ORDER AND ARDOR: THE REVIVAL SPIRITUALITY OF REGULAR BAPTIST OLIVER HART, 1723–1795

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by

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APPROVAL SHEET

ORDER AND ARDOR: THE REVIVAL SPIRITUALITY OF REGULAR BAPTIST OLIVER HART, 1723–1795

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Nathan A. Finn

Date_____

For Candace.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ANTS	Franklin-Trask Library, Andover Newton Theological Seminary, Newton Centre, MA
Brown	John Hay Library, Brown University, Providence, RI
Furman	James B. Duke Memorial Library, Furman University, Greenville, SC
HSP	Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia
JSCBHS	*Journal of the South Carolina Baptist Historical Society*
SCL	South Caroliniana Library, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC
WJE	*Works of Jonathan Edwards*

PREFACE

I enrolled in the Biblical Spirituality Ph.D. program at Southern Seminary because I wanted to study church history under Dr. Michael A. G. Haykin. Three years later, I do not regret my decision. Dr. Haykin consistently astonishes his students with his unmatched command of the historic material, his keen editorial skills, and his eclectic personal interests. His transparent love for the Savior, for his subject, and for his students have forever endeared him to us. I cherish the memory of travelling to Louisville each month in the spring of 2015, rearranging the furniture in the Legacy Hotel lobby, watching helplessly as he spilled purple Noodler's ink all over my most recent chapter, and then receiving his encouraging feedback. En route to one such meeting, Snowstorm Thor forced me off the interstate onto a perilous country highway before I made it to an Elizabethtown truck stop for the night. As I lay down in my truck, I watched with wonder as more beautiful snow piled up around me than this West Tennessean has ever seen. Like that unforgettable night, Ph.D. studies have been an adventure: filled with many new experiences, some unexpected twists, a dash of danger and discomfort, but much joy.

I have admired and enjoyed the work of Dr. Greg Wills and Dr. Nathan Finn for many years. I am honored that they agreed to serve on my committee, and am so grateful for their wise counsel along the way. Another historian-hero, Dr. Thomas Kidd, kindly served as my external reader. This project is immeasurably better because of their investment. Thank you! This dissertation also would not have been possible without several libraries helping me to secure needed primary sources. Jason Fowler, formerly librarian at Southern Seminary, was the first person to place a copy of Oliver Hart's personal writings in my hands. I am also indebted to Graham Duncan at the South Caroliniana Library, Julia Cowart at the James B. Duke Memorial Library, and Bill

Summers at the Southern Baptist Historical Archives. Thank you all.

As always, I have leaned on the people of God. Curve Baptist Church walked with me as I set out on the journey. The Lord especially used my friend Joe Carmack to encourage me in those days. Midway through, the people of Sharon Baptist Church welcomed me into their family; their love and support have been a precious gift of grace in my life. I am especially grateful for my fellow pastors Greg Young and Brian Reid, and for the men of my Sunday School class. I also looked forward to the Sundays I spent in Louisville during the program, because I knew Ryan Fullerton would preach Christ to my thirsty soul from the pulpit of Immanuel Baptist Church. God bless you, brothers.

When I began the course, I suspected that the Lord intended to edify my soul with rich study material, call me to deeper levels of discipline and perseverance, and humble me with the academic rigor of the program. He has done all of this. I never imagined that he was also planning to give me a number of wonderful friendships. How kind he is. The brothers in the Biblical Spirituality Ph.D. program have truly "refreshed my spirit" (1 Cor 16:18). Together, we have feasted on burnt brisket ends, homemade pie and ice cream, evangelical truth from across the centuries, and on the goodness of God. I am particularly grateful for Jared Longshore and Ryan Griffith, my roommates in abundance and in want. The hand of the diligent shall rule! Thank you.

This project is dedicated to my dear wife and closest friend, Candace. The Lord has led us through many changes since we started this program. These include a major move, new ministry responsibilities, and two more children in our happy family. Through it all, you continue to make our home my favorite place on earth. I love you so.

Soli Deo gloria.

Eric Coleman Smith

Savannah, Tennessee

December 2015

CHAPTER 1

"A REVIVAL MORE EXTENSIVE THAN FIRST EXPECTED": OLIVER HART AND REGULAR BAPTIST REVIVALISM

On the night of Sunday, August 25, 1754, Oliver Hart sat down to record a few lines in his diary before bed. The hour was late. According to his usual practice, Hart had preached twice at the Baptist meetinghouse in Charleston, South Carolina, where he had served as pastor for almost five years. But on this Sunday, Hart returned home to find his house filled with young people from the congregation, all in deep spiritual distress. They had come to hear the gospel, as they had almost every night the previous week. Hart wrote of their meeting, "In the evening had my house crowded, mostly with young people, who came to hear me expound, which the Lord enabled me to do with a good degree of freedom; many were affected. Blessed be God the work among our young people seems to go on gloriously!"[1]

It was one of many similar gatherings that took place among the Charleston Baptists throughout the fall of 1754. An unusual seriousness had gripped the youth of the church. Night after night, they assembled to hear Hart preach, pray in groups, and receive direction on finding "comfort" in Christ. Some of the meetings were accompanied by "melting down into tears,"[2] others by "crying out."[3] Hart believed it was a heaven-sent revival. "Blessed be God! I have more reason to believe that some of our young people are concerned for their souls, and it may be that the revival may prove to be more

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[1] Oliver Hart, diary, August 25, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[2] Hart, diary, August 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[3] Hart, diary, September 1, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

extensive than first expected. Lord grant that many may be awakened to a sense of their misery, and enabled to fly to the Rock of Ages for refuge."[4]

Hart's experience represents well the Great Awakening's persistence and power in the American colonies. Thomas Kidd has argued that a "long First Great Awakening" in the eighteenth century produced a new evangelical movement in America, marked by "persistent desires for revival, widespread individual conversions, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."[5] Oliver Hart fits precisely this profile of revival spirituality. Yet the Regular Baptists of the colonial South are not remembered for their support of the revival. Instead, the Separate Baptists are more often credited with bringing evangelical religion to the Baptists of the South later in the eighteenth century, and eventually winning their staid Regular cousins to the awakening through their dramatic success. While the Baptists of Virginia appeared to follow such a pattern, Hart's diary indicates that the picture looked considerably different in the lower South, particularly in South Carolina. Here, a rich legacy of Regular Baptist revivalism had existed since the turn of the eighteenth century.

Regular Baptist Revivalism in South Carolina

Regular Baptist revivalism can trace its roots to the indomitable William Screven (1629–1713).[6] Originally from Somerton in Somersetshire, England, Screven had immigrated to Kittery, Maine, by the year 1668. There, he learned the trade of shipright and joined a Baptist church in Boston. He also began preaching to his neighbors in Kittery, eventually forming a Baptist church there in 1682. For this, Screven was

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[4] Hart, diary, August 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[5] Thomas S Kidd, *The Great Awakening: Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press), xix.

[6] Robert Baker presents his thorough research on Screven's formation of the Baptist church in Kittery in Robert A. Baker, Paul J. Craven, and R. Marshall Blalock, *History of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina 1682–2007* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press), 33–71.

brought to trial in 1682, charged with "offensive speech" and "rash and inconsiderate words tending to blasphemy."[7] When Screven refused to repent of public preaching, he was fined £10 and barred from conducting "any private exercise at his house or elsewhere" in the province of Maine. Yet Screven and the Kittery Baptists had no intention of remaining silent. Screven described the group as "having a desire to the service of Christ . . . and the propagating of his glorious gospel of peace and salvation, and eyeing that precious promise in Daniel the 12th, 3d: 'They that turn many to righteousness shall shine as the stars forever."[8] Knowing their witness would be stifled in Maine, Screven removed the church to South Carolina, where the religious toleration policy allowed greater freedom to spread the gospel. There, on the banks of the Cooper River, Screven settled an area he called "Somerton."[9]

Now in his sixties, Screven ranged widely from his new base of operations, preaching all over the Carolina lowcountry. His aggressive evangelical presence irritated area ministers. Anglican commissary Gideon Johnston (1671–1716) reported a conflict involving "a ship carpenter, the Anabaptist teacher at Charleston . . . concerning some of the town Presbyterians seduced by him."[10] Joseph Lord (1672–1748), a Harvard-trained Congregationalist minister, complained to the governor of Massachusetts about Screven's evangelistic efforts:

> When I came to Dorchester, I found that a certain Anabaptist teacher (named Scriven), who came from New England, had taken advantage of my absence to insinuate into some of the people about us, and to endeavor to make proselytes, not by public preaching up his own tenets, nor by disputations, but by employing some

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[7] Henry Sweetser Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine* (Portland, ME: Marks, 1904), 18–19.

[8] Burrage, *History of the Baptists in Maine*, 13–14.

[9] Historians debate whether the year of the church's migration was 1682, or not until 1696.

[10] "Report of Commissary Gideon Johnston to the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel about 1713," in Arthur Henry Hirsch, *The Huguenots of Colonial South Carolina* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1928), 309. Johnston served as Commissary to South Carolina and rector of St. Phillip's in Charleston from 1707–1716.

> of his most efficient and trusty adherents to gain upon such as they had interest in, and thereby to set an example to others that are too apt to be led by anything that is new. [11]

Screven had scheduled for two women to be received into the church "by plunging," but Lord convinced one of the prospects "of the error of that way."[12] Through Screven's considerable labors, the Charleston church grew to ninety members by 1708.[13] At the time of his death, Screven had also begun a new work in Winyah, later Georgetown Baptist Church.[14] Screven, "a man of great ardor and energy" in the early eighteenth century, foreshadowed the evangelical dynamism of later Regular Baptists during the Great Awakening.[15]

Screven's legacy continued in Isaac Chanler (1701–1749), who migrated to the Ashley River in South Carolina in 1733 from Bristol, England. A Particular Baptist, Chanler strongly advocated the Calvinistic soteriology of the *Second London Confession*, publishing a book on the subject in 1744.[16] He found a receptive audience in the Ashley River baptists, who were dissatisfied with the doctrines of the Charleston Baptist Church. There, Arminian views of salvation were being promoted, and the treasured ritual of laying hands on newly baptized believers was being rejected.[17] The Ashley River group formed a new congregation of twenty-seven members in 1736, calling Chanler as pastor. The church flourished under his leadership. Within three years, around twenty adults

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[11] Joseph Lord to Thomas Hinkley, February 21, 1699, in Solomon Lincoln et al., eds., "The Hinkley Papers," *Massachusetts Historical Society Collection* 4, no. 5 (1861): 305.

[12] Joseph Lord to Thomas Hinkley, "Hinkley Papers," 305.

[13] William Screven to Mr. Callender, August 6, in *Two Centuries of the First Baptist Church of South Carolina, 1683–1883*, ed. H. A. Tupper (Baltimore: R. H. Woodward and Company, 1889), 58.

[14] For the Winyah work, See Roy Talbert and Meggan A. Farish, *Antipedo Baptists of Georgetown, South Carolina, 1710–2010* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2014) 19–26.

[15] Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 12.

[16]Isaac Chanler, *The Doctrines of Glorious Grace Unfolded, defended, and practically improved* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1744).

[17] Sarah E. Kegley and Thomas J. Little, "The Records of the Ashley River Baptist Church, 1736-1769," *JSCBHS* 27, no. 4 (November 2001): 3–4, 10.

were brought into fellowship through profession of faith. In the spring and summer of 1737, Chanler baptized several new converts, while some twenty-one members decisively sought spiritual renewal and "submitted to the holy ordinance of laying on of hands with prayer, for the obtaining of fresh supplies of the Holy Spirit of grace."[18]

When George Whitefield (1714–1770) came to the Charleston area in 1740, he found an ardent supporter in Chanler, who he called "a gracious Baptist minister."[19] Whitefield preached to large audiences at the Ashley River meetinghouse, seeing many conversions.[20] He urged Chanler and the other evangelical ministers in the area to form a transdenominational meeting to promote revival after he left. In a published sermon from these meetings, Chanler celebrated God's work in the revival.[21] Later, Chanler entered a print debate to defend Whitefield's ministry against the attacks of Anglican Commisary Alexander Garden. Chanler's effusive praise of the evangelist brought him into sharp disagreement with Thomas Simmons (d. 1747) and the General Baptists at Charleston. [22]

From 1733–1749, Chanler proved himself "very laborious in ministry," revitalizing Regular Baptist churches across South Carolina.[23] He assisted the Baptists at the Welsh Neck settlement on the Pee Dee River, ordaining Philip James (1701–1753) as their pastor in 1743.[24] Chanler also preached among the Baptists of Euhaw, Edisto, and

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[18] Kegley and Little, "Records of the Ashley River Baptist Church," 11.

[19] George Whitefield, *Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 440.

[20] Whitefield, *Journals*, 440–41.

[21] Isaac Chanler, *New Converts Exhorted to Cleave to the Lord. A Sermon on Acts XI. 23. Preach'd July 30, 1740 at a Wednesday Evening-lecture, in Charlestown, Set Up at the Motion, and the Desire of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield; With a Brief Introduction Relating to the Character of that Excellent Man . . . With Preface by the Reverend Mr. Cooper of Boston, N.E.* (Boston: D. Fowle for S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740).

[22] See Thomas L. Little, *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1670–1760* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 154–57.

[23] Morgan Edwards, *Materials Toward a History of the Baptists*, ed. Eve B. Weeks and Mary Bundurant Warren. (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 2:125.

[24] Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 63. Chanler's sermon on this occasion was subsequently published: Isaac Chanler, *The Qualifications of a Gospel Minister for and Duty in studying rightly to divide the Word of Truth: And the Duty of those who do partake of the Benefit of his Labours*

Hilton Head when they were without a minister, and also supplied the empty pulpit in Charleston until his untimely death in 1749.[25] As Little has observed, Chanler is another significant Regular Baptist figure who led the way in "expanding the reach of evangelical religion in the South Caolina lowcountry in the 1740s."[26]

Regular Baptist revivalism in the South reached its apex in Oliver Hart, who arrived in Charleston from Philadelphia on December 2, 1749, the day Chanler was buried.[27] Through his leadership in the Charleston Baptist Church, and his broader efforts at galvanizing Regular and Separate Baptists of the South for revival, Hart stands as a remarkable example of vibrant, evangelical Christianity during the mid-eighteenth century. After his death, younger men touched by his ministry like Edmund Botsford (1745-1819)[28] and Evan Pugh (1732–1802)[29] labored with the same evangelical energy in the region, extending the Regular Baptist revival legacy into the nineteenth century.

Regular Baptist Revivalism and American Religion

Until recently, Regular Baptist revivalism has been largely overlooked in American Religious studies. Historians have not only failed to recognize the revivalism of Regular Baptists in the colonial South, but as Thomas J. Little has pointed not, they have neglected the South's role in the Great Awakening altogether.[30] For many years,

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Towards Him, Fully, Plainly, and Impartially Represented in Two Sermons on 2 Tim, 2:15. Preached at the Ordination of the Reverend Philip James, at the Welsh Tract, on Pee Dee River in South Carolina, April 4, 1743 (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Greene, 1743).

[25] See Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 20, 38.

[26] Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, 174.

[27] Oliver Hart, *A Copy of the Original Diary of the Rev. Oliver Hart*, mimeographed copy, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY (hereafter *Original Diary*).

[28] Botsford was an English immigrant converted under Hart. He was later ordained by Hart and became a significant Baptist leader in the South. For Botsford, see Charles D. Mallary, *The Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004).

[29] Pugh converted to the Baptist way from Quakerism as a young man. He studied under Hart, was ordained in 1763 to pastor the Peedee Baptist Church, and served in ministry for forty years.

[30] Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, i–xv.

scholars assumed that, compared to New England and the middle colonies, the southern colonies were generally resistant to the rise of evangelical Christianity until late in the movement. Samuel S. Hill has written that, "if one wanted to pinpoint the salient beginning [of southern Christian evangelicalism], he would turn to the 1750s or perhaps the years just after 1800."[31] Similarly, Christine Leigh Heyrman wrote in her influential work *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of Bible Belt Christianity* (1998), "Evangelicalism came late to the American South, as an exotic import rather than an indigenous development."[32] Little rightly identifies the source of this misperception as the almost exclusive academic focus on religion in colonial Virginia, rather than in the lower colonies of South Carolina and Georgia.[33] Some excellent studies on religion in Virginia include Wesley M. Gewehr's classic work *The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740–1790* (1930),[34] Rhys Isaac's *The Transformation of Virginia* (1982),[35] and Philip N. Mulder's *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (2002).[36] Little has rightly observed that "much of the scholarship on religion in the colonial South has been shaped by an assumption that Virginia was representative of the region."[37] Yet this assumption fails to take into account the vastly different religious contexts of pluralistic South Carolina and establishment Virginia during the colonial period.

Scholars are increasingly acknowledging the early and powerful influences of

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[31] Samuel S. Hill, "A Survey of Southern Religious History," in *Religion in the Southern States: A Historical Study*, ed. Samuel S. Hill (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), 383.

[32] Christine Leigh Heyrman, *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (New York: Alfred A. Knopff, 1997), 9.

[33] Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, xii–xiii.

[34] Welsey M. Gewehr, *The Great Awakening in Virginia, 1740–1790* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1930).

[35] Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

[36] Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

[37] Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, xii.

the Great Awakening in the colonial lower South. One example is Sylvia Frey and Betty Wood's *Come Shouting Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and the British Caribbean to 1830* (1998).[38] Thomas Kidd uncovered numerous examples of revival activity in this region in *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (2007). In 2013, Samuel C. Smith's *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* explored the presence of mysticism and revivalism among the colonial South Carolina Anglicans.[39] And Little has offered the most comprehensive study to date in his *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1670–1760* (2013). As these scholars have discovered the extent of the Great Awakening's influence in the colonial South, they have found among the revival's supporters many Regular Baptists. One goal of this dissertation is to build on their insights, taking an in-depth look at the revival spirituality of one of those Regular Baptists, Oliver Hart. Doing so will contribute to a greater understanding of the Regular Baptist movement, and more broadly, of the Great Awakening in the South.

Regular Baptist Revivalism and Baptist Identity

This dissertation also addresses a popular thesis pertaining to Regular Baptists and Southern Baptist identity. Many scholars incorrectly understand Southern Baptists to derive from the confluence of two distinct spiritual streams: Regular Baptists, assumed to be revival-leery, insular, and Calvinistic; and Separate Baptists, portrayed as revivalistic, evangelistic, and quasi-Arminian. On this reading, the Charleston tradition and Sandy Creek tradition, as Walter B. Shurden named the groups, respectively, united to become

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[38] Sylvia R. Frey and Betty Wood, *Come Shouting Zion: African American Protestantism in the American South and the British Caribbean to 1830* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998).

[39] Samuel C. Smith, *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013).

the people called Southern Baptists. The historians chiefly responsible for this narrative are William L. Lumpkin and Shurden.

William L. Lumpkin

In *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1758* (1961),[40] Lumpkin[41] argued that Separate Baptists were responsible for bringing revival spirituality to the Baptists of the South:

> No group heralded religious revival so enthusiastically or so extensively in the period of 1755–1775 and none benefitted by it so generously as the Baptists. Borne upon a tide of exciting religious conquest and following a definite plan of regional expansion, they not only ministered to multitudes but also laid sure foundations for future denominational strength in the three decades after the middle of the eighteenth century. It must be noted, however, that the Baptist awakening was not in any primary sense the concern or achievement of the 'regular' Baptist groups already resident in the South prior to 1755. It was, rather, the work of a handful of rugged, single-minded, enthusiastic colonists from Connecticut who, for their 'irregularity,' were known as 'Separate' Baptists. These settled at Sandy Creek in central North Carolina in 1755 and immediately introduced the phenomenon of revival to the southern frontier.[42]

Lumpkin insisted that it was Separate Baptists "Shubal Stearns and Daniel Marshall, who brought revival to the South and laid the foundations for the Baptist denomination in that region."[43] The Separate Baptists were "revivers of the Great Awakening in the South."[44] In contrast, Lumpkin presented Regular Baptists as distant and suspicious toward revival spirituality, chiefly concerned with "dignity and orderliness in worship; they were not used to the noisy and emotional preaching of the

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[40] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754-1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961).

[41] William L. Lumpkin (1916–1997) was longtime pastor of Freemason Street Church in Norfolk, Virginia. He also taught religion at the University of Richmond and served as Associate Professor of Church History at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville, Kentucky.

[42] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, v–vi.

[43] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 20–21.

[44] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 147.

Separates."[45] He opined that the Regular Baptists "could never have won the South. They lacked the enthusiasm, the vision, and the leadership required for so formidable an undertaking."[46] On the merging of the Regulars and Separates, Lumpkin mused,

> It was in the providence of God that the Separates went their own way until after the Revolution, for they were thus able to give full attention to the evangelistic task without the organizational and doctrinal encumbrances. This delay also gave the Regular Baptists incentive and time for examining their own inner life, for the Separates offered the Regulars a larger challenge as competitors than they might have offered as members of the same family. The Awakening was permitted to run its full course in the hands of the Separates until it was interrupted by the Revolution.[47]

Lumpkin credited the revivalism of the Separate Baptists as the primary shaping influence of the people today called Southern Baptists. "It is not too much to say that the Separate Baptists are historically and hereditarily the chief component of Baptist life in the South," he wrote.[48]

Walter B. Shurden

Shurden[49] popularized Lumpkin's interpretation in "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is it Cracking?" (1981), originally delivered in the Carver-Barnes Lectures at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary.[50] In this address, Shurden proposed that Southern Baptists were formed by the convergence of Regular and Separate Baptists, or

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[45] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 29.

[46] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 157.

[47] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 70–71.

[48] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 154.

[49] Shurden is a church historian with expertise in denominational identity, who taught at McMaster Divinity College, Carson-Newman College, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, and Mercer University. He is the founding executive director for the Center of Baptist Studies at Mercer University in Macon, Georgia. Shurden is "arguably the key public intellectual of the moderate movement [among Southern Baptists] until the early twenty-first century" (Nathan A. Finn, "Now Let Us Praise Famous Moderates: A Review Essay of Three Recent Festschriften," *Journal of Baptist Studies* 4 [June 2010]: 50–52).

[50] Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?" *Baptist History and Heritage* 16, no. 2 (April 1981): 2–11.

the "Charleston" and "Sandy Creek" traditions. Shurden classified the Charleston tradition as chiefly concerned with "order:"[51] the theological order in the Charleston confession,[52] ecclesiological order as manifested in the *Summary of Church Discipline*,[53] as well as liturgical order and ministerial order. "In brief," Shurden said, "the Charleston Tradition consisted of pietistic Puritanism, Calvinistic confessionalism, and a commitment to an educated ministry. Permit me a generalization, and I would dub these folk 'semi-presbyterians.'"[54] On the other hand, Shurden associated the Sandy Creek tradition with the "ardor" of revival piety.[55] "Stearns and company were a highly emotional, deeply pietistic kind of people," Shurden wrote.[56] "Unlike the city slickers from Charleston, they did not praise God by praising God; they praised God by reaching women and men. They had a mourner's bench and they expected public groaning, not polite amen's."[57] He branded Sandy Creek with "revivalistic experientialism, anti-confessionalism, exaggerated localism, and a commitment to personal evangelism. Permit me another generalization, and I would dub these people, 'semi-pentecostals.'"[58] Shurden's synopsis reinforced the erroneous perception of sharp discontinuity between

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[51] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 3. Shurden later credited Claude L. Howe, his major church history professor at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, for introducing him to the designations of "order" and "ardor" in the discussion of the Charleston and Sandy Creek Traditions. Walter B. Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey: Some Transitions in Baptist Life* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 204n5.

[52] The Charleston Confession, adopted by the Charleston Association in 1755, was a slightly adapted version of the Philadelphia Confession, which was taken from the Second London Confession (1689). A reprint of the Charleston Confession is found in H. Rondel Rumburg, *Some Southern Documents of the People Called Baptists* (Birmingham, AL: Society for Biblical and Southern Studies, 1995).

[53] The *Summary*, co-written by Oliver Hart and Francis Pelot (1720–1774), was adopted by the Charleston Association in 1767. It is found in James Leo Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline: A Historical Introduction to the Practices of Baptist Churches, with Particular Attention to the Summary of Church Discipline Adopted in 1773 by the Charleston Association* (Paris, AR: Baptist Standard Bearer, 2004).

[54] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 3.

[55] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 4.

[56] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 5.

[57] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 6.

[58] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 6.

the spirituality of the Regular and Separate Baptists.

The context of Shurden's lecture was significant.[59] As he presented his paradigm, two competing visions of Baptist identity vied for control of the Southern Baptist Convention. A "conservative" or "fundamentalist" group affirmed the inerrancy of Scripture and demanded fidelity to the denomination's confessional documents. A "moderate" or "liberal" group emphasized the soul-freedom of the individual and championed the coexistence of theological diversity in Baptist life.[60] Shurden's agenda in "The Southern Baptist Synthesis" was plain: "We have always been a diverse people. That statement is not made simply as a plea for tolerance, though that in itself would justify it. It is made as a historical fact."[61] For Shurden, establishing discontinuity between Regular and Separate Baptist traditions was essential for his claim: "it is the togetherness, the diversity, the synthesis, which we must receive and confess and forgive. Above all, we must *know* it. Or there will be no hope for the denomination's future."[62]

Reception of Lumpkin-Shurden Thesis

Shurden's denominational vision did not live on in the Southern Baptist Convention, but his historical paradigm for Baptist identity did. In the nearly thirty-five years following the publication of "The Southern Baptist Synthesis," the discrete

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[59] Shurden later referred to this address as a "precture," or "a dab of lecturing and a dab of preaching." He adds, "I have done a good bit of precturing in my life. It is one of my favorite things to do. A 'precture' both frees one from the formality of an academic article while holding one accountable for what is said." Shurden, *Not an Easy Journey*, iv.

[60] This denominational struggle, which lasted from roughly 1979–2000, is termed "the Conservative Resurgence," or the "Fundamentalist Takeover," by the two competing parties involved. It has been chronicled, from the perspective of the denomination's leading seminary, in Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009). Other accounts include Paige Patterson, *Anatomy of a Reformation* (Fort Worth, TX: Seminary Hill Press, 2004), from a conservative perspective, and Walter B. Shurden and Randy Shepley, eds., *Going for the Jugular: A Documentary History of the SBC Holy War* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1996), from a moderate perspective.

[61] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 11.

[62] Shurden, "Southern Baptist Synthesis," 11. Emphasis original.

categories of Charleston order and Sandy Creek ardor have been widely adopted at all levels of Southern Baptist life. Baptist historian H. Leon McBeth,[63] author of the popular textbook, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (1987), passed on the Shurden Synthesis and commended the work of both Lumpkin and Shurden.[64] Bill Leonard did the same in *Baptist Ways* (2003), asserting that "Other 'Regular' Baptists affirmed Calvinism but feared that revival enthusiasm undermined 'decency and order' while promoting unorthodox Arminianism."[65] Other Baptist historians who have utilized the thesis include Jesse Fletcher,[66]Albert Wardin,[67] and Wayne Flynt.[68]

Denominational leaders have often employed the Lumpkin-Shurden thesis in public discourse about Southern Baptist identity. In a 2009 article, college president Emir Caner called Lumpkin's work "the premier text if one wants to understand Separate Baptist thought and practice within the eighteenth century."[69] Caner wrote that the Sandy Creek movement "surged forward with gumption and zeal while the more Calvinistic wing of Baptists, the Regular Baptists, lagged behind, fettered by philosophical

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[63] H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987). McBeth (1931–2013) was long-time Baptist history professor at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas, who identified with the moderate position during the controversy of the Southern Baptist Convention in the late twentieth century. For McBeth, see Karen O'Dell Bullock, "Harry Leon McBeth (1931–Present)," *Baptist History and Heritage* 48, no. 2 (Spring 2013): 10–24.

[64] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 227–34. McBeth praised Lumpkin's work as "the best study of the movement," and lauded Shurden's "keen insight."

[65] Bill J. Leonard, *Baptist Ways: A History* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2003), 120, 122. See also Bill J. Leonard, "Southern Baptist Confessions: Dogmatic Ambiguity," in *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993), 164.

[66] Jesse C. Fletcher, *The Southern Baptist Convention: A Sesquicentennial History* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 31–32.

[67] Albert W. Wardin, *Tennessee Baptists: A Comprehensive History, 1779–1999* (Brentwood, TN: Executive Board of the Tennessee Baptist Convention, 1999), 34.

[68] Wayne Flynt, *Alabama Baptists: Southern Baptists in the Heart of Dixie* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998), 26n60.

[69] Emir Caner, "The Forgotten Hour of How the South Was Won: The Legacy of Daniel Marshall, Pioneer Georgia Baptist," *The Christian Index*, September 24, 2009, accessed December 10, 2014, http://www.christianindex.org/5861.article print. Caner (1970–) was president of Truett-McConnell College in Cleveland, Georgia, at the time.

presuppositions and doctrinal formalism."[70] With Lumpkin, Caner explicitly identified Sandy Creek Baptists with revival spirituality: "Like their influential counterpart and mentor George Whitefield, the formalism and rigidity of a Reformed systematic theology was not primary in their preaching."[71]

University president David S. Dockery has contributed to numerous discussions pertaining to Southern Baptist identity.[72] He has also referenced the categories of Lumpkin and Shurden on several occasions, as in this 2008 article:

> Southern Baptists trace their roots to two groups of Baptists in the South. One is the so-called Charleston Tradition, characterized by confessional theology, strong support for education, quasi-liturgical worship, and order. The other is the Sandy Creek tradition with somewhat different emphases and practices . . . characterized by revivalism, suspicion of educated ministry, and Spirit-led worship.[73]

Likewise, seminary president Paige Patterson[74] has frequently promoted the Lumpkin-Shurden thesis. Patterson delivered the sermon at the two-hundred-fiftieth anniversary of the Sandy Creek Baptist Church, where *Baptist News* reported him to describe the "Southern Baptist river as flowing from two tributaries, one having its beginning in Charleston, South Carolina, the more Reformed tradition of Baptist life, and

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[70] Caner, "The Forgotten Hour."

[71] Caner, "The Forgotten Hour." For a response to Caner's claims, particularly as they relate to Reformed doctrine, see Paul Brewster, "Who Forgot What? A Reply to Emir Caner," *The Journal of Baptist Studies* 4, no. 1 (2010): 30–45.

[72] David S. Dockery (1952 –) is president of Trinity International University in Chicago, Illinois. His works in this area include David S. Dockery and Timothy George, eds., *Baptist Theologians* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1990); David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists and American Evangelicals: The Conversation Continues* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1993); David S. Dockery, "Southern Baptists and Calvinism: A Historical Look," in *Calvinism: A Southern Baptist Dialogue*, ed. E. Ray Clendenen and Brad J. Waggoner (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 29–46; David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Consensus and Renewal: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Proposal* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2008); David S. Dockery, *Southern Baptist Identity: An Evangelical Denomination Faces the Future* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2009); and David S. Dockery, ed., *Southern Baptists, Evangelicals, and the Future of Denominationalism* (Nashville: B&H Publishing, 2012).

[73] Dockery, "Southern Baptists and Calvinism," 35. Cf. Dockery, *Consensus and Renewal*, 137.

[74] L. Paige Patterson (1942–) is the president of Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas.

the other at Sandy Creek."[75] Patterson continued, "I am a Sandy Creeker. If I could manage to have honorary church membership in any church in the Southern Baptist Convention, it would be Sandy Creek . . . we Sandy Creekers still believe we are in the era of evangelism, missions and great revival."[76]

The Lumpkin-Shurden thesis has made its way down to the popular level among Southern Baptists, as well. In a 2006 Convention controversy over personal prayer languages, Southern Baptist pastor Dwight McKissick appealed to Shurden's description of the Sandy Creek tradition to support the practice.[77] McKissick was so vocal about the Sandy Creek connection that the *Florida Baptist Witness* published an interview with Shurden and other historians to mediate the dispute. Even local churches now interpret their spirituality based on the Lumpkin-Shurden thesis, as First Baptist Church of Waynesboro, Georgia, does on its website.[78]

The Lumpkin-Shurden Synthesis:
Is it Cracking?

The Lumpkin-Shurden interpretation of Baptist identity has not gone unchallenged. Some scholars have argued for greater soteriological continuity between Regular and Separate Baptists. Lumpkin's treatment especially leaves the impression that the Calvinism of the Regular Baptists led to ineffective evangelism, while an almost

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[75] Gregory Tomlin, "Sandy Creek: Tributary of Baptist Life Celebrates 250 Years," *Baptist Press News*, November 7, 2005, accessed December 10, 2014, http://bpnews.net/22021.

[76] Tomlin, "Sandy Creek."

[77] James A. Smith, "Prayer Language Debate: Whose History Is Correct?," *Baptist Press News*, February 26, 2007, accessed December 10, 2014, http://www.baptistpress.com/25048/prayer-language-debate-whose-history-is-correct.

[78] The "Our History" page on the site reads, "FBC Waynesboro is a church that was born out of the Charleston Tradition and maintained that tradition tenaciously for a long time. The church has known intermittent seasons of Sandy Creek saturation and has become the kind of church in which these streams have merged mightily, a church where the mind can be challenged and the heart can be 'strangely warmed,' where the holiness of God is honored and the love of God is celebrated, a church where genuine emotional expression in worship is encouraged in the context of biblically directed decorum." ("Our History," *First Baptist Church, Waynesboro, Georgia*, accessed December 10, 2014, http://fbcwaynesboro.org/about/history/.)

Arminian doctrine among the Separates produced an emphasis on individual conversion and a vigorous mission piety.[79] Several historians have objected to this oversimplification. Tom J. Nettles,[80] Gregory A. Wills,[81] and Thomas K. Ascol[82] have all argued that both groups held to a basically Calvinistic theological framework, and both called for individual conversions.

Others have argued that the Regular Baptists of Charleston were more influenced by revival spirituality than the Lumpkin-Shurden thesis suggests. John F. Loftis identified Shurden's "lack of attention to development" as a major weakness of his thesis, insisting that "in order to understand how these traditions formed an identity for the Southern Baptist Convention, an analysis of how these traditions evolved was necessary."[83] Loftis offered a more nuanced picture of Regular Baptist revivalism, suggesting that "theologically, Regulars held their Calvinistic heritage in tension with the

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[79] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 60–63. This comes out strongly in Caner, "The Forgotten Hour."

[80] Tom J. Nettles, "Shubal Stearns and the Separate Baptist Tradition," *Founders Journal* 66 (Fall 2006): 26–31. Cf. Tom J. Nettles, *By His Grace and for His Glory: A Historical, Theological, and Practical Study of the Doctrines of Grace in Baptist Life* (Cape Coral, FL: Founders Press, 2006), xxxix–xl.

[81] Wills states, "The Sandy Creek and Charleston traditions were not very different. They had different names because they had different origins . . . Separates and Regulars united because they recognized that they believed the same New Testament doctrines, taught the same New Testament standards of behavior, and established the same New Testament order in their churches." Their differences, he said, mostly related to "style of preaching and worship." Smith, "Prayer Language Debate." Cf. Gregory A. Wills, "Whosoever Will: A Review Essay," *The Journal for Baptist Theology & Ministry* 7 (Spring 2010): 10–11.

[82] Ascol is primarily concerned with the ways in which the Lumpkin-Shurden thesis has shaped contemporary Southern Baptist life. He writes, "The so-called 'Sandy Creek tradition' has been less than accurately represented by some who would like to suggest that the Separate Baptists who came from that church and association were opposed to Calvinism. Often this is done by speaking of the Sandy Creek tradition as being committed to evangelism and the Charleston tradition as being committed to Calvinism, and these two (or more) traditions combining to form the Southern Baptist Convention. Such historiography misrepresents the Sandy Creek tradition and is suspect at best." Tom Ascol, "Happy Birthday Sandy Creek," *Tom Ascol*, November 8, 2005, http://tomascol.com/happy-birthday-sandy-creek/. Ascol devoted the Fall 2006 issue of the *Founders Journal*, of which he is editor, to this issue. See Tom Ascol, "Sandy Creek Revisited," *Founders Journal* 66 (Fall 2006): 1; and Gene M. Bridges, "The Raw Calvinism of the North Carolina Separates of the Sandy Creek Tradition," *Founders Journal* 66 (Fall 2006): 2–25.

[83] John Franklin Loftis, "Factors in Southern Baptist Identity as Reflected by Ministerial Role Models, 1750–1925" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1987), xxi.

developing revivalistic theology epitomized in Whitfield."[84] This dissertation contends that, while Loftis was on the right track, he did not go far enough in his critique. For the Regular Baptists of South Carolina, there was no tension between their Calvinistic theological heritage and the revivalistic theology of the Great Awakening. As the examples of Screven, Chanler, and Hart demonstrate, many Regular Baptists possessed a rich, revival spirituality before the Separate Baptists arrived in the South. The Lumpkin-Shurden thesis cannot account for this, and should be revised or abandoned.

Thesis

The thesis of this dissertation is that Regular Baptist Oliver Hart shared the revival spirituality of the Great Awakening, and that revival played a greater role in Regular Baptist identity than is often suggested.

State of the Question

The South Carolina Baptist historian Loulie Latimer Owens has called Oliver Hart "a man history seems determined to forget."[85] Despite numerous, enduring contributions to Baptist life, Hart has been overshadowed by contemporaries like Isaac Backus (1724–1806)[86] and Richard Furman (1755–1825).[87] Though Hart receives mention in most textbooks of American Baptist history, no substantial monograph has been devoted to his life. In the latter half of the twentieth century, Owens published several pieces related to Hart, beginning with a biographical entry in the *Encyclopedia of*

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[84] Loftis, "Factors in Southern Baptist Identity," 257.

[85] Loulie Latimer Owens, "South Carolina Baptists and the American Revolution," *JSCBHS* 1 (November 1975): 31–45.

[86] See Alvah Hovey, *The Life and Times of Rev. Isaac Backus* (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1859); and William J. McGlothlin, *Isaac Backus and the American Pietistic Tradition* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1967). Backus was a Baptist pastor, champion of religious liberty, and Baptist historian in the latter eighteenth century.

[87] See James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001). Furman was the leading Baptist minister of the South after Hart's departure from Charleston in 1780, succeeding Hart as pastor of the Charleston Baptist Church.

Southern Baptists (1958).[88] Her most important work on Hart was the forty-one-page *Oliver Hart, 1723–1795: A Biography* (1966).[89] Owens intended her treatment of Hart as a popular introduction, but her research is thorough, and she includes a comprehensive bibliography for further scholarly inquiry. In 1975, Owens also contributed three articles related to Hart's participation in the American Revolution.[90]

In 1982, Baptist historian Robert A. Baker wrote two chapters on Hart in *Adventure in Faith: The First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina*.[91] Baker utilized a number of Hart's original documents in his research. Taken together, Baker's and Owens's work provide the most comprehensive portrait of Hart's life available today. In 1984, Thomas R. McKibbens included Hart in an article about doctrinal preaching among eighteenth century Baptist preachers.[92] As previously mentioned, John Franklin Loftis touched on Hart, along with several other Baptist figures, in his dissertation reexamining the Shurden synthesis in 1987.[93]

In 1995, Hywel Davies highlighted Hart's role as a friend to Particular Baptist Samuel Jones, the primary subject of Davies's book.[94] Davies's work is valuable in

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[88] Loulie Latimer Owens, "Hart, Oliver," in *Encyclopedia of Southern Baptists* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1958), 601.

[89] Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart, 1723–1795: A Biography* (Greenville, SC: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966).

[90] Loulie Latimer Owens, "Oliver Hart and the American Revolution," *JSCBHS* 1 (November 1975): 2–17; J. Glenwood Clayton and Loulie Latimer Owens, eds., "Oliver Hart's Diary of the Journey to the Backcountry," *JSCBHS* 1 (November 1975): 18–30; and Owens, "South Carolina Baptists and the American Revolution."

[91] Robert Andrew Baker and Paul J. Craven, *Adventure in Faith: The First 300 Years of First Baptist Church, Charleston, South Carolina* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1982). An updated and expanded edition of this work was released in 2007, as Robert A. Baker, Paul J. Craven, and Marshall A. Blalock *History of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, 1682–2007* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2007).

[92] Thomas R. McKibbens, "Disseminating Biblical Doctrine through Preaching," *Baptist History and Heritage* 19. no. 3 (Fall 1984): 42–52.

[93] Loftis, "Factors in Southern Baptist Identity."

[94] Hywel Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren: Rev. Samuel Jones (1735–1814) and His Friends: Baptists in Wales, Pennsylvania, and Beyond* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 1995).

showing the important role of friendship and letter-writing in Hart's spirituality. Hart received a similar treatment as a supporting cast member in James A. Rogers's 2001 biography of Richard Furman.[95] In 2005, another McKibbens article drew attention to Hart's conciliatory presence between Regular and Separate Baptists.[96] Also in 2005, Tom J. Nettles devoted one chapter to Hart in his three-volume work, *The Baptists: Key People in Shaping a Baptist Identity*.[97] Nettles's study focused on Hart's theological commitments, including analyses of several of Hart's published sermons. Finally, Kidd and Little have drawn attention to Hart's participation in the Great Awakening, Kidd with *The Great Awakening* (2007) and in *Baptists in America: A History* (2015); Little in *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism* (2013).[98]

While all these resources are helpful for understanding Hart, none supply the full treatment warranted by this major Baptist figure. Furthermore, no one has yet engaged the full breadth of Hart's diaries, letters, sermon manuscripts, and other handwritten materials scattered throughout various historical archives. A major goal of this study is to move toward filling this research gap by providing a detailed introduction to Hart's life and spirituality.

Methodology

The primary methodology for this dissertation is an inductive analysis of primary source documents from Oliver Hart. Hart was a devoted diarist and letter-writer throughout his ministry. His earliest diary, recording his experience in the 1754

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[95] Rogers, *Richard Furman*.

[96] Thomas R. McKibbens, "Over Troubled Waters: Baptist Preachers Who Were Bridge Builders," *Baptist History and Heritage* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 58–63.

[97] Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity: Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005). Nettles contributed a similar version in Terry Wolever, ed., *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2013).

[98] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 264–66; Thomas S. Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); Little, *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism*.

Charleston Baptist revival, is kept at the James B. Duke Memorial Library at Furman University in Greenville, South Carolina.[99] This is the most important source for understanding Hart's participation in the Great Awakening. The collection of Hart's papers at Furman also houses an extensive correspondence with Richard Furman from the years 1777–1794.The remainder of Hart's diaries, covering the years 1769–1770, 1775, 1779–1782, and 1788, are all part of the Oliver Hart Papers at the South Caroliniana Library at the University of South Carolina in Columbia. The greatest value of these diaries lies in what they reveal about the patterns and priorities of Hart's personal spirituality and pastoral ministry. Further perspective on Hart's preaching ministry comes from ten of Hart's unpublished sermon manuscripts, as well as a meticulous record of sermons preached in the years 1773–1794. This same collection contains extensive correspondence between Hart and a variety of friends and family.

Other primary source material useful in this study includes five published sermons,[100] a circular letter on "Christ's Mediatorial Office,"[101] the published minutes of the Charleston Baptist Association[102] and the Philadelphia Baptist Association,[103] as well

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[99] Hart, diary, Hart MSS, Furman.

[100] Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and His Death Deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1777). Oliver Hart, *Dancing Exploded: A Sermon Shewing the Unlawfulness, Sinfulness, and Bad Consequences of Balls, Assemblies, and Dances in General* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1778). Oliver Hart, *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, Shewing The Business of Officers and Private Members in the Church of Christ, and How Their Work Should Be Performed; with Some Motives to Excite Professors Ardently to Engage in It.* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785).Oliver Hart, *A Gospel Church Portrayed, and Her Orderly Service Pointed Out – A Sermon, Delivered in the City of Philadelphia at the Opening of the Baptist Association, October 4, 1791* (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791). Oliver Hart, *America's Remembrancer* (Philadelphia: Dobson, 1791).

[101] Oliver Hart, "Circular Letter," in A. D. Gilette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, 1707–1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 181–91.

[102] Charleston Association, *Minutes of the Charlestown Association, February 7, 1774* (Charleston, 1774). Charleston Association, *Minutes of the Charleston Association, February 6, 1775* (Charleston, 1775). Charleston Association, *Minutes of the Charleston Association, February 3, 1777* (Charleston, 1777). Charleston Association, *Minutes of the Charleston Association, February 2, 1778* (Charleston, 1778). Charleston Association, *Minutes of the Charleston Association, October 19, 1778* (Charleston, 1778).

[103] A. D. Gilette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851).

as the *Summary of Church Discipline*.[104] Finally, a number of published works about Hart's friends, including James Manning (1738-1791),[105] Samuel Jones (1735–1814),[106] Edmund Botsford,[107] Samuel Stillman (1737-1807),[108] Hezekiah Smith (1737–1805),[109] and Richard Furman,[110] contain copies of correspondence to or from Hart.

Background to the Study

I first encountered Oliver Hart in 2009, in Tom Nettles's History of the Baptists class at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. The achievements of this trailblazing pastor-theologian astonished me. Hart organized the South's first Baptist association of churches, established the first Baptist minister's education fund in America, and helped produce the Charleston Confession and *Summary of Church Discipline*. Here was a true Baptist giant, who seemed to be equal parts tireless activist, studied theologian, and godly pastor. Out of the dozens of dynamic Baptists I met in that course, Hart captured my imagination more than any other. Hart intrigued me, partly, because I was a new Southern Baptist, and eager to find heroes in my chosen tradition. As I continued studying Baptist history, I realized how little attention had been paid to

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[104] Garrett, *Baptist Church Discipline*.

[105] James Manning was a Baptist pastor and first President of Rhode Island College (now Brown University). See Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Early History of Brown University: Including the Life, Times, and Correspondence of President Manning. 1756-1791* (Providence, RI: Snow & Farnham, 1897); and William H. Brackney, "James Manning (1738–1791)," in *A Noble Company*, 3:511–38.

[106] Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren*. Jones was a leading Baptist pastor in the Philadelphia Association in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries.

[107] Charles D. Mallary, *The Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004).

[108] Samuel Stillman, *Select Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects, by the Late Samuel Stillman, D.D., Comprising Several Sermons Never Before Published to Which Is Prefixed A Biographical Sketch of the Author's Life* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1808). Stillman was converted under Hart's ministry as a teenager, was later ordained by Hart, and served the First Baptist Church of Boston, Massachusetts, from 1765–1807.

[109] John David Broome, *The Life, Ministry, and Journals of Hezekiah Smith: Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Haverhill, Massachusetts, 1765 to 1805 and Chaplain in the American Revolution, 1775 to 1780* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004).

[110] Rogers, *Richard Furman*.

the man who seemed to stand at the headwaters of Baptist life in the South. In 2011, I sat down with Dr. Michael Haykin to inquire about the Biblical Spirituality Ph.D program. I told him I was interested in researching a neglected Baptist pastor-theologian, and he mentioned Hart. My course was set: here was a man whose story needed to be told.

In the four years since this decision, I have spent many hours reading and re-reading Hart's works. As I searched for an integrating theme in his spirituality, I was amazed at the prevalence of revival. The longer I looked, the more I found Hart's piety to pulsate with the life of the Great Awakening. This was a particularly satisfying discovery, because I have always been supremely attracted to the warm and lively Christianity of Zinzendorf, Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys. Like Martyn Lloyd-Jones, I consider myself "an eighteenth century man." Soon, my thesis came into view: Hart, the stalwart Regular Baptist of the South, wholeheartedly embraced the revival of the Great Awakening in a compelling spirituality of order and ardor.

CHAPTER 2

"AT THAT TIME, THE POWER OF RELIGION WAS GREATLY DISPLAYED": A LIFE SHAPED BY REVIVAL

Richard Furman stood in the pulpit of the Charleston Baptist Church on February 7, 1796, to deliver a sermon in honor of Oliver Hart, who had died just a month before. The legacy Hart had left among Baptists of the South was unsurpassed. From 1750–1780, Hart had served the Charleston Baptists, establishing that congregation as the "Mother Church" of Southern Baptists. He was the chief architect of the Charleston Baptist Association, the first Baptist Association of the South. He had initiated a fund for the education of the Baptist ministers of the South, the first cooperative effort to fund theological education among Baptists in America. He had also personally mentored such notable leaders as Samuel Stillman, Edmund Botsford, and Furman himself, shaping future generations of Baptists in the process. As Furman told the story of Hart's life and ministry, he drew attention to the formative influence of George Whitefield and the revival preachers of the Great Awakening:

> That his attention to religion, and conversion to God, were at an early period, is very certain . . . at that time, the power of religion was greatly displayed in various parts of this continent, under the ministry of that eminent servant of Christ, Rev. George Whitefield, of the Episcopal Church; of Rev. Messrs. The Tennents, Edwards, and their associates, of the Presbyterian and Congregational churches; and of the Rev. Abel Morgan, and others, of the Baptist Church. Several of these, Mr. Hart, at this time, used to hear; and has since professed to have received much benefit from their preaching, particularly from Mr. Whitefield's.[1]

As Furman indicated on that day, Hart's life and ministry cannot be understood

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[1] Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M.* (Charleston: J. McIver, 1796), 21.

apart from the revival of the Great Awakening. The Regular Baptist leader must be recognized as a key figure in the early evangelical movement in America, which Thomas Kidd has identified with "persistent desires for revival, widespread individual conversions, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."[2] Hart's life can be easily organized into three distinct phases. In his earliest years, he was shaped by revival in Warminster, Pennsylvania (1723–1749); he spent his most productive years promoting revival in Charleston, South Carolina (1750–1780); finally, he ended his life laboring and longing for revival in Hopewell, New Jersey (1780–1795).

Shaped by Revival: Warminster, Pennsylvania (1723–1749)

Oliver Hart was born July 5, 1723 in Warminster Township, Pennsylvania. He would spend the first twenty-six years of his life there. During this period he was converted, baptized, married, and called to ministry. In these formative years, Hart was shaped by the piety of his own family, the Philadelphia Baptist Association, and especially the revivalism of the Great Awakening.

The Hart Family

Oliver Hart's grandfather, John Hart (1651–1714), was born in Whitney, Oxfordshire, England. He was a member of the Society of Friends, and a personal acquaintance of William Penn (1644–1718). In 1681, John Hart sailed for the New World as a charter member of Penn's experimental colony, "Pennsylvania." Hart settled near the Poquessing River, where he farmed, served in the local government, and, in 1683, married Susannah Rush (1656–1725). Hart also provided spiritual leadership in the community. He hosted meetings in his home, visited the poor and sick, preached, and

[2]Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), xix.

even published "An Essay on the Subject of Oaths" (1692).[3] Yet Hart's religious views began to change under the influence of George Keith (1638–1716), a Pennsylvania schoolteacher who set out to reform Quaker doctrine.[4] Among Keith's contentions with the Society of Friends were his insistence on a New Testament church structure and an emphasis on salvation through the objective work of the historical Christ. On the latter point, Whitefield would later voice the same evangelical concern after attending a Quaker meeting: "I heartily wish that he would talk of an outward as well as an inward Christ; for otherwise, we may make our own holiness, and not the righteousness of Jesus Christ the cause of our being accepted by God. From such doctrine may I always turn away."[5] Keith put his views in print, and the Society elected to disfellowship him in 1691. Keith departed for England in 1693 to become an Anglican missionary to Quakers.

To the dismay of the Friends, John Hart sided with Keith in the controversy. He even began preaching to other "Keithians" in a house church.[6] Over time, his views continued to develop. In 1697, Hart was convinced of Baptist principles, and "the ordinance of baptism was administered to him by one Thomas Ritter."[7] In 1702, the death of the pastor at nearby Pennepek Baptist Church prompted its members to invite Hart and his house church to join them. Hart was received into membership and appointed

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[3] Hart co-wrote this essay with another Quaker named Thomas Budd. Davis, writing in 1877, noted that "we have never seen a copy of this work, and do not know that one is in existence." W. W. H. Davis, *History of Bucks County, Pennsylvania, From the Discovery of the Delaware to the Present Time* (Doylestown, PA: Democrat Book and Job, 1876), 215.

[4] For Keith and the "Keithian Controversy," see Jon Butler, "Gospel Order Improved: The Keithian Schism and the Exercise of Quaker Ministerial Authority," *William & Mary Quarterly* 31, no. 3 (July 1974): 431–52; Jon Butler, "Into Pennsylvania's Spiritual Abyss: The Rise and Fall of the Later Keithians, 1693–1703," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 101, no. 2 (1977): 151–70; Jon Butler, "The Records of the First 'American' Denomination: The Keithians of Pennsylvania, 1694–1700," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 120, no. 1 (April 1996): 89–105.

[5] George Whitefield, *Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1978), 341.

[6] In a letter from England, Penn urged Hart to reconsider his decision. W. Davis, *History of the Hart Family of Warminster, Bucks County, Pennsylvania. To Which Is Added the Genealogy of the Family, from Its First Settlement in America.* (Doylestown, PA: W.W.H. Davis, 1867), 22.

