“THE DIVINE LIFE IN THE SOUL CONSIDERED”:
THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
WORKS OF SAMUEL DAVIES

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Doctor of Philosophy

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Joseph Charles Harrod
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APPROVAL SHEET

“THE DIVINE LIFE IN THE SOUL CONSIDERED”:
THEOLOGY AND SPIRITUALITY IN THE
WORKS OF SAMUEL DAVIES

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For our sons.
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<tr>
<td>DFW</td>
<td>The Directory for Family-Worship</td>
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<td>DPW</td>
<td>The Directory for the Publick Worship of God</td>
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<tr>
<td>WCF</td>
<td>Westminster Confession of Faith</td>
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<tr>
<td>WLC</td>
<td>Westminster Larger Catechism</td>
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<td>WSC</td>
<td>Westminster Shorter Catechism</td>
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PREFACE

This dissertation is the fruit of more than three years of research, but it had its genesis in an inauspicious late-morning conversation with my doctoral supervisor, Michael Haykin. An hour earlier I had told him that my planned thesis on D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones’ theology of marriage might make a great article, but a terrible dissertation. We discussed several potential topics, but it was Michael, sitting in a floral-print armchair, who finally said, “What about Samuel Davies?” Four significant words indeed. Over the course of many lunches, afternoon teas, and even via Skype, he has whittled away needless words, sharpened blunt transitions, and scribbled marginal notes in purple Noodler’s ink on several iterations of this document. More importantly, he has modeled for me the Christian piety that I found in Davies’ sermons, and for his ministry I am indeed grateful. The other members of my committee, Don Whitney and Greg Wills, have been continual teachers, encouragers, and dialog partners for several years. Both men have shown me what is possible through disciplined work, and I am thankful for their scholarship and friendship.

I am indebted to two stellar librarians in particular: Paul Roberts and Jason Fowler, whose mastery of digital repositories and reference works has proven almost as valuable as their friendship. Further, the reference librarians and associates at Princeton’s Firestone Library, William and Mary’s Swem Library, and the Virginia Historical Society have been most helpful in securing rare items that have made their way into numerous footnotes.

To my brothers in the doctoral program, thank you for your encouraging words and for enduring far too many conversations on Samuel Davies and eighteenth-century Evangelicalism. Thanks also to Rich McRae for lending me his copy of Davies’ sermons.
My family has supported me in ways too numerous and frequent to mention. To my wife, whose patience, sacrifice, encouragement, and steadfast love have carried me far beyond my natural abilities more times than she will know, all my love, always. Finally, to our sons, whose energy and imagination are boundless, Dad is more proud of you than words can express.

Joseph Harrod

Louisville, Kentucky
April 2014
CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

In November, 1752, Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) wrote a Scottish correspondent describing a young minister with whom he had recently spent an afternoon’s conversation: “He seems to be very solid and discreet, and of a very civil, genteel behavior, as well as fervent and zealous in religion.”1 Nearly four years before the aforementioned meeting, Edwards had called the same young preacher “a very ingenious and pious young man.”2 For all that he knew of this godly young man in 1752, Jonathan Edwards could never have known that within a decade their bodies would be buried just yards apart, about a half-mile north of the yellow clapboard house in which both men had briefly lived and died in Princeton. Samuel Davies (1723–1761), the minister whose character Edwards described, was the reluctant fourth president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton), a champion for religious toleration and civil rights for dissenters in Virginia, and a poet whose verses constitute some of the earliest North American hymnody. Davies was a husband and father who had lost both wife and children, a pioneer missionary to African slaves, and a New Side Presbyterian revivalist whom D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones has described as “the greatest preacher” America ever produced. Yet a decade into the twenty-first century, Davies remains relatively unnoticed by American Evangelicals.3

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3D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, Knowing the Times: Addresses Delivered on Various Occasions
Moreover, for all of his remarkable public accomplishments, those who knew Davies most closely esteemed his personal holiness. Upon learning of Samuel Davies’ death, his long-time friend and London correspondent Thomas Gibbons (d. 1785) remarked,

what crowned all, or advanced his distinction as a man and a scholar into the highest value and lustre, was, that his pious character appeared not at all inferior to his great intellect and acquired accomplishments . . . . His pious character as much surpassed all else that was remarkable in him, as the sparkling eye in the countenance of a great genius does all the other features of the face.4

Samuel Finley (1715–1766), Davies’ successor as President at the college, noted that “from twelve or fourteen years of age, [Davies] had continually maintained the strictest watch over his thoughts and actions, and daily lived under a deep sense of his own unworthiness,” and “of the transcendent excellency of the Christian religion.”5 In reading Davies’ sermons, treatises, hymns, correspondence, and diary, one gains a sense of what his friends knew personally: Samuel Davies articulated a warm and Evangelical piety, deeply rooted in theological reflection upon Scripture.

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In recent decades, several writers have drawn attention to the vital link between theology and spirituality. Edward Farley wrote that “a person’s piety is a pattern of being and doing that arises out of a specific interpretation of the gospel.” Alister McGrath has noted similarly that “properly understood, theology embraces, informs, and sustains spirituality,” and Donald Bloesch has asserted that “spirituality is inseparable from theology.” Every theology implies a corollary spirituality or spiritualities. One’s doctrinal commitments, whether articulated and refined or unexpressed and unappreciated, shape the ways in which one lives. This interrelationship between theology and spirituality informs the thesis of this dissertation.

**Thesis**

The purpose of this dissertation is to answer the following question: how did Samuel Davies’ theology inform his understanding of spiritual life and piety? For Davies, this question was of utmost importance. In an undated letter, Samuel Davies expressed the vital importance of theology to Christian piety:

> The blessed Jesus by his mediation opened a way for the communication of Heaven. In truth sir, I cannot inculcate the religion of the holy Jesus without inculcating holiness; & therefore this has been, & I hope shall ever be, the darling subject of my Discourses, wherever I have the honour of preaching the everlasting Gospel to ye [the] sons of men. The free and rich Grace of God, the absolute necessity & complete sufficiency of ye [the] righteousness of Jesus & the importance & necessity of faith, are doctrines dear to my soul, the foundation of my Hopes, & of the utmost consequence in the Christian system.

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9Samuel Davies, letter to unspecified recipient, Samuel Davies Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library. Although the manuscript is undated, Davies mentions preparations for his trip to England, placing the letter in approximately 1753. The transcription leaves Davies’ shorthand, punctuation, and spelling in place. Throughout this dissertation, all citations and quotations from primary sources retain their original spelling and punctuation.
In answering the primary research question, this dissertation also addresses the following related questions: first, what role did the Bible play in Davies’ vision of Christian spirituality? Second, how is the spiritual life communicated to and sustained within individuals through Jesus Christ? Third, what is the nature and role of holiness in the spiritual life of Christians? Finally, what role do means play in the communication, maintenance, and furtherance of Christian piety? In sum, I will argue that Samuel Davies believed that spiritual life was founded on the divine revelation of Scripture, communicated by Jesus Christ to individuals through conversion and regeneration, sustained and nourished by faith in the living Christ, animated by gospel holiness, and maintained through the conscientious practice of various religious duties.

Status Quaestionis

Although Samuel Davies was a key figure in colonial Christianity, his theology and piety remain largely unexplored. Not until the twentieth century did his life and ministry attract scholarly interest, interest that has been restricted to only a few areas of Davies’ legacy, namely his roles as a preacher of the great awakening and as a forerunner of religious toleration. Most recently, Thomas Kidd has described Davies’ role in challenging the colonial Anglican establishment in Virginia and in bringing the awakening to the southern colonies. Mark Noll has contributed two substantive biographical articles on Davies and located him as a key preacher within early Evangelicalism. In his 2008 doctoral dissertation, Charles Holloway compared Davies’ homiletical theology with that of Davies’ fellow Presbyterian and close friend Gilbert

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Tennent (1703–1764), and also with that of Jonathan Edwards.\(^\text{12}\) Holloway suggested that while these three men differed in their homiletical methodology, their underlying theology of preaching was remarkably similar.\(^\text{13}\) In this work, Holloway considered Davies’ theology of Scripture as it related to the work of a preacher, but did not extend this theology to its broader influence on the Christian’s life.\(^\text{14}\) Holloway described an important aspect of Davies’ piety when he demonstrated that Davies believed the preached word was only effective when it was attended and applied by the Holy Spirit.\(^\text{15}\) In his conclusion, Holloway recognized that increased personal devotion was a significant outcome of the ministries of Edwards, Tennent, and Davies, yet devoted less than one page to explaining the features of such devotion.\(^\text{16}\)

In her 1996 doctoral dissertation, Carol Bodeau described eighteenth-century colonial depictions of Native Americans.\(^\text{17}\) To this end, she analyzed five of Davies’ sermons delivered during the French and Indian War, noting his rhetorical movement between Indians as potential allies and Indians as demonic savages.\(^\text{18}\) While Bodeau’s rhetorical assessment of Davies’ sermons is generally accurate, her theological analysis


\(^\text{13}\)Holloway, “Homiletical Theology,” 68.

\(^\text{14}\)Holloway, “Homiletical Theology,” 77–111.

\(^\text{15}\)Holloway, “Homiletical Theology,” 113–16; 120.

\(^\text{16}\)Holloway, “Homiletical Theology,” 148–49.

\(^\text{17}\)Carol Ann Bodeau, “Faces on the Frontier: Indian Images from Colonial Virginia” (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Davis, 1996). The usefulness of Bodeau’s research is limited by her weak historiography. She includes a clear factual error on p. 13 when she indicates that Davies visited David Brainerd’s Indian mission in 1753 and was pleased with Brainerd’s success. Here she relies on Pilcher’s annotations in his republication of Davies’ diary for her chronology, yet Pilcher’s annotations are incorrect. Davies actually visited the mission of John Brainerd (d. 1781); David Brainerd had died in October 1747.

\(^\text{18}\)Bodeau, “Faces on the Frontier,” 4, 12. Bodeau uses the terms “Indian” and “Native American” with specific technical meanings. When non-native writers describe images of native people, she uses the term “Indian.” When discussing the people these images represent, she uses the term “Native American.”
lacks depth and focuses only on broad categories such as “sin” and “millennium.”

Though mentioning Davies’ ethical appeals to his hearers, Bodeau did not develop the implications of these appeals on the lived Christian experience of the congregants.

Further, she omitted nine sermons Davies delivered between 1755 and 1761, in which Davies more clearly articulates his theological bases for declaring the conflict a “holy” war. Though less critical than Bodeau, Iain Murray’s 1994 treatment of Evangelical revivals provides a thoughtful historical narrative of Davies’ life and ministry, especially his theology of revival. Davies believed the rapid spread and success of the gospel during the 1740s–1750s was due to a special effusion of the Holy Spirit upon churches. The key validation of genuine revival was increased Christian love.

During the 1960s and 1970s, G. W. Pilcher produced arguably the two most important scholarly monographs on Davies: *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad* (1967) and *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (1971). The first is an edited transcription of Davies’ diary that he maintained during a trans-Atlantic fund-raising tour on behalf of the College of New Jersey from 1753–1755 and the second is the standard biographical work on Davies, which is itself a reworking of Pilcher’s 1963 doctoral dissertation from the University of Illinois. Pilcher’s sought to present a thorough historiography of Davies’ life and ministry, which he handily accomplished, though not

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20Davies returned from a fund-raising trip to Great Britain in mid-February 1755, and by early March he began to address the war in his sermons. Thirteen sermons preached between March 5, 1755, and January 1761 address the war. Two additional sermons, published in spring 1756, also took up this subject. These sermons will be treated more fully in chap. 1 of the dissertation.

21Murray, *Revival and Revivalism*, 3–31. Nearly half of Murray’s chapter (pp. 3–18) is a biographical sketch.


without weaknesses. Second, in developing his portrait of Davies, Pilcher necessarily interacted with Davies’ theology as a representative of New Side Presbyterianism, as pastor, and a college president, yet because his concern was more broadly historical, he was content to leave significant aspects of Davies’ theology undeveloped and his discussion on spirituality is therefore limited.

R. S. Alley’s 1962 dissertation focused primarily on Davies’ role in advocating religious toleration for non-Anglican congregations in Virginia. In chapter 2 of his work, Alley engaged Davies’ theology, but his major interest was in those aspects of Davies’ theology that relate most directly to the relationship between the Christian and the state: providence, nature, history, and government. Alley’s analysis here is helpful to some degree in elucidating Davies’ worldview. While Alley does take up doctrines of the Christian life such as repentance, conversion, faith and works, and citizenship, his analysis of each theme, save the last, is limited to one page each.

25 Interestingly, Pilcher’s dissertation title lists the year of Davies’ birth as 1724, though Davies was born on November 3, 1723, an uncontested date and one not affected by Old Style/New Style calendar changes. Pilcher cites the 1723 birth date in the text of his dissertation: Pilcher, “Preacher of the New Light,” 6. A more significant error involves an annotation Pilcher made is his transcription of Davies’ diary. In his entry for Monday, October 1, 1753, Davies notes that he “lodged at Mr. Brainerd’s, the good Missionary among the Indians.” For nearly one week, Davies was in Mr. Brainerd’s company. Pilcher adds the following footnote to this entry: “At this time David Brainerd was minister to congregations of Presbyterian Indians in Crossweeksung and Cranbury, New Jersey, and engaged to Jerusha Edwards. His expulsion from Yale in 1743 had actually triggered the founding of the College of New Jersey.” See Pilcher, Samuel Davies Abroad, 17, n. 37. Pilcher’s identification of “Mr. Brainerd” as David Brainerd is impossible as David Brained had died in October 1747, and was buried in Northampton, Massachusetts. Further, Jerusha Edwards died in February 1748, and as I have argued elsewhere, the story of an engagement between Brainerd and Edwards has little historical grounding: Joseph C. Harrod, “Jerusha Edwards: A Heart Uncommonly Devoted to God” (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Jonathan Edwards Society, Northampton, MA, October 7, 2011), 8–11. Davies actually lodged with Presbyterian missionary John Brainerd (d. 1781), David’s brother. While these errors do not overturn Pilcher’s work, they do indicate the need for a critical appropriation of his research.


27 Alley, “Reverend Mr. Samuel Davies,” 2, 18–61.

28 Alley, “Reverend Mr. Samuel Davies,” 45–59. Alley develops the concept of citizenship further than other doctrines of the Christian life and his discussion is helpful for understanding Davies’ ethic.
G. H. Bost’s 1942 dissertation is perhaps the best researched biographical study on Davies yet produced. Bost accurately characterized Davies’ emphasis on Evangelical catholicity, the necessity of holiness, and renewed affections. His chapter on Davies’ family and pastorate provide important vistas through which to observe Davies’ high views of marriage and ministry, views which shaped his spirituality. The chief limitation of Bost’s valuable study is that the breadth of his research does not allow for focused development on those elements of Davies’ theology which most directly affect an understanding of Christian piety. His treatment of this area of Davies’ thought occupies only seven pages.

The sources cited above represent the most substantive treatments of Samuel Davies’ life and theology. A few other works, though less directly relevant to this dissertation’s thesis, deserve mention. Leonard Trinterud’s 1949 study of colonial Puritanism includes a clear summary of New Side federal theology, which includes numerous citations from Davies’ sermons. Wesley Gewehr’s 1930 monograph on the Great Awakening in the South focused primarily on Davies as a promoter of religious toleration and includes a helpful narrative of Davies’ several disputes with Anglican clergy and British officials. This narrative illuminates one of Davies’ chief concerns in seeking religious toleration for Presbyterians in Virginia: his concern over the laxity among many Anglican clergy in living holy lives. R. B. Davis’ 1968 publication of Davies’ collected poetry contains a thoughtful introductory essay on the role of poetry in


Davies’ religious expression and contains many poems that Davies composed as means of applying his sermons to his congregants and also for shaping their piety outside of his normal preaching ministry.34

Samuel Davies has attracted relatively little scholarly attention in the past two and a half centuries, especially when compared to contemporaries such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield (1714–1770). Most studies of Davies have tended to emphasize a few key aspects of his ministry, namely his role as preacher of the Great Awakening, or more commonly his work in securing religious toleration for Presbyterians in Virginia. While some studies have included discussion of Davies’ theology and some aspects of Christian piety, none have attempted a systematic analysis of his theology of spiritual life and its implications for Christian piety, which is the purpose of this dissertation.

Methodology

The primary methodology for this dissertation is an inductive analysis of primary-source artifacts created by Samuel Davies. Today, Davies is cited as a powerful preacher, and that is how his contemporaries remembered him as well. During his own lifetime, at least a dozen of Davies’ sermons were published in North America and in Great Britain.35 Within five years of his death, colleagues, correspondents, and admirers


35Samuel Davies, The Curse of Cowardice: A Sermon Preached to the Militia of Hanover County, Virginia, at a General Muster, May 8, 1758. With a View to Raise a Company for Captain Samuel Meredith. (London, 1758; repr., Woodbridge, NJ: James Parker, 1759); Davies, The Duties, Difficulties and Rewards of the Faithful Minister. A Sermon Preached at the Installation of the Revd. Mr. John Todd into the Pastoral Charge of the Presbyterian Congregation, In and About the Upper Part of Hanover County in Virginia, Nov. 12, 1752. With an Appendix, Containing the Form of Installation, etc. (Glasgow, 1754); Davies, The Duty of Christians to Propagate Their Religion Among the Heathens, Earnestly Recommended to the Masters ofNegroe Slaves in Virginia. A Sermon Preached in Hanover, January 8, 1757 (London, 1758); Davies, The Good Soldier. Extracted From a Sermon Preached to a Company of Volunteers, Raised in Virginia, August 17, 1755 (London, 1756); Davies, Little Children Invited to Jesus Christ. A Sermon Preached in Hanover County, Virginia; With an Account of the Late Remarkable Religious Impressions Among the Students in the College of New-Jersey (London, 1758; repr., Boston, 1759). Davies, Religion
began to gather and publish collections of his sermons. The earliest edition was begun in 1766 and completed in 1771; it contains sixty-three sermons. Nineteen further sermons were added to the various editions by 1810. The edition used in this dissertation, unless otherwise noted, is that from 1854, recently reprinted in 1993. Two sermon manuscripts, located at the Firestone Library of Princeton University, remain unpublished.

According to Sprague, Davies’ British correspondent, Thomas Gibbons, selected the sermons that were included in the multi-volume editions. See Sprague, “Memoir of President Davies,” *Sermons* 1:27–28. Sprague indicated that the sermons were published from Davies’ preaching manuscripts and thus intended for the ear rather than the eye. Nevertheless, Gibbons edited the sermons. In his preface to the fifth edition of Davies’ sermons (1792), Gibbons described this process: “A very considerable number of his Sermons has been transmitted to me, and thence I have selected what were sufficient to compose the ensuing volumes . . . it may naturally be supposed that they required patient and accurate revisal in order to their publication; and that the Editor, if he would discharge his duty as he ought, must find himself under the necessity of making some occasional alterations and amendments as to the language, and especially of adjusting the pointing. These liberties I have taken, and have endeavoured to execute my trust in the same manner which I have reason to think Mr. Davies, had he been living, would have approved and commended . . . . They who knew and heard Mr. Davies will need no further proof than the perusal of the discourses themselves that they are the real productions of the author to whom they are ascribed” (ii–iii). See Samuel Davies, *Sermons on Important Subjects, By the Late Reverend and Pious Samuel Davies, A. M., Sometime President of the College of New Jersey* (New York: T. Allen, 1792), 1:ii–iii.

Pilcher noted that a three-volume 1766 edition of Davies’ sermons may never have been published even though Charles Evans included it in his *American Bibliography*. See Pilcher, “Samuel Davies,” 294. The Boyce Library of the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary lists this work among the library’s Founder’s Collection, yet were unable to locate a physical copy.

Samuel Davies, A sermon on Luke 14:27, and A sermon on 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20, Samuel Davies Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ.
Although Samuel Davies never wrote a systematic theology nor produced major treatises on theological topics, his sermons make his theology accessible. Although he would not have used the term to describe himself, Davies was an itinerant minister to Presbyterian congregations throughout Virginia and parts of North Carolina. Although some of Davies’ sermons record the date of preaching and a specific audience, the majority of his sermons lack such helpful notes. While it is impossible to reconstruct in full Davies’ preaching patterns, it is likely that the nature of his ministry afforded him the opportunity to preach the same sermon on multiple occasions and for different audiences. Two pieces of evidence support this claim. First, several of Davies’ sermons include multiple date and location references, indicating that they were indeed preached on more than one occasion. Second, while some of Davies’ surviving sermons were preached to particular audiences and contain audience-specific applications, most of Davies’ sermons are more general in nature and could easily have been delivered to nearly any congregation with minimal adaptation. Davies’ sermons tend to follow the Puritan “plain style” of explaining a biblical text, identifying several doctrines arising from the text, and offering improvements (applications) to his hearers.

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however, anything but “plain,” blending doctrinal precision and rhetorical eloquence intended to communicate his own experiential appropriation of the text and thus to move his hearers’ minds and hearts.⁴² Davies’ sermons are saturated with doctrine and the repetition of certain doctrines across multiple sermons enables an accurate, though surely not exhaustive, analysis of his theology.⁴³ Due to the fact that Davies articulated his theology primarily through sermons that included intentional applications of specific doctrines, contemporary readers can observe Davies’ vision for living Christianly. While these sermons form the primary source for studying and analyzing Davies’ theology and piety, they are not the only sources.

From 1753–1755, Samuel Davies maintained a diary documenting his travels throughout Great Britain to raise funds for the fledgling College of New Jersey. While the diary functions as a travelogue, it also includes more introspective entries in which Davies recorded his internal struggles with accepting the responsibility for the trip, his fears for the long voyage and for the safety of his family during his absence. This text allows the reader to view Davies’ piety in a less public setting. Similarly, Davies’ family records from his Old Testament and an annotated portion of his New Testament provide helpful insights into Davies’ life and study of Scripture.⁴⁴

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⁴²In an undated letter, Davies described his experience and his aim as a preacher: “The difficulty of the ministerial work seems to grow upon my hands. Perhaps once in three or four months, I preach in some measure as I could wish; that is, I preach as in the sight of God, and as if I were to step from the pulpit to the supreme tribunal. I feel my subject. I melt into tears, or shudder with horror, when I denounce the terrors of the Lord. I glow, I soar in sacred ecstasies, when the love of Jesus is my theme, and, as Mr. Baxter was wont to express it, in lines more striking to me than all the fine poetry in the world, ‘I preach as if I ne’er should preach again; as a dying man to dying men,’” in Albert Barnes, “Life and Times of the Author,” Sermons on Important Subjects by the Reverend Samuel Davies, A. M., President of the College of New Jersey, vol. 1, 4th ed. (New York: Robert Carter, 1845), xxxvii. This introductory essay is not included in the reprinted Soli Deo Gloria edition. The reference is, of course, to Richard Baxter (1615–1691), the English Puritan pastor.

⁴³Because Davies did not date the majority of his sermons, it is nearly impossible to track his theological development chronologically.

⁴⁴Davies family Bible records, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA, and Samuel Davies, New Testament annotations, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.
Samuel Davies’ correspondence also provides another source for understanding his spirituality. Although his preserved letters are not nearly as voluminous as contemporaries such as Jonathan Edwards, John Newton (1725–1807) or Phillip Doddridge (1702–1751), Davies addressed theological questions in them and mentioned spiritual concerns with those to whom he wrote, making this literature a useful source for understanding his vision of spiritual piety. Among those items that have survived, a 1751 letter from Davies to Congregationalist pastor Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790) provides a unique chronicle of the revival in Virginia as well as Davies’ thoughts on friendship and piety.⁴⁵ Similarly, Davies’ tracts and treatises are also important sources. Shortly after arriving in Virginia in 1747, Davies became embroiled in a number of disputes with leading Anglican clergymen and other local officials over the legitimacy of his ministry.⁴⁶ His published responses provide useful insights into Davies’ theology and piety.⁴⁷

Two final sources for understanding Samuel Davies’ theology and piety are his hymns and poems. Davies was among the earliest hymn writers in the colonies, occasionally crafting hymns to complement his sermon topics. Now, hymnody is hardly a uniquely American phenomenon, yet it is a “crucial expression of American Evangelical religiousness.”⁴⁸ Hymns “are an important means of theological pedagogy,” capturing

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⁴⁸Stephen Marini, “Hymnody as History: Early Evangelical Hymns and the Recovery of
key teachings and presenting these doctrines in a memorable way.\textsuperscript{49} For the historian, hymnody provides “an important record of the past spiritual experiences of the believing community.”\textsuperscript{50} In 1860, Basil Manly, Jr. noted rightly that “from the devotional compositions of Christians in all periods a much more accurate sketch may be derived of the doctrines that really impressed on the mind and translated into the life, than from regular creeds or confessions of faith.”\textsuperscript{51} Nathan Hatch has emphasized the influence of Evangelical hymnody due to its popular appeal and wide distribution through the publication of hymn and tune books.\textsuperscript{52} Charles Lippy, explaining the success of hymnody in American religion during the latter half of the nineteenth century, wrote that hymns were “popular vehicles for developing not only a common vocabulary for mush popular Protestant religiosity, but also powerful cohesive bonds among those for whom they captured a way of viewing reality that gave personal experience rich meaning.”\textsuperscript{53} Hymns, then, are an important inroad into understanding the religion of the people who sing them. Yet hymns also help shape the theological contours of their singers.\textsuperscript{54} Similarly, Davies used religious poetry to impress significant theological truths upon the minds of Christian readers. His poems were generally meditative and followed the patterns of Isaac Watts


\textsuperscript{50}Mouw, \textit{Wonderful Words of Life}, xv.

\textsuperscript{51}B. Manly, Jr., and A. Brooks Everett, eds., \textit{Baptist Chorals: Tune and Hymn Book Designed to Promote General Congregational Singing: Containing One Hundred and Sixty-Four Tunes, Adapted to About Four Hundred Choice Hymns} (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1860), iii.

\textsuperscript{52}Nathan O. Hatch, \textit{The Democratization of American Christianity} (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 146.


Although a formal analysis of Davies’ poetry and hymns is beyond the scope of this dissertation, these artifacts will be discussed as they demonstrate ways in which Davies applied theological truth to Christian experience.

**Background to the Present Study**

I was first captivated by the religious landscape of the eighteenth century as a Master of Divinity student at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. During my final year of study I wrote a master's thesis examining the preaching and theology of Jonathan Edwards. The research for this thesis introduced me to the larger world of early Evangelicalism and to the riches of the spirituality of the eighteenth century. My understanding of and appreciation for the early generations of Evangelicals has grown through subsequent doctoral seminars on Puritan and Evangelical piety and early American religious history in which I examined the relationship of marriage and piety and hymnody and piety, respectively.

As my interest in eighteenth-century piety was growing so too was my curiosity regarding the move toward American independence from Great Britain and the founding of the republic during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. This interest was fueled in part by a growing sense of dissatisfaction over public discussions of religious freedom by both the political left and right and the recognition that the American form of government was truly unique. I came to appreciate with new depth the harassment and persecution faced by members of dissenting religious movements within the colonies and more aware of the diversity of philosophy and theology represented among the founding generation and their immediate predecessors. Samuel Davies thus represents a nexus of these two research interests.

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Summary of Contents

This introductory chapter establishes the need for the dissertation, states the research question, thesis and methodology for the study, and describes the relative neglect of Davies among Evangelical scholars.

Chapter 2 places Davies within the historical context of the eighteenth century, and especially within significant movements and events that established the context for his ministry. This chapter also includes an overview of his life and ministry, especially his roles as pastor and college president.

Chapter 3 discusses the role of Scripture in Davies’ theology and spirituality. For Davies, God’s revelation, both written and proclaimed, was the foundation for genuine piety and this chapter demonstrates the ways in which the Bible shaped Davies’ spirituality.

Chapter 4 examines Davies’ theology of regeneration, which for Davies was the beginning point of true piety. Although he had a more Puritan understanding of preparationism, Davies was a consummate Evangelical preacher of the new birth. This chapter explores both the Puritan and evangelical elements of Davies’ doctrine of regeneration and its implications for living the Christian life.

Chapter 5 presents Davies’ doctrine of holiness, which for him was the vital animating principle of Christian spirituality. Davies believed that the link between holiness and piety was inviolable, and that the distinguishing mark of Christian piety was a holy delight in God. This chapter explores the implications of Davies’ theology of holiness for Christian experience.

Chapter 6 explores the range of religious duties that Davies practiced himself and which he encouraged other Christians to perform to maintain a vital experience of communion with God. Davies believed that means such as meditation, prayer, family worship, and the sacraments were essential practices for maintaining genuine Christian piety.
Chapter 7, the conclusion, summarizes answers given to the research question and related questions. It contains a critical appraisal of Davies’ theology of spiritual life as well as suggestions for how modern Evangelicals might appropriate Davies’ legacy.
CHAPTER 2
THE LIFE AND WORLD OF SAMUEL DAVIES

The standard biography of Samuel Davies (1723–1761) is more than forty years old and a full accounting of Davies’ story is beyond the scope of this dissertation.\(^1\) Yet to understand Davies’ theology and spirituality, one must know something of the contours of his life and the world in which he ministered. This chapter overviews Davies’ life and ministry in the context of eighteenth-century colonial America.

A Summary of Samuel Davies’ Life and Ministry

Like the mother of his biblical namesake, Samuel Davies’ mother, Martha, had prayed for a son, a prayer which she saw answered on November 3, 1723.\(^2\) Davies was raised an only child, born in New Castle County, Delaware (then part of Pennsylvania).\(^3\) Both his mother, Martha née Thomas, and father, David (1680–1759), were of Welsh descent. Davies’ paternal grandfather, Morgan David (1622–1694), a Baptist by conviction, left Lantwndoryde, Glamorganshire, Wales, in 1684 and settled a one hundred-acre tract in Merion, Pennsylvania.\(^4\) Morgan David’s two sons, Shionn (or John,

\(^{1}\)The standard account is that of George William Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (Knoxville: The University of Tennessee Press, 1971).


\(^{3}\)Samuel Davies’ mother gave birth to an unnamed daughter who was perhaps stillborn or who died in infancy in 1718. See William Heth Whitsitt, *Genealogy of Jefferson Davis and of Samuel Davies* (New York: The Neale Publishing Company, 1910), 67.

\(^{4}\)Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent*, 3. Regarding Davies’ genealogy, see Harry Alexander Davies, *The
ca. 1670–1753) and David farmed the family’s tract until 1716 before selling their interests and moving to New Castle County where they bought 400 acres in the Pencader Hundred, which they owned jointly until 1743. Now, Welsh settlers had founded a Baptist meeting at Iron Hill in the Hundred in 1703 and Davies’ parents were members of this congregation. Samuel Davies’ mother, Martha, joined the church by baptism in 1711. In February 1716, David “Davis” and Martha “Dafis” signed the church’s new confession of faith. This confession was a Welsh translation of Benjamin (1640–1704) and Elias (1665/66–1699) Keach’s confession, first published in London in 1697 and later adopted by the Philadelphia Baptist Association in 1742. Welsh Baptist minister Abel Morgan Sr. (1673–1722) translated the confession from English into Welsh and the church appended articles on hymn singing and the imposition of hands to the document.

No further history regarding the family’s religious situation survives from 1716 until 1732, when the Welsh Baptist meeting expelled Martha Davies from membership.

The account of Martha Davies’ dismissal is decidedly one-sided. The only extant record comes from the congregation’s meeting minutes, which describe her

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8Conrad, Records, 19–21.

“rebellion . . . against the church.”\textsuperscript{10} This rebellion consisted in Martha’s “opposing the truth which she once professed to the church,” in “refusing instruction, and despising advice,” in “breaking covenant with the church,” and in “being so false and unfaithful . . . that she has curtailed the truth.”\textsuperscript{11} The last two charges specify that Martha’s covenant breaking involved taking church matters to the Presbyterians. Were these matters doctrinal or personal? Had she grown dissatisfied with the theology which she had earlier professed, or perhaps with the answers, or lack thereof, to questions she was raising?

Martha Davies was not the first member the church had expelled, but she appears to have been the only one removed for dealings with local Presbyterians and the last person removed for more than a generation.\textsuperscript{12} Regrettably, Martha Davies’ version of the incident is lost to history, and one might expect her version to contain a different perspective than the official account. Bost’s suggestion that the incident reveals Martha’s “spirit of inquiry . . . and persistence” seems appropriate: rather than amend her views, she joined a neighboring Presbyterian congregation, a move that proved consequential to her son’s life.\textsuperscript{13}

\section*{Education and Conversion}

While Samuel Davies’ tutelage began under the Baptist Abel Morgan, it was

\textsuperscript{10} Conrard, Records, 26. The minutes record her name as “Martha David,” but a later editor added a \textit{nota bene} that “she was President Davis’s mother.”

\textsuperscript{11} Conrard, Records, 26.

\textsuperscript{12} No fewer than thirteen members were put out of the church between 1714 and 1724 for various reasons such as “unseemingly dress”, protracted absences, questionable company keeping, defying church instruction, and similar matters. The book records no further dismissals after Martha Davies’ removal. Interestingly, the book’s detailed records of new members, signatories to the confession of faith, letters of departure granted, excommunications, and deaths within the congregation stop in 1732 and do not resume until 1770. An annotation indicates that pp. 12–51 of the original book are present but blank. Abel Morgan’s brother, Enoch Morgan (1676–1740), was the third pastor of the church and would have presided over Martha’s dismissal. See Conrard, Records, 18–33.

within the Presbyterian Church that he experienced conversion and prepared for ministry. Two men assumed responsibility for Davies’ spiritual well being and education. William Robinson (d.1746) ministered at St. George’s Presbyterian Church in Delaware and it was this congregation which Martha Davies joined in 1732.\(^\text{14}\) Robinson led a small classical school which Davies’ attended until the age of fifteen. Davies was awakened spiritually during his fifteenth year and became a member of the St. George’s Presbyterian Church. Robinson would later become an itinerant preacher in Hanover, Virginia, the same town in which Davies was to spend a decade in ministry. While little information exists about Davies’ education under Robinson, another young Presbyterian minister shaped Davies more profoundly.

Irish by birth, Samuel Blair (1712–1751) immigrated to Pennsylvania, where he studied under William Tennent (1673–1746) at the Log College. The New Castle Presbytery licensed Blair to preach, and he ministered in New Jersey from 1734 until 1739, when he accepted a call to minister in New Londonderry, Pennsylvania. Blair established a classical school in New Londonderry, Fagg’s Manor, and preached to the town’s Irish immigrants.\(^\text{15}\) The congregation experienced a season of revival not long after Blair’s arrival, which the pastor documented for Boston pastor and publisher

\(^{14}\)Little is known about Robinson’s life and ministry apart from the information that Samuel Davies provided Joseph Bellamy in a 1751 letter. For a brief biographical sketch, see Archibald Alexander, *The Log College: Biographical Sketches of William Tennent and his Students, together with an Account of the Revivals under their Ministries* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968), 193–209.

\(^{15}\)One of Samuel Blair’s fellow ministers, Samuel Finley (1715–1766), provided a detailed reflection on Blair’s life and ministry. Finley served as the fifth president of the College of New Jersey, succeeding Samuel Davies in that position in 1761. Finley’s eulogy for Blair recalls the deceased’s early piety, his proficiency with biblical languages, mathematics, and philosophy, and his consistent service in church parliaments. See Samuel Finley, *Faithful ministers the fathers of the church. A sermon preached at Fogs-Mannor. On occasion of the death of the Reverend Mr Samuel Blair, who departed this life July 5. 1752 [sic]* (Philadelphia: Bradford, 1752), 13–18. Samuel Davies eulogized his former tutor in verse, composing a poem recounting Blair’s life and ministry. This poem is appended to Finley, *Faithful Ministers*, 25–32. Archibald Alexander used these sources when writing his own memoir of Blair in his *Log College*, 147–77. A collection of Blair’s sermons and treatises appeared posthumously: Samuel Blair, *The Works of the Reverend Mr. Samuel Blair* (Philadelphia, PA: Bradford, 1754).
Thomas Prince’s (1687–1758) *The Christian History* in 1744.¹⁶

Blair saw this local revival as part of a larger trans-Atlantic work of God.¹⁷ Unlike Jonathan Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative*, which contained several case-studies of specific revival experiences of members of Edwards’ congregation, Blair lamented his negligence in recording specifics as they occurred.¹⁸ Those under his charge had been religiously observant when the young pastor arrived in 1739, but in his assessment they lacked heart-religion. This situation changed dramatically during the spring of 1740. Within the early months of his pastorate, Blair determined to direct his preaching toward the unregenerate within his congregation, that through his preaching they might experience “conviction and conversion,” yet in a scene that would become familiar in the early 1740s, it was during Blair’s absence from the pulpit that the stir of revival began.¹⁹

A rider met Blair as he returned from several weeks’ travel to tell him of a remarkable stirring in New Londonderry. Blair’s first sermon upon his homecoming was from Matthew 6 and he urged his hearers to pursue God’s kingdom with haste. While Blair prized moderation of religious expression, several in his congregation “burst out in the most bitter mourning.” Thus began a season of deep repentance and increased interest in vital religion among the Presbyterians in New Londonderry.²⁰ Samuel Blair’s ministry ended with his untimely death in 1751.

Davies matriculated at Fagg’s Manor shortly after Blair established the school and heard Blair’s preaching and observed its affects upon the congregation. He also noted


his teacher’s desire to downplay the more “enthusiastic” manifestations of spiritual concern among the congregation. Davies’ specific curriculum at Fagg’s Manor has been lost, but in a 1748 response to critics in Virginia, Davies defended the private preparation and public examination of ministerial candidates by the New Castle Presbytery:

[Candidates] have acquir’d the Latin and Greek languages; studied Philosophy, particularly, Logic, Ontology, Pneumatology; and read sundry approven Systems of Theology, besides various Writings on particular important subjects; as, on Natural and Revealed Religion in Opposition to Atheism, Deism, &c. Most of them have learn’d Hebrew, and some of them read Physics and Ethics, or Natural and Moral Philosophy; besides what progress they made in sundry branches of Mathematics.21

In other writings, Davies’ quotes freely from classical and contemporaneous authors such as Virgil, Horace, Grotius, Locke, Böhme, and Doddridge.22 His surviving sermon manuscripts and interlinear notes show facility with Greek. William Foote noted the rigor of Blair’s curriculum with regard to the classics, sciences, and theology.23

While it seems likely that Davies was aware of, if not present at, public meetings hosted at the Manor by the Anglican evangelist George Whitefield (1714–1770) in 1739 and 1740, Davies first mentioned meeting Whitefield and hearing him preach in early 1754.24 Davies was beginning his ministerial training at a crucial period in the

21Samuel Davies, *The Impartial Trial, Impartially Tried, and Convicted of Partiality: in Remarks on Mr. Caldwell’s, alias Thornton’s Sermon Intituled, An Impartial Trial of the Spirit, &c. and the Preface of the Publisher in Virginia* (Williamsburg, VA: W. Parks, 1748), 17.


24Davies left no written testimony of this event, yet he would have been a student at the time of Whitefield’s visit. See Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1920), 60. Pilcher’s suggestion that the Davies was present at the 1739–1740 meetings seems plausible; however Davies journal entry for January 1, 1754 may indicate that he had not heard Whitefield preach before: “Went in the Evening to hear Mr. Whitefield in the Tabernacle . . . he preached on the Parable of the barren Fig Tree, and tho’ the Discourse was incoherent, yet it seemed to me better calculated to do good to Mankind than all the accurate, languid Discourses I have heard. After sermon enjoyed his pleasing Conversation at his House.” George William Pilcher, ed., *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753–55* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 46–47.
social and religious history of the American colonies. Beginning in the mid 1730s and peaking in the early 1740s, the colonies and other parts of the realm experienced an unprecedented spiritual upheaval most commonly known as the Great Awakening.

Davies’ Context: The Great Awakening

Some colonists, especially those in New England, had known revivals of religion prior to the early 1740s, but these events were often quite localized and attracted little publicity.25 Such revivals were sporadic, of relatively brief duration, and often connected with specific pastoral initiatives such as covenant renewal ceremonies.26 Those affected were frequently young adults, who suddenly felt great concern for their souls, experienced conversion, and transitioned into full church membership.27 Yet in the mid-1730s, different manifestations of heightened religious concern began to emerge on both sides of the Atlantic.28

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758) had observed multiple revivals during his youth. Edwards noted a series of five revivals overseen by his grandfather, the powerful Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729), during his near sixty-year pastorate (1669–1729) in Northampton, Massachusetts.29 Edwards had also seen revival accompany his father Timothy’s (1669–1758) ministry in East Windsor, Connecticut.30 But after the young

26Kidd, Great Awakening, 3–5.
30Jonathan Edwards, Letter to Mary Edwards, May 10, 1716, in Letters and Personal Writings,
Edwards had taken up his grandfather’s mantle in Northampton in 1729, he characterized the revival stirrings that began several years later as “surprising.”

In the winter of 1733–1734, revival came to Northampton’s youth following the death of one of their own. Soon a great concern for spiritual matters gripped the larger community, a concern which transformed Northampton well into 1735. What surprised Edwards was that the revival had occurred in a town on the very edge of the British Empire. Edwards was also amazed that the revival’s affects were not limited to young adults, but also involved young and old alike. Neither were the revivals affects limited to one social class. Edwards was also struck by the speed with which the awakening spread, its deep emotional impact, and its wide geographic disbursement. On this last point, Edwards knew that other pastors and congregations in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Jersey were reporting extraordinary experiences, but he did not yet know that similar happenings were afoot in villages and towns in Wales and Cornwall.

Daniel Rowland (1711/13–1790) was already an Anglican curate in Llangeitho and Nantcwinlle, notorious for his “levity and worldliness,” when he was converted through the gospel-saturated preaching of Griffith Jones (1683/84–1761) during the winter of 1734–1735. By the time he was ordained as a priest in August 1735,

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33 Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, ed. Goen, 4: 153–56. Among the reports of revival Edwards mentioned was that of the Dutch pastor Theodore Jacob Frelinghuysen (1691–1747), who ministered in the Raritan Valley of New Jersey, indicating that the revival was not limited to English speaking congregations.

Rowland’s “life and preaching were . . . radically transformed.”35 Rowland’s sense of spiritual urgency for his countrymen prompted him to adopt the relatively novel practice of itinerant preaching, which drew large crowds that quickly outgrew church buildings and yielded numerous conversions.36 Another young Welshman was also struggling with God in this year of grace, 1735. Howell Harris (1714–1773) of Trefeca was a school teacher growing increasingly concerned with spiritual matters. After a period of intense spiritual reflection following Easter, Harris was converted on Pentecost Sunday, May 25, 1735.37 Rowland and Harris met later that year. In the years that followed, Harris and Rowland, guided by Griffith Jones, established religious societies for hundreds of new converts.38

As the isolated villages of Wales experienced spiritual awakening, so did towns along the rugged shores of Cornwall. In 1733/34 George Thomson (1698–1782), rector of St. Genny’s, was converted through a recurring nightmare and the comfort he received from reading Romans 3.39 This spiritual change dramatically affected his ministry although he remained relatively isolated both spiritually and geographically.40 Thomson proved to be a key connection for later itinerant ministers in Cornwall.41

35Evans, Daniel Rowland, 38. See also Morgan, The Great Awakening in Wales, 66–68.

36Evans, Daniel Rowland, 41–45. See also Noll, Rise of Evangelicalism, 80. While Rowland’s spiritual mentor, Griffith Jones, was known for his itinerant ministry, the practice was not yet widespread.

37Harris recounted his spiritual awakening and conversion in A Brief Account of the Life of Howell Harries, Esq. (Trevecka: n.p., 1791), 9–15. See also Noll, Rise of Evangelicalism, 79 and Evans, Daniel Rowland, 53. I am indebted to Eifion Evans for providing helpful background context to understand Harris’ conversion in light of several key devotional books.

38Noll, Rise of Evangelicalism, 88.


40Davies, Cornish Evangelicals, 31.

41Though Thomson was a committed Calvinist and supporter of George Whitefield, he
Rowland and Harris formed the nucleus of Welsh Calvinistic Methodism and Thomson was likewise committed to Calvinistic teachings. These men witnessed an even greater revival in their respective localities during the early 1740s through the ministry of George Whitefield, who was at this time a young Christian under the spiritual direction of two brothers, John (1703–1791) and Charles (1707–1788) Wesley.

Born into a high Anglican family, John and Charles Wesley earned degrees at Christ Church, Oxford, where they formed a society of serious-minded young men who pursued holiness and charitable works. Following their father’s death in 1735, the Wesley brothers undertook a mission to the new colony of Georgia. The brothers had both received ordination as Anglican priests. Their mission was short lived. Mentored by German Moravians, the Wesleys experienced conversion in May of 1738 and one year later began preaching in the open air and for the next five decades transformed the religious landscape of Britain through hundreds of small religious societies, remarkable hymnody, and a consistent message of salvation *sola fide*.

