"SUCH CONFUSION FOLLOWED AS NOTHING WAS DONE": INDIVIDUALIZATION AND RATIONALIZATION IN THE FIRST CHURCH OF ABINGTON 1712-1757

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Abstract: The First Church of Abington was incorporated in 1712. The church called Samuel Brown as its first pastor. However rising individualism, manifesting as family factions and contention affected the church in the 1720s. In the 1740s the religious revival of the Great Awakening and the resulting division between Old and New Lights, furthered individualism in Abington. Because of its reliance on communal bonds the ecclesiastical government lost influence. This loss of influence furthered contention in the church and led to the resignation of Samuel Brown in 1749.

The church of Abington and its new pastor Ezekiel Dodge stopped the in-fighting by using the process of Rationalization. Rationalization, the clarifying, systemizing, and specifying of concepts, created a new system that did not rely on communal bonds and adapted to an individualizing laity. The rationalization of Abington's ecclesiastical government did not secularize the church or cause declension. On the contrary, it stabilized the First Church of Abington.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

"Such confusion followed as nothing was done upon it;" these were the words the First Church of Abington, Massachusetts chose to describe the growing tension that brewed in March 1749. A third of the church had absented themselves because of their discontentment with the Old Light pastor, Reverend Samuel Brown. As New Lights of the Great Awakening, this minority found Brown's doctrine unsound and brought charges against him before church councils in 1744 and 1748. The dissatisfied did not obtain the council ruling they desired, and by March of 1749 the New Lights regularly absented themselves. Now the remaining members struggled to enforce church government on a faction in revolt. However, the church could not find a way to bring the separating members back into the congregation and effectively restore church unity and government. Because of the ineffectualness of ecclesiastical government, the organization and regulation of the church, its meeting adjourned without resolution or even a vote.

The church's attempt to stop this absenteeism fell into confusion because

individualism and theological division made the ecclesiastical government ineffective. The church, beset by the growing individualism evidenced in lay resistance to church discipline and factionalism, had become the scene of prolonged contention between theological factions during the Great Awakening. The church government could not adapt to these developments because it relied upon the very communal bonds and pressures individualism destroyed. Without communal bonds the laity remained fiercely divided over theological issues. Thus, individualism forced Abington to find a new way of government rationalism, the "clarification, specification, and systemization of… ideas."[1] In Abington both ecclesiastical government and theology would rationalize with the systemization of communion practices, specification of theological doctrine with a confession of faith, the Westminster Confession, and the added requirement of a faith relation or conversion relation. These relations told the church of a person's personal conversion experience so that its authenticity could be ascertained. The conversion process was the most individualized aspect of Puritan theology and conversion relations clarified, systemized and rationalized this process.

Max Weber, the preeminent sociologist, pointed out the individualistic elements in Puritan theology, especially the conversion process, and also connected Puritans to the rationalization of the world in his work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*.[2] However, his work suffered from a top down view of history that cast rationalism as the antithesis of religion rather than a tool of social organization. The contention found in the individualization of the laity, factionalism, and an unwillingness

[1]Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore Society*. (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2007), 5.

[2] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* (New York: Routledge Classics, 2001).

to compromise, could easily be misunderstood by ministers as a declension, or lessening of religious spirit. However, as the records of the First Church of Abington reveal, personal belief and fear of doctrinal heterodoxy lay at the center of the church contention. Rationalization, if used properly as in Abington, could stabilize ecclesiastical government in the face of breaking communal bonds and the individualization of society.

Moving on from Weber, Perry Miller's flawed understanding of the Puritans' use of rationalization focused on confinement. Puritans rationalized to "confine the unconfinable God" of Calvinism.[3] This viewpoint ignores the individualizing forces necessitating rationalization. Rationalization reads as a source of limitation and declension, but neither of these things are seen in Abington.

Edmund Morgan, though intrigued by Puritans' "large-scale effort to deal rationally with society," became one of the first critics of Perry Miller.[4] Morgan found declension not a simple linear process but rather a cycle. Morgan came to this conclusion by tracing the Puritan idea of the elect and the faith relation needed to enter the church as a visible saint. In following this idea Morgan started to uncover how Puritan practices worked not only in theory, but in practice and the everyday religion of the laity.

A balanced view of rationalization can come only when a bottom up view of history is added to the narrative. One then sees the religiosity and theological commitment of the laity. Use of the new social history and the town historians of the

[3] Perry Miller, *Errand Into the Wilderness* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984), 93
[4] Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints: the History of a Puritan Idea.* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), vii.