[7] Davis, *Hart Family*, 23.

assistant minister, a position he held until his death twelve years later.[8] His last words were, "Now I know to a demonstration that Christ has saved me."[9]

Fewer details are known of Oliver Hart's father, also named John Hart (1684–1763). John the younger made his home in Warminster Township, where he married Eleanor Crispin (1687–1754) in 1708. Together, they welcomed ten children into the world, among whom Oliver was the fifth.[10] John Hart was considered "a man of wealth for the times" and held a number of civil service positions, including sheriff, justice of the peace, and coroner. [11] He also appears to have been a devoted Christian, following his father to the Keithians, and then to the Baptists of Pennepek.[12] In 1746, John Hart led his family, with 56 members of Pennepek, to form a new church near their home in the upper Southampton area. He would serve Southampton Baptist Church for many years as deacon and clerk.[13] Hart died in his home March 22, 1763, at age 80. The surviving correspondence between Oliver Hart and his father suggests an affectionate relationship in which spiritual matters were discussed with freedom and mutual interest.[14] From his family, Oliver Hart inherited a legacy of devout Christian piety.

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[8] Hart was apparently never ordained, "but was esteemed a good preacher, and considered a pious and exemplary Christian." Davis, *Hart Family*, 28.

[9] Davis, *Hart Family*, 28.

[10] Six of John Hart's children preceded him in death.

[11] Davis, *Hart Family*, 31.

[12] John Hart was baptized at the Pennepek Baptist Church on November 15, 1706.

[13] The group's petition to the rest of the church read, "We your brethren and sisters, in church fellowship and commission, living at and about Southampton, the county of Bucks, having always labored under great difficulties by reason of the remoteness of our habitations from you, and having signified our desire to be separated form you (not from any dislike or want of love to any of you) but that we may be constituted a church distinct from you." Davis, *Hart Family*, 32.

[14] See Oliver Hart to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL, and Oliver Hart to John Hart, March 10, 1757, Hart MSS, SCL. Hart also maintained a correspondence with brothers Joseph and Silas throughout his life.

The Philadelphia Association

Both the Pennepek and Southampton churches of Hart's youth belonged to the Philadelphia Baptist Association (PBA),[15] called by some "the most enlightened, evangelistic, aggressive, and best organized body of Baptists in America,"[16] and "an emporium of Baptist influence."[17] Five Baptist churches established the PBA in 1707: the Pennepek and Welsh Tract churches of Pennsylvania, and Middletown, Piscataway, and Cohansey churches in New Jersey. Theologically, Baptists were committed to the autonomy of local churches, so the association was not viewed as an authoritative body.[18] Yet the churches chose, "by their voluntary and free consent, to enter into an agreement and confederation," "for their mutual strength, counsel, and other valuable advantages."[19] The PBA provided theological accountability among the churches, served as an advisory counsel in difficult ecclesial matters, promoted cooperation among churches in missions and other benevolent causes, supplied a network for connecting churches and ministers, and offered a vital source of fellowship among the early Baptists.[20] The PBA and its churches instilled in Hart his lifelong commitment to Reformed theology, Baptist ecclesiology, and a church-shaped vision of Christian spirituality.

Theologically, the churches of the PBA were rooted in the Particular Baptist

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[15] For a stimulating study of the spirituality of early Pennsylvania Baptists, see Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

[16] William J. McGlothlin, *Baptist Beginnings in Education: A History of Furman University* (Nashville: Sunday School Board, Southern Baptist Convention, 1926), 23.

[17] David Benedict, *Fifty Years Among the Baptists* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 46–47.

[18] The PBA requested Benjamin Griffith (1688–1768) to address this issue in an "Essay on the Power and Duty of an Association," which it unanimously adopted at the 1749 annual meeting. Among the messengers who signed off on the essay at that meeting was Oliver Hart. A. D. Gilette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 63.

[19] From Griffith's "Essay on the Power and Duty of an Association," (1749), in Gillette, *Minutes*, 60–63.

[20] These functions of an association are expounded in H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 243–46.

tradition. In 1742, the PBA formally adopted the *Second London Confession* (1689) with the addition of two articles, "Of Singing Psalms, &c. (Chapter XXIII)," and "Of Laying on of Hands (Chapter XXXI)."[21] The *Philadelphia Confession* formed Hart's theological convictions from his earliest days. Furman remembered Hart as "a fixed Calvinist," remarking that "the doctrines of free, efficacious grace, were precious to him."[22] William Rogers also remembered Hart as "an uniform advocate, both in public and private, of the doctrines of free and sovereign grace."[23]

The two additions to the confession reflect another early influence on Hart: Welsh piety. During the eighteenth century, as McBeth has noted, "the Welsh provided not only members and ministers for the Baptist churches in this country but also shaped their spirit, doctrines, worship patterns, and organizational practices."[24] One gets a sense of the uniquely Welsh flavor of PBA piety from Morgan Edwards' *The Customs of Primitive Churches* (1768).[25] Edwards (1722–1795),[26] Welsh pastor of the Philadelphia

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[21] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 348–55. The latter addition refers to the laying on of hands, with prayer, on all newly baptized believers. Welsh Baptists believed this to be a biblical ordinance (Heb 5:12, 6:12; Acts 8:17-18, 19:6) for "a farther reception of the Holy Spirit of promise, or for the addition of the graces of the Spirit, and the influences thereof; to confirm, strengthen, and comfort them in Jesus Christ," and was a prerequisite to the Lord's Table. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions*, 351. Generally, those of an English Baptist heritage disregarded this rite. When Hart led the Charleston Association to adopt the Philadelphia Baptist Confession in 1755, they excluded the article on laying on of hands, following John Gill. Hart addressed the issue of imposing hands upon ministerial ordination in *A Gospel Church Portrayed, and Her Orderly Service Pointed Out – A Sermon, Delivered in the City of Philadelphia at the Opening of the Baptist Association, October 4, 1791* (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791), 21–22.

[22] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

[23] William Rogers, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Oliver Hart* (Philadelphia: Lang and Ustick, 1796), 22. Rogers (1751–1824) was pastor of the Philadelphia Baptist Church, chaplain in the Continental Army, and professor of English Literature at the University of Pennsylvania.

[24] McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage*, 211. Allen writes, "Welsh piety dominated the practices, if not the formal theology of most of the founding churches of the Philadelphia Association." Wm. Loyd Allen, "The Peculiar Welsh Piety of The Customs of Primitive Churches," in *Distinctively Baptist: A Festschrift in Honor of Walter B. Shurden* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2005), 187–88.

[25] Morgan Edwards, *The Customs of Primitive Churches, or A Set of Propositions Relative to the Name, Materials, Constitution, Power, Officers, Ordinances, Rites, Business, Worship, Discipline, Government, &c. of a Church; to Which Are Added Their Proofs from Scripture; and Historical Narratives of the Manner in Which Most of Them Have Been Reduced to Practice* (Philadelphia: Andrew Stuart, 1768).

[2626] The Welsh-born Edwards, gifted but eccentric, was recommended to the Philadelphia church by John Gill. His greatest legacy is probably as a Baptist historian. See Thomas R. McKibbens and

Baptist Church from 1761–1771, proposed this work as a model of church order and practice for all PBA churches.[27] Edwards considered fourteen rites to be practiced in local churches: baptism, Lord's Supper, imposition of hands, right hand of fellowship, love feast, foot washing, kiss of charity, anointing of the sick, collection for the saints, fasts, feasts, child dedication, funerals, and marriages.[28] Allen notes the strongly "affective" and "embodied" character of the list, reflective of the Welsh spiritual heritage.[29] How accurately the spirituality of *Customs of Primitive Churches* represents Hart's early church experience is uncertain. That Welsh piety seasoned the spirituality of Hart's youth seems likely, for his pastor at both Pennepek and Southampton churches was the Welsh-born Jenkin Jones (c.1686–1760).[30] For twenty-five years, Jones modeled a vigorous, evangelical ministry before Hart. In addition to local church work, Jones maintained a wide itinerant ministry, advocated for religious liberty in Pennsylvania, and served actively in the PBA.[31] Most significantly for Hart, Jones was also "a warm friend of revival."[32]

Kenneth L. Smith, *The Life and Works of Morgan Edwards* (New York: Arno Press, 1980).

[27] Edwards, *Customs of Primitive Churches*, 2. For a complex of reasons (some owing to Edwards's own fall from grace in the PBA), the PBA never endorsed this work. See Allen, "Peculiar Welsh Piety," 176–77.

[28] Edwards, *Customs of Primitive Churches*, 79–100.

[29] Allen, "Peculiar Welsh Piety," 178–92. Allen probably overplays Edwards's lack of emphasis on theological content, but the affective and physical character of the piety he represents is undeniable.

[30] Jones (c.1686–1760) served as joint-pastor of the Pennepek and Philadelphia Baptist churches from 1726–1746, while also maintaining an active itinerant ministry. See Thomas Ray, "Jenkin Jones (c.1686–1760)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America*, vol. 2 (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006). For Jones's participation in the revival, see chap. 6, below.

[31] On religious liberty, Jones opposed the state government's coercion of a local Roman Catholic congregation, as well as its laws prohibited dissenting ministers from performing marriages. In the Association, Jones was one of twenty-five signatories of the new Philadelphia Baptist Confession of Faith, and was elected to negotiate with Benjamin Franklin to print the work for distribution at the 1743 meeting. See Ray, "Jenkin Jones, " 192.

[32] Charles Hartshorn Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1920), 62. Jones's overwhelming support of the Great Awakening casts suspicion on Lumpkin's evaluation of the PBA's rejection of the revival. "The truth is that throughout America the Regular Baptists had experienced painfully slow growth prior to the Great Awakening, and

The Great Awakening

Oliver Hart came of age at the beginning of the Great Awakening, and nothing so profoundly shaped his spirituality as the experience of evangelical revival. By the 1730s, the American colonies had known revivals in sporadic, localized manifestations for decades.[33] But in 1734 in Northampton, Massachusetts, a new "concern about the great things of religion began," the intensity and scope of which had never before been experienced.[34] When Jonathan Edwards (1703–1754) published his account of the Northampton revival of 1734–35 in 1736, it proved to be the catalyst for a spiritual awakening that would transcend denominational lines and geographical borders, and transform the religious scene in America, Great Britain, and beyond.[35] By the late 1730s, the Great Awakening had come to Pennsylvania.

The Warminster County of Hart's youth was a hotbed of revival activity.[36] Just a few miles from Hart's home, William Tennent (1673–1746) was training up and turning out revival preachers at his Log College at Neshaminy Creek.[37] When Whitefield met Tennent, he was impressed with him as an "old gray-headed disciple and soldier of Jesus

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that when the Awakening came, the Regulars stood aloof. They were wary of its theology, its enthusiasm, and its connections with established churches. The twelve churches connected with the Philadelphia Association, the center of Regular Baptist strength in the colonies in 1740, were not greatly stirred by the Awakening." Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 155.

[33] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 1–12. See also Kidd, "'Prayer for a Saving Issue': Evangelical Development in New England before the Great Awakening," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A. G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 129–45.

[34] Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *WJE*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 101.

[35] Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Souls . . .* , in *WJE*, 4:129–213. For Edwards, see George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). For the transatlantic character of the revival, see Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2010).

[36] For the revival in this region, see Maxson, *The Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*.

[37] For Tennent, see S. T. Logan, "Tennent, William Sr. (1673–1746)," in *Dictionary of the Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, ed. D. G. Hart (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R, 2005), 258. For the Log College, see Archibald Alexander, *The Log College: Biographical Sketches of William Tennent and His Students* (London: Banner of Truth Trust, 1968).

Christ," and with his college as something like "the school of the old prophets."[38] Among Tennent's trainees were his four sons: Gilbert (1703–1764), William Jr. (1705–1777), John (1707–1732), and Charles (1711–1771).[39] Gilbert especially proved to be a firebrand in the revival, best remembered for his controversial sermon, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry* (1739).[40] In 1740, Jenkin Jones invited Gilbert to preach in his Philadelphia pulpit; Hart likely heard Gilbert then and on other occasions.[41] Hart later said that he "frequently heard most of [the Tennents] preach with great pleasure, and, I hope, some profit."[42] Hart considered the Tennents "a race of men, devoted to the service of the sanctuary; who, for their abilities, zeal and usefulness, need not give any place to any family, that ever graced the American continent . . . the happy instruments of converting thousands of souls."[43]

Jones also exposed Hart to the revival preaching of John "Hell-Fire" Rowland (d.1745), another Log College graduate.[44] Rowland was a powerful preacher, though his lack of restraint opened him to charges of "enthusiasm."[45] In Rowland's funeral sermon,

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[38] George Whitefield, *Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1998), 346, 354.

[39] For Gilbert, see Michael J. Coalter, Jr., *Gilbert Tennent, Son of Thunder: A Case Study of Continental Pietism's Impact on the First Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986); and S. T. Logan, "Tennent, Gilbert (1703–1764)," *Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, 256–57. For William Jr., see M. J. Coalter, Jr., "Tennent, William, Jr. (1705–1777)," *Presbyterian and Reformed Tradition in America*, 258.

[40] Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, Considered in a Sermon on Mark 6:34.* (Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1740). On the effects of this sermon, see Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 59–60.

[41] Ray, "Jenkin Jones," 203.

[42] In Charleston, Hart would befriend William Tennent III (1740–1777), pastor of the Independent Presbyterian Church, and fellow patriot. For Hart's memorial sermon for William Tennent III, see Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and His Death Deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1777).

[43] Hart, *A Truly Great Man*, 24.

[44] Ray, "Jenkin Jones," 203. For Rowland, see Kidd, *The Great Awakening*, 36–39.

[45] Jones' support of Rowland and the other Awakeners led to a painful controversy with his associate minister, Ebenezer Kinnersley (1711–1788), which dragged on from 1740–1743. See Ray, "Jenkin Jones," 203–4.

his friend Gilbert Tenennt admitted that, "Being young in years and of a warm temper, he was thereby led into some indiscretions in his honest and earnest attempts to do good."[46] One such occasion came at Jones's Baptist meetinghouse in Philadelphia. Rowland's impassioned oratory brought the people to such desperation over the state of sinners that Tennent was compelled to run to the pulpit stairs and cry out, "Oh Brother Rowland, is there no balm in Gilead?" Rowland, "startled by the effect upon his hearers of his fearful words, began to unfold the way of recovery."[47] The incident further reveals the intensity of the revival environment among the Regular Baptists of the PBA as Hart came of age.

Above all others, "the great and good Mr. Whitefield" clearly left the deepest impression on Hart.[48] George Whitefield befriended Hart's pastor, Jenkin Jones, upon his first visit to Philadelphia in 1739, and on May 9, 1740, Jones invited Whitefield to preach at the Pennepek meetinghouse. Over 2,000 gathered to hear Whitefield that day, and Hart was likely part of the crowd.[49] As Furman mentioned in his memorial address for Hart, Hart heard Whitefield on many occasions, and remembered the electrifying effect of his sermons for the rest of his life. Little is known about Hart's adolescent years, but as an old man he commented on his pre-conversion lifestyle in typical evangelical fashion: "My youth was spent in vanity and a listlessness to all that was good."[50] Whether or not Hart exaggerated his early waywardness, he experienced a profound, evangelical conversion under Whitefield's revival preaching around the year 1740, and submitted to baptism by Jenkin Jones on April 3, 1741. Baptist historians never fail to mention

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[46] Gilbert Tennent, *A Funeral Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Reverend Mr. John Rowland, Who Departed This Life, April the 12th, 1745* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1745).

[47] Maxson, *Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies*, 62.

[48] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman. For Whitefield, see Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014).

[49] Whitefield, *Journals*, 310, 420.

[50] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, June 1, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

Whitefield's role in the conversions of Separate Baptist leaders, yet Hart's story reveals the revivalist's decisive role in the spiritual formation of key Regular Baptist figures, too.

Called to Ministry

Hart initially pursued a career in carpentry, but still took an active role in the church.[51] His name appears with the rest of his family in the 1746 document forming the Southampton Church.[52] But the church soon recognized Hart's spiritual earnestness and gift for preaching. On December 20, 1746, the church book reports that "Isaac Eaton and Oliver Hart were called by the church to be on trial for the work of the ministry; to exercise at the meetings of preparations; or in private meetings that might for that purpose be appointed."[53] Hart received his first opportunity on February 21, 1748, when the Rev. Joshua Potts[54] "had the measles," and Hart was said to have "performed to satisfaction." Two months later, the church "gave a full call to Oliver Hart and Isaac Eaton, to preach in any place where Providence might cast their lotts [sic], or need required."[55] The same year, Hart married Sarah Brees (1729–1772).[56]

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[51] Public records on December 31, 1748, report "Oliver Hart, carpenter, of Warminster, and Sarah his wife" "giving a mortgage to his brother Joseph on a tract of 50 acres in Warminster, "to secure the payment of one hundred pounds." Davis, *Hart Family*, 101.

[52] Davis, *Hart Family*, 32.

[53] Southampton Church Book, in Davis, *Hart Family*, 102. Isaac Eaton (1725–1772) went on to serve the Baptist church in Hopewell, New Jersey (1748–1772), and where he also set up a school, Hopewell Academy, through the PBA in 1756. For Eaton, see Walter E. Johnson, "Isaac Eaton (1725?–1772)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2013), 3:217–33.

[54] Potts (1719–1761) served as the first pastor of Southampton Baptist Church, from 1746 until his death. Though he took part in Hart's ordination in 1749, Hart later makes a cryptic remark in a letter to his father regarding their relationship: "I would send my love to Mr. Potts, but I am afraid my love to him is not regarded, if the case stands just the same with my old master." Oliver Hart letter to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL.

[55] Davis, *Hart Family*, 103.

[56] Little is known about Sarah beyond what Hart records in his diary. Sarah, whom he calls, "my dear wife," married Hart when she was 18 years old, and would bear him eight children before her death at age 42. Oliver Hart, *A Copy of the Original Diary of the Rev. Oliver Hart*, mimeographed copy, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY (hereafter *Original Diary*), 6.

So it was that Hart arrived at his night of destiny. On September 9, 1749, Hart attended the PBA's annual meeting as a messenger for the Southampton Church. Jenkin Jones stood to read a letter containing a plea from the Baptist church in Charleston, South Carolina. They inquired "if there was any minister sound in the faith" who could come and minister the gospel to them. After the meeting, Jones and other leaders urged Hart to answer the call, and he agreed.[57] The Southampton Church ordained Hart in a service of solemn prayer and fasting on October 18. On November 13, he boarded the *St. Andrew* in Philadelphia, while Sarah, expecting their second child, and one year-old Seth, stayed behind.[58] Shaped by the revival spirituality of the Awakening, Hart sailed for Charleston to discern if this was indeed where Providence had "cast his lott."[59]

Promoting Revival: Charleston, South Carolina (1750–1780)

The Charleston church was the oldest Baptist congregation in the South. Founded in 1682 in Kittery, Maine, the congregation had relocated soon afterward to Charleston under pastor William Screven.[60] The Kittery group, comprised of committed Particular Baptists, combined with a collection of General Baptists already in the area to form the Charleston Baptist Church. Screven was a remarkable leader, and kept the two groups united throughout his term of service. But for the church to survive beyond his lifetime, Screven knew they must quickly secure a suitable successor. Near the end of his life, Screven urged his flock, "that you, as speedily as possible, supply yourselves with an able and faithful minister. Be sure you take care that the person be orthodox in faith, and of blameless life, and does own the confession of faith put forth by our brethren in

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[57] Davis, *Hart Family*, 103.

[58] Hart, *Original Diary*, 2.

[59] Seth had been born on November 18, 1748. Oliver and Sarah would have eight children altogether, with three preceding their parents in death.

[60] For Screven, see chap. 1, above.

London in 1689, etc."[61] This would prove a mighty challenge. Morgan Edwards later commented, "Had they attended to this counsel, the distractions, and almost destruction of the Church, which happened twenty-six years afterward, would have been prevented."[62] Screven's two immediate successors both died shortly into their tenures.[63] Under the next pastor, Thomas Simmons, the doctrinal tensions present in the church from the beginning erupted into open conflict.

The church's long period of decline began in 1736, when two groups separated from the Charleston Church. The first group, comprised of Particular Baptists, formed a new congregation at Ashley Ferry under the leadership of Isaac Chanler.[64] A second group, General Baptists exasperated with Calvinistic preaching, formed a church at Stono River.[65] Adding to the upheaval, Thomas Simmons shifted to something akin to a General Baptist position himself.[66] He further aggravated the "unhappy difference" with his largely Particular Baptist church by opposing Whitefield's revival, though Whitefield was breathing new life into the people. The church voted to suspend Simmons in 1744. This decision split the church, which still contained some General Baptist supporters of

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[61] The quotation is from Screven's *An Ornament for Church Members*, printed after his death and cited in Basil Manly, *Mercy and Judgment: A Discourse, Containing Some Fragments of the History of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C.* (Providence, RI: Knowles, Vose and Co., 1837), 16.

[62] Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, ed. Eve B. Weeks and Mary Bondurant Warren. (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 2:123.

[63] Little is known about the two men who followed Screven, beyond what Morgan Edwards reports from his conversations with Oliver Hart. Their names were "Sanford" (serving from 1713–1718) and William Peart (serving from 1718–1722). See Robert A. Baker, Paul J. Craven, and R. Marshall Blalock, *History of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina 1682–2007* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press), 101–3.

[64] For Chanler and the Ashley River Church, see chap. 1, above.

[65] A meetinghouse had been erected at Stono as early as 1728 for occasional worship, but a distinct church was not established until the later date. Manly contends that Arianism was present in the church from the beginning, in *Mercy and Judgment*, 20–21. Like many General Baptist churches following this doctrinal trajectory, the Stono church was extinct by 1791. Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists (1670-1805)* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 36–38.

[66] Simmons was apparently led to this change through his son-in-law's close friendship with Henry Haywood, minister of the General Baptist Church at Stono. Manly suggests that Simmons, "though generally esteemed a good man, had surrendered his judgment and feelings too much to the influence of others. This defect in his character had well nigh occasioned the destruction of the Church." Manly, *Mercy and Judgment*, 23.

Simmons. It also launched a legal dispute over the meetinghouse property, which, to the bewilderment of the Particular Baptist majority, resulted in their losing ownership of lot 62.[67] The church's morale continued to dwindle in 1746, when a group from the Edisto Island area broke away to form the Euhaws Baptist Church. Manly believed that the church was reduced to three communicants at this time.[68]

Such was the Charleston church's condition when they solicited the PBA for "any minister sound in the faith." For two years, they had survived on occasional sermons by Chanler, who lent his services from Ashley Ferry. Yet even this source of nourishment was removed by Chanler's sudden death on November 30, 1749, at age 48. The church was attending to Chanler's burial on December 2, 1749, when the *St. Andrew* pulled into port, carrying Hart.

The timing of Hart's arrival was destined to become a piece of Charleston Baptist lore, "believed to have been directed by a special providence in their favor."[69] The church quickly recognized in Hart the leader Screven had prayed for decades before. They called Hart as pastor on February 16, 1750. As Basil Manly later interpreted the events, "The Lord had provided an instrument by which he designed greatly to promote the cause of truth and piety in the province, in the person of Rev. Oliver Hart."[70] A glimpse at that unique province will illuminate his thirty-year ministry there.

Colonial Charleston

> Black and white all mixed together
> Inconstant, strange, unhealthful weather
> Burning heat and chilling cold

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[67] Baker, Craven, and Blalock, *First Baptist Church*, 115–19.

[68] Manly, *Mercy and Judgment*, 27.

[69] Wood Furman, *A History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the State of South-Carolina, with an Appendix Containing the Principal Circular Letters to the Churches* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1811), 7.

[70] Manly, *Mercy and Judgment*, 31.

Dangerous to both young and old
Boistrous winds and heavy rains
Fevers and rheumatic pains
Agues plenty without doubt
Sores, boils, the prickly heat and gout
Musquitoes on the skin make blotches
Centipedes and large cockroaches
Frightful creatures in the water
Porpoises, sharks and alligators
Houses built on barren land
No lamps or lights, but streets of sand
Pleasant walks, if you can find 'em
The markets dear and little money
Large potatoes, sweet as honey
Water bad, past all drinking
Men and women without thinking
Everything at a high price
But rum, hominy, and rice
Many a widow not unwilling
Many a beau not worth a shilling
Many a bargain, if you can strike it
This is Charlestowne, how do you like it?[71]

If Charleston so astonished a worldly English sailor in 1769, one can only wonder at the effect it produced in a Baptist carpenter from the Pennsylvania woods. The poem offers a sense of the unique assignment Hart accepted in moving to Charleston.

Immediately striking would have been the racial makeup of Charleston: the city was roughly half black and half white throughout the colonial period. The lucrative rice and indigo plantations of lowcountry South Carolina, on which Charleston's wealth had been built, required a large labor force of African slaves. So predominant was the black population in Charleston that one contemporary called South Carolina "more like a negro culture;" the sounds of the slaves' Gullah dialect filled the city.[72] Though numerous slaves translated into greater productivity for plantation owners, the threat of slave

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[71] "Poem by Captain Martin," quoted in Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 155.

[72] Robert M. Weir, *Colonial South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1997), 205.

uprisings was also a constant source of dread for Charleston residents.[73] Hart's own relationship to Charleston slaves was complex. He ministered freely to both enslaved and free blacks in Charleston, yet he was also a slave owner.[74] Hart apparently sought to govern his slaves with benevolence. Once, when travelling, his wife wrote him that "the poor black members [of the family] hang about me and wish for Master," their love for Hart such that they "sometimes make me drop a tear."[75]

Charleston was also unique for its great wealth. In a 1740 visit, Whitefield wrote, "I question whether the court-end of London could exceed them in affected finery [and] gaiety of dress."[76] When Josiah Quincy of Boston visited Charleston for the first time in 1773, he exclaimed, "in grandeur, splendor of buildings, decorations, equipages, numbers, commerce, shipping, indeed in almost every thing, it far surpasses all I ever saw, or expected to see, in America."[77] The fourth largest city in the colonies, Charleston

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[73] The bloodiest slave revolt in American history took place twenty miles outside of Charleston at the Stono River Bridge, on September 9, 1739. On the fear of slave insurrection in Charleston, see Walter J. Fraser, *Charleston! Charleston! The History of a Southern City* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1991), 52–55, 66–69, 81–82.

[74] For slave religion in colonial and antebellum Charleston, see Erskine Clarke, *Wrestlin' Jacob: A Portrait of Religion in Antebellum Georgia and the Carolina Low Country* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2000). Two former slaves who benefitted from Hart's ministry were John Marrant (1755–1791) and David Margrett (n.d.). On Marrant, see John Marrant and William Aldridge, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black (now Going to Preach the Gospel in Nova-Scotia), Born in New-York, in North America* (London: Gilbert and Plummer, 1785). On Margrett, see Tim Lockley, "David Margrett: A Black Missionary in the Revolutionary Atlantic," *Journal of American Studies* 46, no. 3 (2012): 729–45.

[75] Anne Hart to Oliver Hart, July 19, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL. For the attitude of "paternalism" among evangelicals like Hart toward slaves, see Allan Gallay, "Planters and Slaves in the Great Awakening," in *Masters and Slaves in the House of the Lord*, ed. John Boles (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1988), 1–18; Robert Olwell, *Masters, Slaves & Subjects: The Culture of Power in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1740–1790* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998). According to William Rogers, Hart eventually changed his position on slaveholding: "A mind like his was always open to conviction, and although in the year 1780, he labored under some prejudices in favor of the slavery of the poor Africans and their descendants; his benevolent soul, soaring above every selfish motive, was soon brought to contemplate the whole with horror—and to wish, yea more, fervently to pray for success to attend the endeavours of those individuals or societies who are laudably engaged in promoting the happiness of the great human family!" Rogers, *Death of the Rev. Oliver Hart*, 24. Despite this praise, Rogers also mentions in a footnote that the Hart family still owned some five slaves at the time of Hart's death.

[76] Whitefield, *Journals*, 384.

[77] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 162.

was "far and away the wealthiest," with its free citizens worth nearly six times that of Philadelphians, seven times that of Bostonians, and eight times that of New Yorkers.[78] Hart would write home to his father, "We have had a very wet and fruitful season. The planters, or farms here go much upon Indigo, which proves a very profitable commodity; if peace was to continue, in all probability this would be the richest province upon the continent by far: Oh that it may be rich in good works!"[79] Materialism produced spiritual indifference. When Whitefield warned the Charlestonians of the dangers of wealth, he "seemed to them as one that mocked."[80] Hart contended with the same problem. "Religion is grown extremely unfashionable in these parts," he wrote to Samuel Jones. "The God Mammon is much more rever'd, than the Lord Jehovah. 'What shall we eat? What shall we drink? And wherewithal shall we be clothed?' Are enquiries much more attended to, than, 'What shall we do to be saved?'"[81] Yet Hart would also count some of the city's wealthiest and most influential residents among his circle of friends, mentioning in his letters Henry Laurens, Thomas Heyward, Jr., Daniel Legare, William Henry Drayton, and John Rutledge.[82]

Charleston's hedonistic culture also set it apart from other colonial cities. "At my first coming, the people of Charleston seemed wholly devoted to pleasure," wrote

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[78] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 161.

[79] Oliver Hart to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL.

[80] Whitefield, *Journals*, 384.

[81] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, June 30, 1769, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[82] Oliver Hart to John Hart, March 24, 1778, Hart MSS, SCL; Hart, diary, June 10, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL. Laurens (1724–1792) was a wealthy South Carolina merchant and rice planter. Laurens served as the President of the South Carolina Council of Safety in 1775, and would serve as President of the Second Continental Congress (1777–1778). Heyward (1746–1809), a Charleston lawyer and judge, signed the Declaration of Independence and Articles of Confederation, and commanded a militia force in the Revolution. Legare (1737–1791), a French Hugenot, was a prominent Charleston lawyer. Drayton (1742–1779) was a Charleston planter, lawyer, and statesman. He served as President of the South Carolina Provincial Congress, ordering the first shot on British troops in South Carolina in 1775. He also served as a delegate to the Continental Congress from 1778–1779. Rutledge (1739–1800), a Charleston lawyer and judge, was governor of South Carolina during the Revolution, a delegate to Continental Congress, and later the second Chief Justice of the Supreme Court.

Whitefield."[83] Historian Walter Edgar has suggested that "the hedonism that came out with the West Indies in the seventeenth century had become ingrained into the colony's lifestyle. No other city had as frenetic a social life as Charleston."[84] That social scene included horse races, dances and balls, the theater, and a host of other diversionary activities. Charleston's hedonism clashed with the devoted piety that evangelicals like Hart sought to produce in the community. Edgar writes, "Much to the chagrin of the clergy, Sunday was a day of leisure and recreation. In the backcountry the women frolicked and the men drank, played cards, raced, hunted, and fished. In the low country it was a time of 'visiting and mirth' for most of the population, white and black."[85] Contending with the worldliness of "poor sinful Charles Town" was a constant challenge for evangelical ministers like Hart. As Whitefield had done, Hart would repeatedly "bear my testimony against stage plays, and other, the vices of the times," most enduringly in his published sermon, *Dancing Exploded: A Sermon Shewing the Unlawfulness, Sinfulness, and Bad Consequences of Balls, Assemblies, and Dances in General.*[86]

Another distinguishing aspect of Charleston's daily life, perhaps contributing to its hedonism, was the constant threat of death. In addition to producing wealth, rice fields bred swarms of mosquitoes. These transmitted yellow fever and malaria that severely weakened the immune system of the population. Charleston became notorious for "air so unhealthful," that its residents "had fevers all year long from which those attacked seldom recover."[87] Childhood mortality rates may have reached as high as 80

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[83] Whitefield, *Journals*, 444.

[84] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 171.

[85] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 173.

[86] Hart, diary, September 8, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. See also Oliver Hart, *Dancing Exploded: A Sermon Shewing the Unlawfulness, Sinfulness, and Bad Consequences of Balls, Assemblies, and Dances in General* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1778).

[87] Edgar, *South Carolina*, 156–61.

percent during the colonial period. Hart experienced this cruel reality firsthand. He buried five children and a wife in his thirty years there.[88]

Another negative feature of Charleston life Hart encountered was the volatile weather. The "excessive sultry" heat of Charleston summers became downright oppressive at times. In July of 1765, Hart confessed to Samuel Jones that he was responsible for two sermons every Sunday, "but whether my strength will be equal to this, through the two following hot months, God only knows."[89] More frightening than the heat were the violent storms that bombarded the coastal city. In 1752, Hart learned about the "boisterous winds and heavy rains" mentioned in the poem, when "a great and terrible" hurricane struck the city and, "my house was washed down and all I had almost totally destroyed."[90] Another entry in 1760 recounted "a most violent whirlwind of that kind commonly known under the title of typhoons," devastating numerous ships and houses.[91] As other evangelicals were apt to do, Hart viewed storms and other disasters as the chastising "judgments of God" against the city. To his dismay, "sinful Charles town" rarely "learned righteousness" in the aftermath.[92]

In this challenging context, churches of virtually every denomination sought to establish a witness in Charleston. Of South Carolina in general in these days, Charles Woodmason wrote, "Such a mix'd medley of religions is hardly anywhere to be found as here—not even in Philadelphia, or Amsterdam."[93] These included the Anglican churches

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[88] The children Hart lost were Seth (1748–1750); Hannah (1750–1753); Joseph (1760–1761); Sarah (October 16, 1772–October 19, 1772); and Silas, a child of his second marriage (August 30, 1775–September 21, 1775).

[89] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, July 15, 1765, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[90] Hart, *Original Diary*, 2–3. It was likely during this storm that the original records of the Charleston Baptist Church were lost. For more on the hurricane, see Fraser, *Charleston!*, 83–85.

[91] Hart, *Original Diary*, 4–5.

[92] Hart, *Dancing Exploded*, 1–2.

[93] Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), 6–7. Woodmason (c. 1720–1789) was an Anglican itinerate minister, best remembered for his journal documenting life on the South Carolina frontier in the late 1760s.

of St. Michael's and St. Philip's, as well as the French Huguenot, Scots Presbyterian, Independent Congregational, Quaker, Lutheran, Baptist churches, and even a Jewish synagogue. The many steeples of Charleston, so striking to ships entering the harbor, earned Charleston the nickname "the holy city."[94] Characteristic of the Great Awakening, Hart happily worked with evangelical ministers from across the denominational spectrum to advance the revival in Charleston.[95]

The Preaching Ministry

Hart may not have possessed much pastoral experience when he stepped off the *St. Andrew*, but he apparently looked and sounded the part. Furman described him as "somewhat tall, well proportioned, and of a graceful appearance; of an active, vigorous constitution . . . his countenance was open and manly, his voice clear, harmonious and commanding."[96] More than a striking appearance, Hart also brought to Charleston the revival ardor of the Great Awakening, which would shape every aspect of his ministry. He wasted no time in applying himself to the revitalization of his new charge, and in the words of Manly, he "soon entered on an extensive field of usefulness."[97]

Hart's first order was reviving the Charleston pulpit. In addition to preaching each Sunday morning and afternoon, Hart delivered a regular doctrinal lecture in a church member's home on Sunday nights. He later organized a "Religious Society" in 1755, which he regularly addressed on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday nights.[98] Besides these meetings, Hart also exhorted the church on "Preparation Days," before the Lord's

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[94] The image is classically captured in "A View of Charles-Town, the Capital of South Carolina, From an Original Picture Painted at Charlestown in the Year 1774, painted by Thomas Leitch, engraved by Samuel Smith, published June 2, 1776 by S. Smith, London," accessed January 15, 2015, http://cdn.loc.gov/service/pnp/pga/02700/02794r.jpg.

[95] For Hart's catholicity, see chap. 6 below.

[96] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 23.

[97] Furman, *History of the Charleston Association*, 5.

[98] Baker, Craven, and Blalock, *First Baptist Church*, 131.

Supper. Hart treated the task of preaching with utmost seriousness:

> Preaching the gospel is an essential branch of divine service. The grand design of this institution is to save sinners, of Adam's race, from eternal misery, in a way consistent with the claims of the violated law, and the honour of the divine perfections and government. "It hath pleased God, by (what the world esteems) the foolishness of preaching, to save them that believe." This is the most important service that ever demanded the attention of man. The position of a minister is enough to make a man, of any sensibility, tremble; he stands between the living and the dead—the living God and dead sinners. "Who is sufficient for these things?" No man, of himself.[99]

Hart's preaching was thoroughly biblical. He early recognized "the necessity of a larger, and better acquaintance with, and a more copious knowledge of, the Word of God," and so resolved, "to read ten chapters every day."[100] The fruit of this discipline is evident in surviving sermons, which demonstrate a loving familiarity with the whole of the Bible. Hart's careful records show that he preached texts from across the canon of Scripture,[101] and he crammed all his sermon outlines with supporting Biblical citations. Hart was convinced that a ready command of Scripture was essential for preaching with authority: "Let every thing you deliver be backed with Scripture, and be careful to advance nothing, but what you can confirm with a '*Thus saith the Lord.*'"[102] Hart often scribbled in his outline the first word or two of a text, indicating that he completed the reference from memory, and his sermonic prose is rich with biblical allusion.

Hart was also a deeply theological preacher. Furman recalled his sermons as, "containing a happy assemblage of doctrinal and practical truths, set in an engaging light, and enforced with convincing arguments." But it was "for the discussion of doctrinal truths, he was most especially eminent."[103] Hart's own description of faithful preaching

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[99] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 22–23.

[100] Hart, diary, August 19, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[101] For a helpful analysis of Hart's sermon record, see Baker, Craven, and Blalock, *First Baptist Church*, 136–37.

[102] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL. Emphasis original.

[103] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

indicates that he explored the full range of doctrinal truths in his pulpit ministry:

> Preaching the gospel will lead to an explanation of what the apostle calls "the form of sound words." Which may include the following sublime and important doctrines, viz. the being of a God—a trinity of persons in the Godhead—the fall of Adam, and the imputation of his sin to his posterity—The corruption of human nature, and impotence of men to that which is spiritually or morally good—the everlasting love of God to his people—the eternal election of a definite number of the human race to grace and glory—The covenant of grace—Particular redemption—Justification by the imputed righteousness of Christ—Pardon and reconciliation by his blood—Regeneration and sanctification by the influences and operations of the Holy Spirit—the final perseverance of the saints in grace—the resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgment. This is an epitome of *the faith once for all delivered to the saints,* which ministers are to preach, and for which they should *earnestly contend*.[104]

For all its doctrinal breadth, Hart's preaching found its central theme in the preeminent subject of the evangelical revival, the person and work of Jesus Christ. It has been said of Whitefield that his "preaching, like his personal faith, centered upon the person of 'the dear Jesus,'" and the same was true for Hart.[105] "Let Christ and his gospel be your delightful theme," he advised preachers. "Yes, Christ is to be the sum, and substance of all your discourses. A little dry morality, however refined, will never feed the minds of your hearers."[106] Over time, he earned a reputation all over Charleston for his evangelical ministry. When an unconverted Edmund Botsford came under soul-concern, a friend advised him that "there is but one minister in this place, who can be of service to you, but he, I am told, is a Baptist; all the rest of the ministers deserve not the name. I would advise you to go hear him."[107] Especially striking in this account is the fact that Botsford's friend was an unbeliever! As Furman recalled, "Christ Jesus, and him

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[104] Oliver Hart, *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, Shewing The Business of Officers and Private Members in the Church of Christ, and How Their Work Should Be Performed; with Some Motives to Excite Professors Ardently to Engage in it.* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785), 14–15.

[105] J. I. Packer, "The Spirit with the Word: The Reformational Revivalism of George Whitefield," in *Evangelical Influences: Profiles of Figures and Movements Rooted in the Reformation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1999), 48.

[106] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[107] Charles D. Mallary, *The Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004), 14.

crucified, in the perfection of his righteousness, the merit of his death, the prevalence of his intercession, and efficacy of his grace, was . . . the delightful theme of his preaching."[108]

Hart was also a Spirit-reliant preacher, evidenced by his numerous prayers for divine enablement while preaching. Hart's Spirit-dependence began in sermon preparation. "Spent this day in my Study; with a view to make some preparations for the Sabbath; but found myself quite empty: and could scarce rise upon any subject for my meditation. Blessed be God! My hope is in him. Tho' I am empty, he is full, and I hope to be fill'd out of that fullness which filleth all, and in all," he wrote. [109] Prayer remained essential in the act of preaching, which Hart believed to be futile apart from the help of the Spirit. Hart's most frequent petitions in regard to preaching were that he might "feel his subject," and preach with "power," "warmth," and "freedom." After the sermon, Hart returned to prayer: "Oh! May the Lord carry on his work in their hearts; may conviction end in conversion, and may none of those awakened turn back again."[110]

Of all the descriptions of Hart's preaching style, "earnest" seems to best capture his pulpit ethos. Furman remembered his sermons as "peculiarly serious," and that "his eloquence, at least in the middle stages of life, was not of the most popular kind, but perspicuous, manly and flowing, such as afforded pleasure to persons of true taste, and edification to the serious hearer."[111] The black gown and bands Hart wore behind the sacred desk added to the *gravitas* of the preaching moment. One hearer transformed under Hart's preaching was Botsford, who took his friend's advice and went to hear Hart. "To describe the exercises of my mind under that sermon would be impossible," he

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[108] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

[109] Hart, diary, August 24, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[110] Hart, diary, August 20, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[111] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

remembered. "However, upon the whole, I concluded it was possible that there might be salvation for me, even for me . . . . Before this, I wished to return to England; but now I was perfectly satisfied to remain, if I lived on bread and water only."[112] While Hart's pulpit manner was graver and more self-consciously confessional than that of his Separate Baptist friends, it seems he preached with no less passion. Edmund Botsford, who heard both Whitefield and Hart on several occasions, wrote in 1769, "Heard Mr. Whitefield . . . liked the discourse much, at same time I think lay a side oratory and Mr. Whitefield's discourse will not do to compare with Mr. Hart's."[113]

A Zeal for Souls

In the words of Basil Manly, Sr., Hart "longed for the souls of men."[114] In Charleston, Hart flung himself into the work of winning and caring for souls with the same activist zeal he had seen in Whitefield and in Jenkin Jones. "I am still trying to labour for God as enabled, but find I come short of that engagedness which I could desire," Hart wrote to his father. "Souls are precious, otherwise the Lord would not have done so much for their salvation as he has done: and can I trifle with them? God forbid! I would fain be made instrumental in bringing many souls home to Jesus Christ."[115] Hart's zeal for souls drove him to preach the gospel beyond the Charleston pulpit, making numerous evangelistic tours, sometimes across several colonies. He also regularly counseled his people in spiritual matters. A taste of his pastoral guidance has been preserved in a number of his letters, as in one letter to Furman upon the conversion of his daughter. "Tell her from me, if she would wish to enjoy the comforts of religion and be useful in life, she must keep near to God and be humble at Jesus' feet," he wrote. "While

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[112] Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford*, 16.

[113] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[114] Manly, *Mercy and Judgment*, 33–34.

[115] Oliver Hart to John Hart, March 10, 1757, Hart MSS, SCL.

she is enabled to do so, she will have nothing to fear from Earth or Hell, for she shall be more than a Conqueror through Him who hath loved her."[116]

Hart's zeal for souls could draw him into thorny pastoral situations. He counseled ministers, "You will at sometimes be under the disagreeable necessity of giving reproof; which you will so do, as to evince that it is from love, to the persons you reprove, however you may dislike their conduct."[117] Only a view of eternity could keep him faithful in oversight. "Visiting the sick and dying persons, is not the least difficult part of your work," Hart cautioned. "To flatter a dying man is little better than soul murder; and yet such when penitent are by no means to be discouraged. You will endeavor therefore to act a tender, but withal a faithful part."[118]

Pastoral ministry served as a crucible for Hart's character. Furman remembered him "passing through a variety of scenes, both of joy and depression; but exhibiting, at all times, an uprightness and dignity, both of temper, and conduct, becoming his religious and sacred character."[119] One of the most trying seasons through which Hart passed was an attempted coup by his assistant, Nicholas Bedgegood (1731–1774), in 1765. Originally an Anglican, Bedgegood had served Whitefield at his Bethesda Orphanage until Hart baptized him in 1757. Two years later, Hart also ordained the younger man. But after bringing the educated, well-spoken Bedgegood onto his staff, Hart discovered his intentions of supplanting him. The ensuing conflict was a source of deep grief, as Hart related to his friend, James Manning:

> How long I am to continue here, and for what purpose, God only knows. I have the mortification to see our church in a shattered condition. Some of our members have broke off. We sinned greatly in calling Mr. Bedgegood from Pee Dee, to be my assistant. Poor man—he has been vastly imprudent in many things; insomuch that

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[116] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 26, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman.

[117] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[118] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[119] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 22.

> his character is ruined; and I fear his usefulness destroyed. At present he continues in, and about Charles Town, as a thorn in my side, and answers no better purpose. It would be impossible for me to give you all the particulars of our unhappiness: however, the event is bad enough.[120]

Despite the pain of this betrayal, Hart remained at his post. Bedgegood passed off the scene in Charleston, and was later disowned as a minister of the gospel when he failed to answer the charges of polygamy brought against him in 1771.When Samuel Jones suggested that Hart remove to either Pennepek or Southampton church shortly after the controversy, Hart declined. He insisted that he "must have an eye to duty, primarily." "God, I trust, has blest my poor labours to some poor souls, which supports me under many trials, and indicates that I ought to continue where I am."[121]

An even more painful event during Hart's tenure at Charleston was the death of his wife, "my dear Sarah," on October 20, 1772. In their twenty-four years of marriage, Sarah had borne Hart eight children, four of whom survived her. Two years after Sarah's death Hart took another wife, the widow Anne Sealy Grimball (1741–1813). Anne was a Charleston native and member of the church, having been baptized by Hart in 1770. Hart wrote that "as a maid, a wife, and a widow, she has sustained an unsullied character, and been a pattern and ornament to her sex . . . . I esteem that as one of the happiest days that put such a prize into my bosom."[122] Anne remembered Hart as "my counselor—guide—friend—my most affectionate and loving husband." She continued, "With him I enjoyed conjugal felicity near twenty-two years—his steady temper—his patience—his fortitude—all contributed to make me happy."[123]

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[120] Oliver Hart to James Manning, August 30, 1765, Manning MSS, Brown. In a letter to Samuel Jones from the same period, Hart wondered if the Bedgegood debacle was not a sign of God's judgment: "We are, I am persuaded, guilty before God, in bringing Mr. Bedgegood from a numerous, well-affected people, where he was greatly useful, to serve us, who were not so much in need of help. Hence God has frowned upon us ever since; so that from step to step, our case has been growing worse and worse, until it is almost become desperate." Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, July 15, 1765, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[121] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, March 7, 1766, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[122] Hart, *Original Diary*, 7.

[123] Anne Hart, *Narrative of Anne Maria Sealy Grimball Hart, born 1741, South Carolina*, HSP.

Over time, a deep bond was forged between Hart and the Charleston Baptist Church. Hart told his father that his people, "continue their regard for me, and love me, sincerely and fervently; which I endeavor in the best manner I can to return."[124] Observing this in a visit to Charleston, Morgan Edwards said of Hart, "He is an excellent man! And well loved by all who know him."[125] An incident from 1771 illustrates Hart's great esteem in Charleston. Hart was robbed of 30 pounds and, "when this fact was known in town, the gentlemen of other societies made him a present of 730 pounds, which they raised among themselves, without the help of his own people."[126] A similar story appears on January 1, 1779, when Hart reported a "kind and generous friend" calling at his house to present him with "a New Year's gift consisting of 300 dollars."[127] Precise records of the church's membership during Hart's tenure are unavailable. But the congregation clearly prospered under his leadership. After his visit there, Edwards spoke of over 200 communicants, before the War years reduced the church's size.[128]

The Broader Baptist Cause

"The settlement of Mr. Hart in Charleston is an important event in the annals of these churches," wrote Wood Furman in his history of the Charleston Association.[129] Indeed, Hart's influence extended far beyond his own local congregation to the entire Baptist cause in the southern colonies. Hart's activist spirituality, a hallmark of the evangelical awakening, was the major catalyst for the transformation of Baptist life in the

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[124] Oliver Hart to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL.

[125] Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, 1:98.

[126] Basil Manly, *Mercy and Judgment*, 34.

[127] Hart, *Original Diary*, 12.

[128] See Baker, Craven, and Blalock, *First Baptist Church*, 143.

[129] Furman, *History of the Charleston Association*, 5. For a more detailed look at the events covered in this section, see chap. 5 below.

South.[130] As already indicated, while Baptists in the middle colonies thrived during the early eighteenth century, churches in the South were generally smaller, weaker, and less organized.[131] This picture began to change with Hart's appearance in Charleston. Within months after Hart's arrival, he was helping to place faithful pastors with area churches. By 1751, he had organized four Regular Baptist congregations into the Charleston Baptist Association (CBA). Consciously modeled after the PBA, the CBA was the first Baptist association in the South. In the years that followed, Hart led the CBA to promote church health, missionary endeavors, and educational efforts among the Baptist churches of the South. It was also through the CBA that Hart worked for union with the growing Separate Baptist movement. Though some Regular Baptists were suspicious of the frontier preachers, Hart was not put off by their eccentricities.[132] He saw in them a common revival heritage. "Through the goodness of God, there is a happy revival of religion in the interior parts of this province, among the Separate Baptists," he wrote to Samuel Jones. "I have visited them twice, much to my satisfaction."[133] Hart made several efforts to include the Separate Baptists in the common work of the CBA. His greatest success came

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[130] Lumpkin's *Baptist Foundations in the South* fails to give Hart and his Regular Baptist cohorts the credit they deserve in this regard. Examples of his faint praise for the Regular Baptists include: "The Separates soon were made to realize, however, that there were other Baptist groups in the South beside themselves, all rather small, struggling companies" (*Baptist Foundations*, 63); "It is not too much to say that the Separate Baptists are historically and hereditarily the chief component of Baptist life in the South, both White and Negro," (*Baptist Foundations*, 154); "Although the Regular Baptists preceded the Separates in the South, they were not overactive when the Separates arrived. The Regulars had been in the Charleston, South Carolina, area for seventy-five years when Shubal Stearns reached North Carolina, but they had organized only four small churches as late as 1751, when the Charleston Association was formed" (*Baptist Foundations*, 154–55); and "The Regular Baptists, in a word, could never have won the South. They lacked the enthusiasm, the vision, and the leadership required for so formidable an undertaking. To be sure, the Regulars experienced a renewed vigor during the southern Awakening, but this renewal came chiefly from the Separates. The Regulars then made a real contribution to the Awakening, but it was limited in scope" (*Baptist Foundations,* 157).

[131] McBeth, *Baptist Heritage*, 216.

[132] Hart's attitude toward the Separates certainly does not reflect Lumpkin's blanket statement that, "The Regulars were suspicious of the Separates' enthusiasm and irregularity in permitting women and illiterate men to preach. He also records Fristoe as saying that, "the Regular Baptists were jealous of the Separate Baptists." Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, 69. This attitude appears to have been more prominent among Regular Baptists in Virginia than in South Carolina.

[133] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, June 30, 1769, Mckesson MSS, HSP.

through his friendship with Separate Baptist Richard Furman, the young preacher from the High Hills of Santee. Furman, who became Hart's most notable protégé, succeeded Hart in Charleston and established the union of Regulars and Separates that would come to characterize the Baptists of the South.[134]

Promoter of Revival

Hart never got over his experience of revival during the height of the Great Awakening. From his earliest journal entries to his final letters, revival seems to have occupied his thoughts, gripped his affections, and filled his prayers more than any other topic. In 1754, he and the Charleston Baptists experienced an awakening firsthand.[135] From August to October, the youth of the church begged Hart to preach to and counsel them , on an almost nightly basis. These meetings, usually held in private homes, were marked by unusual solemnity. After one gathering, Hart wrote, "Blessed be God, who hath enabled me this day to speak his Word with some degree of power: and I trust blest it to some. In the evening met the Society at Mr. Baker's: many were gathered together: I made the suffering, and death of Christ, the subject of my discourse. Several were melted down into tears. Lord carry on thy work among us."[136] Hart concluded his account of the 1754 revival with the report of ten young people receiving baptism.

Hart also promoted revival by supporting Whitefield's evangelistic campaigns. Kidd has noted the significant, yet underappreciated role that local pastors in colonial America played in supporting Whitefield's itinerant ministry. "Whitefield had the luxury of being able to leave whenever he grew weary of a location's intransigence, but local

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[134] For more on Hart as a bridge-builder, see Thomas R. McKibbens, "Over Troubled Waters: Baptist Preachers Who Were Bridge Builders," *Baptist History and Heritage* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 58–63.

[135] For a detailed analysis of the 1754 revival, see chap. 4 below.