Whitefield was born to a Gloucester family of low means in 1714. In keeping with his low social status, he attended Oxford as a servitor in the 1730s and joined the Wesleys’ society. Whitefield dated his conversion to Pentecost Sunday, 1735. He was ordained a deacon the following year and as a priest in 1739 and began preaching in the

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maintained a cordial and regular correspondence with the Wesleys, hosting them during their ministry in Cornwall. See Davies, *Cornish Evangelicals*, 32–33.


44George Whitefield, “A Short Account of God’s Dealings with George Whitefield from his Infancy to his Ordination, 1714–1736” in *George Whitefield’s Journals* (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), 62. This day is the same as the conversion of Howell Harris. See Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 78–79.
open air soon thereafter. Whitefield was a polarizing figure. Historian Thomas Kidd has described him aptly as a “controversial sensation.” His open-air preaching drew thousands of listeners. His eloquent sermons, dramatic presence, and emotional pleadings left audiences stunned. He appeared tireless, preaching multiple sermons daily and maintaining a vigorous itinerary. In 1738 Whitefield visited Georgia, establishing an orphanage before returning to England three months later. In 1739 Whitefield returned to America and set the Middle and New England colonies ablaze with a burning message of the new birth and fiery words of criticism for established clergy. Though Whitefield alienated many ministers, he established enduring friendships with many others. Among his closest colonial supporters were the Tennents.

William Tennent Sr. (1673–1746) and his sons Gilbert (1703–1764) and William Jr. (1705–1777) were Irish immigrants to Pennsylvania, arriving in 1718. William Sr. had been ordained in the Church of Ireland, but declared his Presbyterian sympathies upon his arrival in Pennsylvania. He championed rigorous local theological education and founded a ministerial training school, the Log College, in Neshaminy, Pennsylvania, in 1735. Gilbert prepared for ministry at Yale, earning an MA in 1735. He pastored briefly in Delaware, and settled in New Brunswick, New Jersey, the following year. William Jr., remembered for a remarkable mystical experience, ministered in

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45The bishop of Gloucester ordained Whitefield at age 21, nearly two years younger than his normal policy for men seeking holy orders. See Whitefield, “A Short Account,” 65–71. Whitefield was ordained a priest at Oxford on January 14, 1739, and preached to the miners of Kingswood, Bristol on February 25, 1739. See George Whitefield, “A Continuation of the Reverend Mr. Whitefield’s Journal from his Arrival at London to his Departure from Thence on his way to Georgia,” in George Whitefield’s Journals (London: Banner of Truth, 1960), 199 and 223. See also Kidd, Great Awakening, 44–45.

46Kidd, Great Awakening, 45.


48S. T. Logan, “Tennent, Gilbert (1703–1764),” in Dictionary of the Presbyterian and
Freehold, New Jersey, from 1733–1777. Whitefield met the Tennents in 1739 and praised the elder William’s educational efforts. After meeting Whitefield in New Brunswick, Gilbert Tennent traveled with the young evangelist throughout the middle states and became an ardent promoter of Whitefield’s message. Their admiration was mutual. Through this affinity with the Tennents, Whitefield came to visit Samuel Blair’s school at Fagg’s Manor, Pennsylvania, where he found an audience acquainted with and eager for his message of salvation by faith and the necessity of the new birth. Some colonialists, however, viewed Whitefield and the growing revivals more cautiously. Others rejected the revivals outright as dangerous enthusiasm.

The common designations of “Old Lights” and “New Lights” describing those who opposed and those who favored the revival, respectively, fail to capture the range of opinions regarding the Great Awakening. Thomas Kidd proposes a helpful threefold classification of anti-revivalists, moderate Evangelicals, and radical Evangelicals. The effects of revival were varied, ranging from heightened religious sensitivity to wild ecstatic exhibitions. The awakening was socially destabilizing, upsetting long-held

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50 Kidd, Great Awakening, 47.

51 Kidd, Great Awakening, 47ff.


53 Kidd, Great Awakening, xiv.
Fissures emerged among nearly all denominations, including Dutch Reformed churches, Congregationalists, and Presbyterians.

Samuel Davies thus prepared for ministry during one of the most consequential periods of colonial religious history. His teachers were sympathetic to Whitefield’s Evangelical emphases, but they had arrived at their theological convictions of the necessity of regeneration and faith prior to the evangelist’s arrival. They were also aware of the divisive nature of the revival and imparted to Davies sensitivity to its excesses. When Davies entered public ministry, he was well prepared in learning and temperament for the opposition he faced.

Ordination and Marriage

Samuel Davies completed his studies at Fagg’s Manor in 1746 and the revival-friendly New Castle Presbytery licensed Samuel Davies to preach on July 30th that year. Thereafter, Davies preached in several vacant pulpits in Pennsylvania and Delaware. The presbytery ordained Davies on February 19, 1747. As Davies had no congregation, he was ordained as an evangelist to the leaderless congregations of Virginia.

On October 23, 1746, Davies married Sarah Kirkpatrick. The young evangelist left only one brief note in his family Bible regarding his wife, which records the shocking brevity of their marriage: “Separated from [Sarah] by Death and bereaved of an abortive

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54 On the point of the Great Awakening as a socially destabilizing event, see Kidd, *Great Awakening*, xv, for a very helpful analysis.


57 Davies family Bible records.

Son Sep. 15, 1747.”59 Just over one year after losing his wife and son, Davies married Jane Holt of Williamsburg. Her brother John (1721–1784) was a publisher who developed a deep friendship with his brother-in-law Samuel.60 Davies’ writings reveal his profound love for Jane, whom he called his χαρά:

Connubial Love! thrice happy was the hour  
I fell a willing captive to thy Pow’r.  
Opprest I panted underneath my load,  
While I a single individual stood:  
But, Chara, since with thee I coalesc’d,  
And join’d thee to my maim’d imperfect breast,  
I grew into a finish’d man, compleat,  
And hardly feel the huge unwieldy weight.61

In another poem, written during a two-year sojourn to England, Davies mused,

The Tho’ts of Friends, the Tho’ts of Home  
Engross my Heart and still find Room.  
Chara with what strange, magic Art,  
Dost thou, so distant, charm my Heart?  
Not seas can quench, nor Distance cool  
The flame of Love that fires my Soul.  
Not works of Nature or of Art  
Can raze thine Image from my Heart.62

Davies also recorded his tender affections for Jane in his journal: “My dear Chara has often recurred to my tho’ts, and frequently I imagine myself talking with her. It is a mercy that God has made any of my fellow creatures of importance to my happiness, but my absence from them affords me additional uneasiness. Thus the sweets of life have

59 Davies family Bible records.
60 See Pilcher, Apostle of Dissent, 37. See also Bost, “Samuel Davies,” 87, 90–97.
their stings.”63

The couple had six children: William (1749), Samuel (1750), John Rodgers (1752), Martha (1755), and Margaret (1757). One daughter died during birth (1758).64 At his son John Rodgers’ birth, Davies put his thoughts into verse:

Thou little wond’rous miniature of man,  
Form’d by unerring Wisdom’s perfect plan;  
Thou little stranger, from eternal night  
Emerging into life’s immortal light;  
Thou heir of worlds unknown, thou candidate  
For an important everlasting state,  
Where this your embryo shall its pow’rs expand,  
Enlarging, rip’ning still, and never stand.65

Davies’ theology shaped his paternal affections, as is clear in the remaining stanzas:

Another birth awaits thee, when the hour  
Arrives that lands thee on th’ eternal shore;  
(And O! ‘tis near, with winged haste ‘twill come,  
Thy cradle rocks toward the neighb’ring tomb;)66

In this second stanza, Davies used the occasion of natural birth to picture the spiritual birth which was a prominent feature of his sermons; a regeneration necessitated by humanity’s primordial fall into sin and its sentence of death (cf. Genesis 1:17). The opening lines of stanza 3 reiterate Davies’ anthropology:

Thou embryo-angel, or thou infant fiend,  
A being now begun, but ne’er to end,  
What boding fears a Father’s heart torment,  
Trembling and anxious for the grand event,  
Lest thy young soul so late by Heav’n bestow’d,  
Forget her Father, and forget her God!67

63Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 34–35. See also Bost, “Samuel Davies,” 98, for a small sampling of other journal entries mentioning Jane. Samuel missed his wife greatly during his stay in England and recorded dozens of thoughts and prayers for his wife and sons during this time.

64Davies family Bible records.


Bost found Davies’ verse too sermonizing, marked by “gloomy forebodings” and “horrible” sentiments, and reckoned that such sentiments could not have characterized Davies’ normal home life or regular “trend of thought in the presence of his beloved family.” Contrary to Bost’s analysis, these lines reveal Davies’ biblical worldview which had been shaped by experience. The father’s “boding fears” and “trembling and anxious” countenance seem appropriate when one recalls that it was a mere six years earlier that Davies’ first wife and son had died in childbirth. These lines also express a sentiment shared by Davies’ contemporaries regarding the ever-tenuous balance of an immortal soul’s earthly mortality. The poem ends with a prayer:

Maker of souls! avert so dire a doom,
Or snatch her back to native nothing’s gloom!

Davies’ concern for his children extended to their education and piety. He tutored his children, “unwilling to trust them to a stranger.” Davies lamented the difficulty of tutoring three sons and two daughters: “I find the business of education much more difficult than I expected—My dear little creatures sob and drop a tear now and then under my instruction.” Davies’ concern for his children’s education was inexorably linked with their piety: “There is nothing that can wound a parent’s heart so deep, as the thought

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71 Samuel Davies, Letter to Thomas Gibbons, Sermons 1:59.

72 Samuel Davies, Letter to Thomas Gibbons, Sermons 1:59.
that he should bring up children to dishonour his God here and be miserable hereafter.”

Davies’ sentiments in this letter are consistent with his preaching on the topic of family religion, in which he used 1 Timothy 5:8 to argue that the father who neglected regular occasions of family worship was akin to an infidel. If the recollections of nineteenth-century reporters are reliable, it seems Davies’ prayer for young John went unanswered, as his son appears to have strayed far from his father’s doctrine, and the other children, save one daughter, seem to have had little interest in either Presbyterianism or Christianity.

**Presbyterianism in Virginia**

In Virginia, the Anglican Church viewed religious dissenters as a threat to the social order. George Whitefield had preached at the colonial capital in Williamsburg in December 1739 and was generally well-received by the Anglican establishment. Before

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75In an undated letter, Davies informed Thomas Gibbons in London that “I am not so happy as to see [my children] under deep and lasting impressions of religion; and this is the greatest grief they afford me . . . I earnestly beg your prayers for them.” Davies, Letter to Thomas Gibbons, *Sermons* 1:59. Although the letter was undated, Davies mentions five children: three boys and two girls, indicating that the letter must have been sent after 1757, when his daughter Margaret was born. If Margaret is included among those whom Davies was instructing, she must have been two, perhaps three years of age. Davies died in February, 1761, prior to Margaret’s fourth birthday. In 1837, the *Princeton Review* republished a hitherto unknown letter of Davies and appended to this letter reports on Davies’ ministerial labors and family members. See “A Recovered Tract of President Davies; now First Published,” *The Biblical Repertory and Princeton Review* 9 (1837): 349–64. The unnamed author of the article cites both named and anonymous sources who claimed that William Davies became enamored with Catholicism and that John spurned Christianity altogether. The author claims that Davies’ daughter was the only professing Christian, yet the author knew of only one daughter of Davies, not two; thus this source’s reliability must be viewed with caution.


leaving town, Whitefield left copies of his *Sermons* and *Journals* for printing, hoping that God might “be pleased to bless them to the conviction and edification” of the residents.\(^78\)

Soon Whitefield’s printed sermons made a significant impact upon the people of Hanover. Between 1740 and 1743, Samuel Morris, a brick layer by trade, procured a copy of Whitefield’s published sermons from a visiting Scottish minister and read these sermons with some neighbors. Many of these hearers were greatly affected by the sermons and continued assembling during the week as well as on the Sabbath. Anglican authorities noted the residents’ absence from regular church services. The gathering soon grew large enough to necessitate a dedicated meeting house.\(^79\) The small congregation recognized their need for a minister and in 1743, William Robinson, the man under whose preaching Samuel Davies had been awakened, became the first in a series of visiting Presbyterian preachers to meet this need.\(^80\)

William Robinson’s preaching generated controversy for the enthusiasm it sparked among his hearers. Robinson preached at the “reading house” for four days and offered the people instruction in more orderly worship.\(^81\) Then John Blair (d. 1771), stirred up “frenzy” with his preaching.\(^82\) In 1744 the New Castle Presbytery sent John Roan, another of Tennent’s graduates, who expanded the impact the revivals and who began denouncing the established clergy.\(^83\) The ministries of these three men would make

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\(^79\)Davies, *The State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia; In a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Joseph Bellamy, or Bethlehem, in New-England: From the Reverend Mr. Samuel Davies, V. D. M. in Hanover County, Virginia* (Boston, MA: S. Kneeland, 1751), 10–11.

\(^80\)Davies *State of Religion*, 11.


\(^82\)Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 235. John Blair was the brother of Samuel Blair, Davies’ tutor at Fagg’s Manor. In 1757 he assumed leadership of the school for nine years before being elected as professor of theology at the College of New Jersey, a post which he held until John Witherspoon’s presidency. See Alexander, *Log College*, 178–79.

Davies’ work all the more difficult, kindling the opposition of the leading Anglican clergy and secular magistrates in Hanover and Williamsburg. In May 1745, Gilbert Tennent and Samuel Finley visited the congregation and represented their interests before Governor William Gooch (1681–1751). Though the men stayed for only one week, Morris reported that “the people of God were refreshed, and sundry careless sinners were awakened” by Tennent and Finley’s ministry. Then, William Tennent and Samuel Blair travelled to Hanover, and after securing license to preach, they ministered “about a fortnight” there, serving the Lord’s Supper to the young congregation. Thus the fledgling group of dissenters in Virginia had endured several years of government and religious hostility to their budding Evangelical notions. Neophytes in doctrine and church order, the Hanover congregation remained leaderless. This situation would change, albeit briefly, in 1747.

**Davies’ First Virginia Mission: 1747**

The New Castle Presbytery had ordained Davies in February and he wasted little time fulfilling his call. On April 21, 1747, Davies wrote the Reverend Patrick Henry (d.1777), Rector of St. Paul’s Parrish in Hanover, indicating his reserved assent to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Church of England. One week before sending this letter to

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85 Davies, *State of Religion*, 16.
86 Davies, *State of Religion*, 16.
88 Samuel Davies to Patrick Henry, April 21, 1747, Dawson Papers, Earl E. Swem Library, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, VA. Davies objected to Articles 3, 6, 20, 21, and 37. In Article 3, Davies clarified that he believed the phrase “[Christ] went down into Hell” did not mean “Christ’s burial Descent into the place properly called Hell where the Damned are but either his being in the state of the Dead; or his enduring extreme Misery & great Distress; or his lying in the Grave.” Davies accepted the biblical canon as laid out in Article 6 with the caveat that he would not read the Apocryphal books in public worship. With regard to Article 20, Davies rejected its claim that the Anglican Church had the “power to decree Rites or Ceremonies.” He clarified that Article 21 could not prohibit ecclesiastical councils from meeting apart from a magistrate’s call and that Article 37 could not guarantee civil magistrates right over ecclesiastical affairs. He noted that Articles 34–36 had been negated by Parliament. Henry was Rector of
Henry, Davies had appeared before Governor William Gooch (1681–1751) at Williamsburg where he sought and secured a license to preach at four meeting houses. By Davies’ own admission, his initial visit was exploratory, “to officiate for some time, and to see if any way should be cleared to settle there.” Hanover County had long been settled by the time Davies arrived. Richard Davis described the town as “a generally normal rural population of English descent.” Davies “preach’d frequently in Hanover and some of the adjacent counties at this time,” but his mission lasted less than two months and in his own estimation saw less fruit than previous Presbyterian itinerants. The young evangelist returned home, but his short venture left a lasting impression upon the Evangelical-minded congregants, who urged Davies to remain among them and immediately wrote the presbytery requesting that Davies become their permanent minister.

Davies was convinced that Hanover stood in greater need of a settled minister than other congregations in which he had itinerated in the middle colonies, yet his health faltered following his return from Virginia: “I spent a year under melancholy and consumptive languishments, which I certainly expected would have conveyed me into the eternal world.” Though the deaths of his wife and son in September 1747 certainly exacerbated his melancholy, Davies survived this dark season. And when a messenger from the Hanover congregation arrived in 1748 bringing word of their decision to call


him as minister, Davies resigned himself to God’s care and providence.

**Davies’ Settled Virginia Ministry: 1748–1759**

Samuel Davies settled in Hanover, Virginia, in May of 1748 and remained there until 1759. When Davies returned to Virginia, he found tensions between Dissenters and Anglican clergy and government authorities remained high. The case of Davies’ friend and fellow minister John Rodgers illustrates the parties’ disagreements.

Rodgers and Davies had been students at Fagg’s Manor. Davies recognized the need for settled ministers in Virginia was larger than he could meet, so he brought Rodgers to extend their usefulness. The team arrived in Hanover, preached on a Sunday, then travelled to Williamsburg to secure a license for Rodgers. The governing council rejected Rodgers’ application and refused him licensure despite Governor Gooch’s favorable inclinations. The council refused to reconsider its judgment and thus Rodgers was forced to leave the colony while Davies continued alone. During this same session, dissenting citizens, including Samuel Morris, were fined for having invited John Roan to preach unlicensed several years earlier. Yet Davies preached throughout that summer without incident. In October 1748 he married Jane Holt.

On November 1, 1748, Davies secured licenses to preach at three additional houses, bringing the total of licensed locations to seven. Three of the houses were in Hanover County and the remaining houses were in Henrico, Goochland, Louisa, and

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94 Davies family Bible records. While this period represents the largest part of Davies’ ministry, the narrative that follows is necessarily selective. For fuller treatments, see the surveys of Gewehr, *Great Awakening in Virginia*, 68–105; Bost, “Samuel Davies,” 86-103; Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent*, 86–134.

95 Foote, *Sketches*, 165.


97 Foote, *Sketches*, 168-69, reproduces the license.
Caroline counties. Davies’ territory was large and overland travel significantly difficult. In 1750 the New Kent County court licensed Davies to preach in St. Peter’s parish, but the general court in Williamsburg revoked this license. Davies argued for the right to maintain licensure for preaching in multiple locations. The many families under his spiritual care were too widely dispersed to attend one central location without having to travel upward of forty miles. Davies believed that the governing council was violating the intention of the 1689 Act of Toleration. This act permitted dissenting Protestants the right to assemble for worship in licensed meeting locations conducted by licensed ministers who had taken particular oaths of allegiance. Davies, like others before him, had appealed to the Act as grounds for his licensing and believed that attempts by the Williamsburg council to use the Act to regulate the number and influence of dissenting ministers were a violation of protected rights. Opposition to Dissenters came on differing fronts.

As early as 1747, Patrick Henry of Hanover had attempted to discredit revival-minded ministers by republishing a sermon originally preached in Boston by one John Caldwell. The sermon, *An Impartial Trial of the Spirit*, argued that revivalist preachers placed too much emphasis on the emotional reactions of their hearers as evidence of genuine faith to the exclusion of rationality. The sermon’s conclusion well summarized its author’s intent: “Found not your Evidences of Conversion upon sudden Starts and Warmths in Devotion; much less upon spiritual Pride and Uncharitableness; nor fancy

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100Gewehr, *Great Awakening in Virginia*, 70.

that God will regard you, let your Warmth of Zeal ever be so great, if you are Workers of Iniquity.”102 Patrick Henry appended a preface to this sermon to “open the eyes of some deluded people among us, who are imposed upon by the itinerants.”103

Henry’s chief complaint was that such preachers were “schismaticks” who had split from the orderly Presbyterian Church established decades earlier in the Middle Colonies. Following the lead of Gilbert Tennent, who was closely allied with George Whitefield, these preachers formed a new synod in New York and began sending missionaries “into all neighbouring Governments.”104 Henry chastised these visiting preachers for promising their followers in Virginia that they would soon send a minister who would “qualify himself according to the Law, and become a fixed Pastor among them.”105 Henry hoped that those who read the sermons would be convinced of the reasonableness of Anglicanism, that it did not “consist in uncommon Fervours of Imagination, extraordinary Raptures and Extasies: And that it is altogether irreligious to judge and condemn those as Enemies to Christ, who cannot approve of these Flights, as Signs of Gospel Conversion, and Marks of a true Christian.”106

Now, while Henry’s assessment of the itinerants’ loyalties and motivations was rather uncharitable, his facts regarding the recent history of his ecclesiastical antagonists were correct. Samuel Davies and the Presbyterian preachers who had preceded him in Virginia were indeed part of a breakaway synod established only a few years earlier that pitted the pietistic New Side Presbyterians against the more precisionist Old Side Presbyterians.

102Caldwell, An Impartial Trial of the Spirit, 28.
103Caldwell, An Impartial Trial of the Spirit, xiii.
104Caldwell, An impartial Trial of the Spirit, xiv.
105Caldwell, An impartial Trial of the Spirit, xv.
106Caldwell, An impartial Trial of the Spirit, xv.
The Old Side and New Side Division

Presbyterianism began in the American colonies in 1706 with the first meeting of the Philadelphia presbytery. Its American beginnings were modest given its Old World strengths. From its founding the presbytery in Philadelphia was the nexus of colonial Presbyterian life until 1717 when the church founded additional presbyteries in Long Island, New York and New Castle, Delaware and established the Synod of Philadelphia.

During the 1720s, some Presbyterian ministers questioned the synod’s increasing control over congregations. These questions came to a head in 1729 when the Synod of Philadelphia required subscription to the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Larger and Shorter Catechisms as the doctrinal statement of colonial Presbyterianism. This decision, remembered as the Adopting Act, proved divisive. Cultural differences fueled part of the division as Scots-Irish immigrants like John Thomson (1690–1753) favored subscription, which was a long-established tradition in the Old World, whereas Colonial-born ministers such as Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747) of New England rejected the standards as human impositions.

In the mid-1730s, the Adopting Act’s critics renewed their objections over the case of Samuel Hemphill, an Irish immigrant who had subscribed to the Westminster Standards both in Ireland and in Philadelphia but who later denied many supernatural


108 Hart and Muether, Seeking a Better Country, 36.


doctrines of Christianity under in favor of a more rational faith.\textsuperscript{111} Dickinson and other critics argued that Hemphill’s case exposed the limitations of creedal subscription. While division over creedal subscription was one force pulling at Presbyterian unity during the mid-1730s, concerns of the personal piety of ministers was another, and this concern centered on Gilbert Tennent.

Tennent was concerned that the Synod placed too little emphasis on heart religion and personal holiness among clergy, the kind of piety that his father’s Log College fostered among ministerial candidates. Other Presbyterians were suspicious of Tennent’s seminary because it could not provide the depth of well-rounded education as could Scottish Universities or colonial colleges and because Tennent promoted itinerant ministry that ignored established presbytery lines.\textsuperscript{112} In 1739 the Synod of Philadelphia took steps to limit the Log College’s influence, which exacerbated tensions between the Tennents and their New Brunswick Presbytery and the Synod of Philadelphia. The Tennents’ support for George Whitefield during his 1739–1741 preaching tour put an even greater strain on intra-presbytery relationships, which were at their peak when in Nottingham, Pennsylvania on March 8, 1740, Gilbert Tennent preached a sermon which he later regretted, “The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry.”\textsuperscript{113} This sermon, drawn from Mark 6:34, used Jesus’ lament over leaderless Israel to warn against contemporary “Pharisee-Teachers” who had “learned to prate a little more orthodoxly about the New Birth, than their predecessor Nicodemus, who are, in the mean Time, as great Strangers to the feeling Experience of it, as he.”\textsuperscript{114} The sermon proved divisive.

\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{111} Hart and Muether, \textit{Seeking a Better Country}, 53–54.
\item\textsuperscript{112} Hart and Muether, \textit{Seeking a Better Country}, 56–57.
\item\textsuperscript{113} Hart and Muether, \textit{Seeking a Better Country}, 59–60.
\item\textsuperscript{114} Gilbert Tennent, \textit{The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, Consider’d in a Sermon on Mark VI.34, Preached at Nottingham, in Pennsylvania, March 8. Anno 1739, 40} (Philadelphia, PA: Benjamin Franklin, 1740), 17.
\end{enumerate}
At the May 1740 meeting of the Philadelphia Synod, Tennent argued that local presbyteries ought to examine and ordain prospective ministers and refused to work with many of his critics. In 1741 the New York delegation refused to attend the synod’s meeting in Philadelphia and were thus censured and ejected from the synod. In 1745 the presbyteries of New York and New Brunswick united to form the Synod of New York. This synod, led by Jonathan Dickinson and the Tennents, was decidedly pro-revival and pietistic, but Dickinson favored a moderating approach to many of the revival’s more enthusiastic elements and thus tempered the Tennents’ harsh denunciations of which Gilbert would repent in 1749. The New York Synod’s emphasis on the vital experience of Christian piety shaped ministers like Samuel Blair, Samuel Finley, and Samuel Davies, as well as David Brainerd (1718–1747), missionary to the Indians in New Jersey.

Although the division between the Old Side synod of Philadelphia and the New Side synod of New York persisted, both sides desired restored fellowship, which would eventually come in 1758. Yet at the time of Samuel Davies’ Virginia mission in 1747, the wounds from the separation were still fresh and to outside observers such as Patrick Henry appeared irreconcilable. Henry failed to recognize the nuanced perspectives on revival that marked the New Side synod and undoubtedly colored his judgment of Samuel Davies, whose approach to Christian piety was far closer to that of Dickinson and Blair than that of Tennent.  

Patrick Henry insisted that no New Side Presbyterian minister would be able to

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117 To be fair, Tennent later regretted his acrid tone during these debates and assumed a more conciliatory manner. Davies admired Gilbert Tennent’s “pious Simplicity” and considered him a “spiritual Father.” See Pilcher, ed., Samuel Davies Abroad, 13.
settle permanently among the people of Virginia because such a minister would have to subscribe to the Thirty-Nine Articles of the Anglican Church, which he was convinced the itinerants could not do.\textsuperscript{118} Perhaps Henry’s published doubts best explain Davies’ letter of April 1747 assenting to the Articles and indicating the young minister’s irenicism. Henry’s challenge did not go uncontested.

In 1748 Samuel Davies answered Caldwell and Henry’s charges in one of his few published pamphlets, \textit{The Impartial Trial, impartially Tried, and Convicted of Partiality}.\textsuperscript{119} Davies’ answer was thorough and unrelenting. His phrase-by-phrase rebuttal of Henry consists of 32 pages while his response to Caldwell, whom he exposed as an Irish immigrant named Thornton who had fled to New England to avoid prosecution, was 26 pages. The substance of Davies’ response to Henry highlights the significance of his theology and piety. Davies contended that the doctrines which he and the visiting itinerants who had preceded him preached were none other than the substance of the Anglican Church’s Thirty-Nine Articles.\textsuperscript{120} Further, Davies insisted that “vital religion is a sensible thing” in which one awakened may have assurance of living in a saving relationship with God, admitting that this assurance varies in “degree and duration,” but is empowered by the Holy Spirit, who imparts to Christians “some degree of rational persuasion, that they are children of God thro’ Faith in Christ Jesus.”\textsuperscript{121} Though Davies disagreed with Henry, his correspondence was deferential to the elder

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{118}Caldwell, \textit{An impartial Trial of the Spirit}, xv.
\item \textsuperscript{119}Samuel Davies, \textit{The Impartial Trial, impartially Tried, and convicted of Partiality: in Remarks on Mr. Caldwell’s, alias Thornton’s Sermon, intituled [sic] An Impartial Trial of the Spirit, &c. and the Preface of the Publisher in Virginia} (Williamsburg, VA: W. Parks, 1748).
\item \textsuperscript{120}Davies, \textit{Impartial Trial, impartially Tried}, 5–6. Davies was quick to note that he and the other Presbyterians had preached much more than was contained in the Articles, but nothing they had preached was contrary to their expression of essential Christian doctrine. Davies here emphasized Articles 9–13.
\item \textsuperscript{121}Davies, \textit{Impartial Trial, impartially Tried}, 13.
\end{itemize}
churchman’s authority.  

Samuel Davies’ debates with Patrick Henry were but one aspect of his ministry in Virginia. As Gewehr has noted, much of the opposition came in spite of Davies’ consistent deference and respect for those in positions of authority. He argued successfully against attorney general Peyton Randolph (1721–1775) that the Act of Toleration applied in Virginia as a colony of Britain. In a tract that remained unpublished until 1941, Davies offered a carefully argued and theologically rich rebuttal to the Arminianism of William Stith (1707–1755), president of William and Mary College from 1752–1755. Davies spent the first several years of his ministry in Virginia alone, though he tried (unsuccessfully) to convince Jonathan Edwards to join him in his work. But relief did come.

In 1752 the Virginia authorities licensed a young minister, John Todd, to assist Davies. In the years that followed, the New York Synod supplied more than a half-dozen other ministers to Virginia, such that in December 1755, the ministers established a Presbytery in Hanover. Davies and his fellow ministers saw revivals of religion in 1755 and 1756 and undertook missionary travels through northern Virginia in 1757, extending their congregations therein.

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During his Virginia ministry, Davies also wrote poetry for both private and corporate use. Samuel Davies published a collection of fifty *Miscellaneous Poems* in Virginia in early 1752. In their analyses of these poems, both Davis and Gilborn note Samuel Davies’ self-professed dependence on eighteenth-century British poets Isaac Watts (1674–1748) and Elizabeth Rowe (1674–1737) as well as the sixteenth and seventeenth-century wordsmiths George Herbert (1593–1633) and John Milton (1608–1674). Davies’ reliance on these older poetic masters invited critique. An Anglican cleric, writing pseudonymously, ridiculed Davies’ poetry in an ongoing series of *Virginia Gazette* editorials. Given his tenuous relationship with local Anglicans clergy, however, one wonders if the outmoded lines were only a pretext for debate. Some of Davies’ poems were private reflections, recorded in his journal during his trip to Great Britain. These poems are significant in that they seem to flow quite naturally, or in Davies’ own words “spontaneously,” providing another expression of his rhetorical abilities. Still other poems were intended for broader congregational use as hymns.

Samuel Davies was the earliest colonial hymn-writer. While public worship in the colonies had made extensive use of metrical Psalters for more than a century, original compositions that moved beyond paraphrases of biblical texts were relatively

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130 Davis lists the issues and dates of the *Gazette* in which Anglican clergyman John Robertson, writing under the pen-name Walter Dymocke, criticized Davies’ poetry. He also records Davies’ published responses. “Dymocke” wrote eight lengthy articles critiquing the poems, published in the *Virginia Gazette* between March 20 and June 12, 1752. Davies replied on July 3 and 10. In his replies, Davies admitted that some of the criticisms were warranted, but defended his work nevertheless. See Davis, ed., *Collected Poems of Samuel Davies*, xi.

131 Davies noted on December 7, 1753, that his “Heart spontaneously dictated” a fourteen-line poem to his wife, Jane. See Pilcher, ed., *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 40.

132 Note the masterful, though dated, study by Louis F. Benson, “President Davies as A Hymn Writer,” *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society* 2, no. 6 (September 1904): 277–86.
new in the mid-eighteenth century. Davis composed sixteen original hymns and re-worked the words to two other hymns. He wrote most of his hymns to accompany sermons, often reinforcing or elucidating the text or doctrine upon which he had preached. For example, Davies’ hymn “The Blessing of Hope in Death” accompanied a sermon on Proverbs 14:32: “The wicked is driven away in his wickedness: but the righteous hath hope in death” (AV). In answering the question of how the righteous have hope, Davies wrote in stanza 3,

Yet, SAVIOUR, thine Almighty Pow’r
Ev’n then can sure Support afford,
Ev’n then that Hope shall smile secure,
That’s now supported by thy Word.

Still other hymns have no direct connection with any texts in Davies’ collected sermons. One example is Davies’ “The Glories of GOD in pardoning Sinners,” more commonly known by its first line, “Great God of Wonders!” While only some of the hymns can be dated, those that are calendared fall between July 1755 and January 1758, indicating

133The earliest colonial Psalter, the Bay Psalm Book, had been printed at Cambridge, Massachusetts in 1640 and Cotton Mather released his collection, Psalterium Americanum, in 1718. Benjamin Keach (1640–1704) had introduced hymn singing among the Baptists of London in the early 1670s, to no small controversy. See J. Barry Vaughn, “Benjamin Keach,” in Baptist Theologians, ed. Timothy George and David S. Dockery (Nashville, TN: Broadman and Holman, 1990), 53–56. Isaac Watts popularized the use of hymns in public worship among Congregationalists following the 1707 publication of his Hymns and Spiritual Songs in London. Philip Doddridge (1702–1751) was another Congregationalist hymn-writer and contemporary of Davies. Davies re-wrote several of Doddridge’s hymns. Both Davies and Doddridge were following Watts’ lead.


that Davies’ became better acquainted with the practice of hymn singing during his 1753–1755 trip to Great Britain.\textsuperscript{138} While Davies’ poetry shows his comfort among the highly literate members of society, he was also adept at ministering to those of more humble status. Davies gave considerable attention to the spiritual well-being of African slaves.

Davies estimated that he regularly preached to three hundred African slaves in Virginia and about one hundred had been baptized having a “deep sense” of key doctrines “upon their spirits,” and lives marked by “the strictest Morality and Piety.”\textsuperscript{139} An African slave was “formed for immortality” and thus “a being of vast importance.”\textsuperscript{140} Many slaves, Davies noted, were “eagerly desirous to be instructed [in Christian doctrine], and to embrace every opportunity for that end.”\textsuperscript{141} Davies supplied the slaves with Bibles and other Christian literature and found the recipients thoroughly grateful. He sought song books because, “The Negroes above all of the human species that ever I knew, have an ear for music, and a kind of extatic delight in Psalmody.”\textsuperscript{142} Yet Davies was a product of

\textsuperscript{138}See Benson, “Hymns of President Davies,” 7:343. Davies was already familiar with the use of Psalmody as evidenced by his journal entry for September 24, 1753, when he attended a Psalm-singing service in New York City before sailing for Great Britain. Of this service, Davies recalled that he “was much charmed with the Power of Harmony.” See Pilcher, ed., \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 16. On December 2, 1753, Davies led his shipmates in the singing of a Psalm during public worship. See Pilcher, ed., \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 31. Although Philip Doddridge had died before Davies’ trip to England, he records meetings with other hymn writers such as the Independent preacher Samuel Chandler and Presbyterian preacher and hymn writer Thomas Scott (1707–1775). See Pilcher, ed., \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 45 and 122. Davies also joined in a meeting for hymn singing during the summer of 1754. See Pilcher, ed., \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 98.

\textsuperscript{139}Samuel Davies, \textit{Letters from the Rev. Samuel Davies shewing the state of religion in Virginia, particularly among the Negroes. Likewise an extract of a letter from a gentlemen in London to his friend in the country, containing some observations on the same} (London: R. Pardon, 1757), 10.

\textsuperscript{140}Samuel Davies, \textit{The Duty of Masters to their Servants: in a Sermon by the Late Reverend, Pious, and Learned, Samuel Davies, of Hanover County, Virginia} (Lynchburg, William W. Gray, 1809), 5. This sermon does not appear in Davies’ collected sermons.

\textsuperscript{141}Davies, \textit{Letters}, 11.

\textsuperscript{142}Davies, \textit{Letters}, 12.
his times and owned and sold African slaves as well.143 Davies’ pastoral ministry in Virginia was interrupted for two years in the early 1750s when he joined Gilbert Tennent in a trans-Atlantic fundraising tour throughout Great Britain.

**Davies’ Journey to Great Britain: 1753–1755**

Colonial Presbyterians had long recognized the need for robust, regional theological education. America had only three colleges: Harvard, Yale, and William and Mary. Private pastoral schools such as William Tennent’s Log College and its various offshoots were another option, but neither solution was ideal. Harvard was drifting from its Calvinistic moorings and was cool to the awakening.144 Yale’s administration and students were at odds over the awakening, as evidenced by the expulsion of David Brainerd for his support of the revival. Though this antagonism would change in the following decade, in 1746 it appeared firmly ensconced.145 The Anglican establishment of William and Mary and its great distance from the region of the Middle Colonies limited its potential for the Presbyterians. Now, the private schools were theologically sound, at least as far as New Side Presbyterians were concerned, but functioned more as apprenticeship programs and lacked extensive support structures like libraries and faculty to accommodate the growing needs of a learned ministry. These hardships led Presbyterians to establish a new work in the latter 1740s.

In 1746, several members of the New York Presbytery secured a charter for a college in New Jersey. The trustees were New Side men, but in 1748 a new charter

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included members of the Synod of Philadelphia. In April 1747, the trustees elected Jonathan Dickinson as the school’s first president. The school met in Dickinson’s home in Elizabeth, New Jersey until Dickinson died unexpectedly in October 1747. Aaron Burr Sr. (1716–1757) assumed leadership that fall and formally in 1748, relocating the college to his parsonage in Newark, New Jersey. The school’s financial needs exceeded its income. Burr received no salary for his first three years as president.

By 1753 the college trustees recognized the need for steady funds if the school were to continue. They first asked Ebenezer Pemberton (1704–1777) of New York to undertake a fund raising journey to Great Britain, but Pemberton declined. The trustees then sought Samuel Davies for the mission. Davies was reluctant to leave his work in Virginia, but responded affirmatively to the trustees’ call. The trustees also sought and secured Gilbert Tennent’s assistance in the journey. Davies began a diary in July 1753 and maintained it until his return in February 1755. The trustees could hardly have picked a more difficult time for the men to undertake their journey.

English Presbyterianism had declined and fractured during the early eighteenth century. On the one hand, many who retained the name of “Presbyterian” had adopted Unitarian doctrine. On the other, many who retained the Calvinistic soteriology of Presbyterianism had rejected its ecclesiology and moved among dissenting groups such as the Congregationalists and the Baptists. Further, the colonial division between Old and New Side factions affected the emissaries’ reception: Old Side representatives were already in England seeking funding for educational endeavors. Still, the trip was successful: Davies and Tennent raised in excess of £3,000, funds which the trustees used


148 Pilcher, ed., Samuel Davies Abroad, xi.
to help build Nassau Hall. Davies also made numerous personal connections with various correspondents who offered him advice on how to navigate the political and religious situation of Virginia. He preached frequently throughout England and Scotland and his impressive delivery left a lasting impression as the demand for printed copies of his sermons surged. When Davies returned to the colony during the waning weeks of winter in 1755, he found his reputation significantly enhanced. Yet Davies’ return coincided with one of the most tumultuous periods in colonial history, the Seven Years’ War.

“Religion and Patriotism”: Samuel Davies and the Seven Years’ War, 1755–1761

By the middle of the eighteenth century, England and France had been at war almost continuously since the 1690s. Though America had seen its share of skirmishes, war was normally something far-off, yet by the latter 1740s, the Spanish, French, and English colonial interests, not to mention long-standing feuds between the Native American tribes, would collide with unprecedented force in what was to become the first truly global war. The British colonies, hemmed in between the Atlantic Ocean on the east and French and Spanish territories to the north, the west, and the south, perceived an existential threat to their land, their liberties, and their very lives. Within this backdrop, one skirmish proved a match to tinder.

On the rain-soaked morning of, May 28, 1754, a tall twenty-two year old George Washington (1732–1799) led the roughly forty troops under his command through the forests of the Ohio Country, west of the Alleghenies, in modern day Pennsylvania. The Lieutenant Colonel was joined by a dozen and one Indian warriors. Having spotted a French encampment in a rocky, wooded glen, and seeing few options,

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149 Pilcher, ed., Samuel Davies Abroad, xii.

the Virginian ordered his men to arms. Whether it was the French or British who fired first is lost to history, and each side defended their own innocence, but within a quarter of an hour the French had suffered heavy casualties and laid down their arms. During a poorly handled interrogation, the wounded French commander, Ensign Joseph Coulon de Viliers de Jumonville, had the misfortune of lying too near the spot where the Indian leader Tanaghrisson, known to the British as “Half King,” stood. As the tall Virginian turned to consult a translator, Half King looked at the wounded Frenchmen and said, “Thou art not yet dead, my father,” and repeatedly sunk his hatchet deep into the ensign’s skull until it split. He then washed his hands with the dead Frenchman’s brains before his warriors butchered the wounded French. Lieutenant Colonel Washington watched the scene in horror. He and his men had just started a war that would grow to a truly global scale.151

By June word had reached the French of the slaughter at Jumonville’s Glen, as the spot would come to be called, and they sought revenge. They extracted this revenge on Washington and his troops at the hastily built and practically indefensible Fort Necessity, south of the Forks of the Ohio. On July 4, 1754, Washington surrendered and was allowed to return to Virginia. Though war would not be formally declared for two more years, the British responded to their losses in the Ohio Country with massive force. In the spring of 1755, General Edward Braddock (1695–1755) and his regiments arrived in Virginia and mobilized a war effort unparalleled in the colonies.152 His spectacular march on the French stronghold at Fort Duquesne, modern-day Pittsburgh, conducted according to the European strategies of war, was overshadowed by his more spectacular


152Anderson, Crucible of War, 87.
defeat at the hands of the French and their Canadian and Indian allies along the banks of the Monongahela River.\textsuperscript{153} Braddock’s defeat sent an ominous terror throughout the colonies.\textsuperscript{154} Thus for five long years the battles raged across the continent, each side realizing gains and losses. A major tide turned in 1758 when the British regained control of the forks of the Ohio and one year later, the French surrender Quebec after the pitched battle on the Plains of Abraham. When the British captured Montreal in 1760, the conflict was effectively over in North America although the war would not formally end until February 10, 1763, with the signing of the Treaty of Paris.

Samuel Davies returned from Great Britain in mid-February, 1755 to the snowy shores of North Carolina. By early March he began to take up the conflict with France in his sermons. Thirteen of his published sermons preached between March 5, 1755 and January, 1761, addressed the war. Eleven of the thirteen were drawn from Old Testament texts, nearly always the Prophets.\textsuperscript{155} Three of the sermons were delivered on fast-days, two eulogized fallen leaders, and two were addressed directly to soldiers in local Virginia militias. Each sermon bears Davies’ distinctive rhetoric and Evangelical theology, yet considered as a whole, these sermons also show the larger framework through which Davies understood the conflict at hand.

Less than a month after returning from Europe, Samuel Davies preached a fast-day sermon from Daniel 4:25, a text which declares God’s unilateral authority over all human kingdoms. “A powerful and perfidious enemy is making inroads upon our territories,” Davies told his hearers, and the King of England had dispatched reinforcements to fight on their behalf. Yet “unless the success of the expedition depend

\textsuperscript{153}See Anderson, \textit{Crucible of War}, 94–107, for a detailed account of the battle.


\textsuperscript{155}From the Prophets, Davies preached three sermons from Isaiah, two from Jeremiah, and one each from Ezekiel, Daniel, Jonah, and Zephaniah. Davies also preached two sermons from 2 Samuel, one from Romans, and one from James.
on the providence of God, to what end do we humble ourselves before him, and implore his help?"156 God is perfect in wisdom, justice, goodness, mercy, and patience and is omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Quite contrary to the god of the Deists, the God of Scripture’s character requires his control over his creation.157 God’s active rule is demonstrated especially in times of war and repeatedly throughout Scripture, especially in the Psalms.158 Davies also believed it was common sense that a nation should not go to war without recognizing God’s controlling hand. Neither the Jews of the Old Testament nor the pagans of old dared fight apart from seeking the favor of deity.159 While Davies did not interpret every event as an immediate act of providence, he believed that the conjunction of multiple signs could be attributed only to God’s favor.160 Davies recounted a series of British victories stretching from the Spanish invasion of 1588 through the Battle of Prestonpans in 1745, to show that God “appeared the guardian of that favorite island, Great Britain.”161 Yet God’s past protection was no present guarantee of success, or even survival, when the people of a nation fall into sin.

