

THE FOURTH GREAT AWAKENING OR APOSTASY: IS AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM CYCLING UPWARDS OR SPIRALING DOWNWARDS?

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In his 1999 presidential speech to the Evangelical Theological Society, Professor Wayne Grudem, in an otherwise excellent address, suggested that evangelicalism has been evolving toward a more mature sense of the essentials of the faith over its history. University of Chicago Nobel laureate Robert W. Fogel argued for a similarly rosy picture of the trajectory of American evangelicalism in his recently published *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism*. Professor Fogel believes that beginning with the “First Great Awakening” evangelical Christianity has been on the vanguard of social renewal in America pushing forward the progress of “egalitarianism.” Professor Grudem gives us the view of someone very much on the inside while Fogel’s perspective is that of an outsider. Robert Fogel is a self-confessed secular Jew and a world-renowned empirical historian, a founder of the scientific economic history school known as cliometrics. As such, Professor Fogel’s work is a valuable source for diagnosing the moral health of America and the evangelicalism with it.

Fogel’s paradigm is drawn from what he believes are cycles of ethical challenges America has undergone provoked by technological innovations that create moral crises that, in turn, are resolved by evangelical awakenings.¹ In its own way this is another expression of “the Enlightenment faith in progress.”² In a Hegelian-like dialectic, egalitarian movements pose a thesis that has excesses that are corrected by an “antithesis”; the synthesis leaves us better off than before, but soon another “awakening” poses another thesis, and onward and upward we go. There may be lags between technological transformations and the human ability to cope with them in Fogel’s theory, but eventually, with the impetus of religious institutions, America adjusts to the new ethical complexities.

Fogel’s cycles begin with the “First Great Awakening.” In harmony with recent scholarship, Fogel believes the Awakening was crucial in developing

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¹ “There has been a recurring lag between the vast technological transformations and the human capacity to cope with them” (Robert W. Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000] 8). “Political realignments are set in motion by the gap between new technologies and the human capacity to cope with the ethical and practical complexities they entail” (p. 9).

² Benjamin Barber, *Jihad vs McWorld: How Globalism and Tribalism Are Reshaping the World* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1995) 6.

the sentiments and concepts that led to the American Revolution. New Lights, both close to the people and reflective of their values, had the most to do with preparing the ground for the Revolution.³ After the cultural influences of the Puritan awakening helped provoke the American Revolution, they regrouped, were joined by the Methodist invasion, and set off the "Second Great Awakening." The creation of the term "Second Great Awakening" in the nineteenth century created the impression of a repetition of something similar, which in turn lends itself to the idea of cycles. Whether there are cycles is one of the major questions in weighing the Fogel paradigm.

Fogel is in part breaking from and in part affirming his mentor Simon Kuznets. Kuznets, also a Nobel laureate in economics, described the modern economic epoch as instilling "secularism, egalitarianism, and nationalism."⁴ Fogel, a self-described secular product of the "Third Great Awakening," no longer believes that the Puritan ethic is evaporating under the hot sun of Western secularism. But he does seem to believe in secularization as demystification. The values that the Puritans inculcated in their followers on the basis of divine sanction became part of the national ethos. Fogel affirms Kuznets's link of the modern economy to egalitarianism, though in light of his findings on slavery Fogel would not argue that egalitarian progress was an inevitable fruit of modern economic growth. In his view, the "New Lights" made that possible. Hence the main catalyst for the growth of moral progress in America, according to the Fogel paradigm, has been the religious ethic found principally in the Puritans and inherited chiefly (though not solely) by today's evangelicals. The "Great Awakenings" in his view were uprisings of the Puritan conscience still deep in the American psyche.

TABLE 1. American Cycles in Religion and Their Political Impact:
The Fogel Paradigm*

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Religious revival</i>	<i>Rising political impact of the revival</i>	<i>Challenge to revival's political program</i>
First Great Awakening	<u>1730–1760</u> Weakening of predestination doctrine . . . ; rise of the ethic of benevolence	<u>1760–1790</u> Attack on British corruption; the American Revolution	<u>1790–1820</u> Breakup of Revolutionary coalition

³ Allen C. Guelzo emphasizes not the ways in which the Awakening prepared the political mentality of Americans for the Revolution, but the very substantial role the Awakening played in shaping the American evangelical mentality ("God's Designs," in *New Directions in American Religious History* [ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart; New York: Oxford University Press, 1997] 160).

⁴ Simon Kuznets, *Modern Economic Growth: Rate, Structure, and Spread* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1966) 12.

TABLE 1. (Continued)

Second Great Awakening	<u>1800–1840</u> Anyone can achieve saving grace through . . . struggle against sin; . . . upsurge of millennialism	<u>1840–1870</u> Abolitionist, temperance, and nativist move- ments; attack on corruption of South; Civil War; women’s suffrage	<u>1870–1920</u> Replacement of prewar evan- gelical leaders; Darwinian crisis; urban crisis
Third Great Awakening	<u>1890–1930</u> Shift from emphasis on personal to social sin; more secular interpretation of the Bible and creeds	<u>1930–1970</u> Attack on the corruption of big business and the rich; labor reforms; civil rights and women’s rights movements; expressions of enthusiastic religion	<u>1970–199?</u> Attack on liberal reforms; defeat of ERA; rise of tax revolt, Christian Coalition and other political and creeds
Fourth Great Awakening	<u>1960–?</u> Return to sensuous religion and . . . exper- iential content of the Bible; reassertion of personal sin	<u>1990–?</u> Attack on materialist cor- ruption; pro-life, reassertion of pro-family; media reform movements; expansion of tax revolt; attack on entitlements	<u>?</u>

* Robert W. Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening and the Future of Egalitarianism* 65. Condensed from original, used by permission. In Prof. Fogel’s original chart, the third column reads, in full, “Phase of increasing challenge to dominance of the revival’s political program.” For a fuller explanation of the paradigm, see Prof. Fogel’s book.

I. AWAKENINGS OR APOSTASIES?

But is this optimistic picture of evangelicalism accurate? In the following, I will attempt to sketch a proposal that, though Fogel’s paradigm is largely true for America generally, it obscures a more significant cycle of apostasies which have ravaged evangelicalism for over three hundred years. Rather than American evangelicalism growing from strength to strength through Awakenings, it has rather declined through four great apostasies. True,

these apostasies were met by something that could, arguably, be called an “awakening.” Yet in the wake of each apostasy and corresponding awakening, American evangelicalism was left weaker in itself and in its effect over the surrounding culture. This jeremiad-like paradigm has alarming implications for the trajectory of today’s evangelicalism.

For reasons that are beyond the scope of this essay, I believe that American evangelical history is best seen as having largely begun with Puritanism, centered in New England but also expressed in English (New Side) Presbyterianism and later the Baptists. Until the advent of Methodism, there were only small movements that were not Puritan and can arguably be cited as ancestors of today’s evangelicals.⁵

“Declension” is a vexed question in American religious history. That Puritanism declined is a historical fact. It is not now ruling over a pious New England. The second generation of Puritanism, led by the long-lived Increase Mather (1639–1723), saw what they believed to be “declension” and decried it, creating with their frequent sermons on the topic the new genre of “jeremiad.” However, much of this evidence is disregarded by historians as a mere preaching device—quite mistakenly, I believe. In addition, to call a process “declension” begs the question as to whose standards are being applied. Part of the reason some modern historians are reticent to point to declension in late American Puritanism may be because they prefer post-Puritan New England.⁶ However, it is the Puritans’ definition of declension that matters. To see declension from the Puritan point of view, we must remind ourselves of the stuff of which Puritanism was made. What set Puritanism apart and gave it its potency was something much more deep-seated than some of the relatively petty controversies which marked their initial struggles with mainstream Anglicanism—like the wearing of the surplice, the sign of the cross, kneeling at communion. In the sociologist Pitirim Sorokin’s terms, Puritanism was an ideational island in an increasingly synthetic and even sensate sea.