[136] Hart, diary, October 6, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

leaders had to continue promoting the movement after his departure," Kidd writes.[137] Over the years 1750–1770, Hart was one of Whitefied's key supporters in Charleston. During this period, Whitefield preached in Hart's church, worshipped with Charleston congregation, used Hart to follow up with new converts, and recommended Hart's ministry to others by letter.[138] Though Lumpkin claims that "the Baptist awakening was not in any primary sense the concern or achievement of the 'Regular' Baptist groups already resident in the South prior to 1755," these accounts tell a different story.[139] They place Hart and the Regular Baptists of Charleston in the middle of the action of the "long Great Awakening."

The American Revolution

In the decade of the 1770s, Charleston was abuzz with talk of independence.[140] The wealthiest city among the colonies had much at stake in the conflict with Great Britain, and was set on obtaining liberty. So too was Hart. Among other reasons, Hart and his fellow Dissenting ministers saw the attainment of political liberty to be "intimately connected" with obtaining religious liberty.[141] In 1775, Hart's patriotism and influence among Baptists led to a unique opportunity for service. Along with Congregational minister William Tennant III and statesman William Henry Drayton,[142] Hart was appointed by the South Carolina Provincial Congress to travel the Loyalist backcountry, persuading those skeptical citizens to join the Patriot cause. Hart departed on July 31, 1775. He encountered significant resistance at several stops, and even began keeping his

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[137] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 82.

[138] For Hart's partnership with Whitefield in the revival, see chap. 5 below.

[139] Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations*, v.

[140] For Hart's political activity during this period, see chap. 5 below.

[141] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 22.

[142] For Drayton, see Keith Krawczynski, *William Henry Drayton: South Carolina Revolutionary Patriot* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2001).

journal in code for fear of British interception.[143] By the time he returned on September 6, his party had garnered many pledges of loyalty to the South Carolina Council of Safety. The Provincial Congress formally thanked them on November 29, 1775.

Hart's service came at a steep price. When British troops laid siege to Charleston in March 1780, Hart's friends feared his capture and urged him to flee the city. Setting out with Botsford, Hart preached his way north, supported by the generous gifts of his listeners. Along the way, Hart learned that Charleston had fallen. Most of his personal possessions were now in British possession, and the Baptist meetinghouse had been seized. Hart arrived in Philadelphia on October 14, 1780. He would never see Charleston again.

Longing for Revival: Hopewell, New Jersey (1780–1795)

Hart had left behind an impressive legacy of revival ministry over his three decades in Charleston. Though his most fruitful years now lay behind him, Hart continued to labor and long for revival. During the final fifteen years of his life, Hart served the Hopewell Baptist Church as pastor, played a leading role in the Philadelphia Baptist Association, published a number of sermons as a Baptist statesman, and continued to follow the progress of the evangelical revival.

Settling in Hopewell, New Jersey

Not knowing when or if he could ever return to Charleston, Hart wasted no time in making himself "useful" back in his home region. On December 16, 1780, the Hopewell Baptist Church in New Jersey unanimously called the exiled minister as pastor. Hart wrote on that day, "O Lord, I beseech thee to direct me by thy providence and grace, how to act; and as I am now to have the charge of a numerous people, heretofore divided,

[143] These journals, decoded, are published in J. Glenwood Clayton and Loulie Latimer Owens, eds., "Oliver Hart's Diary of the Journey to the Backcountry," *JSCBHS* 1 (November 1975): 18–30.

grant me wisdom, and every needed grace that I may be made a blessing to them. Amen."[144]

With a living secured at Hopewell, Hart attended to the separation from his wife Anne (or "Nancy," as Hart called her), still in Charleston. This estrangement was a sore trial for Hart. On his birthday in 1781, he wrote,

> Another year of my life is now expired, and the 58th completed. My life has indeed been a checkered one, O that I could add, and useful. The last year has been trying, what the future part of my life may be, God only knows—I would not desire to know. At present, blessed be God, I am comfortably provided for, and yet far from happy, while this cruel separation from my other half continues. Yet I would desire to be content.[145]

Hart's personal writings during this period give the impression that he was helpless as a homemaker and miserable living alone.[146] For eighteen months, he urged Nancy to come to Hopewell, but either fragile health or the anxiety of leaving Charleston repeatedly delayed her departure.[147] Hart persisted in wooing her northward, painting her an idyllic picture of their life together: "I am settled on a pretty little farm; capable with proper management, of producing many good things. One thing only is lacking; you only can supply that." Of course, Nancy would be largely responsible for the "proper management of the farm:" "With ease I can fancy I see you, as heretofore, with your little chicks around you, but this affords me no pleasure; much rather would I actually see you, on my farm, busying yourself with your poultry, traversing the fields, admiring the flocks

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[144] Hart, diary, December 16, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[145] Hart, diary, July 23, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[146] Hart's first order of business upon moving into the parsonage was to retrieve his niece, Nelly Thomas, as his housekeeper. "I trust Providence will favor me in sending her," he wrote, "for I know not how to manage without her." Hart, diary, December 26, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL. In several entries, Hart mentions the church mending his fences, plowing his fields, cutting his wood, and otherwise working to make him comfortable.

[147] Six of Anne's letters to Oliver from this period have survived, all in Hart MSS, SCL. From these letters, Owens suggests that "Nancy must have been quite spoiled. She chided her husband for leaving her, and she whined over her health and bad fortunes with an excess of self-pity" (Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart, 1723-1795; A Biography* [Greenville: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966], 19).

and herds, or within, managing the dairy."[148] Hart's deep affection for his wife shines throughout his correspondence with her, as in these lines:

> I am free to stake the whole of my reputation, with the best connoisseurs, on the prudence I manifested in the choice of a wife. Doth this savor of pride? Pardon it, my love, you are the object; and none other can like this, excite the passion of laudable pride in my breast. The moment I had the happiness of calling you my own, I thought myself one of the happiest of men, and truly you have rendered me so, to the utmost of my wishes. With regard to conjugal felicity, few have enjoyed a greater share of it than we have been favored with, until the fatal period which obtruded this painful separation.[149]

At last, on September 2, 1781, Nancy arrived in Philadelphia. Hart was overjoyed to escort his bride across the threshold in Hopewell, marking the day in his diary: "Blessed be the name of the Lord for this renewed token of his kindness."[150] Three years later, Nancy gave Oliver, at the age of 61, a final son: William Rogers Hart.[151]

Meanwhile, the work at Hopewell was slow. Hart's writings indicate that, though he continued to exercise his ministry with the same vigor as in Charleston, the visible fruit he had enjoyed there was not forthcoming. Passages like this one are common in his diary: "Lord's Day, February 10: a fine day and a pretty good congregation. The Lord enabled me to preach with freedom from Matt 11:28. Come unto me. My soul longed earnestly to see sinners coming unto Jesus weary and heavy-laden with sin. But alas, conversion work is a strange work in this place."[152] Despite their spiritual indifference, Hart's diaries suggest that he loved and served the people of Hopewell earnestly. He sometimes considered returning to Charleston, but ultimately remained at Hopewell until his death in 1795.[153] He directed much of his energy to

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[148] Oliver Hart to Anne (Nancy) Hart, June 12, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[149] Oliver Hart to Anne (Nancy) Hart, June 12, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[150] Hart, diary, September 2, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[151] The boy was born December 13, 1784, named for Hart's friend, William Rogers.

[152] Hart, diary, February 10, 1782, Hart MSS, SCL.

[153] In a letter dated August 27, 1790, Furman refers to a "hint" that Hart had dropped that he was interested in returning to the area. Though Furman expressed excitement over the prospect, he also

healing old divisions and praying for the Spirit's reviving work. "O Lord, pity Hopewell Church," he prayed, "make me an instrument of uniting, and building them up in the most holy faith."[154] Hart also maintained an itinerant ministry as long as he was able.[155]

Leader in the Philadelphia Association

Hart resumed an active role in the Philadelphia Association. He had arrived from Charleston just in time for the 1780 annual meeting, where he was admitted to full membership and was "unanimously requested to preach."[156] Hart would address the association again in the following years, twice on the purpose and order of the local church: in *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple* (1785) and in *A Gospel Church Portrayed* (1791), both printed later by request.[157] Hart based both sermons on the Old Testament figure of rebuilding the Temple and reforming its worship as a picture of the work of the church. Hart also penned a significant theological essay on behalf of the Association. Since 1774, the Philadelphia Association had included with its annual circular letter "an improvement of some article of our Confession of Faith."[158] In 1782, Hart was tasked with chapter eight, "Christ the Mediator," an assignment that allowed Hart to expound his favorite theme, and to exercise the extent of his doctrinal acumen.[159]

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reported that there was simply no suitable place of ministry for him at that time. Richard Furman to Oliver Hart, August 27, 1790, Richard Furman and James C. Furman Collection, Furman.

[154] Hart, diary, April 8, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[155] Hart's writing from this period mention travels to Baltimore, Frederick Town, Philadelphia, and New York City. Hart has left a detailed account of one such trip in the spring of 1788, when he supplied the pulpit of the First Baptist Church of New York City for his friend John Gano.

[156] Gilette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 169–170.

[157] See *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, Shewing The Business of Officers and Private Members in the Church of Christ, and How Their Work Should Be Performed; with Some Motives to Excite Professors Ardently to Engage in It* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785); and *A Gospel Church Portrayed, and Her Orderly Service Pointed Out – A Sermon, Delivered in the City of Philadelphia at the Opening of the Baptist Association, October 4, 1791* (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791). For a theological analysis of both sermons, see Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People Involved in Forming a Baptist Identity: Beginnings in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus Publications, 2005), 90–95.

[158] Gilette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 136.

[159] Full text of this sermon can be found in Gilette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 181–91.

The PBA also called on Hart's theological discernment when the doctrine of "universal restoration" began sweeping through Baptist life in the 1780s. Elhanan Winchester (1751–1797), the gifted pastor of the Philadelphia Baptist Church, began promoting universalism in late 1780, leading to deep division in that congregation by the spring of 1781.[160] The PBA appointed Hart to a committee to investigate the situation and to mediate between the two parties.[161] Hart had served alongside Winchester years before in the Charleston Association. At that time, Hart had admired him as "a valuable man and . . . very useful."[162] Ultimately, the committee confirmed that Winchester had transgressed the bounds of orthodoxy, and sided with the party that opposed him. Winchester left the church, and the committee advised the churches to "beware," and "not admit him, or any who advocate 'universal salvation' to the office of public teaching, or suffer any who avow the same to continue in their communion."[163] In a report to the Warren Association, Hart wrote, "the minds of but too many are poisoned with the heresy, and the Philadelphia Church is reduced to a deplorable situation. God knows where these things will end. We have thought it our duty, however, to bear an open testimony against this damnable doctrine. Churches, in every capacity, ought to be pillars of truth."[164] Hart viewed the fight against encroaching universalism in the context of an ancient spiritual battle. "This is one of the games at which Satan hath play'd in every age of the Christian Church," he wrote to Backus. "more especially in times of revival, the Enemy will sow such tares among the wheat."[165]

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[160] For more on Winchester, see Nathan A. Finn, "The Making of a Baptist Universalist: The Curious Case of Elhanan Winchester," presented to the Baptist Studies Group at the Evangelical Theological Society, San Francisco, California, 2011.

[161] The other committee members were Samuel Jones, Abel Morgan, and James Manning.

[162] Oliver Hart to Isaac Backus, February 16, 1777, Gratz Collection, HSP.

[163] Gilette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 174.

[164] Oliver Hart to Warren Baptist Association, April 22, 1781, Backus MSS, ANTS.

[165] Oliver Hart to Isaac Backus, July 25, 1781, Backus MSS.

Hart monitored other doctrinal aberrations creeping into the churches during this period. He expressed concern over the influence of New Divinity theology at Rhode Island College.[166] This school of thought, also called "New England theology" or "Hopkinsianism" after Samuel Hopkins (1721–1803), creatively refashioned many standard Reformed doctrines by the followers of Jonathan Edwards. Many traditional Calvinists feared that the New Divinity men introduced dangerous innovations to traditional Reformed theology, especially in the areas of free will, original sin, and atonement. In 1790, the church at Stamford queried the PBA about whether or not they should hold fellowship with those who espouse the system of New Divinity. Though the PBA left the decision to the churches, they offered this warning:

> [W]e apprehend danger, lest by these fine spun theories, and the consequences which are drawn from them by some, the great doctrines of imputation of Adam's sin, and Christ's proper atonement, imputed righteousness, &c., should be totally set aside, or at least, the glory sullied. We therefore advise that great care should be taken to guard against innovations not calculated to edify the body of Christ.[167]

Rhode Island College was dear to Hart, but he lamented that it had become "headquarters" for turning out "Hopkinsians" or "New Divinity men" into Baptist pulpits. One graduate was John Waldo (1762–1826), who preached in view of a pastoral call at the Georgetown, South Carolina, Baptist church in 1793. When Hart learned the church had rejected Waldo over his theology, he told Furman he was "glad the Georgetown people have been better taught than to embrace such sentiments or to approve of such preaching." He applied the words of Ralph Erskine to New Divinity: "A poor Divinity and jargon loose, such that will never build the house."[168]

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[166] E. Brooks Holifield surveys the spectrum of Baptist variations on Calvinistic theology in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 273–290. Holifield identifies four main positions: Baptist Edwardeanism, Fullerite Calvinism, Philadelphia Confession Calvinism, and an eclectic popular Calvinism, influenced by Hyper-Calvinism and other Baptist impulses. Using these labels, the men of Rhode Island College, led by its president Jonathan Maxcey (1768–1820), were Edwardean; Hart was a "Philadelphia Confession Traditionalist."

[167] Gilette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 256.

[168] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, May 30, 1793, Furman MSS, Furman; Oliver Hart to

Fighting for Faith

During his latter years, Hart described himself as "an unworthy traveller towards New Jerusalem, who desires ever to esteem himself a stranger and sojourner in this dreary wilderness . . . 'By faith he sojourned in the Land as in a strange country (Heb 11:9).'"[169] Hart often lamented his lack of "usefulness" at this time. The revival he had known in his youth and at Charleston seemed a distant memory. His flock of thirty years was now thriving under the leadership of Richard Furman, whom the church had called at Hart's own recommendation.[170] Hopewell, on the other hand, remained apathetic. "I long to see some fruit of my labour in Hopewell," he wrote, "But alas, we are all to carnal and worldly minded. The things of the world engross our attention too much."[171]

Hart's health was also failing. The aging pastor could no longer maintain the strenuous ministry pace of his earlier years. In 1788, Hart attempted a visit to the Charleston Association's annual meeting, but after making it a considerable distance, Hart's fragile physical condition forced him to turn back. This was a crushing disappointment. Hart confided in his diary,

> But no one knows how much these things have affected my spirits, they rob me of my natural rest, I feel a perturbation of mind which I cannot describe, and what is worse, Satan and unbelief rob me of my spiritual comforts (if ever I knew anything of religion, which I am tempted to doubt) so that my burthen is great. These indeed are precious words – Cast thy burthens upon the Lord, and he will sustain thee. I see many gracious promises and declarations, and have been attempting to plead the

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Richard Furman, August 27, 1793, Hart MSS, SCL. For Waldo's experience at Georgetown, Roy Talbert Jr. and Meggan A. Farish, *The Antipedo Baptists of Georgetown, South Carolina, 1710–2010* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 36–37.

[169] Hart, *Original Diary*, 2.

[170] Hart had written to Furman on October 9, 1784: "Hitherto I have been detailed in this place, and whether I shall ever return to Charleston or not is a matter yet undetermined. I have my health so well here am so well settled, and the situation of this church is such, that I scarce know how to leave the Place. Yet wish my old charge to be supplied. I understand they have had an eye upon you. I have wrote to them to give you a call, which hope you will accept, if you can see your way clear, as I know not of anyone that I should choose in preference, to fill up that place. I hope God will direct you in this great affair, for his own glory, and the good of his church. The struggles I have had in my own mind, to know duty, perhaps have not often been experienced. I now leave it with Him whose I am, [whom] I desire to serve and who can guide all my ways." Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, October 9, 1784, Hart MSS, Furman.

[171] Hart, diary, July 15, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

> blood and righteousness of Christ, and to lay hold on the skirts of his robe, but the arm of faith seems to be withered. I try to say, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief—O Lord give me faith.[172]

The frailties of Hart's old age often turned his mind toward eternity. Meditation on Heaven was a staple of the Puritan and Evangelical spiritual tradition, and became more prominent at the end of Hart's life. On occasion, Hart expressed these reflections through poetry:

> Foreboding thoughts and gloomy fears
> Crowd thick into my breast;
> Perplexing doubts and anxious cares
> Forbid my soul to rest.
>
> Happy ye Saints, above the skies,
> Beyond the reach of woe!
> Dear Lord, command my soul to rise
> With joyful haste I'll go.
>
> The world in sackcloth and distress,
> I'd leave beneath my feet:
> And mounting in a heavenly dress,
> I would my Saviour meet. [173]

Longing for Revival

Despite discouragements, Hart plodded ahead, and never stopped praying for revival, the dominant theme of his correspondence to the end of his life. Hart invariably requested his friends to join him in praying for a spiritual awakening at Hopewell. In 1790, he wrote Furman, "With grief I inform you that religion is at a low ebb in this church. I cannot say there is the least appearance of a Revival amongst us. Hope we shall share an interest in your prayers, that the Spirit of the Lord may breathe on these dry bones, that they may live."[174] Nothing worse could be said of his church than, "Religion

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[172] Hart, diary, September 23, 1788, Hart MSS, SCL.

[173] Cited in William Rogers, *A Sermon*, 21–22. Rogers added, "He had a considerable turn for poetry, though so modest, that but few of his most intimate friends knew he possessed the this talent; a large book of poems, principally of his own composition, was lost in Charleston."

[174] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, July 15, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

was nearly a dead calm."[175] He longed for the lively influences of the Spirit he had felt in days gone past. Again, in 1791, Hart groaned, "Vital piety and practical godliness among professors in these parts, seem to be almost cashier'd. We have had no late additions to our Church, although we have some new seeking souls among us. O pray for us."[176] Later that year, Hart reported five baptisms at Hopewell. Still, he pleaded: "Will you pray, my brother, O pray earnestly that these may be the first fruits of a great harvest. Who knows but God will hear you for us."[177]

Hart was not just interested in revival for his own church. As a true "lover of Zion," Hart sought and celebrated news of awakenings beyond his own field of labor. His words to the Warren Association in 1779 clearly express the fervency of his revival hope:

> Several of [the churches of South Carolina] have been blest with a happy revival of religion; but at Pee Dee there has been a glorious display of the power, the goodness of God, in the conversion of hundreds . . . Our earnest desire and prayer to God is, that his work may extend far and wide, until the saving knowledge of God may cover the Earth as the waters do the sea.[178]

To Backus, after reporting revival in Pennsylvania, he wrote, "O may the gospel of Jesus be preached with success over all this inhabited globe! And may poor Hopewell catch the sacred flame!"[179]

"A Shock of Corn Fully Ripe"

As the year 1795 drew to a close, Hart knew his earthly journey was also complete. By the final week of December, he was confined to his bed, struggling to breathe. When a friend asked if he felt comfortable, Hart replied, "God is an all sufficient

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[175] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, May 30, 1793, Richard Furman and James C. Furman MSS, Furman.

[176] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, June 15, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[177] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, August 26, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[178] Oliver Hart for Charleston Baptist Association to Warren Baptist Association, February 16, 1777, Backus MSS.

[179] Oliver Hart to Isaac Backus, July 25, 1781, Backus MSS.

savior!"[180] On December 29, Hart's son reported that "he called for all around him to help him praise God for what he had done for his soul."[181] The next day, Oliver Hart died at the age of 72.

Testimonies of Hart's godly and useful life poured in. A Philadelphia newspaper praised him for "the endowments of his mind; his early and unaffected piety; his abilities as a theologian and minister of the sanctuary; the regularity of his whole life; his domestic virtues, and universal philanthropy."[182] At Hopewell, Rogers preached a memorial sermon for his friend. "Try, my Brethren, to comfort one another," he exhorted, "give thanks to God that you ever had such a pastor. Imitate the many things you saw in him so worthy of imitation, and 'honor his memory by imbibing his spirit and copying his bright example.'"[183] In Charleston, Furman also spoke for Hart. At one poignant moment, Furman addressed the members of the family:

> The loss of such a father demands a tear on your part, but on his, you have reason to rejoice. Your venerable parent had lived the full term allotted to man on earth; he had exhibited an example of tried worth; had obtained large experience of mercy and love of God; and, being rich in good works, has come to the end of his days as a shock of corn fully ripe, and ready for the garner above. Dry then your tears, imitate his piety and virtues; aid, by your best endeavours, that sacred cause of God and religion, for which he was so long the public and faithful advocate among us; and prepare to meet him in that happy land, 'where seraphs gather immortality from life's fair tree, fast by the throne of God.'"[184]

Perhaps the most significant testimony of Hart's revival spirituality did not come from the polished rhetoric of a public sermon, but in the private tribute of his widow. While reviewing Hart's diaries fifteen years after his death, Nancy came across one of his many prayers for revival. At the bottom of the page, she scrawled this note:

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[180] Recorded by Hart's son, William Rogers Hart, quoted in Rogers, *A Sermon*, 28–29.

[181] Rogers, *A Sermon*, 29.

[182] Cited in Rogers, *A Sermon*, 19.

[183] Rogers, *A Sermon*, 35.

[184] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 27.

"My once dear Hart, how did thy soul long for the conversion of sinners. But now thy, thy painful, pleasing work is done. Thou hast entered into the joy of thy Lord—no more tears to shed for hardened sinners. Thou hast received the 'Well done, good and faithful servant.' May I—may your son, follow thy example.—A. Hart, January 15, 1810."[185]

[185] Hart, diary, October 1788, Hart MSS, SCL.

CHAPTER 3

"MAY WE EXPERIENCE MORE OF THESE DIVINE INFLUENCES": REVIVAL PIETY

At the 1791 meeting of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, Oliver Hart was asked to deliver the annual sermon. At sixty-eight years old, Hart was then an elder statesman in Baptist life, entering the twilight of his long and fruitful ministry. But as he spoke about the necessity of the indwelling Spirit, he sounded again like the young man who had preached alongside George Whitefield at the height of the Great Awakening:

> And as there must be a divine principle, in order to spiritual worship, so that principle must be drawn out into action. There must be the exercise of grace, in faith, hope, charity, and the whole assemblage of Christian virtues. This necessarily calls for the continued influence of the Holy Spirit; for without his aid, we can do nothing. Upon the whole, I apprehend, the spirituality of worship consists in communion with God, through Christ, by the operations of the Holy Ghost. I am sensible there are many who discard this doctrine of divine influences, as enthusiastical; but I look upon it as the quintessence of religion, without which there can be no spiritual—no acceptable worship at all. O, may we experience more of these divine influences! That we may be more spiritual in all the parts of religious worship![1]

Generally speaking, the piety of the Great Awakening was Calvinistic in soteriology, with special emphasis on the Holy Spirit's dynamic activity in conversion and sanctification.[2] The evangelicals' focus on the Spirit earned them the nickname of "New Lights," from suspicious observers, though Thomas Kidd has demonstrated that there were both moderate and radical revivalists within this group. Anti-revivalists feared

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[1] Oliver Hart, *A Gospel Church Portrayed, and Her Orderly Service Pointed Out—A Sermon, Delivered in the City of Philadelphia at the Opening of the Baptist Association, October 4, 1791* (Trenton, NJ: Isaac Collins, 1791), 37–38.

[2] Thomas S. Kidd has argued convincingly for this emphasis on the Holy Spirit as a defining mark of the early evangelicals in *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007). See also Thomas S. Kidd, *George Whitefield: America's Spiritual Founding Father* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), 36.

the enthusiasm, or fanaticism, that seemed inherent in seeking after "divine influences."[3]

Regular Baptists are commonly perceived today to have been anti-revivalists, especially when compared to their Separate Baptist counterparts.[4] This error is, in many ways, understandable. The Separates emerged as a direct result of the Great Awakening. They engaged in emotional worship on the frontier, rejected formal creeds and an educated ministry, and enjoyed spectacular evangelistic success in the second half of the eighteenth century. In many ways, the Separates were textbook "radical revivalists."[5] The Regulars, established in America before the turn of the eighteenth century, traced their roots to the English Particular Baptist tradition. They held tenaciously to the *Second London Confession*, promoted ministerial education, and practiced greater restraint in worship than did the Separates. Yet for all their differences, the two Baptist groups both endorsed the Spirit's work in revival. Popular presentations of the Regulars as suspicious of the Great Awakening, preoccupied with order and fearful of spiritual ardor, are misleading. As one Regular Baptist asked a gathering of Separate during this period, "If we are all Christians, all Baptists—all *New Lights*—why are we divided?"[6] Using Kidd's helpful categories, Regular Baptists should be identified with the "moderate revivalists."

Oliver Hart exemplifies Regular Baptist revival piety. With the other evangelicals of the period, he longed to "experience more of these divine influences!" In this, he followed the preceding generation of Regular Baptists like Jenkin Jones, Isaac Chanler, and William Tilly, all of whom appear in Whitefield's letters and journals as

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[3] For the classic evangelical defense of the revival, see Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, vol. 2 of *WJE*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009). For the quintessential Old Light objection to revival, see Charles Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts on the State of Religion in New-England* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1743).

[4] For this perspective, see especially William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961).

[5] For a detailed analysis on the differences in Regular and Separate Baptists, see chap. 5 below.

[6] Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Pitt and Dickinson, 1894), 68, emphasis original.

trusted supporters of the Great Awakening. He was also joined by contemporaries like Edmund Botsford, Evan Pugh, and Francis Pelot. These Regular Baptists all belonged to what Mark Noll has described as the "network of revived Calvinists" that celebrated Whitefield's ministry and helped form the new evangelical movement.[7] This chapter will establish this claim by examining the shape of Hart's revival piety.

"The Foundation of All Our Happiness": The Covenant of Grace

Hart was known as "an uniform advocate, both in public and in private, for the doctrines of free and sovereign grace."[8] At the root of his theology was a total trust in a holy and all-glorious God, who chose to rescue sinners by his grace before the world began. In eternity past, God "foresaw Adam would fall . . . and that the whole human race would be involved in guilt, and must inevitably perish." In response, the members of the Trinity "formed a council" to "lay the plan" of man's salvation. The Father, "having predestinated a select number of the fallen race to the adoption of children," proposed the work of redemption to the Son, who agreed to secure salvation for the elect through his death and resurrection on their behalf. The Father, in turn, pledged to send the Spirit to the elect at the moment of conversion, making them willing and able to receive the benefits of Christ's saving work.[9] Hart believed that man's salvation stemmed entirely from this mysterious transaction within the Godhead, known as "the covenant of grace."[10] He compared this salvation plan to the building of a glorious house:

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[7] See Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2010), 127–28. Noll mentions Welsh Anglicans, English Dissenters, Scottish Presbyterians, and New England Congregationalists as belonging to this group.

[8] William Rogers, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Oliver Hart* (Philadelphia: Lang and Ustick, 1796), 22

[9] *The Second London Confession* 5.1–2, in William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 259.

[10] Oliver Hart, *Of Christ the Mediator*, in *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807*, ed. A. D. Gilette (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 182.

> The triune Jehovah was the builder of this edifice. God, the Father, chose the materials: God, the Son, purchased them with his most precious blood; and God, the Holy Ghost, by his powerful and gracious influences, hews, planes, polishes, and fits them for the building. Each of these divine persons is equally concerned in the erection of this house. Jehovah then is the Grand Architect or Master Builder; therefore we have no reason to wonder that it is such a magnificent structure.[11]

Hart was quick to defend his covenant theology. When his friend Samuel Jones was questioning the biblical support for the covenant of grace, Hart wrote back, "Blessed be God, that there is such a covenant, justly called the covenant of grace, from its own nature, and in contradistinction from the covenant of works, and this covenant is supported by the clearest (and Scriptural) evidence."[12] In fact, Hart believed that an affirmation of the covenant of grace was essential for the preaching of the gospel of grace. In an ordination sermon, he urged two young ministers:

> In the general you will insist much upon the two following topicks, namely, our apostacy from God, and our redemption by Jesus Christ which will very naturally lead you to take notice of the transactions of God in eternity, with reference to our salvation. Here you will find the foundation of our happiness founded upon an eternal covenant, compact, or agreement, between the three persons of the ever adorable Trinity. That the persons for whom this covenant was made, are a certain, select number, out of the race of mankind, who are redeemed by his blood, justified by his righteousness, called by the inscrutable operations of his Spirit; sanctified by his grace, and finally glorified.[13]

Some Christians objected to this strong emphasis on God's sovereignty as antithetical to revival and evangelism. The Awakening's most noteworthy critic of Calvinism was John Wesley, the Arminian leader of the Methodist movement. In his 1739 sermon *Free Grace*, Wesley argued that the doctrines of eternal election and predestination rendered preaching pointless, undermined man's responsibility for holiness and good works, destroyed "the comfort of religion, the happiness of Christianity," charged the Scriptures with contradictions, and even blasphemed the

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[11] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 19.

[12] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, November 1, 1764, McKesson Collection, HSP.

[13] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

character of God.[14] Wesley roared at the Calvinists, "Here I fix my foot. On this I join issue with every asserter of it. You represent God as worse than the devil!"[15]

Hart disagreed completely. As Furman recalled, "the doctrines of free, efficacious grace were precious to him."[16] Far from "destroying the comfort of religion," he preached that "the foundation of all our happiness" rested on God's covenant of grace. Hart affirmed Whitefield's response to Wesley, that "this doctrine is my daily support. I should utterly sink under a dread of my impending trials, were I not firmly persuaded that God has chosen me in Christ from before the foundation of the world, and that now being effectually called, he will allow no one to pluck me out of his almighty hand."[17]

Hart's Calvinism also did not restrict him from freely offering the gospel to sinners, a divisive issue among Baptists of the day.[18] "High" Calvinists among the English Particular Baptists believed it to be disingenuous to offer the gospel to the non-elect. They simply declared the work of Christ as a fact, and entrusted the rest of the work to the Holy Spirit. The most famous proponent of the "High Calvinist" view was London pastor John Gill (1697–1771).[19] Gill disagreed with the 1689 London

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[14] John Wesley, *Free Grace, a sermon preached at Bristol* (Boston: T. Fleet, 1741), 12–13, 14, 17–18, 18–23, 23–30.

[15] Wesley, *Free Grace*, 25. This inflammatory sermon led to Wesley's public schism with Whitefield and the Calvinist awakeners. For this long-developing feud, see especially Kidd, *George Whitefield*.

[16] Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M.* (Charleston: J. McIver, 1796), 24.

[17] George Whitefield, *A Letter from the Reverend George Whitefield, to the Reverend John Wesley, in Answer to his sermon, entitled Free Grace* (Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740), 17.

[18] For a succinct analysis of this issue, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the Evangelical Anglican Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 120–25.

[19] Gill wrote to defend Tobias Crisp's argument for eternal justification and eternal union from the attacks of Abraham Taylor in his 1732 A Justification of the Doctrine of Eternal Justification. (Roger Hayden, *Continuity and Change: Evangelical Calvinism among eighteenth-century Baptist ministers trained at Bristol Academy, 1690–1791* [Oxford: Chipping Norton, 2006], 39). Gill also republished John Skepp's (1675–1721) *The Divine Energy: or the efficacious operations of the Spirit of God in the soul of man, in his effectual calling and conversion: stated, proved, and vindicated. Wherein the real weakness and insufficiency of moral persuasion, without the super-addition of the exceeding greatness of God's power for faith and conversion to God, are fully evinced. Being an antidote against the Pelagian plague* (1739). Skepp was Gill's friend and mentor and participated in his ordination council. See Alan P. F. Sell, *Great Debate: Calvinism Arminianism and Salvation* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1982), 78. For a defense of Gill as

Confession's rejection of eternal justification, writing that justification "does not begin to take place in time or at believing, but antecedent to any act of faith."[20] Hart consciously followed Gill in most doctrinal matters, referring to Gill more than any other writer, and corresponding with Gill for several years.[21] Some of Hart's statements suggest that he also followed Gill on the matter of the free offer:

> [S]alvation is not of works, but of grace. And these doctrines are to be preached faithfully, without terms and conditions, to be performed by us; and without offers and tenders of grace. Otherwise we blend law and gospel, grace and works, Christ and Moses; and thereby involve the Christian doctrine in the greatest inconsistencies and absurdities. It were to be wished that Christian ministers would be consistent with themselves, as also with the gospel; and not at once preach that salvation is of grace; and then, introduce such terms, offers and conditions, as would lead us to believe that it is not of faith, but as it were by works of the law. This is not to preach the gospel. Surely such workmen have need to be ashamed, for they do not rightly divide the word of truth. And if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle.[22]

In disparaging "offers and tenders of grace," Hart appears at first to share Gill's concerns about the free offer. On the other hand, he could have simply been rejecting the rigorous, drawn-out "preparationism" practiced by many Puritan preachers. Judging by Hart's surviving sermons, the latter option is fairly certain, for Hart preached like an evangelical Calvinist. Consider the closing appeal in a 1765 sermon outline on 1 Timothy 1:15, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief."[23] Hart's final application was, "Let great sinners take encouragement from hence to hope more for mercy and salvation.

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consistent with Whitefield, see Tom J. Nettles, "John Gill and the Evangelical Awakening," in *The Life and Thought of John Gill (1697-1771): A Tercentennial Appreciation*, ed. Michael Haykin (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 131–70.

[20] John Gill, *A Body of Divinity* (Grand Rapids: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1971), 203.

[21] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, December 1, 1763, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[22] Oliver Hart, *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, Shewing The Business of Officers and Private Members in the Church of Christ, and How Their Work Should Be Performed; with Some Motives to Excite Professors Ardently to Engage in It* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785), 15–16.

[23] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

None need to despair!" Pressing this home, Hart answered a series of imagined objections to the invitation:

> Objection 1: "I have been a sinner above my fellows, etc."
> Response: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7)."
>
> Objection 2: "I am an old offender – have done nothing but sin, etc."
> Response: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7)."
>
> Objection 3: "I have stifled the Spirit, killed convictions, and murdered my own soul!"
> Response: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:7)."
>
> Objection 4: "I have a hard heart!"
> Response: "I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh (Ezekiel 36:26)."
>
> Objection 5: "I have 1,000 blasphemous thoughts, etc."
> Response: "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleansesth us from all sin (1 John 1:7)."[24]

Hart's sermons indicate no hesitation in calling all sinners to repent and believe the gospel. At one point, Hart was recognized as the most consistently evangelical preacher in the city of Charleston.[25] His protégés Edmund Botsford[26] and Samuel Stillman[27] were both "free offer men" who also preached for conversion. As

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[24] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

[25] So Edmund Botsford, under conviction of sin, was informed by a friend: "There is but one minister in this place who can be of any service to you, but he, I am told, is a Baptist; all the rest of the ministers deserve not the name. I would advise you to go hear him." Charles D. Mallary, *The Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004), 29.

[26] So zealous a travelling evangelist was Botsford that he earned the nickname, "the flying preacher": "In the month of August, 1773, I rode 650 miles, preached 42 sermons, baptized 21 persons, and administered the Lord's Supper twice. Indeed, I travelled so much this year that some used to call me the flying preacher." Mallary, *Edmund Botsford*, 45.

[27] Stillman's biographer wrote, "He did not, however, connect with this the erroneous idea of some, that all men were not under obligation to repent of their sins and believe the gospel; but whilst he believed the condemnation of sinners was by the moral law, he supposed that this condemnation would be greatly aggravated by a rejection of the gospel, and that they would be treated as those who despised God's grace. His ideas of the faith which accompanies salvation were, that it was a belief of the gospel; a hearty reception of that plan of grace which is revealed in Christ Jesus, accompanied with holy love and every gracious exercise. He rejected the error, that the essence of faith consists in a person's believing that Christ died for him in particular, no such proposition being contained in the word of God, and no one being warranted to believe this till he has good evidence of his regeneration." Samuel Stillman, *Select Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects, by the Late Samuel Stillman, D.D., Comprising Several Sermons*

indebted as Hart was to Gill, he followed Whitefield in his preaching. Whitefield himself, who worshipped at Hart's church, worked with Hart in the revival, and commended Hart's ministry to others, certainly approved of his practice.[28] Hart agreed with his hero that preaching was God's appointed means to save the elect, and, "since we know not who are elect and reprobate, we are to preach promiscuously to all."[29]

The covenant of grace also supplied Hart with a unifying framework for understanding the Bible. Beginning with the first, shadowy gospel promise in Genesis 3:15, Scripture unfolded with increasing clarity God's plan to redeem his people through the work of Jesus Christ, the mediator of the covenant of grace. Though the individual's experience of salvation varied from the Old to the New Covenant, God's people in every age were, in reality, saved through faith in Christ. Hart was thus as comfortable preaching Jesus from the Old Testament as from the New:

> The foundation on which the church is built is the Lord Jesus Christ. Under this character he is frequently spoken of in the Old and New Testaments. By implication, Christ is held forth as the foundation in the first declaration of gospel grace: "The seed of the woman shall bruise the serpent's head (Gen 3:15)." Which imports that, notwithstanding Adam's fall, God would have a church in the world, and that this church should be founded on Christ, as an incorruptible, impregnable basis. But through mercy, we are not left to such abstruse, figurative hints only. The evangelical prophet is more explicit: "Therefore thus sayeth the Lord God, 'Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation, a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation (Isa 28:16).'" The testimony of the apostle Paul is not less express: "Other foundation can no man lay, than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ (1 Cor 3:11)."[30]

With this Christocentric understanding of the Bible, Jesus maintained the central place in Hart's preaching and piety. Furman said of him, "Christ Jesus, and him crucified, in the perfection of his righteousness, the merit of his death, the prevalence of

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Never Before Published to Which Is Prefixed A Biographical Sketch of the Author's Life (Boston: Manning & Loring, 1808), x–xi.

[28] See chap. 5 below.

[29] Whitefield, *A Letter to the Reverend John Wesley*, 12.

[30] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 8–9.

his intercession, and efficacy of his grace, was the foundation of his hope, the source of his joy, and the delightful theme of his preaching."[31] This, too, was characteristic of the Great Awakening.

"A Horrid Enmity Against God": Man's Radical Sinfulness

Evangelical preachers did not shrink from declaring the Bible's grim verdict on man's nature: "Tell me then, o man, whosoever thou art, that disputes the doctrine of original sin, if thy conscience be not seared as with a hot iron!" Whitefield thundered, "Tell me, if thou dost not find thyself by nature to be a motly mixture of brute and devil?"[32] Likewise, Jonathan Edwards is remembered for his unnerving descriptions of man's lost estate: "Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf," he announced.[33] With these revival leaders, Hart declared sin to be "the dreadful thing" at the root of man's problem.[34] "It is against this Sovereign Being that we have rebell'd and whose laws we have broke, and to who's wrath we are obnoxious," he preached.[35]

In Augustinian fashion, Hart affirmed the doctrine of original sin. Adam, humanity's federal representative, plunged his descendants into spiritual ruin through his transgression in the Garden of Eden. Hart described Adam's original relationship with God as one of "the most cordial amity and friendship," until his disobedience "broke the

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[31] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

[32] George Whitefield, *The Indwelling of the Spirit, the Common Privilege of all Believers* (Boston: Keeland and Green, 1739), 16.

[33] Jonathan Edwards, "Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God," in *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, ed. Wilson H. Kimnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney. (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1999) 55–56.

[34] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

[35] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5, Hart MSS, SCL.

tender ties of love and esteem," and "the quarrel commenced, entirely on the part of man."[36] The broken relationship was immediately revealed in Adam's fear of and resentment toward God; Hart observed that fallen man now "dreads the divine presence," and has "contracted a contrariety of soul to the perfections of the Deity, and a horrid enmity against God." On his part, God was "an injured sovereign, insisting that reparation should be made for the dishonor done him." God now demanded both the "punctual observance" of the law, as well as full satisfaction for his law's violation to repair the relationship; yet these were "impossible terms to man in his fallen state."[37]

Adam's sin carried fatal consequences for all his descendants. In the words of the *Second London Confession*, "the guilt of the sin was imputed, and corrupted nature conveyed" to the entire human race.[38] Through the stain of original sin, the human race was by nature "dead in sin, and wholly defiled, in all the faculties, and parts, of soul, and body;" and "utterly indisposed, disabled, and made opposite to all good, and wholly inclined to all evil."[39] Hart compared sinful man to the prodigal son of Luke 15 who "hath left his home, travels into a far country," and now passes through life as "a stranger." Man "hath forsook God and gone after his own heart's lusts;" he has "missed his way," has been "reduced to want," and is now "used with severity . . . deluded by the devil, their hard master." Sin rendered man a stranger in every sense: to "God and to the love of God," and to all of God's "communications of grace." He is a stranger to "Christ and his work of redemption," to "the nature and spirituality of the Law of God, which is a transcript of the moral perfections of God," and even a stranger "to his own heart."[40] Man needed comprehensive rescue from "the guilt of sin, the power and dominion of sin, the

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[36] Hart, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 181.

[37] Hart, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 181.

[38] *The Second London Confession* 6.3 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 259.

[39] *The Second London Confession* 6.4 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 258–59.

[40] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

filth of sin, and the being of sin."[41]

Hart's personal writings show him to be keenly aware of his own sinfulness. As an old man, he bemoaned how he had squandered his early years in living for self rather than for God: "My youth was spent in vanity and a listlessness to all that was good."[42] After his conversion experience, Hart remained sensitive to his ongoing shortcomings in the spiritual life. "I am this day conscious of my own weakness and defects!" he exclaimed in an ordination sermon. "How then shall I impose a charge, in which I have conducted so unworthily myself?"[43] On a birthday, Hart recorded matter-of-factly, "This day was 66 years old, an old sinner."[44] He grew frustrated by his spiritual inertia. "I have to lament of too much leanness of soul," he regularly admitted.[45] In another place, he remarked, "I do this morning feel myself under a sense of barrenness . . . I feel the want and the life and power of religion in my own heart."[46] On another occasion, the example of a pious widow "made me ashamed when I saw how far short I come of acting the Christian and minister. O Lord, revive thy work in my heart, remove deadness from my soul, teach my tongue to speak thy praise."[47] Like other evangelicals for whom the doctrines of original sin and total depravity were so ingrained, humility before God was, perhaps, the dominant note of Hart's piety.

Humility did not dissuade Hart from addressing the sin of worldly Charleston. He believed the ungodly lives of his neighbors were responsible for the fires, storms, and

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[41] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

[42] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, June 1, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[43] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[44] Oliver Hart, diary, in Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart, 1723–1795: A Biography* (Greenville, SC: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966), 26.

[45] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, June 20, 1793, Hart MSS, SCL.

[46] Oliver Hart, diary, August 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[47] Oliver Hart, diary, October 15, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

wars that ravaged the city throughout the eighteenth century. Hart interpreted these as "so many loud calls to repentance, reformation of life, and prayer, that the wrath of God may be turned from us." Still Charleston continued to be "swallowed up in pleasure and dissipation." Thus, Hart "determined, in faithfulness to my trust, to maintain an open and vigorous war with all the vices and sinful diversions of the age." The ridicule he received did not deter him: "If I had not been willing to endure the scoff of the world, I should never have made an open profession of the religion of Jesus; much less should I have become a preacher of his much-despised gospel." Hart knew that whoever "ventures to attack vice, in a public manner, ought to be possessed of some degree of fortitude and resolution; for sin is a monster of more than a thousand heads; should he slay some, there will be many yet remaining, and he may expect to be attacked on every side; especially if he should dare to level at some popular darling vice . . ."[48]

With Whitefield and other evangelical preachers, Hart took special aim at dancing. Not only was dancing itself "extremely immodest, and incentive to uncleanness," but the music was "often very obscene . . . which have a tendency to pollute the imagination, and to raise unchaste thoughts in the mind." Those who lingered at balls also failed to steward precious time, which was "shamefully misimproved . . . squandered away—it is murdered—it is consumed on our lusts." Dancing schools and gowns represented "an extravagant waste of money" that could otherwise "relieve a virtuous family in distress, or cloath half a dozen orphan children." Further, conversation at dances was filled with "flattery, lying, ribaldry and nonsense." Hart denounced the ball as "the devil's procession, and whoever entereth there, entereth into his procession. The devil is the leader, the middle, and the end of the dance. So many paces as a man maketh in a ball, so many leaps he maketh towards hell."[49]

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[48] Oliver Hart, *Dancing Exploded: A Sermon Shewing the Unlawfulness, Sinfulness, and Bad Consequences of Balls, Assemblies, and Dances in General* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1778), 5–6.

[49] Hart, *Dancing Exploded*, 15, 16, 19, 24. In the last statement, Hart favorably quotes another

In addition to open vice, man's sin was also evident in his confused religious efforts. Following Romans 1–2, Hart declared that all men knew that God existed, that he deserved their worship, and required appeasement for sin. But "how he is to be worshipped, in an acceptable manner, by fallen, sinful men, is a point beyond the utmost stretch of human reason to determine without the assistance of divine revelation."[50] Enveloped in darkness, fallen man fearfully groped after God as best he knew how, yielding disastrous results:

> Here the heathen have ever been plunged, not being able to find out by what means they should pacify an offended Deity. Hence they have been driven to the most extravagant practices: of macerating their bodies, cutting them with lancets; offering human sacrifices; and causing even their own children to be roasted in the fire, as the most likely victims to appease their angry gods. Awful indications, these, of the depravity of human nature! To what monstrous and horrid practices doth ignorance drive the sons of Adam![51]

Yet, even when the way of salvation was plainly explained, sin drove man to resist God's grace either by trusting in his own morality, or diving headlong into lascivious living. "The proud boasting Pharisee rejects a crucified Saviour with disdain, and the poor sensual sinner, prefers to him the gratification of his beastly appetites, but to those who are being saved, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God," Hart preached.[52] That saving knowledge of Christ only broke through to the sinner's heart through the Holy Spirit's work of conversion.

"Called by the Inscrutable Operations of His Spirit": Conversion

"Should be glad if you could get an opportunity of conversing with my

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author.

[50] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5, June 5, 1763, Hart MSS, SCL.

[51] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 2:5, Hart MSS, SCL.Hart alludes to 1 Kings 18:20–29 and Micah 6:6–7.

[52] Hart, Sermon 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

daughter-in-law, Sally Clark," Hart wrote to Furman. "I believe her to have experienced a saving change; and that she is a proper subject for baptism."[53] For evangelicals, the doorway to the Christian life was the "saving change," of conversion, wrought in the human soul by the Holy Spirit. This experience, called the "new birth," awakened sinners to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ. Kidd has correctly identified conversion as "the *raison d'être* of the evangelical movement."[54] Whitefield called the new birth "the very hinge on which the salvation of each of us turns, and a point on which all sincere Christians, of whatever denomination, agree."[55] Hart certainly agreed; promoting conversion comprised the center of his ministry. "Oh, that they knew what the new birth means!" he cried after preaching from John 3:7.[56]

One of his church members, Anne Sealy Grimball, experienced a classic evangelical conversion through Hart's ministry. Grimball described herself as "thoughtless and gay" in Charleston society. Yet at times, she found herself "terrified at the idea of death." Eventually, Grimball began attending the Charleston Baptist Church where she sat under Hart's preaching each week. "Here," she recalled, "I heard the gospel in its purity, but neither the threats of the law nor the sweet gospel sound made any impression on my hard and rocky heart." Yet Grimball was also finding Charleston's "gay scene" increasingly dissatisfying, unable to distract her from concerns about eternity. "I was not happy amidst all my flattering prospects: an amiable and tender husband, the gay circle—diversions—visits—congratulations, etc. Something was missing—and that something I could not find. My mind was not at rest." Over the next few years, Grimball experienced the tragic loss of several children, deepening her sense

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[53] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, May 8, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

[54] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 323.

[55] Whitefield, *A Sermon on Regeneration*, 5.

[56] Hart, diary, August 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

of life's brevity and her need for peace with God. "My convictions became more powerful—my situation more alarming, I thought no one was exercised as I was—I could not make my case known—I plainly saw that I must perish, dying as I was," she wrote, The services Grimball attended often produced greater disquiet than comfort at this time. "Satan, the grand enemy of souls, beset me with blasphemous thoughts—frightened me from duty—I feared to hear a sermon, lest it should rise up in judgment against me. Tell my unhappy case to anyone, I durst not," she said. She felt torn as she heard stories of others' conversions: "I loved to hear the people of God tell their experience; [but] feared they should ask me any questions." At long last, relief broke through:

> After many struggles with my frail and corrupted nature, many conflicts with a hard head of unbelief, our condescending Lord made me willing to follow him into the watery grave. I was baptized by Mr. Hart, May 5, 1770 (in my 29th year). Thus the Lord in his abundant mercy led me on from step to step as I could bear with afflictions—with comforts and mercies—with crosses and losses—until I was made willing to trust him, alone, for the whole of my salvation.[57]

Anne Sealy Grimball's conversion experience demonstrates the evangelical belief in the use of means in conversion. The preaching of the law and the gospel, the testimonies of others who had experienced the new birth, and the trials and afflictions of life, all contributed to her conversion. At the same time, the use of means alone was insufficient to effect regeneration. Grimball found herself contending with demonic forces, struggling with her own "frail and corrupted nature" that resisted surrender to Christ, a "rocky heart" and a "hard head of unbelief." It was the operations of the Spirit of God "by which I was made willing to trust him, alone, for the whole of my salvation." Looking back, it was plain that "the Lord in his abundant mercy led me on from step to step." Grimball's conversion was of special significance to Hart's ministry. Four years after baptizing her, Hart would take the young widow as his second wife.

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[57] Anne Hart, *Narrative of Anne Maria Sealy Grimball Hart, born 1741, South Carolina*, HSP.

"Called by the Inscrutable Operations of His Spirit"

Hart believed the Holy Spirit to be the active agent in conversion, his secret work in the human soul the final link in the Trinitarian conspiracy of grace. Hart explained that "the grace, love, or free favor of God is the impulsive cause of salvation," and "what Jesus Christ hath done and suffered for us is the meritorious cause," while the "Spirit of God is the communicative and manifestative cause."[58] The Spirit's initial "communication" or "manifestation" of salvation to man came in an event that Regular Baptists termed the "effectual call."[59] At a divinely appointed moment, the sinner was "called by the inscrutable operations of his Spirit," receiving a sovereign summons to rise and live like Lazarus from within the tomb.[60] The Spirit's call was "inscrutable," or mysterious, because it lay beyond man's control. As the wind blows through the trees, so the Spirit's work in a man's soul could neither be predicted beforehand nor detected at the time. But afterward, the effects of the Spirit's visitation were unmistakable.

Hart elaborated on the effectual call in a sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9.[61] He first distinguished the effectual, or "internal" call, from the "external" call of God. Biblical texts like Matthew 22:14, "many are called, but few chosen," indicated the reality of an

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[58] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9, October 20, 1755, Hart MSS, SCL.

[59] The "effectual call," in which God summoned sinners to believe, is often conflated with the closely related event of "regeneration," in which spiritual life is imparted by the Holy Spirit to enable faith and repentance. Some Baptist theologians, like John Gill, have distinguished between the two events in the *ordo salutis*: "effectual calling may be distinguished from regeneration, taken more strictly, for the first infusion and implantation of grace in the heart . . ." (John Gill, *Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity* [Philadelphia: Graves, 1810], 377.) Others treat these as two perspectives on the same essential reality. *The Second London Confession* addresses both under the heading of "Effectual Calling." (See *The Second London Confession* 10 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 264–65) In this vein, John L. Dagg wrote: "The internal grace, which renders the outward call effectual, is the grace of regeneration. Hence regeneration, considered as the work of the Holy Spirit, is the same as effectual calling; considered as the change of the sinner's heart, it is the effect of this calling. The calling is effectual, because it produces regeneration in the subject on whom it operates." John L. Dagg, *Manual of Theology* (Harrisonburg, VA: Gano Books, 1982), 332–33; cf. Wayne Grudem, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994], 700.). Oliver Hart seemed content to use these two terms almost interchangeably.

[60] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[61] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

external or "general" call that went out to all sinners to repent and believe, through the preaching of the gospel. The external call could be accompanied by the appearance of conversion, but it did not bear the Spirit's power and thus could not prevail upon the sinner's heart. This carried practical implications for Hart's ministry. Hart interpreted the non-response of listeners as a spiritual issue, as when he wrote in 1782 that "The Lord enabled me to preach with freedom from Matt 11:28: 'Come unto me.'" Though "my soul longed earnestly to see sinners coming unto Jesus weary and heavy-laden with sin," no one seemed moved by his invitation. "Conversion work is a strange work in this place," he lamented.[62] The external call also chastened Hart's enthusiasm over initial signs of conversion. His diaries typically move quickly from celebration over a new Christian to intercession. "May the Lord carry on his work in their hearts; may conviction end in conversion, and may none of those awakened turn back again," he prayed.[63]

The external call slammed against man's heart like a wave on a coastal rock, washing away to no effect. This had been Anne Grimball's experience all the years she resisted Christ. But the internal call was a "powerful, efficacious call," in which the omnipotent Holy Spirit overwhelmed the stoutest defiance. The internal call was irresistible, for it wielded the same power that raised Christ from the dead. Hart further described it as "a holy call," which set the sinner apart from his former worldliness to live unto God. It was a call "not according to works," for the sinner had done nothing to make himself fit for the call, but was "according to [God']s purpose," and "according to his grace given to us in Christ before the world began." Hart closed by challenging all who dared "deny the powerful, inscrutable operations of the Spirit in conversion," and pressed the ultimate question: "Have you experienced this inward call?"[64]

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[62] Hart, diary, February 10, 1782, Hart MSS, SCL.