1970s and 80s allowed this bottom up approach to flourish.[5] While these town histories were plentiful, few had mined into the trove of church records scattered about New England.[6] James F. Cooper makes use of these records in his book *Tenacious of their Liberties.* He traces lay participation in multiple churches, uncovering a historical narrative not of declension but growing individualism.[7] Cooper finds the contention surrounding the Great Awakening rooted in religious division as the laity formed and supported their own religious beliefs. As such this infighting does not signify declension. Instead, personalized religion, the growing significance of reputation, and resistance to church discipline indicated rising individualism and a breaking of communal bonds.[8]

However, this new narrative of individualism led to more questions. Does the idea of growing individualism hold true if you examine the microcosm of a single church? Most importantly, what were the churches' responses to growing individualism? To answer these questions we must first understand what is meant by individualism. We will define individualism much like Alexis de Tocqueville did in his seminal work *Democracy in America.* Individualism "disposes each member of the community to sever himself from the mass of his fellows and to draw apart with his family and his friends, so that after he has thus formed a little circle of his own."[9] Therefore individualism is not simply the placing of the self over others, but also the severing and rejection of communal bonds, which breaks the community into smaller familial and individual units.

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[5] The most famous town history is: Kenneth A Lockridge, *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985).
[6]Emil Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1959). This work takes samples of church records, which we will be using for comparison throughout this work.
[7]James F. Cooper Jr., *Tenacious of their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
[8] Ibid., 196, 201, 107.
[9]Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*(New York: Edward Walker, 1840), 104.

This individualism also affected theology leading the New Lights to focus on their personal relationship with God and the dictates of their conscience.[10] With this in mind we will look at the First Congregational Church of Abington, Massachusetts in three separate stages: first, tracing its growing individualization and factionalism, then the breakdown of ecclesiastical government fostered by religious revival, and finally the church's eventual response.

We will follow Abington's story through the church's disciplinary records. Church censures were not only important to the maintenance of the church covenant but also an important place of ministerial/lay interaction. Thus these records allow us to monitor the individualization, theological beliefs, and contention of the laity. Comparing Abington's record of censures with other Congregational Churches will help to contextualize Abington's story and allow for its proper placement in Congregational Church history. Our comparison will use Emil Oberholzer's *Delinquent Saints.* Oberholzer has compiled the disciplinary cases of several churches, organizing them by type and date. This work will use his numbers as a representation of larger Massachusetts trends. Admittedly the sample size is small, but in the absence of more thorough studies, his book is the best base of comparison for Abington. Oberholzer's study represents a good centralized analysis of church disciplinary records. Other sources will supplement Oberholzer's numbers where possible.

Abington functions well as a case study because of its typical beginning and incorporation. Abington, Massachusetts is situated in Plymouth County near the line between Plymouth and Norfolk counties. It is surrounded by the towns of Weymouth,

[10] . Cooper Jr., *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 188, 196.

Brockton, Whitman, Rockland, Pembroke, Bridgewater, Hingham, and Hannover.[11] Many of these towns are seen throughout Abington's church records and are relied upon at times to fill in the blanks when Abington's records fall silent.[12]The first attempt at incorporation in 1706 failed because of insufficient people and a lack of a minister. However, Abington finally became a township in 1712. The incorporated land encompassed "six miles in length and about four miles and a half in breadth" and included 17 homes.[13]Abington, not unusual in its founding or composition, gives us the perfect place to trace the impact of individualization on a single town and the resulting rationalization.

To understand the trend of individualism in the eighteenth century we must first know how Congregational churches governed in the seventeenth century. The ecclesiastical government relied on communal bonds to ensure the proper execution of procedure. The laity deferred to the authority and expertise of their pastors.[14] The pastors' positions as community leaders required such deference. When the church needed a

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[11] The map is of Modern Day Abington but it is a good visual representation of Abington and the surrounding towns. "Town of Abington Massachusetts." Massachusetts Historical Society, *Collections of the Massachusetts Historical Society*, 114; For map: "Abington, Massachusetts" *FamilySearch,* Accessed February 18, 2015, https://stage.familysearch.org/learn/wiki/en/Abington, Massachusetts.

[12] The Congregational Churches nearest each other came together to make their own network of interdependency. Nearby churches relied on each other to attend council meetings and host pastors. We see this in Abington with their reliance on certain other churches like the church in Halifax and in the opening of Abington's pulpit to Rev. William Smith of Weymouth. This network is important to scholars because it can bring to light missing information through a cross referencing of local records.