“If God be turned against a nation . . . how helpless is their condition!”162 With these words, Samuel Davies speculated that God’s long favor with the colonies might have been removed. But why? “Torrents of vice,” “ignorance of divine things,” “a neglect of Christ and his precious Gospel,” daring immorality, a dependence on “luxury and extravagance,” and other such sins had come to characterize the land, and the present

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158 Davies, “God the Sovereign of all Kingdoms,” in Sermons, 3:335–36.
162 Davies, “God the Sovereign of all Kingdoms,” in Sermons, 3:349.
state of war was most certainly God’s judging hand at work in their midst.\footnote{163} Like a father, God was chastening his wayward children to bring about a change of heart.\footnote{164} France was that scourging rod.\footnote{165} Yet just like the Babylonians who occupied the same position, God would also break the rod once its usefulness was finished.\footnote{166}

In his sermon on Isaiah 22:12–14, delivered eleven days after General Edward Braddock’s defeat at Fort Duquesne in July, 1755, Davies took up a prophetic lament against his people, likening them to the mourning Israelites of the text. Though the Virginians had been “favored with the light of revelation from heaven, and the gospel of Jesus,” and had enjoyed long seasons of peace and liberty, yet now they could only expect war because of their prevailing vices and general disregard for God.\footnote{167}

The root of this disregard, and the root of wars in general, according to Davies’ reading of James 4:1, was unrestrained passions.\footnote{168} In a New Year’s Day sermon delivered in 1757, Davies offered a theological interpretation for the British losses during the previous two years: “How peaceably did we live, till France began to fancy that she needed more plantations—that she needed a tobacco colony—that she needed the whole fur trade, and so forth?”\footnote{169} The present circumstances displayed the greater theological truth: “Cannons and trumpets, and all the horrid noise of war, proclaim aloud this melancholy truth, that we are a race of apostate creatures, that have fallen from our

\footnote{163}Davies, “God the Sovereign of all Kingdoms,” in \textit{Sermons}, 3:349.  
\footnote{165}Davies, “The Crisis: Or the Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times,” in \textit{Sermons}, 3:130.  
original rectitude, and become the slaves of imperious and savage passions.”

The citizens’ only hope was to “Repent! Oh! My countrymen, Repent! Sin is the cause of our danger; sin is the bane of our land: and this cause cannot be removed but by repentance.”

Davies urged his hearers to join fasting to their repentance as “the proper expression of it,” and to join prayer to both exercises. For Davies, repentance was intended to restore fellowship with God broken by sin and such fellowship was vitally necessary: “If God dispose the victory as he pleases, then it is most fit, and absolutely necessary, that we should seek to secure his friendship.” While it is clear that Davies called the citizens of Virginia to repent, it is also clear that he located the war’s primary cause in the wickedness of Britain’s enemies.

Samuel Davies appears to have had nothing but contempt for France. Davies’ disdain for the French stemmed from a variety of reasons, but the strongest reason seems to be the strong ties between France and Roman Catholicism. The French were terrorizing Virginians with “popish torture.” Davies believed that he and his hearers might be witnessing the promised final battle between the Lamb and the beast (cf. Revelation 19:11ff). The beast, of course, was the pope and his powers. Davies commonly spoke of France’s civil and religious tyranny and predicted great danger for the cause of Protestantism should France prevail. While France’s alliance with Rome

troubled Davies, the native Indians, France’s allies, also provoked great fear because of their paganism.

Samuel Davies offered a horrifying and dehumanizing depiction of the Indians:

The bloody barbarians have exercised on some of them the most unnatural and leisurely tortures; and other they have butchered in their beds, or in some unguarded hour. Can human nature bear the horror of the sight? See yonder! The hairy scalps clotted with gore! The mangled limbs! Women ripped up! The heart and bowels still palpitating with life, and smoking on the ground! See the savages swilling their blood, and imbibing a more outrageous fury with the inhuman draught! Sure these are not men: they are not beasts of prey; they are something worse; they must be infernal furies in human shape.177

Davies clearly sought to evangelize the Indians, and saw the British failure to spread the gospel among them more properly as one of the causes for the war,178 yet the majority of his descriptions obscure any concern for their physical or spiritual welfare. He feared an increasing alliance with France among other Indian nations.179 Although he commonly pictured them as butchers, rapists, and murderers,180 and a “cruel, barbarous people,”181 Davies seemed willing to accept Indian assistance from the Catawbas and Cherokees in prosecuting the war,182 but in a telling statement, Davies asserted that even the Indian allies of the British would “probably break off their alliance with [us] and join the victorious party.”183 Because of France’s papal-driven ambitions and the Indian


bloodlust, Davies was confident that the battle in which the British were engaged was right.

In a modern setting the phrase “holy war” carries a variety of connotations, yet this phrase aptly describes Davies’ understanding of the conflict. In March, 1755, Davies declared that it was not only lawful, but part of the Virginians’ “Christian duty” to take up arms to defend their country.184 Later that August, a month after General Braddock’s defeat, Davies told a company of volunteers that the cause in which they were engaged was noble and exhorted them to pursue the virtue of courage in battle, as was becoming for Christian men.185 In an address to militiamen three years later, Davies could pronounce a beatitude on the soldiers: “Blessed is the brave soldier: blessed is the defender of his country, and the destroyer of his enemies. Blessed are they who offer themselves willingly in this service, and who faithfully discharge it.”186 These defenders of their country did not merely prepare defenses at home and wait for the enemy; rather, they took the offensive and sought the enemy on his own ground.187

War was not the normal pattern of Christians, nor was it to be sought. Davies began one sermon, addressed to soldiers, by declaring God’s desire to see “universal harmony and benevolence prevail among his creatures,” a desire consistent with God’s character as revealed in Scripture. Yet “when . . . the lusts of men are perpetually embroiling the world with wars,” when “ambition and avarice would rob us of our property, for which we have toiled, and on which we subsist,” when free men face enslavement, when one’s religion is threatened, when one’s fellow citizens are butchered or confined “in a barbarous captivity in the dens of savages,” and when all appears to be

184Davies, “God the Sovereign of all Kingdoms,” in Sermons, 3:354.
lost, “when this is the case, what is then the will of God?” Davies’ concludes forcefully that “in such a time, even the God of Peace proclaims by his Providence, ‘To arms!’” Davies described these soldiers as “an army of saints,” yet realized that the life of a soldier was ripe for sin and was quick to note that one’s military achievements offered no eternal salvation. Yet even those unable to go a fight could contribute through means such as taxes or through spiritual warfare.

At the risk of criticizing Davies from a safe distance, it seems clear that his rhetoric toward the French was often overheated and that his ethic toward the native Indians was surely inconsistent with the gospel ministry in which he was engaged. Davies was willing to impute the worst motives to his enemies, namely greed and tyranny, while seeming to pass over the British greed and tyranny in the form of slavery that would nearly destroy his beloved Virginia within a hundred years. Davies’ assertion that the militiamen who defended Virginia were blessed by God is impossible to verify, but seems to go too far. Yet Davies interpretation is theologically consistent.

First, Davies remained true to his theological moorings of God’s sovereign reign in history. Even in desperate and wicked times, God was in control, and at times used other sinful people to discipline the church. What is less clear, however, is exactly how coextensive the British nation and the church were for Davies. Second, Davies’ assessment of the spiritual condition of Virginians is prescient and consistent with similar evaluations made by the Baptists and Methodists, and within one generation following his death, many people in Virginia were skeptical of the most basic claims of Davies’

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Christianity. Deism and skepticism became fashionable in Virginia, especially following the disestablishment of the Anglican Church.

Perhaps Davies’ most significant interpretation of the French and Indian war is to be found in his own conclusion to a sermon delivered in 1758: “I could venture the reputation of my judgment and veracity, that it will never be well with our country till there be more of the fear and love of God in it, and till the name of Jesus be of more importance among us.” Theology and piety met, even during war. If the war represented a significant upheaval for colonists on the western frontier, this period also brought a major change to the Davies family when Samuel was nominated (twice) as president of the College of New Jersey.

President Davies and the College of New Jersey: 1759–1761

Aaron Burr Sr. had served as the College of New Jersey’s president since 1747 (elected formally in 1748), but his presidency ended with his death in 1757. The college’s trustees prevailed upon Burr’s father-in-law, Jonathan Edwards, to fill the vacancy, a call to which the gifted theologian consented, albeit reluctantly. Edwards died on March 22, 1758 following complications from a smallpox inoculation. He had served as president only two months. The college’s trustees met in April and elected James Lockwood of Connecticut president, but Lockwood refused, and the trustees convened yet again in August 1758 to choose a leader. They elected Samuel Davies.


Davies took the matter to his presbytery, which advised him to remain in Virginia, and thus Davies declined the college’s call. Between August 1758 and the summer of 1759, Davies and the trustees exchanged a series of letters. Davies would not resign his pastoral charge without the consent of the New York Synod. Davies also believed that he was an inferior candidate when compared to Samuel Finley. Davies yielded and became the college’s fourth president. He left his congregation on May 17 and took office on July 26, 1759.197 Davies presided over the college’s commencement in September 1759. Davies was now an administrator.

Among the first tasks the trustees required of Davies was that he “take a Methodical Catalogue of the Books in the College Library.”198 Davies was himself an inveterate reader: his personal library may have contained over 500 volumes and his two-year journal of his trip to Great Britain records his wide-ranging reading interests.199 Davies completed the catalog in 1760, and his prefatory remarks indicate the value which he placed on reading: “A large and well-sorted Collection of Books on the various Branches of Literature, is the most ornamental and useful Furniture of a College, and the most proper and valuable Fund with which it can be endowed.”200 A well-stocked library allowed students to move beyond the boundaries of assigned texts, or merely those books required for recitation, enabling them to become conversant in multiple opinions, to

197Maclean, History of the College of New Jersey, 194–202, provides excerpts and summaries of the correspondence between Davies and the various trustees.

198Maclean, History of the College of New Jersey, 206.

199Richard Beale Davis noted Davies’ library in his introduction to Davies’ collected poems. See Davis, ed., Miscellaneous Poems, xi. Davis appears to have speculated at the number of volumes in Davies’ personal library as he offers no annotation to support this count. On Davies’ reading during his fund raising trip to Great Britain, see Pilcher, ed., Samuel Davies Abroad, 31, 32, 38, and 39 among numerous other references.

200Samuel Davies, A Catalogue of Books in the Library of the College of New Jersey, January 29, 1760 (Woodbridge, NJ: James Parker, 1760), iii. Julian Boyd, Princeton librarian at the time of the catalog’s republication, indicated that Davies’ catalog was only the third produced in the colonies, behind Harvard (1723) and Yale (1743). The catalog indicates the library’s holdings were 1,281 volumes.
become aware of various errors, and to prepare for a life of both private and public learning.201 Davies believed that the catalog would show students (current and prospective) that the college’s library was well-furnished, but far from complete, and that it might help direct donations of those inclined to support the school.202 Davies undertook other administrative matters during 1759-1760: purchasing additional land for the school, developing new admissions criteria and degree qualifications, and introducing psalmody to evening worship.203 Another noteworthy aspect of Davies’ presidency was the care given to the study of Scripture: “The President and Tutors were authorized to appoint any of the students to read a portion of the sacred Scriptures out of the original language at morning prayers.”204 Davies, the gifted speaker, sought to cultivate public speaking among the student body by instituting monthly orations for the college’s senior class.205 Davies presided over three commencements from 1758–1760, conferring upon students the Bachelor and Master of Arts degrees.206

On January 14, 1761, Davies delivered a eulogy for King George II at Nassau Hall.207 The young president took ill several days later and a doctor bled him. Davies preached twice the following day. His fever worsened. The next morning, during breakfast, violent chills assaulted Davies’ body. For ten days he lay delirious until succumbing to his fever on February 4, 1761, nine months short of his thirty-eighth

201 Davies, Catalogue, iii.
202 Davies, Catalogue, iv.
204 Maclean, History of the College of New Jersey, 213.
205 Maclean, History of the College of New Jersey, 213.
206 Although Davies had completed his studies at Fagg’s Manor, a private school, Davies earned the Master of Arts degree on Wednesday, September 26, 1753. He delivered and defended his thesis, Personales Distinctiones in Trinitate sunt aeternae, presumably at a commencement ceremony as the governor of New Jersey and college trustees were present. See Pilcher, ed., Samuel Davies Abroad, 16.
birthday.\(^{208}\)

News of Davies’ death spread throughout the Middle Colonies and abroad and memorials were several in number and charitable in tone. The earliest eulogy appears to have been that of Presbyterian minister David Bostwick of New York, which was penned on February 13, 1761 and appended to Davies’ own sermon on King George’s death.\(^{209}\) Davies’ London correspondent, Thomas Gibbons (d. 1785), recalled his friend’s “pious character” and “great intellect.”\(^{210}\) Samuel Finley, the man whom Davies had thought the better candidate for president of the college and also the man who would become Davies’ successor, praised Davies’ personal discipline and humility.\(^{211}\) One of the most interesting reminiscences came from physician and patriot Benjamin Rush (1746–1813), then a fifteen-year-old recent alumnus of the school. Writing to classmate Enoch Green (1735–1776), Rush lamented: “Oh, my friend, you and I have lost a father, a friend. He was the bright source of advice and consolation, the focus of every earthly virtue, and alas he bore too much of the Divine Image—he had too much of the spirit of the inhabitants of Heaven to be a long sojourner here on Earth.”\(^{212}\)


\(^{209}\) Davies, *A Sermon Delivered at Nassau-Hall, January 14, 1761, On the Death of His Late Majesty King George II*, by Samuel Davies, A. M., Late President of the College of New Jersey, to which is prefixed a brief Account of the Life, Character, and Death of the Author, by David Bostwick, A. M., Minister of the Presbyterian Congregation in New-York (Williamsburg, VA: William Hunter, 1761).


CHAPTER 3

SCRIPTURE: THE FOUNDATION OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Our Petitions can extend far; our tho’ts farther—But above—abundantly above—exceeding [abun]dantly above what we ask or think—exceeding [abun]dantly above all that we ask of think, —w’ a [ . . . ]gious extent is this! And yet, thus far does [ . . . ] & Grace of God extend to supply our Wants & to [nou]rish us w’th his Blessings. Amazing Tho’t! & how [ . . . ] exprest! Plain as Language can be; & yet as h[igh] as Tho’t can rise. The Repetition of y’ Particle [ . . . ] in y’ original renders it still more emphatical. [ . . . ] ναμένῳ ὑπὲρ πάντα ποιῆσαι ὑπὲρ ἐκ πε[ri]σσ’ς ὧν ἄιτούμεθα ἢ νοῦμεν—which may perhaps [ . . . ] thus translated, ‘Who is able to do above,—exceed[ . . . ] abundantly above all that we ask or think. [sic] ¹

Samuel Davies recorded these observations on Ephesians 3:20 in his New Testament on a blank page opposite the printed text. His style was meditative, focusing on key words in the verse, which he wanted to recall later for personal reflection or sermon preparation. This annotation is one of several that have survived and indicates that their author gave meticulous attention to the Bible as he analyzed syntactical constructions in the Greek. The importance of Scripture extended even to the particle. The mention of the biblical text being “Plain” recalls the Reformation emphasis on the perspicuity of Scripture. In fine, Davies’ notes link the significance of the biblical text to the life of its readers: the reader learns that God graciously sustains believers by his word. Samuel Davies believed that the Bible was the foundation for genuine Christian piety and this chapter explores the contours of his reflections on the nature and place of Scripture in the Christian life.

**Scripture in Confession**

When the New Castle Presbytery ordained Samuel Davies in February 1747,

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¹Samuel Davies, New Testament annotations, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA. This copy of Davies’ New Testament was donated to the Virginia Historical Society in 1963 and contains a portion of Galatians through 2 Timothy and bears Davies’ annotations. This manuscript seems not to have been known to George William Pilcher and earlier biographers.
the young evangelist subscribed to the Westminster Confession of Faith, the Longer and Shorter Catechisms, and the directories for public and family worship. The presbytery followed the pattern adopted by the Philadelphia Synod in 1729 of requiring subscription to these standards as a condition for ordination. Although some within the synod debated the necessity of subscription, none questioned the standards’ statements on Scripture. These standards provide a helpful framework for evaluating Davies’ own remarks regarding the Bible.

**The Westminster Confession of Faith**

The Westminster Confession of Faith was a common confession that united English, Irish, and Scottish Presbyterians. An assembly of divines in London drafted and edited the confession from 1643–1648. The colonial synods of Philadelphia and New York adopted the Confession in the eighteenth century and it continued to influence colonial Presbyterianism through the American Revolution and into the nineteenth century. Rather than beginning with ontology and the doctrine of God, the Confession first addressed epistemology by beginning with Scripture.

According to the Confession, nature provides a genuine knowledge of its creator, but this natural knowledge is insufficient for salvation. Instead, God committed his diverse self-revelations into writing “to declare that his will unto his church; and afterwards, for the better preserving and propagating of the truth, and for the more sure establishment and comfort of the church against the corruption of the flesh, and the malice of Satan and of the world.” The “sure establishment” of Scripture is the church’s

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3Westminster Confession of Faith (WCF) 1:1.
foundation. While the canon of Scripture was still a matter of debate among Continental Protestants in the mid-seventeenth century, the Confession recognized 39 Old Testament books and 27 New Testament writings as canonical books and differentiated these writings from the Apocrypha. Because Scripture is the “Word of God,” its authority invites faith and obedience and transcends human and ecclesial testimony. While Scripture presents a consistent message, majestic style, and “many other incomparable excellencies,” one’s final assurance of its “infallible truth and divine authority” rests not in these evidences, but rather in the internal witness of Word and Spirit.

The Westminster theologians agreed that Scripture was a sufficient testimony of “[God’s] own glory, man’s salvation, faith and life,” and that no new revelation of the Spirit or human tradition could be added to it. While anyone could comprehend Scripture’s teachings, the confession’s authors acknowledged “the inward illumination of the Spirit of God to be necessary for the saving understanding of such things as are revealed in the Word.” Although some parts of Scripture may be more difficult to understand than others, the essential message of salvation is clear. As to Scripture’s origin, the original Hebrew and Greek words of Scripture were immediately inspired by God, but people may translate the Bible into various languages that “the Word of God dwelling plentifully in all, they may worship him in an acceptable manner; and, through patience and comfort of the Scriptures, may have hope.” Scripture is its own best interpreter and difficult passages must be interpreted by placing them alongside clearer

4WCF 1:2–3. On the issue of canonical debates during the Reformation and into the seventeenth century, see Letham, Westminster Assembly, 128–30.
5WCF 1:4.
6WCF 1:5.
7WCF 1:6.
8WCF 1:7.
9WCF 1:8.
Finally, Scripture is the “supreme judge by which all controversies of religion are to be determined, and all decrees of councils, opinions of ancient writers, doctrines of men, and private spirits, are to be examined, and in whose sentence we are to rest, can be no other but the Holy Spirit speaking in the Scripture.”

B. B. Warfield considered this section of the Confession to be singular among ecclesiastical creeds: “There is certainly in the whole mass of confessional literature no more nobly conceived or ably wrought-out statement of doctrine than the chapter ‘Of the Holy Scripture.’” Samuel Davies would likely have agreed. Davies subscribed to the Confession in 1747 and in 1758 he was requiring men ordained by the Hanover Presbytery in Virginia to do likewise. An ordination sermon that Davies preached for Henry Patillo and William Richardson in July of 1758 contains the following oath:

Do you receive the Westminster Confession of Faith, as the confession of your faith: that is, do you believe it contains an excellent summary of the pure doctrines of Christianity as taught in the Scriptures, and as purged from the corruptions of popery, and other errors that have crept in to the church? And do you purpose to explain the Scriptures agreeably to the substance of it?

The fact that Davies and the presbytery which he established required ministerial candidates to adopt the Westminster Confession indicates that they viewed the document as relevant; that they required candidates to affirm it as an “excellent summary” and required them to explicate Scripture consistent with its substance shows that they valued it.

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10 WCF 1.9.

11 WCF 1.10.


The Westminster Catechisms

Questions 3–6 and 154–160 of the Larger Catechism and questions 2–3 of the Shorter Catechism address Scripture. The Larger Catechism identifies the “holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament” as the “word of God,” and this word is “the only rule of faith and obedience.”

To answer the question of how the Old and New Testaments claim divine authority, the catechism states,

The Scriptures manifest themselves to be the Word of God, by their majesty and purity; by the consent of all the parts, and the scope of the whole, which is to give all glory to God; by their light and power to convince and convert sinners, to comfort and build up believers unto salvation: but the Spirit of God bearing witness by and with the Scriptures in the heart of man, is alone able fully to persuade it that they are the very word of God.

As to Scripture’s general content, the catechism is brief: “The Scriptures principally teach, what man is to believe concerning God, and what duty God requires of man.”

More particularly, the Scriptures “make known what God is, the persons in the Godhead, his decrees, and the execution of his decrees.” The Shorter Catechism adapted questions 3 and 5 of the Larger Catechism. Notably, the Shorter Catechism links Scripture with humanity’s ultimate purpose of worshipping and enjoying God:

Q. 1. What is the chief end of man?  
A. Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.  
Q. 2. What rule hath God given to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him?  
A. The Word of God, which is contained in the Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments, is the only rule to direct us how we may glorify and enjoy him.

The Larger Catechism includes several questions especially relevant for a piety grounded

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14Questions 158–160 of the Larger Catechism address Scripture as it is to be handled by those preaching the Bible and those who hear it preached. Questions 3–6 and 154–157 are directed to all Christians.

15Westminster Larger Catechism (WLC) 3.

16WLC 4.

17WLC 5.

18WLC 6.

19Westminster Shorter Catechism (WSC) 1–2. Question 2 of the WSC is adapted from Question 3 of the WLC and Question 3 of the WSC is identical to Question 5 of the WLC.
in Scripture. First, Scripture is one of the “outward and ordinary means whereby Christ communicates to his church the benefits of his mediation.”\textsuperscript{20} The Holy Spirit then uses the Word to effect salvation:

The Spirit of God maketh the reading, but especially the preaching of the Word, an effectual means of enlightening, convincing, and humbling sinners; of driving them out of themselves, and drawing them unto Christ; of conforming them to his image, and subduing them to his will; of strengthening them against temptations and corruptions; of building them up in grace, and establishing their hearts in holiness and comfort through faith unto salvation.\textsuperscript{21} Individuals and families are to read the Bible in understandable translations with particular attention to devotion:

The holy Scriptures are to be read with an high and reverent esteem of them; with a firm persuasion that they are the very Word of God, and that he only can enable us to understand them; with desire to know, believe, and obey the will of God revealed in them; with diligence, and attention to the matter and scope of them; with meditation, application, self-denial, and prayer.\textsuperscript{22} Samuel Davies urged his hearers to consider the Shorter Catechism’s statement on God’s providence, indicating that he found the catechism to be a useful summary of doctrine for the laity.\textsuperscript{23}

**The Westminster Directories**

In addition to its confession and catechisms, the Westminster Assembly also produced directories for public and family worship. The Directory for the Publick Worship of God provided a framework for pastors “to conduct worship services within the regulative principle of Scripture.”\textsuperscript{24} It provided a variety of instructions regarding the public reading of Scripture, public prayers interspersed through the service, preaching,

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\textsuperscript{20}WLC 154.

\textsuperscript{21}WLC 155.

\textsuperscript{22}WLC 156–157.

\textsuperscript{23}Samuel Davies, “The Divine Government the Joy of our World,” in *Sermons*, 1:430.

\textsuperscript{24}Letham, *Westminster Assembly*, 304.
the sacraments, the Lord’s Day, psalmody, and a variety of pastoral duties such as marriage ceremonies, visiting the sick, and burying the dead.

With regard to Scripture, the Westminster theologians recognized that the public reading of Scripture was essential for congregational edification.25 This responsibility was reserved for the clergy and those preparing for ministry. Scripture was to be read serially, normally in chapter-length sections from both Testaments, yet the minister had discretion and the assembly’s blessing to read more.26 Literate members of the congregation were to be encouraged to read Scripture privately; illiterate congregants were to be encouraged to learn to read, that they might be pursue private devotions.27

The theologians assembled in London also gave the church a Directory for Family-Worship. Though public worship was a great blessing, the divines believed that “it is expedient and necessary that secret worship of each person alone, and private worship of families, be pressed and set up; that, with national reformation, the profession and power of godliness, both personal and domestick, be advanced.”28

The directory advised the use of prayer and meditation in “secret” or private worship as “the unspeakable benefit whereof is best known to them who are most exercised therein; this being the mean whereby, in a special way, communion with God is entertained, and right preparation for all other duties obtained.”29 Such worship was not for clergy only, but for “persons of all sorts,” both morning and evening. Paraphrasing Acts 20:28, heads of households were instructed to take careful watch over themselves

26DPW, “Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures.”
27DPW, “Of Publick Reading of the Holy Scriptures.”
29DFW, 1.
and their families, that they observe this worship. The Directory also outlined family worship, which included prayer, praises, and reading Scripture, and also the use of the Lord’s Day for spiritual growth. Samuel Davies’ vision of a word-based devotion was certainly consistent with these guidebooks.

The Thirty-Nine Articles

The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion were not Davies’ native creed, but he adopted them in 1747, with some reservations, in order to secure a license to preach in Virginia. Articles 6 and 7 of the statement address Scripture. Article 6 describes the nature and purpose of Scripture:

Holy Scripture containeth all things necessary to salvation: so that whatsoever is not read therein, nor may be proved thereby, is not to be required of any man, that it should be believed as an article of the Faith, or be thought requisite or necessary to salvation. In the name of the Holy Scripture we do understand those canonical Books of the Old and New Testament, of whose authority was never any doubt in the Church . . . And the other Books (as Hierome saith) the Church doth read for example of life and instruction of manners; but yet doth it not apply them to establish any doctrine . . . [and] All the Books of the New Testament, as they are commonly received, we do receive, and account them Canonical.

Both the Westminster Confession of Faith and the Thirty-Nine Articles agree that Scripture contains all that is necessary for saving faith. The Thirty-Nine Articles enumerate the apocryphal books of the Old Testament, which the Westminster Confession omits. This listing prompted Samuel Davies to add the following caveat to his assent to the Articles:

6th Art: with this explication, that by the phrase “And the other Books (as Hierome saith) the church doth read for example of life & instruction of manner”, be not intended to enjoin as a duty the reading of the Apocryphal Books in Publick

30DFW, 1.
31DFW, 2 and 8.
32Davies’ reservations are described in chap. 2 of this dissertation.
33The Thirty-Nine Articles of Religion, 6.
Religious Assemblies.34

Davies’ rejoinder indicates his scrupulous caution with regard to Scripture’s canon and the spiritual welfare of his congregations. To Article 7, which describes the continuity between the Old and New Testaments, Davies readily assented, taking no exception. Although Davies made specific references the Westminster Confession and Catechisms relatively sparingly, a survey of his body of sermons shows that these standards formed the basis for his views on the nature and place of Scripture in the Christian life.

A Theological Analysis of Samuel Davies’ View of Scripture

A close reading of Samuel Davies’ various writings provides an accessible view of his theology of Scripture. The following analysis utilizes Davies’ own theological terminology, which often followed the Westminster Confession.

Inspiration, Authority, and Infallibility

Samuel Davies was certain that the words of Scripture, though penned by human authors, were given directly from God. In a sermon on Luke 16:27–31, Davies argued for divine inspiration of Scripture by virtue of its sublime content when contrasted with its humble origins. How else could a “company of ignorant mechanics” living in the backwater of Judea compose such a “vast treasure of knowledge” or “a system of religion and morality so much more plain, so much more perfect, than all the famous sages of antiquity could frame?”35 Such were Jesus’ disciples, and these disciples claimed to speak on behalf of God. This sermon provides the clearest sustained statement of Davies’ theology of the Bible’s inspiration and authority.

Davies’ stated goal for the sermons was to teach believers “the grounds of the

34Samuel Davies to Patrick Henry, April 21, 1747, Dawson Papers, Earl E. Swem Library, William and Mary College, Williamsburg, VA.

Christian religion, both to prevent their seduction [by false doctrine], and to give them a rational and well-grounded faith." To accomplish this goal, Davies took a twofold approach, arguing first for Scripture’s sufficiency and then against contemporary objections to the Bible. Scripture provided sufficient grounds for faith and ethics and was self-attesting as to its divine origin. Unlike Islam, which spread by force, Christianity grew peacefully, with believers enduring opposition from all people rather than causing it. In this particular sermon, Davies emphasized Scripture’s divine origin, reliability, and clarity. More often, however, Davies asserted or simply assumed Scripture’s inspiration.

During an ordination sermon, Davies asserted that the custom of the imposition of hands was a biblical ceremony linked with the “authoritative benedictions of the inspired patriarchs and prophets.” He stated his position even more clearly in a similar sermon in which he declared that the patriarchs and prophets instituted this practice “under the immediate inspiration of the Holy Spirit.” Solomon was “the wisest of men, inspired from heaven.” Isaiah’s prophetic utterance came from the “omniscient Spirit, who inspired his lips” and Jeremiah’s plea “turn thou me, and I shall be turned” (Jeremiah 31:18) was an “inspired prayer.” Nahum’s description of God’s jealous revenge that found expression in earthquakes was penned in “the language of

38 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in Sermons, 1:88. Davies here overlooked Christendom’s more violent chapters during the medieval period.
inspiration." Paul’s characterization of the lost as “hateful, and hating one another” (cf. Titus 3:3) was written with an “inspired pen.” The author of Hebrews could write of Christ’s compassionate character because of “experience, as well as inspiration.” When the apostle John wrote of Christians being transformed into the likeness of Christ through the “vision of the blessed God in his unveiled glory” (cf. 1 John 3:1–2), he did so by “unerring inspiration.” In Davies’ view, inspiration extended also to the apostolic use of Old Testament texts for Peter offered an authoritative reading of Isaiah 28:16–17 when he took Isaiah’s “foundation stone” as a reference to the Messiah (cf. 1 Peter 2:4, 6).

Due to the fact that God had inspired the text of Scripture, the Bible possessed divine authority to govern one’s theology and to regulate the believer’s attitudes and behavior, especially as it concerned the spiritual life. Samuel Davies regularly asserted this authority when applying passages of Scripture to his audience. To those so-called Christians who neglected family religion, Davies declared that “the omission of a known, practical duty against the remonstrances of your conscience, is a certain evidence that you are entirely destitute of all religion; and therefore I must discharge the artillery of heaven against you in that dreadful imprecation which, as dictated by inspiration, is equivalent to a prediction, or denunciation.” He cited Paul’s apostolic authority when declaring “that I, and all around me, yea, all the sons of men, have been dead; in the spiritual sense, utterly dead.” The authority of Scripture was not simply a matter for preachers, but for

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45 Samuel Davies, “The Compassion of Christ to Weak Believers,” in Sermons, 1:266.
47 Samuel Davies, “Jesus Christ the Only Foundation,” in Sermons, 2:53. Davies noted that Peter was citing the Septuagint translation of the passage.
all the godly as well. Citing Isaiah 66:2, Davis preached that the truly humble person “trembles . . . at the authority of the word.”

When the authors of Scripture addressed a matter, their writings were consistently true and accurate. For example, when Scripture declares that one must experience “spiritual birth,” there is a consistency between Jesus’ teaching that “except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God” (John 3:5) and the “infallible inspiration” of Galatians 6:15 that external religious conformity cannot make one right before God. By describing Paul’s epistle as “infallible inspiration,” Davies was certainly within the bounds of the Westminster Confession, which itself spoke of the “infallible truth” of the Bible.

In a funeral sermon, Davies noted the prophet Ezekiel’s declaration that the wicked must surely die (cf. Ezekiel 33:8) was “eternal truth, which cannot fail” because it arose from “the unchangeable constitution and authentic declaration of a wise and righteous God, which must infallibly stand good, whoever oppose.” For Davies, Scripture is infallible because it originates from God, who is himself perfect:

The authority upon which we are required to receive the doctrines, and observe the precepts of Christianity, is no less than the authority of God, the supreme Lawgiver and infallible Teacher; whose wisdom to prescribe and right to command, are indisputable; and we may safely submit our understandings to his instructions, however mysterious, and our wills to his injunctions, however difficult they may seem to us.

This passage has significant implications for understanding the place of Scripture Davies’ spirituality. First, Scripture is the ultimate grounds for one’s piety. When the Bible
provides teaching and direction, it speaks with the very voice of God and is therefore authoritative and demands obedience. Next, although every command and teaching of Scripture is right, some teachings are veiled and some directions difficult. The believer obeys the biblical text in faith, trusting that God himself has spoken these words and that they are reliable, even if they are mysterious or challenging. In asserting Scripture’s place as the grounds of Christian piety, Davies followed the Westminster Confession:

The authority of the Holy Scripture, for which it ought to be believed, and obeyed, depends not upon the testimony of any man, or Church; but wholly upon God (who is truth itself) the author thereof: and therefore it is to be received, because it is the Word of God.55

### Sufficiency

Samuel Davies found the Bible unquestionably sufficient “to bring men to repentance.”56 Following the Westminster Confession (WCF 1:6), Davies stated that Scripture “gives us sufficient instructions in matters of faith, and sufficient directions in matters of practice.”57 He believed that Christian faith and practice must be grounded upon revelation, that any supposed revelation which could address both faith and practice “has the directest tendency to make us truly religious, and to bring us to a happy immortality,” and that biblical revelation, “particularly in the New Testament” was indeed ”the immediate foundation of Christianity.”58 He explained the Bible’s relationship to both matters.

Faith must be based in reality; true religion requires “right notions of God,” but such notions require more insight than the powers of natural observation allow (cf. WCF

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55WCF 1.4.


57Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in Sermons, 1:77.

Davies likened Scripture to a “collection of rays of light,” that allows one to go beyond natural reason and “brings to light” hidden things (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:9). Further, the Bible “gives us a complete system of practical religion and morality” that reveals “our duties towards God, towards our neighbours, and towards ourselves.”

These moral duties are presented simply and memorably that they might be ever present among Christians, shaping attitudes and behaviors. In its revelation of so complete a moral system, the Bible is sufficient to render “the least in the kingdom of heaven, i.e., any common Christian . . . greater than all the Socrateses, the Platos, the Ciceros, and the Senecas of antiquity; as one that is of a weak sight can see more clearly by the help of day-light, than the clearest eye can without it.”

Scripture was also eminently reasonable. “It is certain,” Davies wrote, “that as God can accept no other worship than rational from reasonable creatures, he cannot require us to believe a revelation to be divine without sufficient reason; and therefore, when he gives us a revelation, he will attest it with such evidences as will be a sufficient foundation of our belief.”

Intrinsically, “the religion of the Bible has the directest tendency to promote true piety and solid virtue.” Biblical piety checks love of self, enjoins love of others, and is “directly calculated to banish all sin out of the world; to transform impiety into devotion; injustice and oppression into equity and universal benevolence; and sensuality

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59 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in *Sermons*, 1:78.
60 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in *Sermons*, 1:78.
61 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in *Sermons*, 1:79.
64 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in *Sermons*, 1:83.
into sobriety.”65 Second, biblical prophecy offers intrinsic evidence that Scripture is sufficiently reasonable. Put simply, only God could reveal future contingent events with certainty; such events are beyond the ability of the best humans, yet numerous biblical texts reveal such contingent events and do so with striking accuracy.66 Finally, Davies argued that the Bible’s “glorious energy on the minds of men, in convincing them of sin, easing their consciences, inspiring them with unspeakable joy, subduing their lusts, and transforming them into its own likeness,” which effects Christians experience daily, was sufficient evidence of its authenticity.67

Extrinsically, Davies offered two evidences that the Bible provided a sufficiently rational ground for its claims: biblical miracles and gospel propagation. First, the New Testament attests to a great number of miracles which Jesus or his followers performed, miracles not done in secret but in public. Such miracles served to confirm Jesus’ teaching in his own day and continued to authenticate the written testimony of his teaching in Davies’ time.68 Second, although the earliest Christians “met with the most strenuous opposition from all the powers of the earth,” and even though the first evangelists were unlikely emissaries, the gospel overcame these obstacles to conquer the ancient world. Unlike Islam, however, Christianity was propagated by “force of evidence, [not] by the force of arms.”69

Aside from the more general sufficiency of Scripture, Davies also emphasized the sufficiency of the gospel. In a sermon on John 3:16-18, Davies remarked, “Sure the heavenly rivers of pleasure flow in these verses. Never, methinks, was there so much

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gospel expressed in so few words . . . . These verses alone, methinks, are a sufficient remedy for a dying world.”70 Scripture’s testimony of Jesus’ resurrection provided a “sufficient ground of faith” to convince sinners of a coming future judgment.”71 Preparation for glory occurs in this life and is fraught with difficulties, yet it is the biblical path and no other path can claim sufficient authority.72 Davies was convinced “both from reason and revelation, that an unholy impenitent sinner, while such, can never enter the kingdom of heaven.”73 Davies presented his hearers a catena of biblical passages touching on the new birth, arguing that such passages were “sufficient to convince [them] of the necessity of this great change.”74 Further, Davies believed the various biblical metaphors representing people as “spiritually dead” (cf. Eph 2:1), “blind” (cf. 2 Cor 4:4), and “deaf” (cf. Ps 58:4) “sufficiently prove the degeneration of mankind.”75 Although some elements of Adam’s fall are difficult to understand, some knowledge of his transgression is necessary and the Bible provides “sufficient light” for such knowledge.76 The authority of Scripture provides “sufficient evidence” of peoples’ natural disinclination toward God and holiness.77 Then, Scripture’s “repeated declarations” provide “sufficient proof to those who believe their divine authority,” of God’s sovereign rule over kingdoms and war.78

75 Samuel Davies, “The Success of the Ministry Owing to a Divine Influence,” in Sermons, 3:14.
78 Samuel Davies, “God the Sovereign of All Kingdoms,” in Sermons, 3:334.
Perspicuity

In a sermon on Ephesians 2:5, Samuel Davies explained the sinner’s desperate condition of spiritual death and followed with an observation from Paul’s epistle: “Let any man carefully read these verses, and consider their most natural meaning, and I cannot but think common sense will direct him thus to understand them. The Scriptures were written with a design to be understood.” \(^7^9\) Davies’ comments demonstrate his commitment to the Bible’s clarity, or in Reformation parlance, its perspicuity.

As recently as a century before Davies’ ministry, the Roman Catholic Church rejected the notion of the laity interpreting Scripture, insisting that trained clergy were its only appropriate interpreters. \(^8^0\) Early Protestant reformers, most notably Martin Luther (1483–1546), had challenged this notion in the mid-sixteenth century, insisting on Scripture’s inherent clarity. \(^8^1\) By the time the Westminster theologians took up the subject, there were divergent positions within Protestantism regarding the Bible’s clarity. \(^8^2\) The Confession recognized varying degrees of biblical clarity:

All things in Scripture are not alike plain in themselves, nor alike clear unto all: yet those things which are necessary to be known, believed, and observed for salvation are so clearly propounded, and opened in some place of Scripture or other, that not only the learned, but the unlearned, in a due use of the ordinary means, may attain unto a sufficient understanding of them. \(^8^3\)

Davies admitted that some parts of Scripture were “difficult and strange,” but quickly noted that there were also “many strange things in the book of nature,” which did not undermine his confidence in its author or the clarity of those things which were more easily understood. Such difficulties within the Bible, Davies asserted, were intended to

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\(^7^9\) Davies, “Nature and Universality of Spiritual Death,” in Sermons, 1:163–64.

\(^8^0\) Gregg R. Allison, Historical Theology: An Introduction to Christian Doctrine (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2011), 120. See also Letham, Westminster Assembly, 142.

\(^8^1\) Allison, Historical Theology, 128–31.

\(^8^2\) Letham, Westminster Assembly, 142–44. See also Allison, Historical Theology, 135–38.

\(^8^3\) WCF 1.7.
promote godliness: “It is necessary we should meet with difficulties in the Scriptures to mortify our pride.”  

Davies believed that biblical revelation was progressively clearer in the New Testament than in the Old. Though he valued the Old Testament, he found the Mosaic covenant “less clear and efficacious” than the new covenant. This situation was in part due to the abiding presence and work of the Holy Spirit among Christians: though “external evidences” such as miracles and prophecies were “sufficiently clear,” under the new covenant, the Spirit of Christ indwells believers, providing a greater degree of “internal illumination” to the biblical text. While the Spirit empowered certain key leaders under the Old Covenant, he did not abide upon the entire believing community as characterized his presence in the New Covenant.

The doctrine of justification by faith illustrates the increased clarity of New Testament Scripture. Davies noted that “this is the only way in which any of the sons of Adam have been saved since the fall . . . and that now, by the gospel, it is more fully and illustriously revealed, the object of a more distinct, particular, and explicit faith.” Further, Davies described the doctrine of justification by faith as “the substratum of all the ceremonies and institutions of the law of Moses” and stated that “the prophets also received this Evangelical light, and continued to diffuse it around them, till the Sun of Righteousness arose; but all these discoveries were but dark, when compared to the clearer revelation we have of it in the New Testament.”

In keeping with Westminster, Davies considered the gospel of salvation

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84 Davies, “Divine Authority and Sufficiency,” in *Sermons*, 1:97.
85 Davies, “Success of the Ministry,” in *Sermons*, 3:16.
through Jesus an especially “clear and perfect revelation.” Davies believed his own day to be part of the “dispensation of the gospel,” a period which he characterized as “a bright and illustrious day” described by numerous biblical metaphors: Jesus is the “Sun of righteousness” (cf. Mal 4:2); and “the Light of the world” (cf. John 8:12). As daytime provided a clear view of nature, so the gospel:

reveals the perfections of God, the wonderful scheme of Providence, the beauties of holiness, the nature of true religion, the duty of man in all its extent, the wonders of the scheme of redemption through Jesus Christ, and the method in which obnoxious sinners of the race of man may be reconciled to God, the prospects of life and immortality, and the important realities of the eternal world.

Peter described the gospel as a “marvelous light” (cf. 1 Pet 2:9) and through Scripture this light shines forth with tremendous brilliance: “Then in what a new and glorious light does the great God appear, and all the truths revealed in the gospel! What new and surprising views [the sinner] has of himself, of sin, and of the eternal world! all is real, interesting, and affecting!”

**Samuel Davies and the Interpretation of Scripture**

Samuel Davies approached Scripture with reverence, attentiveness, and concern to understand and articulate the meaning and message of a text. As a preacher, Davies followed the Puritan plain style, beginning his sermons by explaining a text before deducing several doctrines and improvements (or applications) from that text. Given that the bulk of Davies’ writings are sermons, a detailed examination would

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89 Samuel Davies, “The Crisis, or the Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times,” in *Sermons*, 3:124.


require a thesis unto itself. This exploration will take a doctrinal sounding to show how Davies’ reading of Scripture shaped his theology and piety. It is clear that Davies read the Bible in a straightforward, literal manner, proudly claiming its supernatural elements over and against contemporary interpreters who favored more naturalistic readings. When Davies wanted to illustrate those who rejected the Bible’s supernatural message and authority, he most often turned to the deists.94

**Deism in the Eighteenth Century**

Deism began in England late in the seventeenth century and its influence spread abroad during the eighteenth century.95 Grounded in the ever expanding confidence in human reason which marked the enlightenment, deism favored natural religion to the supernaturalism of the Bible. Deism flourished in England from the 1690s when John Toland’s (1670–1722) *Christianity Not Mysterious* was first published, until roughly the early 1740s.96 Toland’s religious journey began in Irish Catholicism and ended in pantheism.97 His *Christianity Not Mysterious* drew upon John Locke’s (1632–1704) theory of knowledge and rejected elements of mystery in Christianity as corruptions introduced in the early church, especially through the allegorical and

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96John Toland, *Christianity Not Mysterious: Or, A Treatise Shewing, That there is Nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, Nor above it: And that No Christian Doctrine can be Properly call’d a Mystery* (London: n.p., 1702). Toland first published this work in 1696 anonymously. He affixed his name to the second printing in 1702.

typological interpretive methods of the early apologists and fathers. In another work, *Amyntor*, Toland criticized the canon of Scripture, arguing that there was little difference between canonical New Testament writings and several apocryphal books from the same period. Since the New Testament epistles ignored the four canonical gospels, one could surmise that these gospels were not widely-known among early Christians. Further, discrepancies between the gospel stories, such as are found in the genealogies of Matthew and Luke, raise questions as to their authenticity and therefore their authority.

Toland’s works spurred further deistic writings by Anthony Cooper, Earl of Shaftesbury (1671–1713), Anthony Collins (1676–1729), Thomas Woolston (1669–1731), and Matthew Tindal (1656–1733). Deistic treatments of the Bible grew increasingly bold, challenging literal readings of biblical prophecies and miracles and also the deity of Christ. According to Orr, English interest in deism was beginning to ebb by the early 1740s as authors from this point forward failed to produce new ideas or arguments. Their writings mainly repackaged earlier themes. One instance of this repackaging is particularly noteworthy, for it was the posthumously published writings of Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (1672–1751), which provoked Samuel Davies’ ire.