In their view, but our terms, the insufficiently reformed Church of England had evolved out of a theology of culture—a theology that takes its cues not from a transcendent authority, but from the desires of the human society in which it lives. The Puritans believed that the Kingdom of God is the pearl of great price.⁷ As such they were what H. Richard Niebuhr described as a “conversionist” culture. C. Stephen Mott claims that the Puritans were

⁵ Randall Balmer emphasizes the role of Pietism in evangelical history (*Blessed Assurance: A History of Evangelicalism in America* [Boston: Beacon Press, 1999]). Pietism and Puritanism are not unrelated or unsympathetic to each other. But given the fact that Puritanism actually founded two of the most influential colonies, that it dominated New England for over a century, that it produced arguably America’s greatest theologian (Jonathan Edwards) and an abundance of New Light missionaries to the South, etc., Puritanism deserves more attention as the father of American evangelicalism.

⁶ Harry Stout and Catherine Brekus, “Declension, Gender, and the ‘New Religious History,’” in *Belief and Behavior: Essays in the New Religious History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1991) 17.

⁷ “Societies are always involved in a more or less laborious effort to hold together in tolerable conflict the many efforts of many men in many groups to achieve and conserve many goods. . . . Among the many values the kingdom of God may be included—though scarcely as the one pearl of

the first group in history to believe that “one could intentionally and organizationally make changes in one’s community.”⁸

Niebuhr points to culture as “concerned with the *temporal and material realization of values*.”⁹ Hence culture incarnates a value system. For the Puritans, being ideationalists, Scripture, as they interpreted it according to their Calvinist covenant theology, was the final judge for interpreting meaning and creating values. Perry Miller was right, then, to call the Puritan colonies “Bible Commonwealths.” The Puritan wedding shows us the degree to which they were willing to push the Reformation doctrine of *sola Scriptura*. One would expect such a highly “religious” people to elevate the church wedding. But because it was Scripture, not the church *per se*, which was the voice of God—the ultimate concern for ideationalists—they took the church out of the wedding business. Failing to find either precedent or command for the church wedding in Scripture, they decided that weddings ought to be civil—but not secular—affairs. They gave the magistrate the power to perform them.¹⁰ For example, the magistrate John Winthrop, not the minister John Cotton, performed the wedding of John and Judith Hull in their house (not the church) on May 11, 1647.¹¹ This despite the fact that the Puritans inserted the church, the sermon particularly, into almost every public event: days of fasting, elections, and even executions. Puritan culture was, then, truly a culture of theology. So, we can spot declension in Puritan New England when other criteria than the Calvinist Bible began shaping their values. We need not wait for slumping church membership percentages or overt denials of the authority of the Bible. When, for example, New Englanders began preferring English culture, both intellectual and material, over their own Puritan heritage, we may take that as a sign of a change of values and thus a change of ultimate commitments. And, in fact, Harry S. Stout entitles a chapter covering this period “Anglicization.”¹² Such Anglicization was most dramatically illustrated by the defection of several sons of the Puritans at Yale to the Church of England, an incident that became known as “the Great Apostasy.”

For Puritans decline was from being integrated rather than fragmented, what missiologist Richard Bliese insists is the imperative for the Church in a globalized world: being enmeshed in the world.¹³ Decline would not simply be a failing of orthodoxy or piety but of the Church’s ability to shape the

great price” (Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* [New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1951] 38–39). But for the Puritans the kingdom of God was to be exactly that: the center of a monolithic culture.

⁸ Stephen Mott, *Biblical Ethics and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982) 194.

⁹ Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 36, original emphasis.

¹⁰ John Robinson argues that since the “holy scripture divinely inspired . . . does not where furnish or oblige the minister to this work” (*A Just and Necessary Apology of Certain Christians* [London, 1644] 37).

¹¹ John Hull, “Diaries of John Hull” (1857), in *Puritan Personal Writings: Diaries* (New York: AMS, 1982) 143.

¹² *The New England Soul* 127.

¹³ Richard Bliese, “Globalization,” in *Dictionary of Mission: Theology, History, Perspectives* (ed. Karl Müller, Theo Sundermeier, Stephen B. Bevans, and Richard Bliese; Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1997) 177.

morals and character of society at large. Religious zeal, narrowly defined, might even be as strong or stronger than ever. If, however, the church no longer engages the world, and particularly if the Puritan economic ethic is no longer guiding the marketplace, then, by Puritan standards, evangelicalism can be said to have declined.

II. THE FIRST GREAT APOSTASY

The most definite evidence of spiritual decline is the overwhelming testimony of those who were actually there. Eleazer Mather noted that "there is a sad declining in the spirit of the churches" and calls his own time (1676) "a backsliding time."¹⁴ A Synod of New England churches met in Boston in 1679. The solemn ministers were convinced that God had a controversy with New England. They resolved that beyond doubt the churches had declined and that the problems that had afflicted them lately, especially King Philip's War, were God's judgment for their decline.¹⁵ The jeremiad was created by those who thought the form was necessary. The title to a 1683 sermon speaks volumes: *A Plea for the Life of a Dying Religion*. Increase Mather prefaced the published version of that sermon with, "That [our founding] interest [in religion] has been for many years languishing and dying is the observation of all men that have their hearts exercised in discerning things of this nature."¹⁶ Cotton Mather frequently refers to what Puritan scholar Sidney Rooy called "the fact of declension." "I saw a fearful degeneracy."¹⁷ A minister's dying plea was to "look after . . . the dying power of godliness" in the churches, the "old spirit" was dying out with the "old saints," and the like.¹⁸ "Certainly the power of godliness is now grievously decayed among us."¹⁹

"God's Controversy with New England"

by Michael Wigglesworth

If these be they, how is it that I find
 In stead of holiness Carnality,
 In stead of heavenly frames an Earthly mind,
 For burning zeal luke-warm Indifferency,
 For flaming love, key-cold Dead-heartedness,
 For temperance (in meat, and drinke, and cloaths) excess?²⁰

¹⁴ *An Earnest Exhortation* (Cambridge, MA: S.G. and M.J., 1676) 25, 27.

¹⁵ See Increase Mather's *The Necessity of Reformation* (Boston, MA: John Foster, 1679). "That God has a controversy with New England people is undeniable" (p. 3).

¹⁶ Samuel Torrey, *A Plea for the Life of a Dying Religion* (Boston: Samuel Green, 1683); Increase Mather's quote, A2.

¹⁷ Cotton Mather, *The Great Works of Christ in America*, Vol. I (1701; Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1979) 249.

¹⁸ Respectively: *Magnalia Christi Americana* II, 138; II, 334; according to Rooy, *The Theology of Missions in the Puritan Tradition* (Delft, Netherlands: Meinema, 1965) 266.

¹⁹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (New York: Russel & Russell, 1967) 195.

²⁰ Michael Wigglesworth, "God's Controversy with New-England" (1662), in *The Puritans* (New York: American Book Company, 1938).

William Bradford

Love and fervent zeal do seem to sleep/
Security and the world on men do creep.²¹

Jonathan Edwards wrote that the Awakening occurred “after a long continued, and almost universal deadness.”²² Whitefield himself noted the results of decline. “Boston is a large, populous place and very wealthy. It has the form of religion kept up, but has lost most of its power.”²³ Isaac Backus, a late eighteenth-century Baptist leader in New England, explained that the practice of infant baptism combined with ever-loosening standards of church membership worked, over 120 years, to turn “the world into the church and the church into the world, in such a manner as to leave very little difference between them.”²⁴

But “decline” is relative. What to Increase Mather is a decrepit state of spirituality might strike later generations as remarkable piety. Puritan standards and aspirations were remarkably high; the movement had dominated New England for over a century and could not be expected to go quietly into the night. What is frequently termed “The First Great Awakening” was, in fact, a Puritan response to the declension of New England’s founding evangelical ideals. It was a Puritan revival. The decline in zeal had allowed other cultural competitors to gain ground. There was an early “crisis of cultural authority.” Who has authority, the enlightenment, traditionalism, or the experiential Calvinism of the Puritans?²⁵ Leaders, such as Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield, were drawn from the educated middle class on both sides of the Atlantic. Awakening leaders had not “been undone by cosmopolitanism or luxury, or infected by a demoralizing enlightenment.”²⁶ The Awakening was not an ethnic or merely geographically local protest but a cultural protest, a reassertion of Puritan values. The “First Great Awakening” was an uprising by Puritanism to stop the system of Anglicization from sweeping away their evangelical culture.