[63] Hart, diary, August 20, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[64] Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

"Faith: 'Tis a Precious Grace!"

The immediate response of those effectually called by the Spirit was evangelical faith, which Hart described simply as "coming unto God by Christ." Converted individuals came to God as "poor sinners stripped bare of their own righteousness . . . pleading for mercy for Christ's sake only (like Bartimaeus) . . . believing on Christ for salvation."[65] Hart often illustrated the event of saving faith from Psalm 110:3, "Thy people shall be made willing in the day of thy power," a text he preached more than a dozen times in the years 1773–1794.[66] For Hart, the verse perfectly captured the new birth: God's enemies presented themselves as loyal subjects to King Jesus, because God's Spirit had made them willing in the day of his power.

At the moment of faith, the converted sinner entered a living relationship with Jesus Christ, who served a multitude of offices on the believer's behalf. Christ was his covenant head, delivering him from Adam's cursed race and securing for him "all the promises and blessings of the covenant." Christ was the Christian's "surety," the substitute who "engaged to do and suffer all that the law and justice of God required, to make satisfaction for their sins." Christ served also as the believer's advocate, who interceded on his behalf before God. Christ became the believer's prophet, who "teaches powerfully and efficaciously, by his word and Spirit." Christ was the priest in whose sacrificial death "a true and proper atonement was made for sin, satisfaction for divine justice was given, the wrath of an offended Deity was appeased, and sinners have free access unto God, as a God in covenant, a Father and Friend." And Christ became the Christian's king, who ruled by "the most wholesome laws," gave the "most glorious charter of privileges," and conquered all the believer's spiritual enemies.[67]

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[65] In Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[66] Oliver Hart, Sermon Register 1773–1794, Hart MSS, SCL.

[67] Hart, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 186–87.

On one occasion, Hart used poetry to reflect on the grace-given, Spirit-wrought, Christ-focused nature of saving faith:

> Faith! 'tis a precious grace,
> Wherein it is bestow'd
> It boast of a celestial birth
> and is the gift of God!
>
> Jesus it owns a King,
> An all-atoning Priest
> It claims no merit of its own,
> But looks for all in Christ
>
> To him it leads the soul
> When fill'd with deep distress,
> Flies to the fountain of his blood,
> and trusts his righteousness.
>
> Since 'tis thy work alone,
> And that divinely free;
> Lord, send the Spirit of thy Son
> to work this faith in me.[68]

"The New Nature Formed in the Heart"

The Spirit's work in conversion went deeper than an initial burst of faith. God's Spirit also imparted to the sinner an entirely new nature. Upon regeneration, man's disposition toward God was instantly transformed from a hostile sinner to a humble worshipper, who loved God and wanted to be like God. Hart spoke of the new birth as the Holy Spirit implanting "a divine principle of grace" in man's soul. Saving faith not only rescued man from the negative effects of sin, but positively, "holiness is annexed unto, and is part of the new nature formed in the heart."[69]

In the early days of the Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards had offered the classical theological analysis of regeneration in the sermon *A Divine and Supernatural*

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[68] The poem can be found in Hart MSS, SCL. William Rogers noted, "He had a considerable turn for poetry, though so modest, that but few of his most intimate friends knew he possessed this talent. A large book of poems, principally of his own composition, was lost in Charleston [upon Hart's flight to Philadelphia in 1780]." Rogers, *A Sermon*, 21.

[69] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

Light Immediately Imparted to the Soul, and in the book *Religious Affections*.[70] Edwards described the new principle of grace as "a true sense of the divine excellency of the things revealed in the Word of God, and a conviction of the truth and reality of them, thence arising."[71] Picking up on this key evangelical theme, Hart offered his own list of the religious affections awakened by the Spirit in a sermon on the new birth. First, those who have been born again "love the Lord for what he is in himself and what he is to us." Second, Jesus becomes supremely desirable: "we have attracting views of the Lord Jesus Christ and come to a saving close with him." A third sign of the Spirit's work is the new believer "delights to converse on spiritual and divine things." Further, a new affection for the church emerges in regeneration: "we have a tender regard for the cause of God; we rejoice when it flourisheth and mourn when it decreaseth." Fifth, the authority of God is no longer despised as a threat to personal freedom, but "we have a universal regard for all his precepts and commands." Sixth, the Spirit produces a passion for practical godliness: "We hate sin, love holiness, and mourn on account of indwelling sin." Finally, the soul is weaned from its love for this world, and "we have strong desires after heaven."[72] With Edwards, Hart believed the primary evidence of the Spirit's work in the new birth was in new, holy affections.

Like other evangelicals, Hart was careful to distinguish between holiness that flowed from the new birth and the mere moralism carried out in the flesh. Whitefield had warned, "if we are only mere moralists, if we are not inwardly wrought upon, and changed by the powerful operations of the Holy Spirit, and our moral actions proceed from a principle of a new nature . . . it is to be feared that we shall be found naked at the Great Day." [73] Hart, too, declared that holiness arising from a born-again soul was

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[70] Jonathan Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light" in *Sermons*, 121–40.

[71] Edwards, "A Divine and Supernatural Light," in *Sermons*, 121–40.

[72] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 John 3:2, in Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS.

[73] Whitefield, *A Sermon on Regeneration*, 18.

altogether different from natural man's external religion. "The form of godliness, without the power, is like a body without a soul—a dead carcass . . . there must be a divine principle implanted in the heart. A carnal, unregenerate man, as such, can never be a spiritual worshipper. None but those, whose hearts are circumcised, can 'worship God in the spirit,'" he said.[74] Elsewhere, Hart insisted, "Spirituality [the presence of the Holy Spirit] is of the greatest importance and alone can give life and energy to every branch of divine worship. It is internal, experimental religion only, that will be of any avail—the religion of the heart—to this the Lord looks—this he requires."[75]

"Powerfully Wrought Upon by the Word"

Conversion did not occur in a vacuum; Hart believed that preaching was God's chosen instrument for effecting conversion.[76] "Christ hath appointed the preaching of the Gospel, in order to call sinners out of darkness into light," Hart said. Preaching was thus no human invention, for in it Christ "sends down his Spirit to make the preaching of the gospel efficacious."[77] He prayed, "My soul earnestly desires to see sinners powerfully wrought upon by the Word!"[78]

While the Spirit's role in conversion was decisive, Christ invested the gospel preacher with great responsibility in the process. Hart considered preaching to be "the most important service that ever demanded the attention of man," for "the position of a minister is enough to make a man, of any sensibility, tremble; he stands between the living and the dead—the living God and dead sinners." The preacher was dependent on

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[74] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 37–38.

[75] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 37. In support he cited Proverbs 22:26; 1 Timothy 4:8.

[76] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 19.

[77] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

[78] Oliver Hart, Diary, August 1, 1779, Hart MSS, SCL.

the Spirit, yet responsible to communicate clearly:

> Does success depend on the minister? No. Were he possessed of the wisdom of Solomon, the firmness of Elijah and the zeal of Phineas, united with the sanctity of John, the engagedness of Paul and the eloquence of Apollos, he would be unequal to the task. A divine energy, only, can render his labours successful. Nevertheless, those who are engaged in this arduous service should attend to it 'after the due order.' They should preach the pure gospel, and not a mere system of morality. Cautious should they be of blending law and gospel, grace and works. They should preach salvation, through Christ, in a way of free, rich and sovereign grace. 'Not of works, lest any man should boast.' It behooves them to 'be instant in season and out of season,' and to speak with so much life and energy as to evince that their whole soul is engaged in the work. Their language should be plain, yet masculine; their reasoning clear, yet nervous; their countenance, open and free; their action, easy and graceful.[79]

As Heaven's ambassador, Hart believed he was commissioned by Christ to plead with his listeners to receive the gospel. "Ministers of the Gospel were sent to invite poor sinners, and that is their delight," he said.[80] In a sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart labored to establish "that the greatest, or chiefest of sinners may obtain salvation through Jesus Christ."[81] He first announced that Christ was both abundantly able and willing to save sinners; then he began preaching for a response. He piled up biblical encouragements for hesitant sinners to fly to Christ. "How often do we hear [God] declare that he 'willeth not the death of a sinner, but that the sinner repent and believe (Ezek 33:11)?'" Hart asked. "And Christ hath declared that he 'came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance (Mark 2:17).'" Hart then unleashed on the crowd a string of biblical invitations, as if issued directly from Christ: "'Ho! Everyone who thirsteth, come to me (Isa 55:1);' 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest (Matt 11:28);' 'Look unto me, all ye ends of the earth, and be ye saved (Isa 45:22)!'" Not only did Christ invite sinners, Hart said; he also reassured them of a welcome: "Whosoever cometh to me, I will in no wise cast out (John 6:43)!" Hart

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[79] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 23.

[80] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[81] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

then recounted the conversions of Scripture's most notorious sinners: "What a miserable wretch was Mary Magdalene? A vile prostitute, possessed of seven devils, and yet she obtained mercy, and became as remarkable for piety: she had much forgiven, and therefore she loved much," he preached.[82] King Manasseh, Saul of Tarsus; the 3,000 at Pentecost, and the thief on the cross all seemed irredeemable, but were saved when they simply took Christ at his word. "Let great sinners take encouragement from hence to hope more for mercy and salvation. None need to despair!"[83] Hart believed this to be preaching the Spirit honored with conversions.

"The Continued Influences of the Holy Spirit": Sanctification

Though conversion often occurred at the end of a long course of convictions, those who "came through" in new birth were only beginning their Christian experience. The principle of holiness "formed in the heart" by the Spirit at the new birth then had to "extend to the lips and life, or in other words, the words and actions."[84] The believer's new nature must be "drawn out into action," in "the exercise of grace, in faith, hope, charity, and the whole assemblage of Christian virtues."[85] This lifelong process of weakening old patterns of sin and nourishing new habits of grace was sanctification. As in conversion, Hart believed that "this necessarily calls for the continued influence of the Holy Spirit; for without his aid, we can do nothing."[86]

"The Quintessence of Religion"

The indwelling of the Holy Spirit was a central doctrine for the evangelicals.

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[82]Hart alluded to Luke 8:2; Luke 7:36–50.

[83] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:15, Hart MSS, SCL.

[84] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 1:9, Hart MSS, SCL.

[85] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 37.

[86] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 37.

Hart declared that all believers "enjoy the renewing, comforting, and sanctifying influences of the Holy Spirit." Christ had sent the Spirit to "convince the world of sin, renew the soul, comfort the people of God, sanctify and make them meet for Heaven."[87] In his view, true spirituality consisted of "communion with God, through Christ, by the operations of the Holy Ghost."[88]

Yet this was a controversial issue. Hart was well aware that "there are many who discard this doctrine of divine influences, as enthusiastical."[89] Whitefield had repeatedly heard this charge. "We no sooner mention the necessity of receiving the Holy Ghost in these last days, as well as formerly, but we are look'd upon by some as enthusiasts and madmen," he said.[90] Anti-revivalists feared the excesses that accompanied the Spirit's "direct operations," including undue weight given to impulses and impressions, claims to visions and direct revelations, the supposed ability to detect conversion in others, physical manifestations, the priority of the Spirit's inner witness over the outward marks of sanctification, and the criticism of established ministries which did not support the revival. Charles Chauncy, the revival's chief antagonist, drew a direct line from the revivalists to the Antinomian controversy that rocked New England in days gone by.[91] Many evangelicals acknowledged the abuses of the doctrine of the indwelling Spirit; Edwards's *Religious Affections* stands as the classic evangelical attempt to discern between true and false marks of the Spirit's work in revival. Still, they refused to abandon their position. As Whitefield preached, "every Christian, in the proper sense of the word, must be an enthusiast. That is, must be inspired of God, or have God in

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[87] Hart, *Of Christ the Mediator*, 191.

[88] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 38.

[89] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 38.

[90] See Whitefield, *Indwelling of the Spirit,* 6.

[91] See Chauncy, *Seasonable Thoughts*, i–xxx.

him. For who dare say, he is a Christian, till he can say, God is in me?"[92]

For Hart, too, the Spirit's indwelling was "the quintessence of religion." He addressed the doctrine in a pair of sermons on July 9, 1769. In the morning, he taught from Romans 8:9: "Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of his." He first acknowledged how widely "ridiculed" the doctrine was. Yet, Hart pointed out that Paul urged his readers "to make inquiry whether or not we have the Spirit of Christ."[93] Hart then sought to establish "what the apostle intends by the Spirit of Christ." The first possibility was that Paul simply intended "the temper of Christ;" in other words, anyone who followed Jesus' moral example was a true Christian. Yet any anti-supernatural moralist could affirm this statement, while rejecting the offensive doctrines of new birth and the indwelling Spirit. Hart instead argued that Paul meant for all believers to possess the very person of "the Holy Ghost," the third person of the Trinity, in order to belong to Christ.[94] Whitefield had covered the same ground in his published sermon, *The Indwelling of the Spirit the Common Privilege of All Believers*, which Hart appears to have read. For both men, the indwelling of the Spirit was the sign of true Christianity.[95]

Hart moved to expound the ministry of the Spirit. He was "a Spirit of illumination and conviction," for he alone could open the eyes and pierce the heart in regard to one's true condition before God. The Spirit came as "a Spirit of regeneration and conversion," granting spiritual life in the place of death at the new birth. The Spirit also was "a Spirit of sanctification and holiness," implanting the "new principle of grace" in the heart, and gradually conforming the believer to his own holy character. The Holy Ghost came also as "a Spirit of prayer and supplication," moving the saint to humbly call

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[92] Whitefield, *Indwelling Spirit*, 11.

[93] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[94] In support, Hart cited Romans 8:11.

[95] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

on God as Father. The Spirit worked in the believer as "a Spirit of self-denial and mortification," who energized and enabled the Christian to make holy war on the indwelling sin and impulses of self which remained after conversion. Finally, the Holy Ghost was "a Spirit of comfort and consolation." resigning the believer to all the losses and crosses of this life as part of the Father's personal sanctification program, and reassuring him of the Father's unfailing love.

In the afternoon, Hart took up Romans 8:14: "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." He began by explaining, "what is supposed by 'being led by the Spirit.'" Here, he exposed for his listeners two complimentary truths. First, being led by the Spirit "supposes impotence and weakness" on the believer's part. Apart from the Spirit's divine drive and direction, the Christian could never persevere in the path of godliness. At the same time, being led by the Spirit supposed "the agency of the divine Spirit with regard to our good habits and actions." In other words, the Spirit alone could receive the credit for the saint's advances in holiness.[96]

Hart next reflected on "what it is to be led by the Spirit." The Spirit leads the believer "from sin;" empowering him to "mortify the deeds of the body." The Spirit leads the believer "from all dependence of ourselves and brings us to Christ's righteousness," and "leads us to ask for pardon." The Spirit also served as the ultimate teacher in the Christian life, leading the believer "to a true sense of the doctrine of the Gospel and into the path of duty." As the believer met with hardship on the Christian way, the Spirit "leads them through the difficulties and afflictions of this world from one degree of grace to another." Ultimately, those who have the Spirit can be confident that he leads them "at length to Zion," for "those who are led by the Spirit can't fall away."[97] Finally, Hart considered "the character of those who are led by the Spirit of God." They are "sons of

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[96] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[97] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

God . . . by adoption." Once rebels against the King, those indwelt by the Spirit now share in the status, privileges, and destiny of a child of God. These, Hart said, "are the greatest of privileges." Hart closed the sermon by urging the congregation to examine their hearts, and "inquire if we are the sons of God," by discerning the Spirit's indwelling presence.[98]

"The Christian's Work Is a Great Work"

In keeping with his Puritan/Particular Baptist heritage, Hart viewed sanctification as a synergistic endeavor, the Spirit enabling the believer to strive for holiness. "Take heed to yourselves likewise, with regard to your growth in grace. Labor to be continually making advances in the divine life, that you may abound in spiritual things," Hart counseled.[99] This growth came through conflict, for sanctification plunged the believer into "a continual and irreconcilable war" between the Spirit and the flesh, as the *Second London Confession* asserted. In the course of this war, the saints often suffered defeat, for "remaining corruption for a time may much prevail."[100] Yet, strengthened by the Word and the Spirit, motivated by the glory of Christ, and directed toward a heavenly calling, the believer pressed forward toward godliness, knowing that ultimate victory had already been secured on his behalf by Christ. This gritty approach to sanctification comprised the message Hart lived and preached, as in a sermon from 2 Timothy 2:3, "Share in suffering as a good soldier of Christ Jesus":

> Every observant reader of the Word of God may easily discern under what various forms the Christian course of life is set forth, and all tending to show that a Christian's work is a great work, and what he is concerned about, matters of the greatest importance, and consequently can be properly attended unto any otherwise than with all our heart with all our might and with all our strength.[101]

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[98] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[99] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[100] *The Second London Confession* 13.2 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 268.

[101] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 2 Timothy 2:3, Hart MSS, SCL.

As Hart guided his listeners on a tour of the New Testament's metaphors for sanctification, he showed that the Christian was compared to a wrestler,[102] to one who runs in a race,[103] to a fighter,[104] and to a soldier.[105]

Hart commonly applied images of health and fitness to the spiritual life. He often included in his letters such sentiments as, "I enjoy a great share of bodily heath; O that my soul may be in health, and prospered even as my body!"[106] For optimal spiritual condition, Hart urged Christians to "labor to maintain grace in its vigorous exercise."[107] The daily workout he prescribed could be summed in classic evangelical language as "vivification and mortification." Whitefield had called this "the whole of the divine work in the new-born soul." [108] These twin disciplines comprised the saint's pursuit of holiness from both positive and negative perspectives. "Vivification" described the act of stirring up the Spirit's work in the soul through intentional action. The Christian's soul atrophied if neglected, but vivification strengthened and expanded the graces. Hart exhorted every believer to take up this duty: "Be careful to maintain the life and power of godliness in your souls," he wrote to the churches of the Charleston Baptist Association.[109] Hart envisioned no Christian "drifting" into godliness; rather, the staccato exhortations at the close of the New Testament epistles provided the model for his spiritual advice: "We recommend to you all to pray fervently; believe firmly; wait patiently; work abundantly;

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[102] Ephesians 6:12.

[103] Hebrews 12:1; 1 Corinthians 9:24.

[104] 1 Timothy 6:12; 2 Timothy 4:7.

[105] 2 Timothy 2:3.

[106] Oliver Hart to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL.

[107] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[108] George Whitefield, Letter MCMXII to Lady Huntingdon, December 31, 1755, in *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 3:153.

[109] *Minutes of the Charlestown Association, February 6, 1775* (Charleston, 1775), 4.

live holily; die daily; watch your hearts; guide your senses; redeem your time; love Christ; long for glory," he wrote.[110] Hart pressed the duty of vivification with special force on young pastors:

> Take heed that you have not only the habit of grace in your hearts, but also labor to maintain that grace in its vigorous exercise. Be lively, and active for God in the constant exercise of every Christian grace and virtue. Let your faith be strong, your hope firm, your love fervent, your repentance sincere. In a word, imitate your Divine Exemplar in patience, meekness, humility, self-denial, and the like.[111]

Mortification served as the negative counterpart to vivification.[112] Two generations earlier, Puritan John Owen captured the essence of mortification when he wrote, "To kill a man, or any other living thing, is to take away the principle of all his strength, vigour, and power, so that he cannot act or exert, or put forth any proper actings of his own; so it is in this case."[113] John Gill had defined mortification simply as "the weakening of the power of sin."[114] Following these divines, Hart envisioned the mortification of sin as basic to all Christian discipleship. "We exhort you, brethren, to be diligent in every good word and work, dying daily to sin, and living unto God; that so you may be prepared for every dispensation of Providence, and at last received up into glory," he wrote to the Charleston Association.[115] Though "killing sin" was grim work, evangelicals viewed mortification as essential for a vibrant, Spirit-filled Christian experience. The saint's consistent war against his own sinful inclinations signaled the presence and activity of the Spirit, who indwelt the believer as "a Spirit of self-denial and

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[110] *Minutes of the Charlestown Association, October 19, 1778* (Charleston, 1778), 4.

[111] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[112] Two key Pauline texts on this subject are Colossians 3:5 and Romans 8:13.

[113] John Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in the Believer* in *Works*, 6:8. It is not certain that Hart read Owen, but Owen's influence on him was at least indirect.

[114] John Gill, *Complete Body of Practical and Doctrinal Divinity*, 388.

[115] *Minutes of the Charleston Association, February 2, 1778* (Charleston, 1778), 4.

mortification."[116] Thus, only believers were equipped for true mortification, and unregenerate men should not attempt to mortify to merit salvation.[117]

Related closely to mortification, ongoing repentance also kept the soul in fighting trim. Following the *Second London Confession*, Hart preached that as the Spirit brought the Christian under conviction of sin, the pathway to spiritual renewal was "the grace of repentance," designed to be "continued through the whole course of our lives."[118] Hart suggested four aspects to evangelical repentance. First, the believer must obtain "a sense of the evil committed." Beyond a surface-level acknowledgment of sin, the serious Christian must labor to grasp "the sinfulness of his sin" before God, if he is ever to turn from it. Yet this sober self-evaluation did not resign the believer to condemnation. The second step of repentance moved directly to the cross, and "an application of the blood of Christ." Here, the believer personally received the gospel promise of forgiveness through Christ's atoning death. Third, having received the assurance of Christ's pardon, true repentance always made the believer decisive about change, producing "a final resolution to forsake evil." Finally, repentance had done its full work when the believer moved past the negative work of confession and "yielded obedience" in place of the former rebellion. Among key areas of obedience, Hart suggested that repentant believers focus on loving God, Christ, and fellow Christians; prayer and religious conversation; and watchfulness and self-denial.[119]

"Be Frequent in Self-Examination"

The evangelicals' robust doctrine of sin made them keenly aware of their propensity for spiritual deception. The discipline of self-examination was thus viewed as

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[116] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

[117] See Owen, *On the Mortification of Sin in Believers* in *Works*, 6:10–16.

[118] *The Second London Confession* 15 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 269–70.

[119] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

imperative for growing in grace and holiness. Hart pressed this issue in an ordination sermon from 1 Timothy 4:16: "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt save both thyself, and thy hearers." Though preached to ministers, his words applied more broadly to all believers:

> Turn into your own hearts, and labor after the most intimate and extensive acquaintance with your own souls. Look well unto your own state; give all diligence to make your calling and election sure. Nothing can be more awful than to preach an unknown Christ. Be frequent in self-examination, which attend to, with all that holy severity, which the nature, and importance of the thing calls for. Never content yourselves without the most substantial evidences of your interest in Christ, and a work of grace begun and carried on in your own souls. You cannot be qualified to deal with wounded spirits, unless you have been sensible of your own wounds. It is not possible you should, in a suitable manner, direct sinners to Christ, without an actual closure with him yourselves.[120]

Hart's admonition spoke to the preeminent concern of self-examination: the determination of whether or not one had truly experienced conversion. The Puritans had made heavy use of this practice to safeguard against spiritual presumption. The evangelicals followed them in his concern, citing such biblical injunctions as "examine yourself, to see whether or not you are in the faith (2 Cor 13:5)."

Self-examination also helped Christians identify patterns of spiritual decline. Hart warned his congregation that "Christians are subject to an awful declension which is displeasing to Christ," alluding to the church in Ephesus which had "lost its first love (Rev 2:4)."[121] Common symptoms of spiritual declension that Hart noted included "indifference and coldness in the worship of God," "coldness to the ministers and people of God," "fretful or peevishness of spirit," "a desire after and delight in vain diversions," as well as "murmurings under afflictions."

These were the presenting problems for which Christians must search in their examination. Yet Hart then urged his listeners to probe deeper to identify the root causes

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[120] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL. For the classic Puritan exposition of this theme, see Richard Baxter, *The Reformed Pastor* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 2001), 53–86.

[121] Edmund Botsford, Diary 1769–1770, Botsford MSS, Furman.

of spiritual decline. "The want of watchfulness," for instance, left the believer vulnerable to the sifting of Satan. Likewise, the allowance of "spiritual pride" was a classic precursor to a fall. "The omission of secret prayer" drew the heart away from intimacy with God and exposed it to the world's allurements, as did "the keeping of bad company." Failure to mortify less conspicuous sins of the heart, such as "giving into passion, anger, and wrath," led to a general decay of spiritual vitality. Finally, "eagerness after the world" posed a constant threat to the growing saint. Hart urged his listeners to examine their souls, heeding Christ's words in his text: "Remember from whence thou art fallen and repent and do they former works, or else I will come unto thee quickly and remove this candlestick out of its place, except thou repent."[122]

Hart often used heart-searching questions in the application of his sermons to promote self-examination. For example, after presenting his case against dancing in *Dancing Exploded*, Hart posed a string of questions for his listeners to test their behavior: "For what was I made?" "Do I answer the end of my being?" "Is God glorified by all my actions?" "Must I not shortly die, and give an account of my actions to God?" "Have I any time to spare from transacting business for eternity?"[123]

In his personal practice, Hart's diaries reveal a tendency toward melancholy that led him to be rather severe in self-examination. He sometimes entertained doubts about the reality of his conversion: "Satan and unbelief robs me of my spiritual comforts (if ever I knew anything of religion, which I am tempted to doubt), so that my burden is great," he wrote.[124] Elsewhere he lamented, "With pain I reflect upon my leanness and unprofitableness through the whole of my past life . . . ever since I profess'd to know the Lord I have been too—too languid in his service. I sometimes wonder how any people

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[122] Hart here quotes Revelation 2:5.

[123] Oliver Hart, *Dancing Exploded: A Sermon Shewing the Unlawfulness, Sinfulness, and Bad Consequences of Balls, Assemblies, and Dances in General* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1778), 32.

[124] Hart, diary, September 24, 1788, Hart MSS, SCL.

can prefer me as their teacher."[125] This level of introspection was probably not productive. Yet in its healthiest form, self-examination guarded evangelicals against spiritual presumption and slothfulness. When accompanied by repentance and a renewed faith in Christ, the practice could even become "a source of great inner peace and joy."[126] Hart's diaries often strike this note. Despite his spiritual failures, Hart was comforted by the belief that his soul was "under the care of the most kind, and most skillful of all physicians. The medicine he uses is indeed of an extraordinary nature; it is his own blood. A sovereign remedy this! None ever made use of it, but obtained a cure."[127]

"I Would Begin and End Every Day with Thee": Means of Grace

Evangelicals believed that the Spirit's sanctifying work was "conveyed to and nourished in our hearts by a constant use of all the means of grace," to quote Whitefield.[128] Here they followed the Puritans, who had also emphasized that "we drawe neere to God by meanes."[129] In a sermon entitled "Walking with God," Whitefield suggested several practices designed for "our having and keeping up a settled communion and fellowship with [God], and our making a daily progress in this fellowship, so to be conformed to the divine image more and more."[130] Whitefield directed his listeners to the practices of reading Scripture, secret prayer, holy meditation, considering God's

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[125] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, June 15, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[126] J. I. Packer, "Why We Need the Puritans," in Leland Ryken, *Worldly Saints: The Puritans as They Really Were* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), xiii.

[127] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, May 7, 1792, Hart MSS, Furman.

[128] George Whitefield, *The Duty and Interest of an Early Piety set forth in a sermon from Eccl xii, i* (Boston: Kneeland and Green, 1739), 3.

[129] Quote attributed to Richard Greenham (1540–1594) and cited in Michael A. G. Haykin, "'Draw Nigh unto My Soul': English Baptist Piety and the Means of Grace in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 10, no. 4 (Winter 2006): 54.

[130] George Whitefield, *Walking with God*, in *Works* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1772), 5:27.

providential dealings, watching the motions of the indwelling Spirit, attending the ordinances, and keeping company with the saints.[131] Of course, simply going through the motions of these practices carried no value. The means were "no further serviceable to us, than as they are found to make us inwardly better, and to carry on the spiritual life in the soul."[132] Yet when practiced by faith in Christ, God's appointed means were "so many conduit-pipes, whereby the infinitely condescending Jehovah conveys his grace to their souls."[133] The means of grace played a prominent role in Hart's personal piety; through their diligent use, he made it his ambition to "begin, and end, every day with Thee."[134]

Scripture

"The Holy Scripture is the only sufficient, certain, and infallible rule of all saving knowledge, faith, and obedience," stated the *Second London Confession*, and Hart believed it to the core of his being.[135] It is impossible to overstate the primacy of the Bible in his spirituality. To Hart, an open Bible was nothing less than the "mouth of the Lord": "[Christians] should be governed, in every part of the work, by that divine and unerring rule—the holy scriptures, from which they should never deviate an hair's breadth. In all cases they should ask 'counsel at the mouth of the Lord (Josh 9:14),' i.e., the words of his mouth. This is a sure and tried rule which hath never failed," he preached.[136] Based on this conviction, Hart read, meditated, memorized, sang, trusted, and obeyed Scripture. According to William Rogers, it showed in his life: "He read and believed his Bible, and comformably to its precepts, he was full of charity and good

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[131] Whitefield, *Walking with God*, in *Works*, 5:27–31.

[132] Whitefield, *Sermon on Regeneration*, 17.

[133] Whitefield, *Walking with God*, in *Works*, 5:31.

[134] Hart, diary, August 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[135] *The Second London Confession* 1.1 in Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith*, 248.

[136] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 35–36.

works! If not rich in earthly things, he was rich in faith."[137]

Hart studied the Bible front to back, familiarizing himself with the full sweep of its contents. As a young man, he was convinced that he needed "a larger, and better acquaintance with, and a more copious knowledge of the Word of God." So he resolved, "with the permission and assistance of God, to read ten chapters every day, (at least for a time, or till I see an inconveniency arising from it) allowing for times to travel, and unforeseen events."[138] All the while, he relied on "the Spirit of illumination" as he read, praying, "may the Lord grant that I may read to advantage."[139] Hart also meditated on Scripture, lingering slowly and prayerfully over individual verses. John 10:11 inspired him to pray, "Oh that Jesus may be my Shepherd, and that I may by him be led to green pastures. Blessed Jesus! Wilt thou take me into the number of thy sheep, and lead me in and out; and may I be enabled to follow thee withersoever thou goest."[140] Specific promises held a special place in his meditation, particularly in days of doubt and fear: "These indeed are precious words – *Cast thy Burthens upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee* [Psalm 55:22]," Hart wrote. "I see many gracious promises and declarations, and have been attempting to plead the blood and righteousness of Christ, and to lay hold on the skirts of his robe, but the arm of faith seems to be withered. I try to say, Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief—O Lord give me faith."[141]

Hart also studied the Scriptures for the people he served. "But above all things, you are to apply to the study of the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testaments," he advised his fellow pastors. "Here you have that more sure word of prophecy, whereunto

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[137] Rogers, *A Sermon*, 22.

[138] Hart, diary, August 19, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[139] Hart, diary, August 19, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[140] Hart, diary, October 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[141] Hart, diary, September 23, 1788, Hart MSS, SCL.

you will do well that you take heed. This is able to make us wise to salvation, and to furnish the man of God for every good work."[142] Hart's preaching is explored elsewhere in these pages. Here it is simply worth noting his conviction that the greatest spiritual good he could do his people was to preach sermons that stuck closely to the biblical text: "The most natural and easy method, is generally the best: and altho' we ought not to be too much confin'd, yet generally, we ought to keep close to the matter, and observe a connexion," he urged. "Let every thing you deliver be backed with Scripture, and be careful to advance nothing, but what you can confirm with a *Thus saith the Lord*."[143]

Prayer

> O Thou, Most wise and gracious God,
> Who rules all nature with a nod,
> Look down, I pray, and pity me,
> In my distress, I fly to thee.[144]

Furman remembered Hart for his "affectionate, fervent addresses to God in prayer."[145] Hart admonished the churches of the Charleston Association to "be careful to maintain the life and power of godliness in your souls; in order to which, keep close to God in prayer, the neglect of which tends to coldness in religion, and renders the soul more unfit for communion with God."[146] His diaries suggest a commitment to prayer in a variety of forums. Hart kept a set time for private prayers, first thing each morning. For instance, in a travelogue from a missionary journey, Hart repeatedly records, "Rose early, prayed, breakfasted, and were on our way." Morning prayers were supplemented by spontaneous supplications throughout the day. When Hart learned that a friend had just

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[142] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[143] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[144] Hart, diary, August 15, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[145] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 23.

[146] *Minutes of the Charleston Baptist Association, Feb 8, 1775* (Charleston, 1775), 4.

gone into labor. he "went to prayer for her, who was safely delivered of a living child in about half an hours time," he wrote. "I am afraid it would look too vain in me to attribute this success to my poor prayers; but I am determined notwithstanding, it shall serve as an encouragement to me to pray again."[147] Hart utilized his diary as another outlet for private prayer, filling its pages with supplications for his own growth in grace, his pastoral and preaching ministries, and revival in the churches.

Corporate church gatherings constituted another important forum for prayer:

> It is the duty of members, in common, to pray earnestly for the prosperity of the church. Prayer hath a mighty efficacy, and should never be omitted. The effectual prayer of a righteous man availeth much (Js 5:16). They should pray that the minister may be assisted in every part of his work—the word blest—sinners converted and added—saints comforted—peace and love continued—all the members walking worthy of their profession; and that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ (1 Pet 4:11).[148]

Hart also led his household in regular family prayers. His approving description of his friend Francis Pelot's practice is suggestive of his own. "The morning and evening sacrifices of prayer and praise were constantly offered up to the God of our lives and mercies. He not only endeavoured to train up his children in the paths of virtue and religion, but he also took much pains with his servants to teach them the fear of the Lord and the way to eternal happiness."[149] Hart also encouraged family prayers throughout the Charleston Association: "maintain the worship of God in your families; pray with and for them, instruct them in the principles of religion, and enforce your precepts by the best examples," he advised.[150] Hart also enjoyed praying with friends. He recorded in a travelogue: "Providence has remarkably directed us to houses where we are

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[147] Hart, diary, August 7, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[148] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 34.

[149] Oliver Hart, *A Copy of the Original Diary of the Rev. Oliver Hart*, mimeographed copy, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY (hereafter *Original Diary*), 8.

[150] *Minutes of the Charleston Baptist Association, February 1775*, 4.

welcome, among Baptist friends. Here, we spent the evening agreeably in religious conversation; after supper we sung and pray'd, and so lay down to rest."[151] On New Year's Eve, 1780, he wrote, "Deacon Barton, Squire Stout, and several others came and spent the evening at my house. We devoted the time to religious conversation, singing psalms, and prayer."[152] These brief vignettes provide an illuminating window into the "social" religion typical of the early evangelicals.

Worship on the Sabbath

For Hart, spirituality was not an exclusively private endeavor. He and his fellow Baptists especially stressed that Christians were intended to walked with God in the context of "a gospel church." Hart defined a gospel church as "a company of saints, incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body and meeting together in one place for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their Head in all his institutions to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit."[153] He urged believers to "constantly attend on the word and ordinances, in their own church."[154] Saints who neglected the worship gathering courted spiritual disaster: "By this [neglect] their own souls become lean, their brethren are grieved, their ministers discouraged, seekers retarded, and sinners hardened."[155] In addition to hearing the Word and joining in the prayers (treated above), and receiving the ordinances (treated below), corporate worship provided the context for congregational singing, a means of grace Hart treasured. "Harmoniously singing the praises of God, with united voices, is also a branch of service of the house of the Lord, and a delightful employ it is. No branch of divine service so

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[151] Hart, diary, November 8, 1769–February 2, 1770, Hart MSS, SCL.

[152] Hart, diary, January 31, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[153] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 2.

[154] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 28.

[155] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 28.

much resembles Heaven as this," he said.[156]

The priority of corporate worship bore directly on what Michael Haykin has referred to as the "distinct spirituality of time" held by the Puritans and early evangelicals.[157] At the heart of this spirituality of time was the consecration of "the Christian Sabbath," which "provided a context for worship and prayer, meditation and good deeds."[158] Richard Lovelace has insightfully suggested that the observance of Sabbath was essential for Puritan piety because "it was, in essence, a miniature weekly Protestant 'retreat,'" akin to the Jesuit practice.[159] Hart devoted a lengthy section to the Christian Sabbath in his published sermon, *A Gospel Church Portrayed and her Orderly Service Pointed Out*. He insisted that "The oracles of truth inform us, that God hath appointed one day in seven, to be observed as a Sabbath, or day of rest, from all worldly avocations; and wholly devoted to divine service, to the end of time."[160] Hart argued for the Sabbath as a creation ordinance, sanctified by God as "a good and happy day, which then was, and thenceforth should be appropriated to the most blessed purposes of praising and adoring Jehovah; and should prove a blessed day to all true worshippers."[161] This "law of a weekly Sabbath was, from that period, binding on Adam and all his posterity, to the latest ages of time."[162] Upon the resurrection of Jesus, God reinstituted the Sabbath as the Lord's Day for his New Covenant people.[163]Accordingly, Hart's diaries show him

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[156] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 24.

[157] Michael Haykin, "Word and Space, Time and Act: The Shaping of English Puritan Piety," *Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 14, no. 4 (Winter 2010): 38–47.

[158] Haykin, "Word and Space," 38.

[159] Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 131.

[160] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 33.

[161] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 34.

[162] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 34.

[163] Hart established this point by referring to the resurrection passages, Paul's admonition to take up a collection on the first day of the week (1 Cor 16:2), and John's reference to "the Lord's day (Rev 1:10)."

spending his Sundays conducting public services as a minister and sharing spiritual fellowship in the homes of Christian friends.

The Gospel Ordinances

Hart placed great spiritual value in observing "the gospel ordinances," in the local church. These gospel ordinances were designed by God to display "the wonderful beneficience of Christ" to his church.[164] Hart compared them to the "windows of the church," wherein Christ shone the light of his presence and grace to his people. "Being exceedingly lucid, they let in the most refulgent rays, emitted from the glorious Sun of righteousness," he wrote. Receiving the ordinances in a covenant community of faith brought "great comfort and joy" to the church.[165]

The first ordinance was baptism, the dramatic display of the gospel at the beginning of Christian discipleship. "Baptism is symbolical of our fellowship with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection—of the remission of our sins, and of our resurrection from the death of sin to new and holy life," Hart said.[166] He preached passionately for both the biblical method (full immersion in water) and biblical subjects (repentant believers) of baptism. On one occasion, Hart received an opportunity to address a group of Presbyterians. He "preached from Mark 16:15, from which I endeavoured to prove that believers are the only proper subjects of baptism, and that dipping is the mode of administration. How the people felt I don't know."[167]

Even the ice of a New Jersey river in winter could not dampen Hart's zeal for the ordinance of baptism "according to the ancient practice":

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[164] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 16.

[165] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 14.

[166] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 16.

[167] Hart, diary, August 3, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

> This of course was our day of preparation for communion when Mrs. Patience Blackwell offered herself as a candidate for baptism. The time was so short we omitted Preaching in order to attend to that business. Accordingly Mrs. Blackwell gave in her experience in the meeting house, which was satisfactory. We then proceeded to Deacon Nath. Stout's, where, after having cast away the ice (which was of a considerable thickness), the candidate and I, according to the ancient practice, went down into the water, and I baptized her in the Name of the sacred Trinity. We then came up out of the water, and neither of us received any damage, altho' there was snow on the ground as well as ice in the brook. We then return'd with the deacons and receiv'd Mrs. Blackwell as a member, in the usual way, by covenant, then pray'd, sang, and dismiss'd.[168]

This story provides a glimpse into baptism's practical, spiritual significance for Hart and the Regular Baptists. First, baptism was only administered upon credible profession of conversion: it was a public identification with Christ as Lord at the beginning of the Christian way. Second, baptism was a solemn and significant act of obedience to Christ, to be performed as soon as possible upon conversion, regardless of obstacles. Third, baptism was closely connected to the fellowship of the church, an identification with Christ's people. As in Mrs. Blackwell's case, Hart believed baptism must precede both membership and participation in the Lord's Supper.[169] As a public act, typically performed at a river or pond, baptism also carried evangelistic power to unconverted spectators. On another occasion, Hart spoke of "One man who had never seen the ordinance administered . . . could say nothing against it. A woman to whom it was also quite new, said it was the prettiest sight she had ever seen in her life."[170]

Hart also cherished the Lord's Supper, which was "emblematical of the sufferings and death of Christ—of his body broken and blood shed, to procure for us peace, pardon, righteousness, and all the blessings of the new covenant."[171] The spiritual value of the Table was not found in merely ingesting the elements. The Supper was to be

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[168] Hart, diary, January 24, 1789, Hart MSS, SCL. Hart was 65 years old at the time.

[169] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 26.

[170] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, August 26, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[171] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 17.

shared "with an affectionate remembrance of the agonizing of Jesus," Hart therefore encouraged ministers, "by warm and pathetic discourse, suited to the nature and design of the institution," to "raise the faith and affections of the communicants to a crucified Savior."[172] Like other Baptists of this period, Hart spoke of communion as more than a bare memorial of the gospel. It was a sharing in the spiritual presence of Christ. Hart approvingly cited "the great [Herman] Witsius" in calling the Lord's Supper "the sacrament of education, or nourishment in the New Testament church, wherein, by the symbols of bread broken, and the wine poured out, the dreadful sufferings of Christ are represented to believers, and the promises of the New Testament and enlivening communion with Christ, made perfect by sufferings, both in grace and glory, are signified and sealed unto them."[173] For Hart, the Table was a place of intimate communion with Christ. After one service, he reflected, "The Lord stood by me and encouraged me in his work, and particularly in breaking bread, the Lord broke in with much sweetness upon my soul. Others also met the Lord at his table."[174] Hart's 1781 diary lists six Sundays set aside in the year for the observance of the Lord's Supper.[175] It was his practice to treat the day before as a "preparation day," gathering the church on Saturday for a sermon on the atonement, in anticipation of the Table the following morning. "Should providence favor us with the privilege of communicating at the Lord's Table tomorrow, I pray God it may be a good season. O, thou blessed Jesus, favor us with thy presence."[176]

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[172] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 17-18.

[173] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 27. Mark Dever has commented that "Baptists have historically used language so rich about Christ's presence in the Lord's Supper for those who come by faith that little difference is perceptible between their position and the Reformed idea of Christ's spiritual presence." Mark Dever, "The Church," in *A Theology for the Church* (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2007), 828. For more on the "Reformed view" of the Lord's Table among Baptists of this period, see Michael Haykin, "'His Soul-Refreshing Presence': The Lord's Supper in Baptist Thought & Experience in the 'Long' Eighteenth Century," in *Baptist Sacramentalism* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), 177–93.

[174] Hart, diary, August 11, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[175] Hart, diary, January 20, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

[176] Hart, diary, January 27, 1781, Hart MSS, SCL.

Christian Friendship

Fellowship with other believers was commonly recognized as a means of grace among the evangelicals. But the prominent role of Christian friendships in Hart's life is striking.[177] "He possessed in large measure the moral and social virtues, and had a mind formed for friendship," Furman remembered. "In all his relative connexions, as husband, father, brother, master, he acted with the greatest propriety; and was endeared to those who were connected with him in the tender ties."[178] The high value Hart placed on Christian friendship shines in a poignant diary entry upon the death of his fellow minister, Francis Pelot. "I have lost the best friend . . . I ever was blest with in the world," Hart wrote. "The most intimate friendship had subsisted betwixt us for about four and twenty years. In all which time I ever found him a faithful friend and gratified to give advice in the most critical cases."[179] The two had experienced much over those twenty-four years. Hart had convinced the gifted but reluctant Pelot to surrender to gospel ministry when Hart first arrived in Charleston: "He was overcome (as he himself often acknowledged) by the arguments of one whom he ever honored with his friendship and esteem." [180] After Hart ordained Pelot in 1752, the two worked together to strengthen the Baptist cause in the South, leading the Charleston Baptist Association and coauthoring *A Summary of Church Discipline* for its churches in 1773. When Hart remarried after the death of his first wife, he asked Pelot to perform the ceremony. "He was the sincere, open, constant, and hearty friend, could keep a secret, and in short, few men were ever better qualified for friendship than he."[181]

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[177] See George Whitefield's sermon, "The Necessity and Benefits of Religious Society," in *Sermons of George* Whitefield, ed. Lee Gattis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 1:152–67. On the role of friendships among Baptist ministers of the period, see Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 170–72.

[178] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

[179] Hart, *Original Diary*, 8.

[180] Hart, *Original Diary*, 8.

[181] Hart, *Original Diary*, 8.

The importance Hart placed on friendship is displayed most prominently in his letters, a staple of evangelical friendships in the eighteenth century.[182] Hart was a devoted correspondent. He took up his pen to encourage Samuel Jones in his spiritual doubts: "whatsoever is revealed therein [Scripture] comes handed down to us with the greatest certainty, and upon the clearest evidence," Hart reassured him.[183] He also joked with Jones, on hearing of the birth of Evan Pugh's second son, that Pugh was "successful in his generation work if not in that of regeneration."[184] When Edmund Botsford's wife died, he turned to Hart for comfort: "O my father! My father! No one, that has not been exercised in the same way, can have any conception of what I feel . . . O my father! Pray for me, write to me . . ." he pleaded.[185] Hart passed along stories of revival through the mail to Isaac Backus: "O may the gospel of Jesus be preached with success over all this inhabited globe!"[186] And he shared the ordinary events of health, family, and church life with Richard Furman for decades. Hart also corresponded with Baptist ministers beyond the boundaries of America. He mentioned in a 1763 letter to Jones, " I have corresponded with Dr. Gill and several more of our London ministers, for many years past."[187]

Hart delighted in this friendly correspondence, and chided his friends when they were not as dutiful as he was. In a letter to Jones, Hart noted that he had not heard from his friend since his recent marriage, "Sure you have not suffered a wife to lay an embargo on your pen," he teased.[188] He carried his banter further with Manning:

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[182] See D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 240–50.

[183] See Hywel M. Davies, *Transatlantic Brethren: Rev. Samuel Jones (1735–1814) and his Friends* (Bethlehem, NE: Lehigh University Press, 1995), 98.

[184] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, April 21, 1773, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[185] In Charles D. Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004), 52–53.

[186] Oliver Hart to Isaac Backus, July 25, 1781, Backus MSS, ANTS.

[187] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, December 1, 1763, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[188] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, December 30, 1769, McKesson MSS, HSP.

> Altho' you are already in my debt, I am about to give you fresh credit; hoping thereby to induce you to an immediate discharge of the whole you owe. I have sometimes thought that the habit, or disposition of people, is somewhat similar to the climate in which they live: if so, no wonder if you gentlemen, who live so contiguous to the frozen zone, have cold hearts. It should seem as if their hands are cramped with the cold too, and rendered incapable of holding a pen. Otherwise, why is it that I hear from them so seldom? Perhaps you are all better employed. Convince me of that, and you will atone for every past neglect. Well, my dear friend, how is it with you? Does the Lord cut out much work for you to do? How does your soul—how does religion—how does your church, and how does the college prosper? I hope the Kingdom and interests of Jesus Christ flourishes in your parts . . .[189]

As the letter suggests, friendship was for Hart another vital means the indwelling Holy Spirit could use to encourage, comfort, and stir up the graces in his people.

Conclusion

Hart and the Regular Baptists are commonly understood to have stood aloof from the spiritual "ardor" of the Great Awakening, in an effort to cling to the "order" of a rigid confessionalism. The survey of Hart's theology of Christian experience in this chapter demonstrates how mistaken this perception is. Along with a host of his Regular Baptist brethren, Oliver Hart championed the same brand of "revival piety" as did Edwards, Whitefield, and the other "revival Calvinists" in the early evangelical movement. At the heart of this piety was a desire to experience "more of these divine influences," through the dynamic activity of the Holy Spirit.

[189] Oliver Hart to James Manning, December 23, 1767, Manning MSS, Brown.

CHAPTER 4

"LORD, CARRY ON THY WORK AMONG US!": REVIVAL NARRATIVE

In his later years, Oliver Hart assembled a special diary that summarized the major events of his life, including his conversion, his call to ministry, his marriages, and the births of his children. When he came to the fall of 1754, he recorded simply, "Revival of religion."[1] As the previous chapters have demonstrated, Hart's entire life was shaped by the Great Awakening. Yet the fall of 1754 represented a unique episode in Hart's biography, one he later identified simply as "the remarkable revival in our church." From August to October, 1754, Hart found himself at the center of a spiritual awakening in the Charleston Baptist Church that resulted in the baptism of ten new converts. Though a modest ingathering of souls when compared to other revivals of the period, it proved to be a milestone in the church's history. Happily, Hart kept a detailed record of this awakening in his personal diary. Today, Hart's account can be classified as part of that significant genre of evangelical literature birthed by the Great Awakening: the revival narrative.

The Rise of Revival Narrative

"There is no one thing that I know of, that God has made such a means of promoting his work amongst us, as the news of others' conversion."[2] Jonathan Edwards wrote these words in 1737. He scarcely could have imagined then how the news he

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[1] Oliver Hart, *A Copy of the Original Diary of the Rev. Oliver Hart*, mimeographed copy, James P. Boyce Centennial Library, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY (hereafter *Original Diary*), 3.

[2] Jonathan Edwards, *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *WJE*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1972), 176.

shared in *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Souls* would promote the work of revival around the world.[3] A little-known Congregational minister at the time, Edwards had participated in an unprecedented awakening in Northampton, Massachusetts, during the years 1734–1735. At the request of Boston minister Benjamin Colman (1673–1747), Edwards detailed his experience in an eight-page letter in 1735, which he later expanded into *A Faithful Narrative*.[4]

Edwards began his report with an account of Northampton's low spiritual condition leading up to the winter of 1734. "It seemed to be a time of extraordinary dullness in religion," Edwards recalled. He noted particularly the licentious behavior of the young people, "a spirit of contention" in the town, and the spread of Arminian doctrine.[5] But through the sobering deaths of two youths, and a timely Edwards sermon on justification by faith, "the Spirit of God began extraordinarily to set in, and wonderfully to work amongst us." Day by day, "a great and earnest concern about the great things of religion and the eternal world became universal in all parts of the town," Edwards wrote. "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." By the spring of 1735, Northampton had been transformed. "This work of God, as it was carried on, and the number of true saints multiplied, soon made a glorious alteration in the town . . . the town seemed to be full of the presence of God: it never was so full of love, nor so full of joy; and yet so full of distress, as it was then."[6] Edwards guessed that, in the span of six months, about three hundred people were converted. Nor was this all; the revival also spread to some thirty-two surrounding communities in the Connecticut River Valley.

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[3] Full text available in Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 129–213.

[4] Colman was pastor of Brattle Street Church in Boston, and a leading evangelical minister in New England throughout the 1730s and 1740s.

[5] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 146–48.

[6] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 151.

"This seems to have been a very extraordinary dispensation of Providence: God has in many respects gone out of, and much beyond his usual and ordinary way." After documenting the conversion stories of a young woman and a four-year-old girl, and explaining how the revival had drawn to a close, Edwards submitted his narrative to Colman "to dispose of it as you think most for God's glory, and the interest of religion."[7]

A Faithful Narrative was an overnight sensation. In the preface, English Dissenters John Guyse (1680–1761) and Isaac Watts (1674–1748) exclaimed, "Never did we hear or read, since the first ages of Christianity, any event of this kind so surprising, as the present narrative."[8] After decades of "the work of conversion go[ing] on very slowly," they rejoiced that "our ascended Savior now and then takes a special occasion to manifest the divinity of the Gospel by a plentiful effusion of his Spirit where it is preached: then sinners are turned into saints in numbers, and there is a new face of things spread over a town or a country."[9] They expressed hopes that Edwards's story foretold a further-reaching revival that would convert the nations.[10]

In point of fact, *A Faithful Narrative* did become the literary catalyst of the transatlantic, evangelical revival. Upon its publication in London, the recently converted John Wesley read it while walking from London to Oxford. He was awed. "Surely 'This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes,'" he wrote.[11] Wesley would later republish *A Faithful Narrative* for the Methodist people in 1744 and 1755, carefully

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[7] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 210.

[8] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 130. Guyse was a Dissenting minister at New Broad Street in London. Watts, also a Dissenting minister in London, is best remembered for his legacy of evangelical hymnody. Together, Guyse and Watts represent something of the evangelical fathers of the generation preceding the awakening.

[9] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 131.

[10] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 134.