Lord Bolingbroke’s *Works* went to press in 1754 in four volumes. Orr has summarized their content thus: “Bolingbroke’s works abound in destructive and unfriendly criticism of nearly everybody and everything he mentions but especially of the Bible, the Church Fathers and the clergy.” Bolingbroke was more summative than inventive. He rejected Moses’ account of the creation of the universe as inferior to that of
Nicholas Copernicus (1473–1543), Galileo Galilei (1564–1642), Johann Kepler (1571–1630), and Isaac Newton (1643–1727).\textsuperscript{103} He dismissed the prospect of the divine revelation of Scripture, calling men who supposed themselves inspired by God to be "mad."\textsuperscript{104} Bolingbroke also lampooned theology as making Christianity insensible.\textsuperscript{105} He took particular umbrage to the doctrines of the Trinity and the atonement of Christ.\textsuperscript{106}

In the colonies, deism spread more quietly. New England clergyman Cotton Mather (1663–1738) noted his concern at the spread of deism in England in 1701.\textsuperscript{107} He further opposed deism in his \textit{Reasonable Religion}, published in 1713 and also explicitly rejected Toland’s arguments in a 1716 tract, \textit{Utilia}.\textsuperscript{108} In 1732, Jonathan Dickinson took on the topic in his \textit{The Reasonableness of Christianity} and later revisited the subject in \textit{Familiar Letters upon a Variety of Religious Subjects}.\textsuperscript{109} From 1747–1761, the years of Davies’ ministry and presidency, deism was becoming increasingly influential in North America. According to Morais, “Prior to 1784, the American deistic movement made no real effort to examine openly and critically ‘the revealed word of God.’”\textsuperscript{110} But during the

\textsuperscript{103}Henry St. John, \textit{The Works of Lord Bolingbroke}, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1841), 495.

\textsuperscript{104}Henry St. John, \textit{The Works of Lord Bolingbroke}, vol. 3 (Philadelphia: Carey and Hart, 1841), 381.


\textsuperscript{108}Lovelace, \textit{American Pietism}, 52–53.

\textsuperscript{109}Jonathan Dickinson, \textit{The Reasonableness of Christianity, in Four Sermons} (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1732) and idem., \textit{Familiar Letters upon a Variety of Religious Subjects}, 4\textsuperscript{th} ed. (Glasgow: John Bryce, 1775).

\textsuperscript{110}Herbert M. Morais, \textit{Deism in Eighteenth Century America} (New York: Russell and Russell, 1933), 16.
mid-eighteenth century, men indispensable to America’s future found intellectual satisfaction in deism.111 Samuel Davies was not among these men.

**Samuel Davies and Deism**

Samuel Davies was familiar with deism from at least 1754.112 He read Bolingbroke’s *Works* in the spring of 1757 and summarized his views to a correspondent that April.113 Davies was impressed with Bolingbroke’s “manly Style, and strong Imagination,” but with little else.114 How could one applaud the religion of Jesus while simultaneously rejecting the religion of Moses upon which Jesus’ teachings were founded?115 How could Bolingbroke consider Christianity a true religion revealed from God while attacking the very possibility of genuine divine revelation at the same time?116 How could Bolingbroke’s “Christianity” flourish when it was devoid of prayer?117 In sum, Davies wrote, “I could defie his Lordship’s strongest Advocate to point out one Thing

111 Among these notable was Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), who had become an avowed deist by the late 1720s. See Walter Isaacson, *Benjamin Franklin: An American Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003), 84–88, for a helpful discussion of Franklin’s religious sentiments. Further, in 1755, Massachusetts Attorney General Paul Dudley (1675–1752) endowed at Harvard lectures on religion named in his honor, which featured the topic of natural religion prominently. See G. Adolph Koch, *Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1933), 16. Also, the young Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) was growing in his appreciation of deism by the start of his college career at William and Mary in Williamsburg, Virginia, from 1760–1762. I have omitted Thomas Paine (1737–1809) from this list because he came to accept deistic beliefs while living in England, before his arrival in North America in 1774.

112 George William Pilcher, ed., *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753–55* (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 72 and 113. Davies journal indicates that he “had a long Conversation with Samuel Dicker Esquire a notorious Deist” (72) and that he was troubled by the spread of deism among Presbyterian clergy (113).


114 Davies, “Recovered Tract,” 351.

115 Davies, “Recovered Tract,” 353.

116 Davies, “Recovered Tract,” 353.

117 Davies, “Recovered Tract,” 354.
offered by his Lordship upon this Head, that has the Appearance of a solid Argument.”118 Davies had encountered deism well before this review.

As Bolingbroke’s *Works* summarized most all the arguments of his predecessors, and as Davies was acquainted with these works, they serve as an appropriate place to examine Davies’ interpretation of the Bible in light of alternative approaches with which he was familiar. Though one might contrast Bolingbroke and Davies on any number of subjects, the doctrine of Christ’s divinity provides an accessible point to measure the marked relief between their interpretive approaches.

Bolingbroke rejected the notion of Jesus’ divinity. More broadly, he found the doctrinal terminology of the Trinity “sometimes ambiguous and sometimes quite unintelligible.”119 He demurred the incarnation as “gross” and “obscene.”120 He thought the New Testament silent on the matter: “Christ had nowhere called himself God. His apostles called him Lord. Peter had once declared him to be a man: and Paul preaching to the Athenians speaks of him rather as a man than as God.”121 First century Jews “would have been revolted against Christianity more than they were, if they had heard the man, whom they had seen crucified and buried, called God.”122 Bolingbroke summarized his view: “In short, the orthodox doctrine of the trinity was never taught explicitly and positively by any divine authority. It was a vague opinion in heathen theology, which intended no more, perhaps, than to personify the wisdom and goodness of the supreme omnipotent Being.”123

118 Davies, “Recovered Tract,” 357.
Davies, by contrast, could state that “the Denyal of the Divinity of Xt. introduces an essential Innovation into the Xn. System.” He affirmed the doctrines of the Trinity and Jesus’ divine nature knowing that this approach put him at odds with some among his contemporaries. In his ordination vows, Davies had subscribed to the Westminster Confession, which certainly contained an “orthodox” doctrine of the Trinity:

In the unity of the Godhead there be three Persons of one substance, power, and eternity: God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. The Father is of none, neither begotten nor proceeding; the Son is eternally begotten of the Father; the Holy Ghost eternally proceeding from the Father and the Son.

The Confession also offered a strong statement on Christ’s deity:

The Son of God, the second person of the Trinity, being very and eternal God, of one substance and equal with the Father, did, when the fullness of time was come, take upon Him man's nature, with all the essential properties, and common infirmities thereof, yet without sin; being conceived by the power of the Holy Ghost, in the womb of the virgin Mary, of her substance. So that two whole, perfect, and distinct natures, the Godhead and the manhood, were inseparably joined together in one person, without conversion, composition, or confusion. Which person is very God, and very man, yet one Christ, the only Mediator between God and man.

Davies professed devotion to the “sacred Trinity,” linked this devotion to the Trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew’s gospel, and expected such devotion from his congregants. With particular regard to Jesus, Davies owned his ordination vows: “Being God and man, all the advantages of divinity and humanity centre in him, and render him more fit for this office [of universal judge] than if he were God only or man only.” Jesus is “A God-man, divinity and humanity united in one person.” Though

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126 WCF 2.3.
127 WCF 7.2.
Davies had little appreciation for setting December 25th apart as a “holy day,” he took the opportunity to preach upon the glories of the incarnation, which he found majestic rather than crude.\footnote{Samuel Davies, “The Divine Perfections Illustrated through the Sufferings of Christ,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:264.}

Samuel Davies was well aware of the variety of biblical genres and various literary devices employed by Scripture’s human writers; however, it is clear that he read the Bible in a literal manner.\footnote{Samuel Davies, “A Christmas-Day Sermon,” in \textit{Sermons}, 3:562–64. Davies offered multiple reasons as to why he did not observe Christmas as a divinely appointed sacred day (566–71). For the purposes of this chapter, it is noteworthy that he refused to sanctify Christmas Day because of Scripture: “Now that there is not the least appearance in all the Bible of the Divine appointment of Christmas, to celebrate the birth of Christ, is granted by all parties; and the Divine authority is not so much as pretended for it. Therefore, a Bible-Christian is not at all bound to observe it” (567).}

Though he was aware of alternative ways of reading Scripture, namely of downplaying or rejecting its supernatural elements, Davies rejected these approaches in favor of a decidedly conservative approach to the biblical text. His method of interpretation relied on careful exegesis of the Greek and Hebrew texts, which are scattered throughout his sermons.\footnote{Davies occasionally mentioned the genre of a particular sermon’s text. For example, he identified Luke 16:27–31 as a “parabole dialogue.” See Davies, “Divine Inspiration and Authority,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:73. See also idem, “The Nature and Danger of Making Light of Christ and Salvation,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:230. He recognized that biblical authors used Jesus’ “blood” and “cross” as a synecdoche for the totality of his sufferings. See idem, “The Preaching of Christ Crucified the Mean of Salvation,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:630. These examples are illustrative, not exhaustive.}

\textbf{Scripture as a Mean of Grace}

Samuel Davies’ devotion to Scripture as God’s word was greater than a series of doctrinal propositions and interpretive strategies. He found Scripture of matchless

\footnote{As nearly all of Davies’ sermon manuscripts are no longer extant, a detailed analysis of his sermonic composition is impossible. However, two of Davies’ manuscripts housed at Princeton indicate the precision with which he prepared his sermons. A sermon on Luke 14:27, missing from Davies’ collected works, began with the Greek text of his passage. Similarly, a sermon on 1 Thessalonians 2:19, 20 began in the same manner, with the Greek text of the sermon written out in full. See Samuel Davies Collection, Firestone Library, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ. Davies also made frequent annotations in Greek in the margins of his English Bible. See Samuel Davies, New Testament, Virginia Historical Society, Richmond, VA.}
spiritual value: “The word of Christ has been the treasure, the support, and the joy of believers in all ages.” While Davies’ exhortations to Christians for using various means of grace in pursuing communion with God will be addressed more completely in chapter 6, this section explores specific spiritual practices related to the Christian’s appropriation of the Bible in maintaining a vital life of faith. When instructing congregants in using various means to pursue holiness, Davies’ frequently mentioned disciplines which involved Scripture.

Public Means: Preaching and Hearing

While some historians remember Samuel Davies as a champion of religious toleration, an educator of slaves, and a college president, his chief vocation was as a preacher. To date no comprehensive study of Davies’ homiletics has appeared and such a study is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Yet to understand Davies’ spirituality, one must examine the connections between proclamation and piety.

For Davies, preaching was vitally connected to the beginning and continuance of Christian spirituality. The laity were responsible for attending to the public preaching while the clergy must faithfully deliver the Word. The Westminster Directory of Publick Worship provided guidelines for the public reading and preaching of Scripture.

Davies articulated his thoughts on the responsibility of preachers in a 1759

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136 For a recent doctoral dissertation that begins to develop Davies’ homiletic theology and method, see Charles Stewart Holloway, “The Homiletical Theology of Jonathan Edwards, Gilbert Tennent, and Samuel Davies” (Ph.D. diss., Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2008).

ordination sermon. The sermon was given to exhort newly ordained ministers to preach the good news of Christ crucified. The gospel message of Christ’s atoning death was singular in its transformative power. The gospel’s “peculiar excellency” is “that it publishes a crucified Christ as an all-sufficient Saviour to a guilty, perishing world. It is its glorious peculiarity that it reveals a method of salvation every way honourable to God . . . and every way suitable to our necessities.” Ministers were to emulate the Apostle Paul for whom the gospel was the central theme of his preaching: “to instruct mankind in these [truths] is the great object of our ministry, and the unwearied labour of our lives.” Such preaching stands at the head of Christian spirituality because it “gives the strongest assurance to the guilty sons of men, that their offended God is reconcilable to them, and willing to receive them into favour again, upon their penitent return to him.” The gospel proclaims hope and “the hope of acceptance is the spring of repentance and all attempts for reformation” among sinners. Further, such preaching “gives the most moving display of the love of God; and love is a strong attractive to repentance and obedience.”

Here Davies placed preaching at both the genesis and continuance of the Christian life. Davies urged his hearers to use the “cross of Christ” as a “weapon to slay your sins, and break your hearts” that they might “place yourselves under the warm

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138 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:621–51. Near the sermon’s conclusion, Davies added a note that the sermon was delivered “At a Presbytery in Augusta, April 25, 1759.”

139 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:621. Davies’ theology of conversion is covered in more fully in chapter 4 below.

140 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:621.

141 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:641.

142 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:642.

143 Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in *Sermons*, 1:642.
beams of that love.”\textsuperscript{144} Then, preaching the gospel “gives such a representation of the evil of sin, and the dreadful punishment due it, as naturally tends to turn sinners from it, and bring them to repentance.”\textsuperscript{145} Finally, this sort of preaching “presents us with such a perfect pattern of obedience, as has at once the force of an example, and an inducement to holiness.”\textsuperscript{146} Such preaching engendered a decidedly Christocentric spirituality:

Do we suspend all our hopes upon the cross of Christ? Do we glory in it above all other things? Do we feel our necessity of a Mediator in all our transactions with God, and depend entirely on the merit of his death for acceptance, sensible that we have no merit of our own to procure one smile from God. . . . Do our thoughts frequently hover and cluster about the cross with the tenderest affections?\textsuperscript{147}

Davies directed these questions to fellow preachers, yet this pattern of application was consistent with his sermons to lay congregants.

Davies’ sermons tend to follow the Puritan “plain style” of explaining a biblical text, identifying several doctrines arising from the text, and offering improvements (applications) to his hearers. As the following sampling of his sermon applications show, Davies’ regularly exhorted Christians to a deepening, Christ-focused piety.\textsuperscript{148}

After calling Christians to reject every human foundation for their faith and to recognize the unique “preciousness” of the foundation of Christ, Davies asked, “Where is your habitual dependence? Is it on Christ alone? or is it on something else? Do you not feel the need of strength, of spiritual life, of pardon, and righteousness, and eternal life?”\textsuperscript{149} Davies also asked believers to take stock of God’s sanctifying work in their life:

\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{144}Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:643.
\item \textsuperscript{145}Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:644.
\item \textsuperscript{146}Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:645.
\item \textsuperscript{147}Davies, “Preaching of Christ Crucified,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:648.
\item \textsuperscript{148}The sermons that follow are representative of Davies’ preaching and demonstrate that he saw preaching as a key method of promoting vital spirituality among believers.
\item \textsuperscript{149}Davies, “Christ the Only Foundation,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:69.
\end{enumerate}
“Has God hewn you . . . by his word, and broken off whatever was rugged, irregular, and unfit to be compacted into the building [of a spiritual temple]? Has he shaped and polished your souls for a place in it? Do you feel the divine Architect daily carrying on this work in you, polishing you more and more into a resemblance of Christ?”

Davies challenged young Christians to be wary of spiritual lethargy: “Even sincere Christians are too often apt to fall into negligence and security; they contract an indolent, dull, lazy temper, as to the duties of religion and divine things.” This state was often described as “sleep” for in the same way that natural sleep dulled one’s senses, “so this spiritual sleep indisposes the soul for the service of God and spiritual sensations.” Davies challenged his hearers to undertake the “important but neglected duty of self-evaluation” that they might be sensible and growing in grace. He exhorted them to “take some hour of retirement” for self-reflection on whether they had used their time during the previous year profitably or not, and to dedicate themselves at the beginning of a new year,

by casting yourselves upon Jesus Christ and devoting yourselves for this new year entirely to him; resolved to live more on him than you have hitherto done, and depending upon him to conduct you safe through whatever this year may bring forth . . . this is the true and only means whereby we can attain that happiness we ought all to be in pursuit of: that pleasure which will never end.

This pursuit of pleasure was indeed a pursuit of piety.

Samuel Davies believed that one’s love of God was “essential to religion” and “necessary as a principle of obedience,” yet lamented that such love appeared to be so

150 Davies, “Christ the Only Foundation,” in *Sermons*, 2:69–70.

151 Samuel Davies, “A New Year’s Gift,” in *Sermons*, 3:53. Davies delivered this sermon at the College of New Jersey on January 1, 1760, almost six months after he began his tenure as president of the school.

152 Davies, “A New Year’s Gift, in Sermons, 3:53.


rare among humanity. He sought to help professing Christians evaluate their own affections toward God. First, anyone who maintained a natural enmity toward God marked by consistent unrepentant sin clearly did not love God. Second, if professing Christians valued any created thing more highly than their creator such a disordered affection challenged their claim to truly love God:

Now if you love God sincerely at all, you love him supremely; you love him above all persons and things in the universe. To offer subordinate love to supreme perfection and excellency, what a gross affront! It is essential to the love of God, that it be prevalent, or habitually uppermost in your souls.

If a person gives priority to things other than God, such misplaced priorities provide no evidence of genuine love for God. Those who truly love God “will not only allow him chief place in your hearts, but you will show that you do . . . by your habitual practice.” Next, “the love of God is not in you, if you do not labour for continual conformity to him.” Such conformity is both duty and characteristic of true believers. “Thus if we love God, we shall naturally imitate him; we shall love what he loves, and hate what he hates. We shall imitate his justice, veracity, goodness, and mercy; or in a word, his holiness.” Fifth, those who neglect God’s appointed ordinances of prayer, meditation, the Lord’s Supper, or of hearing God’s word preached show that they do not truly love God. To those who neglect secret and family prayer, Davies warned, “is it not evident that devotion is not your delight; and consequently not your daily practice? How then can you pretend, that the love of God dwells in you?” Davies offered these and other heart-

160Davies, “Want of Love to God,” in Sermons, 3:466.
focused challenges to cause his audience to examine their own affections that their faith might be found genuine and that they might grow in piety.

Samuel Davies considered “hearing the word of God” as a religious duty for Christians. While such hearing normally occurred in an assembled congregation, Davies also expected that the heads of households within his congregations would read the Bible to their families. Citing 1 Timothy 5:8, Davies exhorted men to care for the spiritual needs of “domestics,” specifically one’s “wife, children, and servants.” This care was to follow the pattern of Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and consisted of the regular rehearsal of God’s words to instruct one’s children and household. This pattern was reiterated in the New Testament in Colossians 3:16, which, in its immediate context, referred to the gathered church, but which Davies, following the church’s Directory for Family Worship, also enjoined upon families.

**Private Means: Reading and Meditation**

Hearing the Bible read and proclaimed was part of congregational spiritual exercises and domestic responsibilities, but public piety was only part of the Christian’s duty, for genuine spirituality thrived in a believer’s “secret” or personal duties. For Davies, reading the Bible was a necessary and vital way of pursuing personal holiness. He exhorted congregants to “read the word of God and other good books, with diligence,

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162Samuel Davies, “Sinners Entreated to be Reconciled to God,” in *Sermons*, 1:148.
163Davies’ treatment of family worship is considered more fully in Chapter 6 below.
164Davies, “Family Religion,” in *Sermons*, 2:76.
166Davies, “Family Religion,” in *Sermons*, 2:91. See DFW, II and III.
167See DFW, I.
attention, and self-application.”

Reading Scripture might also stir the affections, as Davies recalled from his own reading of 1 Thessalonians 2: “I can remember the time, when the reading of [this chapter] has drawn tears even from [a] heart so hard as mine.”

On the other hand, the neglect of reading Scripture often contributes to “cooling in religion.” The diligent reading of Scripture may also convince the unsaved sinner of their need for Christ. Hearing and reading Scripture are a delight for Christians, because through these disciplines they enjoy filial and communal fellowship with God.

Samuel Davies expected Christians to meditate. He included meditation among various “duties of religion” and encouraged his hearers to make meditation a habitual practice. He followed the Directory for Family Worship in this emphasis. By meditating, believers were following Christ’s own practice of devotion. Davies never defined “meditation” or offered specific details on its mechanics, nor did he describe his own practice of this discipline; rather he expected that his hearers were acquainted with this practice. Davies considered meditation to be an act of the mind that involved sustained, attentive reflection on God, his attributes, works, creation, and word, for the

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169 Samuel Davies, “The Connection between Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in Sermons, 1:281. His exhortation was consistent with the DPW’s concern for pastors to encourage their congregants to read the Bible.


176 DFW, I.

purpose of stirring one’s affections toward God.

Davies proposed several subjects upon which his hearers could affix their thoughts: God’s infinite and saving love;178 heaven and hell;179 “the glories of God displayed in a crucified Jesus . . . the scheme of salvation through his blood”;180 as well as God’s glory and kindness.181 During a fundraising voyage to England, he found the “various Phenomena of the ocean” to provide useful fuel for meditation.182 Davies also encouraged meditation upon Scripture: “Read, and hear, and meditate upon his word, till you know your danger and remedy.”183 Davies mentioned his own deliberate, meditative study of Romans.184 By citing these objects, Davies placed himself within the Puritan tradition of meditation.185 Yet Davies believed that even unbelievers who were spiritually dead could “meditate upon divine things,” warning his hearers against adherence to spiritual disciplines as a sure indication of genuine faith.186 Believers ought to meditate

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179Samuel Davies, “The Nature and Process of Spiritual Life,” in *Sermons*, 1:194. Here Davies suggested subjects upon which believers ought to meditate by mentioning subjects upon which unbelievers may ponder without affect.


181Davies, “Nature of Love to God,” in *Sermons*, 2:480.


185Although a survey of the discipline of meditation within the Puritan tradition is outside the scope of this dissertation, it is clear that the objects of meditation Davies mentioned are consistent with those recommended by Puritan authors for more than one hundred years prior to Davies’ ministry. For a detailed summary of the Puritan meditative tradition, see Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Grand Rapids, MI: Reformation Heritage Books, 2004), 73–100. For a more recent treatment of Puritan meditation, see Tom Schwanda, *Soul Recreation: The Contemplative-Mystical Piety of Puritanism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2012).

before taking the Lord’s Supper.187 Davies believed that meditation afforded the believer delight and helped one to grow in holiness, which fueled happiness.188

While Davies did not describe his methods of meditation, he recorded some of the fruits of his practice in his poems, and these poems illustrate the linkage between reflection on Scripture and personal piety.189 In a poem affixed to a sermon on Revelation 22:17, Davies mused on the spiritual refreshment of the gospel: “And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely” (AV).

Today the living streams of grace  
Flow to refresh the thirsty soul:

Pardon and life and boundless bliss  
In plenteous rivers round us roll.

Ho! ye that pine away and die,  
Come, and your raging thirst allay:  
Come all that will, here’s rich supply;  
A fountain that shall ne’er decay.

‘Come ALL,’ the blessed Jesus cries,  
‘Freely my blessings I will give.’  
The spirit echoes back the voice,  
And bids us freely drink and live.

The saints below, that do but taste,  
and saints above, who drink at will,  
Cry jointly, ‘Thirsty sinners! haste,  
and drink, the spring’s exhaustless still.’

Let all that hear the joyful sound,  
To spread it thro’ the world unite;  
From house to house proclaim it round,  
Each man his fellow-man invite.


188Samuel Davies, “Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in Sermons, 1:278. See also Samuel Davies, “The One Thing Needful,” in Sermons, 1:556.

189Samuel Davies, Collected Poems of Samuel Davies, 1723–1761, ed. Richard Beale Davis (Gainesville, FL: Scholars’ Facsimiles and Reprints, 1968), xix in the editor’s introduction and iii in Davies’ preface.
Like thirsty flocks, come let us go;
Come every colour, every age:
And while the living waters flow,
Let all their parching thirst assuage.  

Here the “water of life” took on the character of “living streams,” “plenteous rivers,” and
a lasting “fountain,” given to satisfy the spiritual thirst of sinners. This grace is offered
without qualification for it is a “rich supply” that gives no hint of being exhausted and
“all” may come to these waters. It is noteworthy that the “all” was truly inclusive of
persons from every race. Davies used imagery drawn from the realm of nature to
illustrate spiritual truths.

In another poetic meditation, Davies contemplated God’s holiness as a motive
for human affection.

Come, Holy Spirit! Come, enflame
Our lukewarm Hearts with Sacred Fire:
May all our Passions, to Thy Name,
In Transports most refin’d aspire.

May Love sublime our Hearts posses,
From every selfish Mixture free,
Fir’d with the Charms of Holiness,
The Beauty of Divinity.

Thus in the glorious Worlds on high,
Where Holiness is most ador’d,
Th’ Angelic Choirs incessant cry,
‘Thrice HOLY, HOLY, HOLY LORD!’

Refine our Hearts, inspire our Tongue,
And We in humble Notes below
Will imitate the heav’nly Song,
And echo ‘HOLY, HOLY,’ too.  

In this meditation, Davies invoked the Holy Spirit’s affective work, much as the classical
poets might have invoked the muse. Yet the Spirit’s work here is to equip the saints for

\[190\] Samuel Davies, “[The Fountain],” in Collected Poems of Samuel Davies, ed. Davis, 203. Davies included a note that this poem was “Annex to a Sermon on Rev. XXII.17. April 9, 1753.” This sermon is no longer extant.

\[191\] Samuel Davies, “Love to God for His Holiness,” in Collected Poems, ed. Davis, 100–01. This poem was associated with 1 John 4:16, in a sermon which Davies preached on December 2, 1750. This sermon is no longer extant.
worship by giving them a pure vision of God’s total purity, a vision drawn from the biblical imagery of Isaiah 6 and Revelation 4–5 where heavenly worshippers behold God’s holiness and overflow with praise. In both examples of Davies’ meditation, biblical passages, theological doctrines, and natural observations join to create powerful imagery to stir one’s heart for devotion.

**Psalmody**

Though references in his writings are scarce, Samuel Davies found the practice of singing the Psalter to be an especially edifying one. In September 1753, while lodging with Aaron Burr, Sr. (1716–1757), then president of the College of New Jersey, Davies recorded in his diary that he “attended in the Evening on a Meeting for Psalmody, and was much charmed with the power of Harmony.”192 Davies urged families to sing the Psalms as regular expressions of praise: “As to family praise, it is a duty, because thanksgiving is so often joined with prayer in Scripture . . . and psalmody must be owned the most proper method of expressing thankfulness by such as own it a part of divine worship.”193 He also recognized that psalmody brought a particular “delight” to enslaved Africans among his congregations, and that many slaves were especially musically inclined.194 The Westminster Confession called Christians to sing the Psalms as part of their regular worship, as did the church’s Directory for Publick Worship.195 Indeed, by during the 1750s, the decade of Davies’ ministry, psalmody had already been part of the

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194Samuel Davies, *Letters from the Rev. Samuel Davies shewing the state of religion in Virginia, particularly among the Negroes. Likewise an extract of a letter from a gentlemen in London to his friend in the country, containing some observations on the same* (London: R. Pardon, 1757), 12.

195WCF 21.5; DPW, *Of Singing of Psalms*. Curiously, the DFW did not enjoin psalmody upon families.
worship of the Reformed churches for over 200 years.\(^{196}\)

John Calvin’s (1509–1564) *Geneva Psalter* of 1542 shaped worship in the Reformed tradition, especially among the English and the Scots, who largely ignored hymnody until the late seventeenth century.\(^{197}\) During Davies’ lifetime, Colonial Presbyterians had no prescribed psalm book; some used the Scottish Psalter while others preferred the *Bay Psalm Book*.\(^{198}\) Davies likely advocated for the use of Isaac Watts’ (1674–1748) *Hymns and Spiritual Songs* as Davies admired Watts’ paraphrases and original compositions.\(^{199}\)

**Conclusion**

This chapter has shown that the Bible was foundational to Samuel Davies’ theology and vision of genuine Christian spirituality. It was the authoritative fount of his theology and the reliable aid for his piety. One of the principle uses of the Bible was to give Christian’s directions for drawing near to God. The Bible shaped Davies’ view of ultimate reality: of the nature and person of God; of God’s works of creation, judgment, redemption, and consummation; of unseen beings and powers; and of unseen punishments and rewards. Scripture provided a sufficient framework for “life and godliness” (cf. 2 Peter 1:3). For Davies, spiritual life was not something that one discovered; it was a new creation, a distinct work of God marked by one’s conversion.

\(^{196}\)Paul Conkin’s brief statement is apt: “The Reformed musical heritage is complex.” Because of this complexity, the following survey omits a discussion of psalmody and hymnody in the Lutheran tradition, which is itself a rich study. See Paul K. Conkin, *The Uneasy Center: Reformed Christianity in Antebellum America* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 199.


\(^{198}\)Conkin, *Uneasy Center*, 204.

\(^{199}\)Davies admiration for Isaac Watts is discussed more fully in chap. 2 above.
CHAPTER 4
CONVERSION: THE BEGINNING OF CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

What is it to be born again? To gain your attention to this inquiry, I need only put you in mind, that whatever be meant by the new birth, it is not an insignificant speculation, not the disputed peculiarity of a party, not the attainment of a few good men of the first class, but it is essential to every good man, and absolutely necessary to salvation. You cannot doubt of this, if you look upon Jesus Christ as a person of common veracity, and worthy of credit in his most solemn declarations; for he has declared over and over again, with the utmost solemnity, that Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of heaven.¹

Samuel Davies was persuaded that the Bible located the beginning of spiritual life at the point of regeneration. For Davies, Christianity was an interior religion not determined by mere external ritual nor outward practice, but rather by the hidden, enlivening work of God upon one’s heart. Davies’ theology of conversion was shaped by historic Presbyterianism, a body of Puritan literature, and the practice of contemporary eighteenth-century ministers. This chapter explores the influence of these various sources on Samuel Davies’ own theology of conversion and its implications for Christian spirituality. This exploration will show that Samuel Davies’ theology of conversion was decidedly shaped by certain Puritan authors.

Conversion in the Westminster Confession of Faith

The Westminster Confession of Faith provided Davies with a trustworthy exposition of the Christian life, and thus serves as the appropriate starting point for investigating the sources of Davies’ theology of conversion. The Confession addressed

¹Samuel Davies, “The Nature and Author of Regeneration,” in Sermons by the Rev. Samuel Davies, A.M. President of the College of New Jersey, vol. 2 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1854, repr. 1993), 483–84. This work will be henceforth cited as Sermons.
conversion first of all under the heading of free will: “Man, by his fall into a state of sin, has wholly lost all ability of will to any spiritual good accompanying salvation: so as, a natural man, being altogether averse from that good, and dead in sin, is not able, by his own strength, to convert himself, or to prepare himself thereunto.” Here the Confession emphasized the total inability of people to relate to God aright and presented a bleak picture for humanity, identifying sin as the source of this disordered relationship. “Sin” is not merely specific acts of commission or omission, but rather the “state of sin,” so all-encompassing that it is described as death. Yet the Westminster divines did not leave the sinner without hope:

When God converts a sinner, and translates him into the state of grace, He frees him from his natural bondage under sin; and, by His grace alone, enables him freely to will and to do that which is spiritually good; yet so, as that by reason of his remaining corruption, he does not perfectly, or only, will that which is good, but does also will that which is evil. Where the former article emphasized human inability, this article celebrated God’s gracious sovereignty in saving sinners. The Confession identified salvation as a monergistic divine work: God converted sinners, changed their natural fallen state for a supernatural state of grace, freed them from sin’s bondage, and renewed their wills. Yet the statement also balanced God’s free and unhindered work with humanity’s finite capacity. Though spiritually renewed, people lived imperfect Christian lives during their earthly pilgrimage.

The Westminster Confession of Faith presented an ordo salutis that followed a logical rather than strictly temporal arrangement. Following its articulation of free will,

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2WCF 9.3.
3WCF 9.4.

4WCF 9.5 promised complete renewal for the believer only after death: “The will of man is made perfectly and immutably free to do good alone in the state of glory only.”

the Confession addressed effectual calling, justification, adoption, sanctification, saving faith, repentance, works, perseverance, and assurance. Though this arrangement corresponded generally to the experience of Christian conversion, some elements might be temporally displaced. For example, in classic Protestant theology, justification and adoption denote a legal status that follows effectual calling, but may not be experienced by converts until the exercise of saving faith and repentance. Similarly, faith and repentance are notoriously difficult to divide in terms of the believer’s experience of salvation. Further, assurance, which the Confession associated with the inner witness of the Holy Spirit, might be immediate or gradual and is prone to fluctuation during one’s lifetime.

The Confession’s treatment of effectual calling definitely shaped Davies’ theology of conversion:

All those whom God hath predestinated unto life, and those only, He is pleased, in His appointed time, effectually to call, by His Word and Spirit, out of that state of sin and death, in which they are by nature to grace and salvation, by Jesus Christ; enlightening their minds spiritually and savingly to understand the things of God, taking away their heart of stone, and giving unto them an heart of flesh; renewing their wills, and, by His almighty power, determining them to that which is good, and effectually drawing them to Jesus Christ: yet so, as they come most freely, being made willing by His grace.

Davies’ preaching exemplified his confidence that the “Word and Spirit” were means through which God converted sinners. In his sermons, the imagery of spiritual enlightenment, renewed understanding, and a new heart were expressed clearly. Although the Westminster Confession of Faith sets forth a formal statement of Davies’ theology of conversion, he was also shaped by various pastors whom he knew as close mentors and contemporaries but mostly through their writings.

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6WCF 10–18. Glorification is addressed in WCF 32.
7WCF 18.2–4. The topic of assurance will be treated more full in chap. 6 below.
8WCF 10.1.
Conversion in Puritan and Early Evangelical Theology

When Samuel Davies wrote Joseph Bellamy (1719–1790) in 1751, he described his pastoral ministry in Virginia, noting specifically the work of conversion:

It may suffice in general to observe, that abstracting peculiar Appendages, and in different Circumstances, the Work of Conversion here has been generally carried on in those Steps that are described by experimental Divines, as Alliene, Shepherd, Stoddard, Flavel, &c. And there’s nothing confirms me more in the Truth of their Notions of experimental Piety, than the Universal Uniformity and Agreement in Substance of the Exercises of those that can make the fairest Claim to saving Grace, however different their Residences, Education, external Means, &c. be.9

Davies’ testimony highlights the place which conversion held in his theology. First, conversion was crucial to his ministry. Bellamy had encouraged Davies to publish a narrative of his Virginia mission, which was originally a piece of personal correspondence.10 Davies published the letter that it might “not only gratify good People, but (as you give me Reason to hope) animate their Prayers for us, and also encourage Preachers to come into these Parts.”11 After a lengthy recounting of the geography of Virginia and a history of the gospel’s spread therein, Davies turned to his pastoral work and provided sundry examples of people who had experienced genuine heart transformation.12 His desire for the prayers of the people of New England and for a fresh influx of ministers was owing to the great spiritual need among the people of Virginia, the vast majority of whom, in Davies’ estimation, were spiritually benighted and whose only remedy was the gospel.

In the second place, Davies’ statement reveals that he believed conversion


10William Henry Foote, Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical, 2nd series (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1856), 42. Apparently Bellamy had requested Davies publish an account of his missionary work in Virginia, yet Davies was unacquainted with Boston ministers and sent the letter to Bellamy for publication.

11Davies, State of Religion, 3.

12Davies, State of Religion, 4–25.
occurred in something of an established manner, or in his word, “those Steps that are
described by experimental Divines.”13 For Davies, conversion took a particular shape and
had certain characteristic hallmarks. Then, the manner of conversion and its hallmarks
were hardly novel; they had been described by certain “experimental” theologians whose
works were presumably well-known to Bellamy and more broadly among Christians and
ministers in New England, and whose theologies and practices were well-received.14
Davies hoped that by publishing this letter, he would attract ministers to Virginia who
had a similar view of the importance and work of conversion, a fact highlighted by his
attempts to have Jonathan Edwards join him in Virginia.15

Finally, Davies’ own pastoral experience confirmed for him the soundness of
various Puritan theologians’ writings on conversion. These divines, removed from Davies
by time and location, described a pattern of heart transformation which he found reliable
and repeatable, even in the remote parts of Virginia. Perhaps Davies also found them
agreeable because of the influences of his own theological mentors and contemporaries.
What were these “Notions of experimental piety” that Davies found so widespread? How
did these notions influence Davies’ own theology? Though Davies certainly read more
broadly than the four Puritan theologians he mentioned to Bellamy, and though Puritan
theologies of conversion were somewhat diverse, these writers provide a helpful context
for understanding Davies’ own theology of conversion.


14In Davies’ listing of particular “experimental Divines,” he included two prominent New
England clergy, Thomas Shepard (1605–1649) and Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729) in the middle of two
English theologians, Joseph Alleine (1634–1668; Davies misspelled his name as Alliene) and John Flavel
(1628–1691). Although one ought not make too much of this list, it is interesting that he includes two well-
respected New England Congregationalists in the midst of a treatise which was designed for publication in
Boston and which sought to recruit New England clergy to come to Virginia.

15Foote, Sketches of Virginia, 41. Davies wrote Bellamy and asked him to appeal to Edwards in
person. Davies’ admiration for Edwards is apparent: “Of all the men I know in America, he appears to me
the most fit for this place; and if he could be obtained on no other condition, I would cheerfully resign him
my place, and cast myself into the wide world once more” (41).
Joseph Alleine (1634–1668)

Joseph Alleine “openly began to run his Christian Race” around the age of eleven. His older brother Edward had been a minister and following Edward’s death, Joseph expressed a desire for the service of the church. Joseph began preparing for the ministry at Lincoln College, Oxford, around age fifteen. By 1651 he had moved to Corpus Christi College, Oxford, where he completed his Bachelor of Arts two years later. In 1655, at the age of twenty, he began to assist the vicar of St. Mary Magdalene Church, Taunton.

The vicar, George Newton, recalled Alleine fondly and afforded the young minister opportunities for preaching and public prayer, but noted that Joseph excelled in the more personal work of house-to-house ministry, especially catechetical instruction. Alleine was accused of breaking the Act of Uniformity in 1662, ejected from the church, and imprisoned for continuing to preach. His wife recalled his passion for sinners: “He was very urgent with those that were Unconverted, to look with more care after their Salvation.” Alleine was in and out of prison from 1662–1665, and during his intervals of freedom, he exhausted himself in preaching sometimes up to four times a day. His body broken by strenuous labor for the gospel, he died 1668, at the age of 34.

Alleine’s most enduring and influential work, published posthumously, first appeared under the title An Alarm to the Unconverted in 1671. After its initial printing,

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16The earliest biography of Alleine is that written by his wife. See Theodosia Alleine, The Life and Death of Mr. Joseph Alleine, Late Teacher of the Church at Taunton, in Sommerseteshire, Assistant to Mr. Newton, Whereunto are Annexed Diverse Christian Letters of His, Full of Spiritual Instructions tending to the Promoting of the power of Godliness, both in Persons, and Families (London: n.p., 1672), 29.

17Alleine, Life and Death, 43–48.

18Alleine, Life and Death, 63–65.

19Alleine, Life and Death, 66.

20Alleine, Life and Death, 66–70.
which sold 200,000 copies, the title was changed to *A Sure Guide to Heaven*. Alleine sought to correct common mistakes about conversion (chap. 1) and to plead its necessity and nature (chaps. 2–3). He addressed unconverted sinners, showing them marks of their spiritual condition and warning them of its attendant miseries (chaps. 4–5), and offered directions for and motives to conversion (chaps. 6–7).

Conversion was not simply assuming the designation “Christian” nor was it synonymous with water baptism. Conversion also went beyond morality, external piety, and rule keeping. Rather, conversion “lies in the thorow change both of the heart, and life.” Though the Father and Son are involved in conversion, it is chiefly the work of the Holy Spirit, never a human endeavor: “Never think thou canst convert thy self. If ever thou wouldst be savingly converted, thou must despair of doing it in thy own strength.” Internally, conversion was the work of God’s free grace while externally it was accomplished by “the merit and intercession of the blessed Jesus.” The gospel minister was the instrument of conversion and conversion’s ultimate end was God’s glory.

Conversion affected the whole person. It focused one’s mind on God and his glory and away from self; it altered the intention of one’s will that Christ might become preeminent and that one might freely choose to follow Jesus; it changed the affections

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such that one now hoped in Christ and not earthly gain, desired grace instead of gold, rejoiced in God’s word rather than wealth, cared for the soul more than the body, feared displeasing God rather than his own ruin; and loved the crucified Christ as his beloved bride. Conversion also affected one’s body, not through some inherent physical change, but through the washing of renewal (cf. Titus 3). Eyes no longer coveted, ears were now closed to Satan’s call, the mind was concerned with more glorious subjects, the heart turned from lusts, and the mouth turned from corrupt speech to grace-seasoned tones. As the body changed, so did one’s habits and practices.

Alleine offered five reasons why conversion was necessary: first, because people are created for God’s glory and cannot glorify God so long as they remain in their sins, conversion is necessary to ensure that their life is not lived in vain. Then, because humans are created as God’s vice-regents upon earth, their spiritual condition affects the entire created order: the world cannot be truly glorious until mankind is set aright spiritually. Third, while one remains unconverted, “all thy religious performances will be but lost; for they can neither please God . . . nor save thy soul.” Further, the unconverted soul is without hope in this world and in the next. Finally, “without [conversion], all that Christ hath done and suffered will be (as to you) in vain . . . that is, it will no way avail to your salvation.”


Alleine’s “Directions for conversion” found in chapter 6. He wrote pastorally, as if he were speaking to the reader face-to-face. Readers were to reflect on the impossibility of entering heaven while remaining unconverted, to “labour to get a thorough sight and lively sense and feeling of thy sins” by meditating on the sheer volume of their sins, on the distance these sins placed between themselves and God, and also on the just recompense due because of these transgressions.36 They were to continually bring to mind their “present misery”: “O study thy misery, till thy heart do cry out for Christ, as earnestly, as ever a drowning man did for a Boat, or the wounded for a Chirurgeon.”37 As readers reflected upon their desperate state, they were to remind themselves that they were powerless in and of themselves to alter this state and thus to renounce their sins, turning to God alone for rescue.38

In Alleine’s work, Davies would have found a young non-conformist minister passionate for the salvation of souls. Davies would have also seen the repeated encouragement to use means in pursuing one’s conversion. Alleine was sure of God’s sovereignty in salvation and his all-sufficient resources to save all who would come to him. He was certain that nominal Christianity lacked saving power, that people left to their own natural condition could never warrant nor secure salvation, that they must be born again (cf. John 3:3). While Alleine’s treatment of conversion is the simplest of those Davies cited, it was undoubtedly influential as Davies reiterated these basic elements of conversion throughout his sermons.

John Flavel (1628–1691)

John Flavel’s father, Richard, was a Presbyterian minister who died as a


37 Alleine, Sure Guide to Heaven, 121. Here Alleine used the phrase “Chirurgeon,” which in contemporary parlance is “surgeon.”

prisoner of the state for his religious convictions.\textsuperscript{39} John went to University College, Oxford, where he prepared for ministry. His first appointment came in 1650 to Diptford. Here his first wife and child died during labor; he remarried in 1656. That same year, Flavel became minister in Dartmouth, a ministry marked by many conversions.\textsuperscript{40} He felt the effects of the Act of Uniformity, being ejected by authorities in 1662 for nonconformity, yet he maintained a regular and secret pattern of preaching to his congregants in woods, on beaches, and on islands.\textsuperscript{41} Following the Declaration of Indulgence (1672), Flavel returned to Dartmouth, now a licensed Congregationalist.\textsuperscript{42} Flavel gave diligent attention to cultivating personal godliness through the means of meditation and prayer and enjoyed a strong preaching ministry, but his writing ministry of the 1670s–1680s was also fruitful. His \textit{Works} went through several printings in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The Banner of Truth reprint of his works comprises six volumes of over 3,000 pages and includes sermons, tracts, and treatises.\textsuperscript{43}

Among Flavel’s writings, \textit{The Method of Grace} provides the author’s most detailed treatment of conversion.\textsuperscript{44} The treatise consisted of six parts: the application and effecting of redemption, motives to draw sinners to Christ, the benefits purchased by 

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  \item \textsuperscript{39}Beeke and Pederson, \textit{Meet the Puritans}, 245.
  \item \textsuperscript{40}Beeke and Pederson, \textit{Meet the Puritans}, 245. One noteworthy example of Flavel’s powerful ministry is the conversion of Luke Short. At age fifteen, Short heard Flavel preach in Dartmouth from 1 Cor 16:22: “If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha.” Eighty-five years later, Short, now living in New England, remembered this sermon and experienced deep conviction over a long lifetime of sin and was converted at the age of 100. I am indebted to Michael Haykin for this reference, which can be found in Robert Murray M’Cheyne, \textit{The Works of the Late Rev. Robert Murray M’Cheyne, Complete in Two Volumes} (New York: Robert Carter, 1847), 2:221–22. For further analysis of Flavel’s piety, see Adam Embry, ed., \textit{“An Honest, Well Experienced Heart”: The Piety of John Flavel} (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2012).
  \item \textsuperscript{41}Beeke and Pederson, \textit{Meet the Puritans}, 247.
  \item \textsuperscript{42}Beeke and Pederson, \textit{Meet the Puritans}, 247.
\end{itemize}
Christ for believers, things which ordinarily precede conversion, distinctions between true and nominal Christians, and finally the present and future state of the unconverted. Each of the books six parts contains several chapters and each chapter is a sermon framed upon a biblical text, chosen predominately (though not exclusively) from John’s Gospel or Paul’s letters to the Romans, Ephesians, or Corinthians.