The problem for ministers like Jonathan Edwards was how to revive Puritan ideas, how to make them speak compellingly to the rapidly changing

²¹ Bradford, “A Descriptive and Historical Accounting of New England,” *Mass. Hist. Soc., Collections*, 1st Ser 3 (1694) 83; according to Darrett B. Rutman, *Winthrop’s Boston: A Portrait of a Puritan Town, 1630–1649* (New York: Norton and Company, 1965) 273. John Eliot: “We that have lived to bury most of the good old generation of professors do by experience see that our youth cannot fill the rooms of their fathers, and yet are such as are to be encouraged and received in the Lord” (according to Stephen Foster, “The Puritan Social Ethic: Class and Calling in the First Hundred Years of Settlement in New England” [Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1966] 180; from “Baxter-Eliot,” 165).

²² Jonathan Edwards, *The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1741) 125.

²³ Whitefield, “Journals,” in *The Great Awakening: Documents on the Revival of Religion, 1740–1745* (ed. Richard L. Bushman; Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1969) 31.

²⁴ Isaac Backus, *Church History of New England from 1602 to 1804* (Philadelphia: American Baptist Publication Society, 1853) 150–51.

²⁵ “All great social crises arise when old sources of authority are no longer able to resolve the social and individual tensions within a culture or community. . . .” (William McLoughlin, *New England Dissent, 1630–1833* 335).

²⁶ Richard Hofstadter, *America at 1750: A Social Portrait* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1971) 221.

culture of Anglo-America. These leaders were content with their Reformed and Puritan heritage. They sought re-presentation of it: how to package the old convictions in a way that would attract and impact the developing eighteenth-century society.²⁷

New England's Awakening, unlike that of the Wesleys, thrived on the preaching of Calvinism.²⁸ All the leading Awakening revivalists—Edwards, Whitefield, the Tennents and their “log college” disciples, most Separatists and Baptists—reasserted the “Calvinist” doctrines of divine sovereignty and human dependence. These doctrines, they believed, they had learned not so much from Calvin as Christ.²⁹ Hence, although there was a weakening of the doctrine of predestination in America at this time, as Fogel's paradigm suggests, it was not on the part of the leaders of the Awakening, but on the part of the opposers of the revival.³⁰

In one sense, the “First Great Awakening” was remarkably successful. Alan Heimert argues that it laid the cultural groundwork for the American Revolution. And it appears to have been the spark that led to evangelical missionaries spreading out across the thirteen colonies and then the new Republic, evangelists who in a generation or so would themselves spark what became known as “The Second Great Awakening.”

But if returning New England to Puritan hegemony was the goal, even the “First Great Awakening” was a failure. The remnants of New Light Puritanism scattered in at least three different directions: the Baptists, the New Divinity movement, and the non-New Divinity Edwardsians. The New Divinity, in particular, was formulated to be a “consistent Calvinism.” But rather than putting humpty-dumpty back together again, the New Divinity deepened the divisions, including their own divisions with their Puritan past. Fractures in the original Puritan holistic worldview show up even among the staunchest New Divinity theologian: Samuel Hopkins. His ethic of “disinterested benevolence” was contrary to Jonathan Edwards's eudominianism—the belief that ultimately people are happiest obeying the will of God. Hopkins taught that anything tainted with “self-love” was unacceptable to God—even the desire for salvation. Therefore, the true saint had to

²⁷ Harry S. Stout, *The Divine Dramatist* xvii. “The Awakening, in fact, was less an act of cultural defiance than an adaptation of vital orthodoxy to changing cultural and demographic circumstances” (Gerald Moran, “Christian Revivalism and Culture in Early America: Puritan New England as a Case Study,” in *Modern Christ Revivals* [ed. Edith L. Blumhofer and Randall Balmer; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993] 44). Allen Guelzo, in summing up both Henry F. May and W. R. Ward, suggests just this interpretation of the Awakening: it can be “seen less as a movement to establish a new identity and more as an effect to recover or protect old ones” (“God's Designs,” in *New Directions in American Religious History* 149).

²⁸ Alan Heimert, *The Great Awakening: Documents Illustrating the Crisis and Its Consequences* (ed. Alan Heimert and Perry Miller; New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967) xxvi.

²⁹ Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976) 54. “The typical sermon of the Great Awakening was a careful disquisition on such points of theology as man's total depravity or the unconditional election of the saints” (Heimert, *The Great Awakening* xxvi).

³⁰ In private conversation I found Fogel is very aware that Edwards, among others, reasserted Calvinism.

be willing to be damned for the glory of God.³¹ This repelled many people. The broader Edwardsianism of men like Timothy Dwight was more successful and eventually co-opted the remnants of the New Divinity.

The New Divinity ministers exhibited a greater tendency to theological speculation than their Puritan forebears and less concern for “personal secular affairs.” Indeed, New Divinity “schools of the prophets” inculcated just these tendencies.³² Some of the New Divinity ministers, particularly the followers of Nathaniel William Taylor, although they spoke out against slavery and the corruption of wealth, allowed their sharp focus on conversion and piety to become an excuse for escaping “the gritty work of social change.”³³ They were, however, moralistic. Joseph Haroutunian believed that the New Divinity followers of Jonathan Edwards eventually allowed moralism to triumph over transcendent faith. “Calvinism thus degenerated into a scheme of theology plus an independent set of ‘duties.’ Its holy fire was quenched, and its theological ashes lay exposed to the four winds.”³⁴

Meanwhile, the Baptists began a burgeoning growth. Though they had never forgotten the persecution meted out to them by the mainstream Puritans, from early on they had felt the bonds of their spiritual kinship to other evangelicals. Puritan champion Cotton Mather even preached the sermon at the ordination of a Baptist minister in Boston in 1718. That one of the first Baptist ministers in Boston would ask one of the leading pedobaptist Puritan ministers to preach his ordination sermon speaks volumes about how close these two camps saw themselves. That feeling of close relation to other evangelicals would dwindle as Baptists became the big winners after the Awakening, especially in the South.

III. THE SECOND GREAT APOSTASY

The first great apostasy was the declension of evangelical zeal among the New England Puritans. It sparked, by reaction, the Great Awakening. The second great apostasy grew out of that, beginning with the growth of Arminianism among the erstwhile Puritans and culminating in appointment of Henry Ellery Channing to the theology chair at that formerly Puritan institution known as Harvard. Probably the leading figure in this apostasy was the Boston minister and son of Puritan founders Charles Chauncy (1705–1787). Chauncy as a young man led the opposition to the “First Great Awakening.” Chauncy as an old man championed the theological innovations in New England that became part of the second great apostasy.

³¹ Joseph C. Conforti, *Samuel Hopkins and the New Divinity Movement* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1981) 121.

³² *Ibid.* 35.

³³ Douglas A. Sweeney, “Nathaniel William Taylor and the Edwardsian Tradition: Evolution and Continuity in the Culture of the New England Theology” (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1995) 148–51.

³⁴ Joseph Haroutunian, *Piety versus Moralism: the Passing of the New England Theology* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1932) 127.

