

A New Evangelicalism and Congregational Fractures

Reviewed by Lee Williams

Two-hundred and thirty-three years before Abraham Lincoln stood on that “great battlefield,” John Winthrop reminded his fellow colonists aboard the *Arbella* that they journeyed to establish a “city upon a hill,” and “the eyes of all people are upon us.” In New England, the governor believed, they would establish a colony united by godly living and government. Yet, instead of a model for the world, eighteenth-century Puritanism provided a rare example of a house divided. The Great Awakening, according to Douglas Winiarski, provided the “rock on which the ship of New England Congregationalism foundered.” (p. 373)

In fascinating vignettes drawn from church records, diaries, letters, and published ecclesiastical debate, Winiarski reconstructs a society experiencing the powerful, worldwide influences of a developing market economy, in which spiritual authority passed from the trained clergy to ordinary people. The “visible saints,” whose public professions of faith (later contained in written records called relations) heretofore granted them access to social respectability and upward mobility, saw their corporate religious experiment give way to individualism and conversion experiences, in which a “vibrant Congregational establishment was buried under an avalanche of innovative and incendiary religious beliefs and practices.” (p. 9) These “new” beliefs were experiential in nature, and not part of traditional Puritan theology, where a “godly walk” was the key to salvation and security. The process of “new birth,” introduced in “Whitefieldarian revivals” (p. 15) of the 1740s, “was quite unlike the more traditional seventeenth-century puritan morphology of conversion.” (p. 16)

Employing subtle echoes of David D. Hall’s *World of Wonders* (1990) combined with elements of Harry S. Stout’s *The Divine Dramatist* (1991), Winiarski recovers a world peopled by well-known clerics, but progressively modified by the desires of ordinary people in the pews. In the eighteenth-century wilderness of North America, a church defined by consensual community was swept aside by a new evangelicalism. This understanding is teased from the primary sources, which allow the author to “provide a baseline for assessing shifts of religious experience across a broad spectrum of the population.” (p. 529) Analyzing “over twelve hundred relations from more than forty Congregational churches over a period spanning two centuries” (p. 529) Winiarski documents the demise of Congregational

hegemony, where “perhaps as many as one hundred New England congregations fractured into competing factions between 1742 and 1760.” (p. 377)

The fracturing continued beyond this eight-year period, however, and is particularly relevant for my own community in Bennington, Vermont. In Part Five, “Travels,” Winiarski documents the itinerations of the Fay family of Westborough, Massachusetts. Family members John, James, and Steven, converted during the preaching tour of George Whitefield, helped lead an intrepid group of Separatists to the frontier of the New Hampshire Grants to escape the “Standing Order” of Congregationalism. (p. 386) Aided by others from the region of the revivals, the Old First Church was “gathered” on December 3, 1762, providing the new evangelicalism to three-quarters of the early settlers of this town. Ultimately, the newly gathered Bennington church would fall victim to the same splintering of Christianity aptly demonstrated by Winiarski’s research and writing.

Aside from the fascinating social implications of this work, the volume also provides a wealth of bibliographical information concerning primary source materials in New England archives. If for no other reason, Winiarski’s research provides a much-needed synthesis of disparate materials previously known only to well-trained experts. This work will certainly give rise to many further investigations, perhaps shedding increased light on the confluence of events leading to the explosive growth of Baptist, Methodist, and Episcopalian churches in this area. Winiarski’s research will shed little new light on Whitefield, Edwards, or even Davenport, but will provide myriad productive references for those seeking to understand those who left the Congregational churches of colonial New England in the eighteenth century.

Professor Winiarski serves as professor of religious studies and American studies at the University of Richmond, and has received numerous awards for this research. The monograph, containing hundreds of extensive footnotes drawn from secondary literature, journals, and primary sources, also contains an overview of major collections of relations of faith. Useful appendices allow the novice historian to read selected relations, providing a glimpse of a relatively unknown world for the non-scholar. The work is rounded out with an extensive and useful index, and is salted with charts and illustrations.

If there is any weakness in this exhaustive research, it is the dependence on percentage for all data analysis. One could wish for an occasional degree of significance. The work will appeal strongly to graduate students and those seeking to gain an insight into the complexities of New England Congregationalism in the eighteenth century. Historians of evangelical

Christianity will find the book interesting because it documents the revived growth of born-again conversion experiences, and the recurring theme of *sola scriptura* and priesthood of the believer, so characteristic of the popular Reformation and particularly the Anabaptist movement. Lastly, local historians throughout the New England area will benefit from the tantalizing references to separatist churches that constitute the earliest history of many communities. □

Darkness Falls on the Land of Light: Experiencing Religious Awakenings in Eighteenth-Century New England.
By Douglas L. Winiarski; Chapel Hill; University of North Carolina Press, 2017. 632 pages. \$49.95.

Red Scare in the Green Mountains

Vermont in the McCarthy Era 1946-1960

Reviewed by Tyler Resch

In the early 1950s Vermont figured prominently during the so-called Red Scare Era when Senator Joseph R. McCarthy of Wisconsin, abetted by some right-wing newspapers and commentators, local and national, held the nation in a state of fear and suspicion with demagogic accusations of treason. To be called a communist or even to emit the aura of “fellow traveler” was enough to ruin a career. The paranoia plague also caused many a suicide.

Echoing McCarthy, Vermont’s long-time congressman Charles Plumley even sought to persuade the legislature to censor books used in the state’s public schools; he failed but his efforts raised the level of cultural anxiety. The governor, Lee Emerson, overrode the findings of a University of Vermont committee to cause the unfair dismissal of a distinguished tenured botany professor with the Russian-sounding name of Alex Novikoff for his previous political activity.

Two Vermont newspapers vigorously fanned the flames of suspicion of anyone who professed non-orthodox thoughts or ideas, or who might be considered “pink,” in the parlance of the time. These papers were the *St. Albans Messenger* and the long-gone *Burlington Daily News*, both of which