Flavel addressed his readers: “It is thy *one thing necessary* to get a cleared interest in Jesus Christ; which being once obtained, thou mayest face the storm with boldness and say, come troubles and distresses, losses and trials, prisons and death, I am provided for you; do your worst, you can do me no harm.”

Flavel emphasized the doctrines of regeneration and adoption and noted that these doctrines allow one to stand secure in God. He hoped that the “stranger to *regeneration* . . . a person that makes a *powerless profession* of Christ” might “meet with something that will convince thee how dangerous a thing it is to be an old creature in a new creature’s dress and habit” and that “God may help thee to put on Christ, as well as the name of Christ.”

For Flavel, regeneration was “one of the greatest, and most noble effects of the [Holy] Spirit upon our souls.” He appealed to 2 Corinthians 5:17, “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature.” One’s “being in Christ” did not mean “a general profession of Christianity, which gives a man a *reputation* of an interest in him; but by being in Christ, he means an interest in him, by *vital union* with his person, and real participation of his benefits.” The one who experienced this vital union was “renewed by gracious principles, newly infused into him from above, which sway him and guide

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him in another manner, and to another end than ever he acted before.”\(^{49}\) These gracious principles were not simple refinements of one’s character, rather “infused de novo, from above.”\(^{50}\)

Flavel found parallels between the biblical account of creation and the work of regeneration: “The same almighty Author who created the world, createth also this work of grace in the soul of man.”\(^{51}\) He believed that the Spirit’s illuminating work on sin-darkened minds (cf. Col 3:10) mirrored the creation of light (cf. Gen 1:3).\(^{52}\) Then, as God created the world ex nihilo, so the Spirit’s saving actions constituted “a new work of creation.”\(^{53}\) Indeed, as the Spirit moved upon the waters like a brooding hen over her eggs (cf. Gen 1:2), so “a quickening influence must come from the Spirit of God, or else the new creation can never be formed in us.”\(^{54}\) Further, just as “the word of God was the instrument of the first creation (cf. Ps 33:6, 9), so Christians are born again by the instrument of the word (cf. 1 Pet 1:23 and Jas 1:18).”\(^{55}\)

Conversion apart from supernatural regeneration was impossible, for regeneration brought spiritual life (cf. 1 John 3:14), a tender soul (cf. Heb 9:14), and a transformed “practice and conversation” (cf. Eph 2:1-3, 1 Cor 6:11, and 1 Pet 4:4).\(^{56}\) Flavel insisted that “there is an absolute necessity of the new creature to all that expect interest in Christ, and the glory to come, since all the characters, marks, and signs of such

\(^{49}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:346.

\(^{50}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:346.

\(^{51}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:348.

\(^{52}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:348.

\(^{53}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:348.

\(^{54}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:348.

\(^{55}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:349.

\(^{56}\)Flavel, Method of Grace, in Works, 2:349–50.
an interest, are constantly taken from the new creature wrought in us.”\textsuperscript{57} Thus, “purity of heart,” “holiness in both principle and practice,” “mortification of sin,” and “longing for Christ’s appearance” all arose from regeneration.\textsuperscript{58}

While regeneration was a sovereign work of God by the Holy Spirit, certain preparatory means normally preceded it.\textsuperscript{59} Flavel stated “that there is no coming ordinarily to Christ without the application of the law to our consciences, in a way of effectual conviction.”\textsuperscript{60} While God’s law could not justify sinners, it could “convince us, and so prepare us for Christ.”\textsuperscript{61} Because “unregenerate persons are generally full of groundless confidence and cheerfulness, though their condition be sad and miserable,” they needed to be convinced of their desperate condition, for which the law of God was a powerful instrument.\textsuperscript{62}

Flavel made fine distinctions between those upon whom God worked conviction using the imagery of gestation. He compared some under the initial work of conviction to “embryos” and encouraged them to accept the spiritual distress they surely felt: “O! it is better to weep, tremble, and be distressed now, than to mourn without hope forever.”\textsuperscript{63} Flavel compared those who had been converted to “complete births of the Spirit,” indicating that the pain of the law had been shown to be for their benefit, certain that the God who wounded them had also bound their wounds.\textsuperscript{64}

\textsuperscript{57}Flavel, \textit{Method of Grace}, in \textit{Works}, 2:357.

\textsuperscript{58}Flavel, \textit{Method of Grace}, in \textit{Works}, 2:357.

\textsuperscript{59}For a recent analysis of John Flavel’s preparationism, see Joel R. Beeke and Paul M. Smalley, \textit{Prepared by Grace, for Grace: The Puritans on God’s Ordinary Way of Leading Sinners to Christ} (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2013), 177–90.

\textsuperscript{60}Flavel, \textit{Method of Grace}, in \textit{Works}, 2:287.


\textsuperscript{63}Flavel, \textit{Method of Grace}, in \textit{Works}, 2:304.

\textsuperscript{64}Flavel, \textit{Method of Grace}, in \textit{Works}, 2:305.
In Flavel, Davies would have found the necessity of regeneration and conversion not only asserted but argued with dozens of Scripture proofs. Like Alleine, Flavel warned readers of the danger of claiming the name of Christian apart from the real, divine work of God upon one’s soul. Flavel’s discussion of preparatory means was longer and more nuanced than Alleine’s, but both men asserted that God’s normal pattern of conversion began temporally prior to the believer’s experience of the new birth and that such work was indispensable.

Thomas Shepard (1605–1649)

By the time Thomas Shepard emigrated to New England in 1635, he had earned two degrees from Cambridge and had been an ordained minister for the better part of a decade. His life had been far from easy. Shepard was born in Northamptonshire in 1605, the youngest of nine siblings. By the age of ten he had lost both his parents, first his mother, then his father, and suffered neglect at the hands of a disinterested stepmother. Entrusted to his older brother’s care, Shepard flourished, entering Emmanuel College, Cambridge, at fifteen. Though he squandered his early years at Cambridge in drunkenness, Shepard sat under the deeply affective preaching of John Preston (1587–1628), where he was awakened spiritually by a sermon of Preston on 1 Corinthians 1:30, “But of him are ye in Christ Jesus who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.” Shepard’s awakening came as the culmination of an intense, protracted period of remorse for his sin, and his conversion

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was neither “a speedy or an easy work.” The Anglican Church ordained him as deacon, then priest, in 1627 at Peterburgh, and he ministered in Earls Colne, Essex from 1627 to 1630.

Harassed by William Laud (1573–1645) and his surrogates for nonconformity, Shepard settled in Yorkshire where he soon married. Under increasing pressure from religious authorities, Shepard and his family made a failed attempt to sail for Boston in 1634, a voyage that they completed successfully a year later. They settled in Newtown (Cambridge), Massachusetts. Within four months of their arrival, Shepard’s wife, Margaret, died. He had been installed as pastor of Newtown’s Congregational Church and was now left bereaved to care for the souls of this congregation as well as that of his infant son, also named Thomas. Shepard stayed in Newtown for the remainder of his life. In 1636, Shepard was influential in the founding of Harvard College and assisted in raising funds for scholarships. He supported missionary work among Native American peoples, notably through his friend John Eliot (1604–1690). Shepard played a role in the Cambridge Platform of 1648 that defined congregational polity for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. As early as 1640, Shepherd had expressed serious reservations about the state of the community in Newtown and even his own desire to

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68 Albro, Life of Shepard, xxii–xxiii.
69 Beeke and Pederson, Meet the Puritans, 525.
70 Shepard, “Autobiography,” 35–39. Shepard addressed the autobiography to his son: “To my dear son Thomas Shepard with whom I leave these records of God’s great kindness to him, not knowing that I shall live to tell them myself with my own mouth, so that he may learn to know and love the great and most high God, the God of his father.” Thomas Shepard and his wife Margaret had lost a first son, also named Thomas, during the failed voyage of 1634 (35–36) and named their second son, the recipient of this autobiography, in his older brother’s honor (36).
71 Beeke and Pederson, Meet the Puritans, 525–26.
74 Beeke and Pederson, Meet the Puritans, 527.
remain in ministry.\textsuperscript{75} Within a year he was dead.

In the late 1630s, Shepard became a key voice of opposition during the Antinomian Controversy, which erupted over the preaching of Boston Congregationalist pastor John Cotton (1584–1652) as set forth by his ardent lay supporter Anne Hutchinson (1591–1643).\textsuperscript{76} The issues of conversion and piety were central to the controversy. Holifield has well-summarized the doctrinal question for the controversy: “whether sanctification provided evidence of justification.”\textsuperscript{77}

Cotton taught that sanctification provided no sure evidence that one’s faith was genuine. Rather, one must wait for an immediate knowledge of one’s standing before God given by the Holy Spirit. Hutchinson, who had been part of John Cotton’s congregation in England before following him to New England, defended her pastor in lay meetings held in her Boston home. She rejected the preaching of the law, a hallmark of those Massachusetts Congregationalists who opposed Cotton. Shepard and fellow Massachusetts ministers Thomas Hooker (1586–1647) and Peter Bulkeley (1583–1659) were vehement in their opposition to the views of Cotton and Hutchinson. These ministers argued that the Spirit worked through Scripture, not apart from the word, and that biblical promises of holiness could provide a reliable basis for assurance of salvation. The controversy culminated in a congregational trial in which Hutchinson was banished from Massachusetts.\textsuperscript{78} It is within this context that Shepard’s writings on conversion must be considered. Though Davies did not specify which of Shepard’s writings he valued,

\textsuperscript{75}Pettit, The Heart Prepared, 104.

\textsuperscript{76}Shepard, “Autobiography,” 67–70. Shepard’s account of the controversy is one-sided. For a balanced summary of the controversy, see E. Brooks Holifield, Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 44–48. For a recent scholarly interpretation of the controversy that favors Cotton and Hutchinson, see Janice Knight, Orthodoxies in Massachusetts: Rereading American Puritanism (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994).

\textsuperscript{77}Holifield, Theology in America, 44.

\textsuperscript{78}Holifield, Theology in America, 48.
three of Shepard’s works addressed the topic of conversion directly and became classics among Puritans after their publication.

The first of these works was *The Parable of the Ten Virgins*, which consisted of sermons Shepard preached to his Newtown congregation from 1636–1640. Shepard understood the minister’s work “to woo for Christ, and so to present chaste virgins for Christ.” Shepard’s sermons follow two main divisions: Matthew 25:1–5, which focused on the church’s preparation to receive Jesus and 25:6–12, which announced Christ’s return. Shepard used the analogy of human marriage to understand the beauty of spiritual marriage to Christ. Those who sought communion with Christ must be “divorced from all others, and espoused only to Jesus Christ.” They must be separated from idols, fellow creatures, and even self-reliance on keeping God’s law. On this last point, Shepard was careful to explain that the law remained vital for the believer, but that it was not the grounds for one’s salvation. Rather, Shepard believed that “if ever we look to have communion with Christ, to do all spiritual work, all we do . . . [is] from the mighty power of Christ, from the life and spirit of Christ.” Shepard maintained that conversion was a mighty work of God through the Spirit. Yet conversion ordinarily took place as

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81 Though the following analysis is necessarily brief, see the excellent summary by Randall C. Gleason in *The Devoted Life: An Invitation to the Puritan Classics*, ed. Kelly M. Kapic and Randall C. Gleason (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2004), 123–37.


the culmination of God’s preparatory work, “wrought by the power of Christ, out of his eternal love to the vessels of glory, as an antecedent, not moving cause of his eternal fellowship.”87 Shepard’s *Parable of the Ten Virgins* was a massive work of pastoral ministry aimed to provide spiritual comfort for those who trusted in Christ by means of rigorous biblical argumentation. Gleason has noted the work’s influence upon later Puritans and early Evangelicals.88

The second of Shepard’s influential works was *The Sincere Convert*.89 Shepard sought to prove God’s existence and glory from Exodus 33:18.90 He set forth humankind’s initial blessed estate when Adam and Eve loved God perfectly with unblemished understanding, affections, and will. Yet this fellowship was broken in the fall,91 and followed by misery. God did not leave humanity in such a miserable situation, but wrought a way of deliverance through the unique redemption of Christ. He also emphasized that the number of people who would be saved was small, and that the damned received a just punishment for their rebellion against God.92

By means of the fall, “Adam was the poisoned root and cistern of all mankind: now, the branches and streams being in the root and spring originally . . . are tainted with the same poisoned principles.”93 As a result of this ruin, “Every man is born stark dead in sin . . . empty of every inward principle of life, void of all grace, and hath no more good

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in him (whatsoever he thinks) than a dead carrion hath.” Shepard adduced ten warnings from this fact of spiritual death: dead people cannot perform any good actions, nor do they fear danger. They cannot respond to “the best of offers” and are totally spiritually insensitive: blind, deaf, tasteless, unfeeling, speechless, and breathless. The spiritually dead lacked all beauty, were worm-riddled, and destined for eternal judgment. Yet in Christ, God provided dead sinners hope.

Shepard argued for the singular efficacy of Jesus to save sinners. Jesus satisfied God’s justice, took upon himself the sins of the elect, and bore God’s wrath, thus he was uniquely qualified to impute his righteousness to chosen sinners. Shepard anticipated the objection that if Christ’s sacrifice was intended only for the elect, how could one know that they were numbered among these chosen ones? Some people assumed that because Jesus’ sacrifice was limited in its scope, that they were likely excluded from those who were to be saved? But on what grounds could sinners base this assumption? Shepard asked how a person could know that he or she was not among the elect. Some who entertained these despairing notions might do so wrongly. Then, Jesus’ kingly authority compelled the universal proclamation of the gospel; because he possessed all authority in heaven and earth (cf. Matthew 28:18–19), all people owed him allegiance as omnipotent king first, then as savior. Yet in Christ, God provided dead sinners with hope.

Citing Matthew 7:14, Shepard declared “the paucity of them that shall be saved” and the “difficulty of being saved.” Shepard divided the known world into four

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97Shepard, *Sincere Convert*, 49.
98Shepard, *Sincere Convert*, 55.
parts: Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. Only Europe was generally given to Christianity, and even there the Roman Catholic Church exercised a great hold among many people, assuring their ruin.\textsuperscript{99} Even among those who were blessed with great access to the means of grace (preaching, prayer, the ordinances, etc.), they must remember that the Pharisees had such access yet were hopeless.\textsuperscript{100} Further, those who found salvation were saved with great difficulty. One’s wishes, tears, frequent prayers, or church attendance would not save them. Drawing upon the imagery of his text, Shepard proposed four “strait gates” through which the sinner must pass: first, the gate of humiliation, through which God truly brought sinners to recognize their state of despair. Then, sinners passed through the gate of faith, and Shepard believed that true faith was rare indeed. Third, sinners traversed the gate of repentance, which was easily feigned. Finally came the gate of opposition from the “devils, the world, and one’s own flesh, who knock a man down when he begins to look toward Christ and heaven.”\textsuperscript{101}

Despite these difficulties, some would be saved, and in his final section, Shepard provided meticulous directions for those who would flee hell. Those who were damned received God’s just judgment.\textsuperscript{102} Many were deluded by Satan, false teachers, a false spirit, and the false application of Scripture.\textsuperscript{103} Shepard provided eleven warnings against sinners who trusted religious performance and their own selves for salvation.\textsuperscript{104} Yet the means that carried sinners to Jesus were to be used diligently.\textsuperscript{105}

\textsuperscript{100}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 60–61.
\textsuperscript{101}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 64–65.
\textsuperscript{102}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 68–82.
\textsuperscript{103}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 82–87.
\textsuperscript{104}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 94–105.
\textsuperscript{105}Shepard, \textit{Sincere Convert}, 105–09.
The third of Shepard’s enduring writings was *The Sound Believer*, a sustained reflection on conversion.⁠¹⁰⁶ Shepard reasoned that there were four ways in which sinners had ruined themselves: “Ignorance of their own misery . . . security and unsensibleness of it . . . carnal confidence in their own duties . . . and presumption or resting upon the mercy of God by a faith of their own forming.”⁠¹⁰⁷ To counter these ruinous acts, Shepard posited a “fourfold work of Christ’s power” to save sinners: conviction, compunction, humiliation, and faith.⁠¹⁰⁸ Shepard ascribed the work of conviction to the Holy Spirit and saw it as the initial stage in redeeming elect sinners. The Spirit convicted a person of his or her sinful state, but also of specific sins and of the heinousness of those sins. This conviction was more than an awareness of sin, but a “real” and “constant” light that kept sin ever before the person.⁠¹⁰⁹

Where conviction of sin worked principally in one’s mind, compunction for sin worked in a person’s heart: “[compunction] is in the affections and will, and seated therein principally: a man may have sight of sin without sorrow or sense of it.”⁠¹¹⁰ He further defined compunction as “a pricking of the heart, or the wounding of the soul with such fear and sorrow for sin and misery as severs the soul from sin, and from going on towards its eternal misery.”⁠¹¹¹ For the elect, compunction for sin always followed conviction of sin, even if some biblical examples of conversion seemed to lack this deep

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⁠¹¹¹ Shepard, *Sound Believer*, 146.
Compunction consisted in the “marvelous fear and terror of the direful displeasure of God, of death, and hell, [and] the punishment of sin.”\textsuperscript{113} Further, compunction brought spiritual sorrow that the joy promised in the gospel might be sweeter. Finally, compunction separated the sinner from sin as a branch might be lopped from a tree, severing the branch from the enlivening power of its roots.\textsuperscript{114}

Shepard believed that those who felt compunction for their sin were to be brought lower yet through gospel humbling. Humility, then, was a work of God that caused one to despair of self-righteousness and to look wholly to God for the righteousness of Christ.\textsuperscript{115} Here, Shepard wrote of the relationship between preaching the gospel and the law: “As for the preaching of the gospel before the law to show our misery, it is true that the gospel is to be looked at as the main end; yet you must use the means, before you can come to the end, by preaching of the law, or misery in despising the gospel.”\textsuperscript{116} The law brought humility in four ways: it brought to light the radical extent of inward corruption, showed the full depth of original sin, overwhelmed the soul with a vision of total sinfulness, and magnified God’s justice in judging sinners.\textsuperscript{117} Shepard viewed the work of conviction, compunction, and humiliation as preparatory works for genuine faith.

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\textsuperscript{112}Shepard, \textit{Sound Believer}, 140. Here Shepard stated, “Do not make the examples of converted persons in Scripture patterns for all things of persons unconverted; do not make God’s work upon the one run parallel with God’s work upon the other” (140). He addressed criticisms that some converts such as Lydia (Acts 16:4), the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 7:27), and the Roman centurion (Acts 10:2) did not appear to show compunction by stating that Scripture did not necessarily record every detail about one’s experience (141).
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\textsuperscript{113}Shepard, \textit{Sound Believer}, 146.
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\textsuperscript{114}Shepard, \textit{Sound Believer}, 146–55.
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\textsuperscript{115}Shepard, \textit{Sound Believer}, 175–77.
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\textsuperscript{116}Shepard, \textit{Sound Believer}, 160. Samuel Davies followed Shepard’s pattern of balancing law and gospel, as is discussed in chap. 5 below.
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“Faith is the complement of effectual vocation; which begins in God’s call, and
ends in this answer to that call.” For Shepard, faith was “a gracious work of the Spirit
of Christ” whereby sinners actually trust Christ alone for salvation. Faith included
assent to the truths of the gospel, but moved beyond intellectual recognition of truths to a
whole-hearted trust in Christ. The Spirit communicated faith to the human soul by
means of the preached word of God, drawing the sinner toward Christ. Faith was the
key to union with Christ and Shepard identified various privileges of this union in chapter
2 of The Sound Believer.

Shepard articulated his ordo salutis: preparation (conviction, compunction, and
humiliation), vocation, faith, justification, reconciliation, adoption, sanctification,
audience with God, and glorification. Justification was the immediate imputation of
Christ’s righteousness into the believer. Reconciliation followed justification and
consisted of peace with God and God’s “love and favor.” Then, God poured out his
Spirit upon reconciled sinners, adopting them into his family, showing the same love to
each reconciled sinner that he showed to Jesus. The reigning power of sin was broken
in God’s adopted children and God then impressed his image upon these children through
sanctification, which consisted of total inward renewal after the image of Christ.

118 Shepard, Sound Believer, 191.
119 Shepard, Sound Believer, 194–212.
120 Shepard, Sound Believer, 192–93.
121 Shepard, Sound Believer, 200–02.
122 Shepard, Sound Believer, 164–70. Shepard’s schema differed slightly from that of Thomas
Hooker in that he included audience. See Holifield, Theology in America, 42.
123 Shepard, Sound Believer, 237.
124 Shepard, Sound Believer, 248.
125 Shepard, Sound Believer, 252.
126 Shepard, Sound Believer, 255–57.
Shepard elevated audience with God in prayer as one of the most essential benefits of salvation. He encouraged his readers to pray in the name of Christ, which he understood to mean praying “with reliance upon the grace, favor, and worthiness of the merits of Christ,” praying “from his command, and according to his will,” and praying “for the sake and use of Christ, and the glory of Christ.” Finally, Shepard anticipated a future “immediate communion with God in Christ” in which all remnants of sin would be purged from the believer in a glorious place with a glorious body with a glorious soul among a glorious company.

From Shepard, Davies would have learned that conversion was a difficult and perplexing matter that required a minister to be ever vigilant on behalf of his congregation. The preacher was to herald the gospel by returning often to the Old Testament law that sinners might ever be reminded of their want of holiness and holiness among the saints might be encouraged. Davies was convinced that God converted sinners according to a certain pattern, and in Shepard he would have found just such a pattern, tested by time and approved by five generations of colonial ministers. As shown below, Davies imbibed Shepard’s theology.

**Solomon Stoddard (1643–1729)**

The fourth listed source for Davies’ understanding of conversion was Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, Massachusetts. Stoddard was a powerful ministerial force in the Connecticut River Valley in the late 1600s and early 1700s. He graduated from

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Harvard in 1662 and came to Northampton in 1669, where he remained until his death in 1729. “Pope” Stoddard exerted a tremendous influence on religion and politics throughout the Connecticut River Valley during his long life and exceptionally enduring ministry in Northampton. According to Kidd, “Stoddard developed the most elaborate Evangelical theology of conversion prior to [Jonathan] Edwards.” As Jonathan Edwards, his grandson, recounted in his *Faithful Narrative*, Stoddard “was eminent and renowned for his gifts and grace; so he was blessed, from the beginning, with extraordinary success in his ministry in the conversion of many souls.” Stoddard’s focus on conversion was grounded in the theology he had learned at Harvard, that is, the theology of the first New England Puritans such as Shepard, Hooker, and John Norton (1606–1663). Stoddard received this conversionist tradition of his forefathers, developed it further, and preached it forcefully. Yet Stoddard also modified this tradition, most notably as it related to church membership and the Lord’s Supper.

New England Congregationalism had sought a pure church composed of those persons who could offer a credible testimony of God’s converting work and their children. Stoddard demurred. He developed the following doctrine from Exodus 12:47–48: “Sanctifying Grace is not necessary unto the Lawfull attending of any duty of

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Worship.\textsuperscript{135} While this sanctifying grace was necessary for one to serve God, commune with God, and experience salvation, it did not bar one from public worship.\textsuperscript{136} Longstanding forms of biblical worship such as prayer and hearing as well as preaching the word might be practiced by the unconverted as well as the true believer.\textsuperscript{137} Similarly, some old covenant forms of worship such as circumcision, Passover, sacrifice, and even priestly duties might be carried out by unregenerate persons.\textsuperscript{138} Even essential New Testament rites such as baptism, gospel ministry, and the Lord’s Supper might be administered to the unregenerate.\textsuperscript{139}

Stoddard appealed to Scripture’s silence on the matter of testing conversions: “There is no certain rule given in the Scripture to the guides of the church, whereby they can distinguish Saints from Hypocrites,” and though they ought to know their own spiritual condition, people may even be confused as to their own standing before God: some who were godly were so sensitive to sin that they imagined themselves unconverted, while some who were clearly godless had false confidence and believed themselves genuine Christians.\textsuperscript{140} More importantly, worship provided sinners a means to obtain true grace as “the giving of Converting grace is not limited to any one Ordinance.”\textsuperscript{141} Thus by attending corporate worship, sinners might be converted through prayer, hearing the word, baptism, or especially the Lord’s Supper.\textsuperscript{142}

\textsuperscript{135}Solomon Stoddard, \textit{The Inexcusableness of Neglecting the Worship of God, Under a Pretence of Being in an Unconverted Condition} (Boston: B. Green, 1708), 3.

\textsuperscript{136}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 3.

\textsuperscript{137}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 4–6.

\textsuperscript{138}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 7–10.

\textsuperscript{139}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 10–14.

\textsuperscript{140}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 14.

\textsuperscript{141}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 17.

\textsuperscript{142}Stoddard, \textit{Inexcusableness of Neglecting Worship}, 17.
theology brought him into dispute with other New England clergy, notably Boston’s Increase (1639–1723) and Cotton (1663–1738) Mather and Edward Taylor (1642–1729) of Westfield, Massachusetts. What was indisputable was Stoddard’s concern for souls.

Stoddard addressed conversion in several works. His *Treatise Concerning Conversion* first appeared in 1719.\(^{143}\) By this time, he had already issued a handbook for younger ministers, his *Guide to Christ* (1714), which became a pastoral classic.\(^{144}\) Even earlier was Stoddard’s massive *Safety of Appearing* (1687).\(^{145}\) Stoddard defined the nature of genuine conversion at the outset of his *Treatise Concerning Conversion*:

“Persons are said to be savingly converted when they are turned from the power of Satan unto God; when they have a work of Regeneration wrought in them; when they are made holy and so are justified and made heirs of the Kingdom of Heaven; and this change is made at once in the Soul.”\(^{146}\) Conversion rendered one “wholly new; when God converts a man he gives him a new heart, and puts a new Spirit within him.”\(^{147}\) God effected conversion through the work of the Holy Spirit.\(^{148}\)

Though conversion was an instantaneous work, it normally followed a period of preparation, marked by “contrition and Humiliation” over one’s sin.\(^{149}\) Stoddard was

\(^{143}\)Solomon Stoddard, *A Treatise Concerning Conversion: Shewing the Nature of Saving Conversion to God, and the Way wherein it is wrought; Together with an Exhortation to Labour after it* (Boston: James Franklin, 1719).

\(^{144}\)Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ*.


\(^{146}\)Stoddard, *Treatise Concerning Conversion*, 1–2.

\(^{147}\)Stoddard, *Treatise Concerning Conversion*, 9.


\(^{149}\)Stoddard, *Treatise Concerning Conversion*, 2.
clear that this preparation was “Antecedent to Conversion, but no part of Conversion.” Sinners undergoing preparation for salvation were still “under the dominion and government of Sin.” Such preparation enabled one “to be sensibly seeking after reconciliation” with God. Under this work, sinners saw the horrors of hell, their own lack of inherent righteousness, and God’s justice in condemning them.

Saving faith preceded conversion: “When the Soul has performed one holy Action it is converted. One holy action may be performed in the twinkling of an eye: An Act of Faith in Jesus Christ is done at once: And when the Soul has performed one holy Action it is converted.” For Stoddard, faith consisted in believing the testimony of Scripture regarding Jesus, loving God and Christ, repenting for sin, humbling and denying oneself, thanksgiving, and obedience. For his emphasis on work, Stoddard held firmly to a doctrine of inability. Sinners were “utterly depraved, dead in trespasses and sins,” unable to see God’s glory.

Though Stoddard valued the Old Testament law, he explained that “the Gospel is the means of Conversion. It is by the Gospel that the hearts of men are made holy . . . so the Law . . . teacheth men that they should be holy, but that don’t make them holy.” Stoddard believed that it was a minister’s job to “guide souls through the work of conversion,” and offered a general method for this task. If one sought a minister’s

150Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 3.
151Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 3.
152Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 53.
153Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 54–56.
154Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 4.
155Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 19–24.
156Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 35.
157Stoddard, Treatise Concerning Conversion, 18.
counsel, the minister was to affirm the great danger of remaining unconverted, encourage the sinner to use means in pursuing conversion, and to prescribe a gospel balm consisting of secret, daily acts of piety, self-reformation, and openness to the Spirit’s convicting work.  

From Solomon Stoddard, Davies would have imbibed a great concern for the conversion of sinners, similar in intensity but different in practice to that of Shepard. Both Shepard and Stoddard regarded conversion as difficult for the sinner, even with a skilled minister as a guide. Davies did not follow Stoddard’s doctrine or practice of allowing all to partake of the Lord’s Supper, reserving the ordinance strictly for believers. Yet, he would have found in Stoddard’s writings an exemplar of preparation for conversion and the minister’s personal work in dealing both with people who were indifferent to the gospel as well as those under the weight of conviction.

Jonathan Edwards (1703–1758)

As noted in chapter two, Jonathan Edwards’ ministry was marked by serious reflection on conversion. Under both his grandfather’s and father’s ministries, Edwards learned the art of guiding souls through what his relatives regarded as the oft-treacherous straits of the new birth. In his own congregations, Edwards reflected upon the received wisdom of his forbears, and formulated his own theology of conversion that left an indelible mark on American theology. Samuel Davies respected Edwards greatly.

159 Stoddard, Guide to Christ, 1–3.

160 Samuel Davies, “The Christian Feast,” in Sermons, 2:141. In this sermon, Davies sought to prepare those who would partake of the Supper for the celebration. For Davies, the supper was given as a seal of God’s covenant of grace with believers and allowed believers to enjoy communion with God (150–60). He did not see it as a rite for the unconverted. Davies’ views on the Lord’s Supper are developed more fully in chap. 6 below.

161 Pages 23–24 above.

During his farewell sermon to the people of Hanover, Virginia, Davies remembered Edwards as “the profoundest reasoner, and the greatest divine . . . that AMERICA ever produced.”\(^{163}\) Davies’ wish for Edwards to settle in Hanover as a co-laborer in ministry indicates his appreciation for Edwards and a tacit approval of Edwards’ pastoral theology.\(^{164}\)

Though Davies’ extant works rarely mention Edwards’ writings, he was certainly familiar with *A Faithful Narrative*.\(^{165}\) During a trip to England from 1753–1755, Davies met John Guyse (1680–1761), a dissenting minister who, along with Isaac Watts, had assured that Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative* was printed and distributed in Great Britain in 1737.\(^{166}\) During his meeting, Davies noted that one of those present “talked in a sneering manner” about this conversion account.\(^{167}\) It goes without saying that Davies did not share this gentleman’s opinion of the work.

The context for Edwards’ *Faithful Narrative* is straightforward. During the winter of 1733–1734, revival came to Northampton, Massachusetts’ young people following the death of one of their peers. Soon a great concern for spiritual matters gripped the larger community, a concern which transformed Northampton well into 1735.\(^{168}\) What surprised Edwards was that the revival had occurred in a town on the very edge of the British Empire. Edwards was also amazed that the revival’s affects were not


\(^{164}\) See chap. 4, n8 above.


\(^{166}\) For a thorough discussion of the publication and reception of this work, see Edwards, *Faithful Narrative*, ed. Goen, 4:32–46.

\(^{167}\) Pilcher, ed., *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 61.

limited to young adults, but also involved young and old alike. Neither were the revivals affects limited to one social class. Edwards was also struck by the speed with which the awakening spread, its deep emotional impact, and its wide geographic disbursement.169

Edwards was amazed at how quickly the work of conversion progressed among his people and with the sheer number of those saved: “the work of conversion was carried on in a most astonishing manner, and increased more and more; souls did as it were come by flocks to Jesus Christ. From day to day, for many months together, might be seen evident instances of sinners brought out of darkness into marvellous light.”170 Edwards calculated “that more than 300 souls were savingly brought home to Christ in this town in the space of half a year.”171

Edwards described conversion as “a great and glorious work of God's power, at once changing the heart and infusing life into the dead soul.”172 This work was “very mysterious,” and Edwards likened it to “a glorious brightness suddenly shining in upon a person” or “the dawning of the day, when at first but a little light appears, and it may be is presently hid with a cloud; and then it appears again, and shines a little brighter, and gradually increases, with intervening darkness, till at length, perhaps, it breaks forth more clearly from behind the clouds.”173

Ever the observer, Edwards documented and reported the various experiences of those who had been converted. Though there was “vast variety, perhaps as manifold as


the subjects of the operation,” Edwards saw similar patterns. Sinners became self aware of their spiritual danger and of the necessity of some escape. This awareness might come gradually or suddenly, but when it came, those awakened to their distress “quit their sinful practices” and made “earnest application to the means of salvation—reading, prayer, meditation, the ordinances of God’s House, and private conference.” There was also great variety with regard to people’s experience of assurance of conversion: some “carried on with abundantly more encouragement and hope than others; some have had ten times less trouble of mind than others, in whom yet the issue seems to be the same.”

Edwards described the inner struggle of those awakened to their sin: “The corruption of the heart has discovered itself in various exercises, in the time of legal convictions; sometimes it appears in a great struggle, like something roused by an enemy, and Satan the old inhabitant seems to exert himself like a serpent disturbed and enraged.”

God worked through the various means of grace “to make way for, and to bring to, a conviction of their absolute dependence on his sovereign power and grace, and universal necessity of a Mediator” that those awakened might recognize God’s absolute justice in condemning them for their sin, which they came increasingly to see were more than external acts but matters of a corrupt heart. This awareness of their dire circumstances prepared them for the incomparable hope of the gospel of grace.

Edwards noted that this grace seemed first to arise “in earnest longings of soul

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after God and Christ, to know God, to love him, to be humbled before him, to have
communion with Christ in his benefits.”179 Such awakened sinners often began to see the
sweetness of Christ’s mercy and trusted him for their relief and were converted.
According to Edwards, many of the townspeople who underwent similar experiences did
not yet know that they were converted because of prior misapprehensions as to the nature
of true conversion.180 Yet those who knew this change often moved from terror to
comfort: “they have a little taste of the sweetness of divine grace, and the love of a
Saviour.”181

In Edwards’ work, Davies would have found a vision of conversion compatible
with his Puritan heritage: a vision that stressed God’s sovereignty and man’s inability,
promoted the use of means for the conviction of sin and the administration of comfort,
emphasized the need for a powerful work of God’s Spirit, and described specific
instances of conversions that had happened during Davies’ own lifetime, guided by a
pastor whom Davies respected.

Samuel Blair (1712–1751)

Although Samuel Blair’s extant works are relatively few, especially when
compared with the corpus of an Edwards, Flavel, or Shepard, yet Blair’s influence must
be considered, for he trained Davies for ministry and it was from within Blair’s
congregation that Davies would have observed his mentor’s affective preaching and
counseling of those wrestling with conversion.182 In his letter to Joseph Bellamy, Davies


180Edwards, Faithful Narrative, ed. Goen, 4:173–74. Here Edwards may have been quietly
noting deficiencies in his grandfather Solomon Stoddard’s longstanding ministry in Northampton. Many
who were converted had sat under Stoddard’s ministry and had entertained wrong conceptions about
conversion.


182Blair’s collected writings were published posthumously in 1754 and contain roughly 400
pages of sermons, treatises, and addresses, along with eulogies for Blair. See Samuel Blair, The Works of
described Blair as “the brightest Light in these Parts of Zion” and also as “My Father! Tutor! [and] Friend!” as he lamented his passing.\textsuperscript{183}

As described in chapter 2, Blair sought to stir his hearers’ hearts by preaching for “conviction and conversion” of sinners, which he understood as sovereign works of God.\textsuperscript{184} Blair believed that God had decreed from eternity some people to be saved by conversion and some to remain damned as “Examples of his punishing Justice.”\textsuperscript{185} For Blair, God worked his “Power and Influence” upon those who were converted while he withheld these graces from the reprobate.\textsuperscript{186} Unless God were “effectually to renew and sanctify them,” they would continue to reject “true Holiness.”\textsuperscript{187} He understood preaching to be a key mean of awakening sinners, and preached the necessity of the new birth.\textsuperscript{188} From his own experience, Samuel Blair recognized that conversion might come very quickly and be accompanied by dramatic physical and psychological stresses. Though he sought to curb his hearers’ physical responses to his preaching, he called for sinners to flee to the kingdom of God immediately.\textsuperscript{189}

Due to the lack of extant materials, a more detailed examination of Blair’s influence on Davies is impossible, but by Davies’ own estimation, Blair was a minister worthy of imitation. Samuel Blair’s practices reinforced the theologies that Davies had


\textsuperscript{183} Davies, \textit{State of Religion}, 31–32.
\textsuperscript{184} See pages 21–22 of chapter 2.
\textsuperscript{185} Blair, \textit{Works}, 308.
\textsuperscript{186} Blair, \textit{Works}, 308–09.
\textsuperscript{187} Blair, \textit{Works}, 309.
\textsuperscript{188} Blair, \textit{Works}, 192.
\textsuperscript{189} For Blair’s recounting of his preaching, see Samuel Blair, \textit{A Short and Faithful Narrative of the Late Remarkable [sic] Revival of Religion in the congregation of New-Londonderry, and other parts of Pennsylvania} (Philadelphia, PA: Bradford, 1744), 13–28.
read and studied and provided. From Blair and others, Davies inherited a rich tradition of theological reflection upon the nature and practice of Christian conversion which helped form his own vision for the beginning of the Christian life.

**Samuel Davies’ Theology of Conversion**

The following analysis of Samuel Davies’ theology of conversion is drawn largely from his sermons and shows that Davies understood conversion as a mighty and decisive act of God in which dead sinners were brought into spiritual life through various means, most notably the preached word of God. Because conversion was God’s work, it produced a humble assurance within the converted that their faith rested not on performance but upon God’s mercy in Christ through the instrumentality of the Spirit. Such faith encouraged genuine piety.

**Predestination**

While people experienced conversion temporally, its foundation rested in eternity. Samuel Davies was a committed Presbyterian and held unswervingly to God’s sovereignty in saving sinners, yet he appears to have been somewhat reserved in preaching the doctrine of predestination. The theme was not commonplace in his corpus of extant sermons and the one sermon devoted to this doctrine demonstrates that Davies preferred a more practical explanation of the idea.

Davies took up the topic of predestination in a sermon on Romans 9:22–23. His interest was practical: he wanted to help his congregants determine their “preparation for glory” or “fitness for destruction” by examining their “habitual dispositions.” The dispositions Davies cited as evidence of fitness for glory demonstrate the vital link

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190 Samuel Davies, “The Vessels of Mercy and the Vessels of Wrath Delineated,” in *Sermons*, 2:364–85. The sermon is undated.

between theology and piety. Davies asked a series of interrogatives to those who questioned their fitness for heaven: first, “Do you love and delight in God—in a God of infinite purity? . . . Do you delight in the service of God, in contemplating his glories, in celebrating his praises, and in the humble forms of worship in his church on earth?”

Similarly, they must love holiness and act benevolently towards their fellow man. For those whose lives were so characterized, Davies insisted that they remember the truly pious heart was humble: “If you are fit for these pure and blessed regions, it is God that has made you so, by his own almighty power.”

Likewise, Davies addressed those fit for destruction in terms of their want of piety: “Are there not some of you who have no pleasure in devotion, no delight in conversing with God in his ordinances? The posture of humble worshippers at the throne of grace is not easy and agreeable to you; and hence you have prayerless families and prayerless closets.” Following a similar series of indictments, Davies assured his hearers that “it is God alone that can work in you both to will and to do.” More particularly, Davies ascribed this work to the Holy Spirit as none other was “equal to this arduous work.”

Even with his practical emphasis, Davies recognized that the doctrine of predestination was controversial. He anticipated his hearers’ objections to the “horrible doctrine of predestination.” Yet Davies reassured his congregation that he was more interested in helping them than confusing them: “My present design is to speak to your hearts, about an affair which you are all concerned and capable to know, and not to

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196 Davies, “Vessels of Mercy and Wrath,” in Sermons, 2:367. The designation of the doctrine as “horrible” are words Davies projected onto his hearers.
perplex your minds with a controversy, of which not many of you are competent judges.” Then, Davies offered a tepid apology for the doctrine:

I must own, indeed, I am not altogether a sceptic in that doctrine. It is not an entire blank in my creed; nor am I at all ashamed to declare my sentiments in a proper time and place. At present I shall only tell you, that I cannot be persuaded God has made such a world as this, without first drawing the plan of it in his own omniscient mind. I cannot think he would produce such a numerous race of reasonable and immortal creatures, without first determining what to do with them. I cannot think the events of time, or the judicial process of the last day, will furnish him with any new intelligence to enable him to determine the final states of men more justly than he could from eternity.

Davies’ statement is interesting for several reasons. First, his insistence that predestination was not “an entire blank in my creed” indicates that the topic was not one his congregation was accustomed to hearing him discuss. An examination of his extant sermons reinforces this fact, for Davies was far more likely to preach on such core doctrines such as grace and justification, faith and repentance, or even heaven and hell than on predestination. Then, his caveat that he was willing to discuss his opinion “in a proper time and place” begs the question of precisely what his ideas were; the brief summary he offered appears non-controversial in that he upheld God’s omniscience as the logic for predestination. If his pulpit was not the appropriate venue for such a discussion, perhaps a 1755 controversy with Anglican William Stith, then president of William and Mary College, afforded Davies the “proper” occasion to explain his position.

Davies left Virginia in 1753 to undertake a fundraising trip to Great Britain on behalf of the College of New Jersey. Not long after Davies’ departure, President Stith delivered a sermon before Virginia’s general assembly in Williamsburg upon Matthew 7:13–14. In this sermon, Stith took aim at Davies, who had previously stated his belief

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that most people would not be saved. Stith “firmly believed” that Davies was wrong and took the “strait gate” and “narrow way” as references to unbelieving Jews living in Jesus’ own time, “not to be extended to all Christians, or to Mankind in general.” Stith proceeded to advance the idea that just as Old Testament saints such as Abel, Noah, and Moses were saved by Jesus, even with nearly no knowledge of his actual person, so might many others be saved. Further, “It seems equally unreasonable to think, that God will condemn to eternal Perdition, for the Want of Faith, those honest and virtuous Heathens, who, as far as human Frailty would permit, acted sincerely and conscientiously, according to the best of their Knowledge and Understanding.” Upon returning from England in 1755 and learning of the challenge, Davies replied to Stith in a series of six letters, which he decided to leave unpublished since Stith had recently died. Near the end of his final letter, Davies addressed the doctrine of predestination at length.

Stith rejected the notion that God had damned some people by eternal decree.

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200 Stith, Nature and Extent, 9. Davies had made the statement in his pamphlet, The Impartial Trial, Impartially Tried, and Convicted of Partiality: in Remarks on Mr. Caldwell’s, alias Thornton’s Sermon Intituled [sic], An Impartial Trial of the Spirit, &c. and the Preface of the Publisher in Virginia (Williamsburg, VA: W. Parks, 1748), 47.

201 Stith, Nature and Extent, 12.


204 Samuel Davies, “Charity and Truth United or the Way of the Multitude exposed in Six Letters to the Rev; Mr. William Stith, A.M., President of William and Mary College. In Answer to Some Passages in William Stith's Sermon Entitled The Nature & Extent of Christ's Redemption, Preached Before the General Assembly of Virginia, Nov.11, 1753,” ed. Thomas Clinton Pears, Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society 19 (1940–1941): 193–323. Pears has provided an excellent overview of the history of these letters’ transmission (194–95). Davies explained his reason for leaving the letters unpublished in a prefatory statement: “The following Answer was finished July 4, 1755. And while the Author was circulating it among a few Friends, in order to receive their Remarks, before it should go to the Press, the Country was alarmed, & struck into a Consternation, with the News of General Braddock's Defeat (July 9). He therefore tho’ the Publication of it unseasonable at that Time; & let it lie by him, for some Months; designing to publish it, when the Attention of the Public should not be so much engaged. But during this Delay, M. Pres. Stith died; & then he tho’ the Publication entirely improper, lest he should seem to insult the Memory of the Dead, for which he had a sincere Regard, or to triumph without an Antagonist. Decem. 23, 1755” (202).
Davies responded, “I make the actual Providence of God in Time, the Expositor of his Decrees from Eternity; and learn his eternal Plan of Government from his actual Administration.” God created humans “mutable and fallible” and, Davies reasoned, God had chosen from eternity to create people as such. God had decreed that people would “fall into Sin,” yet Davies did not charge God with causing them to sin; God’s “Decree and Foreknowledge do not influence Men to sin.” From all eternity, God had determined to show grace to certain sinners while allowing “the greater Number [of people]” to follow their course of sin. According to Davies, all who are saved find salvation through Jesus Christ; all who are damned are condemned because of their own actual sin: “In short, I find that God does actually govern the World, and particularly the Affairs of Men; and therefore I believe that he decreed to do so, and formed the Scheme of his Government before-hand; or, that he knew what to do with the World, before he made it.”