[13]Ibid; "Town of Abington Massachusetts" Accessed February 15, 2015, http://www.abingtonma.gov/; In comparison Marlborough had approximately 55 people at its incorporation and about eight or ten families. Sudbury had a population of around 80 in 1640. Abington tried to stop the incorporation of Hanover from part of Abington and Scituate in 1726 claiming there were not enough people. There were 53 families, which was small but more than Abington at its start. Charles Hudson, *History of the Town of Marlborough, Middlesex County, Massachusetts: From its First Settlement in 1657 to 1861* (Boston: Press of T.R. Marvin & Son, 1862), 247; Sumner Chilton Powell, *Puritan Village: The Formation of a New England Town* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 1963), Figure 14; JedediahDwelley and John F. Simmons, *History of the Town of Hanover, Massachusetts, with Family Genealogies*(Published by the town of Hanover, 1910), 11-12.

[14] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 10.

decision on theology the lay vote dutifully followed the minister's guidance. Furthermore, the church rarely decided discipline in a public meeting because the parties involved privately addressed the issue. Individuals did not strive to preserve their innocence and reputations at all costs, unlike Abington. Rather they came to private agreements. Such action put less stress on communal bonds and the ecclesiastical government, letting it work without contention. Even large churches such as the First Church of Boston "averaged only four or five formal disciplinary hearings each year through the 1640s."[15] We see then a lack of conflict and factionalism even in Boston.

The church of Abington presents us with a different outlook than that of seventeenth century Congregational churches. Incorporated in 1712, growing individualism led to rising factionalism and contention in the church in the 1720s. The Great Awakening and resulting religious division amplified this individualism. Individualism finally led to the breakdown of ecclesiastical government because of the government's base on communal bonds. Rationalization of church government and doctrine stabilized Abington and allowed the church to adapt to an individualizing laity.

[15] Ibid., 22-23, 26-27

CHAPTER I

ALL OUR YESTERDAYS

In 1712 Abington formed a church and ecclesiastical government to join together a new community in spiritual unity.[16] However, the system proved weak and unable to resolve basic differences and contention within the fractious community. By the 1740s several forces proved too much for the frail system and all pretense of harmony collapsed into open division, hostility, and internal discord. An examination of the disciplinary records of Abington reveals that rising individualism provoked this contention between church members, and between the laity and the minister.

The first minster during this divisive time was Reverend Samuel Brown. Born in Newbury in 1687, he graduated from Harvard in 1709. The church of Abington called him in 1711. However, the ordination did not take place until 1714. He would continue

[16] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington, Plymouth County, Massachusetts: With an Appendix* (Boston: Samuel N. Dickinson, 1839,) 35. Accessed February, 15 2015. http://books.google.com/books?id=DMwTAAAAYAAJ&pg=PA7&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=3#v=onepage&q&f=false

to serve the town of Abington until his death in 1749. During his time as pastor, the First Congregational Church of Abington expanded from its original 8 founders to 207 members. The church's acceptance of the half-way covenant of 1662, which allowed the baptism of children even when their parents were not members, resulted in more baptisms than full members, in total 512.[17]

The Church of Abington, like other Congregational churches, had its own covenant that formed the center of its ecclesiastical government. One had to enter the covenant to become a full member of the church and receive the ordinance of Communion. The church considered the church covenant integral to how "a company of Christians… bec[ame] a [c]hurch[,]" through "bind[ing] themselves to the Lord, and one to another."[18] In this covenant, church members agreed "to walk together as a [Church] of [Christ], [i]n all wayes of his owne instituting agreeable to y^{e} –prescriptions of his holy word."[19] The basic tenets of *Sola Fide* and *Sola Scriptura* created the foundation of the church covenant. The church believed that God joined with individual members through a dispensation of his grace. Man could not keep the pact on his own merit because of his sinful nature. Individuals in this covenant of grace then joined together as a church. One had to be entered into covenant of grace before one fully entered the church covenant. Those in the church covenant strived to follow the Gospel alone, and while they

[17] Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 39-40, 44.
[18] Richard Mather, *An Apology of the Churches in New-England for Church-Covenant* (Shropshire, England: Quinta Press, 2011), 10, 8. http://quintapress.macmate.me/PDF_Books/An_Apology_v1.pdf [Accessed November 14, 2012].
[19] *Abington Church Records 1714-1749*, Transcribed by James F. Cooper, page not numbered. Covenant.

understood that man could not keep the covenant by himself, they expected each other to "Beseec[h] God to make [their] Spirits steadfast in his Covenant."[20]