Alan Heimert points to Charles Chauncy as the epitome of the liberal mind's new ethic drawn from the new currents of "Enlightenment" ideology.³⁵ To counter the "First Great Awakening," Charles Chauncy wrote that the gospel is a system "approving itself to the reason of man."³⁶ Later, this same Chauncy asserted that Jonathan Edwards's doctrine of original sin (essentially Augustinian) was "a direct contradiction . . . to that moral discernment mankind are naturally endowed with."³⁷ In his *Seasonable Thoughts*, Chauncy not only attacked the Awakening and George Whitefield, but went out of his way to defend John Tillotson, that moralistic theologian famously described by Whitefield as knowing less about Christ than Mohammed. His embrace of Puritanism's long time enemy, Arminianism, as well as, later, universalism, marks not just a good faith change of theological convictions, though it may have been that. After more than a century of relative theological stability, Chauncy's turn away from Puritanism was a sign that New Englanders were losing the fundamental character of its culture of theology: its theocentricity.

Chauncy was prominent among the many post-Puritans who rejected what had been a *sine qua non* of Puritanism: Augustinian-like belief in human depravity. Lemuel Briant, Samuel Webster, and Jonathan Mayhew were three others. Briant (1722–1754), in an intemperate attack on the Awakening revealingly entitled *The Absurdity and Blasphemy of Deprecating Moral Virtue*, rejected the traditional Puritan theme of human works being "filthy rags" (Isa 64:6) and, on his own presumed authority, deemed it blasphemy. Webster (1718–1796), in the anonymous tract *A Winter Evening's Conversation Upon the Doctrine of Original Sin* (1757), illustrates the fundamental shift at the heart of the second great apostasy: from Augustinian pessimism to "Enlightenment" optimism. Webster, a 1737 Harvard graduate and pastor at Salisbury, Massachusetts, rejected the doctrine of the imputation of Adam's sin because it is absurd "to say we were moral agents at that time."³⁸ What was unspoken—and apostates have usually failed to admit it since—was to whom it was "absurd." To Webster, the standards of English "Enlightenment" theologian John Taylor were effectively the new canon. Charles Chauncy acknowledged his great debt to John Taylor when he eventually came out and advocated universalism.³⁹ Finally, we have Jonathan Mayhew (1720–1766), a student at Harvard when the Awakening crested. Initially Mayhew was swept along by the revivalism, but

³⁵ Alan Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966) 248.

³⁶ Charles Chauncy, *The Wonderful Narrative: Or, A Faithful Account of the French Prophets* (Glasgow: Robert Foulis, 1742) i.

³⁷ Chauncy, *Five Dissertations on the Scripture Account of the Fall and Its Consequences* (London: Charles Dilly, 1785) 264. Edwards's doctrine of original sin is Augustinian in asserting that because of Adam's sin we are all sinful. Edwards's theory of how that sin passed down (because we were all in Adam) is different from Augustine's.

³⁸ The next year, 1758, Peter Clark, minister at Danvers, published a reply to Webster in which he charged Webster with being a "rational gentleman" who twisted Scripture to conform to his rationalist presuppositions.

³⁹ Chauncy, *The Mystery Hid from Ages and Generations . . . the Salvation of All Men* (London: Charles Dilly, 1784) xi. He specifically gives Taylor the credit for teaching him to read the Bible

eventually his exposure to the new thought from England turned him into “the most outspoken and thoroughgoing” of the early Arminians. The distinguishing mark of this party, imperfectly labeled “Arminian,” was the notion that humans are rational beings who should derive their standards of virtue from an observation of the external world.⁴⁰ Arminianism’s focus on human beings—their reason, their innate potential—separated them from the theocentricity of Augustinian piety. “Every aspect of the New Learning seemed to elevate man and man’s possibilities.”⁴¹

With such a rosy view of human beings, it was possible to view their societies and social structures favorably as well. In both the first great awakenings, the theological innovators (who today would be labeled “liberals”) were generally socially conservative, committed to the status quo. Chauncy had embraced a theology of culture, what Niebuhr excoriates as a “culture-theology.”⁴² Alan Heimert mocked Chauncy’s “heaven” as “a sort of glorified Harvard graduate school.”⁴³ As it turned out, it would be a grad school to which all are admitted and everyone passes.⁴⁴

Like the fourth-century Arians, New England’s Arminians, many of whom became early Unitarians, sought to drain all mystery from religion, to remove all that they believed defied human beings’ noble, clear-eyed reason. Not only was the decree of predestination too mysterious for them, the dogmatic assertion of Christ’s eternal equality with the Father was unbearably irrational, and in their view there was nothing that was transrational.⁴⁵ Sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke believe that religious movements tend toward less tension with the wider culture. Often they develop a rationalistic theology “shorn of mystery, miracle, and mysticism.” Being in the service of synthetic or even sensate ends, such religious movements replace “an active supernatural realm” with “abstractions concerning virtue.” They insist that, though respectable theologians welcome these developments as improvements, they are a symptom of death for the church that shows them. They signal the beginning of serious religious decline. “Religious organizations can thrive only to the extent that they have a theology that can comfort souls and motivate sacrifice.”⁴⁶

in “that free, impartial, and diligent manner” (p. xii). Chauncy dealt with all the passages traditionally thought to be on hell by interpreting them to be about a purgatory through which people will pay for their depravities in this life (pp. 8–9).

⁴⁰ Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* 5.

⁴¹ Robert J. Wilson III, *The Benevolent Deity: Ebenezer Gay and the Rise of Rational Religion in New England, 1696–1787* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1984) 21.

⁴² Niebuhr, *Christ and Culture* 101.

⁴³ Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind* 47.

⁴⁴ The title of his anonymously published 1784 book on universalism says it all: *The Mystery Hid from Ages and Generations, made manifest by the Gospel Revelations: Or, The Salvation of All Men the Grand Thing Aimed at in the Scheme of God*. Chauncy believed in a purgatory through which many will suffer “for a long time, in proportion to the moral depravity they have contracted in this [age]” (p. 9). That it is works in this life which determines one’s punishment further confirms the degree to which Chauncy had strayed from Augustinian theology.

⁴⁵ Edwin Gaustad, *The Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957) 133.

⁴⁶ Finke and Stark, *The Churching of America, 1776–1990: Winners and Losers in Our Religious Economy* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1997) 5.

This second great apostasy was also met by an effective counter-move: "The Second Great Awakening." At the height of this Awakening's power, the human-centered apostasy, most purely represented by Unitarianism, was ridiculed as holding to "the Fatherhood of God, the brotherhood of man, in the neighborhood of Boston." And there was some good reason for such feelings of triumph. As Christine L. Heyrman has recently chronicled, evangelicalism began transforming the formerly hard ground of the South into the Bible belt.⁴⁷ Baptists, in particular, brought much of the Puritan ethos with them to the South. They were joined by the Methodists whose evangelical Arminianism seemed to defy what had been a theological law of gravity: that the assumption of human ability to choose for God would rapidly fall into Socinianism.

The eclectic and sometimes Arminian revivals of the "Second Great Awakening" were at first particularly shaped, at least in form, by the myths of the Great Awakening. After the American Revolution, though, Methodism, which looked more to John Wesley than Jonathan Edwards, added new dynamics. Through nineteenth-century revivalists such as Lyman Beecher, Charles Finney, and Dwight Moody, elements of the two revivalisms became so mixed together as to be indiscernible. America experienced a long period of revivalistic evangelical growth beginning both with New Light attempts to recreate the Great Awakening and to preserve the Puritan heritage, on the one hand, and Methodist itinerant evangelism on the other. It was not so much an episode as it was an era.

The "New Divinity" theologians launched a process of historical re-interpretation. At the beginning of the revival movements of the nineteenth century, which they helped ignite, they began to interpret those disparate revivals through the lens of the Great Awakening. This caused those revivals to be eventually dubbed the "Second Great Awakening." Other evangelicals would carry this on by invoking the social memory of Puritanism, Edwards, and the first Great Awakening to shape the new revivalism.⁴⁸ The description "Second Great Awakening" suggested a cyclical renewal that was not quite accurate.