[11] *The Journal of the Rev. John Wesley*, ed. Nehemiah Curnock and John Telford (London: R. Culley, 1909), 2:84.

removing all references to Edwards's Calvinistic theology.[12] In Scotland, William McCulloch (1691–1771) and James Robe (1688–1753) devoured the story, and would later use it to shape their own account of the Cambuslang revival in 1742.[13] Howell Harris (1714–1773) of Wales read it also. When revival came to his homeland in the ensuing years, he remarked, "Sure the time here now is like New England."[14] In 1738, *A Faithful Narrative* was printed in German; in 1740, a Dutch translation appeared. In short, Edwards's account was "a media event"[15] that "fired the evangelical imagination."[16] Its influence was incalculable. Bruce Hindmarsh writes, "As his narrative of revival was read aloud to congregations, as it was serialized in revival magazines in London and Glasgow, it inspired ministers to expect that such an experience could be replicated among their own people."[17]

Edwards's work also inspired a host of other revival narratives. Evangelicals founded four major periodicals in Great Britain and America between the years 1741–1743: the Calvinistic Methodist *Christian's Amusement* in London (later *The Weekly History* under the leadership of George Whitefield), William McCulloch's *The Glasgow Weekly History*, Thomas Prince's (1687–1758) *The Christian History* in Boston, and James Robe's *The Christian Monthly History* in Edinburgh. Each was devoted to relating stories of "the progress of the gospel at home and abroad."[18] The *Christian History* was

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[12] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Reception of Jonathan Edwards by Early Evangelicals in England," in *Jonathan Edwards at Home and Abroad: Historical Memories, Cultural Movements, Global Horizons*, ed. David W. Kling and Douglas A. Sweeney. (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2003), 204–206.

[13] See James Robe, *A Short Narrative of the Extraordinary Work at Cambuslang, in a letter to a friend* (Boston: Kneeland and Green, 1742).

[14] W. R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 322. Harris was one of the leaders of the evangelical awakening in Wales.

[15] Hindmarsh, "Reception of Jonathan Edwards," 204.

[16] Mark Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield, and the Wesleys* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2010), 91.

[17] Hindmarsh, "Reception of Jonathan Edwards," 203.

[18] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in*

described by one contemporary as "containing accounts of the revival and propagation of religion (of late) in Great Britain and America: which exhibits to us a large number of very satisfactory and joyful accounts."[19] Most of these revival narratives explicitly followed Edwards's structure: an appraisal of the town before the revival, a description of the beginnings and effects of the revival, detailed accounts of individual converts' experiences, and a report on the continuing or declining state of the revival.[20]

One spin-off narrative came from the pen of Samuel Blair (1714–1751) in 1744.[21] Born in Ireland, Blair trained at William Tennent's Log College before settling at a Presbyterian church in Fagg's Manor, or New London-Derry, Pennsylvania, in 1739. Blair also began a school modeled after Tennent's, where Samuel Davies (1723–1761) would receive his training. In 1740, Blair's Fagg's Manor congregation experienced "a very comfortable enlivening time to God's people, and great numbers of secure careless professors, and many loose irreligious persons thro' the land were deeply convinced of their miserable perishing estate, and . . . many of them were in the issue, savingly converted to God."[22] Thomas Prince asked Blair to contribute "as cautious and exact account as might be of the happy revival of religion in my congregation," to *The Christian History*. Blair was happy to oblige, being "convinced that it is our duty, in the most open manner to declare and bear testimony unto the work of God's grace among us at this day, for the honor of his name, and the good of his church, both in the present and future generations." Yet Blair did not think the magazine would be widely read in the

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Early Modern England (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 68–69.

[19] Samuel Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative, of the late remarkable revival of religion in the congregation of New Londonderry, and other parts of Pennsylvania, as the same was sent in a letter to the Rev. Mr. Prince of Boston* (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1744), 3.

[20] Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 23.

[21] For Blair, see Archibald Alexander, *Biographical Sketches of the Founder, and Principal Alumni of the Log College* (Princeton, NJ: J. T. Robinson, 1845), 254–92.

[22] Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative,* 44.

middle colonies. He published his letter separately, hoping to spread revival further.[23]

Blair deliberately followed Edwards's template. Before the revival, Fagg's Manor knew of an outward form of religion, but precious little experimental piety. The people were devoted to such worldly practices as parties, horse racing, and dancing. "Thus religion lay as it were a dying, and ready to expire its last breath of life in this party of the visible church," Blair commented. All this began to change in the spring of 1740, "when the God of salvation was pleased to visit us with the blessed effusions of his Holy Spirit in an eminent manner." An anonymous guest preacher first awakened "deep soul-concern" among Blair's people, and Blair quickly followed up with his own intense gospel preaching. The results were remarkable:

> I think there was scarcely a sermon or lecture preached here thro that whole summer, but there were manifest evidences of impressions on the hearers, and many times the impressions were very great and general: several would be overcome and fainting; others deeply sobbing, hardly able to contain, others being in a most dolorous manner, many others more silently weeping, and a solemn concern appearing in the countenance of many others.[24]

Like Edwards, Blair carefully noted that he did not aim to create these physical manifestations, nor did he view them as certain signs of God's work. Blair was more interested in the kind of inner transformation Edwards had witnessed in Northampton. "The general carriage and behaviour of the people was soon very visibly alter'd," he wrote. This included a new devotion to and delight in the Bible, sound Christian literature, religious conversation, and public worship.[25] Blair also followed Edwards by including accounts of the town since the revival had faded, as well as conversion stories of a young woman, an older man, and two little girls. In closing, he wrote:

> Thus sir, I have endeavour'd to give a brief account of the revival of religion among us in these parts, in which I have endeavored all along to be conscientiously exact in

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[23] Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative*, 3–5.

[24] Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative*, 15–16.

[25] Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative*, 10–11, 15–18.

> relating things according to the naked truth, knowing that I must not speak wickedly even for God, nor talk deceitfully for him, and upon the whole I must say it is beyond dispute with me, and I think it is beyond all reasonable contradiction that God has carry'd on a great and glorious work of his special grace among us.[26]

Living about seventy miles north of Fagg's Manor in Warminster Township, Hart likely read the narratives of both Edwards and Blair, and perhaps many others, during the 1740s. Hart's correspondence reveals an insatiable appetite for revival reports throughout his life. It should therefore come as no surprise that when he recorded the events of the 1754 Charleston revival in his diary, he had been profoundly shaped by the revival narrative genre. There are some significant differences from Blair's and Edwards's narratives. Hart's account takes the form of a private diary, not a letter. It is not known if Hart ever intended anyone to read his story, though Richard Furman would quote from it at length in a memorial sermon for Hart.[27] Hart also did not attempt to place the revival in the context of the city's spiritual condition, but focused entirely on his own congregation. Yet the influence of revival narrative on these pages remains unmistakable. In particular, Hart's diary parallels Edwards's *Faithful Narrative* in six revival themes: personal renewal, preaching for conversions, private meetings, personal testimonies, powerful affections, and protecting from deception.

Personal Renewal

The morning of August 5, 1754, found Hart in low spirits. He lamented,

> I do this morning feel myself under a sense of my barrenness. Alas, what do I do for God? I am indeed employed in his vineyard, but I feel to little purpose. I feel the want of the *life* and *power* of religion in my *own heart*; this causes such a languor, and faintness in all my duties to God. This makes me such a poor manager of time. Alas! I am frequently upon my bed, when I ought to be upon my knees. To my shame, sometimes the sun appears in the horizon, and begins his daily course, before I have paid my tribute of praise to God, and perhaps while I am indulging

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[26] Blair, *A Short and Faithful Narrative*, 44.

[27] Richard Furman, *Rewards of Grace Conferred on Christ's Faithful People: A Sermon, Occasioned by the Decease of the Rev. Oliver Hart, A.M.* (Charleston: J. McIver, 1796), 25.

> myself in inactive slumbers upon my bed. Oh wretched stupidity! Oh that for time to come I may be more active for God.[28]

The passage illustrates several concerns central to the spirituality of the Great Awakening. First is Hart's desire to feel the "life and power of religion in my own heart." Evangelicals longed to move beyond formal participation in the institutional church and affirmations of doctrinal statements. They wanted to experience "the life of God in the soul of man," in the words of the evangelical muse, Henry Scougal.[29]

While the evangelical emphasis on a vibrant, personal relationship with God had certainly been prominent in English Puritanism, it is most closely associated with Continental Pietism. In the preceding generation, German pastor Philip Jacob Spener (1635–1705) had sounded a call for spiritual renewal in the Protestant church in the small book *Pia Desideria* (1675).[30] Spener lamented how few church members "really understand and practice true Christianity (which consists of more than avoiding manifest vices and living an outwardly moral life)." Despite possessing religious knowledge, many were "altogether unacquainted with the true, heavenly, light and life of faith."[31] Spener responded by offering "several simple Christian proposals" for promoting vital godliness in the church, including personal Bible reading and the formation of Christian societies outside the church's regular services. Spener's "pious desires" and the movement of Pietism he launched "helped condition the faith and practices of early American evangelicalism," contributing "an intense focus on the heart, often in conflict with the

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[28] Oliver Hart, diary, August 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. Emphasis original.

[29] Henry Scougal (1650–1678) was a Scottish theologian at the University of Aberdeen. Upon reading Scougal's *The Life of God in the Soul of Man*, Whitefield knew that "I must be born again, or be damned," and claimed that he "never knew what true religion was until he read this book." See J. I. Packer, "Henry Scougal: The Life of God in the Soul of Man" in *Puritan Profiles* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 37–46.

[30] Spener, Lutheran pastor and theologian, widely considered the "Father of Pietism," was also influential in the founding of the University of Halle in 1694. See W. R. Ward, "Philip Jacob Spener," in *Biographical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2003), 622–24.

[31] Philip Jacob Spener, *Pia Desidera*, trans. Theodore G. Tappert (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1964), 45, 46.

decayed state of formal, established religion."[32] These concerns permeate Hart's writings. He often quoted Proverbs 23:26 in his sermons, "My son, give me thine heart," finishing the verse with a drawing of a heart on his sermon manuscript.

The diary also reflects another standard feature of evangelical piety, the commitment to a certain set of devotional practices. When Hart confesses "a languor and faintness in all my duties to God," he alludes to the personal disciplines of early morning prayer and praise. These were among the primary "means of grace" whereby individual Christians could draw near to God.[33] Hart's angst in his diary is a direct precursor to the contemporary evangelical preoccupation with the "quiet time." Note that the faithful performance of these duties required the close management of one's time, another enduring evangelical concern. James Gordon has pointed out that "the regular hour, usually early in the morning, careful watching of the clock to make sure time was carefully used, [and] anxiety to make sure all opportunities were 'improved,'" are classic features of evangelical devotion.[34] One's consistency in this hour of private worship often served as a measuring stick of evangelical spirituality. Any perceived shortcoming in these duties left a sincere believer like Hart lamenting his "wretched stupidity" and feeling "shame" for sleeping in.[35]

On this occasion, Hart concluded his self-examination with firm resolution:

> Ever I have heretofore done: I would resolve to be a better manager of my *time* than I have hitherto been, to rise earlier in the mornings; to be sooner with thee in secret devotion; and oh, that I may be more devout therein! I would be more engaged in my studies; grant, O Lord that I may improve more thereby! And when I go out,

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[32] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 39.

[33] For a survey of evangelical spiritual practice, see Ian Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus: The Evangelical Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality Series (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005).

[34] James Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 5.

[35] The classic example of the introspective tendency among the early evangelicals is Jonathan Edwards, *The Life of David Brainerd*, vol. 7 in *WJE*, ed. Norman Pettit (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1985).

> enable me better to improve my visits; that I always may leave a savour of divine things behind me. When I go to thy house in order to speak for thee, may I always go fraught full with divine things and be enabled faithfully and feelingly to dispense the Word of Life. In a word, I would begin, and end, every day with thee; teach me to study thy glory in all I do, and will thou also be with me in the night watches; teach me to meditate on thee, upon my bed, and may I sleep for thee; and desire no more than nature requires, fit me for thy service. Thus, teach me to number my days that I may apply my heart unto wisdom.[36]

The passage exemplifies the evangelical ideal of an active spirituality.[37] Hart's vision of the godly life was lively, energetic, strenuous. It did include strategic periods of holy seclusion—the "secret devotion" of morning prayer and engagement in "my studies"—yet these respites largely served the end of "fitting me for thy service," public ministry. Note that Hart aspired not only to the bare performance of spiritual duties, but for greater intensity and fruitfulness in them. He resolved to "rise earlier" and "be more devout" in prayer; to be "more engaged" in study; to "improve" his visits; to preach "faithfully and feelingly." He closed with a prayer for nothing short of total consecration to God: "in a word, I would begin, and end every day with thee," even improving the hours he spent on his bed.

Hart was not finished making resolutions. Two weeks later, he added another new initiative, specifically related to the study of Scripture:

> Being convinced for a considerable time past, of the necessity of a larger, and better acquaintance with, and a more copious knowledge of, the Word of God, I came to a resolution this morning, with the permission, and assistance of God, to read ten chapters every day, (at least for a time, or till I see an inconveniency arising from it) allowing for times to travel, and unforeseen events. According to this resolution I began the New Testament this morning purposing first to read over that; and then to begin with the Old Testament, and may the Lord grant that I may read to advantage.[38]

Again, Hart expressed a hallmark of the evangelical awakening, a renewed commitment to seeking God in the Bible.[39] Unlike many previous generations of

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[36] Hart, diary, August 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. Emphasis original.

[37] For Hart's activism, see chap. 5 below.

[38] Hart, diary, August 19, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[39] For evangelicals as "Biblicists," see D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain:*

Christians, evangelicals had ready access to copies of the Scriptures in their own language, and promoted personal Bible reading as the primary means of privately drawing near to God. During the Northampton revival, Edwards had reported that "while God was so remarkably present among us by his Spirit, there was no book so delighted in as the Bible . . . . Some by reason of their esteem and love to God's Word, have at some times been greatly and wonderfully delighted and affected at the sight of a Bible."[40] So with Hart, because both Old and New Testaments were nothing less than "the Word of God," to obtain "a more copious knowledge" of the Bible was to grow nearer to God himself.[41]

One can hardly read Hart's resolutions without thinking of Edwards' more famous list, his *Resolutions*.[42] Like Hart, Edwards was driven by a desire to redeem the time for God's glory, as in his Resolution 5: "Resolved, never to lose one moment of time; but improve it in the most profitable way I possibly can."[43] Within his spiritual commitments, Edwards also focused on Bible knowledge: "28. Resolved, to study the Scriptures so steadily, constantly, and frequently, as that I may find, and plainly perceive myself to grow in the knowledge of the same."[44] Both Edwards's youthful *Resolutions*, as well as his more mature reflections on personal spirituality in *A Personal Narrative*, exhibit the same evangelical desire for consecration to God as in Hart's diary.[45]

A History from the 1730s to the 1980s (New York: Routledge, 2005), 12–14. See also Randall, *What a Friend We Have in Jesus*, 42–58.

[40] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 184.

[41] Setting goals for daily Bible intake remains a hallmark of evangelical devotion. For instance, the daily Bible reading plan of Scottish evangelical Robert Murray McCheyne (1813–1843) remains in heavy circulation among evangelicals today through the accompanying devotionals by D.A. Carson entitled *For the Love of God: A Daily Companion for Discovering the Riches of God's Word*, Vol I–II (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2006). For McCheyne's spirituality, see Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 121–43.

[42] Jonathan Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, vol. 16 of *WJE*, ed. George S. Claghorn (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1998) 753–59.

[43] Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 753.

[44] Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 754.

[45] Edwards penned his Resolutions over the years 1723–1724. He wrote his "Personal

Hart soon put feet to his commitments. He filled the ensuing pages of his diary with reports of praying, studying, preaching, counseling, traveling, and generally "laying himself out for God." It seems Hart was never happier than when the pace was most demanding: "Blessed be God, I can say, although I am at times weary *in* my Lord's work, yet I am not weary *of* it: and I hope I never shall. The more I am engaged in it, the better I like it; the sweeter I find it!"[46] Hart's personal renewal in August of 1754 is pertinent to the story of the 1754 revival. Historians of the Charleston Baptist church point out that the events of the awakening followed directly on the heels of Hart's own private consecration.[47] As in Edwards's case, the congregation in Charleston would follow the lead of its impassioned minister. Of Edwards and the Northampton revival, George Marsden writes, "His personal role was astonishing. The town seemed to be made over in his image . . . . People identified with this demanding young preacher who set before them an exalted spiritual vision."[48] So in 1754, Hart's personal renewal served as a model and a catalyst in the Baptist revival at Charleston.

Preaching for Conversions

Hart was well acquainted with "revival preaching," having sat under the electrifying addresses of George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent, John Rowland, Abel Morgan, and Jenkin Jones. In 1754, Hart's own preaching was a primary agent in the Charleston revival. He preached often, with two formal services each Sunday, a doctrinal lecture every Wednesday, impromptu meetings in church members' homes, and itinerant

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Narrative" almost twenty years later, to relate his spiritual journey to his son-in-law, Aaron Burr. See Edwards, *Letters and Personal Writings*, 741–52, 790–804.

[46] Hart, diary, September 2, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. Emphasis original.

[47] So Basil Manly, Sr., writes, "Very shortly after the date of this pious effusion, the great work of grace began under his ministry; and very many, especially of the young, were brought to the knowledge of the truth." Basil Manly, *Mercy and Judgment: A Discourse, Containing Some Fragments of the History of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C.* (Providence, RI: Knowles, Vose and Co., 1837), 35.

[48] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 158.

work over the Ashley River. One of his earliest entries from the period captures the essence of his pulpit ministry: "Preached twice with some degree of warmth: in the afternoon from John 3:7: 'Ye must be born again;' felt my soul drawn out after the conversion of sinners; Oh, that they knew what the new birth means!"[49] This quote suggests a brand of revival preaching that was biblical, conversion-oriented, and passionate.

Preaching for Hart was always the proclamation of Scripture. As Hart preached from John 3:7 on August 4, so he centered all his sermons on a biblical text, often a single verse. The message was then developed according to the Puritan method: after introductory remarks on the context and relevance of the selected verse, he provided an exposition of the text's doctrine, then moved to personal application. Other preaching texts Hart mentioned in the diary include Revelation 1:5: "Unto Him that loved us;" Galatians 4:19: "My little children;" 1 John 2:1: "But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Righteous;" and Malachi 4:2: "But unto you that fear my name shall the Sun of righteousness arise with healing in his wings; and ye shall go forth, and grow up as calves of the stall."[50]

The terms Hart used to describe his preaching also point to his Bible-centeredness. He typically spoke of "expounding": explaining the biblical message and pressing it onto his listeners. "I have for sometime past felt a love for expounding, and have had frequent opportunities so to do."[51] For example: "I expounded some part of the last chapter of Luke;" "I expounded part of the 21st chapter of St. John;" "expounded

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[49] Hart, diary, August 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[50] Hart kept a careful record of many things, including the sermons he preached. A sermon register he kept from the years 1773–1794 has been preserved, listing the sermons he preached during this period by text as well as by date. The sermon register is valuable not only in demonstrating that Hart invariably preached from a text of Scripture, but it also that gives some insight into his favorite preaching texts.

[51] Hart, diary, August 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Matthew 15 from 21st to 23rd."[52] Hart also uses the metaphor of "opening" the biblical passage, as one might raise the lid of a treasure chest to reveal the riches it contained: "I opened the first part of Isaiah 42;" "opening up the first five verses of the 2nd chapter of Isaiah;" "opened and spiritualized the first chapter of Jonah."[53] "Spiritualizing" was another method of applying Scripture, drawing spiritual principles from biblical narratives. In the previous example, Hart compared his listeners to Jonah slumbering in the storm and prayed, "Lord, wilt thou awake sleeping sinners, that they may call upon thee for mercy!" Hart also spoke of "spiritualizing blind Bartimaeous," and "spiritualiz[ing] Namaan's case."[54] Whitefield often employed this method in his own preaching, and Hart may well have read his published sermon on "Blind Bartimaeus."[55] Hart's Bible-driven preaching practice was grounded in his theological convictions about the Bible. He believed that Scripture, being the Word of God, had the power to awaken and to convert: "I hope some felt the Word," he often remarked after preaching. He longed for his listeners to be "affected under the Word," and prayed "Oh that their hearts were opened to hear the Word, and that they might receive it!"[56]

In addition to sermons that were biblical, Hart's revival preaching also aimed for conversions. While salvation was a supernatural work, the instrument God used to effect the new birth was earnest, Spirit-empowered preaching. Hart longed to see God work this miracle through his sermons, as when he "felt his soul drawn out" for his listeners' conversion.[57] Similar statements abound in his diary. "Found my heart much

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[52] Hart, diary, August, 23, 25, September, 20; October, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[53] Hart, diary, September 1, 2, 13, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[54] Hart diary, August 23; October 13, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[55] George Whitefield, "Blind Bartimaeus" in *The Sermons of George Whitefield*, ed. Lee Gattis (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 1:456–66.

[56] Hart, diary, September 11, August 25, September 22, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[57] "Found my heart much drawn out in the afternoon after the conversion of young people. Lord take thine own work, into thine own hands." Hart, diary, August 18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

drawn out in the afternoon after the conversion of young people. Lord take thine own work, into thine own hands," he wrote.[58] After addressing a gathering of young people: "I believe that some of them are under some Awakening. Oh! May the Lord carry on his work in their hearts; may conviction end in conversion, and may none of those awakened turn back again."[59] In another example, he wrote, "was informed this day that a young man (W. R.) was struck with convictions last night while I was expounding; if so, Lord may they never wear off, till they end in a saving conversion to Thee!"[60] Speaking about a sermon from Isaiah 55:6-7, he wrote, "towards the latter end of my discourse, my heart was much drawn out after the conversion of sinners, and the increase of grace in the hearts of these young persons lately converted."[61]

Hart's revival preaching was also notable for its passion. When critics of the Great Awakening accused Jonathan Edwards of playing too heavily to the emotions, he replied, "Our people don't so much need to have their heads stored as to have their hearts touched; and they stand in greatest need of that sort of preaching that has the greatest tendency to do this."[62] Hart followed the same philosophy. After a sermon from Galatians 4:19, he wrote, **"**I am sure I spoke from the heart, and firmly believe I felt what the Apostle did when he said, 'I travail in birth till Christ be formed in you.' Some, Blessed be God, seemed affected under the Word."[63] One gets a sense of Hart's passion from the vocabulary he uses to describe both his delivery and the hearer's reception of the message. "Warmth" was a favorite image, as in, "preached twice with some degree of

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[58] Hart, diary, August 18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[59] Hart, diary, August 20, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[60] Hart, diary, September 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[61] Hart, diary, September 29, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[62] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 388.

[63] Hart, diary, August 25, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

warmth."[64] Affectionate preachers before him, from the Puritan Richard Sibbes (1577–1635)[65] to Edwards, had also insisted that a sermon contain both light and heat.

Other dominant preaching images in Hart's writings include "power" and "freedom": "Blessed be God this was a good day throughout. I had great freedom in dispensing the Word, and I hope and believe many felt the power of it."[66] Hart prayed for God's converting power to visit his hearers while preaching: "Lord, smite their hearts powerfully, and may they not rest, till they find rest in thee;" "Work powerfully upon their young hearts!"[67] He could also use gentler imagery, describing the Word as coming with "sweetness": "I expounded to many of my people, with great freedom and sweetness, I trust to myself and others."[68] After preaching Song of Solomon 1:2, "For thy love is better than wine," he wrote, "I hope some felt the sweetness of Christ's love and could say from experience that Christ's love was better than wine."[69] Warmth, power, freedom, sweetness: this was the vocabulary of a passionate revival preacher. It is not uncommon to read in his diary that "several were much affected . . . some could scarce forbear crying out,"[70] or when he saw many "melted down into tears."[71] Hart labored to inform the mind by clearly explaining the text, yet also maintained that revival would come only if God himself "broke in with light, power, and sweetness upon the heart."[72]

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[64] Hart, diary, August 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[65] Sibbes was an Anglican preacher in the Puritan tradition, known as the "sweet dropper" for his ability to communicate the tenderness of Christ. See Mark E. Dever, *Richard Sibbes: Puritanism and Calvinism in Late Elizabethan and Early Stuart England* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2000).

[66] Hart, Diary, 1 September 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[67] Hart, diary, September 11, October 8, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[68] Hart, diary, August 11, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[69] Hart, diary, October 2, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[70] Hart, diary, September 1, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman..

[71] Hart, diary, August 27, September 16, October 6, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[72] Hart, diary, September 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Samuel Stillman would one day become the pastor of the First Baptist Church of Boston, Massachusetts, where he occasionally counted John Hancock, John Adams, and Henry Knox among his listeners. But in 1754, he was simply the unconverted teenage son in a Charleston Baptist family. Stillman has left behind an eyewitness testimony of the power of Hart's preaching during the 1754 revival. He described himself in these days as a spiritually indecisive young man, until "my mind was again solemnly impressed with a sense of my awful condition as a sinner" after hearing a weighty message from Hart. This time, conviction did not wear off as before. "This conviction grew stronger and stronger. My condition alarmed me. I saw myself without Christ and without hope. I found that I deserved the wrath to come, and that God would be just to send me to hell. I was now frequently on my knees, pleading for mercy. As a beggar I went, having nothing but guilt, and no plea but mercy," he remembered.[73] Evangelicals described this as a sinner's experiencing the power of God's Law. Before one could value Christ's offer of salvation, one first must be brought to understand God's holiness and transcendence, and the perfect standard to which he held his creatures in the Law. The Law exposed the sinner's desperate need for grace, shattered all former self-righteousness, and drove him to despair of ever saving himself. Evangelicals like Hart deemed this process essential for bringing a careless sinner like Stillman to the alarming realization that he was a "beggar," "having nothing but guilt, and no plea but mercy."

Stillman experienced the transition from despair to hope on August 27, when Hart declared the gospel from Matthew 1:21, "And she shall bring forth a son, and thou shalt call his name Jesus; for he shall save his people from their sins." Through this sermon, Stillman finally "received consolation." He recalled that "Christ then became precious to me, yea, all in all. Then I could say of wisdom, 'Her ways are ways of

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[73] Samuel Stillman, *Select Sermons on Doctrinal and Practical Subjects, by the Late Samuel Stillman, D. D., Comprising Several Sermons Never Before Published to Which Is Prefixed A Biographical Sketch of the Author's Life* (Boston: Manning & Loring, 180), vi.

pleasantness, and all her paths are peace.' That I still think was the day of my espousal. Glory be to God, for the riches of his grace to me. Why me, Lord?"[74] Stillman's transformation was immediately evident. He became a leader among the other awakened youths, often leading in prayer and hosting meetings in his family's home.

Hart's revival preaching is an important piece in the case for his revival spirituality. Separate Baptist preachers like Shubal Stearns are rightly remembered for their passionate, evangelistic, revival-oriented preaching ministries. Morgan Edwards recalled Stearns' preaching voice as "musical and strong, which he managed in such a manner as, one while, to make soft impressions on the heart, and fetch tears from the eyes in a mechanical way; and anon, to shake the nerves and throw the animal system into tumults and perturbations."[75] Yet Hart's diary indicates that Regular Baptists also knew what it meant to preach in the great revival tradition of George Whitefield. Without question, the different backgrounds, personalities, and ministry contexts of the Regular and Separate Baptists contributed to distinctive preaching styles. Hart appears to have been more serious in his manner, more precise in his sermon construction, more polished in his delivery, and more constrained by his confessionalism than Stearns. Yet by no means was Hart dispassionate, unconcerned about the conversion of sinners, or suspicious of the Spirit's operations while in the pulpit. He was a revival preacher.

Private Meetings

An emerging feature of the evangelical awakening was a renewed emphasis on private religious meetings among laypeople. The idea of an *ecclesiolae in ecclesia*, little churches within the church, had roots in the Magisterial Reformation and in English

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[74] Samuel Stillman, *Select Sermons*, vi.

[75] Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards a History of the Baptists*, ed. Eve B. Weeks and Mary Bundurant Warren (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 2:93.

Puritanism, but is most closely associated with Continental Pietism.[76] For the Pietists, the institutional church to which the masses belonged "could not possibly meet the religious needs of the more earnest Christians," and thus "some means had to be found to provide for the religious needs of those men and women who wanted more than baptism, confirmation, and a learned sermon on some disputed point of theology."[77] Addressing this need, Philip Jacob Spener recommended the adoption of *collegia pietatis*, or private gatherings for piety. Spener called Christians to meet in small groups outside the regular church services for prayer, the devotional reading and discussion of Scripture, and mutual spiritual encouragement. Spener envisioned the minister remaining present to encourage lay participation, providing the people "a splendid opportunity to exercise their diligence with respect to the Word of God and modestly to ask their questions (which they do not always have the courage to discuss with their ministers in private) and get answers to them."[78] Spener believed these meetings to be a key in restoring vitality to the church. "In a short time they would experience personal growth and would also become capable of giving better religious instruction to their children and servants at home," he wrote.[79]

The concept of the *collegia pietatis* gained traction in the evangelical movement. Various manifestations of the small group principle appeared among the Moravians at Herrnhut, the early Methodists, as well as in Edwards's Northampton revivals.[80] In *A Faithful Narrative*, Edwards indicated that an important catalyst for the

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[76] Richard F. Lovelace notes the endorsement of small group meetings for piety by the Reformers Martin Luther and Martin Bucer in *Dynamics of Spiritual Life: An Evangelical Theology of Renewal* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1979), 165. Marsden addresses the same pattern among the Puritans when he writes, "In Elizabethan England when the original Puritans were frequently oppressed, the neighborhood conventicles were often the heart of the movement. Nothing was more distinctive about Puritanism than its encouragement of lay spirituality." Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 156.

[77] F. Ernest Stoeffler, *The Rise of Evangelical Pietism* (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 19.

[78] Spener, *Pia Desidera*, 90.

[79] Spener, *Pia Desideria*, 90.

[80] Noll, *Rise of Evangelicalism*, 67–69.

awakening had been the organization of the young people into small groups for "social religion," including biblical instruction, prayer, singing, and spiritual conference.[81] These meetings grew especially popular among the awakened young people. Previously given to "frolicking," and generally careless living, they now voluntarily met in groups for spiritual improvement. Edwards observed that "the place of resort was now altered; it was no longer the tavern, but the minister's house, that was thronged for more than ever the tavern had been wont to be."[82] Hart followed Edwards's pattern, and promoted private religious meetings in the Charleston revival. Reports of small-group gatherings outside formal church hours and off church premises appear on every page of his diary. Hart organized many of these meetings himself, as when he lectured to a "society" on Wednesday afternoons on a doctrinal subject, or when he instructed baptismal candidates in his home. More commonly, the young people planned the meetings. They simply showed up in groups at Hart's doorstep, or requested that he address them at the house of a church member. On other occasions, the youth gathered with no pastoral oversight.

Hart's entries during the week of Tuesday, August 20 to Monday, August 26, indicate something of the frequency and character of these private meetings. On Tuesday night, Hart sat at his desk at 10 o'clock, still exhilarated by the events of the day. "Blessed be God who hath brought me through another day, and supplied all my wants therein, and gave me an opportunity this evening of expounding to several young people, who came to my house."[83] Hart took great pains to accurately diagnose the spiritual condition of each of his people to determine the spiritual medicine he would prescribe. In a later sermon, Hart spoke of the importance and difficulty of exercising this pastoral discernment:

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[81] Edwards, *Great Awakening,* 155–56.

[82] Edwards, *Great Awakening,* 161.

[83] Hart, diary, August 20, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

> In a word, study, rightly to divide the Word of Truth; that you may give a portion in season to each of your hearers. Our congregations, generally, if not always, consist of persons of the most different characters: as saints, and sinners, the humble penitent, and the presuming hypocrite. Between these you are to distinguish: and by no means to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs! I have some times thought it one of the most difficult parts of a minister's work, rightly to distinguish between the hypocrite and the weak believer, and so dispense the Word, as not to encourage or buoy up the former, or to discourage the latter. In this, you will act with particular caution![84]

On this Tuesday evening, Hart believed many of his young charges had entered the earliest stages of the process. They had received a new awareness of their sin and need for salvation: "I believe that some of them are under some Awakening. Oh! May the Lord carry on his work in their hearts; may conviction end in conversion, and may none of those awakened turn back again!"[85]

On Wednesday, Hart delivered his regular Bible lecture, taking up Revelation 3:18 and praying, "Lord, give us all that white raiment, that our souls may be clothed therewith!" Afterward, "a good number of people" assembled at a Mrs. Baker's house to listen to Hart "expound" another portion of Scripture. "May the Lord bless these our weak endeavors to love him! And may something be done in these societies, to his glory," Hart prayed. While Hart reveled in the pace of the revival ministry, it also took a physical toll on him. "[I] feel myself a little indisposed in body," he confessed. Yet in the heat of revival, Hart even turned sickness and fatigue to spiritual profit: "oh may I be prepared for my dissolution; and may I live in a habitual preparation for death!"[86]

Night after night, the young people gathered to hear the Word from Hart. He reported another private meeting on Thursday, August 22. "Blessed be God who hath brought me to the winding up of another day; and for all his mercies performed upon me therein; and particularly for an opportunity of expounding this evening," he wrote.[87]

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[84] Oliver Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[85] Hart, diary, August 20, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[86] Hart, diary, August 21, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[87] Hart, diary, August 22, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Friday was also eventful. "I find when God gives me a heart to work for him, he also finds me work to do," he wrote. He continued,

> I have for sometime past felt a love for expounding, and have had frequent opportunities so to do. This evening several people came to my house with a desire to receive some spiritual instruction; which gave me an opportunity of spiritualizing blind Bartimaeus' case, I hope to some advantage. The priest's lips are to retain knowledge, and unto them (so the means) are the people to seek for wisdom. Lord give me the wisdom which is from above, that I may teach my people thy fear! Blessed be God! I have more reason to believe that some of our young people are concerned for their souls, and it may be that the Revival may prove to be more extensive than first expected. Lord grant that many may be awakened to a sense of their misery, and enabled to fly to the Rock of Ages for Refuge.[88]

On Saturday, Hart secluded himself in his study to prepare Sunday's messages. The constant preaching from the previous week had totally depleted him. "Spent this day in my study, with a view to make some preparations for the Sabbath; but found myself quite empty, and could scarce rise upon any subject for my meditation." Hart took this occasion of weakness to turn to God. "Blessed be God! My hope is in him. Tho' I am empty, he is full, and I hope to be fill'd out of that fullness which filleth all, and in all."[89] On Sunday, after preaching two sermons to the church, Hart recorded, "In the evening had my house crowded, mostly with young people, who came to hear me expound, which the Lord enabled me to do with a good degree of freedom; many were affected. Blessed be God the work among our young people seems to go on gloriously!"[90] Monday found Hart again following up with awakened individuals: "In the afternoon I went and convers'd with several under soul trouble; blessed be God I find them in a fine way."[91]

Hart's record of these private meetings provide further evidence of his enthusiastic participation in the Great Awakening. The conferences Hart arranged show

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[88] Hart, diary, August 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[89] Hart, diary, August 24, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[90] Hart, diary, August 25, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[91] Hart, diary, August 26, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

his industry in promoting revival, as well as his awareness of the practice in other places. The voluntary meetings arranged by the young people indicate the authenticity of the spiritual awakening that visited Charleston.

Personal Testimonies

As already noted, Edwards believed that "there is no one thing I know of, that God has made such a means of promoting his work amongst us, as the news of others' conversion."[92] The sharing of personal conversion stories played a prominent role in the Northampton revival. Early on, a notorious young woman, "one of the greatest company-keepers in town," experienced conversion. Edwards wrote that "God made it, I suppose, the greatest occasion of awakening to others, of anything that ever came to pass in the town . . . the news of it seemed to be almost like a flash of lightning, upon the hearts of young people all over the town, and upon many others."[93] As the revival gathered momentum, it became common for the people of Northampton to share their conversion stories: "'tis very much the practice of the people here to converse freely one with another of their spiritual experiences," Edwards wrote.[94] Critics of the revival, like Timothy Cutler (1684–1765), lampooned the sharing of testimonies:

> The Calvinistic scheme is in perfection about 100 miles from this place. Conversions are talked of, *ad nauseum usque*. Sixty in a place undergo the work at once. Sadness and horror seize them, and hold them for some days; then they feel an inward joy, and it first shows itself in laughing at meeting. Others are sad for want of experiencing this work; and this takes up for the present the thoughts and talk of that country; and the canting question trumped about it, "Are you gone through?" i.e. conversion.[95]

These charges of enthusiasm did not deter Edwards from encouraging personal

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[92] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 176.

[93] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 149.

[94] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 190.

[95] Timothy Cutler to Zachary Grey, June 5, 1735, in Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 161. Cutler served as rector of Yale College, and minister of Christ Church, Boston.

testimonies. He maintained that "it has been a practice which, in the general, has been attended with many good effects, and what God has greatly blessed among us."[96] Indeed, the sharing of one's conversion story became a staple of the evangelical movement.[97]

Hart also valued the sharing of personal testimonies in the Charleston revival. He recalled after one meeting, "This evening many young people came to my house: most of them to discourse with me in order for baptism, and at that time it pleased God to manifest his love to Miss 'S. R.' She was so full she could not help discovering of it to all present."[98] Vocalizing one's testimony became an important mark of an authentic, inner work of salvation. Early evangelicals identified the young woman's experience with Paul's description in Romans 5:6 of "the love of God . . . shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us." This experience was epitomized in Wesley's famous Aldersgate experience, when he reported, "I felt my heart strangely warmed," and moments later "testified openly to all there what I now first felt in my heart."[99] Like Wesley and countless other evangelicals during the Great Awakening, Miss S. R. "could not help discovering" the saving change in her heart to the people around her.

The most detailed example of testimony in Hart's diary comes on September 5, 1754.[100] On this night, Hart was "refreshed" by his conversation with several young people, "some of whom now have their mouths open to speak for God, and can freely tell what he hath done for them." One of these was Margaret Mageay, a young woman who had lived with the Harts, apparently as a servant, for almost two years. After laboring "under some considerable concern of soul," Margaret informed Hart she had finally "got

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[96] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 191.

[97] For an analysis of this theme, see Hindmarsh, *Evangelical Conversion Narrative*.

[98] Hart, diary, October 1, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[99] Albert C. Outler, Ed., *John Wesley* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1964), 67.

[100] Hart, diary, September 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

comfortable last night." As Hart interviewed Margaret, he "found her quite clear, with regard to the Lord's visiting her with his love last night." Critical in her experience was the remembrance of a Scripture verse: "She had these words, *I have loved thee with an everlasting love*,[101] set home with so much light, and evidence, that she could not avoid taking comfort from them." Margaret thus derived the assurance of her salvation from both objective and subjective sources. Objectively, she trusted not in inner voices supplying "new revelations," but in the unchanging promises of God recorded in the Bible. At the same time, the Holy Spirit personally "set home" these promises to her heart "with so much light, and evidence," that she "could not avoid taking comfort from them."[102] No longer did she merely assent that the promises were true in a general sense; she now leaned on these promises as true for her. This was the personal element Wesley had famously emphasized in his testimony: "I felt I did trust Christ, Christ alone for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away *my* sins, even *mine*, and saved *me* from the law of sin and death."[103]

Margaret's conversion testimony followed the same pattern that Edwards had frequently observed within his congregation at Northampton, where "There is often in the mind some particular text of Scripture, holding forth some evangelical ground of consolation; sometimes in a multitude of texts, gracious invitations and promises flooding in one after another, filling the soul more and more with comfort and satisfaction."[104] As Margaret personally believed God's promises, she became "serene and comfortable," and "in a humble and holy frame of soul."[105]

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[101] Quotation of Jeremiah 31:3. Emphasis original.

[102] Hart, diary, September 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[103] Outler, *John Wesley*, 67. Emphasis original.

[104] Edwards, *Great Awakening,* 172.

[105] Hart, diary, September 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

David Bebbington has identified this immediate sense of assurance upon conversion as a new feature of the evangelical movement, the decisive point of discontinuity with all previous manifestations of Protestant spirituality.[106] When evangelical pastors like Edwards and Hart interviewed hopeful converts, they did not follow their Puritan forbears and, "encourage them to wrestle through their own doubts and fears over a protracted period." Instead, "if [they] were satisfied that they had been truly converted, [they] assured them that they were real Christians."[107] Bebbington attributes this shift to the influence of Enlightenment epistemology, which gave Christians like Edwards, Wesley, and Hart, a heretofore-unknown confidence in the powers of human knowledge. The new believer need not slog through an agonizing season of spiritual insecurity as John Bunyan (1628–1688) had in a previous generation; they could know they had been saved. [108] Whether or not one accepts all of Bebbington's claims regarding the Enlightenment, it seems clear enough that the doctrine of assurance underwent some transformation in the shift from the Puritan to the Evangelical era.[109] Hart's diary demonstrates that he was part of this important transition.

While Hart conferenced with Margaret, five more young women entered the

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[106] Bebbington writes, "Whereas the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the experience of believers, the Evangelicals believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God. The consequence of the altered form of the doctrine was a metamorphosis in the nature of popular Protestantism. There was a change in patterns of piety, affecting devotional and practical life in all its departments. The shift, in fact, was responsible for creating in Evangelicalism a new movement and not merely a variation on themes heard since the Reformation." Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43. For a counterpoint to Bebbington's thesis, on assurance, see Joel R. Beeke, "Evangelicalism and the Dutch Further Reformation," and Garry J. Williams, "Enlightenment epistemology and eighteenth century evangelical doctrines of assurance," in *The Advent of Evangelicalism: Exploring Historical Continuities*, ed. Michael A.G. Haykin and Kenneth J. Stewart (Nashville: B&H Academic, 2008), 146–69, 345–74.

[107] Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 47.

[108] Bunyan was a Baptist minister in the Puritan tradition, best remembered for his enduring allegory of the Christian life, *The Pilgrim's Progress*. His spiritual autobiography, *Grace Abounding to the Chief of Sinners*, epitomizes how grueling the quest for assurance could be among Puritan Christians. See *Works of John Bunyan* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1999), 1:6-50.

[109] While this point seems plain enough to me from the primary sources, in the overall picture, I see far more continuity than discontinuity between the Evangelicals and their predecessors.

room. They were also "under some awakenings." Like a spiritual midwife, Hart acted to assist in the new birth process he believed to be taking place in them. Rather than exhort them with the gospel himself, Hart instead relied upon the personal testimony of their peer, Margaret. He asked Margaret, "if she could not now tell what God had done for her." She eagerly complied:

> Oh yes sir said she: I could now speak for God if the world was to hear; for I now have felt his love and know that he hath loved me with an everlasting love; Oh! What a night had I last night! What a sweet night! And then turning herself to one of the young women, Oh Miss Betsy! Said she, Jesus Christ is sweet, he is precious, had I known his sweetness, said she, I would not have lived so long without him; and then turning herself to another, said, Oh, Oh! Miss Nancy, Christ is sweet! And since he hath had mercy on such a vile wretched sinner as me, I am sure none need ever to despair, Oh! Come Christ![110]

After Margaret's testimony, "the young women were all the same time much affected." The girls Betsy and Nancy "could no longer contain but crying out, got up and went out of the house to vent their grief."[111] As at Northampton, the personal testimonies in Charleston not only served as valuable evidence of personal conversion, but also as an effective means of evangelism.

Powerful Affections

At the center of the Great Awakening was a renewed emphasis on "experiential religion." Some of the emotional displays in the revival, such as weeping and groaning, drew a sneer from anti-revivalist detractors who viewed these displays as antinomian "enthusiasm." While recognizing the danger of excesses, Edwards perceived that blanket denunciations of the revival were rooted in a cold, rationalistic view of Christianity. Contesting this perspective, Edwards argued that "true religion must consist very much in its affections." He elaborated,

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[110] Hart, diary, August 26, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[111] Hart, diary, September 5, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

> The Author of human nature has not only given affections to men, but has made 'em very much the spring of men's actions. As the affections do not only necessarily belong to the human nature, but are a very great part of it; so (inasmuch by regeneration, persons are renewed in the whole man, and sanctified throughout) holy affections do not only necessarily belong to true religion, but are a very great part of that. And as true religion is of a practical nature, and God has so constituted the human nature, that the affections are very much the spring of men's actions, this also shows, that true religion must consist very much in its affections.[112]

Hart adopted this perspective in Charleston. His 1754 diary provides an extended account of the awakened affections of the Charleston Baptist Church. This began with Hart himself, who is anything but stoic in the pages of his diary. Characteristic of the narrative are selections like the following, which sound as if they had been lifted directly from George Whitefield's *Journals*: "Oh! May the mercies of this evening be writ for a memorial upon my very heart! I had such a sense of God's goodness, love, and mercy to me in every respect, that I had almost said, Lord it is enough; hold thy hand. And is all this possible! Is it really so! Lord, why me! Why me! Not unto us, not unto us O Lord, but unto they name be all the praise!"[113]

The youth of the Charleston congregation also exhibited deep emotion on either side of the conversion experience. The initial signs of awakened affections that Hart detected among them resulted from the conviction of sin. One night, a group of young men arrived at Hart's house, "deeply concerned to discourse with me about their souls' affairs." As Hart drew the boys into conversation, the impromptu visit developed into a full-scale revival meeting. "But oh, what an evening we had!" Hart wrote, "Such another I never saw! May I never forget it! I believe I never shall." What happened?

> Some complained, and cried out under a sense of the desperate wickedness and corruption of their own hearts: of which they had such a deep sense, that they seemed to study to find out such words to express themselves concerning it, as might set it forth in the strongest forms. Some were crying out under a sense of sin; never were such a company of great sinners met together in the world, if they

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[112] Jonathan Edwards, *Religious Affections*, vol. 2 of *WJE*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1959), 101.

[113] Hart, diary, August 26, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

themselves might be judges; but the most of them were crying out for Jesus Christ; Oh give me Christ! Give me Christ! Oh if I had but Christ![114]

Desperate for relief, the young men turned to those who had already "come through" in conversion to "help them to Christ." They were in pitiful condition. Hart remarked that although their actions "might argue weakness, yet at the same time I hope it also argued sincerity." Soon, they could only express themselves in the kinds of inarticulate moans toward God that Edwards had witnessed in Northampton.[115] Hart prayed that these were the birth pains of a new creation: "Oh! The groans and sighs of these poor creatures; which coming from the heart, penetrated heaven's gates, and I doubt not, entered into the ears of the Lord God of Sabbaoth. Lord hear their cries! And give them a sense of their interest in thy Love; for thy Son's sake Amen!"[116]

On the other side of the new birth, converts demonstrated the genuineness of their faith by communicating their affectionate sense of God's love for them in Christ. Margaret described her conversion as having finally "got comfortable."[117] "Sweetness," had been a favorite descriptor of religious experience for both Edwards and Whitefield; Abigail Hutcheson declared in *A Faithful Narrative* that, "I am brimful of a sweet feeling within!"[118] The sugary testimony also appears frequently on the lips of new converts in Hart's diary. After his spiritual travail, Samuel Stillman informed Hart that "he had now got Christ and felt the sweetness of his love."[119] A young man named "K B" cried out, "oh . . . Jesus Christ is sweet!"[120] Hart also wrote that God, "broke in with light, power,

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[114] Hart, diary, August 26, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[115] "As for persons crying out, and being set into great agonies, with a sense of sin and wrath, and having their strength taken away, and their minds extraordinarily transported with light, love and comfort, I have been abundantly amongst such things." Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 533.

[116] Hart, diary, August 26, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[117] Hart, diary, September 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[118] Edwards, *Great Awakening*, 196.

[119] Hart, diary, August 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[120] Hart, diary, August 29, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

and sweetness, upon the heart of a poor young creature (Miss Nancy K) who had been for some time past under deep convictions. But now she is triumphing in Almighty Grace!"[121]

Protecting against Deception

As Kidd has shown extensively in *The Great Awakening*, colonial reaction to the revival can be charted along a spectrum.[122] At one end, anti-revivalists like Charles Chauncy and Alexander Garden viewed the movement as dangerous, antinomian disorder. At the other end, radical revivalists, notoriously embodied in the person of James Davenport, seemed willing to bless any rapturous experience or bodily manifestation as Spirit-given. Between these two extremes, "moderate revivalists" hailed the awakening as a genuine outpouring of the Holy Spirit, while also recognizing much dross mixed in with the movement. Jonathan Dickinson (1688–1747) offered one voice of cautious enthusiasm in his *Display of God's Special Grace* (1742).[123] But the moderate revivalist *par excellence* was surely Edwards, who applied his unsurpassed intellect to analyzing the difference between true and false works of the Spirit of God.[124] At the height of the Great Awakening, Edwards penned three works designed to shepherd the revival movement: *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (1741), *Thoughts on the Revival of Religion in New England* (1742) and his magisterial *Treatise Concerning Religious Affections* (1746). Edwards believed pastoral discernment between true and false signs of revival to be of the utmost importance "in this extraordinary day,

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[121] Hart, diary, September 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[122] Kidd argues this thesis throughout *The Great Awakening*.

[123] Jonathan Dickinson, *A display of God's special grace. In a familiar dialogue between a minister & a gentleman of his congregation, about the work of God, in the conviction and conversion of sinners, so remarkably of late begun and going on in these American parts* (Boston: Rogers and Fowle, 1742).

[124] For the progression of Edwards's thought in this area, see Michael J. McClymond and Gerald R. McDermott, "Theology of Revival," in *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 424–47.

when that which is so remarkable appears; such an uncommon operation on the minds of people, that is so extensive; and there is such a variety of opinions concerning it, and so much talk about the work of the Spirit."[125]

For all his unabashed jubilation over the Spirit's work in his congregation, Hart's diary indicates that he shared the concerns of the moderate revivalists. Throughout the fall of 1754, Hart remained cognizant of his people's, and his own, capacity for spiritual deception during such religious excitement. Consider the caution in this early entry: "Many seem now to be under soul concern. There are appearances now of one touched almost every evening. Lord grant that abortions may be prevented! May all these under concern, be really born again! Amen!"[126] Like Edwards in the previous decade, Hart bore the responsibility to interpret the otherworldly events that were turning his community upside down. This drove Hart to employ the pastoral tools of personal interviews, secret prayer, and outside counsel.

Hart carefully interviewed every individual who professed conversion. On September 17, at a full Society meeting of attentive young people, Hart "examined each one of them in particular, and most of them wept much." Afterward, he prayed, "Oh that they may have true repentance, even a repentance which need not be repented of."[127] Again, on September 22, Hart reported "conversing with two young girls about 12 years old." He received "much comfort and satisfaction" from the conversation. "I believe God hath begun a work of grace in their hearts: and hope he will give them to evidence it by their lives," he wrote.[128] It was earlier noted that Hart was more open to granting immediate assurance to his converts than previous generations of Puritan pastors had

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[125] Edwards, *Great Awakening,* 226.