Echoing his sentiment in *The Vessels of Mercy and Wrath*, Davies stated, “If it be just for the supreme Judge actually to condemn impenitent Sinners at the last Day, it could not be unjust for him to purpose to condemn them from all Eternity: for the Formality of a public Trial will not be intended for his Information; but he was as well acquainted with their Characters from all Eternity, as he will be then.” While Davies may have been reticent to address predestination from the pulpit, he clearly found the doctrine “amiable, glorious and majestic,” whether or not “blinded Mortals” could see it.

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Immediate Regeneration

Samuel Davies was persuaded that the Bible located the beginning of spiritual life at the point of regeneration. Passages such as 1 Peter 1:3, James 1:18, and Ephesians 2:5 describe the infusion of spiritual life as “begetting” or “quickening” while Ezekiel describes this change as the implantation of a new heart and Spirit (cf. Ezekiel 36:23). John’s Gospel and letters refer to this experience as the “new birth” (cf. John 3:3, 1 John 3:9). The consistent theme of these passages is the new and instantaneous nature of spiritual life, a theme which seemed quite contrary to the notion, held by some, “that a power of living to God is universally conferred upon mankind in creation” and that Christ’s atoning death made such living possible for all because Christ had died for all. Davies rejected this teaching by way of several arguments. First, the presence of a “new” or “second” birth is inexplicable if spiritual life were naturally communicated at physical birth. Additionally, biblical texts describing the distinction between the old and new man would be nonsensical (cf. Rom 6:6, Eph 4:22, Col 3:9,10). Second, Davies appealed once more to Ephesians 2:5 and Ezekiel 36:26, which locate God’s work of enlivening dead sinners “posterior to, and consequently distinct from, [natural] creation.” As spiritual life is connected with regeneration, Davies understood that this


214 Davies, “Divine Life in the Soul,” in Sermons, 2:521. In locating the starting point of spiritual life, Davies appealed to Scripture at every point, but did not offer his own positive exegesis of those passages which some would cite as evidence of a general spiritual life flowing from the cross. Instead, Davies remained close to those passages that supported his view.
life was communicated instantaneously and not by gradual acts.\textsuperscript{215} Now, while repeated acts serve to nourish and confirm spiritual life, they do not confer it upon one’s soul. Davies believed that to claim that spiritual life was generated by good actions would be to suppose its existence and non-existence at the same time, which was an irrational notion.\textsuperscript{216}

The biblical language of “begetting,” “quickening,” or “resurrection” to describe the communication of this life were at odds with a developmental concept of its impartation, and as holiness is the “source and principle” of spiritual life, and since, in Davies’ view, this holiness is superadded to human reason at a particular point in time, it could not be brought into being before it existed.\textsuperscript{217} Unlike morality, which was obtained through “frequent and continued exercise,” gospel-holiness “proceeds from a principle divinely implanted.”\textsuperscript{218} Only those persons who had experienced the new birth could possess spiritual life. Davies noted two corollaries to this truth: first, any person who would serve God acceptably most receive the grace to do so and second, even the best religious actions of the unregenerate do not merit God’s favor.\textsuperscript{219} Davies did not, however, believe that the unregenerate should disavow religious activity: “It is true their performing the duties of religion and virtue in the best manner they are capable of, is less displeasing to God than the willful neglect of them, or the commission of the contrary sins, and therefore they should endeavour to perform them; but yet it cannot said to be positively pleasing to him.”\textsuperscript{220} In Davies’ theology, spiritual life is communicated in the

\textsuperscript{218} Davies, “Divine Life in the Soul,” in \textit{Sermons,} 2:525.
act of regeneration, which is a monergistic work of God upon the soul, yet this act follows God’s preparatory work.

**Preparation for Conversion**

In a sermon on Ephesians 2:4-5, Davies observed that, “though spiritual life is instantaneously infused, yet God prepares the soul for its reception by a course of previous operations.” As God created the world in six days, “though he might have spoken it into being in an instant,” so Davies believed God worked to prepare a soul to receive quickening grace. God prepares every soul, though the duration of this preparation will differ. Davies traced these steps for his audience to enable them to discern “whether ever divine grace has carried you through this gracious process.” God works upon “all the principles of the rational life” among those who are spiritually dead in order to stir up in them spiritual desires: “He brings the sinner to exert all his active powers in seeking this divine principle: nature does her utmost, and all outward means are tried before a supernatural principle is implanted.”

Rather than following his normal pattern of text-doctrine-application, Davies here imagined the spiritual journey of a congregant through vivid imagery. “You lay for ten, twenty, thirty years, or more, dead in trespasses and sins; and you did not breathe and pant like a living soul after God and holiness; you had little more sense of the burden of sin than a corpse of the pressure of a mountain.” This person ignored those who tried to warn them of their spiritual peril until one day the heard the gospel message: “the terrors of the Lord were thundered in your ears to awaken you.” The Holy Spirit then moved effectually upon this person: “Perhaps a verse in your Bible, a sentence in a sermon, an

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alarming Providence, the conversation of a pious friend, or something that unexpectedly occurred to your own thoughts” moved them. Perhaps this person then sought moral reformation, yet apart from heart-implanted “divine supernatural life,” such reforms were fruitless.²²⁵ But God then gave this one new spiritual perception to see their awful condition and their inability for self-rescue. It is at this moment of helplessness that God infuses a new principle into the heart: “The pulse of spiritual passions began to beat towards spiritual objects; the vital warmth of love spread itself through your whole frame; you breathed out your desires and prayers before God; like a new-born infant you began to cry after him, and at times you have learned to lisp his name with filial endearment.”²²⁶ Throughout the sermon, Davies used the raising of Lazarus as a controlling image. Davies utilized his rhetorical abilities to provide his hearers with an overwhelming sensory experience of the preparatory work of God in the soul. The implications of Davies’ theology for Christian spirituality are significant: while it may take different forms in each person, sinners should expect to move through various experiences as God draws them to himself, culminating in an immediate new spiritual birth. Though Davies’ sermon is sprinkled with biblical allusions, he was clearly unable to develop specific doctrinal points based on the exegesis of particular texts to support his theology of preparationism.²²⁷ Elsewhere, Davies encouraged sinners to use prayer as the appropriate means to prepare their heart for salvation: “You must accustom yourselves to frequent, importunate prayer. If ever you be saved, or prepared for salvation, it will be in answer to prayer: therefore, engage in it, persevere in it, and never give out until you


obtain your request.” Though these doctrines were critical in Samuel Davies’ theological vision of spiritual life, yet perhaps more central to his thought, however, was the vital spiritual relationship between Christ and the believer.

**Spiritual Life Communicated through Christ**

Samuel Davies believed that spiritual life was possible only by the union of believers with Christ and he expounded on this union in his second sermon on Galatians 2:20. In explaining this relationship, Davies first addressed the ways in which spiritual life is communicated to the believer through Christ and then how Christ supports and nourishes this life. In describing the ways in which Christ communicates spiritual life to believers, Davies emphasized the headship of Adam and of Christ.

Due to the sin and resultant forfeiture of spiritual life by Adam, who “was constituted [by God] the representative of his posterity,” all people are born spiritually dead, that is, they lack the power to obey God. Davies believed this scenario was just as God was both powerful and righteous enough “to suspend the continuance of the powers of upright moral agency conferred upon his creatures” when such powers are abused. While men and women inherit Adam’s guilt, they also sin personally. One’s personal sin deprives that person of spiritual life both morally and physically: morally, personal sin renders one guilty of subverting God’s righteous standard and moral image conferred upon men and women in creation (cf. Gen 1:26–27). Physically, personal sin tends to “strengthen and encourage” habits which weaken and ultimately destroy their actors. If spiritual life is to flourish in the sinner, the moral and physical influences of

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229 Davies, “Divine Life in the Soul,” in *Sermons*, 2:526. Here Davies noted that he lacked the time to prove that Adam’s sin was imputed to subsequent generations and took this doctrine for granted.


sin must be removed and replaced by a holy influence. Davies believed that Christ was the only being capable of these actions.

By both his active and passive obedience to God, Christ actually broke the power of sin and secured salvation, regeneration, and holiness for his people (cf. Heb 10:10, 14; Titus 2:14): “The Lord Jesus, by his sufferings, made a ‘complete satisfaction to divine justice;’ and thereby redeemed the blessing forfeited; and by the merit of his obedience, purchased divine influence for the extirpation of the principles of spiritual death which lurk in our natures, and the implantation of holiness.”

“It is only on the account of his righteousness,” Davies noted, “that spiritual life is first given and afterwards maintained and cherished.”

Christ was not only the purchaser of spiritual life, but also its mediator. Davies encouraged his hearers that Christ actually communicated spiritual life to his people (cf. John 5:21; Acts 5:31; Col 3:3-4; Heb 12:2). According to Davies, Christ reigned over “a sovereign empire of grace founded in his own blood (cf. Matt 28:18).” Davies articulated several implications of Christ’s unique mediatorial role for spiritual life: believers ought to look to Christ alone “for the supplies of his grace to support and nourish their spiritual life.” He warned his hearers against an attitude of spiritual self-sufficiency: “If you ‘compass yourself with sparks of your own kindling’ (cf. Isa 50:11),

232 Davies, “Divine Life in the Soul,” in Sermons, 528. The published editions of “Divine Life” include Davies’ statement that Jesus made a “complete satisfaction to divine justice” in quotation marks, yet do not cite the source of Davies’ quote, if indeed he was quoting a source. It is possible that Davies quoted the English Puritan Thomas Brooks (1608–1680), whose Golden Key contains this exact phrase. Further supporting this link is the fact that Brooks followed this phrase by citing Hebrews 10:10 and 10:14, which are the first biblical passages that Davies cited to support his statement. See Thomas Brooks, The Golden Key to Open Hidden Treasures, in The Complete Works of Thomas Brooks, vol. 5, ed. Alexander Balloch Grosart (Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1867; Repr., 2001), 251.


your devotions will be cold and languid, and a deadly chillness will benumb your spirit. Place yourselves, therefore, under the vivifying beams ‘of the Sun of righteousness, and you shall go forth and grow up as calves of the stall (cf. Mal 4:2).’”237 If Christ is the only procurer and mediator of spiritual life, how ought Christians to seek spiritual nourishment from him?

Christ’s communication of grace is “peculiar and distinguishing” and restricted to his own people.238 Davies drew upon the biblical imagery of marriage (cf. Eph 5:28, 32) and also the communication between the head and the body (cf. Col 2:19) as well as the vine and branches (cf. John 15:5) to illustrate the relation between Christ and his followers. Davies noted that “spiritual life, as to its infusion and preservation, proceeds from the Lord-Mediator, both morally and physically.”239 Now, believers are united to Christ morally by a “special legal union” whereby the faithful enjoy the merits of Christ’s obedience and physically they are united by faith.240

Davies described faith as the “grand ligament” whereby believers are “indissolubly conjoined” to Christ, both in an initial and continuing union.241 Though spiritual life consisted of multiple essential parts, namely repentance, love, grace, virtue—no part is as central as is faith because faith, or simply “trusting in the Lord,” reminds believers of “their own weakness” and produces humble dependence on Christ.242 Through faith, Christ dwells in the believer’s heart (cf. Eph 3:17) and faith also

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empowers spiritual adoption (cf. John 1:12). Faith, for Davies, was essential for Christian spirituality. Davies offered his hearers three applications of this doctrine. First, “saving faith is always operative,” for it is continually looking to Christ for grace, and Christ is ever ready to give what that faith seeks. Second, “Faith has so important a place in the unition of the soul with Christ, and, consequently, in entitling us to his righteousness, and deriving vital influence from him, that without it we cannot be at all united to him, or share in the happy consequences of this union, no more than there can be a circulation of the blood without veins and arteries.” Finally, faith is the distinguishing mark between mere morality, which is natural and “gospel holiness,” which is supernatural. Davies concluded his sermon by noting several implications for the Christian life.

Many people, reasoned Davies, found religion burdensome because they lacked spiritual life: “Religion is not natural to them, for want of a new nature,” yet believers experience the light yoke of Christ (cf. Matt 11:30). Davies suggested soul-probing questions to his hearers: “Do we feel, or have we felt, a supernatural principle working within . . . is the habitual bent of our wills God-ward . . . . Is our religion more than a mere acquired habit . . . do we derive our strength for obedience from Christ by faith?” Because godliness is a great mystery (cf. 1 Tim 3:16), “it ought, therefore, to engage our most serious and intense thoughts.” Then, Davies exhorted his audience to

acknowledge God for his “distinguishing grace” at work in their lives: “Can you restrain
your wonder, that you should be the chosen objects of sovereign grace? Or avoid
breaking forth into ecstatic praises at so surprising a dispensation?”250 Believers ought to
life according to the inclinations of their new nature: “Indulge the propensions and
tendencies of the new nature; obey and cherish all the impulses and motions of the divine
principle within you.”251 Finally, those among Davies auditors who lacked spiritual life
should seek it diligently, utilizing all “proper means” to obtain it, yet recognizing that the
final judgment might be closer than they supposed.252

**Christians Formed into Christ’s Image**

If believers were united to Christ, Davies believed that they ought to
progressively grow in likeness to Jesus. Preaching from Galatians 4:19–20, Davies
explicated Paul’s longing for Christ to be formed among the Galatians: “They are made
new creatures after the image of Christ; until the sacred foetus be formed in their hearts;
until the heavenly embryo grow and ripen for birth, or until they be conformed to Jesus
Christ in heart and practice.”253 Further, this conformity consisted in “our being made
conformable to him in heart and life, or having his holy image stamped upon our hearts.
This is essential to the character of every true Christian.”254

Davies rejected the idea that a Christian might perfectly imitate Christ during
this life, but believed that Paul’s language indicated a new “prevailing temper” of the
soul:

That filial temper towards God, that humble veneration and submission, that ardent

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253 Samuel Davies, “The Tender Anxieties of Ministers for their People,” in *Sermons*, 2:409.
devotion, that strict regard to all the duties of religion, that self-denial, humility, meekness and patience, that heavenly-mindedness and noble superiority to the world, that generous charity, benevolence and mercy to mankind, that ardent zeal and diligence to do good, that temperance and sobriety which shone in the blessed Jesus with a divine, incomparable splendor: these and the like graces and virtues shine, though with feeblower rays, in all his followers. They have their infirmities indeed, many and great infirmities—but not such as are inconsistent with the habitual prevalency of this Christ-like disposition.  

This conformity to Christ distinguished Christians from the world: “If you are like him, you will certainly be very unlike the generality of mankind,” and Davies assured believers that rejecting worldly patterns of behavior would bring reproach. Yet how was Christ formed in believers?  

Davies believed this work was of the Holy Spirit: “It is the hand of God that draws the lineaments of this image upon the heart, though he makes use of the gospel and a variety of means as his pencil.” More particularly, the Spirit caused the believer to become painfully aware of her lack of natural righteousness before God and drove her to various means such as prayer and hearing the preached word of Scripture to mortify sin. Davies likened the Spirit’s work to that of a servant clearing a house of “rubbish.”  

Following this purgative work, the Spirit “enlightened your minds to view the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ and the method of salvation revealed in the gospel,” and “the view of his glory proved transformative: while you were contemplating the object, you received its likeness; the rays of glory beaming upon you (cf. 2 Cor 3:18), as it were, rendered your hearts transparent, and the beauties of holiness were stamped upon them.” Though the work of forming Christ in a believer belonged to the Spirit, it was also incumbent upon the believer to “endeavour to improve and perfect this divine
Christians were to continually examine their hearts and actions for instances of deformity from the divine image and to yield to the Spirit’s shaping work. Davies addressed a similar theme from Romans 8:29, noting that want of conformity to the image of Christ was a sure indication that God’s love was absent. Such conformity was at once “the duty and the peculiar character of every sincere lover of God.” People imitate that which they love, and for someone to confess love to God while neglecting holiness was an “elusive and absurd” pretence to faith.

**Conclusion**

This chapter has demonstrated that Samuel Davies understood conversion as the beginning of the Christian life and the commencement of genuine spirituality. Only those who had been truly converted, who were partakers, of the covenant of grace, could draw near and experience communion with God. Conversion was God’s work, wrought immediately through faith and marked by real and abiding spiritual change as sinners were brought from spiritual death to life (cf. Eph 2:8–9). Davies inherited his theology of conversion from the Puritans and so placed great emphasis on the role of preparation for conversion, yet the work of preparation might be relatively brief; he preached with great urgency for sinners to be converted today. Though it was communicated instantly in conversion, spiritual life was marked by progressive conformity to the image of Christ as believers grew in gospel holiness.

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CHAPTER 5
HOLINESS: THE VITAL PRINCIPLE OF
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

The blessed Jesus by his mediation opened a way for the communication of Heaven. In truth sir, I cannot inculcate the religion of The holy Jesus without inculcating holiness; & therefore this has been, & I hope shall ever be, the darling subject of my Discourses, wherevery I have the honour of preaching the everlasting Gospel to ye [the] sons of men.¹

Samuel Davies thought often of spiritual life and holiness, so much so that even a decade before his death, he intended to write a treatise on the subject.² As Davies opened his heart to a ministerial correspondent, spiritual life and holiness were much on his mind:

But, alas! my brother, I have but little, very little true religion. My advancements in holiness are extremely small; I feel what I confess, and am sure it is true, and not the rant of excessive or affected humility. It is an easy thing to make a noise in the world, to flourish and harangue, to dazzle the crowd, and set them all agape, but deeply to imbibe the spirit of Christianity, to maintain a secret walk with God, to be holy as he is holy, this is the labour, this the work. I beg the assistance of your prayers in so grand and important an enterprise.³

For Davies, the spiritual life that began at one’s conversion was marked by a steady obedience to God, patterned after God’s own character. God, through the Holy Spirit, “turned the prevailing bent of [Christians’] souls towards holiness,” yet it was also to be

¹Samuel Davies, letter to unspecified recipient, Samuel Davies Collection, Box 1, Folder 1, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library.

²William Henry Foote, Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical, 2nd series (Philadelphia, PA: J. B. Lippincott and Company, 1856), 42. Foote transcribes a letter between Davies and Joseph Bellamy of Bethlehem, Connecticut, in which Davies mentioned that he had “dropped the thoughts of my intended treatise on the Morality of Gospel-Holiness, till I have more leisure, and a larger acquaintance with divinity” (42).

³Samuel Davies, letter to Thomas Gibbons, in Sermons by the Rev. Samuel Davies, A.M., President of the College of New Jersey, vol. 1 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo Gloria, 1854, repr., 1993), 60. This work will be henceforth cited as Sermons.
the believer’s earnest desire, both in this life and the life to come:

Do you delight in holiness? If not, what would you do in a region of holiness? Alas! to you it would be an unnatural element. Are the saints, those whom the world perhaps calls so with a sneer, because they make it their great business to be holy in all manner of conversation, are these your favourite companions? Is their society peculiarly delightful to you? And are they the more agreeable to you, by how much more the holy they are?4

This chapter examines Samuel Davies’ theology of the Christian life, which he understood to be a vital spiritual life communicated and sustained by God’s Spirit and characterized by holiness. Though the Westminster Standards undoubtedly shaped Davies’ view of holiness, his theology was far more detailed than that articulated by Westminster.

The Westminster Confession of Faith addressed the necessity of holiness among believers in its treatment of sanctification. According to the confession:

They, who are once effectually called, and regenerated, having a new heart, and a new spirit created in them, are further sanctified, really and personally, through the virtue of Christ’s death and resurrection, by His Word and Spirit dwelling in them: the dominion of the whole body of sin is destroyed, and the several lusts thereof are more and more weakened and mortified; and they more and more quickened and strengthened in all saving graces, to the practice of true holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.5

According to the Westminster theologians, holiness was an essential fruit of the gospel and was a synergistic work in which the regenerated person now yielded to God’s “Word and Spirit” working within him or her. Though imperfect in this life, sanctification was best understood as a “a continual and irreconcilable war” between Spirit and flesh and “through the continual supply of strength from the sanctifying Spirit of Christ, the regenerate part does overcome; and so, the saints grow in grace, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.”6 Such holiness manifested itself in works performed in obedience to God’s


6WCF 13.2–3.
commands.7 Davies’ own reflection on the nature and need of holiness and the Christian life understandably went deeper than that of the Confession.

**The Nature and Communication of Spiritual Life**

Samuel Davies offered his most detailed exposition of spiritual life in two sermons on Galatians 2:20: “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh, I live by the faith of the Son of God.”8 As Davies explained the text, he noted first that “believers are endowed with spiritual activity.”9 He identified this doctrine in the seemingly contradictory statements “I am crucified” and “I live.” The first statement bespoke “the mortification of indwelling sin, the subduction and extirpation of corrupt principles and inclinations.”10 Following a typically Reformed treatment of sanctification, Davies declared that “mortification of sin is part of the service of God, at least a necessary prerequisite.”11 The second statement, “I live,” signifies vivification, or what Davies called “spiritual activity; a vigorous, persevering serving of God.”12

Due to its inherently mysterious nature, spiritual life was difficult to articulate in words and to understand completely, as is true of much of life. One might explain the “effects and many of the properties” of biological life, yet who was able to explain life in itself? This difficulty is compounded with the spiritual life because this form of life more nearly approached God’s own divine life, “that boundless ocean of incomprehensible

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7WCF 16.2.
mysteries.”¹³ The mind-darkening effects of sin compounded the difficulty of understanding spiritual life. In this context, Davies cited 1 Corinthians 2:14, which described the inability of non-Christians to “receive or know the things of the spirit of God.”¹⁴ This inability seemed an impenetrable barrier to genuine understanding among some of Davies’ hearers. Only those persons who had themselves experienced the enlightening work of the Holy Spirit could comprehend the doctrine of spiritual life clearly.¹⁵ In the same way that the wisest animal was incapable of rational self-awareness, so the unbeliever, though rational, was incapable of perceiving the true nature of spiritual life.¹⁶ Davies reiterated the necessity of the Spirit’s work of illumination elsewhere:

True faith includes not only a speculative knowledge and belief, but a clear, affecting, realizing view, and a hearty approbation of the things known and believed concerning Jesus Christ; and such a view, such an approbation, cannot be produced by any human means, but only by the enlightening influence of the holy Spirit shining into the heart.¹⁷

Though Satan had blinded humanity and obscured a true sight of Christ’s glory, the Holy Spirit’s “divine illumination pierces the cloud that obscured his understanding, and enables him to view the Lord Jesus in a strong and striking light; a light entirely different from that of the crowd around him; a light, in which it is impossible to view this glorious object without loving him.”¹十八 The Presbyterian minister thus encouraged his hearers to call out to God for his enlightening Spirit to overcome unaffected hearts.¹⁹

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¹⁷Samuel Davies, “Christ Precious to All True Believers,” in Sermons, 1:396.
¹⁸Davies, “Christ Precious to All True Believers,” in Sermons, 1:397.
these attendant difficulties, Davies undertook an explanation of the nature of spiritual life in the hopes of giving his hearers “a faint glimmering” of the doctrine. He arranged his topic under three headings: first, the vital principle of spiritual life; second, the disposition of the spiritual life; and third, spiritual empowerment for service.20

Holiness, for Davies, was the vital principle of spiritual life.21 Davies described the necessity of holiness and its relationship to spiritual life yet left the term itself undefined in these sermons. Humans are rational beings, yet reason alone is an inadequate animating principle for spiritual life because “life and all its operations will be of the same kind.”22 Reason is a normal human operation, yet it may be, and often is, performed apart from holiness. What, then, would distinguish normal animal life from spiritual life? For Davies the two were quite distinct: the normal person might think and will, but these rational exercises never proceeded from a morally good nature. Spiritual life, however, was marked by a willing and thinking that proceeded from a morally good nature.23 Davies imagined someone objecting to this claim: are not all of the acts of the spiritual life reducible to mere rationality? Are not such actions merely “thinking and walking in a holy manner?” The spiritual life is indeed marked by the operation of rationality (thinking and willing), so Davies said, and these exercises may involve objects consistent with those required by God’s law, yet such operations are “morally good and acceptable to God” because their fitness is only possible when holiness is superadded to rationality.24 God is the one who joins holiness to rationality (cf. 1 John 3:9) and this
merger occurs at the moment of regeneration. The implications of Davies’ assertion for spirituality are significant. Only those persons who have been “quickened by efficacious grace” are capable of exercising a morally acceptable act. So though both Christian and pagan pray, the pagan’s prayer is fundamentally different than the prayer of the righteous person because it is morally unacceptable to God. The sinner remained “everlastingly incapable of living religion” apart from the monergistic work of God.

Davies’ second point was that “spiritual life implies . . . a spontaneous inclination towards holiness.” All forms of life have unique tendencies, so spiritual life is marked by “a savour, a relish of divine things,” and these tendencies are as natural to spiritual life as eating is to animal life. In fact, the biblical authors describe these holy affections with language of “hungering and thirsting (cf. 1 Pet 2:2), and cultivating spiritual mindedness (cf. Col 3:2),” and “the strongest bent of their souls is God-ward.” Davies continued: “By virtue of this [God-ward bent] they incline to keep all God’s commandments; they have an inward tendency to obedience; they love God’s law; they delight in it after the inner man (Ps 119:97) . . . and their love and delight will habitually sway them to observe it; religion is their element, their choice.”

Those who possess spiritual life obey God out of a deep love for holiness and for the perfectly-holy God who commands true fatherly affections and not out of a fear of the consequences of disobedience only. What should one make of those people who

seem naturally inclined towards or even delighted by religious activities or attitudes? Davies suggested that two distinguishing marks separate such people from those who possess supernatural holiness: first, if one performs religious duties as an end unto themselves, without heed to the God who has prescribed that activity, such a person is acting from a motive of self-gratification, not out of deference to God. Second, spiritual life brings a universal delight in holiness for anything God has commanded, even if that which is commanded is contrary to one’s “natural inclinations.” So, a seemingly “natural” bent towards some religious duties, while ignoring others, is no indication of genuine spiritual life. While self-gratifying obedience “is always a maimed, imperfect, half-formed thing,” obedience flowing from a holy principle has an aesthetic quality of an “amiable symmetry and uniformity” that flow from a changed heart.

In the third place, Davies claimed that “spiritual life implies a power of holy operation. A heavenly vigour, a divine activity animates the whole soul.” Christians are those who “have strength given them; renewed and increased by repeated acts, in the progress of sanctification.” Davies cautioned that this animating power may at times wane in one’s actual experience: “I do not mean that spiritual life is always sensible and equally vigorous; alas! It is subject to many languishments and indispositions: but I mean there is habitually in a spiritual man a power, an ability for serving God which . . . is capable of putting forth acts of holiness, and which does actually exert itself frequently.” Davies cautioned that this animating power will wax and wane in one’s

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actual experience.37 It is divine grace that animates this power, and it is nothing short of “the life of God in the soul of man.”38

Davies offered several avenues of application of his discussion of the nature of spiritual life. First, natural human powers, apart from the principle of holiness, are insufficient to produce or sustain spiritual life—rather, it is “supernatural” and a “divine, heaven-born thing” implanted by God.39 Second, holiness consists in more than good acts. True holiness flows from a new heart and new spirit (cf. Ezek 36:26, 27) and the shedding abroad of God’s Holy Spirit in the hearts of believers (Rom 5:5).40 Furthermore, spiritual life is to be distinguished from morality in that the former has a divine origin and the latter a natural origin. The animating principle of the act determines its significance.41 Finally, even though believers may at times grow faint, “the pulse of the spirit, though weak and irregular, still beats.”42 For Davies, then, holiness-empowered living was the true mark of genuine spiritual life: “The design of the whole dispensation of God’s grace towards fallen sinners, is their vivification to holiness, that they may bring forth fruit unto God” (cf. Rom 7:4).43 He encouraged Christians that,

Moreover, the design of your vivification, and the natural tendency of the principle of spiritual life is, that you may live to God; and therefore you are peculiarly obliged to make your whole life a series of obedience to Him. Indulge the propensions and tendencies of the new nature; obey and cherish all the impulses and motions of the divine principle within you.44


38This reference may have been an allusion to the famous seventeenth-century work, The Life of God in the Soul of Man by Scottish theologian Henry Scougal (1650–1678).


Interestingly, Davies omitted any discussion of the precise nature of holiness. But given
the significant place of this doctrine in his theology, it is unsurprising to find other
sermons which clarify and further his thought.

In a sermon on Hebrews 12:14, Davies treated a text that commands Christians
to “follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord.”
Davies first defined holiness; next, he urged his hearers to endeavor to obtain this
holiness; finally he reiterated the “absolute necessity” of holiness. Davies’ description
of holiness is significant for understanding his theology and spirituality. According to
Davies, God formed human beings to pursue happiness, yet because of their natural
proclivity toward sin, people seek “supreme happiness in sinful, or at best created
enjoyments, forgetful of the uncreated fountain of bliss.” All earthly enjoyments are,
however, inadequate and ultimately unsatisfying. Recognizing this fact, many people
look beyond this world for unseen rewards, yet not everyone who looks should expect to
find this reward because it is promised only to those who are holy.

Now, Davies described holiness as “conformity in heart and practice to the
revealed will of God.” God is the final standard of perfection and his holiness is the
Christian’s own standard: “We are holy when his image is stamped upon our hearts and
reflected in our lives” (cf. Rom 8:29). Davies further defined holiness as “conformity to
God in his moral perfections.” These moral perfections could only be known as they are
revealed in Scripture, thus his emphasis on conformity to God’s revealed will. Davies

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45 Samuel Davies, “The Connection between Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in *Sermons*, 1:268–84. This sermon is undated.
believed that God revealed his will in both law and gospel. Law informs one’s duty to
God as creator and other humans as fellow created beings. Gospel informs one’s duty as a
sinner to God. Holiness, then, is “absolutely necessary” to see the Lord, which Davies
described as a beatific vision, or “the vision and fruition of his face.” From this
principle of holiness flow several “dispositions and practices in which it consists.”

Those who are holy are the ones who “delight in God for his holiness.” This
affection is unnatural for sinners, yet the perfectly holy God commands his creatures to
“be holy as he is holy” (cf. 1 Pet1:16), and Davies explained that “this disposition is
connatural to a renewed soul only, and argues a conformity to his image.” Indeed,
“holiness in fallen man is supernatural.” This delight in God’s holiness characterizes the
worship of heaven (cf. Rev 4:8) and indeed apart from this delight, “the perfections of
God lose their luster, or sink into objects of terror or contempt.”

For Davies, those who love God’s holiness will also love his revealed will that
promotes holiness: “Holiness consists in a hearty complacence in the law of God, because
of its purity (cf. Pss 19:7-10; 119:140).” Sinners reject the law because they believe it
an unattainable standard of precision, yet those regenerated by God become “its willing
subject.” Davies also suggested that holiness embraced the gospel and its method of

salvation. The gospel promotes God’s moral perfections and the “beauties of holiness.”

The gospel explained divine justice through Christ’s substitution and the Spirit’s sanctification of sinners, and this sanctification renders people “capable of enjoying God” and the way in which God maintains “intimate communion with them.” Christ’s propitiatory cross-work illustrates God’s holiness in requiring punishment for sin and his choice of his co-equal son as the only adequate object of judgment shows the infinite extent of God’s holiness. Sinners cannot stand before God, but through the gospel they are being sanctified in this life and will be perfected at death. Those being sanctified trust fully Christ’s righteousness for justification before God and rejoice in the necessity of holiness.

Just as people delight in God’s holiness as it is revealed in Scripture, so they rejoice in the religion that the Scriptures reveal: “Holiness consists in an habitual delight in all the duties of holiness towards God and man, and an earnest desire for communion with God in them.” Davies believed that the Psalter supported this idea that the singular delight of the believer is holy service to God, but he was careful to distinguish between formal religion and revealed religion. Only that religion that is founded upon “divine friendship” offers true delight. Elsewhere, Davies argued that holiness and happiness were inseparable and that God himself was the true source of happiness for believers: “Every creature in the universe, as far as he is holy, is happy,” and “Therefore, by how

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60 Davies, “Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in *Sermons*, 1:275.


64 Davies, “Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in *Sermons*, 1:278.

65 Davies, “Present Holiness and Future Felicity,” in *Sermons*, 1:278–79. Davies cited Pss 27:4, 63:5–6, 73:28, and 139:17 in support of the idea of delighting in holy service. He believed Ps 42:1–2 taught the friendship with God was the essence of genuine religion.
much the more holy Jehovah is, by so much the more fit he is to communicate happiness to all that enjoy him; and consequently he is an infinite happiness, for he is infinitely holy.”⁶⁶ Again, “The truth of the matter is, the conduct of sinners . . . is the greatest absurdity; they are willing to be happy, but they are not willing to be holy, in which alone their happiness consists.”⁶⁷

The heart transformed by grace grew in its capacity to love holiness; through habitual practice, the formerly rebellious heart becomes disposed to serve God gladly (cf. John 15:15; 1 John 3:2-10, 5:3).⁶⁸ Growth in holiness was essential: “True Christians are far from being perfect in practice, yet they are prevailingly holy in all manner of conversation; they do not live habitually in any one known sin, or willfully neglect any one known duty” (cf. Ps 119:6).⁶⁹ Further, “even in the present state, [Christians] are laboring after perfection in holiness. Nothing can satisfy them until they are conformed to the image of God’s dear Son.”⁷⁰ Even when a Christian felt distant from God, he was inclined toward holiness: “Even the poor creature that often fears he is altogether a slave to sin, honestly, though feebly, labours to be holy . . . he has a heart that feels the attractive charms of holiness, and he is so captivated by it, that sin can never recover its former place in his heart.”⁷¹ Davies described these inclinations and affections as sources of joy in the believer: “Since your conformity to him consists in holiness, let me beg you to inquire again, Do you delight in holiness? Is it the great business of your life to

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⁶⁶Samuel Davies, “God is Love,” in Sermons, 1:469.


Personal holiness was the hallmark of genuine devotion to Christ:

Our bodies are his, and therefore all our members should be instruments of righteousness unto holiness. Your eyes are his, therefore let them glorify him by viewing the wonders of his word and works. Your ears are his, therefore let them hear his voice. Your tongues are his, therefore use them as instruments of praise, and of making known his glory. In short, you are all entirely his, therefore be all entirely devoted to him.73

Believers used various means in order to grow in holiness. In a sermon on Luke 10:41–42, Davies understood the unum necessarium of the text as “the salvation of the soul, and an earnest application to the means necessary to obtain this end above all other things in the world.”74 Means such as prayer and hearing and meditating on Scripture were “appointed to produce or cherish holiness in us” and Christians were to “use these means with constancy, frequency, earnestness, and zeal.”75

Davies placed great emphasis on the role of obedience in pursuing holiness. Genuine believers were far from antinomian; rather, they viewed obedience as “pleasant”:

Here then, you that profess to love the Lord Jesus, here is an infallible test for your love. Do you make it the great study of your life to keep his commandments? Do you honestly endeavor to perform every duty he has enjoined, and that because he has enjoined it? And do you vigorously resist and struggle against every sin, however constitutional, however fashionable, however gainful, because he forbids it?76

Davies warned his congregation of the necessity of obedience: “The only way to please God, and the best test of your love to him, is obedience to his commandments.”77 Davies

72Samuel Davies, “Evidences of the Want of Love to God,” in Sermons, 3:466.

73Samuel Davies, “Dedication to God Argued from Redeeming Mercy,” in Sermons, 2:130.


75Davies, “One Thing Needful,” in Sermons, 1:556. Davies’ teachings on the various means of grace are discussed in chap. 6 below.


77Davies, “The Nature of Love to God,” in Sermons, 2:466.
cited a catena of passages from John’s gospel to prove his point, which he punctuated with 1 John 5:3, arguing that Christians who obey the law out of love find God’s commands delightful.⁷⁸ Davies afforded no room to those who refused to forsake sin:

they who have not practical respect to all God's commandments, without exception, and who do not inwardly delight in his law, are of a spirit and character directly contrary to David and Paul; in other words, they are wicked. The wilful and habitual practice of any known sin, and the wilful and habitual neglect of any known duty, are repeatedly mentioned in the Scriptures, as the sure signs of a wicked man.⁷⁹

For Davies, then, holiness was the true substance of spiritual life. Holiness was practical consistency with God and his revealed will. Holiness is supernatural in its origin and progressive in its development and was marked by reordered affections. Further, Davies’ definition emphasizes the central place that Scripture held in Davies spirituality: one cannot be holy apart from conformity to God’s revealed will, law and gospel. Yet a discussion of Davies’ understanding of the spiritual life would be incomplete without reference to the ministry of the Holy Spirit.

**The Holy Spirit and the “Spiritual” Life**

Kidd has well-noted the special place of pneumatology among early colonial Evangelicals, and Samuel Davies’ is no exception.⁸⁰ In Davies’ theology, the Spirit applied the work of Christ to God’s elect, and was thus the immediate source of “spiritual” life. In his atoning death, Christ had “purchased” the Spirit’s influence, and the Spirit “[quickened] dead souls.”⁸¹ The Holy Spirit worked his “enlightening influence” upon believers, enabling them to behold the glory of Christ, an affecting sight

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that remained hidden to sinners. Sinners were estranged from God, and engaged in rebellion against him; and they love to continue so. They will not submit, nor return to their duty and allegiance. Hence, there is need of a superior power to subdue their stubborn hearts, and sweetly constrain them to subjection; to inspire them with the love of God, and an implacable detestation of all sin.

Through his Spirit, God exerted saving power over rebellious sinners: “many a stubborn will has he sweetly subdued; many a heart of stone has he softened, and dissolved into ingenuous repentance . . . many a depraved soul has he purified, and at length brought to the heavenly state in all the beauties of perfect holiness.”

Davies also often described the work of the Holy Spirit in drawing Christians near to God. The Spirit “urged and sweetly constrained” Christians to yield themselves fully to God, a dedication they could not make apart from the Spirit’s gracious operations. Noting the interplay between Word and Spirit, Davies insisted that it was the Spirit who affected people’s hearts through the preached word. In his words, “Has not the blessed Spirit at time borne home the word upon your hearts with unusual power, and roused your conscience to fall upon you with terrible, though friendly violence?”

During the Lord’s Supper, God “communicates his love and the influences of his Spirit to [believers]; and they pour out their hearts, their desires, and prayers before him.”

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82 Samuel Davies, “Christ Precious to All True Believers,” in *Sermons*, 1:396.

83 Samuel Davies, “The Preaching of Christ Crucified the Mean of Salvation,” in *Sermons*, 1:639.

84 Davies, “Mean of Salvation,” in *Sermons*, 1:639. Elsewhere, Davies stated that “To bring sinners to repentance, God has instituted the gospel and its ordinances, and for this end they are dispensed among you; for this end also he rouses your consciences within you, and communicates his Holy Spirit to work upon your hearts.” See Samuel Davies, “A Time of Unusual Sickness and Mortality Improved,” in *Sermons*, 3:238–39.


88 Samuel Davies, “The Christian Feast,” in *Sermons*, 2:154. The nature of the Eucharist and
the “sanctifying Spirit” who communicated “purifying, all-healing influences” to those chosen sinners who were to be saved.\textsuperscript{89} Redeemed sinners cherished holiness because of the influence of the Spirit of holiness, who “turned the prevailing bent” of Christians “towards holiness, so that you esteem it the principle ornament of your nature, and make it the object of your eager desires, and most vigorous pursuit.”\textsuperscript{90} Christians were those upon whose souls God had drawn his own image (cf. Romans 8:29), and the Spirit accomplished this radical change.\textsuperscript{91} The Holy Spirit worked to sanctify the “poor in spirit,” those who were aware of the insufficiency of their own holiness and of their dependence upon Christ.\textsuperscript{92} To those Christians whose zeal for the Lord had waned, Davies was convinced that God, through the Spirit, “can rekindle the languishing flame of devotion,” and thus he implored his hearers, “O let us apply to him with the most vigorous and unwearied importunity for so necessary a blessing.”\textsuperscript{93} By means of the Holy Spirit, God gave believers various fruits of the gospel, blessings of being citizens of the kingdom of God. Among these fruits was the Spirit’s influences “to support his subjects under every burden, and furnish them with strength for the spiritual warfare.”\textsuperscript{94} Finally, one of the Spirit’s most important ministries was providing Christians assurance that God had really adopted them into his kingdom.\textsuperscript{95}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{89}Samuel Davies, “A Sermon on the New Year,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:204.
\item \textsuperscript{90}Samuel Davies, “The Vessels of Mercy and the Vessels of Wrath Delineated,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:370.
\item \textsuperscript{91}Samuel Davies, “The Tender Anxieties of Ministers for their People,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:422.
\item \textsuperscript{92}Samuel Davies, “Poor and Contrite Spirits the Objects of the Divine Favour,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:221.
\item \textsuperscript{93}Samuel Davies, “The Divine Government the Joy of our World,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:433.
\item \textsuperscript{94}Davies, “Divine Government,” in \textit{Sermons}, 1:436.
\item \textsuperscript{95}Samuel Davies, “The Objects, Grounds, and Evidences of the hope of the Righteous,” in \textit{Sermons}, 3:490. The issue of assurance is discussed more fully in chapter 6 below.
\end{itemize}
Samuel Davies encouraged congregants to pray that God would send his Holy Spirit in special and powerful manifestations: “Betake yourselves to earnest prayer; and confess your guilt . . . cry for his Spirit to shed abroad his love in your hearts: here let your petitions centre; for this is the main thing.” Equally direct was his appeal for congregants to pray for the Spirit in the midst of the Seven Years’ War:

And how are we to expect his sacred influences? Or in what way may we hope to attain them? The answer is, Pray for them: pray frequently, pray fervently. “Lord, thy spirit! O give thy spirit! that is the blessing I want; the blessing which families, and nations, and the whole human race want.” Pray in your retirements; pray in your families; pray in societies appointed for that purpose; pray in warm ejaculations; pray without ceasing, for this grand, fundamental blessing.

Elsewhere, Davies exhorted believers, “Above all, pray that the Holy Spirit of God may be poured out upon us, to work a general reformation.”

Davies’ most sustained reflection on the work of the Spirit came in a sermon on Isaiah 32:13–19. Davies preached the sermon on a called fast-day, October 16, 1757, during the early years of the Seven Years’ War. In Davies’ view, the colonial way of life, the British kingdom, and even the future of Protestantism were uncertain. He framed his sermon against the backdrop of the question, “what is the best remedy in this melancholy case?” The Virginia preacher noted first that Isaiah’s prophecy described the fall of the Southern Kingdom of Judah to Babylon, an attack by a heathen people against God’s chosen nation, which had been orchestrated by God himself, in order to chastise his

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97Samuel Davies, “The Crisis, or The Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times,” in *Sermons*, 3:145. Davies repeated this prayer in another sermon, adding “Therefore, brethren, let us earnestly cry to God for his Spirit. Would you beg for bread, when famishing? Would you beg for life, if condemned to die? O then beg for the Spirit: for this gift is of more importance to you and the world, than daily bread, or life itself.” See Samuel Davies, “Serious Reflections on War,” in *Sermons*, 3:301.


100Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:204.
backslidden followers who had grown to love wealth more than Yahweh. It was a situation not unlike the then-present state of the colonies. The remedy proposed in Isaiah’s text was exactly that which Davies thought most meet: an outpouring of the Holy Spirit.

Now, Scripture represented the Spirit as “the original fountain of the real goodness and virtue which is to be found in our degenerate world; the only author of reformation, conversion, sanctification, and every grace included in the character of a saint, or a good man.” Isaiah described a time of the “plentiful communication of [the Spirit’s] influence to effect a thorough reformation”; a “copious effusion . . . like a mighty shower or, or torrent that carries all before it.” Davies believed that God had sent such an outpouring during the era of Ezra and Nehemiah and that “The outpouring of the Holy Spirit is the great and only remedy for a ruined country.”

Davies focused his hearers’ thoughts on a nation-wide outpouring of the Spirit, rather than a primarily personal reformation, and noted God’s various promises to Israel to pour out the Spirit (cf. Ezek 11:17–20, 36:16–25, and 39:25–29; Zech 4:6). History proved that when God withheld the Spirit, nations faltered, but when he sent the Spirit, “the cause of religion and virtue is promoted, almost without means; then sinners are awakened by a word; religion catches and circulates from heart to heart, and bears down all opposition before it.” Yet Davies did not need to go back as far as ancient Palestine

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102 Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:207.

103 Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:207–08.

104 Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:208.