Charles Grandison Finney became a "bridge between cultures" bringing the populist Methodist way to the middle-class Presbyterians.⁴⁹ Though certainly no Calvinist Puritan, he did advocate Puritan "weaned affections" toward wealth and luxury. Finney's Oberlin College, while disavowing Calvinist orthodoxy, became a center for disseminating the Puritan ethic. The faculty came mostly from rural or small town New England families that had carried their Puritan values west.⁵⁰

So while the Puritan quasi-theocracy had long since dissolved, Puritan values were spread further and deeper into American culture by what

⁴⁷ See *Southern Cross: The Beginnings of the Bible Belt* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997).

⁴⁸ Conforti, *Jonathan Edwards, Religious Tradition, and American Culture* 12.

⁴⁹ Nathan D. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989) 199.

⁵⁰ Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889-1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 7.

George Marsden calls “culturally aggressive New England Yankees.” Both Marsden and Fogel sketch a complicated, reflexive process in the first half of the nineteenth century in which Northern Protestants, at first battling each other for political dominance, eventually coalesced joining Northern Baptists and Methodists in the new Republican party.⁵¹ “The result,” says Marsden, “was that the Republican Party had a strong Puritan-evangelical component, bent on regulating the society according to Christian principles.”⁵² The abolition of slavery was their first great goal and their greatest achievement. The war that became inevitable for this achievement is largely responsible for forging the American identity of a nation “of the people, by the people, for the people” that it projects to the world today.

When we speak of values being transmitted apart from holistic religious conversion and the acceptance of the theological systems that originally underlay those values, we are referring to secularization. Perhaps the chief weakness of the Fogel paradigm is its inadequate account of the impact of secularization. Fogel does not believe secularization (as demystification) has overcome the potency of evangelical religion in American society. However, secularization as privatization creates autonomous arenas of life.⁵³ Values are difficult to transmit from religion to other areas of life.

For example, Puritans put the wedding outside the church precisely because of their theological convictions. It was a testimony to their commitment to a theocratic culture. We can measure the decline of this holistic, theocentric culture by the wedding—in particular, the wedding of widow Deane to Captain John Fisk in 1779 in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. Mrs. Deane was a church member, but Captain Fisk exhibited no “signs of grace.” Undeterred by objections from her pastor, Stephen West, Deane married the unregenerate captain and was excommunicated. The new Mrs. Fisk was not only unrepentant, but also sought to humiliate her pastor by appealing to an ecclesiastical council. In a classic symptom of secularization, not only did a church member, Mrs. Fisk, expect that the realm of marriage was independent of religious law, but she was able to get one of the most prominent clergymen of Connecticut, Joseph Huntington, to advocate her case. Only when secularism had taken hold could Huntington argue, “marriage is purely a transaction of a civil kind.” Mrs. Fisk lost in part because West was able to stack the council with fellow New Divinity men. The New Divinity men, by rejecting Huntington’s logic, showed themselves to be, generally, inheritors of the Puritan cultural ethic.⁵⁴ But they were in the minority.

⁵¹ See Robert Fogel’s *Without Consent or Contract: The Rise and Fall of American Slavery* (New York: Norton, 1989), which was part of the work that won him the Nobel Prize in Economics.

⁵² George Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991) 89.

⁵³ To be fair to Fogel, sociologists Finke and Stark, when addressing secularization, state that it is a self-limiting process which eventually results in revival (*The Churching of America* 43). Fogel’s cyclical revivals are built on such a view. However, this has not been the case in Europe where secularization appears to have triumphed, and it only appears to be the case in the United States when one accepts the cyclical interpretation of Awakenings.

⁵⁴ Guelzo, “God’s Design” 140–43. Oddly Guelzo tries to use this very incident as proof that the New Divinity had bought into a “come-outerism” that was a break with the original Puritan vision.

Meanwhile, the Puritan work ethic remained an ingrained habit. In the early nineteenth century even the Unitarians preserved the same ethic. "When it came to the central socioeconomic facts of the day," Keith Stavely notes, "Unitarianism and evangelicalism, order and enthusiasm were of essentially the same mind. Both strove to convince themselves that economic change was leading to moral and spiritual betterment."⁵⁵

However, the underlying theology, that of the Reformation generally and William Perkins specifically, had been completely replaced by the Unitarians and grew fainter with the new Arminianized evangelism. To the degree this theological root, its "dimension of depth," was changed, the ethic from which it sprouted would whither.

The Calvinist Puritanism of New England gave way to the nondogmatic religion of Unitarianism, but the Unitarians were if anything more energetic than more traditional Christians in seeking to live the kind of moral life that Christianity prescribed. Then with shocking abruptness, most of those who still held and practiced a variety of the Christian ethic, even though they had abandoned the doctrines of the Christian faith, suddenly turned and abandoned the ethic as well.⁵⁶

It was precisely the theocentric ethic developed by John Calvin and William Perkins that gave the Puritan ethic its potency and staying power. Discipline, as Robert Fogel notes, "requires a *capacity to resist the lure of hedonism*, to control self-indulgence, to remain faithful to a commitment despite strong impulses and other distractions."⁵⁷ The utilitarian rationale, which has tried to replace the theological one, is less bracing, far weaker at motivating. Even to those who manage to muster discipline for mere utilitarian reasons, prosperity as an end in itself begins to seem rather vacuous.

Despite the triumphalism that still surrounds the epoch known as "the Second Great Awakening"—see for example Jon Butler's *Awash in a Sea of Faith*—evangelicalism was less cohesive than it was before the Awakening and had not regained any of the ground lost to the second great apostasy. Harvard, in fact, went from being a center of rationalistic Unitarianism to including the romanticism of transcendentalism. Timothy Dwight held Yale firmly in the evangelical fold during his shepherdship, but it did not stay there after Dwight's demise. Even Andover, intentionally set up as an evangelical replacement for Harvard, eventually drifted away. This string of lost theological institutions would be seen as a (perhaps inevitable) pattern which probably encouraged a suspicion of seminaries among many evangelicals by the twentieth century.

Meanwhile, though there were more evangelical churches reaching more Americans through the "Second Great Awakening," they arguably stood for less at the end of this era than at the beginning. Church membership statistics are a favorite tool of some to demonstrate the increase of evangelical

⁵⁵ Keith W. F. Stavely, *Puritan Legacies: Paradise Lost and the New England Tradition, 1630–1890* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987) 206.

⁵⁶ Harold O. J. Brown, *The Sensate Culture: Western Civilization Between Chaos and Transformation* (Dallas: Word, 1996) 103–4.

⁵⁷ Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening* 256, original emphasis.

influence throughout the nineteenth century and to the 1970s. The rise in church membership from 20% in seventeenth-century New England to nearly two-thirds by the 1970s confirms, to some, the hypothesis that America has continued to progress morally.⁵⁸ Like Jon Butler, William McLoughlin and Robert Fogel believe that this shows the continuing growth in the cultural influence of evangelicals. That is an illusion. First, the statistic fails to tell us that standards for church membership in seventeenth-century Puritan churches were exceedingly high. Besides agreeing to Puritan doctrine and living a scrupulous life (in view of the prying eyes of other members), one had to give a public account of an experience of salvation. Standards became so prohibitive that many of the second generation of New England Puritans, though orthodox and moral, were not able to qualify for membership and the "Halfway Covenant" had to be created. And, it must be emphasized, nearly all the people were churchgoers. The drift toward "promiscuous church admissions" became extensive during the crest of the "Second Great Awakening," especially among the rapidly growing Methodists.⁵⁹ Today, even in most conservative evangelical churches, membership is easily obtained through simply asking for it. Therefore, the 20% in seventeenth-century New England represents a hard core of Puritan stalwarts while the 1970s' two-thirds includes many, if not mostly, nominal adherents.