[126] Hart, diary, September 1, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[127] Hart, diary, September 17, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[128] Hart, diary, September 22, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

been. Here, it is equally evident that the assurance Hart offered to new believers was not glib or unqualified. He still took a "wait-and-see" attitude with those who professed faith. Hart rejoiced over any indications of new spiritual life, but he always spoke guardedly about his "hope" that his interviewees had been truly "brought clear." He referred to them as "(shall I call them) new converts." He was pleased after hearing some of them pray in public, but he was still concerned about the authenticity of their devotion. He prayed, "Lord grant they may be influenced by a principle of love to thee!"[129]

Secret prayer was another essential means of guarding his people from deception. In the privacy of his study, Hart prayed for the preservation and perseverance of the new believers. After noting that some of the young people had met without him, he prayed, "Oh, may they continue in the good ways of the Lord, to their lives' end; I dread the thoughts of their going back, or giving up. Lord! Forbid that this should be the case of any of them."[130] As the revival gathered momentum, he soberly interceded for a complete work of grace: "Was informed this day that a young man (W. R.) was struck with convictions last night while I was expounding; if so, Lord may they never wear off, till they end in a saving conversion to thee."[131] On August 30, he recorded the reported conversions of two more young people. This meant he had "hope now that six persons are brought clear," and several others were still wrestling with God. He prayed,

> God grant that not one of these your creatures may be deceived; if one soul of them should miscarry, it would be bad; but if it should all prove a deception, the Lord pity us! For it would be an awful case indeed: but I cannot persuade myself as yet to think so, but if it should, I hope the Lord will prevent its progress. But if it is his work as I hope and believe it is, Lord carry it on and increase it for Thy name's sake; and for Jesus' sake Amen and Amen. And may the good Lord keep me truly humble under such honors conferred upon me. I am afraid of spiritual pride.[132]

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[129] Hart, diary, September 3, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[130] Hart, diary, September 9, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[131] Hart, diary, September 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[132] Hart, diary, August 30, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Even when he was diligent to interview and pray for new converts, Hart still could not shake the fear of a sham revival. "[I] felt myself much oppressed last night and this morning, under a fear that there may be too much of delusion in this work going on. If this should be the case, that Satan should have a hand in it, it would be dreadful." Hart decided to consult with an outside source. He took his concerns to one "Mr. Moody, a good old disciple of Jesus Christ." Hart gave Moody "as particular an account of the manner how so the work was begun; and carried on, as I was able; and desired his opinion concerning it." Moody told Hart "not to be discouraged; but to wait, and time would discover how it was; but he thought, he had seen nothing in it but what might be looked upon with a favorable aspect, and as proceeding from the motions of the Spirit of God. Only says he, when God works, the devil will work too, and you need not wonder if all don't turn out right." The two were then joined by John J. Zubly (1724–1781), [133] who supported Moody's counsel. This eased Hart's mind. Having received "some necessary cautions, and directions from this precious old disciple of Jesus," Hart "took my leave of him, with my hopes somewhat strengthened."[134]

The new converts received a final inspection from Hart upon their baptisms. Before making his or her faith public, each candidate met with Hart to give an updated account of his or her soul. Thus, Stillman came to Hart, "to have some discourse with me; as he designs to offer for baptism soon." In this meeting, Hart questioned Stillman and the girl Margaret, concluding, "Both gave indubitable evidences of a work of grace begun, and carrying on in their hearts. But as to their doctrinal knowledge, it is somewhat weak."[135] He examined a larger group on October 1. Finding their testimony satisfactory,

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[133] John J. Zubly was pastor of Wappetaw Independent Congregational Church (South Carolina) (1748–1759) and Independent Presbyterian Church in Savannah, Georgia (1760–1781). Zubly became well-known as a warm supporter of the colonies and pamphleteer, until in 1775 he turned back and became a Loyalist. See Randall M. Miller, *"A Warm and Zealous Spirit:" John J. Zubly and the American Revolution, a Selection of his Writings* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

[134] Hart, diary, August 30, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[135] Hart, diary, September 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Hart scheduled a baptism for October 10. "Went over the river to Mr. Screven's in company with most of my people," he recorded. "Examined ten persons, all gave very good satisfaction: and most of them spoke surprisingly of what God had done for their souls. Afterward, I baptized them according to the primitive mode, in the name of the Father, etc."[136]

Conclusion

Hart may not have intended for his 1754 diary to be read, but its preservation is a boon for historians. First, it clarifies our understanding of Hart's own spirituality, demonstrating how deeply he was shaped by the Great Awakening, and especially by revival narratives. More broadly, Hart's diary also helps us appreciate the pervasive influence of the Great Awakening, showing how the evangelical revival reached into the lower South in the 1750s. The Charleston Baptists' small-scale revival should be considered one of the "important, widespread revivals" which occurred during the "long great awakening" through the eighteenth century.[137] Finally, Hart's diary sheds further light on the spirituality of the Regular Baptists of the colonial South. Hart's account of the 1754 Charleston revival provides further evidence that Regular Baptists participated in the Great Awakening to a greater degree than is usually acknowledged. The significance of this finding is further seen when one considers that the Separate Baptists, typically credited as those "who brought revival to the South and laid the foundations for the Baptist denomination in that region," did not arrive in Sandy Creek, North Carolina, until the year 1755.[138]

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[136] Hart, diary, October 10, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[137] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, xix.

[138] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), 20–21.

CHAPTER 5

"MAY I LAY OUT MY STRENGTH FOR THEE!": REVIVAL ACTIVISM

On September 12, 1754, Oliver Hart dashed off two clipped sentences in his diary: "Find myself in a good state of bodily health. Lord may I lay out my strength for thee!"[1] This brief memorandum perfectly captures the ethos of Hart's evangelical spirituality: it was on the move. As he saw it, God had given him physical health and strength in order to spend it, to "lay it out," in a life of service. Even the discipline of diary-keeping, generally associated with calm self-reflection, Hart generally employed to describe either the work he had done, or work that he hoped to do. If one theme dominates Hart's personal writings, it is his unrelenting drive to be "useful" for the Lord: "O that for time to come I may be more active for God!"[2]

While earlier Christian traditions obviously contained active elements, the early evangelicals gave activism a unique place of prominence in their spirituality, as David Bebbington has noted.[3] This impulse is exemplified in Hart's hero, George Whitefield. James Gordon has called Whitefield "a restless, energetic, activist, happy only when burning the candle at both ends."[4] Whitefield was an evangelical force of nature: preaching an estimated 18,000 sermons over his lifetime, crisscrossing the Atlantic Ocean thirteen times, raising support for his Bethesda Orphanage in the colony

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[1] Oliver Hart, diary, September 12, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[2] Hart, diary, August 4, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[3] D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (New York: Routledge, 2005), 10–12.

[4] James Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2002), 63.

of Georgia, maintaining a massive correspondence with the great and the small, and holding together a transcontinental, trans-denominational revival movement comprise a just sampling of his historic activism. "Keep me travelling, keep me working, or at least beginning to begin to work for thee, till I die," he prayed.[5] This pattern of strenuous Christian service left an indelible mark on Hart's own ministry. While Regular Baptists are today often portrayed as lagging behind their energetic Separate Baptist counterparts during the eighteenth century, Hart's story demonstrates that many Regulars also labored to advance the gospel "with the greatest ardor."[6]

Building the Christian Temple: A Philosophy of Activism

Hart reflected on the active Christian life in *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple*, a sermon preached before the Philadelphia Baptist Association on October 21, 1783.[7] He selected Haggai 2:4 for his text: "Yet now be strong, O Zerubbabel, sayeth the Lord, and be strong, O Joshua, son of Josedech the high priest, and be strong all the people of the land, sayeth the Lord, and work; for I am with you, sayeth the Lord of hosts." He applied the text by calling Christians to build up the church of Jesus Christ through gospel service. Hart opened the sermon by lambasting "lukewarmness and indifferency in religion." He viewed spiritual apathy as the church's great enemy, "injurious to the best cause in the world, contrary to the spirit of Christianity, and highly provoking to the King of saints." Hart cited Christ's rebuke of the church at Ephesus for "losing its first love," and to the church at Laodicea for being

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[5] Gordon, *Evangelical Spirituality*, 59.

[6] Oliver Hart, *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple: A Sermon, Shewing the business of officers and private members in the church of Christ, and how their work should be performed, with some motives to excite professors ardently to engage in it* (Philadelphia: Robert Aitken, 1785), 41.

[7] Hart, *Humble Attempt*. The copy in my possession bears the personal signature of the English Baptist John Ryland (1753–1823), suggesting something of Hart's wider influence.

"lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot," for support.[8] Hart then turned sharply on the messengers of the association: "And are not some of our churches equally reprehensible? Have not most of them lost their first love? Are not ministers and people become too remiss? Alas! Where is our flaming love, burning zeal and assiduity in religion?"[9] Hart then extended hope: "The gospel means of revival are still in our hands. Let us then rouse from our lethargy: gird on our strength, and work vigorously in repairing the Christian Temple, which through sloth and negligence is too much gone to decay."[10] The answer to the church's woes was vigorous action. Just as all the Jews in Haggai's day helped build the Temple, "even so should Christians of all ranks and characters, labor in building up the church of Jesus Christ. Every one has a work to do; none should be idle."[11]

In the course of the sermon, Hart suggested six characteristics of "how this work ought to be performed."[12] First, Christian service must be "governed, in every part of the work, by that divine and unerring rule, the holy Scriptures, from which they never should deviate an hair's breadth." Evoking the imagery of Nehemiah's construction of the Jerusalem wall, Hart told his listeners that they "should work with one hand and hold a Bible in the other."[13] At the same time, believers must work "from a principle of divine love." Hart compared the "divine and heavenly principle" of love to "the main spring of a watch," which "should set all the wheels of the soul in motion and keep them going." Indeed, if love to God did not "pervade all the labors of those engaged," the workers toiled in vain.[14] Christians must also undertake the work "with a view to the glory of

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[8] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 3. Hart alludes to Revelation 2:4 and 3:16.

[9] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 4.

[10] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 4.

[11] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 7.

[12] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 35.

[13] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 35–36. Hart alludes to Nehemiah 4:17.

[14] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 35–36.

God." This was not to suggest that Christian activity could "add anything to his essential glory, which is incapable of any addition or diminution." Instead, the believer engaged in God's work "that the glory of the divine perfections may be displayed: the grace, wisdom, mercy, and goodness of God manifested, and the supreme being acknowledged, loved, praised, and adored by all rational intelligent creatures." If God's glory was the believer's aim in life's most common concerns, much more so should it motivate his every action in the service to the church.[15]

Hart further urged his listeners to work with "courage, fortitude, or firmness of mind, resolving to supersede every obstacle." Now sixty years old, Hart well understood the obstacles inherent in serving the church. Haggai's repeated admonition to "be strong" in the building of the temple revealed the necessity of a holy tenacity on the part of the Christian worker. "A languid workman, like a timid soldier, is not to be depended on," Hart preached.[16] Hart also called his listeners to "attend to this work heartily—with all their heart and with all their soul." Hart warned against those who, "Judas-like," worked in the church "from pecuniary motives . . . in a cause which they reprobated in their hearts." Such hypocrites were destined to receive God's judgment, Hart warned, for "Cursed are they that doeth the Lord's work deceitfully."[17] Finally, Hart called the messengers to "persevering constancy." Hart's illustration of this point, drawn from the military world, carried special force in Revolutionary Philadelphia:

> The Lord will have no three months, nor three years men employed in his service. All these artificers should enlist for life, and constantly persevere in the work till disabled by death. Some who have engaged in this service, have grown weary of it, and given up. Others, on account of some difficulties, have slunk away, like cowards, and deserted the cause. Many, upon finding that building the Christian temple might interfere with their ease, health, interest, or reputation, have given over, and left the work to other hands. Blessed be God, all are not of this stamp.

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[15] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 36–37. Hart cited 1 Cor 10:31.

[16] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 37–38.

[17] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 38. Hart cited Jeremiah 48:10.

> Christ hath still some faithful servants left, who adhere firmly to the work assigned them. Should we say unto such, as Jesus said unto the twelve, "Will ye also go away?" each one would answer, "God forbid! Lord, to whom should we go. I love my Master—I love his work. Let him bore mine ear through with an awl, for I will serve him forever."[18]

Hart's message in *An Humble Attempt* captures the spirit in which he lived his own Christian life. He believed that if the greatness of a cause "gives nerves to the reasonings of a senator, fire to the pleadings of the barrister, and bravery to the exertions of a soldier," then it should certainly animate the believer's service of "glorifying God, promoting virtue and piety in the world, and saving souls from death." Serving the Lord called forth "the greatest ardor" from his people.[19] The remainder of this chapter will explore four arenas in which Hart applied his vigorous, evangelical spirituality: evangelism, gospel partnerships, education, and politics.

Evangelism

"May you be made wise to win souls, and may you have many to be your joy and crown!"[20] So Hart prayed for his friend Samuel Jones, a reflection of his own passion for evangelism. In reviewing Hart's tenure at the Charleston Baptist Church, Basil Manly, Sr., drew attention to his predecessor's zeal for evangelism. "While his great end in life was the glory of God, he viewed the salvation of sinners as a principal means of promoting it. He longed for the souls of men; and was jealous over them and himself, with a godly jealousy, lest by any means he should run in vain," Manly wrote.[21] Communicating the gospel to unbelievers with the aim of seeing them converted lay at the heart of evangelical activity, and at the center of Hart's ministry. As he wrote to his

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[18] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 38–39. Hart alludes to John 6:67–68 and Exodus 21:5–6.

[19] Hart, *Humble Attempt*, 41.

[20] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, December 1, 1763, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[21] Basil Manly, *Mercy and Judgment: A Discourse Containing Some Fragments of the History of the Baptist Church in Charleston, S.C.* (Providence, RI: Knowles, Vose, and Co., 1837), 33–34.

father, "I am still trying to labor for God as enabled, but find I come short of that engagedness which I could desire: souls are precious, otherwise the Lord would not have done so much for their salvation as he has done: and can I trifle with them? God forbid! I would fain be made instrumental in bringing many souls home to Jesus Christ."[22]

Local Evangelism

Hart's weekly preaching ministry constituted his primary evangelistic platform. Hart's preaching has already been explored at some length, but it is worth noting again that the conversion of sinners was his paramount concern in the pulpit. Hart believed that the "grand design" of preaching was "to save sinners, of Adam's race, from eternal misery, in a way consistent with the claims of the violated law, and the honor of the divine perfections and government." Thus, preaching the gospel must be "the most important service that ever demanded the attention of man." Behind the sacred desk, Hart knew the preacher "stands between the living and the dead—the living God and dead sinners. 'Who is sufficient for these things?' No man, of himself."[23] The story of Edmund Botsford's conversion supplies a window into the gravity with which Hart conducted his evangelistic pulpit ministry. "To describe the exercises of my mind under that sermon would be impossible," Botsford testified. "However, upon the whole, I concluded it was possible that there might be salvation for me."[24]

Hart also promoted the gospel outside formal church gatherings. He preached to local military personnel, as on July 17, 1757, when he addressed "Col. Boquet's regiment of soldiers in Nightengale's Pasture."[25] On other occasions, Hart carried the

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[22] Oliver Hart to John Hart, March 10, 1757, Hart MSS, SCL.

[23] Oliver Hart, *A Gospel Church Portrayed*, 22–3.

[24] Charles D. Mallary, *Memoir of Elder Edmund Botsford* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004), 16. I relate the full context of this quote in chap. 2.

[25] Oliver Hart, *A Copy of the Original Diary of Rev. Oliver Hart of Charlestown, Pastor of the Baptist Church of Charlestown*, mimeographed copy, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, KY, 10. Hereafter *Original Diary*.

gospel to condemned prisoners. On July 22, 1777, a young soldier called Malcolm had been sentenced to die for deserting the American troops. Hart, dressed in his gown and bands, went to the military barracks to visit Malcolm and two other soldiers, where he "conversed and prayed with them" for some time. Afterward, Hart walked with them to the scaffold. He "conversed with them all the way," speaking to Malcolm over the noise of fife and drums. Despite his best efforts, Hart "discovered but little signs of penitence in either of them." Still, Hart accompanied Malcolm to the place of execution, where he prayed with him again, and said farewell. When one of Malcolm's commanding officers addressed him a final time, the young soldier called for Hart. Though Hart suspected that "all he wanted was to protract time," he prayed with him once more, and then watched in sorrow as he was shot before the firing squad.[26]

Hart also strove to commend the gospel in the course of ordinary life, a theme he explored in an ordination charge.[27] He urged ministers to "walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise," in the community, recognizing that they lived "in the midst of a censorious world." Hart knew that unbelievers scrutinized his conduct, searching for a reason to condemn him and the message he preached. To promote the gospel in such an environment required "the wisdom of the serpent, tempered with the innocence of the dove," so as to give "no just occasion for offense." Hart called the young men to pursue a "uniformity of conduct" at home, in the church, and before the world. Yet they must also be discrete enough to suit their behavior to "time, place, and circumstances. " "You may be grave, but not sullen, or morose; you may be cheerful, but not light or vain. You will be happy if you can so conduct as to be respected, and yet rever'd," he counseled. In secular business dealings ("which ought to be but few," Hart added), ministers must "act

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[26] Hart, *Original Diary*, 11. The other two soldiers were led to believe they would be executed with Malcolm. They were instead reprimanded and returned to the ranks. Hart was aware of this plan.

[27] Hart drew from Jesus's instructions to his disciples in Matthew 10, as well as the admonitions of Peter and Paul in Col 4:4–6 and 1 Peter 2:11–25.

a just and upright part, doing to all, as you would they should do to you." Even casual conversation should serve the gospel:

> Let your speech at all times be seasoned, as that it may minister grace to the hearers. Be neither too open, nor too reserved in conversation, but labour to find out the happy medium. A loquacious disposition is attended with many disadvantages; therefore be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools. And yet, when you can speak to advantage, especially if an opportunity offers to speak for God; by no means be silent.[28]

Hart's thoughtful reflections on this subject indicate his burden to advance the gospel.

Itinerant Evangelism

Hart's passion for souls regularly drove him beyond his own community.[29] He maintained a steady itinerant preaching schedule, sometimes travelling far from home for extended periods of time. On January 19, 1756, Hart left Charleston to seek a missionary for the Charleston Association, and did not return home until November 4, 1756. Hart preached throughout the middle colonies on this journey, apparently to good effect. In a letter to his father, Hart referred to the fruit of this preaching tour. "I believe the Lord hath owned my poor labors while in Pennsylvania, and the Jerseys: I have received several letters, giving me some encouraging accounts of something being done by such an unworthy instrument while there; may all the praise be to him to whom alone it is due," he wrote.[30] Reports of shorter excursions pepper his diaries. Hezekiah Smith mentioned Hart accompanying him on a tour of some of the communities near Charleston in the spring of 1763.[31] From November 1769 through February 1770, Hart and Evan

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[28] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[29] On itinerant ministry among colonial Baptist ministers, see Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 169–72.

[30] Oliver Hart to John Hart, March 10, 1757, Hart MSS, SCL.

[31] John David Broome, *The Life, Ministry, and Journals of Hezekiah Smith: Pastor of the First Baptist Church of Haverhill, Massachusetts, 1765 to 1805 and Chaplain in the American Revolution, 1775 to 1780* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2004), 223–25.

Pugh preached through North Carolina and Virginia.[32] Hart even used his flight from Charleston in the spring of 1780 to spread the gospel, stopping to preach in places like Stone River in North Carolina; Orange County, Fauquier County, and Leesburg, Virginia; Frederick Town and Baltimore in Maryland; and London Tract and Philadelphia in Pennsylvania to proclaim the gospel.[33] Still, he wrote on his fifty-eighth birthday, "through mercy am in good health, but am ashamed that I have lived so long to so little purpose, and sorry that I am now in no way of usefulness."[34] Into old age, Hart maintained a passion for itinerant evangelism.

Evangelism with Whitefield

Hart also partnered with George Whitefield to spread the gospel, assisting the revivalist during his visits to Charleston during the years 1750–1770.[35] Three separate sources link the two ministers during this period. The first is John Gano, who came to Charleston on a missionary tour in the spring of 1755. As was typical of his practice, Hart offered Gano his pulpit. It proved to be an unforgettable invitation for the young missionary. Gano remembered,

> Mr. Hart spread word among the people that I was to preach. I went, with my tattered garb on; and when I rose to speak, the sight of so numerous and brilliant an audience (among whom were twelve ministers, and one of whom was Mr. Whitefield), for a moment, brought the fear of man on me; but, blessed be the Lord,

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[32] Hart, *Original Diary*, 5.

[33] Hart, *Original Diary*, 14–15.

[34] Hart, diary, July 5, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[35] Thomas Kidd has noted the significant, yet underappreciated role that local pastors in colonial America played in supporting Whitefield's itinerant ministry. Of Charleston pastor Josiah Smith, Kidd writes, "Smith . . . helps show that Whitefield's ministry, though decisive, was managed by figures such as Smith. Whitefield had the luxury of being able to leave whenever he grew weary of a location's intransigence, but local leaders had to continue promoting the movement after his departure. We have known that Whitefield depended on a network of supporters, but we have not done enough to consider these supporters' experience of revivalism or to show how challenging the promotion of Whitefield's revivals could be." Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), 82.

> I was soon relieved from this embarrassment: the thought passed from my mind, I had none to fear, and obey, but the Lord.[36]

The incident supplies a fascinating anecdote from eighteenth-century Baptist history. It also shows Whitefield worshipping at Hart's Baptist meetinghouse in Charleston in 1755, further identifying Hart and the Charleston Baptists with the revival at an early date.

The second source linking Hart and Whitefield is a letter from Whitefield's hand, from the same period as the Gano incident. A female correspondent, "Mrs. C.," had solicited Whitefield for spiritual counsel after hearing him preach. On March 3, 1755, Whitefield responded by commending her to Hart's pastoral care: "I would have you write to Mr. H[ar]t by the bearer, who is an experimental Baptist preacher from the northward. O that he may say something, that may do my dear family some good."[37] Whitefield's recommendation of Hart serves as further evidence of the evangelical character of Hart's ministry in Charleston.

Whitefield likely maintained regular contact with Hart whenever he passed through Charleston in the years that followed. A collaboration in ministry near the end of Whitefield's life proved to be their most fruitful. On March 4, 1770, Whitefield preached in Charleston for the last time. On this occasion, a former slave named John Marrant wandered up, planning with a friend to disrupt the meeting by blowing a French horn. Instead, the scoffer experienced deep conviction under Whitefield's message. Marrant fell to the ground, unable to move. He was carried to the vestry, where Whitefield later visited him, saying, "Jesus Christ has got thee at last." Marrant was then transported home and committed to a sickbed. Before Whitefield left Charleston, he first asked Hart to call on Marrant. Marrant picks up the story from there:

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[36] Terry Wolever, *The Life and Ministry of John Gano, 1727–1804* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 1998) 60.

[37] George Whitefield, *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 2:116.

> On the fourth day, the minister Mr. Whitefield had desired to visit me came to see me, and being directed upstairs, when he entered the room, I thought he made my distress much worse. He wanted to take hold of my hand, but I durst not give it to him. He insisted upon taking hold of it, and then I got away from him on the other side of the bed; but being very weak I fell down, and before I could recover he came to me and took me by the hand, and lifted me up, and after a few words desired to go to prayer.
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> So he fell upon his knees, and pulled me down also; after he had spent some time in prayer he rose up, and asked me now how I did; I answered, much worse; he then said, "Come, we will have the old thing over again," and so we kneeled down a second time, and after he had prayed earnestly we got up, and he said again, "How do you do now;" I replied worse and worse, and asked him if he intended to kill me? "No, no, said he, you are worth a thousand dead men, let us try the old thing over again," and so falling upon our knees, he continued in prayer a considerable time, and near the close of his prayer, the Lord was pleased to set my soul at perfect liberty, and being filled with joy I began to praise the Lord immediately; my sorrows were turned into peace, and joy, and love. The minister said, "How is it now?" I answered, all is well, all happy. He then took his leave of me; but called every day for several days afterwards, and the last time he said, "Hold fast what thou has already obtained, 'till Jesus Christ come.'"[38]

Whitefield died six months later in Newburyport, Massachusetts. Yet his life's work lived on in his unlikely convert, Marrant. Marrant began ministering to slaves in Charleston before travelling to London. There, in 1785, he received ordination at the Countess of Huntingdon's Bath Chapel. He then carried the gospel to a black Loyalist community in Nova Scotia. His published narrative of his life saw some fifteen editions.

Regular Baptists are sometimes caricatured as lacking evangelistic zeal in comparison to the Separate Baptists. Certainly, Regular Baptists cannot claim the dramatic results that their Separate brethren enjoyed on the frontier. Hart himself marveled at their success. "It should seem as if the trees had become men and them men Baptists. This is the Lord's doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes!" he exclaimed to Furman. "Little did I think when Brother [Pugh] and I travelled through that wilderness in so solitary a manner, that so great a change would have taken place in so short a space of time, if ever."[39] Yet Hart's ministry demonstrates that the charge of lukewarm

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[38]John Marrant and William Aldridge, *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant, a Black* (London: Gilbert and Plummer, 1785), 12–13.

[39] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 26, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman.

insularity does not stick against all the Regulars. Along with men like Jenkin Jones,[40] Isaac Chanler,[41] John Gano,[42] Hezekiah Smith,[43] and Edmund Botsford,[44] Hart was one of many Regular Baptists who celebrated and participated in the evangelistic fervor of the Great Awakening. In his own words, "What can be more desirable than to have many for your joy and crown! Oh! How comfortable!"[45]

Gospel Partnerships

Hart's activist legacy cannot be measured by his own individual achievements. He was a fine preacher, but could not hold multitudes spellbound like Whitefield. A dutiful evangelist, he did not plant dozens of churches like Shubal Stearns. A capable theologian, he bequeathed the church no doctrinal works as did John Gill. Hart's greatest contribution was his unsurpassed skill at forming gospel partnerships, the fruit of which has endured beyond his lifetime and down to the present day. Hart relentlessly promoted cooperative ministry, especially among Baptists of the South. This legacy above all that qualifies Hart as "Southern Baptists' most important pioneer."[46]

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[40] For Whitefield's commendation of Jones, see George Whitefield, *Journals* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1998), 310, 419–20. On Jones's itinerant ministry, see Thomas Ray, "Jenkin Jones (c.1686–1760)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 2:184–85.

[41] For Whitefield's commendation of Chanler, see Whitefield, *Journals*, 438–440. For Chanler's endorsement of Whitefield, see Isaac Chanler, *New Converts Exhorted to Cleave to the Lord, a sermon on Acts 11:23, preach'd July 30, 1740, at a Wednesday evening lecture in Charlestown, set up at the motion, and by the desire, of Rev. George Whitefield* (Boston: Cooper, 1740).

[42] The story of Gano's vibrant evangelistic ministry is recorded in Wolever, *The Life and Ministry of John Gano, 1727-1804*.

[43] For Smith, see Broome, *Life, Ministry, and Journals of Hezekiah Smith*.

[44] So zealous a travelling evangelist was Botsford that he earned the nickname, "the flying preacher:" "In the month of August, 1773, I rode 650 miles, preached 42 sermons, baptized 21 persons, and administered the Lord's Supper twice. Indeed, I travelled so much this year that some used to call me the *flying preacher*." Mallary, *Edmund Botsford*, 45.

[45] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[46] Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart 1723–1795: A Biography* (Greenville, SC: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966), 1.

The Charleston Association

When Hart moved to Charleston in December 1749, little organization existed among the Baptist churches of the South. Of the four Regular Baptist congregations in the region, three were in fragile condition. The Charleston Church had just weathered a tumultuous decade.[47] The Ashley River congregation had suddenly found itself without its capable pastor upon the death of Isaac Chanler. The Euhaw Baptist Church had existed with no regular minister since 1744, relying solely on Chanler's occasional services, and the ministry of a "probationer," a lay preacher named Francis Pelot. Further inland, the Welsh Neck Baptist Church had two ministers, Phillip James, assisted by John Brown (1714–1790?).[48] Yet on the banks of the Peedee River, this congregation of Welsh immigrants remained disconnected from the other Regular Baptist churches in the region.

Hart worked quickly to strengthen these churches. He appears to have helped Ashley River in securing the services of John Stephens, a pastor from the Philadelphia Association. Hart recorded Stephens's arrival in his personal diary, preached Stephens's installation sermon on June 1, 1750, and immediately began to work with him in the regional Baptist cause.[49] Hart was also responsible for the acquisition of Euhaw Church's pastor. Their lay preacher, Pelot, had shrunk from ordination for several years, but Hart convinced him to commit. Hart remembered that Pelot "continued as a candidate (resisting, through modesty and self diffidence many solicitations to ordination) until at last, he was overcome (as he himself often acknowledged) by the arguments of one whom he ever honored with his friendship and esteem."[50] On Monday, January 13, 1752,

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[47] The history of this congregation is recounted in chap. 2.

[48] Phillip James had been ordained by Isaac Chanler and Thomas Simmons in 1743. John Brown, ordained in May, 1750, left Welsh Neck soon afterward, apparently due to some strange beliefs about the last things. He preached at large in the region for the next forty years. See Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003), 64.

[49] Hart wrote, "The Rev. John Stephens arrived at Charles Town from Philadelphia on May the 12th, 1750." Hart, *Original Diary*, 2.

[50] Hart, *Original Diary*, 8.

Hart preached Pelot's ordination service, assisted by Stephens. Hart exhorted Pelot with Christ's sober words in Matthew 10:16, "Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves. Be ye therefore wise as serpents and harmless as doves." Hart reported that "many attended the solemnity and in general they were much affected."[51]

As Hart connected these individual churches with able pastors, he was also working toward a bigger vision. In Wood Furman's words, Hart "had seen, in the Philadelphia Association, the happy consequences of the union and stated intercourse among Churches maintaining the same faith and order."[52] At the core of their ecclesiology, Baptists insisted on the autonomy of the local church. No pope, bishop, or any ecclesial structure could supplant the authority of Jesus Christ ruling over an individual congregation through his Word. At the same time, many Baptists recognized the value of local congregations freely cooperating for gospel advance. In 1707, five churches in the middle colonies had formed the Philadelphia Association, sending messengers to an annual meeting "to consult about such things as were wanting in the churches, and to set them in order."[53] The Philadelphia Association's formative role in Hart's life and ministry has already been noted.[54] By 1749, Hart's last year in Pennsylvania, these churches had developed a detailed philosophy of associational life, outlined in Benjamin Miller's essay, "the Powers and Duties of an Association," When Miller's essay was adopted, Hart affixed his signature in approval.

Hart was eager to replicate this associational model from the moment he arrived in Charleston. Soon after Stephens arrived at Ashley River, and while Pelot still

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[51] Hart, *Original Diary*, 8.

[52] Wood Furman, A *History of the Charleston Association of Baptist Churches in the state of South-Carolina* (Charleston: J. Hoff, 1811), 8.

[53] A. D. Gilette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from A.D. 1707 to A.D. 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 25.

[54] See chap. 2 above.

considered the call at Euhaw, Hart acted to unite the Baptist churches of the South. He invited the churches at Ashley River, Euhaw, and Welsh Neck to send messengers to Charleston on October 21, 1751. The delegates from Ashley River, Welsh Neck, and Charleston met as scheduled, but Euhaw's messengers were hindered by flooding. Loulie Owens rightly calls it "the most historic single event in Hart's ministry."[55] No detailed report of the meeting remains, but among Hart's papers exists a written address outlining the benefits of an Association. Robert Baker has plausibly argued that this must have been Hart's inaugural address at the Charleston Association.[56] Whenever Hart may have delivered this message, its contents reveal Hart's vision for the association. He focused on six main responsibilities.

First, the Association must endeavor to mediate disagreements. Divisions inevitably arise among the most sincere Christian believers, and some will require outside mediators. The Association should view the opportunity to heal breaches between a pastor and people, between feuding church members, or even between sister congregations, as both a duty and a privilege. "While there is a woe denounced against those by whom [the divisions] do come; so on the other hand there is a blessing exhibited for all the peace-makers. And it is certainly the business of an Association to study, and prosecute, the things which make for peace," Hart preached.[57]

The Association should also oppose false doctrine. Hart noted this to be the main purpose of the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15. The "Judaizing heresy," "being like to spread to the detriment of the churches, and the wounding of the cause of Christ," was more than the apostle Paul could confront on his own. Thus, the members of the Antioch

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[55] Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart, 1723–1795: A Biography* (Greenville, SC: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966), 10.

[56] See Robert A. Baker, Paul J. Craven, and R. Marshall Blalock, *History of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2007), 150–51.

[57] Oliver Hart, Sermon on Associations, Hart MSS, SCL.

church sent Paul and Barnabas, along with some others, to the apostles and elders at Jerusalem to address the issue. The leaders of the church gathered, ruled against the Judaizers, and alerted the churches of their decision by a "circular letter." Hart believed this established a wise precedent for the South Carolina churches to follow. "If such care and pains were taken in the purest age of Christianity, to prevent the progress of false doctrine," Hart reasoned, "ought not we also to exert ourselves in the same as being the most likely way to answer so good a design? If we act wisely, no doubt we shall."[58]

The Association was also obligated to identify false preachers in the area who could mislead the people. In this day of limited communication, it was not uncommon for a stranger to appear claiming to be a minister, while concealing an immoral lifestyle or heretical beliefs.[59] "There are too many, who run unsent; and who either by their irregular conduct, corrupt principles, or licentious practices bring the holy religion of Jesus into contempt," Hart warned. He again appealed to apostolic procedure, quoting Paul's adamant statement of Galatians 2:5, "we gave place by subjection, no not for an hour, that the truth of the gospel might continue with you." Reflecting on the New Testament's serious judgment against false doctrine, Hart thundered, "And ought not the truth of the gospel to be equally precious to us? No doubt! Therefore ought we with equal zeal and spirit to use our endeavours to suppress all such unruly pretenders." With its collective theological understanding and its network of communication, the Association stood in a unique position to serve as a gatekeeper against impostor-preachers.[60]

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[58] Hart, Sermon on Associations, Hart MSS, SCL.

[59] An infamous example of the time is that of Desolate Baker (1694–1778). Baker emigrated to the American colonies from England under the assumed name of "Henry Loveall." Baker had adopted the alias to hide his checkered past: he had run away from his master, committed bigamy, and engaged in sexual relations with black and Indian women, ultimately contracting syphilis. Nathaniel Jenkins, minister of the Cohansey Baptist Church, commented that the "Loveall" moniker was "a very suitable name agreeable to his properties who loves so well the black, the swarthy, and the white so as to lie with them." See Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 24–25.

[60] Hart, Sermon on Associations, Hart MSS, SCL.

Next, the Association should help churches solve "difficult cases of conscience." Problems sometimes surfaced in Christian communities without clear Scriptural solutions, from membership matters to questions of marriage and divorce among members. When complex questions arose, Hart asked, "what better method can they then take than to apply to the association, who, there is reason to believe, will be instructed by the Spirit of God, when thus particularly concerned in things relative to his interests." Whenever called upon, the Association should act to "relieve a distressed brother" and "ease a wounded conscience."[61]

Hart then called the Association to "consider affairs in general which relate to the welfare of Zion," or the broader cause of Christ. This could, on occasion, lead the Association to set apart days for humiliation, or for Thanksgiving, as Providence dictated. The Association should also be concerned with the next generation of ministers, and should "conclude upon some methods for educating, and trying the gifts, and honorably calling out persons to the great work of the ministry." As the Association became aware of needy churches, it should connect them with capable pastors, as the Philadelphia Association had done with Hart and the Charleston Baptist Church. The Association might even find it necessary to appeal to the pastor of an established church to itinerate in a destitute area, "when there is a greater prospect of usefulness in that way than in their own charge." The Association could also serve the broader church by sending out circular letters informing churches "of their proceedings, and determinations, and to give such advice with regard to their moral and religious conduct as is necessary."[62]

Finally, Hart urged the Association to conduct its business with godly decorum. Hart foresaw the potential for disagreement within the assembly, and cautioned them "To be instant and fervent in prayer, and to conduct with a gravity becoming those

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[61] Hart, Sermon on Associations, Hart MSS, SCL.

[62] Hart, "Sermon on Associations," Hart MSS, SCL.

who are working for God and transacting business for eternity. To guard against a clamorous, contentious disposition; and by no means to give way to a sprit of anger or revenge; but to adhere to their contrary virtues, of meekness, patience, humility and the like." Again, Hart looked to the Jerusalem Council as his model. "While Peter is speaking all is hush'd. When he had finished speaking, the same attention is paid to the speech of James," Hart said. "After this, tho' these seem to have been the chief speakers, what they had offered was weighed, and judiciously considered by the whole body, and the conclusion drawn accordingly. A pattern well worthy of imitation!"[63]

The messengers embraced Hart's proposal, agreeing to form an association for "the promotion of the Redeemer's kingdom, by the maintenance of love and fellowship, and by mutual consultations for the peace and welfare of the churches."[64] They committed to meet annually, on the Saturday before the second Sunday in November. The first two days of the meeting would be devoted to public worship, and the business of the Association would commence with an introductory sermon on Monday morning at 10 o'clock. These decisions were ratified at the next year's meeting, signed by five ministers: Hart, Stephens, Pelot, John Brown, and Joshua Edwards (1703?–1784),[65] along with eight lay messengers. After meeting in Charleston for its first several years, the association eventually adopted that city's name. Hart served as its moderator in the years 1759, 1764, 1769, 1773, 1775, and 1778, and as clerk from 1752–1757 and 1777. The establishment of the Charleston Association endures as Hart's most significant contribution to Baptist history. As Baker observes, "there were other Baptists in this era who glimpsed the larger denominational fellowship involving the communion of the

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[63] Hart, "Sermon on Associations," Hart MSS, SCL.

[64] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 9.

[65] Joshua Edwards, a native of Wales, served the Welsh Neck church from 1751–1758, the Cashaway Church from 1758–1761, and Little Peedee Church from 1761–1768. After this, he preached at large in the region until his death in 1784.

saints, but it was Hart who first initiated the movement in the South to put this grand design into structured form."[66]

Cooperative Missions

One of the most significant benefits of the Charleston Association was the platform it provided for cooperative missionary endeavors. By the early 1750s, the interior territory of Virginia, North Carolina, and South Carolina had attracted many new settlers, creating a need for gospel ministers. In 1752, the Philadelphia Association sent Benjamin Miller and John Thomas to Virginia to reform an Arminian Baptist church, left destitute after the moral failure of its pastor.[67] They were to instruct the people with doctrinal preaching, examine them for personal experiences of grace, and provide them with spiritual counsel. They also planned to administer the ordinances to a church Thomas had established on an earlier mission. Accompanying them was a layman, John Gano. Though not licensed to preach, Gano unexpectedly received several opportunities to exhort, instruct, and counsel on the trip. He apparently performed brilliantly at every turn. But when Gano returned to his home church in Hopewell, New Jersey, he was called to account for this "irregular preaching." Gano related his story, insisting that "my own conscience acquitted me," and that he would do the same if placed in the same position again. Rather than discipline Gano, the church invited him to "exercise his gifts" before them. Impressed by what they heard, they licensed Gano on April 14, 1753.[68]

Gano preached at the Baptist church at Morristown, New Jersey, until the Philadelphia Association asked him to return on a mission to Virginia. After Hopewell Baptist Church ordained Gano on May 29, 1754, he travelled south. On his first stop,

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[66] Baker, Craven, and Blalock, *First Baptist Church*, 147.

[67] The failed minister was the aforementioned Henry Loveall of footnote 59.

[68] For Gano's account of these events, see Wolever, *John Gano*, 40–49.

Gano first led a group of General Baptist congregations in North Carolina to embrace Particular Baptist views, and these churches would later join the Philadelphia Association.[69] Gano then went further south to Ashley Ferry, where he preached for John Stephens. The congregation, comprised mostly of slaves, received Gano warmly. The slaves formed two lines outside the meetinghouse to thank Gano after the service, prompting Stephens to remark to Gano, "You make a very good Negro preacher." Gano later made it to Charleston, where Hart also opened his pulpit to him.[70] Gano returned home in the fall of 1755, at which time he married Sarah Stites and resumed his ministry at Morristown.[71]

Hart observed all these events with keen interest. At the 1755 Charleston Association meeting, he urged the messengers to "take into consideration the destitute condition of many places in the interior settlements of this and the neighboring provinces," and "to make contributions for the support of a missionary to itinerate in those parts." The Association approved, and "Mr. Hart was authorized and requested, provided a sufficient sum should be raised, to procure if possible a suitable person for the purpose."[72] When the funds came in, Hart boarded the sloop *Fancy* on January 19, 1756, for Philadelphia.[73] He spent the next nine months back in his home territory, visiting family, strengthening ties with church leaders, and preaching constantly. Hart also met

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[69] Many historians have criticized Gano for this. For a negative evaluation, see Philip N. Mulder, *A Controversial Spirit: Evangelical Awakenings in the South* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 38–44. For a positive evaluation, see David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America, and Other Parts of the World* (Boston: Lincoln & Edwards, 1813), 2:98–100, and Nettles, *The Baptists*, 2:111–113, 460n19.

[70] This was the occasion on which Gano saw Whitefield in the Charleston congregation.

[71] A significant event in Gano's brief ministry at Morristown was the conversion of Hezekiah Smith. Smith, who became a friend of Hart's, would pastor the Haverhill, Massachusetts Baptist Church for forty years, raise funds effectively for the founding Rhode Island College (later Brown University), and serve as a chaplain during the American Revolution. See Broome, *Hezekiah Smith*.

[72] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 10.

[73] Hart, *Original Diary*, 3.

with Gano, prevailing upon him to come to Charleston on temporary loan from the Morristown Church. At their 1756 meeting, the Charleston Association charged Gano "to visit the Yadkin first and afterwards to bestow his labours wherever Providence should appear to direct."[74]

Over the next year, Gano's missionary work in North Carolina was "crowned with remarkable success." Many individuals professed the gospel and churches grew stronger through his efforts. After Gano returned to Morristown, the Charleston Association issued him a letter of thanks "for his faithfulness and industry in the mission." [75] Soon, the Morristown Church was convinced to release Gano permanently, to serve the more pressing needs of the destitute Carolinas. Gano ministered effectively at the Jersey settlement for three more years, during which time the church grew sufficiently to join the Charleston Association. Gano returned north in 1760, driven away by the conflict of the French and Indian War.[76] Hart's request for an Association-sponsored missionary would make a lasting impact. In the short term, the Jersey Settlement Church had been established. In the long term, a precedent for cooperative missions had been set, to be further developed under Richard Furman's leadership of the Association in the following generation.[77]

Uniting the Regular and Separate Baptists

Hart's passion for gospel partnerships did not end with the Regular Baptists churches of the Charleston Association. He also pioneered the union between Regular and Separate Baptists across the South. The Regular Baptists traced their origins in South

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[74] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 10.

[75] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 11.

[76] Gano's French ancestry made him an object of suspicion during this period.

[77] See James A. Rogers, *Richard Furman: Life and Legacy* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2001), 135–68.

Carolina to William Screven's transplanting of the Kittery, Maine, congregation in Charleston in 1682. The Separate movement, birthed by men converted during the Great Awakening, blew into Virginia and North Carolina in the mid-1750s. Historians have generally overplayed the theological differences of the two Baptist groups, particularly their soteriology[78] and their stance on revival.[79] Their essential theological unity revealed itself when Regular Baptist John Gano visited a Separate Baptist Association meeting. The unlettered Separates first eyed the Princeton-educated Regular Baptist with suspicion, but his warm gospel preaching won them over. On his part, Gano reported of the Separates, "doubtless the power of God was among them; that although they were rather immethodical, they certainly had the root of the matter at heart."[80]

At the same time, the cultural differences between the Regulars and Separates must be acknowledged. Primarily, they disagreed over the use of creeds. In Separate Baptist leader John Leland's (1754–1841) words, "The Regulars adhered to a confession of faith, first published in London, 1689, and afterwards adopted by the Baptist Association of Philadelphia, in 1742; but the Separates had none but the Bible."[81] When the Regulars proposed to unite with the Separates around a written creed, the latter "expressed fears, that the confession of faith might in time bind them too much, as there

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[78] Their basic soteriological agreement is evident in this 1787 statement published by a general committee of Separate and Regular Baptists in Virginia: "To prevent the confession of faith from usurping a tyrannical power over the conscience of any, we do not mean that every person is bound to the strict observance of everything therein contained; yet that it holds forth the essential truths of the Gospel, and that the doctrine of salvation by Christ and free, unmerited grace alone ought to be believed by every Christian and maintained by every ministers of the gospel. Upon these terms we are united; and desire hereafter that the names *Regular* and *Separate* be buried in oblivion, and that, from henceforth, we shall be known by the name of the *United Baptist Churches of Christ in Virginia*." In Robert Baylor Semple, *A History of the Rise and Progress of the Baptists in Virginia* (Richmond, VA: Pitt and Dickinson, 1894), 101. Emphasis original.

[79] See especially chaps 1–2 of this dissertation.

[80] Semple, *Rise and Progress*, 67.

[81] John Leland, *The Writings of the Late Elder John Leland* (New York: G. W. Wood, 1845), 105. The "strict Calvinism" Leland refers to is the strict confessionalism of the Regular Baptists. On the basic soteriological agreement between the two groups, see footnote 78.

were some objectionable parts."[82] From the Regular Baptist perspective, the confession of faith was not intended to usurp the Bible's authority, but to protect its essential truths from heretical interpretation.

The Regulars and Separates also differed in worship practice. While affirming that the Separates had "the root of the matter at heart," Gano also called their meetings "rather immethodical." Wood Furman mentioned among the Separates' "peculiarities," their "allowing of private members and women to speak in their assemblies under a persuasion of their being under a divine impulse."[83] Writing as an insider, John Leland elaborated,

> The Regulars were orthodox Calvinists, and the work under them was solemn and rational; but the Separates were the most zealous, and the work among them was very noisy. The people would cry out, 'fall down,' and, for a time, lose the use of their limbs; which exercise made the bystanders marvel; some thought they were deceitful, others, that they were bewitched, and many being convinced of all, would report that God was with them of a truth.[84]

Style of dress was another matter of disagreement. Separate Baptists maintained a strict dress code; their men "cut off" their hair and repudiated "superfluous forms and modes of dressing . . . [as] cock't hats."[85] The austere appearance of the Separates made them the object of ridicule among the Anglican gentlemen of Virginia. It also caused them to stand out from the Regular Baptists, who the Separates found "not sufficiently particular in small matters, such as dress, etc."[86] The Regulars maintained that the Separate's scruples in these nonessential matters were unnecessarily restrictive. Furman wrote, "The peculiarities of the Separates were a preciseness in dress and

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[82] Semple, *Rise and Progress*, 67.

[83] Furman*, Charleston Association*, 33.

[84] Leland, *Writings*, 105.

[85] Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), 162. For a Separate Baptist defense of "serious living," see David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist, or A View and Defence of the Christian Religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774), 59–60.

[86] Semple, *Rise and Progress*, 67.

language, somewhat similar to the Quakers . . . "[87]

In the first several years of their coexistence in the South, leaders on both sides explored the possibilities of uniting the two Baptist groups. Every effort ended in frustration. In 1762, Separate Baptist Philip Mulkey (1732–1801) sent several inquiries to the Charleston Association, which responded by sending Hart and Evan Pugh to a Separate Baptist general meeting in North Carolina, but nothing came of this.[88] In 1769, the Regular Baptists of the Ketocton Association commissioned messengers to present an official letter of reconciliation at a Separate Baptist meeting in North Carolina: "If we are all Christians, all Baptists—all *New Lights*—why are we divided? Must these little appellative names, *Regular* and *Separate*, break the golden bond of charity?"[89] Yet they, too, failed to persuade. In 1772, the Separates of Congaree Association began corresponding with the Philadelphia Association at the urging of Regular Baptist Morgan Edwards, and the next year sent messengers to the Charleston Association meeting. Again, negotiations for union broke down:

> The Association testified their desire of union by proposing liberal terms, which allowed their brethren the observance of their peculiarities, reserving to themselves the right of friendly discussion on the points of difference. But the Separates would be satisfied with nothing short of the Regulars coming fully into their own views. So the desirable object was not then accomplished.[90]

In the end, when formal action could not reconcile the South's Baptists, friendship did. Here, no Baptist played a more vital role than Oliver Hart.[91] Hart made

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[87] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 33.

[88] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 33.

[89] Semple, *Rise and Progress*, 68. Italics original.

[90] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 33.

[91] Thomas R. McKibbens, Jr. highlights this in his article "Over Troubled Waters: Baptist Preachers who were Bridge Builders," *Baptist History and Heritage* 40, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 58–63. McKibbens rightly recognizes the important role of Hart's friendships in bringing Baptists together. He is wrong in identifying the difference between Regular and Separates as "the old liberal and conservative divide," and in his implication that Hart accomplished their reconciliation by downplaying the importance of doctrinal precision.

several journeys into the Carolina frontier to preach at Separate Baptist congregations over the years.[92] He celebrated the "happy revival of religion in the interior parts of this province, among the Separate Baptists." Hart mentioned two visits to the Separates, once with Evan Pugh to assist in ordaining two ministers, and second to witness ten new believers receive baptism. One of the converts, a little girl, impressed Hart by giving "an amazing account of the Lord's work on her heart." Hart remembered both visits with the Separates "much to my satisfaction."[93] In a 1775 tour of the Carolina backcountry, Hart lodged with Separate minister Philip Mulkey of Faireforest Church. Hart even submitted, at Mulkey's insistence, to the Separate Baptist rite of footwashing:

> This evening before we lay down to rest, Brother Mulkey requested that he might wash my feet; with some reluctance I consented, after declaring that I did not believe it to be an ordinance of Christ, he then, being girded with a towel, and having water in a basin with great humility and affection, proceeded to wash my feet, talking religiously and affectionately all the time.[94]

In his flight from Charleston to Philadelphia in 1780, Hart stayed and preached with Separate Baptist leaders John Leland and John Waller (1741–1802)[95] in Orange County, Virginia.[96] He corresponded regularly with New England Separate Baptist Isaac Backus, whose written works Hart read and highly esteemed.[97] Yet the most significant friendship Hart formed among the Separate Baptists was undoubtedly with Richard Furman.

Hart first met Furman at the Separate Baptist High Hills of Santee Church,

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[92] Hart, *Original Diary*, 6–13.

[93] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, June 30, 1769, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[94] Oliver Hart, "Oliver Hart's Diary of the Journey to the Backcountry," J. Glenwood Clayton and Loulie Latimer Owens, eds., *JSCBHS* 1 (November 1975): 22.

[95] John Waller, known as "Swearing Jack" before his conversion in 1767, was a key leader among Virginia Baptists during the period of intense persecution in the Revolutionary era. See James B. Taylor, *Virginia Baptist Ministers* (New York: Sheldon, 1860), 78–85. See also Thomas S. Kidd, *God of Liberty: A Religious History of the American Revolution* (New York: Basic Books, 2010) 37–56.

[96] Hart, *Original Diary*, 14. Hart stayed with these Virginia ministers from September 21–24, 1780.

[97] See Oliver Hart to Isaac Backus, February 16, 1777, Gratz MSS, HSP.

where the eighteen year-old delivered the evening sermon on January 2, 1774.[98] Hart commented that "it was a time of refreshing to the people of God."[99] The relationship between the seasoned Regular statesman and the young Separate preacher grew from there. It would prove pivotal in uniting the Baptists of the South. After Furman accepted the pastoral call at High Hills, Hart urged him to lead his Separate Baptist brethren to join the Charleston Association. "I hope we shall have your voice, and influence, for the junction there proposed," Hart wrote. "If you, and the Congaree, will come into the plan, it will be strengthening of us all. I am much of the opinion, it would be much to the advantage of the Baptist interests of this state."[100] In addition to directly advancing the gospel, Hart believed a united Baptist front was necessary for establishing religious liberty under the new constitution. The union of all Baptists "will necessarily render us more conspicuous to the state," rather than as an inconsequential sect.[101]

When Hart fled South Carolina after thirty years at the Charleston Baptist Church, he handpicked Furman as his replacement. "I have wrote to them to give you a call, which hope you will accept, if you can see your way clear, as I know not of anyone that I should choose in preference, to fill up that place," Hart told Furman. "I hope God will direct you in this great affair, for his own glory, and the good of his church."[102] When the comparatively urbane Charleston Baptist Church, the flagship congregation of the Regular Baptists, called the Separate preacher from the wild frontier of the Santee

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[98] High Hills of Santee Church, a Separate Baptist congregation in the Carolina Backcountry formed under the revival preaching of Joseph Reese in 1770. See Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 150–153. Joseph Reese (1732–1795) was ordained by Hart and Evan Pugh in 1769, and served the Congaree Baptist Church in the backcountry of South Carolina until his death in 1795. Wood Furman remembered that "his natural eloquence, and command of the passions of his hearers were extraordinary." See Furman, *History of the Charleston Association*, 72.

[99] Hart, *Original Diary*, 6.

[100] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, February 12, 1777, Hart MSS, Furman.

[101] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, February 12, 1777, Hart MSS, Furman.

[102] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, October 9, 1784, Hart MSS, Furman.

River, the long-desired union was solidified.[103] For the rest of his life, Hart carried on an affectionate correspondence with Furman, who preached a moving memorial sermon from the Charleston pulpit upon Hart's death.[104] Furman, often recognized as "the father of Southern Baptists," would carry forward many of Hart's plans for Baptist denominational life in the next generation.[105] In addition to expanding the influence of the Charleston Association,[106] and carrying the torch for Baptist missions,[107] Furman is also remembered as a champion for Baptist education. [108] In each of these endeavors, Furman stood on the shoulders of Oliver Hart.

Education

A plaque in the First Baptist Church of Charleston, South Carolina, lauds Oliver Hart as "Father of the education movement among South Carolina Baptists, 1755."[109] Though Hart himself received only "a plain English education," the former carpenter devoted himself to study after entering the ministry.[110] The doctrinal truths of Scripture were the means whereby God could be better known, and Hart labored to grasp

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[103] In 1769, Baptist Jeremiah Dargan visited the High Hills region and called it "this wicked, wicked neighborhood," and "this wild place," where he preached "to no purpose except provoking them to outrage." See Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 150.

[104] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*.

[105] See Rogers, *Richard Furman*.

[106] Furman served as moderator for the Association for over twenty-five years, during which time he dramatically extended the Association's work in the areas of missions and education, and providing a general framework for today's Southern Baptist Convention.

[107] Furman served as the first president of the Triennial Convention, the first national body of Baptists in America. The Triennial Convention, so called because it met every three years, was founded as the "General Missionary Convention of the Baptist Denomination in the United States of America for Foreign Missions."

[108] In an 1817 address to the Triennial Convention, Furman called Baptists to include education in the denomination's work, sparking a movement that led to the founding of Furman University in 1826.

[109] Owens, *Biography*, 41.

[110] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 23.