105 Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:211.


107 Davies, “Pouring out of the Spirit,” in *Sermons*, 3:216.
for an example of the Spirit’s effusion; he recalled a period just sixteen years earlier as he spoke of the Great Awakening in New England to illustrate the effects of the Spirit’s outpouring.

Prior to its awakening, New England had fallen into a state of religious discontent until “suddenly, a deep, general concern about eternal things spread through the country; sinners started out of their lumbers, broke off from their vices, began to cry out, What shall I do to be saved? and made it the great business of their life to prepare for the world to come.” Here Davies reminisced about his days under Blair’s ministry: “I have seen thousands at once melted down under it; all eager to hear as for life” and while many so-called conversions of this period proved spurious, “blessed be God, thousands still remain shining monuments to the power of divine grace in that glorious day.”

Davies offered several anecdotal evidences of the Spirit’s current work, in England, in New England, and in Virginia; yet these works were but a “dew” when what the sin-sick land required was a fountain, which Davies concluded was “the most important blessing, both to our country and our souls, both with regard to time and eternity; and without it, both our country and our souls will be lost in the issue.”

Davies’ reflection on the Holy Spirit was not restricted to his sermons, but also appeared in two of his hymns. Davies appended the first hymn to his sermon on Isaiah 32:13–19 just considered. The first two stanzas recounted the dire situation colonists faced in the midst of war:

WHILE in a thousand open’d Veins
Contending Nations bleed,
While Bri’rs and Thorns on blooming Plains
And fruitful Fields succeed;


While Desolation rages round, 
Like an o’erwhelming Flood,
Where can a Remedy be found 
To stop these Streams of Blood?$^{111}$

Stanzas 3–5 invoke the Spirit’s presence, offering a variation on Davies’ sermon

application. Here Davies envisioned the Spirit’s outpouring in powerful natural imagery:

the Spirit’s coming is like a “Flood” and “reviving Show’r”:

Eternal Spirit! Source of Good!
The Author of our Peace,
Pour down thine Influence, like a Flood,
On this wide Wilderness.

O grant us one reviving Show’r,
And let it spread afar:
Thine Influence alone can cure
The bleeding Wounds of War.

Come, Thou—and then the Wilderness
Shall bloom a Paradise,
And heav’nly Plants t’ adorn and bless
O’er this wild Waste shall rise.$^{112}$

Davies likened the colonies, gripped by war, as a “Wilderness” and a “wild Waste,”
parched by drought. As a torrential downpour could saturate a dry ground, enlivening the
vegetation, so Davies sought the Spirit’s abundance. Davies also expected that the
Spirit’s coming would produce a moral change: the barren, untamed “Wilderness” would
“bloom a paradise” Isaiah provide the imagery: Isaiah had prophesied that Judah would
be plagued by “thorns and briers,” military fortresses and cities would become the
domain of wild animals; yet when God would pour out the Spirit, the wilderness would
be transformed into a “fruitful field.” The vision was eschatological, and Davies captured
the nature of the prophecy in stanzas 6–7:

Then Peace shall in large Rivers flow,
Where Streams of Blood have run;


Then universal Love shall glow,
And all the World be one;

Then num’rous Colonies shall rise,
A People all Divine,
To fill the Mansions of the Skies,
And bright as Angels shine.\(^{113}\)

In a second hymn, not associated with a sermon or a specific biblical text, Davies again invoked the Holy Spirit. Where the first hymn was broad in scope, like the sermon to which it was annexed, this hymn is a more personal plea for revival:

ETERNAL Spirit, Source of Light,
Enliv’ning, consecrating Fire,
Descend, and with celestial Heat
Our dull, our frozen Hearts inspire,
Our Souls refine, our Dross consume!
Come, condescending Spirit, come!

In our cold Breasts O strike a Spark
Of the pure Flame which Seraphs feel,
Nor let us wander in the Dark,
Or lie benumb’d and stupid still.
Come, vivifying Spirit, come,
And make our Hearts thy constant Home!

Whatever Guilt and Madness dare,
We would not quench the heav’nly Fire:
Our Hearts as Fuel we prepare,
Tho’ in the Flame we should expire:
Our Breasts expand to make Thee Room:
Come, purifying Spirit, come!

Let pure Devotion’s Fervors rise!
Let ev’ry pious Passion glow!
O let the Raptures of the Skies
Kindle in our cold Hearts below!
Come, condescending Spirit, come,
And make our Souls thy constant Home!\(^{114}\)

In this hymn, Davies used contrasting elements of darkness and light as well as coldness and heat to picture the Spirit’s work in the believer. The Holy Spirit was the “Source of Light” who illuminated darkened minds. He was a fire who melted frozen hearts, and,


burning with greater heat, refined holiness in a believer’s soul by purifying them of their sins. The Spirit worked upon the heart, which the believer prepared as one might lay wood for a fire. Yet this fire was dangerous: it brought the prospect of consuming the one in whom it burned. As the refiner’s fire purified gold of dross, so overlong exposure to such heat might destroy the precious metal itself. Davies’ mention of “Guilt” and “Madness” in the first line of stanza 3 help explain his imagery here: though freed from sin’s power, the believer still lived with sin’s presence, or in Davies’ words, “Guilt,” and this sin operated at one’s very core, in one’s “heart.” If the Spirit were to purge one’s heart of sin completely, then who could survive such a work? To invite the Spirit’s purifying presence in the presence of such copious fuel was tantamount to a madman’s dare, nevertheless, Davies cried, “Come!” The Spirit enflamed the believer’s devotion and “pious Passion,” causing them to glow as brightly as the sun. The Spirit’s coming was no solitary event, rather it was an abiding presence, made clear by Davies’ repeated refrain, “make our Hearts thy constant Home!”115

Samuel Davies considered the spiritual life to be a supernatural work of God, wrought in believers by the Holy Spirit, whose sanctifying influences were among the blessings of the gospel. The Spirit worked through the word, never apart from it, and was the immediate cause of spiritual life. During the Seven Years’ War, Davies implored his hearers to seek the Spirit’s fullness; as individuals, families, and congregations. As the Spirit purified the believer, burning away the dross of sin which remained in every Christian, the believer was enabled to draw ever closer to God in spiritual communion.

**Spiritual Communion**

The language of communion or fellowship was also used by Samuel Davies when describing the nature of spiritual life: “If you love God and the Lord Jesus Christ,

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you delight in communion with them.” True friends seized every opportunity for fellowship and a dear companion’s “absence is tedious and painful to them.” God was such a friend to believers. Davies balanced God’s transcendence and immanence:

Though God be a spirit, and infinitely above all sensible converse with the sons of men, yet he does not keep himself at a distance from his people. He has access to their spirits, and allows them to carry on a spiritual commerce with him, which is the greatest happiness of their lives.

Jesus had promised this communion (cf. John 14:21–23) and it was a “mystical fellowship” that believers enjoyed, and which was unknown to sinners. Davies returned to the analogy of human relationships to explain this friendship. Just as friends experienced communion through mutual exchanges, so God drew near to his people as a father might approach his child, showering grace, inflaming love, and assuring them of his closeness. For their part, Christians had freedom to approach God through acts of devotion, especially prayer, yielding themselves to his presence. Davies celebrated God’s nearness:

And oh! how divinely sweet in some happy hours of sacred intimacy! This indeed is heaven upon earth: and, might it but continue without interruption, the life of a lover of God would be a constant series of pure, unmingled happiness.

Contrary to the opinion of some detractors, true religion was “a source of happiness” and provided the faithful “a happiness more pure, more noble, and more durable than all the world can give.” This happiness was not only a future pleasure, but a believer’s present joy, and consisted of “the pleasures of a peaceful, approving conscience, of communion with God, the supreme good, of the most noble dispositions and most delightful

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116 Davies, “Nature of Love to God,” in Sermons, 2:463.
117 Davies, “Nature of Love to God,” in Sermons, 2:463.
118 Davies, “Nature of Love to God,” in Sermons, 2:463.
119 Davies, “Nature of Love to God,” in Sermons, 2:463.
contemplations.” Such blessings and happiness were bound up in the gospel of Jesus Christ, and it was through Christ that believers had “sweet communion” with God, and experienced his love and grace which allowed them to persevere through the trials of life.

Occasionally, though, the believer’s experience of God did not seem as intimate, for “at times their Beloved withdraws himself, and goes from them, and then they languish, and pine away, and mourn.” Though Davies left this thought undeveloped, he was describing a phenomenon well-known and addressed by the Puritans, namely that of spiritual desertion. Though it was likely a theme common to his pastoral ministry, it is found only here among his extant sermons.

Davies recognized that the deep communion with God that he had described was probably foreign to many of his congregants, and he anticipated their objections that such talk was “enthusiasm, fanaticism, or heated imagination.” He had already appealed to more than a half-dozen passages of Scripture which promised such intimacy, but here replied only that such communion was indeed true of God’s friends and if some critics questioned the possibility of this close relationship, then their distance from God testified that they were no friends of God.

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Conclusion

Samuel Davies though much about the spiritual life. Though remembered as an evangelist and a preacher of revival, this examination has shown that Davies’ called Christians to seek lasting satisfaction in communion with God. Such communion was founded upon the believer’s union with Christ and empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit, who worked to sanctify believers. While this communion might be variable, it was “sweet,” even more profound than the closest human friendship. Davies believed that such communion was neither automatic nor accidental, rather it was cultivated through the intentional practice of certain spiritual exercises; specific means of grace, which brought the believer experientially close to God.
CHAPTER 6
THE MEANS OF GRACE: THE PRACTICE OF
CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY

Now the ordinances of the gospel are, as it were, the places of interview, where God
and his people meet, and where they indulge those sacred freedoms [of
communion]. It is in prayer, in meditation, in reading or hearing his word, in
communicating at his table; it is in these and like exercises that God communicates,
and, as it were, unbosoms himself to those that love him.¹

Genuine Christian spirituality was a monergistic work of God who graciously
rescued sinners, yet Samuel Davies frequently urged his hearers to make use of various
means of grace in pursuing personal holiness and divine communion. This chapter locates
Davies’ understanding of spiritual practices within the Puritan and early Evangelical
contexts and describes those disciplines that Davies most frequently mentioned.

The Means of Grace in the Puritan and Early
Evangelical Traditions

As has been noted, Samuel Davies placed himself within the Puritan tradition
with regard to his doctrine of conversion and his insistence upon certain means of grace
also indicates his reliance upon this tradition for devotional expressions of Christian
spirituality.² According to Chan’s excellent work on the discipline of meditation, the
Puritan doctrine of the means of grace states that “God does not work directly in the
world but chooses to operate at the natural and human level. Thus if he regenerates a

¹Samuel Davies, “The Nature of Love to God and Christ Opened and Enforced,” in Sermons
by the Rev. Samuel Davies, A.M. President of the College of New Jersey, vol. 2 (Morgan, PA: Soli Deo
Gloria, 1854, repr., 1993), 464. This work will be henceforth cited as Sermons.

²In a letter to Joseph Bellamy, Davies indicated that his pastoral ministry, specifically his work
for the conversion of sinners, was grounded in the pattern of his Puritan forbearers. Samuel Davies, The
State of Religion among the Protestant Dissenters in Virginia; In a Letter to the Rev. Mr. Joseph Bellamy,
or Bethlehem, in New-England: From the Reverend Mr. Samuel Davies, V. D. M. in Hanover County,
Virginia (Boston, MA: S. Kneeland, 1751), 25. For an analysis of these influences, see chap. 4 above.
soul, it is by a process that could be easily discovered via faculty psychology, namely, from the understanding to the affections and will.”³ Puritans suggested a variety of means that the believer might use to draw near to God. Such means “consist of those practical duties, the regular performance of which were thought to lead, in some inexplicable way, to an increase in virtues or godliness.”⁴ Chan notes that the various means “invariably includes prayer, meditation and conference as private means; ministry of the word, sacraments, and public prayer as public means,” and as these means were divinely ordained, they were to be practiced regularly.⁵

Haykin suggests that “prayer, the Scriptures, and the sacraments or ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper” were key means practiced by Puritans and later Christians who were heirs to their heritage.⁶ Hambrick-Stowe’s work on the spirituality of seventeenth-century colonial Puritans shows significant overlap between the various means of grace practiced in England and New England. He includes such disciplines as Psalm singing, Scripture reading, the Sacraments, conference, family devotions, study, meditation, personal writing, and especially prayer, as common means practiced by Davies’ ministerial predecessors.⁷ Lovelace, in his treatment of Cotton Mather’s ascetical practices, noted that the disciplines of meditation, prayer, family devotions, Sabbath keeping, and the Sacraments remained constant into the second and third generation of


⁵Chan, “Puritan Meditative Tradition,” 14.


New England Puritans. In their respective recent studies of Jonathan Edwards’ piety, Whitney and Strobel indicate that practices such as hearing, reading, or meditating on Scripture, as well as prayer, attending the ordinances, family worship, Sabbath keeping, fasting, and journaling, among other disciplines, marked this Evangelical contemporary of Davies. Even closer to Davies was fellow New-Side Presbyterian Jonathan Dickinson, who compiled a similar list of religious exercises, intended to help one walk closely with God: prayer, biblical and occasional meditation, family worship, public worship, and observing the ordinances. Trinterud has shown that the use of these various means of grace was commonplace among other New Side Presbyterians who were contemporaries of Davies. Davies also inherited a set of devotional practices from his own religious tradition.

The Westminster Confession addressed various means of grace under the heading of religious worship. According to the divines, all people knew that God existed and was worthy of devotion, yet only those patterns of devotion revealed in Scripture were appropriate means to seek fellowship with God. The Confession noted that prayer was required of all and was to be “made in the name of the Son, by the help of His Spirit, according to His will, with understanding, reverence, humility, fervency, faith, love and

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perseverance; and, if vocal, in a known tongue.”13 Prayer was restricted for the living or those who were yet to be born, but was never offered for the dead. Nor was prayer’s efficacy strengthened by location, “but God is to be worshipped everywhere, in spirit and truth; as, in private families daily, and in secret, each one by himself; so, more solemnly in the public assemblies.”14 The Confession also addressed the special use of Sundays as a means of grace. From creation forward, God had appointed Saturday for holy observance, but because of the resurrection of Christ from the dead, Christians were to observe Sunday as the “Christian Sabbath,” marked by rest, worship, and merciful works.15

While the confession drafted at Westminster provided doctrinal cohesion for Reformed Christians in Great Britain, the pastor-theologians who framed the statement also produced directories for both public and private worship which encouraged various means of grace for the purpose of godliness. These works both replaced and surpassed the Anglican Book of Common Prayer in their scope of suggesting various disciplines for congregations, families, and individuals.

The Directory for the Publick Worship of God offered ministers directions on praying during the worship service, during the administration of the ordinances, and during pastoral visitations or special ceremonies.16 It directed congregations on conducting fasts and keeping the Lord’s Day holy.17 Similarly, the Directory for Family Worship encouraged individual “secret” worship through the means of prayer and

13WCF, 21.3.
14WCF, 21.4, and 6.
15WCF, 21.7–8.
16Directory for the Publick Worship of God (DPW), Of the Publick Prayer before the Sermon, Of Prayer after the Sermon, Of the Administration of the Sacraments, The Solemnization of Marriage, Concerning Visitation of the sick, and Concerning Burial of the Dead.
17DPW, Concerning Publick Solemn Fasting, and Of the Sanctification of the Lord’s Day.
meditation, “the unspeakable benefit whereof is best known to them who are most exercised therein; this being the mean whereby, in a special way, communion with God is entertained, and right preparation for all other duties obtained.”

For families, the divines suggested that the “ordinary duties” included prayer, praises, reading Scripture, and catechetical instruction. It suggested ways in which families could sanctify the Lord’s Day, namely through meditation and conference upon the day’s sermon. It also offered specific directions for prayer:

So many as can conceive prayer, ought to make use of that gift of God; albeit those who are rude and weaker may begin at a set form of prayer, but so as they be not sluggish in stirring up in themselves (according to their daily necessities) the spirit of prayer, which is given to all the children of God in some measure: to which effect, they ought to be more fervent and frequent in secret prayer to God, for enabling of their hearts to conceive, and their tongues to express, convenient desires to God for their family.

The Means of Grace in Samuel Davies’ Ministry

Samuel Davies insisted that certain devotional practices were hallmarks that characterized and sustained a vital Christian piety. In a sermon on Acts 11:26, Davies linked the practice of various disciplines such as “prayer, . . . meditation, . . . fasting, and every religious duty” to the believer’s imitation of Christ, who himself “abounded” in these activities as well as in certain virtues. Davies concluded that “this resemblance and imitation of Christ is essential to the very being of a Christian, and without it, it is a vain pretence.” In a sermon on Galatians 4:19–20, Davies identified secret and family prayer as well as public worship, the sacraments, and fasting as the “outward duties of

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18 Directory for Family Worship (DFW), 1.
19 DFW, 2.
20 DFW, 8.
21 DFW, 9.
In a new year’s sermon preached just a month before he died, Davies encouraged his congregants to hear and read Scripture, meditate “upon divine things,” and have fellowship with wiser Christians “as means instituted for your conversion.” In other sermons Davies reiterated the importance of prayer, hearing and reading Scripture, meditation, the Lord’s Supper. Nothing about Davies’ lists of disciplines is surprising, but it was through these simple, reliable means of grace that Davies believed communion with God was sustained. Those disciplines related to Scripture have been covered in chapter 3. The means of prayer, fasting, conference, the ordinances, and the Lord’s Day will be explored below.

**Prayer**

Though the means of accessing Davies’ own personal piety are few, those artifacts that do survive indicate that he was a man of prayer. Nowhere was his commitment to prayer more evident than during his fundraising journey to Great Britain, on behalf of the College of New Jersey, from 1753–1755. During this trip, Davies maintained a private diary, which has preserved some of his habits and forms of prayer. Davies had promised his wife Jane that he would set apart Saturday evenings for special times of prayer for her during his voyage and on Saturday, December 7, 1753, Davies noted that he had “Found more Freedom than usual in Intercession for my dear absent Friends, particularly for Mr. Rodgers, and my Chara.” Though the content of these

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24Samuel Davies, “The Tender Anxieties of Ministers for their People,” in *Sermons*, 2:413.


28Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 34. Mr. Rodgers was John Rodgers (1727–1811), a close ministerial friend of Davies. “Chara,” from the Greek for “joy,” was Davies’ nickname for his wife.
prayers was undoubtedly richer than Davies left in his diary, his brief written prayers show the tenor of his concern for his beloved spouse during their separation: “O! Thou God of our Life, with all the importunity so languid a Soul is capable of exerting, I implore thy gracious Protection for her, that she may be supported in my Absence, and that we may enjoy a happy Interview again.”29 Two months later, as Davies thought of his wife and children, he prayed, “To thee, O Lord, I then solemnly committed them and now I renew the Dedication. I know not, if ever I shall see them again; but my Life and theirs is in the Hand of divine Providence; and therefore shall be preserved as long as is fit.”30 Just two weeks later, Davies family weighed heavy on his heart: “Lord, I am oppressed; undertake for me.”31

The following Saturday, Davies “was much depressed in Spirit at the Prospect of the Voyage, and the Tender Tho’ts of Home,” when he prayed, “May the God of my Life support me!”32 Just two days later, Davies’ recorded that his “Tho’ts often take a sudden Flight to Hanover, and hover over my Chara, and my other Friends there.” He implored, “O may indulgent Heaven preserve and bless them!”33 Davies’ ship sailed in the early morning of November 18, and the following evening he asked, “O Lord, bless my dear Family.”34 During the treacherous voyage home in 1755, Davies recounted that he “often fell upon my Face, praying in a Kind of Agony, sometimes for myself, sometimes for the unhappy Ship’s Company, and sometimes for my dear, destitute

29Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 7.
30Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 9.
31Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 12.
32Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 15.
33Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 16.
34Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 29.
Family, whom the nearest Prospect of Death could not erase from my Heart.”

Gilbert Tennent, the renowned Presbyterian pastor from New Jersey, accompanied Davies on the journey to England. During the voyage, the two ministers encouraged one another through prayer. Davies was seasick for about the first ten days of the voyage, yet on November 26, he and Tennent “prayed in our Room together in the Morning and Afternoon with some Freedom.” They began these meetings a day earlier: “Yesterday and today we prayed together alternately in our Room; and I felt some Tenderness and Importunity in so doing. O that we may in this inactive Season be laying up proper Furniture for active Life upon Shore!” They maintained this pattern of regular prayer during the voyage across the Atlantic: “Since I noted it last, Mr. Tennent and I have prayed each of us twice in our Room, and one of us alternately in the Cabin in the Evening.” Moreover, Davies and Tennent maintained this pattern of praying twice daily once they arrived in Great Britain. One Wednesday night, after spending the evening with the “Wonder of the Age,” George Whitefield, “Mr. Tennent’s heart was all on Fire, and after we had gone to Bed, he suggested we should watch and pray; and we rose, and prayed together ‘till about 3 o’clock in the Morning.” Tennent and Davies prayed often during their trip. When they encountered difficulty raising funds, they prayed for God’s direction.

Davies also prayed in the pulpit, sometimes experiencing God’s blessing and at

35Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 144.
37Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 32.
39Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 44.
40Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 60.
other times feeling confused.\textsuperscript{41} When he heard others pray, Davies could not help but noting the impressions they made upon him. When in Northampton, Davies visited the late Philip Doddridge’s congregation, then under the oversight of Robert Gilbert (d. 1760), and was “pleased to find him a weeping Petitioner to Heaven in Prayer.”\textsuperscript{42} At Yarmouth, Davies visited Congregationalist pastor Richard Frost (1700–1778), who “In Prayer . . . has an uncommon Dexterity in descending to particulars.”\textsuperscript{43} In Halesworth, Davies stayed with the Congregationalist minister Samuel Wood (d. 1767), and recounted that “His Expressions in Prayer are remarkably striking and solemn.”\textsuperscript{44} What do reflections such as these say about the place of prayer in Davies personal life?

First, Davies’ own prayers reveal that he was theologically consistent in recognizing God’s sovereign control over every aspect of life and death. Although he loved and missed his family, he expressed confidence in God’s ability to protect and bless them during his absence. Then, when he was fearful, Davies sought consolation in prayer, entrusting his own life to God’s mercy. His mention of praying from the pulpit shows that he recognized his effectiveness as a preacher was linked to God’s blessing and not primarily his own rhetorical abilities. Further, Davies’ reflections on his habit of praying at set times with Gilbert Tennent indicates that he found such discipline helpful and spiritually edifying, not stifling or ritualistic. This sentiment is reinforced by their especially rich time of watching and praying until the early morning. Finally, the fact that Davies recalled the specific gifts or abilities of others in prayer shows that prayer was something that he valued enough to notice, especially when one showed a particular

\textsuperscript{41}Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 83 and 113.

\textsuperscript{42}Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 118.

\textsuperscript{43}Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 123. For Frost’s biography, see John Browne, \textit{History of Congregationalism and Memorials of the Churches in Norfolk and Suffolk} (London: Jarrold and Sons, 1877), 246.

\textsuperscript{44}Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 125.
freedom in conversing with God. Davies’ various diary entries have the cumulative force of showing that prayer was a normal and significant part of his Christian experience. With regard to prayer, Davies preached what he practiced.

Samuel Davies’ delight in prayer carried over from the closet to the pulpit. In his sermons, Davies prayed for his hearers, both believers and unbelievers, and exhorted both to draw near to God through prayer. Although Davies never set down a systematic treatment of prayer, frequent references to prayer abound in his sermons. In examining Davies’ theology of prayer and its implications for Christian piety, a key question is that of the relationship between prayer and communion with God.

Those who love God and Jesus delight in prayer, the exercise of which was the believer’s chief experience of communion with God:

Friends, you know, delight to converse together, to unbosom themselves to one another, and to enjoy the freedoms of society. They are fond of interviews, and seize every opportunity for that purpose; and absence is tedious and painful to them. . . . Now, though God be a spirit, and infinitely above all sensible converse with the sons of men, yet he does not keep himself at a distance from his people. He has access to their spirits, and allows them to carry on a spiritual commerce with him, which is the greatest happiness of their lives.45

Believers foster such communion through prayer. For Davies, true prayer bespoke of a Trinitarian faith in the Father, Son, and Spirit. Warning his congregants of the danger of Laodician tepidity in religion, Davies encouraged them to pray, “‘Lord, fire this heart with thy love.’”46 Prayer was the proper remedy for a lukewarm heart; only God could instill this “sacred fire,” and Davies exhorted believers “fly to him in agony of importunity, and never desist, never grow weary till you prevail.”47 The God to whom Davies directed his prayer was omniscient, the “Supreme Majesty of heaven and earth,” and the human petitioner was variously a criminal who sought pardon or a “famished


beggar” who sought relief. For Davies then, prayer was no less than worship, which could be offered fittingly or poorly, and therefore genuine prayer could never become a cool, detached ritual.

At various points in his sermons, Davies emphasized prayer as the pathway of vital spiritual communion between the believer and each member of the Godhead. Davies insisted that the Father was indeed a prayer-hearing God and insisted that Christians ought to approach him in prayer reverently and confidently (cf. Ps 65:2). The Bible contained a rich history of God acting upon the prayers of his people: God heard Moses’ cry, “Show me, I Pray thee, thy glory” (cf. Exod 33:18–19) and revealed his glorious name and character to the aging prophet-leader. God heard Hezekiah’s prayer for deliverance from the Assyrians (cf. 2 Kngs 19:14–19) and rescued his people. For Davies, however, the Father was even more willing to hear the prayers of believers.

Christians were those who had been born again, and one of the signal benefits of regeneration was that the Christian was now adopted into God’s family and related to God as a child would relate to a father. Just as in human relationships, where a child had freedom to approach a loving father, so Christians enjoyed the “peculiar privileges” and a “liberty of access” to their heavenly Father, especially in prayer. “As the children of God have liberty to address their Father, so they have the privilege of having their petitions graciously heard and answered. A human parent is ready to give gifts to his

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49 Samuel Davies, “Poor and Contrite Spirits the Objects of Divine Favour,” in Sermons, 1:222.
50 Samuel Davies, “The Name of God Proclaimed by Himself,” in Sermons, 1:442.
51 Samuel Davies, “Ingratitude to God and Heinous but General Iniquity,” in Sermons, 1:653.
children, and much more is our heavenly Father” (cf. Luke 11:11–13 and Matt 6:6–9).53

With regard to the Son, Davies insisted that Jesus was “precious to believers as a great High Priest.”54 In his death on the cross, Jesus had atoned for sin, yet through his ongoing heavenly session, Jesus continued to pray for sinners.55 Though Davies certainly emphasized the centrality of the cross, he also rejoiced in the mediation of Christ. Jesus stands before the Father as a slaughtered lamb (cf. Revelation 5:6), “bearing the memorials of his sacrifice, and putting the Father in remembrance of the blessings purchased for his people.”56 Just as Jesus had prayed for his followers during his time on earth (cf. John 17:24), so he now prayed that the blessing he secured on the cross would be applied to the faithful. Such thoughts moved Davies to exclaim, “Now how precious must Christ appear in the character of Intercessor! That the friendless sinner should have an all-prevailing advocate in the court of heaven to undertake his cause!”

As believers prayed on earth, so Jesus prayed in heaven, offering up “the great incense of his own merit” comingled with the petitions of the saints. Davies appealed to the covenant of grace between the Father and the Son as the believer’s grounds for praying with assurance. Further, he insisted that Christians could pray with the confidence, even in their weakest moments, knowing that Jesus was ever available to hear their petitions and to plead their cause with the Father.57 Prayer, however, was more than merely asking Jesus for needs and blessings; it was the chief means through which the believer maintained fellowship, or in Davies’ words, “intercourse,” with the ascended

54Samuel Davies, “Christ Precious to all True Believers,” in Sermons, 1:386.
Prayer, for Davies, was a key way in which one looked to Christ for saving relief. In an unforgettable illustration, Davies asked his hearers to picture one of their own dear children kidnapped by a murderer. If the parents were to arrive in time, and were to lock eyes with their terrified son or daughter before the death blow was struck, how loud would be the child’s unspoken cry for deliverance in that moment? In the same way, when the sinner came to apprehend his desperate state, she cried out to God in prayer. Such a sinner would not only pray in public, but in secret, shaking off the tendency of so many to go through life as in a trance, ever ready to seek help from Christ.

Davies also encouraged his hearers to pray for the work of the Holy Spirit among them. For Davies, the Spirit awakened benighted sinners to see the glory of Christ; therefore he encouraged Christians to pray that the Spirit would communicate God’s love and other “sacred influences” among them and so bring a general reformation to the colonies. By looking at Paul’s frequent prayers for divine assistance, Davies concluded that such prayers were necessary, for who would pray for what they already possess? More particularly, Davies recognized that it was the Holy Spirit himself who strengthened believers’ weakness in prayer and devotion (cf. Rom 8:24).


62 Samuel Davies, “The Success of the Ministry Owing to a Divine Influence,” in Sermons, 3:22–23. Elsewhere, describing the seriousness with which Christians were to seek eternal life, Davies appears to have taken Rom 8:26 to apply to Christians, when he stated that Christians are those who “pray with unutterable groans.” In Rom 8:26, it is the Spirit, not believers, who prays with unutterable groans on behalf of believers. See Samuel Davies, “Saints Saved with Difficulty and the Certain Perdition of Sinners,” in Sermons, 1:591.
depended on the Spirit’s aid in prayer during times of spiritual adversity: “Sometimes, alas! they fall; but their general lifts them up again, and inspires them with the strength to renew the fight. They fight most successfully upon their knees.” Davies likened Christians to soldiers, engaged in ongoing warfare. This warfare was both internal and external: from without, Christians faced a nearly continuous stream of temptations; from within, they battled sin's insurrection. Given the unceasing nature of their battle, Christians ought not to be surprised when beset with weakness and fatigue in their fight, yet through prayer they had hope of success. Such prayer was the “most advantageous posture for soldiers of Jesus Christ,” through which their captain would send reinforcements to assist in battle, enabling even the weakest soldier to “overcome, through the blood of the Lamb.”

Though all Christians were soldiers in God’s “spiritual army,” ministers were especially called to prevail in prayer, arming themselves with the “humble doctrines of the cross” to “rescue enslaved souls from the tyranny of sin and Satan.” For the minister to pray was for him to wage an attack against the forces of evil. Davies modeled such attacks in his sermons, especially with regard to the success of the gospel. When Davies considered the universality of spiritual death, he was astonished that “the generality of mankind are habitually careless about the blessed Jesus; they will not seek him, nor give their hearts and their affections, though they must perish for ever by the neglect of him!” This sad state drove him to pray, “‘Father of spirits, and Lord of life, quicken, oh quicken these dead souls!’” He expected his congregants to unite their voices also in

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64 Davies, “Mediatorial Kingdom,” in Sermons, 1:303.


prayer: “Oh, Sirs, while we see death all around us, and feel it benumbing our own souls, who can help the most bitter wailing and lamentation? Who can restrain himself from crying out to the great Author of life for a happy resurrection?”68 As a pastor preaching to spiritually dead hearers, Davies likened himself to the prophet Elijah, praying over the Shunamite widow’s son, “Oh Lord my God, I pray thee, let this sinner’s life come into him again” (cf. 1 Kngs 17:21).69 Davies’ commitment to battling for souls through prayer extended well beyond his own congregations in Virginia; he had a more global perspective. Davies rejoiced that Christians had a benevolent divine king who ruled an “empire of grace,” and asked his hearers to pray that this kingdom would be expanded: “Let us pray that all nations may become the willing subjects of our gracious Sovereign.”70

Fasting

Samuel Davies had been back in Virginia less than a month after his trip to England when his Hanover congregation spent Wednesday, March 5, 1755, in fasting and prayer.71 Though Davies undoubtedly led his congregation in observing this sacred day, aimed at securing God’s gracious intervention on behalf of the British against the French and their Indian allies, he made no mention of his own habits of fasting. As he stood in the pulpit, he declared,

If God dispose the victory as he pleases, then it is most fit, and absolutely necessary, that we should seek to secure his friendship. If we have such an Almighty Ally, we

70Samuel Davies, “The Divine Government the Joy of our World,” in Sermons, 1:437. The concept of praying for the conversion of the nations is not as frequent in Davies’ published works as it was for his contemporary, Jonathan Edwards. Perhaps this paucity of references indicates that the subject was not often one he considered, or perhaps it is due to the fact that only a fraction of Davies’ sermons have survived.
71Davies appended a note to his sermon that March 5, 1755 was “a day of fasting and prayer.” See Samuel Davies, “God the Sovereign of All Kingdoms,” in Sermons, 3:329.
are safe; and if we have provoked his displeasure, and forfeited his friendship, what

can we do but prostrate ourselves in the deepest repentance and humiliation before

him? for that is the only way to regain his favour. This is the great design of a fast;

and from what you have heard, you may see it is not a needless ceremony, but a

seasonable and important duty. 72

In his sermons, letters, and diary, Davies has left no record of his own practice of this

“important duty.” Perhaps he took Jesus’ admonition to “appear not unto men to fast, but

unto thy Father which is in secret” (Matt 6:16–18) seriously, believing that to discuss his

own practices would forfeit the discipline’s blessings. Or maybe Davies thought fasting

so commonplace as to need no elaboration. One can reasonably assume that Davies

would not have been guilty of hypocrisy on this count. His sermons reveal a twofold

message on fasting: positively, fasting was a sign of heartfelt repentance; negatively, it

could become a form of works-righteousness.

Although not wholly unknown in England, fast-day observances were

commonplace in New England and the other American colonies. 73 In New England,

ministers relied on a simple pattern of using Sunday sermons as vehicles of primarily

spiritual concern and used weekday sermons or lectures for more civil matters. 74 This

pattern does not mean that Puritan minister separated spiritual and civil affairs, but rather

serves as a reminder that the coextensive nature of the covenantal relationship of the

political fabric of New England with the covenant of grace necessitated careful attention

lest eternal salvation and moral obedience be conflated. Puritan New England valued its

seasons of fasting from its earliest days forward, yet by 1755, other colonies held similar

days. 75 Though the practice of setting apart fast-days appears to have been less common


73 For an excellent survey of the development of public fasts in New England, the best study is

still that of W. DeLoss Love, The Fast and Thanksgiving Days of New England (Boston: The University


74 Stout, New England Soul, 27.

75 Love, Fast and Thanksgiving Days, 299–304.
in Anglican Virginia than in Puritan Massachusetts or Connecticut, Virginians had indeed observed such days. Davies’ sermons recount three fast days during his ministry in Virginia, each occurring during the tumult of the Seven Years’ War.

Stout has well-noted the serious nature with which congregations and communities observed fast days. Due to the fact that the regular patterns of life and commerce were interrupted to implore God’s special grace or favor, Davies used such days to remind his hearers of both the blessings and dangers of such religious observances. As already mentioned, Davies described fasting as a “seasonable and important duty” which expressed a believer’s genuine mourning over sin. He based this assessment on Joel 2:12–18, which called God’s people employ fasting as a sign of repentance. Following General Braddock’s defeat in the summer of 1755, Davies returned to this theme and this text, encouraging his Hanover congregation to “join earnest prayer to your repentance and fasting.” Yet Davies knew that some of his hearers might take pride in their religious austerity and warned such against trusting ceremonies instead of Christ.

Can you pretend that you have always perfectly obeyed the law? That you have never committed one sin, or neglected one duty? Alas! You must hang down the head, and cry, guilty, guilty . . . Set about obedience with ever so much earnestness;

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76 Love, Fast and Thanksgiving Days, 304. With regard to Anglicanism, Davies himself observed that the Anglican calendar included no fewer than ninety-five stated fast days. See Samuel Davies, “A Christmas-Day Sermon,” in Sermons, 3:570.

77 Davies, “God the Sovereign,” in Sermons, 3:329 captured the earliest fast day of this period, occurring in the spring of 1755. See also Samuel Davies, “Serious Reflections on War,” in Sermons, 3:280, which was both a New Year’s sermon and a fast-day sermon for January 1, 1757, called by the Presbytery of Hanover. Finally, see Samuel Davies, “The Crisis, or the Uncertain Doom of Kingdoms at Particular Times,” in Sermons, 3:120, for a fast-day sermon called by the Synod of New York for October 28, 1756. Unlike New England, where government-sponsored fasts were more common, two of the three fasts Davies mentioned were called by Presbyterian leaders rather than civil magistrates.


repent till you shed rivers of tears; fast, till you have reduced yourselves to skeletons; alas! all this will not do, if you expect life by your own obedience to the law.  

In another setting, Davies remarked that the message of the cross was “unnatural” to sinners, who were more apt to “submit to the heaviest penances and bodily austerities” and to “afflict themselves with fasting” rather than to trust in the righteousness of Christ alone for salvation. Fasting, then, was an appropriate spiritual practice by which God’s people expressed genuine repentance, but it was a practice which might be easily subverted as a form of self-righteousness.

**Baptism and the Lord’s Supper**

Samuel Davies was certain that all true Christians used the ordinances of baptism and the Lord’s Supper as means to closer fellowship with God. For Davies, the neglect of these ordinances was an indication of a spiritual malady: “You have not the love of God in you, if you do not delight to converse with him in his ordinances.” He challenged those who had “no pleasure in devotion, no delight in conversing with God in his ordinances” to question the genuineness of their religion. In these ordinances, Christians “do in a more solemn public manner, engage ourselves to the service of God.”

Davies did not address baptism often, yet his reflections emphasized the significance of this rite for the Christian life. Davies understood baptism as “a badge of Christianity, and a mark of our being the disciples, the followers, and servants of Jesus

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83Samuel Davies, “Evidences of the Want of Love to God,” in *Sermons*, 3:466.


Like a soldier who had volunteered to serve in the army, so were Christians who underwent baptism. It was a token of one’s commitment to follow Christ as well as one’s “initiation into the church of Christ.” Of course, many of the congregants whom Davies addressed did not volunteer as soldiers but rather were baptized as infants, having received it most likely in the Anglican Church. Still, Davies believed they had the obligation to honor this covenant.

Baptism was also an outward “sign of regeneration, or of our dying to sin, and entering into a new state of existence, with new principles and views, to walk in newness of life.” Yet Davies knew that some who had undergone the physical rite of baptism lacked a genuinely new heart:

> Here then, you that have been baptized, and had the sign, inquire whether you have had the thing signified? Whether you have been so thoroughly renewed, in the spirit of your mind, and so have entered upon a new course of life that you may be justly said to be born again, to be quickened with a new life, and to be new creatures?

Perhaps more significantly, Davies understood baptism as “a sign and seal of the covenant of grace, and of our dedication to the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” Here Davies linked baptism with the gospel and understood baptism as evidence that Christians were “devoted to the sacred Trinity, and each person in the Godhead, under that relation which they respectively sustain in the economy of man’s redemption.”

Davies offered a more thorough reflection on the sacrament of the Lord’s

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Supper. The ordinance was commemorative, and thoughtful preparation for the Supper was a mark of one’s piety:

In so solemn a posture as at the Lord’s table, in so affecting an act as the commemoration of that death to which we owe all our hopes of life and happiness, and with such solemn emblems as those of bread and wine in our hands, which represent the broken body and flowing blood of Jesus, we are to yield ourselves to God, and seal our indenture to be his.93

The meal had replaced the Jewish Passover and commemorated God’s might act of delivering people from sin.94 The Lord’s Supper was a sacrament because “it is intended to represent things spiritual by material emblems or signs which affect our senses, and thereby enlarge our ideas and impress our hearts in the present state of flesh and blood.”95 Here, Davies described a strong connection between body and mind in one’s spirituality: “God consults our weakness, and . . . makes our bodily senses helpful to the devotions of our minds.”96

In the sacrament, Christians can see Jesus portrayed clearly. Davies described the Lord’s Supper as “a bright ray of evangelical light; and it helps you to see the love and agonies of Jesus, the great atonement he made for sin, and the method of your pardon and salvation. Come then, ye children of light, come and gaze, and wonder at these astonishing sights!”97 Elsewhere, having described the glories of God and how they are manifest in the suffering of Christ, Davies turned to the table: “these things may endear the institution of the Lord’s supper to you as exhibiting these glories, by sacred emblems, to your senses: therefore you should esteem it, and reverently attend upon it.”98

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93Samuel Davies, “Dedication to God Argued from Redeeming Mercy,” in Sermons, 2:118.
98Samuel Davies, “The Divine Perfections Illustrated in the Method of Salvation through the
The supper was “a token of love, or memorial left by a friend at parting among his friends, that whenever they see it they may remember him.”99 Like baptism, the Supper was a “badge” and “seal” of true faith, and as such, believers were to afford it great attention: “this remembrance of a suffering Savior must be attended with suitable affections.”100 More significantly, God used the ordinance as a means to “[maintain] communion with his people, and they with him.”101 In the celebration of the meal, there is a spiritual intercourse carried on between [God] and [believers]. He communicates his love in the influences of his Spirit to them; and they pour out their hearts, their desires, and prayers before him. He draws near to them, and revives their souls; and they draw near to him, and converse with him in prayer, and in other ordinances of his worship.102 Further, at the table, “[God] favors them with his spiritual presence, and gives them access to him; and they draw near to him with humble boldness, and enjoy a full liberty of speech in conversation with him.”103

As the Lord’s Table was indeed such a place intimate spiritual communion, those who would receive the supper must be reconciled to God, and “delight in communion with him.”104 The Lord’s Supper was no converting ordinance, but rather a place where the converted experienced spiritual intimacy with God. Here Davies offered his own view of the efficacy of the table, a view that differed significantly from Solomon Stoddard of Northampton: “to what purpose do you communicate? This will not constitute you Christians, nor save your souls. Not all the ordinances that ever God has instituted can do this, without an interest in Christ, and universal holiness of heart and

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As Christians prepared to receive the Lord’s Supper, Davies used the occasion to point believers toward the cross, arguing that their daily carriage was to reflect the significance of what was commemorated in communion. They depended upon God: “Alas! if you separate yourselves from him, you are like a stream separated from its fountain, that must run dry; a spark separated from the fire, that must expire; a member cut off from the body, that must die in putrefy.” He took such preparation seriously and encouraged congregants to use other appointed means such as encountering Scripture, meditation, and prayer to prepare themselves to receive the meal: “read, and hear, and meditate upon his word, till you know your danger and remedy. Take this method first, and when you have succeeded, come to this ordinance, and God, angels, and men will be due welcome.”

While the occasion of the eucharistic celebration afforded Davies an opportunity to remind Christians of their devotion to God, he pleaded with them to make this dedication “fixed and habitual”: “it is not a formality to be performed only at a sacramental occasion, not a warm, transient purpose under a sermon, or in a transport of passion; but it must be the steady, uniform, persevering disposition of your souls to be the Lord’s at all times, and in all circumstances, in life, and death, and through all eternity.”

**Family Worship**

Now, family worship nowhere appears in Davies’ list of various means of

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105 Davies, “The Christian Feast,” in *Sermons*, 2:166. For Stoddard’s position on the Lord’s Supper, see chapter 4 above.