The "First Great Awakening" was the point at which some "New Lights" began to throw the concept of Christendom overboard. The separation of Church and State, promulgated a century earlier by Roger Williams, became much more commonly advocated as "New Lights" met opposition from the "Old Light" establishment. The Great Awakening shattered the Puritans' holistic worldview in which a faithful church and a faithful state are in united covenant with God. About eighty years after the outbreak of the Awakening, Lyman Beecher at first lamented the disestablishment of Connecticut's Congregational church, in 1818; but as he mastered the voluntary society, he saw the great possibilities for "influence."⁶⁰ Beecher was determined these societies would bring to bear as closely as possible the influence once exerted by the old establishment. Beecher sought to harness New Divinity zeal to fuel new voluntary societies like the American Tract Society. Eventually he came to believe that disestablishment was "the best thing that ever happened to the state of Connecticut" and that the ministers had actually gained influence.⁶¹

⁵⁸ William McLoughlin, *Revivals, Awakenings, and Reform: An Essay on Religion and Social Change in America, 1607-1977* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978) 3. Roger Finke and Rodney Stark announce, with a barely suppressed "Eureka!," "In the Puritan Commonwealth of Massachusetts religious adherence probably never exceeded 22 percent" (*Churching of America* 19). Like many others who try to prove rising religious influence on the basis of raw numbers, they make the basic mistake of assuming the meaning of "membership" has remained the same.

⁵⁹ Richard Carwardine, *Transatlantic Revivalism: Popular Evangelicalism in Britain and America, 1790-1865* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978) 51.

⁶⁰ The Congregational Church in Massachusetts was not disestablished until 1833, demonstrating that the first Amendment to the US constitution was not believed to necessitate disestablishment by the states.

⁶¹ Guelzo, "God's Design" 239.

These convictions seem to confirm the Fogel paradigm that the “Second Great Awakening” was another giant moral step forward. Professor Fogel appears to be right, but those who use the same evidence to prove, without nuance, that complete separation of church and state is good for both are not considering the big picture of history. What they fail to see is the enormous cultural momentum created by a thousand years of Christendom and a century of Puritan hegemony in New England. This momentum meant that institutional disestablishment did not immediately mean cultural disestablishment. The moral renewals Fogel has identified appear to have continued spreading the Puritan ethic. However, this was not simply, as some insinuate, because disestablished churches had to learn to be more entrepreneurial (though that was part of the success). Rather, in most places in the United States through the nineteenth century there was an ambiguously understood Protestant cultural establishment; by the 1950s that had broadened to a Judeo-Christian, “Protestant, Catholic, Jew,” cultural establishment. Protestantism so dominated nineteenth-century America *both* because it had to depend on its people for success *and* because it was culturally affirmed—the very opposite of what predominated in Europe.

IV. THE THIRD GREAT APOSTASY

The third great apostasy is familiar to evangelicals today as the rise of Protestant Liberalism. The first apostasy was a decline in piety; the second great apostasy directly rejected the authority of the Augustinian interpretation of the gospel that had been central to evangelical theology since the Reformation; the third great apostasy attacked *sola scriptura* as the ultimate ruling authority over the Church’s doctrine and morals. I trust that this decline from America’s “First Faith” is still sufficiently understood as to need little elaboration here. What does need our attention, for understanding our probable trajectory, is the notably weaker response that resulted from the new apostasy—a reaction so weak most evangelicals would scarcely identify it as an “Awakening.”

Because the “Second Great Awakening” had been good at gaining converts but relatively weak at winning back the leading theological centers of America, the evangelical movement was left with few bastions, besides Princeton, to resist the third great apostasy. That apostasy was, indeed, met with resolute scholarship from the likes of B. B. Warfield and defensive measures, such as the “fundamentals.” But these seemed incapable of stemming the tide of the third great apostasy. Hence, many evangelicals today see the period as one of retreat and defeat and hardly recognize any “Third Great Awakening” to have met it.

Professor Fogel, however, does believe there was a “Third Great Awakening.” Here he shows that he is interpreting the “awakenings” less as a purely religious expression than as a more nebulous social movement. Fogel shows he is aware that this era heralded a “more secular interpretation of the Bible and creeds.”⁶² He draws our attention to the significant contribu-

⁶² Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening* 65.

tion of the social gospellers to the progressive era. However, for Fogel the "Great Awakenings" are not primarily religious in nature. "They are," he reports, "primarily political phenomena in which the evangelical churches represent the leading edge of an ideological and political response to accumulated technological, economic, and social changes that undermined the received culture."⁶³ This assumption is fundamentally flawed when applied to the origins, adventures, and dissemination of Puritanism and their evangelical descendants. In Fogel's view, religion served as a spur. Religion was, and is, good for most, because it bears good fruit. Religion was, and is, in Fogel's view, an instrument, not an end.

The Great Awakening and its nineteenth-century continuation were primarily religious in nature and specifically evangelical. Not so with the progressive era. Though the leaders of the progressive movement "routinely noted the pervasiveness of Calvinist influences in their homes and made few objections to their import," they resisted ministerial or missionary careers as outlets for their Puritan conscience. In fact, some of them lived relatively scandalous lives.⁶⁴ The evangelistic movements that there were, such as Dwight L. Moody or Billy Sunday, represent no sharp upsurge in revivalism such as we associate with an "Awakening." Continuity was the order of the day, at least in popular religion; Moody's ministry was prominent well before this period. It is true that the Pentecostal explosion began at this time, through the Asuza Street revival in Los Angeles in 1906–1908. Nevertheless, I know of no connection between the birth of Pentecostalism and the social crusades Fogel says were the hallmark of the "Third Great Awakening." The Progressive era appears to be, rather than another Awakening, remarkable for the relatively low level of direct evangelical influence in the reforms, although there was still significant religious involvement in them.

Certainly the broad evangelical interdenominational community that had grown out of the Great Awakening and through the nineteenth century was generally appreciative of the social progress of the era. However, they believed themselves to be so under heterodox attack that they devised "the fundamentals"—essentially a new evangelical ecumenical creed in reaction against "modernism." Fogel describes these theological developments: "In the two previous Awakenings, the liberal wing represented a retreat from strict Calvinism, but this time the retreat went so far among some of the liberals as to reject the supernatural elements of religion altogether."⁶⁵ Here Fogel deals with a problem in his thesis: the increased theological deviance among the leading actors in the social reforms of the "Progressive era." During previous awakenings, the "liberals," like Charles Chauncy and Ebenezer Gay, were social conservatives who were hostile to the awakening; the evangelicals were the "progressives." Fogel recognizes that the most outspoken proponents of the progressive reforms from religious circles,

⁶³ Ibid. 39.

⁶⁴ Robert M. Crunden, *Ministers of Reform: The Progressives' Achievement in American Civilization, 1889–1920* (New York: Basic Books, 1982) 3, 16.

⁶⁵ Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening* 145. In private conversation he stated that he believes that much of late nineteenth-century "liberalism" was an expression of secularism.

namely the “social gospellers,” are poor reflections of their Puritan forefathers. However, Fogel’s cyclical pattern of moral renewal forces him to describe theological liberals, leaders of an apostasy from a Puritan/evangelical point of view, as leaders of a “Third Great Awakening.” Fogel does, indeed, seem to have demonstrated that there have been cyclical ethical advances in American history, each, in part, a further dispersal of the Puritan ethic. However, to call them “awakenings” stretches the meaning of the term beyond its specific religious intent. In addition, his thesis seems to illustrate the process of demystification—ethics stripped of its theological roots. But evangelicalism can only continue to be a source for future ethical renewal if the movement retains its theological vitality and if it avoids the other expression of secularization, namely privatization.⁶⁶

Fogel may very well be correct to credit the Puritan heritage with the Progressive movement, “the Third Great Awakening.” However, we should note how far the Puritan impulse had drifted from its original moorings. Being Augustinians, the Puritans would also have found the Social Gospel’s fundamental belief in human innocence to be as just as naïve as the early nineteenth-century belief that every industrious person can succeed. Fogel identifies the central tenet of the “Third Great Awakening” as the proposition that if people were corrupt, they were corrupted by a sinful social order.⁶⁷ In the Great Awakening, generally those most committed to preserving the Augustinian doctrine of “original sin,” in some form or other, were the “New Lights.” They did not believe in *laissez faire* but instead held that the state should act for the poor as guided by Christian principles. However, with this “Third Great Awakening,” Fogel portrays the “New Lights” as those who not only reject any form of Augustinian human depravity but even the traditional concepts of individual responsibility. Hence, Fogel’s “Third Great Awakening” is a fusion of the third great apostasy and the progressive movement. Evangelicals generally deplore the former and appreciate the latter.