Church discipline protected the integrity of this church covenant by preserving church purity. Because discipline was an integral part of church government and the one lens through which to analyze church interaction for signs of growing individualism, it is important to understand the fundamental role of discipline and how it properly functioned. Otherwise it will prove impossible to trace changes in church discipline and its shifting reception in the church community. The church considered continued willful sinning and refusal of repentance as a breach of covenant and worthy of censure. The sinner no longer looked to Christ, in the eyes of the local church, and may not have been one of the elect who received the grace of God. If the congregation did not act to fix the breach, the church allowed itself "to be profaned by [a] notorious and obstinate offende[r]."[21] Because the church needed to maintain the purity of its covenant, the church required members to "yield [them]selves to ye Discipline & power of [Christ] in his [Church] and attend [its] Seals and Censures."[22] These censures included excommunication, the withdrawal of "all Christian fellowship and communion[,]" and admonition, a suspension from the ordinance of communion until the admonished

[20] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* Covenant; Mather, *An Apology of the Churches in New-England,* 33-34.
[21] *The Results of Three Synods held by the Elders and Messengers of the Churches of Massachusetts Province, New England : Containing, I. The Platform of Church-discipline in the Year 1648 : II. Propositions Concerning the Subject of Baptism in 1662 : III. The Necessity of Reformation with the Expedients Subservient there-unto Asserted, in Answer to Two Questions in 1679* (Boston : Re-printed for B. Eliot and D. Henchman, 1725), 34. Sabin Americana.
[22] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* Covenant.

repented.[23] Both censures allowed for the removal of the offender and the restoration of the Church's covenant with God.

However, church discipline served functions beyond the preservation of church purity. The main purpose of church discipline was "the winning and healing of the offender's soul."[24] Even the harshest censure, excommunication, was not immutable. The church used excommunication to turn an erring soul towards God. For while some were saved with compassion, "others [were] save[d] with [the] fear" of excommunication and eternal damnation.[25] It was an impetus meant to shock the offender into self-examination and realization of sin. This jolt of fear came from the separation of one's soul from God's church and the attendant possibility of damnation. If the church refused to reinstate a sinner, it deemed that person was most likely not one of the elect and permanently separated the offender from an institution of God. While the excommunication lasted, the church viewed the excommunicate as cursed, belonging "under the Kingdome of Satan."[26] However, permanent excommunication was rare; most excommunicates repented and the church returned them to membership.

The church enacted discipline with "a spirit of Meekness" because sin could tempt anyone.[27] To help ensure that church discipline was neither too strict nor too lax, the church followed multiple steps during the chastising of a member. In a private

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[23] Nathanael Emmons, "A Platform of Ecclesiastical Government, Established by the Lord Jesus". 1826. Prefixed to the *Cambridge Platform*. Accessed February Cambridge platform 19; Cambridge Synod, *The Results of Three Synods*, 35.
[24] *The Results of Three Synods*, 36; *Abington Church Records*, Covenant.
[25] Ibid.
[26] Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline Wherein the Way of the Churches of New-England is Warranted out of the Word, and all Exceptions of Weight which are made against it, Answered* (London: A.M., 1648), 281. Sabin Americana. http://galenet.galegroup.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/servlet/Sabin [Accessed September 20, 2012].
[27] Cambridge Synod, *The Results of Three Synods*, 35-36.

offense, the affronted party admonished the errant member first privately, then with a group of two or three to bear witness. Only if the offender refused to repent, even when confronted, could the aggrieved bring the case before the church for formal censuring.[28] Church discipline did not rely on ministerial authority alone. Censure could only be enacted with the consent of the (male) members of the church and it was within their rights to "hinder the execution of [a] sentence" if they believed the sentence unjust.[29] In fact, it was a sin to affirm a wrongful censure and the duty of the church members to dissent from any unjust or unscriptural actions of the elders.[30] This requirement for church consent in discipline is what makes disciplinary records a good source of lay/ministerial interaction.

To analyze Abington's disciplinary records, one must first contextualize them within the trends of the day. The Abington records align with the trends of censure in Massachusetts in the 1720s. The frequency of censure in church discipline had decreased by the 1720s for multiple reasons. The first and most drastic reason for the shift was the Salem Witch Trials in 1692. By the 1720s, both churches and civil courts alike understood the Salem trials, executions, and excommunications had been a mistake. In 1710, the courts examined "several persons who were condemned... [and the] damages they sustained" and agreed to compensation.[31] By 1712, even the Church of Salem had reversed the excommunication of Rebecca Nurse, claiming that the testimony against her

[28] Ibid., 35-36.
[29] Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline,* 197.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Recommendation and Authorization for Compensation Claims and Amounts Allowed, September 14, 1710, *Massachusetts Archives Collection*, 135 (Boston), 145.