"the Bible-system in all its parts."[111] Furman recalled that "the powers of his mind were strong and capacious, and enriched by a fund of useful knowledge," gained by "an intimate acquaintance with the sacred Scriptures, and an extensive reading of the most valuable, both ancient and modern authors."[112] At various points in his writings, Hart mentions reading the works of Augustine (354–430),[113] Herman Witsius (1636–1708),[114] Matthew Poole (1624–1679),[115] Matthew Henry (1662–1714),[116] Joseph Caryl (1602–1673),[117] Richard Baxter (1615–1691),[118] and John Gill. As Tom Nettles has observed, Hart had also memorized large portions of the *Baptist Catechism*.[119] Hart always identified himself as "a friend of learning," and spent his life advocating education among Baptist ministers.[120] "Learning is an excellent handmaid to grace. None slight it

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[111] William Rogers, *A Sermon Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. Oliver Hart* (Philadelphia: Lang and Ustick, 1796), 24.

[112] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 23–24.

[113] Augustine of Hippo is widely considered the most influential theologian of the western church, the author of such monumental works as *The Confessions*, *The City of God*, and *On the Trinity*. See Peter Brown, *Augustine of Hippo: A Biography* (Los Angeles: University of California, 2000).

[114] Witsius, a Dutch Reformed theologian, is most famous for his *The Economy of the Covenants Between God and Man*. See "The Life and Theology of Herman Witsius" in Joel R. Beeke, *Puritan Reformed Spirituality* (Webster, NY: Evangelical Press, 2004), 331–52.

[115] Poole, an English Nonconformist minister, is best remembered for his *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. See "Matthew Poole (1624–1679)" in Joel R. Beeke and Randall J. Pederson, *Meet the Puritans: With a Guide to Modern Reprints* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2006), 484–87.

[116] Henry, an English Nonconformist minister, is best remembered for his celebrated *Commentary on the Whole Bible*. See "Matthew Henry (1662–1714)" in Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 324–33.

[117] Caryl was an Independent Puritan minister appointed to the Westminster Assembly and author of several biblical expositions. See "Joseph Caryl (1602–1673)" in Beeke and Pederson, *Meet the Puritans*, 133–37.

[118] Baxter was a Puritan minister best remembered for practical writings such as *A Christian Directory* (1673), *The Saints' Everlasting Rest* (1650), and the quintessential Puritan pastoral manual, *The Reformed Pastor* (1656). See J. I. Packer, "Richard Baxter: A Man for All Ministries" in *Puritan Portraits* (Fearn, Scotland: Christian Focus, 2012), 157–80.

[119] Nettles writes, "One of the remarkable features of this sermon is the number of times Hart quotes verbatim from the *Baptist Catechism* as a foundation for his theological exposition. He does this at least on seven occasions." Tom J. Nettles, *The Baptists: Key People in Forming a Baptist Identity: Volume 2: Baptists in America* (Fearn, Scotland: Mentor, 2005), 459n68. For the *Baptist Catechism*, see H. Rondel Rumburg, *Some Southern Documents of the People Called Baptists* (Hueytown, AL: Society for Biblical and Southern Studies, 1995), 211–38.

[120] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, December 1, 1763, McKesson MSS, HSP.

but such as know not its value," Hart insisted. "Without some assistance therefrom, it will be difficult, if not impossible, to expound some passages of Scripture. Ministers' knowledge cannot be too extensive."[121]

The Minister's Education Fund

When Hart arrived in Charleston in 1749, the Baptist churches of the South were producing no new ministers of the gospel. All their pastors were "imports" from the northern colonies or from across the Atlantic. Moreover, the Baptists of America had not yet established a theological school for ministers. Pastoral candidates received their training through personal study and guided apprenticeships with experienced ministers. Early in his ministry, Hart envisioned a solution to both issues. At the inaugural address of the Charleston Association in 1751, he argued for the promotion of ministerial education as a primary way that an association contributed to "the welfare of Zion." He urged the churches to "conclude upon some methods for educating, and trying the gifts, and honorably calling out persons to the great work of the ministry." [122]

Hart acted on this conviction in 1755. The year before, Samuel Stillman had been converted in Hart's church. Hart told his father that he considered Stillman "an extraordinary youth," who he believed "would come to be publicly useful to the church of Jesus Christ."[123] Perhaps Stillman's great promise as a minister prompted Hart to launch what was later called "the Baptist Religious Society," with a goal "to assist pious young men in obtaining education for the public services of the church."[124] In short order,

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[121] Hart, *Christian Temple*, 46.

[122] Hart, Sermon on Associations, Hart MSS, SCL.

[123] Oliver Hart to John Hart, September 1755, Hart MSS, SCL. For Stillman, see chap. 4 above.

[124] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 26. Richard Furman made a manuscript copy of the original charter of the Society. See Richard Furman, "Rules for the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge and Practice, entered to at Charleston, 1755," Furman MSS, Furman.

Hart involved the Association in strengthening the Society. In 1757, he inquired, "Whether there could not be some method concluded upon, to furnish, with suitable degree of learning, those among us who appear to have promising gifts for ministry?"[125] The churches of the association each pledged to contribute to the purchase of a library for the Society. They collected a total of 133 pounds (the Charleston Church contributing 60), which it entrusted to a committee comprised of Hart, Francis Pelot, and John Stephens. Hart served as treasurer of the humble "education fund." It was another historic achievement for Hart: "To it is reckoned the honor of being the first religious partnership among Baptists in America in the interest of religious education," wrote Furman.[126]

In the years that followed, numerous young men benefitted from the Society. No formal enrollment records exist, but Hart's personal writings are filled with references to the novice ministers he trained, among them Stillman, Edmund Botsford, Edmund Matthews, Nicholas Bedgegood, David Williams, and Evan Pugh. Pugh wrote to a friend, "I'm now studying with dear Mr. Hart, and he seems to signify of their trying to settle me in town which would be very agreeable to me, for I like the place and people much."[127] In a less formal capacity, Hart also acted as a father in the ministry to Hezekiah Smith and Richard Furman. Through Hart's personal investment in these young men, the picture of Baptist ministers in the South began to change. On February 26, 1759, Hart ordained Stillman, who served a church at James Island before leaving for the First Baptist Church of Boston, and Bedgegood, who went on to serve the Welsh Neck Church.[128] Hart ordained Pugh in 1763, who pastored the Cashaway Church (later Mount Pleasant), and preached at large in the area for the rest of his life.[129] Botsford, converted and called to

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[125] See Baker, et al., *First Baptist Church*, 161.

[126] Wood Furman, quoted in Owens, *Biography*, 13.

[127] Evan Pugh to unknown recipient, April 23, 1762, McKesson Collection, HSP.

[128] Hart, *Original Diary*, 3.

[129] Leah Towsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 86–87.

ministry under Hart, was also ordained by his mentor on March 14, 1773. Eight months later, Hart and Pelot travelled to Savannah, Georgia, to constitute a new Baptist church gathered there under Botsford's preaching.[130] Hart and Pugh ordained Joseph Reese in 1769; Reese served the Congaree Church for decades and also planted the High Hills Church in 1770.[131] The list of ministers Hart directly influenced, who then influenced others, could be multiplied many-fold. To Hart, these mentor relationships were vital for the health of southern Baptist congregations for generations to come. They were also precious to him; he called the young preachers filling southern pulpits "the fruit of my labours, the seals of my ministry, my joy and crown."[132]

Hart's passion for ministerial education never waned. Over the years, many Baptists objected to formal learning as non-essential, even dangerous, for prospective pastors. Hart answered these detractors patiently, but directly. One of his most eloquent responses came in 1791, almost forty years after launching the Religious Society in Charleston. Hart described ministers as the "pillars" of the church. As such, they were to be "hewn by the axe of the law, smoothed by the plane of the gospel, painted by the gifts and graces of the Spirit, and varnished by human erudition."[133] Though many viewed the "varnish" of theological education to be unnecessary, Hart insisted that it was "a qualification of great importance, and ought never to be dispensed with, when it can be obtained." He then sounded again a plea for school:

> In ancient times, there were schools of the prophets; and they are not less needed now. May such institutions be encouraged. We can do little or nothing else towards preparing these pillars. It is a pity that we are so reluctant in this. I am sorry to say,

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[130] Hart, *Original Diary*, 6.

[131] Furman, *Charleston Association*, 72–75.

[132] Hart, Sermon on 1 Timothy 4:16, Hart MSS, SCL.

[133] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 16.

> that several young ministers, of bright natural parts, and gracious endowments, are groaning for want of this advantage.[134]

More than sixty years later, another South Carolina Baptist sounded these same notes, as James Petigru Boyce[135] convinced the South Carolina Baptist State Convention to adopt a plan for founding of a theological seminary for the Baptists of the South.[136] Whether he realized it that night or not, Boyce, who came to faith as a boy in the pews of the First Baptist Church of Charleston, was following in the footsteps of Oliver Hart. Not only was Boyce building on Hart's vision, but the books originally purchased with the money from Hart's fund "became the nucleus of the library at Furman University," and subsequently of the library at The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary.[137]

Rhode Island College

Hart's efforts in Baptist education extended beyond the southern colonies. He also warmly supported Rhode Island College, the first educational institution founded by Baptists in America. The institution known today as Brown University originated in the desire of the Philadelphia Association "to secure for the Baptist churches an educated ministry without the restrictions of denominational or sectarian tests."[138] At their October 12, 1762, meeting, the Philadelphia Association made a motion to establish such a college. Founding the school would require tireless labor from Baptists throughout the colonies, and Hart was eager to do his part. He wrote to Samuel Jones, "It gives me great

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[134] Hart, *Gospel Church*, 16–17.

[135] Boyce (1827–1888), prominent Southern Baptist denominational leader and theologian of the nineteenth century, founded The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in 1859. For Boyce, see Tom J. Nettles, *James Petigru Boyce: A Southern Baptist Statesmen* (Philipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2009).

[136] See Gregory A. Wills, *Southern Baptist Theological Seminary 1859–2009* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 14–16.

[137] See H. Leon McBeth, *The Baptist Heritage: Four Centuries of Baptist Witness* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1987), 237.

[138] Reuben Aldridge Guild, *Life, Times, and Correspondence of James Manning, and the Early History of Brown University* (Boston: Gould and Lincoln, 1864), 7.

pleasure that we are like to have a college in those parts, and should be glad to have it in my power to serve so valuable an institution." In early conversations, Hart even offered to travel to London on behalf of the college, though he eventually laid aside these plans to raise funds for the school from Charleston.[139]

In 1769, Hart opened the Charleston Baptist Church to the college as a base for raising funds in the South. The college had enlisted Hezekiah Smith, a trustee, to lead the fundraising effort. Hart had ordained Smith to gospel ministry on September 9, 1763, and remained on friendly terms with the Princeton-educated preacher.[140] Throughout the winter of 1769 and the spring of 1770, Smith's journals contain numerous references to staying in Hart's home and preaching from his pulpit when he wasn't scouring about South Carolina raising funds for the school. Hart often accompanied Smith as he travelled into the South Carolina backcountry. After Smith returned home, Hart praised Smith to James Manning, president of Rhode Island College:

> As to his endeavors to serve the college, they have been indefatigable, and his success has been more than equal to what could have been expected, all things considered. I am sure he has merited the grateful acknowledgements of the corporation. No man could have done more, and few would have done so much as he has, to serve the institution. He has met with much opposition, and bore many reflections, but none of these things have discouraged him. I heartily wish the benefactions of this province may greatly promote the welfare of the college. Great grace be with you.[141]

The college then asked Hart to help raise funds himself, commissioning him, along with Pelot and Gano, to "address the Baptist Associations throughout America, and urge their cooperation in these efforts to raise funds for the college."[142] Hart subsequently led the Charleston Association in 1774 to adopt a motion, "recommending to every

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[139] Oliver Hart to Samuel Jones, February 7, 1764, McKesson MSS, HSP.

[140] Broome, *Hezekiah Smith*, 29.

[141] Oliver Hart to James Manning, April 17, 1770, Manning MSS, Brown University.

[142] Guild, *Brown University*, 22.

member to pay sixpence sterling, annually, for three years consecutively, to their Elder, or some suitable person; this money to be paid to the Treasurer of the College."[143] Though not a large sum, this financial pledge during a time of approaching war indicated a serious commitment to establishing the institution. Both the Philadelphia and Warren associations later adopted the Charleston plan.

Rhode Island College acknowledged Hart's contributions in 1769, bestowing on him at its first commencement ceremony the honorary Master of Arts degree.[144] William Rogers insisted that the degree was well-deserved: "Such were the improvements of his mind by self-application, close reading, and habitual reflection, that few men more richly deserved those honours, which, by our first seminaries of learning, have been in many instances too incautiously bestowed!"[145] Hart later remarked on this event when Furman, another self-educated minister, hesitated to receive the same honorary degree. "Permit me to insist upon it, that you will own the title which Rhode Island College has conferred upon you. If the corporation had a right to bestow it, you have a right to receive it," Hart said. "It is an honorary title, frequently bestowed on persons who have not had the advantage of a liberal education. I know one, at least, on whom it was bestowed, who was every way more undeserving of it than Mr. Furman."[146]

Hart sent his oldest son, John, to Rhode Island College as a student. This was a mixed blessing for the school. Upon John's conversion and baptism in 1786, Botsford remarked to Hart, "Whatever *you* may have known, *we* all knew J. to have been the wildest of Mr. Hart's children."[147] While at school, John's misbehavior earned him the

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[143] Guild, *Brown University*, 22.

[144] Guild, *Brown University*, 80.

[145] Rogers, *A Sermon*, 25.

[146] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, May 30, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman. Hart is referring to himself.

[147] Mallary, *Memoirs of Elder Edmund Botsford*, 48–49. Emphasis original.

rod of Manning's discipline. John's name appears in an official statement from the school as having been reprimanded, along with other boys: "John Hart, for habitually neglecting your studies, being out of College in the evening in town beyond the time specified in the laws and absent from his room in study hours and making disturbance by noise or otherwise, and suffering others to spend their time idly in his room at entertainments or otherwise."[148] Manning relayed this information to Hart, who responded promptly:

> I am sorry John has conducted so as to give you so much trouble, and to forfeit the place he had under the management of Mrs. Manning. Had I been apprised of his unworthy conduct sooner, perhaps I should have remanded him back to Carolina; for I am not in such affluent circumstances as to throw away money in the education of one who has no view to his own advantage. I thank you, however, for all the pains you have taken with him, and that you have made trial of the discipline of the rod. Let me entreat you unweariedly to exert your best endeavors for his advantage. Who knows but God may give him a turn? I should be sorry he should return a worthless blockhead.[149]

At the close of the same letter, Hart would again plead with Manning for assistance with John: "Could you not prevail on John to write to me? I have received but one letter from him for the space of twelve months past, although I have sharply reproved him for the space of twelve months past, although I have sharply reproved him for his neglect, over and over again."[150] This vignette reveals that Hart not only battled uphill to promote Baptist education in the public square, but in his own home. In both cases, he labored tirelessly.

Politics

Hart displayed his activist spirituality more broadly by participating in the tumultuous political events at the end of the eighteenth century. The plaque honoring Hart in Charleston's First Baptist Church also identifies him as "Patriot, American

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[148] James Manning, "Public admonition of a number of students," Manning MSS, Brown.

[149] Oliver Hart to James Manning, November 27, 1773, Manning MSS, Brown.

[150] Oliver Hart to James Manning, November 27, 1773, Manning MSS, Brown.

Revolution, 1775–1780."[151] Richard Furman praised Hart for "his usefulness as a citizen of America," for being "prompt in his judgment, ardent in his love of liberty, and rationally jealous for the rights of his country."[152] For Hart, who saw the American cause as bound up with the Baptist interest of religious liberty, patriotic service was simply another manifestation of his Christian activism, of "doing something useful for God."

The Road to War

After the war, Hart preached a sermon entitled *America's Remembrancer*, in which he traced God's providence in forming the new nation.[153] As he reflected on the events that led to the war, Hart did not hesitate to identify Great Britain as "the aggressor" in the conflict. He viewed Britain throughout the 1760s and 1770s as increasing in jealousy at the "rising glory" of America, which had grown from a dependent child to "a man's estate." Parliament had "framed oppressive acts" which "not only embarrassed our commerce, but taxed us without our consent, and proceeded so far as to declare that of right they might bind us in all cases whatsoever." Hart referred to the Stamp Act of 1765[154] and the Townshend Acts of 1767,[155] which the colonists viewed as illegitimate "taxation without representation."[156]

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[151] Owens, *Biography*, 41.

[152] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 26.

[153] Oliver Hart, *America's Remembrancer, with Respect to her Blessedness and Duty. A Sermon, delivered in Hopewell, New Jersey, on Thanksgiving Day, November 26, 1789* (Philadelphia: Dobson, 1791).

[154] In the Stamp Act, the British Parliament required the American colonies to purchase many widely used printed materials on paper produced in London carrying an embossed revenue stamp. The purpose of the unpopular act was to pay for the British military stationed in the colonies after the Seven Years War.

[155] The Townshend Acts, named for Britain's Chancellor of the Exchequer Charles Townshend, were a series of acts passed by the British Parliament against the American colonies, designed to raise revenue from the colonies and to enforce compliance with trade regulations. The colonists found these measures deeply offensive and responded with violent protest, most infamously in the Boston Tea Party.

[156] For a lucid presentation and defense of the American position during the war, see Friedrich Gentz, *The Origin and Principles of the American Revolution, Compared with the Origin and Principles of the French Revolution*, trans. John Quincy Adams (Philadelphia: Dickins, 1800).

For Hart and his fellow Patriots, accepting Parliament's repressive measures was unconscionable. "What could we, the devoted sons of America, now do? To tamely put on the shackles fabricated for us, we apprehended, would argue a meanness of soul, unworthy the offspring of Freemen – a baseness, derogatory of human nature," Hart said. Yet America still "retained an affection for Great Britain, although strangely metamorphosed from a tender mother into a tyrannical step-dame." The colonists submitted a series of protests against these acts. When these cries went unheard, and after Britain's issue of the Intolerable Acts,[157] delegates from the thirteen colonies assembled in Philadelphia as the first Continental Congress in the fall of 1774. With one voice, the colonies petitioned the Crown to ease its repressive measures. They found "the haughty monarch was deaf to our supplications."[158] On April 19, 1775, the King's troops "commenced hostilities," opening fire on American militia at Lexington and Concord.[159] Hart received the news on May 8; war would soon come to Charleston.

The Back Country Commission

The colony of South Carolina had formed the First Provincial Congress at the beginning of 1775, after her five delegates returned from the first Continental Congress.[160] In June of 1775, they reassembled to make serious preparations for war: calling for 1,500 troops, creating a "Council of Safety" vested with extensive executive powers in the province, and composing an oath of allegiance to the colonial cause called

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[157] The Intolerable Acts, or Coercive Acts, were a series of punitive laws passed by the British Parliament in 1774 against the colony of Massachusetts, in response to the defiance of Boston's citizens in throwing a large shipment of British tea into the Boston harbor (the Boston Tea Party) in December 1773.

[158] Hart, *America's Remembrancer*, 9. Hart compared the King's response to the Congress's plea with the tyranny of Nahash the Ammonite against the men of Jabesh-Gilead (1 Sam 11:1–2). When the people entreated Nahash to make with them a covenant of peace, he responded, "On this condition will I make a covenant with you, that I may thrust out all your right eyes, and lay it out for a reproach upon all Israel."

[159] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[160] The delegates were Christopher Gadsden (1724–1805), Thomas Lynch, Jr. (1749–?), Henry Middleton (1717–1784), Edward Rutledge (1749–1800), and John Rutledge (1739–1800).

"the Association." As the Council scrambled to enlist support for the Association, they knew their greatest challenge lay in the "Back Country."

The western Carolina frontier was a different world from Charleston. The poor settlers who populated the Back Country had been far removed from the daily clamor for independence the city had known for the past decade. The Back Country men were also loyal to the King, and generally averse to helping the aristocrats of Charleston. The Council of Safety recognized that winning the Back Country over would be vital to their success. They proposed to send a team of three men "to make progress into the Back Country, to explain the causes of the present disputes between Great Britain and the American colonies," and to persuade them to sign the Association.[161] The first member of the team was William Henry Drayton, a wealthy planter, lawyer, and statesman of Charleston, an aggressive Patriot, and a future President of the South Carolina Provincial Congress. The second man was William Tennent III, pastor of the Congregational church in Charleston and grandson of William Tennent I. A riveting orator, Tennant held Master's degrees from both Princeton and Harvard. Hart, the self-taught Baptist preacher, was the third member. Socially, religiously, and personally, Hart was vastly different from the other two men, but the Council of Safety selected Hart for his ability to communicate with the large Baptist population of the Back Country. The letter Hart received, signed by Henry Laurens, assured him that "Your compliance will be esteemed by the Council of Safety as an instance of your zeal in public service, when the aid of every freeman and lover of constitutional liberty is loudly called for."[162]

Hart eagerly accepted the charge. His cousin, John Hart, would sign his name to the Declaration of Independence on behalf of New Jersey.[163] His brother, Joseph,

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[161] From a copy of Hart's commission, printed in the *Baptist Courier*, March 9, 1793, and cited in Owens, *Biography*, 16.

[162] Cited in Owens, *Biography*, 16.

[163] John Hart (1706?–1779) was a public official and politician in New Jersey, widely known as "Honest John." He served as a delegate to the Second Continental Congress.

would serve as an officer in the Continental Army of Pennsylvania. His son John, home from college, served under South Carolina war hero General William Moultrie.[164] At fifty-two, Hart was not in fighting trim, but he could preach the message of liberty to ordinary Baptist folk. He wrote in his diary, "On Monday, July 3, 1775, I set off for the frontiers of the province, being appointed by the Council of Safety to accompany the Honorable William Henry Drayton and the Rev. Wm. Tennent to try to reconcile a number of the inhabitants, who are disaffected to the government."[165] It would be a costly service. As Hart rode away, his new wife, Nancy, was pregnant with their first child. Silas Hart would be born August 30, while Hart was still gone. Tragically, the boy would die less than a month later, when Hart was again missing, at the bedside of his deathly ill daughter, Nelly. "I was absent at the birth and death of the child, a heavy trial to my dear Nancy," Hart wrote.[166]

Yet these events still lay in the future as Hart rode off to fulfill his commission. Though he would rendezvous with Drayton and Tennent at various points on the journey, they each followed different routes. Hart rode first to the familiar Congaree Baptist Church, led by his friend Joseph Reese. There, on August 2 he preached from John 8:36: "If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed." Hart deftly shifted from extolling spiritual freedom in Christ to political freedom, addressing his listeners with "the subject of the times."[167] The congregation received his message positively. Afterward, Hart prevailed on Reese to join him on the journey. As the two travelled together, they talked with anyone who would listen about "the state of the times." At one

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[164] Moultrie (1730–1805) won great fame in the "Battle of Sullivan's Island" when he led the state militia in staving off the British attack on Charleston. Hart remembered the battle as, "when God appeared for me, and defeated our enemies. A day much to be remembered by Carolina." Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[165] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[166] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[167] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 19.

stop, Hart delivered another creative twist on a gospel text, Galatians 5:1: "Stand fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage." Hart "took occasion to speak on the state of national affairs," while the people "heard with attention." He learned afterward that "one opposer was convinced, and sharply reproved one who quarreled with the sermon."[168]

The most pleasant event in the journey came on August 21, at William Wofford's home on the Tyger River. There, Drayton, Tennent, and Hart hosted a picnic for the locals, drawing a large crowd. "A beef was barbecued, on which we dined," Hart recorded. After the meal, Reese, a good singer, opened with a song. Drayton then spoke for over an hour on the recent developments between the colonies and the Crown. Hart recorded that the people listened attentively, and at the end of the meeting, more than seventy men came forward to sign the Association Agreement. In fact, the people were "so active and spirited," they insisted on forming a provincial regiment on the spot.[169]

Not every stop was so encouraging. On August 10, Hart and Reese arrived at the home of Separate Baptist Phillip Mulkey at Fairforest Creek. Mulkey, whose name has appeared before in these pages, was serving under a moral cloud at this point in his ministry. Hart had written to Manning in 1767 that "The greatest appearance [of revival] we have had, for some years passed, has been among the Separatists: and especially under one Mr. Philip Mulkey. But he, poor man, has sadly fallen, having become the father of a spurious child by a widow woman, a member of his own church. On account of which religion has suffered much, especially in those parts, and among those people." [170] Morgan Edwards added in 1772 that "a thorn was put into [Mulkey's] flesh about 4 years ago which will . . . teach his votaries that he is but a man."[171] Despite his checkered

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[168] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 20.

[169] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 23.

[170] Oliver Hart to James Manning, December 23, 1767, Manning MSS, Brown.

[171] Morgan Edwards, *Materials Towards A History of the Baptists*, ed. Eve B. Weeks and Mary

past, Mulkey maintained a significant following for many years. But by 1790, the Charleston Association had disfellowshipped Mulkey entirely, warning churches of his "enormous crimes; such as adultery, perfidy and falsehood, which have been attended with very aggravating circumstances, often repeated and continued in for years; and part of the time, united with his highest pretensions of zeal and piety."[172]

Whatever Mulkey's personal difficulties, he received Hart and Reese warmly the night they arrived on his doorstep. To Hart's dismay, however, Mulkey revealed himself to be a Loyalist. Along with all his neighbors, Mulkey was under the sway of a prominent Tory leader in the area, Colonel Thomas Fletchall. "I find that Col. Fletchall has all those people at his beck, and reigns amongst them like a little king," Hart remarked.[173] Fletchall had even composed an "Association" of his own, pledging loyalty to the crown. Hart called it "a jejune incoherent piece, but serves to delude the people . . ."[174] As Hart engaged Mulkey's neighbors in conversation, he saw that they too were "so on the side of the ministry, that no argument on the contrary side seemed to have any weight with them." The next day, Hart was addressing a few dozen men when a crowd of angry Loyalists interrupted, shouting that they "wished 1,000 Bostonians might be kill'd in battle," and one "wish'd there was not a grain of salt in any of the coast towns on the continent." Hart wrote that night, "On the whole, they appear to be irritated in the extreme."[175] Fearing British interception, Hart began writing his diary in code. He had reason to be nervous; Tory resentment ran deep against the patriots in many portions of the Back Country. A few altercations between Drayton and Tory leaders nearly touched

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B. Warren (Danielsville, GA: Heritage Papers, 1984), 2:141.

[172] See Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists*, 125.

[173] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 21.

[174] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 20.

[175] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 21.

off a civil war.[176] Adding to these anxieties, the group chose an unseasonably rainy August to travel across the frontier. Muddy roads and swollen creeks made progress difficult. Hart reports crossing "several deep creeks," and rivers that were "very high and ran rapidly."[177] He must have been relieved to arrive safely back in Charleston in September 6.

One can only speculate on what Hart's "Back Country Commission" accomplished in the American Revolution. Owens wondered aloud if some of the Back Country sharpshooters at the pivotal Battle of King's Mountain in 1780 may have "listened to Tennent in log meetinghouses or sat with Hart into the night?"[178] This, of course, cannot be confirmed. Yet some facts are clear: after covering over 300 miles in a month's time, speaking an average of once a day, and holding hundreds of personal conversations about "the state of the times" with Back Country neighbors, Hart and his party garnered numerous pledges of loyalty to the South Carolina Council of Safety, for which the Provincial Congress formally thanked them on November 29, 1775. Owens calls Hart's Back Country commission, "the most significant contribution to the American Revolution by any individual South Carolina Baptist."[179]

Campaigning for Religious Liberty

Hart's military service had ended, but he still took an active part in the political events of the day. On March 30, 1776, Hart and other area ministers from across the denominational spectrum met at the High Hills of Santee Church, to adopt a resolution to send to the Provincial Congress of South Carolina. It read in part, "We hope yet to see

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[176] See Owens, "Hart and the American Revolution," 5–12.

[177] Hart, "Journey to the Back-Country," 26.

[178] Loulie Latimer Owens, "Oliver Hart and the American Revolution," *JSCBHS* 1, (November 1975): 14.

[179] Owens, "Hart and the American Revolution," 2.

hunted Liberty sit Regent on the Throne, and flourish more than ever . . . . We bless God that he hath begun our deliverance, and that he will complete it shall be our constant prayer."[180] Hart's personal writings in this period are replete with references to political developments. In the summer of 1776, he wrote, "On July 4, the thirteen united colonies of North America were declared free and independent states by the Continental Congress."[181] On March 26, 1777, he recorded, "South Carolina broke off the British yoke and established a new form of government upon a free and generous plan, and rulers being chosen from among ourselves. May we never again be enslaved!"[182]

One prominent reason for Hart's devotion to the American cause was the prospect of obtaining religious liberty.[183] At this time, Baptists and other Dissenters were still fined and jailed in those regions where the Church of England was established.[184] Hart viewed state-established religion as "the sole cause of all those horrid persecutions which have so much disgraced Christianity and set the world on fire." Securing the freedom to worship according to one's own conscience was therefore "a capital blessing," and "the natural and inalienable right of all men."[185] Upon William Tennent III's untimely death in 1777, Hart took the occasion to preach the principle he and his friend shared:

> I am clear in my opinion, that the peace, welfare and happiness of this state, depends much upon our having our religious, as well as our civil liberty constitutionally fixed. All who have just notions of freedom, and have embarked in the glorious cause, will certainly expect this. It is so just and equitable, that the meanest citizen may demand it, as his right. It is our inalienable property, as much so as limb or life; and we cannot dispose of it, without being guilty of great injustice to ourselves, and

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[180] Cited in Owens, *Biography*, 17.

[181] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[182] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[183] Richard Furman remembered Hart as "desiring to preserve his political liberty, with which he found his religious liberty intimately connected." *Rewards of Grace*, 26.

[184] See Kidd, *God of Liberty*, 37–55.

[185] Hart, *America's Remembrancer*, 15.

> impiety toward God. We hope therefore, that our representatives will do justice to their constituents, by fixing religious liberty on the broadest bottom, and the most permanent foundation.[186]

Hart rallied his fellow ministers to this cause. "We now have a hopeful prospect that we shall obtain religious liberty, in its full extent, in this state; it cannot fail if the Dissenters will be careful to attend the next Session of Assembly," he told Furman. He labored to unify Regular and Separate Baptists for religious liberty. "I am the more for this junction, because I fear that some of the Baptists on the frontiers will be deemed unfriendly to government," he wrote. "Therefore let all of us who are in support of our happy constitution unite together in one band; we shall thereby appear the more respectable in the eyes of government." Hart was unconcerned with charges of pragmatism or of politicizing the church. "Let not these thoughts be rejected as human policy," he wrote. "While in the world, we must be concerned with it, and I am sure the religion of Jesus forbids us not our making ourselves as comfortable in it as possible."[187]

Paying the Price

Hart's friends feared that the British military would punish Hart for his conspicuous service to America if they ever seized Charleston. Their fears were well grounded. The British arrested 65 known patriots after taking Charleston, imprisoning them for a time in St. Augustine, Florida. They were later paroled, but deported with their families from the state.[188] Accordingly, when the British threatened Charleston in October of 1775, Hart moved his family and their possessions by schooner to Euhaw, where they stayed with the widow of Francis Pelot. In the process, Hart contracted a

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[186] Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and his Death deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: Bruce, 1777), 29–30.

[187] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, February 12, 1777, Hart MSS, Furman.

[188] See Walter Edgar, *South Carolina: A History* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), 237–38.

fever that kept him from preaching for more than a month. It was August 3 of the following year before the Hart family felt safe to return to Charleston.[189]

In February of 1780, Sir Henry Clinton again brought the British army against Charleston. Doctors advised Hart, once again weakened by a fever, "to leave town for a change of air, especially as the enemy had landed and it was supposed Charleston would soon be attacked." Hart and Nancy vacated the city for the house of his son-in-law, Thomas Screven, in St. Thomas Parish. There, Hart convalesced for two months, where he received reports of Clinton's impending arrival. Hart shared in the anxiety of all Charleston citizens in these tense days: "Often did I petition God with prayers and tears that poor Charles Town might be spared, and not suffered to fall into the enemy's hands. Never could I give it up until I heard the of its surrender," he wrote. News of the city's fall reached Hart on May 21, 1780. He acted quickly. "To escape being made prisoner, I left my family, and travelled northward."[190] He elaborated in another place: "I packed a few clothes in haste and took leave of my dear wife and the family (the most affecting parting I ever experienced), and mounting my horse, set off. But whither was going or when I should return I did not know." Hart could only "endeavor to leave my connections and place myself in the hands of the great and wise Disposer of all events."[191]

Accompanied by Botsford, Hart travelled and preached his way northward, supported by financial contributions from his listeners. Along the way, Hart learned that his personal possessions, including "a large volume of poems, principally of his own composition," had been lost, and the Baptist meetinghouse had been seized for the storage of salt beef. [192] Hart arrived in Philadelphia on October 14, 1780. One year later,

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[189] Hart, *Original Diary*, 9.

[190] Hart, diary, May 21, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[191] Hart, *Original Diary*, 13.

[192] Hart, *Original Diary*, 13.

Hart was again in Philadelphia, attending the annual meeting of the Philadelphia Association. On October 24, 1781, he heard the Liberty Bell tolling out news of a great victory. He wrote, "This day arrived, from General Washington, the account of the surrender of Lord Cornwallis and the whole army under his command to General Washington on the 19th inst. A glorious event!"[193]

Conclusion

For over forty years, Oliver Hart embodied the energetic, active piety that flowed out of the Great Awakening. In the arenas of evangelism, gospel partnerships, education, and politics, Hart threw himself, body and soul, into Christian work. Like those giants of early evangelicalism, Whitefield and Wesley, Hart was most satisfied when the pace was most demanding. As he wrote in 1754, "Blessed be God, I can say, although I am at times weary *in* my Lord's work, yet I am not weary *of* it: and I hope I never shall."[194]

[193] Hart, diary, October 24, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[194] Hart, diary, September 2, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. Emphasis original.

CHAPTER 6:

"OH THAT ALL BIGOTRY WAS ROOTED OUT OF THE EARTH!": REVIVAL CATHOLICITY

On October 27, 1754, Richard Clarke, rector of St. Phillip's Anglican Church in Charleston, was taken ill. Scheduled to perform a funeral that afternoon and unable to attend, Clarke relayed a message to Oliver Hart. In an apparently unprecedented procedure, Clarke asked the Regular Baptist minister to conduct the service for him, and in his "own way." Though holding vastly different convictions regarding church order, Clarke recognized in Hart a fellow evangelical, and trusted him to preach Christ to his people. Reflecting on this, Hart wrote,

> In the evening I buried a child in the church burying ground, and spoke extempore, perhaps the first instance of this nature ever known in this province. The church minister was sick and could not attend himself; therefore, gave me free liberty to speak in my own way; which discovered an extraordinary catholick spirit. Oh that all bigotry was rooted out of the earth; then would there subsist a greater harmony between persons, than what does; it is indeed a pity that our little outward differences should cause such a shyness between us.[1]

The incident captures the spirit of evangelical "catholicity" which swept the north Atlantic Protestant world during the Great Awakening. The experience of the new birth, the hunger for gospel holiness, and the desire to see many converted to faith in Jesus Christ by the Spirit's power united Christians who differed over many ecclesiological issues. Richard Lovelace has described "Awakening spirituality" as "consciously ecumenical, recognizing that God has more important goals than refining the perfect theology through this or that small group of elect theorizers," and notes that "discernment of the Spirit at work across the boundaries of Calvinism, Lutheranism and

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[1] Oliver Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

Arminianism is a mark of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century evangelicalism."[2]

Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins have recently observed that Oliver Hart, along with most Regular Baptists, adopted this "catholic spirit" of the revival. "Like his mentor Whitefield, Hart took denominational boundaries lightly and focused primarily on promoting a vital relationship with God," they write.[3] At the same time, Hart worked tirelessly to promote a distinctly Baptist church order among the Baptist churches of the South. Hart's combination of warm-hearted catholicity and cheerful Baptist conviction, characteristic of the Regular Baptists, stands out as a significant element of his evangelical spiritual legacy.

The Roots of Evangelical Catholicity

The catholicity of the awakening had its roots in a number of earlier movements. Among the most significant forerunners of Protestant ecumenism were the Continental Pietists, led by Philip Jacob Spener, August Herman Francke (1663–1727), and Gottfried Arnold (1666–1714).[4] The Pietists believed that heart-devotion to Jesus Christ served as the true basis of unity for all Christians, not doctrinal formulations or worship forms. Consequently, they emphasized the priority of the invisible church of all regenerated souls, rather than the visible church of any particular denomination. In the following generation, Moravian Pietist Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf (1700–1760) argued that every Christian tradition offered a *tropos paideia*, or "type of

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[2] Richard F. Lovelace, "Evangelical Spirituality: A Church Historian's Perspective," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 31, no. 1 (March 1988): 32.

[3] Thomas Kidd and Barry Hankins, *Baptists in America: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), 28–29.

[4] Francke was the organizational genius of German Pietism, largely responsible, among other endeavors, for the founding of the University of Halle; see Markus Matthias, "August Herman Francke (1663–1727)," in *The Pietist Theologians*, ed. Carter Lindberg (New York: Blackwell, 2005), 100–114. Arnold served as an influential Pietist theologian and church historian at the turn of the eighteenth century; see Peter C. Erb, "Gottfried Arnold (1664–1714)," in *The Pietist Theologians*, 175–89. For an analysis of Continental Pietism's extensive influence on the evangelical awakening, see especially William R. Ward, *The Protestant Evangelical Awakening* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

teaching." Just as the beauty of a diamond can be fully appreciated only by viewing it from many angles, so the various traditions each offered their own needed and beautiful views of the truth of Christianity.[5]

Many English Puritans shared the Pietist burden to unite Christians around matters of practical godliness. The non-conformist Richard Baxter warned Christians of being "counfounded by the noise of sectaries, and divers opinions in religion." He prioritized the "one universal church of Christians in the world," which every believer entered "by being born of the Spirit." Like the Pietists, Baxter's chief concern was not one's denominational affiliation, but a life of vibrant holiness: "if then thou hast faith, and love, and the Spirit, thou art certainly a Christian, and a member of Christ, and of this universal church of Christians."[6] Baxter expressed similar thoughts throughout his voluminous corpus, but never more memorably than in 1680:

> I am a Christian, a meer Christian, of no other religion; and the church that I am of is the Christian church, and hath been visible where ever the Christian religion and church hath been visible: But must you know what sect or party I am of? I am against all sects and dividing parties: But if any will call meer Christians by the name of a party, because they take up with meer Chrisitanity, creed, and Scripture, and will not be of any dividing or contentious sect, I am of that party which is so against parties: If the name Christian be not enough, call me a Catholick Christian; not as that word signifieth an hereticating majority of bishops, but as it signifieth one that hath no religion, but that which by Christ and the Apostles was left to the Catholick Church, or the Body of Jesus Christ on earth.[7]

Among American Puritans, Cotton Mather (1663–1728) was an outspoken proponent of "the unity of the godly" around the turn of the eighteenth century.[8] In 1692,

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[5] See Arthur Freeman, "Count Nicholas Ludwig Von Zinzendorf: An Ecumenical Pioneer," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 36, nos. 3–4 (Summer-Fall 1999): 297. See also A. J. Lewis, *Zinzendorf the Ecumenical Pioneer* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962).

[6] Richard Baxter, *A Christian Directory* (Grand Rapids: Soli Deo Gloria, 2008), 52–53.

[7] Richard Baxter, *Church-History of the Government of Bishops and Their Councils Abbreviated* (London: John Kidgell, 1680), [xiv].

[8] For a recent study of Mather, see Rick Kennedy, *The First Evangelical: A Short Life of Cotton Mather* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015). Lovelace claims that "there is no area in which Mather approached greatness so nearly—and offered so assured a lead toward the future—as in his ecumenism." Richard F. Lovelace, *The American Pietism of Cotton Mather: Origins of American Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 251.

Mather preached a sermon called *Blessed Unions*, inspired by the merging of a group of English Presbyterians and Congregationalists to form "the United Brethren." Mather proposed a similar plan of union, based not on comprehensive theological agreement, but on evangelical piety. In Lovelace's words, Mather believed "the key of a vitalized Christian experience was sufficient to unlock all the doors built up between genuine Christians through misunderstanding."[9] Indeed, to require precise doctrinal conformity of others was both unrealistic and uncharitable. "We must first forbear to impose one upon another. It is impossible for any but God who forms the Spirit of man within him, to form the understandings of men, into a belief of every Christian doctrine," Mather said. He urged against "a Samaritan sort of crabbedenss, churlishness, forwardness, towards all that are not in everything just jumping with us," for this was "not the Spirit of the Gospel." He warned that "we must beware how we ever monopolize all godliness to our own little party . . . wherever we can see, *Alliquid Christi*, anything of Christ, let it be dear to us."[10] For Mather, unity was the essential prerequisite for the worldwide revival that he believed would usher in the millennium. "There will be no revival unless there is unity, and the converse is equally true," he insisted.[11]

By the end of the 1730s, Mather's dream appeared to have reached its fulfillment in the ministry of George Whitefield. Like his predecessors, Whitefield believed in the unifying power of heart religion over doctrine, the priority of the invisible communion of regenerate souls over communion in a particular "visible church," and evangelical harmony as essential to revival. What distinguished Whitefield from his predecessors was his unparalleled, firsthand experience of Christian diversity. Whitefield kneeled at the altar with Oxford Anglicans, preached in the fields to unlearned

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[9] Lovelace, *Cotton Mather*, 274.

[10] Cotton Mather, *Blessed Unions* (Boston: B. Green and J. Allen, 1692), 72–79.

[11] Mather advances this idea in his *Shaking Dispensations* (Boston: B. Green, 1715).

Methodists, served at the communion seasons of Scottish Presbyterians, and attended meetings of American Congregationalists, Baptists, and Quakers. Bruce Hindmarsh argues that Whitefield's utterly unique experience as the grand itinerant raised his catholicity to new heights, causing him to "minimize church order, in order to maximize spiritual solidarity with individuals who had been born again."[12] As Whitefield wrote to the Scottish Presbyterian Ralph Erskine, "Though I profess myself a minister of the Church of England, I am of a catholic spirit; and, if I see any man who loves the Lord Jesus in sincerity, I am not very solicitous to what outward communion he belongs."[13]

Whitefield received the opportunity to explain his ecumenical policy in Boston on September 19, 1740, before five Anglican clergy. When asked about his endorsement of non-Anglican ministers, Whitefield asserted that "a catholic spirit was best," and that "it was best to preach the new birth, and the power of godliness, and not to insist so much on the form: for people would never be brought to one mind as to that; nor did Jesus Christ ever intend it." Bishop Timothy Cutler pressed him here: surely Christ's prayer "that all may be one, even as Thou Father and I are one,"[14] demanded a single, visible church (namely the Church of England). Whitefield offered a different interpretation. Echoing his Pietist forbears, Whitefield insisted that the reality of regeneration trumped all external expressions of the Christian faith. "That was spoken of the inward union of the souls of the believers with Jesus Christ, and not of the outward Church," he countered. "I saw regenerate souls among the Baptists, among the Presbyterians, among the Independents, and among the Church folks—all children of God, and yet all born

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[12] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, "The Spirituality of George Whitefield" (paper presented at Whitefield and the Great Awakening, Andrew Fuller Conference, The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, October 22, 2014).

[13] George Whitefield to Ralph Erskine, January 16, 1740, in *Works of the Reverend George Whitefield* (London: Edward and Charles Dilly, 1771), 1:140.

[14] An allusion to John 17:21.

again in a different way of worship: and who can tell which is the most evangelical?"[15]

As Whitefield corresponded with a diverse range of Christian believers, he allowed differences of church communion to fade into insignificance before the all-important reality of the new birth:

> What a divine sympathy and attraction is there between all those who by one spirit are made members of that mystical body, whereof Jesus Christ is the head! . . . Blessed be God that his love is so far shed abroad in our hearts, as to cause us to love one another, though we a little differ as to externals: for my part, I hate to mention them. My one soul question is, *Are you a Christian?* Are you sealed by Christ's spirit to the day of redemption? Are you hungering and thirsting after the perfect, everlasting righteousness of Jesus Christ? If so, you are my brother, my sister, and mother.[16]

These remarks demonstrate Hindmarsh's observation that a major shift in Protestant spirituality was taking place in the dawn of the Great Awakening. Eighteenth-century evangelicals like Whitefield "abandoned the Puritan-Reformed question, 'what constitutes a true church?' for the Evangelical-Pietist question, 'What constitutes a true Christian?'"[17]

Whitefield carefully avoided entanglements in ecclesiological arguments. In Scotland in 1741, Whitefield found himself in the middle of a bitter dispute between the Church of Scotland and the Associate Presbytery, which had recently seceded from the national church. The leaders of the secession church wanted to "set me right about church government," Whitefield wrote, calling him to endorse their Solemn League and Covenant and repudiate the apostate Church of Scotland.[18] To their frustration, Whitefield instead accepted preaching invitations from both parties, informing them that he "had no scruples" about their disagreement, "and that settling church government, and

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[15] Whitefield, *Journals*, 458.

[16] George Whitefield to Mr. P., November 28, 1739, in *Works*, 1:126. Emphasis original.

[17] D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *John Newton and the English Evangelical Tradition: Between the Conversions of Wesley and Wilberforce* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 322.

[18] George Whitefield to J[ohn] C[ennick], August 1, 1741, in *Works*, 1:304–5.

preaching about the solemn league and covenant, was not my plan." He had not studied these issues, "being too busy about other matters, as I judged, of greater importance."[19]

In some places, Whitefield treated church order as a taboo subject, divisive to evangelical unity and a distraction from the mission. He wrote to one Baptist minister:

> If the Lord gives us a true catholic spirit, free from a party sectarian zeal, we shall do well. I am sorry to hear that there is so much narrowness among some of the brethren in Wales. Brother [Howell Harris] complains sadly of it. I hope dear Mr. O. will be kept free, and not fall into disputing about baptism, or other non-essentials. For I am persuaded, unless we all are content to preach Christ, and to keep off from disputable things, wherein we differ, God will not bless us long. If we act otherwise, however we may talk of a catholic spirit, we shall only be bringing people over to our own party, and there fetter them.[20]

As the Awakening wore on, evangelical unity became increasingly difficult to maintain. Whitefield experienced painful, public splits with Wesley, for instance, as well as with the Moravians. Still, Whitefield strove valiantly to hold evangelicals together. When all else failed, he appealed to their heavenly destiny. "The divisions among the brethren sometimes grieve, but do not surprise me," he wrote. "O how do I long for heaven! Surely, *there* will be no differences, no strife there, but who shall sing with most affection to the Lamb that sitteth upon the throne."[21] To the Moravian Peter Böhler, he wrote, "May God preserve us from falling out in our way to heaven! The world and the devil are united against us. O that we could all unite against them!"[22] It was Whitefield's unequaled embodiment of the catholicity of the revival that so influenced the Regular Baptists of the eighteenth century.

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[19] George Whitefield to Thomas N[oble], August 8, 1741, in *Works*, 1:307–8. For an account of this meeting, see Kidd, *George Whitefield*, 151–54.

[20] George Whitefield to Mr. [John] O[ulton], May 27, 1742, in *Works*, 1:394. Oulton (1719–1804) was a Baptist minister in Liverpool for fifty years.

[21] George Whitefield to Mr. J. H., in *Works*, 1:224. Emphasis original.

[22] George Whitefield to Peter Böhler, October 10, 1741, in *Works*, 1:332. Böhler (1712–1775) was a Moravian missionary influential in the lives of Whitefield and the Wesley brothers. On Böhler, see T. S. A Macquiban, "Böhler, Peter (1712–1775)," in *Biogrpahical Dictionary of Evangelicals*, ed. Timothy Larsen (Downers Grove: IVP, 2003), 60–61. For Whitefield's split with Böhler, see Kidd, *George Whitefield*, 157–61.

Regular Baptist Catholicity

On the whole, Regular Baptists in the American colonies embraced the "catholic spirit" of the evangelical awakening. One early example is Jenkin Jones, pastor of the Baptist congregations at Pennepek and Philadelphia, and a leader in the Philadelphia Baptist Association from 1726–1760. Whitefield sought Jones out on his first visit to Philadelphia on November 5, 1739, and quickly identified Jones as a fellow evangelical. "I was visited in the afternoon by the Presbyterian minister, and went afterward to see the Baptist teacher who seems to be a spiritual man," Whitefield wrote. The next night, Jones and the Presbyterian minister went to hear Whitfield in the Anglican Church, and were reportedly "much rejoiced to hear Jesus Christ preached in the Church."[23] Whitefield left Philadelphia the next week. When he returned in April of 1740, he was delighted to find that Jones had been promoting the revival in his absence:

> It is impossible to express the joy many felt when they saw my face again. O how did they comfort my heart with the account of what God had done for their own and many other people's souls. The Baptist minister in particular, who has been instrumental in watering what God has planted, recounted to me many noble instances of God's power of free grace shown in the conviction and conversion of some ministers as well as common people.[24]

A few weeks later, it was Whitefield's turn to hear Jones. Greatly pleased, Whitefield reported that Jones "preached the truth as it is in Jesus." In fact, Whitefield called Jones "the only preacher that I know of in Philadelphia, who speaks feelingly and with authority. The poor people are much refreshed by him, and I trust the Lord will bless him more and more.[25] For Jones, these experiences with Whitefield established sufficient grounds for an evangelical alliance. On May 9, he had Whitefield preach at the Pennepek meetinghouse, to over two thousand people.[26] In the days to come, Jones extended

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[23] Whitefield, *Journals*, 342.

[24] Whitefield, *Journals*, 406.

[25] Whitefield, *Journals*, 419.

[26] Whitefield, *Journals*, 419.

invitations to other revivalists outside the Baptist circle, including Gilbert Tennent and John "Hell-fire" Rowland.[27]

The people of Jones's churches received the awakeners with enthusiasm, but Jones met stiff resistance from his own assistant minister. Jones had baptized Ebenezer Kinnersley in 1735. The bright young man would later teach English at the University of Pennsylvania from 1755–1773, and assist his friend Benjamin Franklin in his research of electricity.[28] Kinnersley was disgusted by the emotionalism of the awakening. When filling Jones's pulpit in his absence, Kinnersley sharply criticized Whitefield, Rowland, and the whole revival. The church's members were deeply offended. Many walked out on Kinnersley's sermon, and later brought charges against him for undermining Jones's leadership. When Kinnersely refused to apologize, he was excluded from the Lord's Table. Matters turned uglier still when Kinnersley aired his grievances in Franklin's *Pennsylvania Gazette*. He accused Jones of lying and showing ungodly favoritism toward Rowland, a fellow Welshman, and attacked the church for ill treating him.[29] Incensed, the church responded by publishing its own letter, which exonerated Jones, condemned Kinnersley, and called the latter to repentance.[30] Kinnerseley responded in print once more before the controversy died out.[31] The incident reveals the something of the conflict which Regular Baptist leaders like Jones could invite through their partnerships with the evangelical awakeners.

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[27] On Hart's exposure to these preachers as a member of Jones's church, see chap. 2, above.

[28] Kinnersley later taught English at the University of Pennsylvania (1755–1773) and befriended Benjamin Franklin, assisting Franklin in his research of electricity. For Kinnersley, see J. A. Leo Lemay, *Ebenezer Kinnersley, Franklin's Friend* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1964).

[29] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 15, 1740.

[30] *Pennsylvania Gazette*, August 14, 1740, appendix D.

[31] See Thomas Ray, "Jenkin Jones (c. 1686–1760)," in *A Noble Company: Biographical Essays on Notable Particular-Regular Baptists in America* (Springfield, MO: Particular Baptist Press, 2006), 200–210.

Whitefield travelled south after leaving Pennsylvania in 1740, and by July 7 was in Ashley Ferry, South Carolina, fourteen miles outside of Charleston. He had been invited by Isaac Chanler, who he called "a gracious Baptist minister." Whitefield preached at the Ashley Ferry meetinghouse "to the conviction of some and the comfort of others," though "the violent heat of the weather, and great expense of sweat," forced him to lie down afterwards. The next day, he preached twice at the Independent Presbyterian Church before lodging with Chanler for the night, still "very weak." On July 9, Whitefield awoke weaker still, but kept his appointment to preach for Chanler at ten in the morning. This time the meetinghouse could not contain the crowd, so Whitefield preached under a tree. "People seemed to come from all parts, and the Word came with convincing power," he wrote. By July 20, Whitefield was convinced that revival had come to Charleston. "Though the heat of the weather, and frequency of preaching, have perhaps given an irrevocable stroke to the health of my body; yet I rejoice, knowing it has been for the conviction, and I believe conversion of many souls," Whitefield wrote. "Numbers are seeking after Jesus."[32]

Before leaving Charleston, Whitefield advised the local pastors to establish a weekly lecture to carry on the work of the revival. Chanler's first address at these meetings was later published as *New Converts Instructed to Cleave to the Lord* (1740).[33] It stands as a remarkable testimony of the Regular Baptists' "catholic spirit" during the revival. In the preface, Boston minister William Cooper (1693–1743) [34] marveled that the meeting was "carried on in a united manner, by several dissenting ministers of different

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[32] Whitefield, *Journals*, 440–44.