V. THE FOURTH GREAT APOSTASY

As one voice among thousands, [Jonathan] Edwards helped perpetuate that quintessentially Puritan notion of a righteous city set high upon a hill for all the world to see. That notion apparently has yet to run its course. In this sense, we continue to inhabit a world formed largely by the Puritans and Edwards.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ On secularization, see Bryan Wilson, “Secularization: The Inherited Model,” in *Religion in American History: A Rader* (ed. Jon Butler and Harry S. Stout; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998). Wilson critiques the privatization model. Peter Beyer, in *Religion and Globalization* (London: Sage Publications, 1994), describes how globalization encourages privatization of religion. He believes that the pressure toward privatization must be resisted with more striving to apply religion practically to all of life (p. 80).

⁶⁷ Fogel, *The Fourth Great Awakening* 120.

⁶⁸ Stout, “The Puritans and Edwards,” in *Jonathan Edwards and the American Experience* (ed. Nathan O. Hatch and Harry S. Stout; New York: Oxford University Press, 1988) 157.

But that notion's potency is not inexhaustible. It was the driving force behind the "First Great Awakening" and one of the major forces behind the so-called Second Great Awakening. But by the end of the nineteenth century, with evangelicalism under renewed attack by a new apostasy, it was capable of a much weaker response. Essentially it was only capable of a strategic retreat. In so doing, it left many of its former bastions behind, most notably Princeton. And yet Professor Fogel proposes that we are in the midst of a "Fourth Great Awakening." If he is correct, and I (sort of) believe that he is, and if awakenings arise as responses to apostasies, then the question is begged: What is the Fourth Great Apostasy?

The Great Awakening has not yet fully dissipated its energy even as America has slipped, since the 1920s, into its sensate stage.⁶⁹ In 1957 sociologist Pitirim Sorokin attacked the hedonistic trend of American culture in his *The American Sex Revolution*. The work ethic, he wrote, was breaking down along with other standards.⁷⁰ Certainly there have been further triumphs, especially in the civil rights movement. But the overall trend is toward the abasement of the founding principles. The crisis now, as Os Guinness rightly saw, is a "crisis of cultural authority."⁷¹ As with previous such crises, parts of the evangelical church are falling under its sway.

If Increase Mather (d. 1723) could be raised from the dead and become a historian of the last 300 hundred years like Fogel, I suspect he would come up with a paradigm that stood all of Fogel's optimism on its head: "Four Great Apostasies and the Demise of Evangelicalism." Mather would agree with most of what Fogel sees as progress: the end of mass chattel slavery, higher living standards for laborers, improved medical care, lower income inequality, and so on. Mather, though, would see a continued declension of his precious City upon a hill. Some developments, such as the "shift of emphasis from person to social sin" which Fogel designates a religious revival, Mather would see as an apostasy. To his credit, Fogel notes that this shift

⁶⁹ Francis Fukuyama mentions that the 1920s saw new dances and "the opinion that decent women could be seen in dance clubs," a rise in the rate of alcohol consumption, movies, "literary modernism" (Fukuyama, "The Great Disruption," *The Atlantic Monthly* [May 1999] 68). Evangelical philosopher Francis Schaeffer cited it as the decade in which a Nietzschean denial of absolutes was introduced into popular culture that had some immediate effect especially in the visual arts. In addition, William Graebner cites the 1920s as the decade in which the "youth cult" rose to prominence in American culture. "By the 1920s, this focus on youth was an inescapable aspect of the national experience. . . . It allowed the young the freedom to set their own standard of conduct or morality" (*A History of Retirement: The Meaning and Function of an American Institution* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980] 42). Graebner quotes Gilman Ostrander, "The Roaring Twenties consisted of nothing less than the blanket repudiation of the traditional farm-oriented, church-oriented, somewhat patriarchal moral order of Protestant America. . . ." (*American Civilization in the First Machine Age: 1890-1940* [New York: Harper & Row, 1970] 238-39). Also, Alistaire Cooke calls the 1920s a "morally shabby" decade. Fukuyama believes that the seeds sown in the 1920s did not bear widespread fruit until the 1960s because of the intervening Depression and Second World War ("The Great Disruption" 68).

⁷⁰ Michael P. Richard, "Applying Sorokin's Typology," in *Sorokin and Civilization* (ed. Joseph B. Ford, Michel P. Richard, and Palmer C. Talbutt; New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1996) 163.

⁷¹ *The American Hour* (New York: The Free Press, 1993) 4.

was part of a “more secular interpretation of the Bible and creeds.” Mather, though, would probably say that when the secular is ruling over the sacred, “Ichabod” has been written over the church’s door.⁷² Certainly Mather, being no simpleton, would recognize the movements of jihad, counter-cultural reassertions of the old Puritan ethic. But to Puritan eyes, I believe, the evangelical heritage appears to be petering out. Rather than experiencing cyclical renewals, evangelicalism appears to be spiraling downwards. Rather than growing stronger through awakenings, it appears that evangelicalism in America experiences a falling away around the turn of each century. Each falling away, though met by an awakening, leaves evangelicalism weaker than before.

Increase Mather decried a declension in his own lifetime. While I believe he would have been gladdened by the Great Awakening, he would have seen the strident “Old Light” resistance to it and the Arminianism which grew out of it as a significant falling away. The moral decline around the American Revolution, the Unitarian takeover of Harvard, and the multiplication of strange sects (like the Shakers) were, in this hypothetical Matherian paradigm, the “Second Great Apostasy.” It was met by the “Second Great Awakening.” The relative success of that religious epoch put off another apostasy for about a century. The presuppositions of the Enlightenment, however, eventually spurred the “Third Great Apostasy.” Its long delay was made up for by its sweeping success, eventually wresting even Princeton—the last of the Puritan/Awakening seminaries from evangelicalism. The major denomination of America’s evangelical century, Methodism, was deeply compromised by what was now called “liberalism.”

After a brief peace in the mid-twentieth century, a “Fourth Great Apostasy” emerged, again wooing erstwhile evangelicals from their Puritan heritage. This apostasy seems to be not so much theological as behavioral, though presuppositional issues lurk. The “Fourth Great Apostasy” appears to be an attack on evangelical moral standards. For a Puritan, like Mather, that would make it no less important. The Puritans had believed that since the Bible clearly taught church discipline, it was “an essential note of the church.”⁷³ By the late twentieth century many, if not most, evangelical

⁷² In the first few years of the eighteenth century, Increase Mather declared that New England was earning itself the title “Ichabod.” “Ichabod” was the title of a sermon Increase Mather preached soon after his ouster from Harvard, referring to the loss of Israel’s glory when the Philistines captured the ark of the covenant (1 Samuel 4) (David Hall, *The Faithful Shepherd: A History of the New England Ministry in the Seventeenth Century* [Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1972] 306).