was insufficient as it occurred in an "hour of Darkness and Temptation."[32] Consequently, in later years few churches were willing to use excommunication, except as a last resort, with the specter of such past abuses in recent memory. As Cooper notes in *Tenacious of their Liberties* "ministers pleaded for calm and healing."[33] The most common disciplinary tactic of Massachusetts' Congregational churches, including Abington, at this time, was a simple suspension of members from communion, in expectation of repentance.[34]

Other far-reaching developments contributed to shifting censure practices. David C. Brown discusses these in "The Keys of the Kingdom, Excommunication in Colonial Massachusetts."[35] While censure, especially excommunication, involved an element of social punishment through shunning, the censure could not "deprive [the excommunicated] of his Civil Rights."[36] Consequently, church punishment remained separate from civil law. Because of separation of civil and church law, social shunning did not have governmental power supporting it as it did in England. The only way a church could isolate an excommunicated was if all the town people were a part of the church and in agreement with the shunning. However, the Massachusetts charter of 1691 stripped the social dominance of the church, allowing for "liberty of conscience" in religious matters.[37] As more people became members of other denominations, such as the Baptists, exclusion from the Congregational church lost its isolating ability. The

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[32] Richard D. Pierce, ed. "The Records of the First Church in Salem Massachusetts 1629-1736," [March] 6, 1712, *Electronic Text Center, University of Virginia Library*. http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/etcbin/toccer-new2?id=SalRec1.xml&images=images/modeng&data=/texts/english/modeng/parsed&tag=public&part=3&division=div1 [Accessed November 15, 2012].
[33] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 144.
[34] Ibid., 145.
[35] David C. Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom: Excommunication in Colonial Massachusetts," *The New England Quarterly* 67 (December 1994).
[36] Cambridge Synod, The Results of Three Synods, 36.
[37] The 1691 Massachusetts charter as quoted in Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom," 560.

dissenting population grew throughout the 1720s. Brown notes that Boston gained prominent Anglican churches in 1723 and 1735. According to William McLoughlin, Quakers and Baptists increased only proportionally to population from 1690-1734. However, "Anglicans increased substantially."[38] By 1735, 1% of the population in the Puritan colonies were dissenters. While this is not a large percentage, it was enough to prevent complete social isolation, giving excommunicates the option of becoming a dissenter rather than asking forgiveness and returning to their church.[39]

The final reason for the decrease in censure usage was the advent of the Halfway-Covenant. While only 1% dissented, many more were outside of the church's control. Though baptized as children, many felt they had not experienced the saving act of grace needed to become full church members. The Synod of 1662 brought baptized children under the "seal of [m]embership" so that they were under church covenant and "liable to [c]hurch-censures" without the need for full induction into church communion or evidence of God's act of saving grace.[40] This new addition to church government, called the Halfway-Covenant, was important, as Kenneth Lockridge notes in his book *New England Town*, in bolstering the flagging numbers of church membership.[41] However, allowing children partially into the church covenant meant that the church membership was no longer limited to visible saints. Some of those children might grow up to be negligent adults. The church would then have no other choice than to either remove them from the church or lessen disciplinary censures. The increase in numbers also made the

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[38] William G. McLoughlin, *The Baptists and the Separation of Church and State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 120

[39] Ibid., 120-121. Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom," 551-553, 556, 561.

[40] Cambridge Synod, The Results of Three Synods, 36.

[41] Lockridge, Kenneth A., *A New England Town: The First Hundred Years* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1985), 34.

process of keeping watch on members and enforcing disciplinary measures more difficult.[42]

One sees the necessity of reducing disciplinary censures best in the complaint of a minister in 1730. Two of his negligent church members left for the Anglican Church after being disciplined. The pastor complained in a letter to a fellow minister that he had to stop disciplining members or risk losing them to the Anglicans.[43] Pastors had to minimize censures to keep church members.

One can see the decline of excommunication and admonition in the eighteenth-century throughout Massachusetts's Congregational churches. The First Church at Dorchester's records last mention excommunication in 1692, when the church censured a widow who ran off with "another woman's husbond."[44] According to Brown, the last excommunication at the First Church in Boston was in 1715, when the church excommunicated James Maxwell "for the sin of drunkenness." Excommunication was not the only censure whose usage decreased. The major churches of Boston and Salem did not admonish members after 1720.[45]

Though Samuel Brown, the first minister of Abington, would end his career in controversy, the beginning of his ministry seemed peaceful, based on the relative absence of discipline cases. From the founding of the church in 1712 to 1730, Abington had six

