in church policy; they remained apart from the church and took no part in its problems. It is more likely, however, that they had an indirect influence, primarily because they did remain apart. Seeing the Separates and their unbending standards of purity on the outside, and seeing their own questionable purity on the inside, a growing number of people evidently began to weigh the differences and feel the need for a change: they could not purify themselves automatically, of course, but in light of their recent tarnished state, they could at least make the symbolic gesture of reasserting the stricter ways of the past.

It is important to note that the reversal of the Granville church was brought about by the church members without the leadership of their minister or

other members of the county clergy. Indeed, such a change was a serious blow to Reverend Smith, who had upheld Stoddardean practices throughout his ministry at Granville. The people of Granville had written their original Edwardsean covenant in 1754 when they were without a minister, and their return to the standards of that covenant in 1769 represented open opposition to Smith; it was clearly a movement of the pew and not the pulpit. When Smith refused to change with the congregation, he became almost an outcast in his own church, allied only with a handful of disgruntled members — one of whom was the disgraced deacon, Luke Hitchcock. In 1771, Reverend Smith and his allies were accused of having “so departed from the Congregational Platform & their covenant with this Chh as that they are worthy of Discipline & rejection from the Chh upon non repentance.” Smith himself was singled out for preaching sermons that were “not Sound & too much Crouding upon the Chh.” There were also questions, as the complaint delicately put it, about “Some things that he may have Said more Privately that may be Matters of uneasiness.”²⁷

After 1769, Reverend Smith never again lived in peace with his church. During the early 1770s he barely managed to retain his position, occasionally having to turn to his colleagues in the Hampshire Association of Ministers for support. By 1776, however, the growing dissatisfaction with his doctrinal beliefs was matched by an equal dissatisfaction with his political beliefs. Smith was reputed to be a loyalist, and that proved too much for his people to bear. The fragile balance he had maintained tipped against him; he was dismissed and by April of 1776, he was on his way out of town. He and his family joined a group of other loyalists heading for the Mississippi River, where they would be part of a new colony near Natchez. But during the trip south Jedediah Smith became delirious with fever, jumped overboard, and nearly drowned. Soon after the company reached Natchez, Smith died, never quite recovered from his fever, perhaps never quite recovered from the painful events of the past few years in Granville.²⁸

The title of this paper suggested that there was somehow a “politics of purity” in pre-Revolutionary Granville. It is necessary to put that notion into a proper context, to define what was “political” about the controversy in the Granville church. Certainly the sad fate of Jedediah Smith suggests a tempting possibility to see the religious divisions in the late 1760s as clear indicators of political divisions in the Revolution. Reverend Smith, after all, was driven from town partly for his religious views, partly for his politics. But beyond Smith there does not seem to have been a clear loyalist faction in Granville, certainly not one based on religious beliefs. Even the much-maligned Luke Hitchcock joined the patriot cause and eventually died while in military service. Indeed, though he was pressured out of office as deacon in 1769, Hitchcock continued to serve as selectman until he went off to war, and he was also a member of the town’s new revolutionary committees between 1774 and 1776.²⁹ His career alone suggests a kind of separation between the crisis in the church and the politics of the town. There may well have been strong per-

sonal animosities that emerged from the religious controversies of the 1760s, but the troubles of the church did not appear to spill over significantly into the town meeting. In a strict sense, then, the church controversy was not "political." It did not define clear factions that continued to stand at odds in the secular affairs of the town or the province.

It is only on a broader, more general level that the religious history of the Granville church takes on some political significance. To some extent we have to understand the religious sentiments of the people as part of a communal identity, perhaps a collective frame of mind: if the Granville people gained anything from their difficulties in the 1760s, it was an acute sensitivity to what the state of their church implied about the spiritual health of the community. Indeed, the focus of the local unrest on the church suggests a kind of moral crisis during the years before the Revolution, a crisis that could only be corrected in the church. In 1756, when the church dropped the Edwardsean practices on which it had been founded, it committed itself to a covenant calling for an end to "Sinfull Stumbling Blocks & Contentions." In a growing town constantly receiving new inhabitants, the old standards seemed too harsh, too restrictive, too divisive, and the people of the church adopted a more liberal and tolerant stance designed to preserve social harmony. The error charged against the separating dissidents, in fact, was not simply their adherence to an unacceptable doctrine, but the "Conterary Spirit of Censoriousness Contempt Jalosy" their standards could — and apparently did — create. But as the people of Granville fell into wranglings and contentions of their own throughout the 1760s, they seemed ultimately to question their own standards of behavior, especially those of their spiritual leaders. They looked to their church almost as if a change in the church could bespeak a commitment to change in the people themselves. The rejection of the Stoddardean system and the return to the Edwardsean position in 1769 was not so much a sophisticated theological statement as a general admission of collective doubt and error. People sought to reverse the history of the town and restore at least the form and standards they had known years earlier. In short, they looked to correct the problems of the present by reaffirming the virtues of the past.