⁷³ The phrase “essential note of the church” is from the literary debate between Archbishop John Whitgift and early Puritan Thomas Cartwright (1535–1603). David D. Hall notes that Puritan discipline was key to the visible church’s goal of edification: “an ongoing process of spiritual and ethical improvement as the church approximated ever more closely the kingdom of God” (“Narrating Puritanism,” in *New Directions in American Religious History* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1997] 56).

churches rarely, if ever, practiced church discipline despite (or, more likely, because of) the country's acute moral crisis.⁷⁴ Some polling data purport to show that evangelical moral behavior, as seen by divorce rates and what used to be seriously called "fornication," is little (or no) better than the average population. Meanwhile, some evangelical writers and speakers seem to be getting a lot of mileage out of denouncing "legalism" as if the major fault was excessive moral rigorism. In July 2000, one of America's largest churches, Willow Creek Community Church, invited to a leaders' conference a man widely known for repeated adultery, cited for lying under oath, an adamant defender of abortion including the grisly procedure of "partial birth abortion," an advocate of legitimizing homosexuality, and the destroyer of the major source of medicines for one of the world's poorest nations (Sudan); the assembled evangelical leaders not only listened to him as an expert on leadership but gave him a standing ovation. An emblematic institution formed during the "Third Great Awakening," Fuller Theological Seminary, while claiming to be broadly evangelical, made adherence to "evangelical feminism" a shibboleth for admission into its faculty; its recently retired ethics professor, Lewis Smedes, justified some homosexuality (a capital offense in Puritan Massachusetts).⁷⁵ Hence, if Increase Mather could come back to parry with Professor Fogel, his paradigm might look like the following:

TABLE 2. American Cycles in the Declension of the Puritan Heritage:
Increase Mather's hypothetical response to the Fogel Paradigm

<i>Phases</i>	<i>Apostasy</i>	<i>Jihad</i>	<i>New Status Quo</i>
<u>1675–1750</u> First Great Apostasy	Decline of zeal; collapse of "Indian" mission; I. Mather out of Harvard; "Great Apostasy" at Yale; Anglicization	"Reforming Synod"; Colman and Stoddard reconcile with Mathers; volun- teer societies; network of piety; Stoddard's "harvests," Hampshire Association; Great Awakening	Puritans required to tolerate Quakers, Baptists, and Anglicans; Harvard more latitudinarian; ministers' authority increasingly confined to religion

⁷⁴ That there has been a measurable moral decline in America is documented in Francis Fukuyama's *The Great Disruption: Human Nature and the Reconstitution of Social Order* (New York: A Touchstone Book, 2000). Fukuyama's optimistic conclusion is belied by the empirical data he cites.

⁷⁵ A Fuller faculty member told me that a non-feminist probably should not come to Fuller. Lewis Smedes, "Exploring the Morality of Homosexuality," in *Homosexuality and Christian Faith: Questions of Conscience for the Churches* (ed. Walter Wink; Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999).

TABLE 2. (Continued)

<u>1770–1803</u> Second Great Apostasy	Resistance to revival of Puritanism; Arminianism; Universalism, Unitarianism take Harvard	J. Edwards's reputation grows; Separates and Baptists grow; Baptists take Puritanism south; the New Divinity; T. Dwight at Yale; "Second Awakening"	Unitarian breakaway; moral slump addressed; "Second Awakening" begins era of evangelical culture; rise of Methodism
<u>1890–1950</u> Third Great Apostasy	Shift from per- sonal to social sin; more secular interpretation of the Bible and creeds; "higher Biblical criti- cism," mostly from Germany	Pentecostalism; fundamental- ism and neo- evangelicalism; reassertion of the personal content of the Bible, personal sin; Billy Graham and Fuller Theo- logical Seminary	Evangelical vs. liberal battles; dispensation- alism; evan- gelicals retreat from public life; Pentecostals and Southern Baptists (SBC) feel distinct from evangelicals
<u>1965–???</u> Fourth Great Apostasy	"Great Disrup- tion"; European existentialism; rejection of traditional morality; homosexuals ordained; Fuller reneges; Clinton not excommu- nicated; CT for considering "limited god" theology	H. Lindsell's "Battle for the Bible"; moves in PC (USA) and Methodists to bar homosexual ordination; conservative churches grow; conservative resurgence in SBC; home- schooling move- ment; "Promise Keepers"	Third-world Christianity comes to USA; division of evangelicals between social conservatives (Pat Robertson, SBC) & social liberals ("evangelical feminists," Tony Campolo)?

This final, "fourth great apostasy," may be the final product of secularization. Even if there is heightened piety in a secular culture, that piety is more and more difficult to translate to business or political life. Privatization makes it nearly impossible for religion, no matter how revived, to lead the future of egalitarianism. So even if there is a "Fourth Great Awakening"

now underway, the force of that awakening may never make it out of Fogel's first column, "phase of religious revival," to the second column, "phase of rising political impact." As Harry Stout observes, "Plausible arguments can be made that, at all levels of American society, the juggernaut of secularism rolls on, pressing religious belief into smaller, less consequential territory."⁷⁶ Instead of originally Puritan ideas being shorn of their specific theological dressing and adapted to more utilitarian purposes, as in Fogel's conception, those ideas eventually fail to get communicated at all, in any form, outside of specifically theological or pietistic circles; even theology and piety and morality break off from one another. Religion loses its ability to introduce new values, to resolve new ethical crises. The ideational can no longer say that something is right or wrong; ethics must serve a sensate purpose.

Considering Fogel's Nobel Prize-winning research, it is unclear on what grounds slavery would be condemned under a purely sensate ethic. We have no assurance that respect for humanity—much less "egalitarianism"—will rule the day when there is a conflict between those rights and some sensate value. Arguably, we are faced with that dilemma now in the abortion debate with the sensate value of "choice" winning out over the rights of the human person.

Some may take the relative higher profile of today's "religious right" to be a sign of a new awakening underway. That may very well be true. Yet was there a time when the forces that provoked the awakening were so strong? And, if we date the rise of this awakening as does Fogel (over 30 years ago), has there been any awakening so fruitless in gaining its goals? It does not appear, as yet, that this weak fourth awakening is even capable of the strategic retreat of the third. There are exceptions, of course, the conservative resurgence in the Southern Baptist Convention being the most notable.⁷⁷ But its failure of a boycott against the Disney corporation, its slow growth, and an internal rebellion by its Texas state convention shows that such apparent signs of progress may be fleeting. Besides, the Baptists appear to be the anomaly. The benchmark evangelical magazine *Christianity Today* published editorials criticizing Southern Baptists' move to protect male headship in church leadership and to reject teachers of a "limited God."⁷⁸ In decades past, such convictions would have been thought of as without need of defense and yet evangelicalism's leading voice thought them as without deserving promotion.

Meanwhile, even if evangelicalism is stronger than it appears, its influence on the wider American culture is fading. Throughout the second half of the twentieth century the US Supreme Court has enforced a "separation of church and state" (constitutionally applicable only to the Federal government) on all levels of government, particularly school boards, apparently seeking to establish secularism. In this context, Cal Thomas, evangelical

⁷⁶ Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* 211.

⁷⁷ See Jerry Sutton, *The Baptist Reformation* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2000).

⁷⁸ Editorial, "Do Good Fences Make Good Baptists?," *Christianity Today* 44 (August 7, 2000) 36.

political commentator, wrote, "For Christians, the vision of worldly power is not a calling, but a distraction."⁷⁹ William Perkins's vision of every legitimate task being a calling and the entire heritage of Puritan holistic inner-worldly asceticism is thus lost.

But then again globalization may have providential tricks up its sleeve. There is always that wild card of what Jonathan Edwards called "the surprising work of God." Puritanism has cast its evangelical bread upon the waters. And it just may come back. It is possible that the all-encompassing vision of some form of Puritanism may grasp another people, another civilization. That civilization may clash with the sensate West—and probably triumph. Or, in the language of US foreign policy toward China, it may "engage" the US and keep the slide toward barbarity in check, a trend that even after the twentieth century's brutal record the West still refuses to face up to. Or, pockets of enflamed Jeremiahs may come to the USA like Jonah to Nineveh. In 1998 the Anglican archbishops of Southeast Asia and Uganda decided that the American Episcopalian church was apostate and appointed two pure (if not Puritan) bishops to reform the church in America. American evangelicalism is not an island unto itself. Its brothers and sisters in other, non-Western societies may yet come to its rescue. Or a sensate American evangelicalism may pull other churches down with it.

⁷⁹ Thomas, "Not of This World," *Newsweek* (March 29, 1999) 60.