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[42] Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom: Excommunication in Colonial Massachusetts," 559-560.
[43] Ibid., 561.
[44] First Church, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester, in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston: George H. Ellis, 1891), 15. Accessed November 15, 2012. http://books.google.com/books?id=0-xzW5V-AzoC&q=excommuni#v=snippet&q=another%20woma n's&f=false
[45] Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom", 56; Richard D. Pierce, ed. "The Records of the First Church in Boston 1630-1868, volume 1" (Boston: The Society, 1961), 182. *Electronic Texts in American Studies.* Paper 62. Accessed November 15, 2012. http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1061&context=etas.

recorded cases of church discipline: one case of fornication, two cases of non-attendance, an unspecified misdemeanor and an unusual case in which the church censured the deacon and removed him from his post for falsehood. The former deacon then absented himself from church, resulting in further censure. Of these incidents, only the deacon and the woman who committed the misdemeanors were put under the censure of admonition.[46] The other offenders confessed and apparently the church did not admonish them.

By comparing the censures found in Abington with the censure numbers found in Emil Oberholzer's *Delinquent Saints,* one can contextualize Abington's records with other churches in Massachusetts. While Oberholzer's data is by no means exhaustive, it is more than enough to place Abington within disciplinary trends. From 1690-1729, a total of forty years, there were only nine cases of fornication in Plymouth County and twenty-five cases in Norfolk County. In terms of single churches, not counting acquittals: Plymouth's First Church had one case from 1710-1729, Boston's First Church had four cases of fornication, Boston's Second Church had five, and Dorchester's Church had a high of thirteen cases. The town closest to Abington that Oberholzer examined, Quincy Massachusetts, had a total of three cases. This sample group ends up with a mean of 4.5 cases per church from 1710-1729. Abington's single case of fornication is well within the standard deviation of the sample.[47]

Oberholzer compiled statistics of absenteeism, not all of which became censures, "based on all the records…consulted in the various counties" excluding those connected

[46] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1714-1749.
[47] Emil, *Delinquent Saints,* 254-257. (Standard deviation of above sample 4.46.)

to schisms and conversion or "incidental to another offense."[48] We can compare these figures to Abington's numbers. In his sample, Oberholzer found two cases in Plymouth County from 1690-1729. In the Massachusetts records Oberholzer examined he found seven cases of absenteeism from 1710-1729. None of the people censured for absenteeism left their church.[49] If one removes the absence censure connected to the deacon's falsehood case, Abington had a total of two in the 1720s.[50] When we compare Abington's numbers to the absenteeism seen in the 1730s and 1740s, it is quite low. The number of total absences found by Oberholzer more than doubled in the 1730s, from seven to eighteen. In the 1740s, this number rose further to twenty-nine.[51] The absenteeism found in Abington, though low when compared to the 1740s, did show the inherent weakness in the ecclesiastical government and its inability to inspire absentee members to forego their own individualistic tendencies and family ties for the good of church harmony.

Most unusual in Abington's disciplinary records from this time period were not the number of cases but the numerous church councils, and the lay, and minister/lay tension that surrounded the councils. These councils undermined the working of church discipline and reveal a glimmer of the individualism and lay contention that riddled Abington in the 1740s and eventually led to the complete collapse of church order.[52] The first disciplinary case spawned two councils and created lay contention despite being a seemingly simple case. Those involved in the case placed their own desires and family

[48] Ibid., 251-252.
[49] Ibid., 252-253.
[50] Both absentees were upset at the ruling of another disciplinary case and at the testimony given during said case. However, as neither absentee were one of the ones disciplined in that case one cannot say they were directly connected to the case.
[51] Ibid., 253
[52] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1714-1749, 3-8.

reputation over church harmony, and fought any church decision that reflected poorly on them.

William Hersey Jr. and his wife Abigail were the son and daughter-in-law of founding church members William Hersey Sr. and his wife Sarah.[53] Abigail was a halfway member, and she and her husband, who had yet to own the covenant, wished to have their child baptized.[54] The church refused because of its suspicion of fornication. One of the Herseys requested that the church call a council, but absented himself the day the church voted.[55] The vote passed and the church called a council in November of 1722. The church of Abington expected the council to "Settle ye difference wth respect to ye baptizing;" the council consisted of delegations from the churches of Milton, North Braintree, and Dorchester.[56] The council found in favor of Reverend Brown and the church majority, saying the child showed "Clear Signes of a perfection of Growth & Strength" beyond that of a child born at 5 months and nine days.[57] "Brown [did] Not Consen[t] to…Will^{m} Hearfeys [?] owning ye Covenant" and refused to baptize the child until Hersey made "a penitent Confession of his Sin of fornication."[58] The council urged Hersey towards this repentance. It must have also noticed strife within the church, because the council instructed Abington to "lay aside Contention & to follow y^{e} Things y^{t} make for peace" and to "honour y^{eir} Revnd Past^{r} In y^{r} Lord."[59] Contention had split the church into factions, Hersey's allies and his detractors. The church of Abington did not