106 Davies, “Dedication to God,” in *Sermons*, 2:132.


grace, but it was one of the common means that he practiced and enjoined other Christian families to use to promote godliness. No sources survive that describe worship in Davies’ household, yet a few sources illuminate Davies’ thoughts on the discipline. During his trip to Great Britain, Davies observed some families gathering for devotions and recorded their attention to “examining [their] Children, reading a Sermon, Singing and praying” in his diary. 109 As already noted, the Westminster theologians issued a directory that encouraged family worship as part of its program of national reformation. 110 This directory exhorted families to attend to prayer, Bible reading, and catechizing. 111 Perhaps Davies had this directory in mind when he cautioned his congregants against the neglect of gathering their families morning and evening for prayer and worship. 112 It is reasonable to assume that Davies followed these general guidelines in his own family. Davies set down his thought on the matter of family most fully in a sermon on 1 Timothy 5:8. 113

“The heads of families are obliged,” Davies preached, “not only to exercise their authority over their dependents, but also to provide for them a competency of the necessaries of life.” Such provision did not stop with material provision, which Davies understood to be the primary point of his chosen ext, but extended also to their immortal souls. 114 Davies considered those who forsook family worship to be worse than infidels. 115 In keeping with his ecumenical spirit, Davies suggested that family religion

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110 DFW, Preface.
111 DFW, 2.
“be not the peculiarity of a party,” but was a common expectation of all believers.\textsuperscript{116} Davies sought to prove the necessity of family worship from nature and from Scripture, to discuss its frequency, to show heads of households their specific responsibilities to foster such devotion, and to counter various objections to the discipline. Davies contended that “prayer, praise, and instruction” constituted the elements of family worship, going further that the Westminster Directory in his inclusion of psalmody, which he thought “the most proper method of thanksgiving.”\textsuperscript{117} 

Davies first sought to justify family devotions by appealing to nature. Just as God alone was worthy of private worship from individual humans, so too was he worthy of family worship. If a family was \textit{capable} of worshipping God, then they were \textit{obligated} to worship him.\textsuperscript{118} This situation existed in part because God had created people as sociable creatures and instituted the family as the first society. Further, God sustained families and thus they owed him homage. Morning and evening, Davies’ hearers received God’s blessings “flowing down upon your houses.” Would those who had received such unwarranted blessings fail to return thanks and supplications? Worship, then, was the “principal end” of all families.\textsuperscript{119} To those who rejected this design, Davies asked, “Can you expect that godliness shall run on in the line of your posterity, if you habitually neglect it in your houses?”\textsuperscript{120} Though such regular devotions could not guarantee a godly lineage, “How can you expect that your children and servants will become worshippers of the God of heaven, if they have been educated in the neglect of family religion? Can


\textsuperscript{120}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:84.
prayerless parents expect to have praying children?"\textsuperscript{121} Davies was unrelenting:

Their souls, sirs, their immortal souls, are intrusted to your care, and you must give a solemn account of your trust; and can you think you faithfully discharge it, when you neglect to maintain your religion in your families? Will you not be accessory to their perdition, and in your skirts will there not be found the blood of your poor innocent children? What a dreadful meeting may you expect to have with them at last?\textsuperscript{122}

Regular family devotion was the only reliable help that families could utilize to keep the gospel ever before their precious children and dependable servants; thus Davies pleaded, “I beseech, I entreat, I charge you to begin and continue the worship of God in your families from this day to the close of our lives.”\textsuperscript{123}

Family religion was not only an authoritative command of God, it was also a prerogative afforded by grace. What better ways could families spend their days than conversing of heaven and heaven’s God? “To mention our domestic wants before him with the encouraging hope of a supply! To vent the oerflowings of gratitude! To spread the savour of his knowledge, and talk of him whom angels celebrate upon their golden harps in anthems of praise!”\textsuperscript{124} Even pagans understood the necessity of family worship. How could Rachel’s theft of a family idol go unnoticed if Laban had not reared his family to worship such things (cf. Gen 31:34)? If even pagans trained their households for worship, how much more ought God’s people foster true faith under their roofs?\textsuperscript{125} Such worship was well attested in Scripture.

Isaac and Jacob were wont to build altars in their various encampments so they might worship God because they had observed this habit in their father, Abraham (cf. Gen 18:17–18, 26:25, 28:18, and 33:20). Similarly, Job modeled a serious concern for

\textsuperscript{121}Davies, “Family Religion,” in Sermons, 2:85.

\textsuperscript{122}Davies, “Family Religion,” in Sermons, 2:86.

\textsuperscript{123}Davies, “Family Religion,” in Sermons, 2:86.

\textsuperscript{124}Davies, “Family Religion,” in Sermons, 2:86.

\textsuperscript{125}Davies, “Family Religion,” in Sermons, 2:88.
godliness in his rising early to offer sacrifices on behalf of his children (cf. Job 1:5). Even the great King David led his family in worship (cf. Ps 101:2) and the godly prophet Daniel “always observed a stated course of devotion in his family” (cf. Dan 6:10). Such biblical examples continued into the New Testament, where Paul mentioned several house churches (cf. Rom 16:5, 1 Cor 16:19, and Col 4:15). Peter was found praying at home (cf. Acts 10:2, 30). Even the pagan Cornelius led his family in devotion.

Scripture also added precepts to its examples. Paul exhorted the Colossians to pray in their families (cf. Col 4:2). Peter warned husbands to give attention to their relationship with their wife lest their prayers he hindered (cf. 1 Pet 3:7). This last example led Davies to encourage the practice of husbands and wives retiring for secret prayer together:

As there is a peculiar intimacy between them, they ought to be peculiarly intimate in the duties of religion; and when retired together, they may pour out their hearts with more freedom than before all the family, and particularize those things that could not be prudently mentioned before others.

Deuteronomy 6:6–7 and 11:19 provided the basis for family worship in Israel as did the special yearly observance of Passover. While Hebrews 3:13 and Colossians 3:16, which instructed daily teaching, applied immediately to the church, they surely also applied to families. Davies added the duty of praise to family worship based on Philippians 4:6, Colossians 4:2, and 1 Thessalonians 5:17–18. The foundation provided, Davies reiterated the vital need for family worship. The choice was simple, and tended to affect the entire community:

If the grateful incense of family worship were ascending to heaven every morning and evening, from every family among us, we might expect a rich return of divine blessings upon ourselves and ours. Our houses would become the temples of the

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Deity, and our congregation feel his gracious influences.\textsuperscript{130} Such influences would affect children and servants, ending household strife and vice, and reviving true religion.\textsuperscript{131} The neglect of family worship would also have striking consequences, turning homes into “nurseries for hell.”\textsuperscript{132}

How frequently ought families to gather for worship? At least daily, answered Davies, preferably morning and evening, for Israel’s sacrifices followed this twice-daily rhythm, and the Psalmists often commended this pattern (cf. Pss 141:2, 145:2, 55:17, and 92:1–2). Even the prophet Amos warned Judah to “Seek him that turneth the shadow of death into the morning, and maketh the day dark with night” (Amos 5:8).\textsuperscript{133}

God had given heads of household the particular responsibility to conduct family worship, using gentle means where possible and compulsion when necessary. Though “the consciences of all, bond and free, are subject to God only, and no man ought to compel another to anything, as a duty, that is against his conscience,” family worship proved to be an exception. How else could Joshua speak for his own household when he proclaimed that they would serve the Lord (cf. Josh 24:15) unless he had authority to compel such service, even if it proved merely external?\textsuperscript{134} Davies also anticipated various objections to family worship and defended his case.

To those who complained that their secular business left them no time for family worship, Davies wondered how such incredibly busy people found time to eat, hold idle conversations, or even sleep, which were of far less importance in light of eternity. How did such people view time, and was their business lawful or unlawful?

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{130}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:92.
  \item \textsuperscript{131}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:92.
  \item \textsuperscript{132}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:92.
  \item \textsuperscript{133}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:93–95.
  \item \textsuperscript{134}Davies, “Family Religion,” in \textit{Sermons}, 2:95–96.
\end{itemize}
Surely any legitimate business could be ordered to provide time for family devotions. Then, Davies imagined some might plead ignorance of how to pray, which he found a pitiful excuse: just as a beggar was perpetually sensible enough to ask for handouts, so one who knew little of prayer was still conscious of the need to seek God. Yet his congregation had no legitimate excuse at this point, for they had long enjoyed the riches of “preaching, Bibles, and good books” which instructed them in prayer. Further, how could one who claimed ignorance of prayer expect to grow in its performance by neglecting it? Here Davies was even willing to suggest that those unskilled in prayers might use forms of prayer as crutches, for a season, until they grew in strength. As nearly all of Davies’ Virginia congregations had been gathered from the Church of England, presumably these forms include those of the Anglican Book of Common Prayer as well as the more basic forms from the Presbyterian Directory for Publick Worship. To those who were ashamed to worship God in their families, Davies wondered how one could share in the task of angels, who offered unceasing praise, and remain ashamed. All that was needed was practice.

As his sermon closed, Davies offered sympathetic counsel to those whose hearts had been softened by his sermon. Perhaps they were ashamed of long-neglecting family worship and unsure how to begin this practice. Such past failure ought to be confessed and remedied speedily. Some might be afraid that there family would ignore their pleas for worship, or worse, mock their piety. Davies concluded, “Are you more afraid of a laugh or a jeer than the displeasure of God? Would you rather please men than him?” In another context, Davies encouraged parents, especially fathers, to remind children often of the importance of their baptism:

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Take your little creatures up in your arms, and with all the powerful oratory which the fond heart of a father and the warm heart of a Christian can make you master of, put them in mind of their early baptism; explain to them the nature of that ordinance; and labour to make them sensible of the obligations that lie upon them in consequence of it. Warn them of the danger of breaking covenant with God, and living a life of perjury.\(^{138}\)

Davies cited the example of Philip Henry (1631–1696), a Nonconformist minister of Welsh ancestry and father to the famed biblical commentator Matthew Henry (1662–1714), who composed a baptismal covenant for his children, reviewed it with them each Sunday evening, and when they were of a certain age, made them write it out and sign it.\(^{139}\) Elsewhere, Davies described the worshipping family of the righteous as “little churches, in which divine worship is solemnly performed.”\(^{140}\) Given Davies’ reflection on the significance and practice of family worship, including baptismal covenants, we can reasonably assume that his own practice would have been similar to the one he encouraged his congregants to pursue.

**Sabbath/Lord’s Day**

Hambrick-Stowe has well-noted the Puritan innovation of the Sabbath as a “devotional point of reference,” especially among New England’s Puritans.\(^{141}\) This weekly cycle pictured the gospel and differed significantly from the yearly Anglican cycles of fast and holy days as well as the Roman Catholic calendar of worship from which the Anglican pattern was derived.\(^{142}\) Puritans saw the Sabbath as a divine institution given to humans as a means of grace through which they might rest from


\(^{140}\) Samuel Davies, “Saints Saved with Difficulty, and the Certain Perdition of Sinners,” in *Sermons*, 1:588.

\(^{141}\) Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 96.

\(^{142}\) Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 97.
earthly concerns and draw near to God. Thomas Shepard, Congregationalist minister in Newtown (Cambridge), Massachusetts, defended the Sabbath’s unique and continuing relevance in a series of sermons published as *Theses Sabbaticae*. Here he argued for maintaining the Sabbath as a holy day, for the Sabbath was the bellwether of true piety:

> It is easy to demonstrate by Scripture and argument, as well as by experience, that religion is just as the Sabbath is, and decays and grows as the Sabbath is esteemed: the immediate honor and worship of God, which is brought forth and swaddled in the first three commandments, is nursed up and suckled in the bosom of the Sabbath.

Shepard presented hundreds of theses arranged under four headings: the Sabbath’s morality, change, beginning, and sanctification. God had given humans the Sabbath and it was incumbent upon people to observe it, not out of superstition or mere custom, but as an act of obedient worship to the creator. Lovelace has indicated that for the Puritans, the Sabbath functioned as a “miniature, day-long retreat each week,” which served as a powerful instrument of transformation. The Westminster theologians also addressed the Sabbath in their confession. In Scripture, God had established the Sabbath as “a positive, moral, and perpetual commandment binding all men in all ages.” Like Shepard, the Westminster divines believed that Jesus, by virtue of his resurrection, had changed the Sabbath of creation (Saturday) to the Lord’s Day (Sunday). The Sabbath proved a key issue of division between English Puritans and Anglican authorities, notably Archbishop William Laud, yet the Puritan view prevailed, at least initially, in Anglican

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147 WCF, 21:7.

Virginia, where strict Sabbath observance was a founding principle at Jamestown.\textsuperscript{149} After the 1620s, when James I (1566–1625) and Charles I (1600–1649) exerted more direct rule over the colony, Puritan influence waned. By the 1700s, Sunday in Virginia had become more a day of relaxation and amusement than devoted worship.\textsuperscript{150} Though he never offered a statement on precisely how Christians ought to use the Sabbath as a means to draw near to God, Davies shared the Puritan view that the Sabbath was a divine ordinance, a mean of grace, not to be ignored.

For Samuel Davies, Sunday was the “Christian Sabbath,” a positive law founded upon God’s revealed will.\textsuperscript{151} God had consecrated Sunday “for the commemoration both of the birth of this world, and the resurrection of its great Author.”\textsuperscript{152} It was a day set aside for prayer and the concerns of eternity.\textsuperscript{153} Davies included Sabbath breaking among a list of various other sins which testified to one’s guilt before God and warned those who found the Lord’s Day marked by “tedious hours,” who could not bear to set apart worldly concerns for even a few hours each week, that hell would be a place where they would no more be troubled by such concerns, but rather face the horrible prospect of eternal punishment.\textsuperscript{154} He insisted that he had long warned his Hanover congregants not to break the Sabbath; rather, they were to consider it an

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  \item \textsuperscript{150} Rhys Isaac, \textit{The Transformation of Virginia: 1740–1790} (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 68.
  \item \textsuperscript{152} Davies, “A Christmas-Day Sermon,” in \textit{Sermons}, 3:564.
  \item \textsuperscript{153} Samuel Davies, “The One Thing Needful”, in \textit{Sermons}, 1:571.
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Personal Writing

On July 2, 1753, Samuel Davies, dipped quill in hand, made his first entry into a travel diary that he kept updated until February 15, 1755, when he returned to Hanover, Virginia. That Davies would keep such a diary is unremarkable; the practice of maintaining a record of one’s spiritual progress was well-established by Davies’ time. What is surprising is that his diary remained unpublished until fifty-eight years after his death, especially when other Evangelicals’ journals, those of Davies’ peers, enjoyed wide distribution. How did such personal writings fit into the Puritan and early Evangelical means of grace? Why did Davies maintain this diary? What spiritual or other purposes did it serve? Why did this diary remain out of the public view for nearly six decades?

Charles Hambrick-Stowe has well-summarized the Puritan tradition of maintaining diaries:

In their personal spiritual writing Puritans practiced self-examination; recorded ordinary events and “remarkable providences,” which taken together could provide clues to God's plan for the soul; kept track of public worship and private devotional activity; and meditated and prayed. Diary entries also included terse notes of entirely secular transactions, of who visited whom or preached on what text.156

While the practice of maintaining personal writings to track one’s spiritual growth (or declension) may not have been universal, it was certainly practiced among colonial clergy from the earliest days of settlement. Thomas Shepard maintained such a diary, as did the poet-pastor Michael Wigglesworth (1631–1705) of Malden, Massachusetts.157 Cotton Mather kept a diary that documented his meticulous and sincere use of various

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156Hambrick-Stowe, *Practice of Piety*, 186.

means of grace to pursue holiness. Among Davies’ peers, Jonathan Edwards kept various personal writings including a diary and his resolutions, as well as thousands of miscellaneous thoughts on life, Scripture, and theology. The great revivalists George Whitefield and John Wesley maintained lifelong diaries and journals, some intended to foster private devotion and others clearly intended for public promotion. David Brainerd (1718–1747), Presbyterian missionary to the Indians of Delaware and New Jersey, was closer in age to Davies than these other men, and maintained both a private “diary” and a public “journal” of his mission work. While his Puritan forbearers and Evangelical contemporaries used the medium of personal diaries, Davies’ own diary is at once similar yet distinct from each of these sources mentioned.

While Davies reflected on his own heart and his motives, his diary entries lack the depth of introspection of a Shepard, Wigglesworth, or Brainerd. Davies recorded no list of guiding personal resolutions as did Edwards. He left no record of his fasts, Bible-reading regimen, or numerous days of prayer as did Mather. Davies was not nearly as meticulous as Wesley, sometimes skipping several days’ entries or summarizing large blocks of time with a simple paragraph. Of all those contemporary diary-keepers

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mentioned, Davies’ diary most closely resembles that of George Whitefield, who maintained a reasonably detailed record of his travels and impressions of his sermons and hearers. Davies’ motivations for keeping his diary and his intentions for its use seem largely idiosyncratic, which indicates that his diary was likely a very personal document.

Davies stated his motivation for beginning and keeping the diary:

And now as Divine Providence, quite contrary to my Expectation seems to call me to a very important Embassy for the Church and for the Public; and as it will tend much to my future Satisfaction, to have the Record of my procedure by me for a Review in an Hour of Perplexity; I think it expedient to state the Affair in Writing and to keep [a Diary of] all the remarkable Occurencies I may [meet with in] my Voyage.

By his own admission, Davies was unsure that he was the right person to undertake the fundraising trip to Great Britain and had suggested other ministers he believed to be better suited for the task, yet “Providence” prevailed.163 Might Davies’ stated reason for maintaining the diary have been simply pious posturing for later readers, a culturally-expected demurrer in light of such an honor? Almost certainly not. Although Davies had expressed his desire to live on in “public usefulness” after his death, he never published his diary following his return from Great Britain nor did he leave instructions for it to be published after his death as he did with his sermons.164 Davies also appears to have been consistent in his personal humility. When the trustees of the College of New Jersey elected him as president, Davies declined the nomination more than once before reluctantly agreeing to the post.165 Then, Davies took few steps to mask his interactions

162Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 2.

163Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 2–8.

164See Samuel Davies, Sermons on Important Subjects, By the Late Reverend and Pious Samuel Davies, A. M., Sometime President of the College of New Jersey (New York: T. Allen, 1792), [i] (unnumbered). In the preface to the 1792 edition of Davies’ sermons, Thomas Gibbons, dissenting preacher in London and one of Davies’ key correspondents, excerpted a letter Davis had sent in 1757: “I want to live after I am dead, not in name, but in public usefulness: I was therefore about to order in my will that all my notes, which are tolerably full, might be sent to you to correct and publish such of them as you might judge conducive to the public good” [i].

165For the minutes of the trustees and their correspondence with Davies, see John Maclean,
with or opinions of numerous Christian leaders in the colonies and Great Britain, which information might have been deemed inappropriate or at least too delicate to commit to print. Of course, he might simply have edited such information out of a print edition, but that he left his original diary unedited in this way makes it less likely that he wanted the material to be public after his demise. Finally, Davies made numerous personal, ministerial, and familial notes in the diary, none of which would be scandalous if published, but most would have been uninteresting for the broader public. Davies’ own explanation for keeping the diary, namely as a record of God’s dealings and his own travels, seems best taken at face value.\textsuperscript{166}

Davies maintained his diary in a way that best suited his own devotional needs. Davies followed no systematic schema in what he chose to include or how he structured his entries. He narrated his travels and the hospitality of his hosts. He listed sermons that he had preached in various pulpits, noting his own sense of anointing\textsuperscript{167} or powerlessness.\textsuperscript{168} He recorded the sermons he had heard preached by others and his thoughts or reactions to them.\textsuperscript{169} He preserved descriptions of times of prayer with his friends\textsuperscript{170} and for his family.\textsuperscript{171} He mentioned books and sermons he read during his


\textsuperscript{166}While Davies’ desire to maintain a record of his trip and God’s dealings seems to have been his primary motivation, it is likely that he may have preserved the detailed records of his visits and funds raised as a log for the trustees for the College of New Jersey, should questions have ever been raised about how he spent his time and efforts abroad.

\textsuperscript{167}“Preached a Sermon in the Morning from Isai. 66.1,2. and thro’ the great Mercy of God, my Heart was passionately affected with the Subject.” See Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 19.

\textsuperscript{168}“Preached at Mr. Finley’s on Deut. 10,-13. a Sermon which I preached in Hanover with great Satisfaction and Prospect of Success; but alas! I have lost that Spirit with which it was first delivered.” See Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 10.

\textsuperscript{169}“Heard Mr. Rodgers preach a very good Sermon . . . and my Mind was deeply impressed” See Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 25.

\textsuperscript{170}See Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 26, 30, and 32 representatively.

\textsuperscript{171}See Pilcher, ed. \textit{Samuel Davies Abroad}, 20, 28, 32, 33, among many others.
travels. He documented fundraising visits, noting carefully the amounts collected or promised. Davies also used his diary to capture his occasional poems.

Davies’ diary found its way into the possession of John Holt Rice (1777–1831), publisher and professor at Hampden-Sydney College and later Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. Rice was a distant relative of Davies; his mother was a cousin of Samuel Davies’ wife, Jane Holt. By 1818, Rice had acquired some of Davies’ papers and wrote Archibald Alexander (1772–1851) of Princeton seeking additional manuscripts. Davies’ diary was among these papers. Rice published extracts of the diary in 1819 in his *Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine*. These extracts were reprinted occasionally during the nineteenth century. Pilcher’s 1967 transcription represented the first full publication of the journal. Whether the diary remained private because Davies wished it to be so or whether it simply disappeared among various family

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172See Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, 21, 31, 33, 39–40, 109, 135, among others. Davies recorded at least twenty books, sermons, or treatises that he read during his travels, mostly during his time at sea, but also during his horseback travels on land (109). His reading tastes varied widely from travel journals (33–36) to sermons (31, 34, 60) to novels by Daniel Defoe (1660–1731) (39) and a biography of Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658) (109).


179See Pilcher, ed. *Samuel Davies Abroad*, xii-iii, for a discussion of the transmission of the journal.
artifacts, or more likely through a combination of these reasons, Davies found the discipline of documenting his spiritual life and God’s work through his ministry to be helpful for a season, even if he never required it of other Christians as a mark of true piety.

**Christian Friendship**

In the fall of 1751, Davies wrote a friend who, though unnamed when the letter was reprinted, must have been close to the pastor indeed:

> My very dear friend, I REDEEM a few nocturnal hours to breathe out my benevolent wishes for you, and to assure you of my peculiar regards. Human life is extremely precarious and uncertain; and, perhaps, at your return, I may be above the reach of your correspondence; or, perhaps, your voyage may end on the eternal shore. I, therefore, write to you, dear sir, in the last agonies of friendship, If I may use the expression.

Davies’ thoughts on that particular evening seem laden with the near prospect of death. The minister assured his friend that if he were to return to find that Davies had died during his absence, he could forever treasure their friendship, assured that Davies had often prayed for him. If Davies were to outlive this dear brother, he would be comforted by the fact that he had expressed the depth of their friendship. Such thoughts of death stirred Davies to “rest my guilty soul on an all-sufficient redeemer with all the humble confidence of a confirmed faith.” Further, these reflections called to Davies’ mind God’s gracious heart-work of regeneration and earlier seasons of devotion: “when I can recollect the solemn transactions between God and my soul, and renew them in the most voluntary dedication of myself, and all I am and have, to him, through the blessed mediator; then immortality is a glorious prospect.”

Davies’ indicated that he and his friend had previously discussed

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180Samuel Davies, letter to unspecified recipient, in “Letters of Samuel Davies,” *The Virginia Evangelical and Literary Magazine* 2 (1819), 539.


“experimental religion,” and he wrote this letter with a particular theological motivation: to insist upon the necessity of the new birth. Apparently his friend remained unconvinced that regeneration was necessary to one’s eternal salvation. Davies sought to persuade him otherwise:

That thorough change of heart, usually denominated regeneration; that distressing conviction of our undone condition by sin, and utter inability to relieve ourselves by virtue of that strength common to mankind in general, that humble acceptance of Christ as out only Saviour and Lord, by a faith of divine operation, that humbling sense of the corruption of human nature, and eager pursuit and practice of universal holiness, which I have, I believe, mentioned in conversation and my letters, appear to me of absolute necessity.\(^\text{183}\)

Davies directed his friend to the sermons of Philip Doddridge, the Nonconformist polymath of Northampton, England, which provided “a rational account of that important change.”\(^\text{184}\) Davies was “inexpressibly anxious . . . lest you should fatally mistake here,” especially in light of his friend’s favorite authors, who treated experimental religion “very superficially” and tended to “mislead us in sundry things of great importance relating to it” by neglecting the doctrines of the new birth.\(^\text{185}\) Davies insisted that “our notions of the substance of vital piety ought to be well examined, and impartially formed; as a mistake here may be of pernicious consequences.”\(^\text{186}\) This letter’s focus on heart, or in Davies’ words, “experimental” religion provides a helpful vantage point from which to evaluate the place of friendship in Samuel Davies’ spirituality. While it is impossible to say precisely how many close friendships Davies might have enjoyed during his lifetime, it is easier to identify several common features of Davies’ various friendships. The artifacts here are few, yet they show that Davies often approached friendship from the standpoint of piety.

\(^{183}\)Davies, “Letters of Samuel Davies,” 541.

\(^{184}\)Davies, “Letters of Samuel Davies,” 541.

\(^{185}\)Davies, “Letters of Samuel Davies,” 541–42.

\(^{186}\)Davies, “Letters of Samuel Davies,” 542.
First, genuine Christian friendship concerned itself with matters of eternal significance. This emphasis is apparent in the letter just considered, where Davies took the opportunity of an upcoming trans-Atlantic voyage, fraught with danger, to address a friend’s understanding of conversion. Then, true friendship consisted of mutual encouragements to persevere in the faith and in the ministry. Before Davies sailed for Great Britain in 1753, he travelled from Virginia to New York, meeting various colleagues along the journey. During October and November, Davis stayed often with his longtime friend and fellow Presbyterian minister John Rodgers (1727–1811). During this period, Davies was able to comfort Rodgers when John’s wife became ill and delivered a daughter about a month early. For his part, Rodgers’ preaching stirred Davies’ heart, prompting the Virginian to meditate on the love of God and the place of the affections in the believer’s life. The two ministers conversed freely on such matters, opening their hearts to one another “with all the freedom of Xn. Friendship.”

When the two friends parted, Davies noted that they “retired, and each of us prayed in the tenderest and most pathetic Manner, giving Thanks to God for that peculiar Friendship which has subsisted between us, and committing each other to the Care of Heaven for the future.” Similarly, Davies and Gilbert Tennent shared many days in prayer and edifying conversation during their journey to and stay in England.

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187 For an overview of Rodgers’ life and ministry, see Harris Elwood Starr, “Rodgers, John” in Dictionary of American Biography, vol. 16, ed. Dumas Malone (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1943), 74–75. Samuel Blair had trained both Davies and Rodgers for ministry and they had been ordained less than a year apart and had both sought licensure from the Anglican authorities in Virginia in 1747, but when Rodgers’ request was denied, he settled in Delaware. So close were these friends that Davies named a son John Rodgers Davies.

188 Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 21–22.

189 Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 25.

190 Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 26.

191 Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 28.

192 See, representatively, Pilcher, ed. Samuel Davies Abroad, 30, 32, and 38.
Davies found discretion to be an equally key element of Christian friendship. When writing to Joseph Bellamy, the Congregationalist pastor of Bethlehem, Connecticut, Davies noted, “I must suppress sundry Particulars that might be proper to mention in the Freedom of amicable Conversation, but are not to be trusted to the Candour of a censorious World.” Further, Davies indicated that sharing private information in a public setting to be “pregnant with mischievous Consequences,” insisting that only “intimate Friendship” provided the proper occasion to discuss such matters.

Friendship between Christians was a valuable means of grace; thus it is unsurprising to find that Samuel Davies encouraged his hearers to meet with fellow Christians for encouragement. Davies specifically urged the faithful to join one another in societies for prayer. At this time, informal “societies” were an established and growing method of promoting piety outside of the congregational setting. Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705), the German Lutheran pastor now regarded as the father of German pietism, had proposed the collegia pietatis, or “holy gatherings” in his 1675 introduction to Johann Arndt’s (1555–1621) classic True Christianity. This introduction, later published separately as Pia Desideria, was widely influential among early Evangelicals. Spener called for Christians to gather in homes and, under the leadership of a minister, to discuss Scripture and, perhaps, to sing, in order to promote spiritual

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194 Davies, State of Religion, 4.


growth. The practice spread among early Evangelicals, notably the Moravians, and especially among Wesleyan Methodists and the Calvinistic Methodists of Wales. While Davies left no discussion on composition or practices of such societies among the Presbyterians of Virginia, he encouraged his hearers to gather in such small groups for the purpose of prayer.

The Means of Grace and Assurance of Salvation

Earthly life is fleeting and assurance of how one will spend eternity is essential. Samuel Davies believed that Christians could have such an assurance.

Proverbs 14:23 warned the wicked of destruction yet declared that “the righteous hath hope in his death.” What sort of hope could the righteous have? First, the righteous could hope for God’s support in death because God had often promised to support his people in both life and death (cf. 2 Tim 1:12; Ps 23:4, and Rom 8:35–39). The righteous could also hope in the immortality of the soul, because everlasting life was promised in the gospel (cf. 2 Tim 1:10). Then, Christians had hope because of the promise that their bodies would one day be resurrected from the grave (cf. 1 Cor 15:53–55). Finally, the righteous had hope in death because of the promise of eternal fellowship with and worship of God.

197 Spener, Pia Desideria, 89–90.
(cf. Ps 17:15 and Phil 1:23). Such were the objects of the righteous person’s hopes, but what qualified a person as “righteous?” Though people might disagree over such qualifications as distinguish the righteous and the wicked, surely God was able to establish such criteria, or in Davies’ words, the “characters which he has declared essentially necessary to salvation.” God had indeed established such a foundation in Scripture, and because God’s character and utterly unshakable and his word completely trustworthy, Christians could have reliable assurance of salvation.

God’s mercy to sinners displayed in the gospel of Jesus Christ was the sinner’s only foundation of assurance. While one could not trust in his own inherent righteousness, he could hold fast to the imputed righteousness of Christ: “It is in the mercy, the mere mercy of God, through Jesus Christ, that he trusts.” Such who had received Christ’s righteousness were empowered to live obedient lives, marked by good works, but these works were no sufficient ground of assurance; one’s only hope was in having been born again, possessing an interest in Christ. Yet how was one to know that they had experienced this saving regeneration? Davies believed that by means of a “thorough trial,” of their character, a person could know if they had truly experienced the new birth and, consequently, trust God’s reliable word that all who had been born again had the promise of eternal salvation. Part of this “thorough trial” involved examining one’s life in light of Scripture. Those who cherished attitudes or behaviors that God had approbated and rejected personal holiness could have no assurance; even worse, their groundless hope served to undermine Scripture’s authority: if the Bible declared that the impenitent would perish (cf. Luke 13:3–5) and yet held out hope of their ultimate

204 Davies, “Hope of the Righteous,” in Sermons, 3:486.
salvation, how could it possibly support the hopes of the saints? People who lived in "willful neglect" of duties God had prescribed had no ground for hope. Yet not all who sought assurance were so hypocritical; surely some were genuinely faithful followers of Christ.

Those who saw evidence of the new birth in their lives had reliable grounds for hope, but these grounds did not mean that the believer’s experience of assurance was always consistent with the reality of their security in Christ:

Now different believers, and even the same persons at different times, have very different degrees of this evidence. And the reason of this difference is, that sundry causes are necessary to make the evidence clear and satisfactory; and, when any of these are wanting, or do not concur in a proper degree, then the evidence is dark and doubtful.

Davies’ pastoral concern was evident. Those who have been born from above ought to have hope, not in themselves but rather in the grace of God working in their lives. Yet such people might at various seasons entertain unfounded doubts. How could one maintain a consistent hope of salvation and a steady assurance? They could grow in their certainty, Davies taught, by growing “to some eminence” in their practice of various graces. Christians who were weak in their practice of various disciplines might have hope, but such hope would almost certainly be weak in the face of death. Those saints who had “made great attainments in holiness,” however, maintained a steady assurance, yea even with joy. Consistent with his emphasis on the ministry of the Holy Spirit, Davies also taught that the Spirit’s work was essential to one’s assurance.

Davies looked to Romans 8:16, which promised that those whom God had adopted could expect the Holy Spirit to provide an internal testimony confirming God’s

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legal declaration: “The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the
children of God.”209 Davies explained the Spirit’s ministry further: “He excites our graces
to such a lively exercise, as to render them visible by their effects, and distinguishable
from all other principles.”210 Yet Davies believed that such interior confirmation was
within God’s purview to grant or to withhold; it did not necessarily accompany
regeneration nor was it promised to in the same degree to every saint. Where this
testimony was absent, the saint might feel confused, doubtful, and buffeted.211 When God
was pleased to give such assurance, however, “it will be like a ray of heavenly light, to
point out his way through the dark shades of death, and to open to him the transporting
prospects of eternal day.”212 While the Spirit’s heart-ministry was God’s prerogative, the
saint ought to use those means within his control, namely the discipline of self-
examination. Christians who neglected regular introspection were likely to have only
meager assurance whereas those believers who diligently looked after their lives
abounded in hope.213 Regardless of a person’s experience of assurance, through the
gospel the righteous had hope. While a person might wish for greater assurance, she must
remain contended with this objective promise of assurance of salvation through Christ’s
merit. “The soldiers of Jesus Christ have generally left this mortal state in triumph;
though this is not an universal rule.”214 In sum, Davies believed that believers could be
assured of salvation because of Christ’s objective cross-work, evidences of a changed
life, and the Spirit’s interior witness, yet such assurance admitted to degrees.

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Samuel Davies’ theology of assurance was consistent with the Westminster divines, who extended cautious optimism to the saints when they declared:

such as truly believe in the Lord Jesus, and love Him in sincerity, endeavouring to walk in all good conscience before Him, may, in this life, be certainly assured that they are in the state of grace, and may rejoice in the hope of the glory of God, which hope shall never make them ashamed. 215

Davies followed the Confession’s insistence on the promises of God, testimony of works, and the Spirit’s witness as the grounds for an “infallible assurance of faith.” 216 Similarly, he adhered to the Confession’s admonition that such assurance was not bound up “to the essence of faith,” and that the Christian might wait long to receive the comfort of this hope, and that such believers ought to use “ordinary means” to foster joyful, thankful assurance. 217 Yet because salvation was based on the objective work of God, even those Christians who lost assurance were “never so utterly destitute of that seed of God, and life of faith, that love of Christ and the brethren, that sincerity of heart, and conscience of duty, out of which, by the operation of the Spirit, this assurance may, in due time, be revived; and by the which, in the mean time, they are supported from utter despair.” 218

It is right to locate Davies’ treatment of assurance with a discussion of his views on the various means of grace because Davies’ saw the two concepts as integrally linked. Christians who neglected fellowship with God through God’s ordained means ought not hope of salvation:

Now God has been so condescending, as to represent his ordinances as so many places of interview for his people, where they may meet with him, or, in the Scripture phrase, draw near to him, appear before him, and carry on a spiritual intercourse with him. 219

215 WCF 18.1.
216 WCF 18.2.
217 WCF 18.3.
218 WCF 18.4.
As God had been so gracious as to establish means through which his people might commune with him, it followed that true believers delighted in such means as prayer, hearing and meditating on Scripture, and taking the Lord’s Supper. Such means were not only duties but “privileges; exalted and delightful privileges, which sweeten their pilgrimage through this wilderness, and sometimes transform it into a paradise.”

Davies believed that one’s disposition toward the means of grace was a necessary indicator of their interest in Christ and their assurance of salvation. Those people who neglected the public assembly, maintained “prayerless closets” and “prayerless families,” and avoided the daily practice of devotion had no basis to claim to love God nor could they have any assurance of saving faith. Rather, every genuine believer could testify with King David of their soul’s insatiable thirst for God (cf. Ps 42:1–2) and sought to satisfy this thirst in the ever-flowing fountain of God’s presence through the habitual practice of various means.

**Conclusion**

For Samuel Davies, Christians maintained communion with God through the diligent spiritual activities such as reading and meditating upon Scripture, prayer, fasting, and Sabbath keeping. Davies stood in a long Christian tradition which emphasized the use of means in pursuing godliness (cf. 1 Tim 4:7). Though such exercises did not make one a Christian, they were simultaneously preparatory to and essential for the Christian life. Sinners were to read Scripture and pray that they might be converted. Christians used such disciplines to maintain vital communion with God. Some disciplines, such as the Lord’s Supper, were reserved exclusively for believers, while others, like the Sabbath,

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221 Davies, “Evidences of Want,” in *Sermons*, 3:467.
222 Davies, “Evidences of Want,” in *Sermons*, 3:467–68.
were intended for all members of society. Davies himself practiced the disciplines he enjoined upon his congregants, believing that through such means he, and they, could draw near to God.
CHAPTER 7
CONCLUSION

The question that began this dissertation was “how did Samuel Davies’ theology inform his understanding of spiritual life and piety?” Additional questions followed, such as what role the Bible played in Davies’ vision of the Christian life and spirituality, how spiritual life was communicated and sustained within believers by Jesus Christ, the nature of Christian holiness in spiritual life, and the place of various means in pursuing communion with God.

This dissertation has shown that Samuel Davies was not only an eighteenth-century revivalist, spokesman for religious toleration, and college president, but that he was a deeply pious man whose doctrinal convictions, consistent with his Presbyterian commitments and shaped by Puritan tradition, formed a framework from which he called believers to sustained communion with God. Davies was no theological innovator, but rather a synthesizer and gifted spokesman for those traditions that he had inherited.

The research for this dissertation has been undergirded by several presuppositions. First, the history and theology of the Christian experience is a worthy academic endeavor. Then, theology and spirituality are coinherent; that is, the particular contours of one’s theology shapes one’s experience of the Christian life and such doctrinal and ascetical nuances matter. Third, Samuel Davies’ Christian piety provides a fruitful model for examination and emulation because of the seriousness with which Davies pursued personal piety and the frequent and careful applications he offered his congregants to encourage Christian devotion.

Having reviewed Davies’ life and writings, and the considerable impact of his
ministry, several findings may be drawn from this study. In his critical study of the Evangelical movement in Britain, David Bebbington identified four “special marks” of Evangelical religion: deep commitments to the Bible as God’s Word, the necessity of personal conversion, great emphasis on the cross-work of Christ, and a highly-motivated activism in missions and evangelism.1 Though Bebbington did not mention Samuel Davies in his study, his quadrilateral is an accurate statement of most of Davies’ core theology and thus forms a fitting conversation partner for review and dialogue. The Bible played a foundational role in Davies’ life and ministry. Though he was widely read, there was no book he treasured more highly than the Bible, for he was convinced that God spoke authoritatively through holy writ. Davies was keenly aware of various challenges to the nature and authority of Scripture but was unflinching in his rejection of such theological skepticism. Davies prized the Bible so highly because it was the place where he and other believers could hear God speaking most clearly. For Davies, to hear, read, study, and meditate upon the Bible was nothing short of enjoying fellowship with God.

Davies believed that sinners must be born again in order to be saved. This was the essential message of all of Davies’ extant sermons. Conversion was a decisive, God-wrought change in which the Holy Spirit imparted new life to spiritually dead people, applying the merits purchased by Jesus, according to the electing design and grace of the Father. Young, old, religious, irreligious, man, woman, slave, or master; such distinctions made no difference to Davies with regard to a person’s spiritual state. He was convinced that all were benighted and imprisoned by sin and therefore all must receive the new birth to have any hope of eternal life. Davies’ commitment to conversion was related to his commitment to the centrality of the cross of Christ. Jesus was the perfect, obedient son of God who was also the slaughtered Lamb, the great high priest, and the

conquering king. The only method of salvation was to trust in the efficacy of Christ’s sacrifice; no other remedy could save sinners. Davies’ commitment to the converting message of the cross impelled his activism, seen most clearly in his sermons, where the call to repent and believe the gospel was ubiquitous. This commitment to activism compelled Davies to minister among enslaved Africans in Virginia, to procure Bible and other works of Christian literature for them, to instruct them in the essentials of the faith, and to treat them as spiritual equals even as he bought and sold them as property. This last point raises a matter that must be addressed: Samuel Davies was a man of contradictions. He preached a gospel of liberation from the tyranny of sin while at the same time owning humans as property. He declared that Christians faced a spiritual enemy and called them to fight through prayer while simultaneously calling for soldiers to wage a holy war against the French and Indians. These contradictions mar his otherwise remarkable ministry.

While Bebbington’s quadrilateral of Evangelical commitments rightly describes several of Davies’ theological commitments, it fails to capture two critical aspects of his thought, namely his emphases on the necessity of personal holiness and the ministry of the Holy Spirit. Davies was convinced that no significant revival of religion could occur unless God effused his Spirit from heaven. As he interpreted his own experiences as a student at Samuel Blair’s academy, he attributed the overwhelming success of the gospel to the Spirit, who accompanied the preached word, applying it with power to spiritually-dead sinners and reviving believers whose passion had waned. He called upon Virginians to pray that God might send his Spirit afresh and thus transform a land marked by the ravages of war. The Holy Spirit was the Spirit of holiness, and where the Spirit worked, people ought to be changed. Davies took Hebrews 12:14 as a theme verse in his preaching, insisting that those who had been born again must live holy lives. Davies called his hearers to use various means of grace to foster such holiness. The Bible
took chief place among these means. Davies was convinced that Christians ought to hear Scripture, read Scripture, and meditate upon Scripture that they might grow in the knowledge of and conformity to Christ. He found prayer to be the irreplaceable means of enjoying communion with the Triune God and encouraged congregants to pray in private, in public, and certainly within their families. For Davies, the Christian home was an irreplaceable school in which genuine piety was to be fostered as parents prayed for and with their servants and their children. Fasting was a biblical sign of a truly repentant heart and an aid to prayer. Davies insisted that the sacraments of baptism and the Lord’s Supper were key covenantal markers intended to remind Christians continually of their need to draw near to God and that these ordinances were places in which believers were to foster vital spiritual communion with their risen Lord. Davies’ insistence on holiness as a vital mark of all believers also shows one area in which Davies’ theology differed from Bebbington’s assessment of Evangelicalism: assurance of salvation.

Bebbington has argued that early Evangelicals, notably Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, shaped by Enlightenment ideas of the reliability of human reason, moved away from a Puritan conception of assurance that was often skeptical of one’s claim to faith and insisted that assurance of salvation was normal for those who had been spiritually reborn. Garry Williams has demonstrated that Edwards and Wesley were more consistent with the Reformers and Puritans on the question of assurance that Bebbington allowed and also that there was a diversity of opinion among Eighteenth-Century Evangelicals on the nature of assurance. Davies’ voice has not been considered in this discussion. Though he believed assurance of salvation was possible, Davies’ located it in rigorous self-examination and the objective truth of God’s promise to save

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2Bebbington, Evangelicalism in Modern Britain, 42–50.

believers, whose lives would give evidence of regeneration. The Spirit’s internal witness of one’s spiritual adoption was a grace that God allowed saints to have at his own discretion, certainly not universally. Holiness mattered because it was a chief means of evidence that one had indeed experienced the new birth. Davies’ activism, then, was not fueled by a sense of easy or early assurance, but rather on the conviction of the universal need to repent and believe the gospel.

No dissertation can claim to exhaust its subject. While this thesis has provided a deeper analysis of key aspects of Davies theology than previous studies, more remains to be examined. For one, Davies’ views of trans-denominational ministry and ecclesiology deserve further attention. Davies was certainly a committed Presbyterian but he recognized the necessity of cooperating with pastors from other Christian denominations for the sake of the gospel. Perhaps no incident illustrates this cooperative spirit better than a letter that Davies sent to John Wesley:

Though you and I may differ in some little things, I have long loved you and prayed for your success, as zealous revivers of experimental Christianity. If I differ from you in temper and design, or in the essentials of religion, I am sure the error must lie on my side. Blessed be God for hearts to love one another.4

The letter, in full, demonstrates Davies’ zeal for missions among slaves and for the propagation of the gospel, but this excerpt is striking as it shows Davies’ character: he would not only work with Christians with whom he disagreed theologically, but could do so with humility and genuine Christian affection. Given the global need of cooperation in evangelism and mission, Davies has much to teach modern Evangelicals about how to work with fellow Christians despite significant theological differences. Other areas of inquiry would involve a closer look at Davies’ hermeneutical approach to interpreting Scripture as well as his rhetorical approaches to imagination and persuasion. By accounts of his own peers, Davies’ sermons were arresting. Their language, imagery, and

argumentation retain power nearly three centuries later. The modern church would be well-served to consider Davies’ preaching afresh.5

Perhaps the most significant finding for twenty-first century Evangelicals is that it has reiterated the vital relationship between theology and piety. Davies’ life and ministry show that a learned, nuanced theology is no bar to warm piety. Rather, theology serves spirituality by providing it a reliable foundation and rich content while spirituality serves theology by continually reminding the theologian that bare factual knowledge of the great truths of the gospel and the gospel’s God is insufficient apart from a heart fired with love to God. Davies modeled this balance of theology and piety in a manner worthy of emulation.

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5For an important study of Davies’ rhetoric, see Barbara Ann Larson, “A Rhetorical Study of the Preaching of the Reverend Samuel Davies in the Colony of Virginia From 1747–1759” (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 1969).
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This dissertation argues that Samuel Davies’ theology of and vision for the Christian life were inseparable. Although his contribution to American Evangelicalism was not as original nor as widely remembered as that of his contemporaries, Samuel Davies’ insistence on vital Christian piety was far more central to his ministry than was religious toleration or patriotic duty, which are more commonly remembered emphases of his legacy. Chapter 2 recounts the contours of Davies’ life and world.

Chapter 3 argues that Samuel Davies’ vision of the Christian life was grounded in the divine revelation of Scripture. The Bible was essential to a life of godliness.

Samuel Davies believed that Jesus Christ communicated and sustained divine life in people and that this life marked the beginning of genuine piety. Chapter 4 shows that Davies’ emphasis on conversion is grounded in the Puritan tradition yet evinces an emerging Evangelical theology.

Chapter 5 argues that Davies saw gospel holiness as the animating principle of spiritual life, that which separated it from worldly, even religious counterfeits.

Chapter 6 demonstrates that Davies believed that spiritual life was maintained through the conscientious practice of various religious duties, especially through private prayer and public communion.
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