It was with that sense of the past that the people of the town entered the Revolution. In 1774 they framed a carefully worded letter to the Boston Committee of Correspondence that opened with a clear declaration that "King George III is our rightful sovereign and king, and . . . we will at all times bear all allegiance due unto him." The letter went on to point out that the acts of a devious Parliament were threatening to "perplex and enslave this his Majestys free and Loyal province. . . [and] to Alienate the Affections of his Majestys faithful Subjects."³⁰ Such a statement of loyalty and duty to the king was, of course, a standard line of Whig argument, sometimes to be dismissed cynically as pure political rhetoric. But for the people of Granville such forms of expression were not totally disingenuous, but had at least some basis in common experience. Just as people could look back to the theological standards of the past in hopes of correcting the problems of their own community, so could

they look back to the traditions of king and constitution to overcome the corruption of political society as a whole. The Revolution, of course, eventually provided an altogether different solution. But when we look, as Adams suggested, for the transformation in the minds and hearts of the American people, we must be aware of the fundamentally conservative mentality involved. Especially in the rural towns distant from the political world of Boston, the initial impulse was not to create a new society based on new ideas and structures, but to try to recall the old forms of the past.

NOTES

1. John Adams to Hezekiah Niles, 1818; quoted in Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, 1967), 160.
2. Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (New York, 1970), 183-232. Bushman is perhaps the most emphatic in pointing to the origins of liberalism in the post-Awakening period, but others share his point of view to a degree. Both Bailyn in *Ideological Origins*, 246-272, and William G. McLoughlin in *New England Dissent 1630-1833: The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge, 1971) argue that the experience of Separates and Baptists in the post-Awakening years contributed to the emergence of religious liberty in post-Revolutionary society. The now-classic work connecting the Awakening and the Revolution is, of course, Alan Heimert's *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, 1966) in which Heimert sees the roots of American radicalism in the form and content of New Light preaching. Heimert's argument, however, is tempered by a number of qualifications and complexities and is, therefore, somewhat more cautious than that of Bushman.
3. See, for instance, Philip J. Greven, Jr., *Four Generations: Population, Land and Family in Colonial Andover, Massachusetts* (Ithaca, 1970); Robert A. Gross, *The Minutemen and Their World* (New York, 1976); and Kenneth A. Lockridge, "Social Change and the Meaning of the American Revolution," *Journal of Social History*, 6 (1973), 403-439; for the South, perhaps the most interesting and stimulating recent work is that of Rhys Isaac, who describes in a very convincing manner the significance of religion as a reflection of social strains in pre-Revolutionary Virginia: see "Religion and Authority: Problems of the Anglican Establishment in the Era of the Great Awakening and the Parsons' Cause," *William and Mary Quarterly*, xxx, no. 1 (January, 1973), 3-36; and "Evangelical Revolt; The Nature of the Baptists' Challenge to the Traditional Order in Virginia, 1765 to 1775," *William and Mary Quarterly*, xxxi, no. 3 (July, 1974), 345-368.
4. Harold Field Worthley, *An Inventory of the Records of the Particular (Congregational) Churches of Massachusetts Gathered 1620-1805* (Cambridge, 1970), 246-248.
5. The church papers are part of the collection in the History Room of the Granville Library. Because each item is not catalogued or numbered separately, references in subsequent footnotes will be to the folder in which the particular document is kept, and when possible to the title of the document itself. I am grateful to Mrs. Helena Duris for granting me access to the papers, which are not public records; I am also grateful to Ted Hammett for bringing the Granville collections to my attention.
6. Cf. Richard D. Brown, *Revolutionary Politics in Massachusetts: The Boston Committee of Correspondence and the Towns, 1772-1774* (Cambridge, 1970), esp. chapter 5.