[33] Isaac Chanler, *New Converts Exhorted to Cleave to the Lord. A Sermon on Acts XI 23 Preach'd July 30, 1740 at a Wednesday Evening-lecture, in Charlestown, Set Up at the Motion, and the Desire of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield; With a Brief Introduction Relating to the Character of that Excellent Man . . . With Preface by the Reverend Mr. Cooper of Boston, N.E.* (Boston: D. Fowle for S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1740).

[34] Cooper served as Benjamin Colman's assistant at the Brattle Street Church in Boston.

denominations," and noted "how much is their divine Master honour'd and pleas'd, when the *members* of this family live united in bonds of love and charity; and, if they can't be one in judgment in every lesser matter, are yet one in disposition and affection, in aim and design." Cooper commended Chanler's sermon for its broad, evangelical appeal, for it contained "spiritual evangelical truths, treated of in a manner suiting the oracles of God, that is to say, with gravity, plainness, and good judgment, and the whole very sensibly animated with a true spirit of piety." Cooper urged the reading of Chanler's message upon "all such as have tasted that the Lord is gracious, and desire an establishment in grace."[35]

Chanler began the sermon by celebrating the revival, searching for adequate words to describe his "holy pleasure, as well as wonder" at God's "raising up and sending forth such eminent instruments of good to the souls of men, crowning their labour with so great and uncommon success."[36] Chanler could not restrain his enthusiasm over Whitefield, who he called "very dear unto all such as have felt the power of the word preached by him reaching their hearts." Aware that many were working to discredit Whitefield, Chanler defended the evangelist on the grounds of "the antiquity and soundness of his doctrine," "the holiness and circumspection of his life and conversation," as well as the unprecedented success of his labors. Chanler considered the last proof to be "an irrefragable argument, that he is a man sent from God." He declared that "if these things my friends are enthusiasm and madness, I heartily pray God they may increase and abound yet more and more!" As Chanler closed his introduction, he called his listeners to imitate Whitefield's virtues, particularly his "catholic spirit." "Let our love like his be catholic, breathing in a free and open air, abstracted from all bigotry and party zeal, loving the image of God on whomever we may see it impressed . . . that is

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[35] William Cooper, Preface, in Chanler, *New Converts*, i–iv.

[36] Chanler, *New Converts*, 1–2.

to say, all the regenerate sons and daughters of God, howsoever they may be distinguished by different denominations amongst men."[37]

The body of the sermon, aimed at encouraging young converts to "cleave to the Lord," focused on the great evangelical themes that Whitefield himself preached: the sovereign grace of God in salvation, the absolute necessity of conversion, and the call to evangelical holiness. Chanler warned the new believers against returning to their worldly ways, recommended sound Puritan books for their edification,[38] and closed with a fervent evangelistic appeal for those who had not yet closed with Christ.[39] At no point, however, did Chanler instruct the young converts on proper church order. Little comments, "That Chanler preached this unique catholic quality in religious matters was highly significant, especially because his sermon was intended 'for the benefit of young converts, newly inlisted [sic] into the Lord's service.'"[40]

A mutual friend of Chanler and Whitefield at this time was Regular Baptist William Tilly (1698–1744). A native of Salisbury, England, Tilly came to America in 1721, was called to ministry at the Charleston Baptist Church, and ordained at Edisto Island Baptist Church (later Euhaw) in 1731.[41] Tilly travelled to Whitefield's orphanage in Savannah with a group of friends on July 31. The following Sunday, Whitefield found himself so sick that "I was struck, as I thought, with death." Several guests had arrived,

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[37] Chanler, *New Converts*, 4–5.

[38] Chanler, *New Converts*, 30–32. Chanler recommended Anglicans Bishop Usher, Bishop Downame, Richard Sibbes, John Preston, William Perkins, and Thomas Wilson. From the Dissenters, he recommended Stephen Charnock, John Flavel, Joseph Alleine, Durham, Matthew Henry, Samuel Willard, Solomon Stoddard, Pemberton, Benjamin Keach, and John Bunyan. Above all, Chanler admonished them to read "the Book of books," the Bible.

[39] Chanler, *New Converts*, 38–42. Whitefield wrote to Chanler the following year, sending his love to the flock at Ashley Ferry. See George Whitefield to Isaac Chanler, February 17, 1741, in *Works*, 1:237–38.

[40] Thomas J. Little, *The Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1670–1760* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 146–47.

[41] For Tilly, see Leah Townsend, *South Carolina Baptists, 1670–1805* (Baltimore: Clearfield, 2003) 38; and David Benedict, *A General History of the Baptist Denomination in America and Other Parts of the World* (New York: Lewis Colby and Company, 1850), 703.

eager to hear Whitefield, but he was so weak that he asked Tilly to preach for him instead. Tilly did not consent, encouraging Whitefield that "God would strengthen me if I began." Whitefield began. As he prayed, one guest fell to the ground, "as though shot with a gun." From there, "the influence spread." As the congregation listened, "Tears trickled down apace, and God manifested himself much amongst us at the Sacrament."[42] To Whitefield's astonishment, Tilly partook of communion with the Anglican guests. In a letter the next week, Whitefield commented, "The word runs like lightning in Charles-Town. A serious lively Baptist minister, named *Tilly*, is here also; he has preached often for me, and last Sunday received the sacrament in our way—O bigotry, thou art tumbling down a-pace!"[43] Jones, Chanler, and Tilly exemplify the catholicity that characterized Regular Baptists during the early days of the evangelical revival. They were willing to unite on the basis of evangelical piety for advance of the gospel in the revival, though, as will be seen, this catholicity had limits. In the next generation, Oliver Hart carried on the Regular Baptist catholic spirit.

Oliver Hart's Catholicity

Hart would have observed a remarkable example of evangelical catholicity in the city of Charleston during the mid-1750s. A society began meeting on a monthly basis, for prayer and the discussion of "some literary or religious topic which had been previously agreed on."[44] It was a sort of ecumenical "holy club."[45] The society counted among its members some of the leading figures of Charleston society. These included the

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[42] Whitefield, *Journals*, 447.

[43] George Whitefield to Mr. N., August 15, 1740, in *Works*, 1:203.

[44] See David Ramsay, *The History of South Carolina, from its first settlement in 1670, to the year 1808* (Charleston: David Longworth, 1809), 2:452–53; Frederick Dalcho, *An Historical Account of the Protestant Episcopal Church in South Carolina, from the first settlement of the province, to the war of the Revolution* (Charleston: E. Thayer, 1820), 180–83.

[45] See Samuel C. Smith, "Charleston's Holy Club," in *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 94–107.

French Huguenot architect Gabriel Manigault; Henry Laurens and Christopher Gadsden of the Anglican church, both of whom would later serve the Continental Congress;[46] and the eminent lawyer John Rattray of the Presbyterian Church. Among the clergymen known to belong to the society were Richard Clarke, rector of St. Philip's, William Hutson of Charleston's Independent Presbyterian church, John J. Zubly of the Wappetaw Independent Presbyterian House, and Phillip Morrison of the Scot's Presbyterian Church. Whether or not Hart participated in "Charleston's holy club," is unknown, though his prominence in the religious community and his friendship with virtually all of the above men makes this highly plausible. At any rate, Hart clearly counted himself as part of a transdenominational revival movement, one he had been immersed in from his childhood days in Jenkin Jones's Pennepek Baptist Church. These early experiences left an indelible impression on Hart, who demonstrated the catholicity of the awakening throughout his Charleston ministry.

Hart and the Presbyterians

Presbyterians represented the shortest theological leap for a Regular Baptist whose own creed consciously followed the Westminster Confession so closely.[47] When two young Rhode Island College graduates were sent by their Presbytery "on a preaching excursion" to the Carolinas, Hart happily broke bread with them.[48] One Presbyterian that Hart admired was Samuel Davies, who established an evangelical presence in Virginia through circuit preaching from 1748–59.[49] It is not certain that Hart had contact with

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[46] Samuel Smith explores the evangelical faith of Laurens and Gadsden, and how their "pietistic impulse for unity" contributed to their role in the American Revolution in *A Cautious Enthusiasm*, 146–60.

[47] In an effort to show their unity with other dissenting groups under persecution, the authors of the Second London Confession made the Westminster Confession the basis of their own. See William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Confessions of Faith* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 1969), 235–38.

[48] Hart, *Original Diary*, December 12, 1778, 12.

[49] The standard account of Davies (1723–1761) is George William Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Virginia* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1971). For a more recent analysis of Davies's spirituality, see Joseph Charles Harrod, "'The Divine Life in the Soul Considered': Theology

Davies in these years. Given their relatively close proximity and Hart's large network of communication, some personal acquaintance is likely. In 1759, Davies accepted the presidency of New Jersey College, which had already trained several of Hart's Regular Baptist colleagues. Tragically, Davies died less than two years into his administration, at the age of thirty-seven. In a letter on April 27, 1761, Hart mourned Davies's death as a blow to the entire evangelical movement:

> I lament with you (and surely all the friends of Zion must mourn) the loss of the justly celebrated President Davies. Oh, what floods of sorrow must have overwhelmed the minds of many, when it was echoed from house to house and from village to village, as in the dismal sound of hoarse thunder, *President Davies is no more!* Oh, sad and melancholy dispensation! Arise, all ye sons of pity, and mourn with those that mourn. And thou, my soul, let drop the flowing tear while commiserating the bereaved and distressed. Alas for the dear woman, whose beloved is taken away with a stroke! May Jesus be her husband, her strength, and her stay. Alas for the bereaved children! May their father's God be their God in covenant. Alas for the church of Christ! Deprived of one of the principal pillars, how grievous the stroke to thee! But Jesus, thy head and foundation, ever lives.
>
> And thou, Nassau Hall, lately so flourishing, so promising, under the auspicious management of so worthy a President—what might we not have expected from thee! But alas! How is the mighty fallen in thee! How doth the large and beautiful house appear as a widow in sable weeds! And thy sons, lately so gay and pleasant, as well as promising and contented—how do they retire into their apartments, and there with bitter sighs, heavy groans, and broken accents, languish out, My Father, my Father!—the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof! But I can write no more.[50]

Hart's working relationship with Presbyterian William Tennent III in the Revolution has already been noted.[51] They travelled the Carolina Backcountry together in 1775 on a special mission from the South Carolina government, and afterward petitioned the congress for religious liberty under the new constitution. These shared labors under such intense circumstances forged a strong friendship between the two men. When Tennent died on August 11, 1777, Hart preached a memorial sermon in the Baptist

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and Spirituality in the Works of Samuel Davies" (Ph.D. diss., The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 2014).

[50] Oliver Hart to James Manning, April 27, 1761, Manning MSS, Brown.

[51] See chap. 5 below.

meetinghouse.[52] He based his message on a popular eighteenth century funeral text, 2 Samuel 3:38, "Know ye not that there is—a great man fallen this day in Israel?" He considered how Tennent displayed five essential qualities of "a great man:" a distinguished pedigree, good natural parts and abilities, intelligence and learning, a benevolent heart, and devotion to religion. Hart dedicated the sermon, "preached from pure regard to his memory," to the bereaved mother, wife, and congregation, "with much affection."[53]

Hart also counted William Hutson (1720–1761) among his Presbyterian friends. While a stage player in New York in 1740, Hutson, like Hart, was converted under Whitefield. Hutson went on to teach in a slave school on the estate of Hugh Bryan,[54] followed by a brief stint at Whitefield's Bethesda Orphan House, before accepting the pastoral charge of Stoney Creek Independent Presbyterian Church. Hutson provided evangelical leadership at Stoney Creek until 1756, when he moved to the Independent Presbyterian Church in Charleston as co-pastor. As at Stoney Creek, Hutson actively promoted revival during his five-year ministry in Charleston. One of his most successful endeavors was the publication of his deceased wife's letters and diaries under the title *Living Christianly, Delineated* (1760).[55] The work, which also included Hugh Bryan's memoirs, gained wide acceptance in the international evangelical community.[56]

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[52] Oliver Hart, *The Character of a Truly Great Man Delineated, and His Death Deplored as a Public Loss: A Funeral Sermon, Occasioned by the Death of the Rev. William Tennent, A.M.* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1777).

[53] Hart, *Truly Great Man*, 4.

[54] Bryan (1689–1753), a follower of Whitefield, gained notoriety for his revival work among the slaves, failed prophecies regarding slave liberation, and generally bizarre behavior. See Harvey H. Jackson, "Hugh Bryan and the Evangelical Movement in Colonial South Carolina," *William and Mary Quarterly* 43, no. 4 (1986): 594–614.

[55] William Hutson, *Living Christianity, delineated, in the Diaries and Letters of two Eminently pious Persons, lately deceased; vis. Mr. Hugh Bryan, and Mrs. Mary Hutson, Both of South Carolina. With a Preface by the Reverend Mr. John Conder, and the Reverend Mr. Thomas Gibbons* (London: J. Buckland, 1760).

[56] See George Howe, *History of the Presbyterian Church in South Carolina* (Columbia: Duffie & Chapman, 1870), 1:240–250; Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, 165–66.

It is not surprising that Hart reported being "much refreshed" by Hutson's visits, deliberately echoing the Apostle Paul's language of his own friendships.[57] Hart invited Hutson to preach from his pulpit on several occasions. Hart also travelled to support Hutson as he stood against their common enemy of Charleston vice. Hutson preached "a plain excellent discourse" from Matthew 22:5, the former actor, now walking in evangelical holiness, "bore his testimony also against stage plays." Though the sermon stirred Hart, he reported that Hutson's other listeners "made light of it."[58]

Hart and Hutson shared a friendship with John Joachim Zubly, pastor of Wappetaw, and then the Savannah Independent Presbyterian churches from 1748–1781. Zubly later gained infamy for switching to the Loyalist position during the Revolution, but Hart valued him as a trusted gospel partner in Charleston.[59] In August of 1754, Hart spent a week at Zubly's home "very agreeably," and commented, "Oh how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell in unity!"[60] The next month, Zubly returned the favor, staying with Hart and preaching several times, as "the Lord owned it for comfort to many souls."[61] Zubly returned again the next month, proclaiming Christ from the Prodigal Son parable, and bearing "a faithful and excellent testimony against the stage plays."[62] When Hart's congregation experienced revival that fall, Zubly helped Hart to discern it as a true work of God.[63] Despite differences in ecclesiology, the mutual concern for conversion, revival, and practical holiness united Hart with many evangelical Presbyterians.

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[57] Hart, diary, October 16, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman. For the Pauline theme of "spiritual refreshment" through friendships, see Rom 15:32; 1 Cor 16:17–18; 2 Cor 7:13; Philemon 7, 20.

[58] Hart, diary, October 18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[59] See Randall M. Miller, *"A Warm & Zealous Spirit": John J. Zubly and the American Revolution: A Selection of his Writings* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1982).

[60] Hart, diary, August 17, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[61] Hart, diary September 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[62] Hart, diary October 17–18, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[63] Hart, diary, August 30, 1764, Hart MSS, Furman. See chap. 4.

Hart and the Methodists

In the fall of 1769, as Whitefield was preparing for his final journey to America, John Wesley's Methodists were also making plans to send their first missionaries. In the Conference at Leeds on August 3, 1769, Wesley announced that two of their number, Richard Boardman (1738–1782) and Joseph Pilmoor (1739–1825), would soon depart for the colonies, and he took up a collection for them as "a token of brotherly love." Whitefield, still in London, sent for the two young men. "As he had long been in America, he knew what directions to give us, and treated us with all the kindness and tenderness of a father in Christ," Pilmoor wrote. "Difference of sentiment made no difference in love and affection."[64] After Whitefield "prayed heartily for us," the two men sailed for America on August 21, 1769, believing "we had full power, according to the New Testament, to preach the everlasting gospel and do all possible good to mankind."[65]

Pilmoor eventually journeyed south, arriving in Charleston after a "very rugged" passage on January 19, 1772. He received a dismal first impression when he inquired about family prayers in the house where he lodged. Pilmoor's host informed him that the practice "might not be agreeable" to "the mixed multitude" in his house, because "family prayer is very uncommon in Charleston."[66] Taking his leave of these "sons of Belial," Pilmoor struck out for the General Baptist meetinghouse. Knowing they would share his Arminian theology, Pilmoor offered to preach. They agreed, and the next day Pilmoor delivered his first sermon in Charleston. The crowd was small on short notice, but "two ministers were present all the time, and behaved very well." One was Oliver Hart. Pilmoor recorded that "the Baptist minister, Mr. Hart, returned me thanks for my sermon and invited me to preach in his pulpit." Hart's invitation encouraged Pilmoor that

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[64] Albert Micajah Shipp, *The History of Methodism in South Carolina* (Nashville: Southern Methodist Publishing House, 1834), 123.

[65] Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 124.

[66] Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 127.

God had work prepared for him to do in the city. After preaching to the General Baptists the following Sunday morning, he travelled to Hart's meetinghouse. Pilmoor stuck with standard evangelical subjects: the salvation of God from Psalm 18 in the afternoon, and the unity of the regenerate from Romans 8:14, "As many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God." Pilmoor reported that the Baptist meetinghouse was "as full as it could hold," and that "the Lord was remarkably present."[67] He preached several more times from Hart's pulpit before leaving Charleston, and even stayed in the home of a Baptist church member.

Given Hart's commitment to Calvinism, his open acceptance of the Arminian Pilmoor into his pulpit is striking. Their partnership was possible for the same reason that both Wesley and Whitefield could send Pilmoor out with their full blessing: they all viewed themselves as part of the same international, transdenominational, evangelical revival movement. Pilmoor preached the gospel, called for conversions, and prayed for revival, just as Hart did. After addressing Hart's congregation on "the law as a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ," Pilmoor commented, "I am not so much satisfied with preaching the Law, as I am with the gospel; but it is necessary, and therefore I must submit for the good of mankind and glory of God." Hart could have made the same statement, and for this he received the young Methodist warmly. Pilmoor, in turn, left Charleston remembering Hart as "not only sensible, but truly evangelical, and very devout."[68]

Hart and the Anglicans

Anglicanism historically represented the furthest stretch for a Baptist's evangelical ecumenism. English Baptist John Gill articulated the reasons for this in his

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[67] Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 128–29.

[68] Pilmoor's diary during this period is reproduced in Shipp, *History of Methodism*, 128–34.

1751 tract *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England*.[69] Gill recognized that dissenters from the Church of England were "frequently charged with schism, and their separation is represented as unreasonable, and they are accounted an obstinate and contentious people." Gill composed this 16-page pamphlet to explain that their nonconformity "does not arise from a spirit of singularity and contention, but is really a matter of conscience with them."[70] Gill then produced eleven reasons why Dissenters could not, in good conscious, commune with the established church: its man-made constitution, its national rather than congregational form and order, its unregenerate membership, its corrupt and unbiblical doctrines, its wrongly-administered ordinances, its creation of unbiblical ecclesiastical offices, its recognition of the King as head of the church, its pagan and Judaistic rites and ceremonies, its imposition of the Book of Common Prayer, and finally its "persecuting spirit" against all dissenters. Gill's clear and concise presentation left no doubt that disagreements between Baptists and Anglicans were numerous and significant. Indeed, Gill did not hesitate to announce, "we cannot think such a church is a true church of Christ."[71] *Dissenters' Reasons* resonated with nonconformists of all stripes, seeing multiple editions in Gill's own lifetime. Baptists in Virginia, for instance, knew firsthand the "persecuting spirit" of established Anglicanism, as David Thomas's *The Virginian Baptist* (1774) clearly demonstrates.[72]

Hart's experience with Anglicans in South Carolina was quite different. Despite doctrinal disagreement and the historic enmity between the two traditions, Hart

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[69] John Gill, *The Dissenters' Reasons for Separating from the Church of England. Which were published at the end of Dr. Gill's Answer to a Welch Clergyman, and Occasioned by the said writer*, 4th ed. (London: 1760).

[70] Gill, *Dissenters' Reasons*, 3.

[71] Gill, *Dissenters' Reasons*, 14.

[72] David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist, or A View and Defence of the Christian Religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774). See also Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 244–52; Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740–1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press), 161–77.

was happy to work with clergymen who shared his evangelical commitments. This stemmed from his relationship with the Anglican Whitefield, but extended to men like Richard Clarke, who served St. Philip's from 1753–1759. Clarke strongly supported the revival, developing a reputation for an earnest ministry and ecumenical spirit. In later years, Clarke gained notoriety for his apocalyptic predictions. Governor William Henry Lyttleton reported that "in the month of February last the Reverend Mr. Clarke . . . preached some sermons in which he asserted that the world would very soon be at an end, and that in this month of September some great calamity would befall this province." In time, Clarke's behavior grew more eccentric. "At length this enthusiasm rose to such a height that he let his beard grow and ran about the streets crying, Repent, Repent, for the Kingdom of Heaven is at hand, but on the 25th he resigned his Benefice and embarked for England," Lyttleton wrote. [73] Clarke published several prophecies, seizing evangelical attention internationally.[74] He maintained a wide following for several years after leaving South Carolina, though he apparently ended his life impoverished and espousing universalism. [75]

Whatever Hart made of Clarke's prophetic ministry, he loved Clarke's evangelical fervor during the Charleston years, and enjoyed a most cordial relationship with him. "Waited, this afternoon, on the Rev. Mr. Clark, Rector of this place, who received me with all possible expressions of kindness; and after we had spent some time

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[73] William Henry Lyttleton to Board of Trade, September 1, 1759, British Public Record Office, Transcripts of records relating to South Caorlina, 1663–1782, South Carolina Department of Archives and History, Columbia, 28:213, cited in Little, *Southern Evangelicalism*, 148.

[74] These writings include Richard Clarke, *The Prophetic Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated: In Order to Show the Time, when the day of Judgment for the First Age of the Gospel, is to be Expected: and the Setting Up the Millennial Kingdom of Jehovah and His Christ*, 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: William Bradford, 1759); Richard Clarke, *A Second Warning to the World, by the Spirit of Prophecy. In an Explanation of the Mysteries in the Feast of Trumpets on the First Day of the Seventh Month* . . . (London: J. Townsend, 1760); and Richard Clarke, *A Spiritual Voice to the Christian Church, and to the Jews; In an Explanation of the Sabbatical Year of Moses by the Gospel of Jesus Christ* . . . (London: J. Townsend, 1760).

[75] See Dalcho, *Protestant Episcopal Church*, 183.

agreeably together, he took me in his chair to a funeral," Hart wrote. "I am heartily pleased to see the catholic spirit of which this man is possess'd; and I hope, and believe, he will be a blessing to this town."[76] For the rector of St. Philip's to invite the Baptist minister to ride in his carriage was evidence enough of a catholic spirit, but Clarke later outdid this gesture by inviting Hart to conduct a funeral at the church cemetery in his place. This, to Hart, "discovered an extraordinary catholic spirit." [77]

The wide variety of personal friendships Hart maintained across the denominational spectrum testifies that the same "extraordinary catholic spirit" resided in him. By focusing on a mutual commitment to the gospel message and a shared experience of evangelical piety, Hart was able to establish effective gospel partnerships with Christians of sometimes vastly different doctrinal convictions. Hart's catholicity provides another clear signal of the revival's deep influence on the Regular Baptists. As David Bebbington has written, Hart's life demonstrates that the "experience of the revival brought Baptists closer to other Christian traditions. Evangelicals were sure that what united them, the gospel of salvation, was far more important than what divided them."[78]

Oliver Hart's Regular Baptist Convictions

In light of Whitefield's obvious influence on Hart's catholicity, Kidd has called Hart "less a precisionist Baptist than a revivalist and moral reformer."[79] Yet Hart's Baptist convictions should not be undersold. While Regular Baptists like Hart clearly affirmed their solidarity with other evangelicals, they also remained passionate about

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[76] Hart, diary, September 23, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[77] Hart, diary, October 27, 1754, Hart MSS, Furman.

[78] David W. Bebbington, *Baptists Through the Centuries: A History of a Global People* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2010), 80–81. Bebbington explicitly identifies Hart as an example of the "interdenominational cooperation" which became common among the Baptists as a result of the awakening.

[79] Kidd, *Great Awakening*, 257.

biblical church order. This is evidenced by the Charleston Baptist Association's adoption of *A Summary of Church Discipline* (1774), which Hart and Francis Pelot had prepared for use in the churches.[80] The Charleston Confession affirmed that "the catholick or universal church, which (with respect to the internal work of the Spirit and truth of grace) may be called invisible" included "the whole number of the elect that have been, are, or shall be gathered into One, under Christ."[81] Yet Hart also declared that membership in a "particular gospel church" was vital to Christian spirituality: "A particular gospel church consists of a company of saints, incorporated by a special covenant into one distinct body and meeting together in one place for the enjoyment of fellowship with each other and with Christ their Head in all his institutions to their mutual edification and the glory of God through the Spirit," he wrote.[82] With other Regular Baptists, Hart continued to care deeply about the life of the local church, rightly ordered according to the Bible. He was especially concerned with the issues of baptism and church membership. While he ever remained a "friend of Zion" in the broadest sense, he also maintained an unflagging "zeal for the honor of the Baptist interest."[83]

"Agreeable to the Ancient Practice"

The ordinance of baptism was "the defining rite of the Baptist religion," and represented the most obvious point of difference between the Regular Baptists and their evangelical friends.[84] Unlike virtually all other participants in the revival, Baptists

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[80] *A Confession of Faith, Put Forth by the Elders and Brethren of Many Congregations of Christians (Baptized upon Profession of their Faith) in London and the Country. Adopted by the Baptist Association in Charlestown, South-Carolina. To which is annexed, A Summary of Church Discipline* (Charleston: David Bruce, 1774).

[81] *A Confession of Faith*, 71.

[82] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 2.

[83] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

[84] On the significance of immersion for defining Baptist community, see Janet Moore Lindman, *Bodies of Belief: Baptist Community in Early America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), 75–80.

rejected the sprinkling of infants as a sign of covenant membership, insisting instead that baptism according to the Biblical command was "by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[85] Other church traditions looked on immersion as a radical and even offensive practice. One gets a sense of how immersion was perceived in *The Virginian Baptist*, in which David Thomas voiced the objections he frequently heard to immersion:

> [D]ecency one might think, would constrain you to administer that ordinance, in a more agreeable and becoming manner than you do. What need dipping of people? Is not a drop or two of water as good as the whole ocean? And is not pouring or sprinkling much better modes of baptism, than plunging; especially in such a freezing cold country as this is? Why then are you so bigotted to such an obsolete, unfashionable, odious ceremony, as to differ with all the rest of the Christian world about it? It is your obstinate attachment to this ridiculous manner of baptizing your converts, that chiefly serves to render your sect odious, so contemptible in the eyes of every other denomination that practices water baptism at all. There is no peculiar mode essential to the ordinance, therefore one will answer as well as another, and it is very impudent not to choose that which is the easiest, the latest and of greatest reputation. How vain must you then be to persist in your odd way! When there are so many learned remonstrances made against it; since it exposes you to universal derision and makes your very name a laughing stock; surely it would be your wisest course to alter it immediately and bear the reproach of so needless a deviation from the common custom of Christians no longer.[86]

Thomas, Hart, and the Regular Baptists were unmoved by the scoffs of outsiders. For them, only the immersion of a confessing believer conformed to Scripture's pattern of baptism and communicated the rich symbolism "of our fellowship with Christ, in his death, burial, and resurrection—of the remission of our sins, and of our resurrection from the death of sin to new and holy life."[87] Hart rejoiced with Furman over the significance of the baptisms of his wife and daughter: "But when you had the happiness of leading a wife and a daughter into the water and burying them with Christ in

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[85] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17.

[86] Thomas, *Virginian Baptist,* 50.

[87] Oliver Hart, *An Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple, shewing the business of officers and private members in the church of Christ, and how their work should be performed; with some motives to excite professors ardently to engage in it* (Philadelphia: Aitken, 1785), 16.

baptism; and having thus symbolically washed away their sins, of receiving them into Christ's sheepfold, methinks your soul was in raptures."[88]

Hart did not shrink from persuading non-Baptists of his position; at least he tried. After fleeing Charleston in 1780, Hart preached for several weeks to the people of Stoney River Presbyterian Church. One night, Captain John Stephenson, a member of the church, came to Hart and announced that he was "convinced of the invalidity of infant sprinkling and the validity of believer's baptism, to which he desired to submit." Hart examined Stephenson, who satisfied Hart with his "gracious experience and knowledge of gospel doctrines."[89] A few weeks later, Hart gathered "a large congregation" for a service "under the shade of trees, near the banks of N. River." Though all were "professed Presbyterians," Hart preached for half an hour from Mark 16:16, "from which first I endeavoured to prove that believers are the only proper subjects of baptism, and that dipping is the mode of administration." He confessed that "How the people felt I don't know," though they all "behaved decently, and heard with much attention." After the sermon, Hart stepped down into the river. There, "in the face of the whole congregation, I baptized Capt. John Stephenson, a man of good character, and member of the Presbyterian Church." The pedobaptist crowd was fascinated by the ritual. Stephenson was "the first person ever baptized in these parts or in this river, hope numbers may follow the example, though a new and strange thing to almost all who saw it. Never did I see people behave with more decorum." Afterward Hart added, "I hope he will not disgrace the Baptists by embracing their principles. "[90]

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[88] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 26, 1793, Hart MSS, Furman.

[89] Oliver Hart, diary, July 14, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

[90] Oliver Hart, diary, August 3, 1780, Hart MSS, SCL.

"Though We Walk not Together"

Hart's convictions regarding baptism carried significant implications for church membership. As Hart noted in the *Summary of Church Discipline*, all who are received into church communion "ought to be truly baptized in water, i.e. by immersion, upon a profession of their faith, agreeable to the ancient practice of John the Baptist and the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ."[91] Requiring baptism before membership and communion at the Lord's table was not unique to Baptists; it was a fact "allowed by all," Baptist and pedobaptist alike. Baptists simply did not recognize pedobaptists to have been "truly baptized in water," and were convinced that "there is not one instance in the Word of God of any being admitted without it."[92] Thus, while Hart felt free to invite the Methodist Joseph Pilmoor or the Presbyterian John Zubly to preach in his pulpit, he could not admit them to church membership or to the Lord's table.

This position did not square with the ecumenical ethos of the revival, and Whitefield regularly confronted his Baptist friends over their "narrowness" in regard to the Lord's table. He pleaded with Jenkin Jones, "Oh admit of a *mixed communion*. I think the glory of God requires this at your hands. May the Lord give you a right understanding in all things."[93] Whitefield likely referred to a previous conversation with Jones. The Philadelphia Association would, in fact, speak to this issue at their meeting just months later. Prompted by the catholic spirit of the awakening, the Cohansie Baptist Church inquired if a pious Pedo-baptist may be admitted to communion without baptism, and, furthermore, "doth not refusing admittance to such an one, discover want of charity in a church so refusing?" The association unanimously answered in the negative.[94]

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[91] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17.

[92] *Summary of Church Discipline*, 17. Hart and Pelot cited Acts 2:41; 8:12; 16:15; 18:8; 19:5; Rom 6:3–4; Gal 3:27; and Col 2:12 as establishing the biblical pattern of baptism preceding church membership.

[93] George Whitefield to Jenkin Jones, May 12, 1740, in *Works*, 1:175.

[94] A. D. Gillette, ed., *Minutes of the Philadelphia Baptist Association, from 1707 to 1807* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1851), 42–43. The association cited three reasons for

The discussion was not new in Baptist life, as Whitefield pointed out in a 1767 preface to the *Works of John Bunyan*. Bunyan, beloved by all evangelicals for his *Pilgrim's Progress*, had served as a Baptist pastor in Bedford, England, in the late seventeenth century. He invited controversy in 1672 by publishing *A Confession of my Faith, and A Reason of my Practice; or With who and who not, I can hold church-fellowship, or the communion of saints*. He announced that while he dared not fellowship with the openly profane, he would "with those that are visible saints by calling: with those that, by the word of the gospel, have been brought over to faith and holiness."[95] In classic Pietist fashion, Bunyan prioritized the invisible church of all the regenerate over any visible church form. Differences over water baptism should not bar God's children from communion in the local church, for "the edification of souls in the faith and holiness of the gospel, is of greater concernment, than an agreement in outward things."[96] When Christians differed over baptism, Bunyan advised, "love them still, forgive them, bear with them, and maintain church communion with them. Why? Because they are new creatures, because they are Christ's: for this swallows up all distinctions."[97] Bunyan even accused those who made baptism grounds for separation in church communion of being "carnal," "babyish Christians."[98] Several Particular Baptist ministers immediately "fell with might and main" upon Bunyan. Unmoved, he responded with *Differences in Judgment About Water Baptism No Bar to Communion*,[99] and *Peaceable Principles and*

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this ruling: first, they found in the commission of Christ no unbaptized persons admitted to communion (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 12:13); second, it is the church's duty to maintain the ordinances as delivered in Scripture (2 Thess 2:15; 1 Cor 11:2; Isa 8:20); and third, "because we cannot see it agreeable, in any respect, for the procuring that unity, unfeigned love, and undisturbed peace, which is required, and ought to be in and among Christian communities (1 Cor 1:10; Eph 4:3)."

[95]John Bunyan, *Works*, ed. George Offor (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth, 1991), 2:604.

[96] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:611.

[97] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:612.

[98] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:613.

[99] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:616–47.

True.[100] He maintained that "baptism with water, is neither a bar nor bolt to communion of saints, nor a door nor inlet to communion of saints."[101] He prayed, "God, banish bitterness out of the churches and pardon them that are the maintainers of schisms and divisions among the godly."[102]

Whitefield, of course, commended Bunyan for his "catholic spirit":

> But this, I must own, more particularly endears Mr. Bunyan to my heart; he was of a catholic spirit, the want of water adult baptism with this man of God, was no bar to outward Christian communion. And I am persuaded that if, like him, we were more deeply and experimentally baptized in to the benign and gracious influences of the blessed Spirit, we should be less baptized into the waters of strife, about circumstances and non-essentials. For being thereby rooted and grounded in the love of God, we should necessarily be constrained to think, and let think, bear with and forbear one another in love; and without saying "I am of Paul, Apollos, or Cephas," have but one grand, laudable, disinterested strife, namely who should live, preach and exalt the ever-loving, altogether lovely Jesus most.[103]

Hart celebrated the unity of the universal church, but did not believe Scripture permitted him to adopt Bunyan's and Whitefield's more liberal standards of local church communion. In 1782, Hart and the rest of the Philadelphia Association responded to the question, "what measures ought to be taken with a sister church who holds and actually admits unbaptized persons to the Lord's Supper?" Again, their response was unequivocal: "We observe, that such a church may and ought in the first instance, to be written to by a sister church, exhorting them to desist from such a practice, and to keep the ordinances as they were delivered to them in the word of God."[104]

Hart addressed this issue at length in a 1790 letter to Richard Furman. [105] The Charleston Association, now led by Furman, had recently approved the admittance of

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[100] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:648–57.

[101] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:656.

[102] Bunyan, *Works*, 2:657.

[103] Whitefield, *Works*, 4:307–8.

[104] Gillette, *Philadelphia Baptist Association*, 200.

[105] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

their Baptist church members into membership in a pedobaptist congregation. From his home in Hopewell, New Jersey, Hart vigorously objected to this decision. He noted that both Baptists and pedobaptists agreed that baptism was "essential to church membership and communion." With this point established, "it naturally follows that no society of Christians, however pious, can impose a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan, without baptism." From this Hart concluded that "it cannot be consistent with good order to dismiss our members to any church whatever which is so disorderly as to set aside an ordinance, which Christ in his gospel holds as essentially necessary to church communion and fellowship." Hart believed that pedobaptists were consistent in their position, and that Baptists should be, too. Pedobaptists would "never do" what the Association had suggested, and dismiss their members into communion with a Baptist church, for this would legitimize believer's baptism, which "would end to bring down their infant-sprinkling." In the same way, Hart argued, the Association's approval of its members joining pedobaptist churches comprised "a tacit acknowledgement that infant sprinkling is equally valid with believer's baptism," and opened the door for its members to "slide into the bosom of pedobaptist churches." He closed his case by emphatically stating that "there need be no dismissing of members to churches with whom we are not in communion; for we ought to hold communion with all 'true Christian churches.'"

Hart realized that his strong ecclesiological statements did not savor of the "catholic spirit" he exhibited on so many other occasions. Yet in matters of church order, Hart did not intend to be sectarian, simply obedient to Christ's commands:

> I hope nothing that I have said will be construed into bigotry, or the want of Christian regard to pedobaptists. I think the whole tenor of my conduct acquits me from such a charge. I sincerely declare, that I esteem a number of pedobaptists as Christians, in preference to many Baptists, and could freely commune with them at the Lord's Table, if my Master did not forbid by making Baptism an *essential* prerequisite to church membership; and we are to walk by this. With regard to our

> pedobaptist brethren I wish them well and forbid them not, though they walk not with us.[106]

Hart's letter to Furman supplies valuable insight into the ecumenical tensions Regular Baptists experienced in the wake of the revival. Evangelical piety provided sufficient grounds for cooperation in preaching the gospel and spreading the revival. Yet sincere piety did not set aside the clear biblical directives regarding "a regular orderly church, upon a gospel plan." Regular Baptists held church order to be far more significant than did Whitefield or Bunyan. On the other side of the new birth, both Baptists and pedobaptists must walk in obedience to Christ as best they both knew how, even if they did not walk together.

"Associating with the Humble Baptists"

Though Hart enjoyed a wide acceptance in Charleston society, he still understood that a stigma was attached to being Baptist. He wrote to Furman, "I wish for the interest of the religion we profess, we may all grow in grace, knowledge, and understanding, that the Baptists may be distinguished by something superior to folly and meanness."[107] Though this negative perception was more pronounced in Virginia, Baptists everywhere occupied a lower rung on the social ladder.[108] This is clearly seen in the journals of Charles Woodmason (1720?–1789).[109] Woodmason migrated from England to South Carolina around 1752, where he pursued variously the careers of merchant, planter, storekeeper, and civil magistrate for over a decade. Hart would have known of Woodmason during thus period, for he enjoyed great popularity in Charleston:

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[106] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman. Emphasis original.

[107] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

[108] See Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 161–71; David Thomas, *The Virginian Baptist: or A View and defence of the Christian religion, as it is professed by the Baptists of Virginia* (Baltimore: Enoch Story, 1774).

[109] See Richard J. Hooker, "Introduction," in Charles Woodmason, *The Carolina Backcountry on the Eve of the Revolution*, ed. Richard J. Hooker (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1953), xi–xxxix.

"I was greatly caressed, and ev'ry one's favriter," he remarked.[110] In 1766, Woodmason took ordination vows in the Anglican Church and accepted an itinerant mission to the Carolina backcountry. During this mission, Woodmason regularly skewered the "New Light Baptists" in his journal, including both Separates like Philip Mulkey and Regulars like Joseph Reese. He condemned Baptists for revival enthusiasm: "They set about effecting in an instant, what requires both labour and time—they apply to the passions, not the understanding of the people."[111] He also accused them of hypocrisy and immorality: "does your assembling together to see a few worthless wretches dipp'd in water, and viewing their nakedness (which some have purposely expos'd to your view) tend to edification?" he asked his congregation.[112] The Baptists did not help the relationship. Among other abuses he suffered, Woodmason reported, "The people took up two others for entering the house where I was when in bed—stealing my gown—putting it on—and then visiting a woman in bed, and getting to bed to her, and making her give out next day, that the Parson came to bed to her—this was a scheme laid by the Baptists—and man and woman prepared for the purpose."[113] Still, Woodmason did not condemn all Baptists equally. "I know, and greatly respect, many worthy persons among them and I wish that there were many more such," he admitted; "it is very plain that the errors of some of our neighbors do not so much proceed from a bad heart (as is the case with another sect) as from a wrong head . . ."[114]

Hart appears to be one of the wrongheaded Baptists Woodmason tolerated, for he records delivering a parcel of letters and books to "the Reverend Mr. Hart" in

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[110] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 193.

[111] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 117.

[112] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 117.

[113] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 45.

[114] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 117.

Charleston on September 7, 1766.[115] Nevertheless, Hart happily identified himself with the frontier Baptists Woodmason despised, and accepted the scorn that came along with it. He remembered his hero, Whitefield, scoffing at immersion. "The great and good Mr. Whitfield exclaim'd—"These Anabaptists are stealing sheep, they wash my sheep and they fleece my sheep,'" Whitefield clearly intending "'washing'" as "a term of aspersion."[116] On one occasion, Hart mentioned a young woman whom he feared was "perhaps raised too high to associate with the humble Baptists." In reflecting on the young lady's hesitancy, he remembered a similar case from his past experience: a lady who became convinced of Baptist principles, yet remained unwilling to hold communion with the Baptists. She "wished me to baptize her, that she might join the Church of England. I could not find a freedom to do it," Hart recalled. "It is a pity that grandeur should have so much influence on the minds of those who would be deem'd followers of that humble Jesus, who had nowhere to lay his head."[117]

Conclusion

Oliver Hart's evangelical catholicity provides further evidence of his participation in the Great Awakening. Richard Furman remembered him fittingly as "a consistent, liberal Baptist."[118] Hart was indeed a "consistent Baptist," thoroughly convinced of his ecclesiological position from Scripture, unwilling to compromise at the level of local church practice, and eager to promote the *Charleston Confession* and the *Summary of Church Discipline* throughout the South. At the same time, Hart demonstrated a "liberal" love toward believers from other traditions who affirmed the evangelical truths he believed comprised the core of the Christian faith. Perhaps the best

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[115] Woodmason, *Carolina Backcountry*, 6.

[116] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, March 2, 1790, Hart MSS, Furman.

[117] Oliver Hart to Richard Furman, November 9, 1791, Hart MSS, Furman.

[118] Furman, *Rewards of Grace*, 24.

analysis of Hart's catholicity comes from his own pen. In his funeral sermon for William Tennent III, he praised his Presbyterian friend for his principled ecumenism, revealing much about his own position:

> It may not be amiss to observe, that his religious sentiments were open, free and generous, built upon principles of true catholocism [sic]; not influenced by bigotry or party spirit. He thought that religion should be left entirely free, and that there should be no manner of constraint upon the conscience. He was of opinion, that there was a wise providence in permitting people to think differently about modes of worship, and therefore valued good men of every denomination.[119]

[119] Hart, *Great Man*, 26.

CHAPTER 7

"MY SOUL LONGS FOR THE DOWNPOURING OF THE SPIRIT": REVIVAL LEGACY

On February 16, 1777, Oliver Hart composed a letter to Isaac Backus. For over twenty-five years, both had worked tirelessly for revival among the Baptist people: Backus in Middleborough, Massachusetts, and Hart in Charleston, South Carolina. Yet the two men, among the leading American Baptist figures of the eighteenth century, had never met. Hart was delighted that Backus had "opened the door" for correspondence by a recent note. He complimented Backus on several recent publications, and expressed interest in his forthcoming history of the Baptists in New England.[1] Eventually, Hart turned to the spiritual condition of his Charleston congregation:

> I have resided in this town, and had the pastoral charge of the Baptist church here, upwards of twenty seven years, in which time have seen many changes, and passed through many trials, personal and relative. The church at some times has flourished, at others declined. At present it is at a low ebb, and can hardly be looked upon in any other light than as a little sister among the daughters of Zion. My soul longs for the downpouring of the Spirit amongst us, that we may have an ingathering of many souls; for this, I crave your interest at the throne of grace.[2]

These lines exemplify the piety of the Great Awakening, which Thomas Kidd has identified with "persistent desires for revival, widespread individual conversions, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit."[3] Indeed, from his conversion in 1740 until his death in 1795, Oliver Hart was a product, a practitioner, and a promoter of revival all of his days.

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[1] Backus published the first of his three-volume project in 1777 under the title *A Story of New England, with particular reference to the Denomination of Christians called Baptists* (Boston: Edward Draper, 1777).

[2] Oliver Hart, Letter to Isaac Backus, 16 Feb 1777, Gratz MSS, HSP.

[3] Thomas S. Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), xix.

The Regular Baptists of the colonial South are not remembered for their support of the Great Awakening. The meteoric rise of the Separate Baptist movement in the mid-1750s has overshadowed the contributions that the Regulars made to the revival. More generally, scholars have tended to neglect the influence of evangelical religion in colonial South Carolina altogether. By analyzing the spirituality of South Carolina Regular Baptist Oliver Hart, this dissertation has demonstrated that he shared the revival spirituality of the Great Awakening, and that revival played a greater role in Regular Baptist identity than is often suggested. This argument, introduced in chapter one, was advanced in the five subsequent chapters.

Chapter two related the biography of Oliver Hart, showing how his life and ministry were profoundly shaped by the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. As a young man in Pennsylvania, Hart was converted and called to ministry through the revival preaching of George Whitefield, the Tennent family, John Rowland, and Hart's pastor, Jenkin Jones. During Hart's most fruitful years of service in Charleston, South Carolina, Hart promoted the revival through his preaching, activism, and "catholic spirit." The Charleston Baptist Church experienced a significant revival under Hart at this time, in 1754. In the latter portion of his life, Hart labored and longed for revival to come to his congregation in Hopewell, New Jersey, and beyond.

Chapter three examined the revival piety that undergirded Hart's ministry and personal spirituality. As a Regular Baptist, Hart subscribed to the same evangelical Calvinism that fueled leading revivalists like Whitefield and Jonathan Edwards. Hart's commitment to the *Second London Confession* guarded his revival ministry against radical emotionalism, providing a biblical grid for interpreting Christian experience, yet fully allowing for the Holy Spirit's activity in conversion and sanctification. Further, Hart's use of the means of grace supplied him with spiritual practices that nurtured the fruit of personal and corporate revival.

Chapter four focused on the most intense personal experience of revival in

Hart's ministry, an awakening among the youth of the Charleston Baptist Church in 1754. An analysis of Hart's diary during this period proved that it belongs to the emerging genre of eighteenth-century "revival narrative," epitomized in Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative*. Six specific themes from Hart's diary were identified as paralleling Edwards's work: personal renewal, preaching for conversions, private meetings, personal testimonies, powerful affections, and protecting from deception. It was further noted that this Regular Baptist revival occurred before the arrival of the Separate Baptists in Sandy Creek, North Carolina.

Chapter five showed that Hart's was an essentially activist spirituality, another hallmark of the evangelical awakening. Far from the insular or lethargic piety that the Regular Baptists have often been accused of, Hart's Christian life revolved around vigorous, "useful" service to God. Hart's philosophy of Christian activism was examined from his sermon *A Humble Attempt to Repair the Christian Temple*. Then, four key areas of his activist legacy were considered: evangelism, gospel partnerships, education, and political activity.

Chapter six showed how catholicity, another defining characteristic of the Great Awakening, influenced Hart and a number of other Regular Baptists. Following Whitefield, Hart's emphasis on evangelical piety (especially the new birth, gospel holiness, and the desire for sinners to be converted by the Holy Spirit) allowed him to partner with Christians across the denominational spectrum to advance revival. Hart's friendships with evangelical Presbyterians, Methodists, and Anglicans were all noted. While Hart embraced the ecumenical impulse of the awakening to a great extent, it was also shown that he maintained a deep commitment to "the Baptist cause," especially in his stance on baptism, church membership, and his identification with the socially despised Baptists.

The findings of this study are significant on at least three levels. At the broadest level, the thesis confirms and advances current scholarly work on the pervasive

influence of the Great Awakening in colonial South Carolina and the lower South. For decades, American religious historians assumed that, compared to New England and the Middle Colonies, the South was little impacted by the evangelical revival until later in the eighteenth century. More recently, Thomas Kidd,[4] Thomas Little,[5] and Samuel Smith[6] have all shown the extensive influence of the revival in South Carolina from an early date. The present study contributes to this growing body of literature by demonstrating the revival spirituality of Regular Baptist pastor Oliver Hart of Charleston.

Second, this thesis exposes the weaknesses of a popular model of Southern Baptist identity. In the latter half of the twentieth century, William L. Lumpkin and Walter B. Shurden argued that the Separate Baptists were responsible for bringing the spiritual "ardor" of the Great Awakening to the Baptists of the South.[7] The Regular Baptists, according to their interpretation, stood aloof from the revival, chiefly concerned with "order." Their thesis has been widely received at all levels of Southern Baptist life. While important distinctions existed between the Regular and Separate Baptists, the "order-ardor" dichotomy is a misleading oversimplification.[8] Regular Baptists in the South in fact shared the spirituality of the evangelical revival, as has been amply proven in these pages from the life of Oliver Hart. In fact, earlier generations of Particular and Regular Baptists like William Screven, Isaac Chanler, and William Tilly, all practiced a vigorous, revival spirituality in South Carolina long before the Separate Baptists arrived in the mid-1750s, with Chanler, Tilly, and Hart all vocally supporting George Whitefield.

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[4] Kidd, *The Great Awakening*.

[5] Thomas J. Little, *Origins of Southern Evangelicalism: Religious Revivalism in the South Carolina Lowcountry, 1670–1760* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013).

[6] Samuel C. Smith, *A Cautious Enthusiasm: Mystical Piety and Evangelicalism in Colonial South Carolina* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013).

[7] William L. Lumpkin, *Baptist Foundations in the South: Tracing through the Separates the Influence of the Great Awakening, 1754–1787* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1961), and Walter B. Shurden, "The Southern Baptist Synthesis: Is It Cracking?," *Baptist History and Heritage* 16 (April 1981): 2–11.

[8] These distinctions are explored in chap. 5, above.

Of Hart's Regular Baptist contemporaries, Francis Pelot, Edmund Botsford, and Joseph Reese also actively participated in the revival. Much research remains to be done on each of these Regular Baptist figures. The Lumpkin-Shurden thesis accurately observes some differences between Regular and Separate Baptists in their attitudes toward confessions, ministerial education, and worship style. Yet its overall portrayal of sharp discontinuity between the two groups is ultimately unhelpful, and should be discarded.

Finally, this dissertation presents the first comprehensive study of a major, but neglected American Baptist, Oliver Hart. Through his impressive record of promoting revival, organizing the South's first Baptist Association, establishing the nation's first Baptist theological education fund, advocating for home missions, helping unite Regular and Separate Baptists in the South, and working for religious liberty during the American Revolution, Hart is largely responsible for laying the foundations of Baptist life in the South. After surveying his life and ministry, it is difficult to escape the same conclusion of Loulie Latimer Owens from over fifty years ago: Southern Baptist have no more important pioneer than Oliver Hart.[9] It is appropriate to allow Hart the last word, with spiritual counsel that capture the Christ-centered piety of the Great Awakening:

> I trust your soul prospers in heavenly and divine things, and that you see much of the goodness of the Lord in the land of the Living. The Goodness and Mercy of God appears conspicuous in many instances, but especially in the Gift of his dear Son, for rebellious sinners. And what were we, my dear friend, that we should be made partakers of such great grace? In Christ we have a rich, an immensely rich portion. If Christ is ours, we have all we can wish; an inheritance which waxeth not old, and can never fade away. Clothed in his righteousness, and washed in his blood, we shall appear before God without spot or wrinkle or any such thing, This may reconcile us to all the little trials which fall to our lot in the present life, especially seeing even these, are working together for our good.[10]

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[9] Loulie Latimer Owens, *Oliver Hart, 1723–1795: A Biography* (Greenville, SC: South Carolina Baptist Historical Society, 1966), 1.

[10] Oliver Hart to Hannah Polhill, May 1764, Hart MSS, SCL.

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ABSTRACT

ORDER AND ARDOR: THE REVIVAL SPIRITUALITY OF
REGULAR BAPTIST OLIVER HART, 1723–1795

Eric Coleman Smith, Ph.D.
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This dissertation argues that Regular Baptist Oliver Hart shared the revival spirituality of the Great Awakening, and that revival played a greater role in Regular Baptist identity than is often suggested. Chapter 2 demonstrates that Hart's life and ministry were profoundly shaped by the evangelical revival of the eighteenth century. He was converted in revival as a young man, promoted revival at the height of his ministry in Charleston, South Carolina, and longed for revival in his latter years in Hopewell, New Jersey. Chapter 3 examines Hart's revival piety. The theology of the Christian life that undergirded his ministry was the evangelical Calvinism that united Christians from across denominational lines during the Great Awakening. Chapter 4 focuses on the most intense personal experience of revival in Hart's ministry, an awakening among the youth of the Charleston Baptist Church in 1754. An analysis of Hart's diary during this period proves that it belongs to the emerging genre of eighteenth century "revival narrative," epitomized in Jonathan Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative*. Chapter 5 shows that Hart's spirituality was marked by the evangelical activism of the Great Awakening, as illustrated by his efforts in evangelism, gospel partnerships, education, and politics. Chapter 6 demonstrates that Hart and a number of other Regular Baptists shared in the evangelical catholicity of the revival. While Hart embraced the ecumenical impulse of the awakening to promote revival, he also maintained deep Baptist convictions.

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