[53] http://jskent.blogspot.com/2010/02/william-hersey-family-us-1635-to.html
[54] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1715-1716, 31.
[55] The records are stained here so it is unclear if Hersey Jr. or Sr. asked for the council.
[56] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1722, 3; First Church, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester,* 137.
[57] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1722, 3.
[58] Ibid., 4.
[59] Ibid.

take these words of caution and peace to heart, for this was not the last of the Hersey case.

Instead of following the council's advice and repenting, Hersey Jr. disappeared from Abington's records for many years. This lack of resolution only prolonged church strife. The first council actually furthered contention as the laity divided along family lines over the result. In December of 1722, the church asked William Tirrell to explain his absence from church and his accusation of false witness against one Mrs. Porter during the council. Tirrell explained he would not have absented himself "If he had Considered his obligation by [Church] Covenant" and claimed his accusation resulted from misunderstanding. After offering his apology, the church forgave Tirrell.[60] Despite Tirrell's explanations, it is probable his comments during the council were based on family ties as Mrs. Hersey's maiden name was that of Tirrell.[61] It is far more likely that Tirrell accused Mrs. Porter to defend his family's reputation and it seems rather doubtful that his absence from church right after the council meeting was not connected. Thus, we see contention and infighting amongst the laity and a placement of familial reputation over church duty. William Tirrell may not have violated the church covenant out of contempt for the church, but he chose to absent himself when faced with a challenge to his family reputation rather than to accept the council decision and thereby promote church unity.

[60] Ibid. 4-5

[61] *Vital Records of Abington Massachusetts To the Year 1850 Volume II-Marriages and Deaths* (Boston: New England Historic Genealogical Society, 1912), 104. Accessed February 15, 2015, http://ma-vitalrecords.org/MA/Plymouth/Abington/Images/Abington_M104.shtml.

William Tirrell Jr.'s wife, Deborah Tirrell, also stopped attending church in July of 1723. When asked about her absence, her response was twofold. First she said she was sick. But this claim was followed by the statement "She Should Not partake till She was better Satisfied wth the Wittnesses" in the Hersey case. Mrs. Tirrell leaves no doubt that she also absented herself because of the Hersey case and the continuing tension between the two sides, witnesses and family. The church later censured her for irregular behavior and she was not restored to communion until 1728.[62]

The Tirrells continued to stick by the Hersey family. In September of 1724, Isaac Harris, a Bridgewater innkeeper, took William Hersey before the Plymouth Court of Common Pleas to answer for a debt of £13. Abington innkeeper Thomas Tirrell, son of William Tirrell, was one of the bond's guarantors, showing the continued close relations between the two families.[63]

While the court judgment of £6.11s.9d and £2.17s.3d was appealed, William Hersey's church case would stretch out far longer than his time in civil court.[64] Instead of simply confessing to their crime of fornication in order to have their child baptized, the Herseys chose to put the church through a second council, bringing further trouble in an effort to avoid a confession of guilt. The Church of Abington called the council in October of 1724. While no record of this council remains in the Abington church records, the records of the first church of Dorchester tell us that the council reaffirmed its earlier decision. William and Abigail Hersey's children could be baptized in any church if only

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[62]Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1723, 6-7.
[63] David Thomas Konig, ed., *Plymouth Court Records 1686-1859* "Volume 5 The Court of Common Pleas 1702-1736," (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc, 1979), 174; Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 30.
[64] Konig, "Volume 5 The Court of Common Pleas 1702-1736," 174.

they "present[ed] a confession approved by the council."[65] Defying two councils, William Hersey and his wife tried one more time in 1731 to enter into fellowship with the First Church in Abington without repenting. The church requested a confession yet again, but also gave the Herseys the option of "Solemnly Clear[ing] y^{m} Selves from Such a Suspicion In the Strongest Terms."[66] The Herseys claimed their innocence and the church finally admitted them into communion nine years after the first council was called.[67] In the end, the church of Abington submitted to the Hersey's wishes allowing them entrance without a confession. The church conceded its position, for the sake of communal harmony but the Herseys did not. One can clearly see the beginning of individualism, the placement of individual reputation over the community.