7. Albion B. Wilson, *History of Granville, Massachusetts* (n.d.), 27ff, 164. The "Old Light" designation for Chauncy is in Franklin Bowditch Dexter, *Biographical Sketches of the Graduates of Yale College* (New York, 1903) I, 9-11. The reference to the spirit of Whitefield and Edwards in Granville is in Alfred Minot Copeland, *A History of Hampden County, Massachusetts* (1902) III, 260.
8. "Some general rules agreed upon . . ." (1754) in Folder "Church Covenants, Reports, Constitutions, Reports of Councils, 1755-1885," Granville Library.
9. *The Testimony of the North Association in the County of Hartford . . . And An Address From some of the Ministers in the county of Hampshire, to the Rev. Mr. Whitefield* (Boston, 1745) 5-6; for a discussion of the Hampshire Clergy in the years following the Awakening see Mary Catherine Foster, "Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1729-1754: A Covenant Society in Transition," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan (1967) 102ff; and Gregory H. Nobles, "Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts, 1740-1775: The Rural West on the Eve of the Revolution," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Michigan (forthcoming) Chapters 2 and 3.
10. The works on Edwards and his dismissal are numerous. The most detailed nineteenth century works on the affair are Sereno E. Dwight, *The Life of President Edwards* (New York, 1830); and James Russell Trumbull, *History of Northampton From Its Settlement in 1654* (2 vols., Northampton, 1902). Both of these works — the two standard biographies of Edwards, Perry Miller, *Jonathan Edwards* (New York, 1949) and Ola E. Winslow, *Jonathan Edwards, 1703-1758* (New York, 1940) also give a good summary of the events and the issues. More recently, two unpublished works have also given considerable attention to the Edwards dismissal; see Mary C. Foster, "Hampshire County," and Patricia Juneau Tracy, "Jonathan Edwards, Pastor; Minister and Congregation in the Eighteenth-Century Connecticut Valley," Ph.D. dissertation, University of Massachusetts (1977).
11. Reply to complaints by David Rose and Nathan Barlow, October, 1757, in Folder "Church Covenants, Reports . . .," Granville Library.
12. Timothy Mather Cooley, *Sketches of the Life and Character of the Rev. Lemuel Haynes, A.M.* (New York, 1837), 42-43. The biographical material on Rev. Smith in Dexter, *Yale Graduates* II, 240-41, seems to have been drawn largely from Cooley's book.
13. Reply to complaints of David Rose and Nathan Barlow, October, 1757; Reply to complaints of Thomas Gillet, March 27, 1760 (?) and Elisabeth Gillet, March 26, 1761 (?) in Folder "Church Covenants, Reports . . .," Granville Library.
14. *Journal of the Reverend John Ballantine, 1737-1774*, Westfield Athenaeum, entry for May 3, 1763; Diary of Edward Billing, Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association Library; Massachusetts Archives XIV, 596-608. The best general surveys of the Separate movement are C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* (New Haven, 1962) and McLoughlin, *New England Dissent*.
15. Cooley, *Life of Lemuel Haynes*, 30-40.
16. Untitled report, April, 1761, in Folder "Church Covenants, Reports . . ."; "First Admonition Sent to Separates" in Folder "The Church and the Separatists, 1763-1769," Granville Library.
17. "Second Admonition to Separates," "Method of Dissolving the Union Between us & the Separates," May, 1763, in Folder "The Church and the Separatists, 1763-1769," Granville Library.
18. Undated letter in Folder "The Church and the Separatists, 1763-1769."

19. Joseph B. Felt, *Collections of the American Statistical Association* (Boston, 1847), Vol. I Part II, 151, 159-160. Wilson, *History of Granville*, 172-174. Rev. John Ballantine noted that "Gerard Pratt's wife of Granville desired me to baptize their child because they were offended with Rev. Mr. Smith for preaching half ye time in ye west part of the town, according to vote of inhabitants." See *Journal of Rev. Ballantine*, entry for July 3, 1768.
20. The cases cited here are from numerous examples contained in the folders in the Granville Library; see especially "Confessions and Complaints," "Confessions of Sin and Complaints, undated through 1765," "Confessions of Sin and Complaints, 1766 through 1819," and "Experiences Leading to Joining the Church, 1768-1790." One of the stipulations attached to my being granted access to the records was that the names of the wrongdoers not be published, and for that reason I have not gone into detail in specific cases. Apparently the standards of behavior of Granville residents in the 1760s were not only disturbing to the people themselves, but are still a matter of some concern today.
21. Hitchcock's name does not appear on a petition and list of settlers sent to the General Court in 1750, just eight years before he was chosen selectman; see Wilson, *History of Granville*, 34-35, 310.
22. The long-standing feud between Hitchcock and the Burt family is documented primarily in two folders, "The James Burt Affair, 1760-1767" and "Confessions and Complaints," Granville Library.
23. Complaint against Luke Hitchcock, May 19, 1762, in Folder "Confessions and Complaints," Granville Library.
24. See Folders "Confessions and Complaints" and "Confessions of Sin and Complaints, 1766 through 1819," Granville Library.
25. Complaint against Luke Hitchcock, July 27, 1769, in Folder "Experiences Leading to Joining the Church, 1768-1790." Letter from Luke Hitchcock to Granville church, July 27, 1769, in Folder "Confessions and Complaints, 1766 through 1819."
26. See Folder "The Doings of the Church and Committee," Granville Library.
27. *Ibid.*
28. Wilson, *History of Granville*, 174-175.
29. Wilson, *History of Granville*, 59-60, 310.
30. Granville to Boston Committee of Correspondence, August 31, 1774, in L. Kinvin Wroth *et. al.*, *Province in Rebellion: A Documentary History of the Founding of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1774-1775* (Cambridge, 1975), document 253, pp. 774-776.