The Hersey case was not the only case from 1714-1730 in which an individual's desires brought both strife and a council to Abington. In January of 1723 the church convicted deacon Joseph Lincoln, whom it elected in 1717, "of falshoods & Injustice &…Many other Irregularities very unseemly to such a post."[68] A deacon was supposed to prove himself qualified and blameless, for a post established by Christ. Scripture required them to be "grave, not double-tongued, not given to much wine, not given to filthy lucre."[69] A conviction of falsehood then was considered a strong affront to scripture and to Christ. It was also a breach of the church's trust because a deacon was supposed to care for the offerings, gifts, communion table, and treasury of the church. The church

[65]First Church, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester, in New England, 1636-1734,* 137.
[66]Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1731, 8.
[67] Ibid., 8, 2.
[68] Ibid., 1723, 5.
[69] Cambridge Synod, *The Results of Three Synods*, 15.

could no longer trust Lincoln to care for "the temporal good… of the Church."[70] Lincoln had bought land from Tirell under the false pretense of keeping the sheriff from it.[71] The deacon meant to care for the material possessions of the church lied for his own material gain.

The church removed Lincoln from his post, he later confessed his sins and was "Restored to Charity as a Brother of y^{e} [church]."[72] Despite what seemed a quick and orderly resolution to the case, the church reopened the matter the next week because "A Number of y^{e} Brethren Declared y^{t} they Did Not fully understand y^{e} proceedings…wth respect of ejecting of Joseph Lincolne out of his post of Deac^{n} Ship."[73] The church retook the vote and once again removed him from his post by unanimous consent. After this vote Joseph Lincoln "absented himselfe from Communion for Six Monthes."[74]

As events would eventually show, Lincoln absented himself because of his shame and anger. He, like William Hersey, was more preoccupied with his honor and reputation than his duty to the church. The church finally called Lincoln to account for his absence in July of 1723, whereupon he refused to explain his non-attendance and the church placed him under the censure of admonition. A month later, Lincoln requested a meeting to explain his absence. Lincoln noted three reasons for his non-attendance. The first was a sickness that lasted a few months. The second was that the church had removed him from his position as deacon. His third and final reason was what happened after Reverend Brown had told him "y^{t} he had Thro his mismanagements been Instrumental of keeping

[70] Ibid.
[71] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1723, 5.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Ibid.

Sundry out of y^{e} Chh." After Brown's statement, a fellow member, Andrew Forde, "Declared before y^{e} Chh" that he had told Lincoln of his mismanagement.[75] This third reason shows that Joseph Lincoln was not just ashamed at his loss of status but angry with both a fellow member for confronting him in front of the church, and with Reverend Brown who accused him of preventing the membership of others. Lincoln's later actions clearly show his dissatisfaction with Reverend Brown.

Later in 1723, Lincoln would attack Brown's authority and bring contention into the church, laying the groundwork for a further rupture of lay-minster relations in the 1740s. The church had not found Lincoln's reasons for absenteeism to be acceptable and refused to lift the censure they had placed on him. After this vote Lincoln asked the church to call a council claiming "y^{t} he was not offended wth y^{e} [church] nor any of the Brethren but only wth y^{e} Past^{r} ."[76] Thus, even though Lincoln had mentioned Brother Andrew Forde's words, by this time he placed all the blame on Reverend Brown. He no doubt remembered Brown's harsh words and most likely knew that Brown helped guide the laity in questions of church discipline, and he therefore chose to attack Brown's authority rather than question the members. When the church refused his request to call a council, Lincoln took his attack a step further and "Called a Councill himselfe, on y^{e} 31st of Decemb^{r} 1723."[77]

By calling the council himself, Lincoln removed the decision to call a council from Brown and the church membership. By the eighteenth century, ecclesiastical

[75] Ibid., 1723, 6. The actual sentence is a bit vague only saying "It was he yt… had tolde him So." However if Ford had been talking of telling Brown, the Reverend would have used the first person as he did throughout the explanation of the reasons.
[76] Ibid.
[77] Ibid.

government allowed a person to unilaterally call a council if he or she felt oppressed and unfairly censured. All that the ecclesiastical government required was for the aggrieved individual to inform the local church. However, this step was to be a measure of last resort after the "aggrieved appli[ed] himself… to the church with humble remonstrances of the hardships…used upon him."[78] In being denied a council, Lincoln believed he had no choice but to call one himself to address the oppressive way he felt Samuel Brown treated him.

Lincoln set a precedent in Abington by using unilateral action to undermine ministerial and church authority. While the council decided that Lincoln must "make an acknowledgement" to be returned to Communion, the consequences were far-reaching.[79] Lincoln had pinpointed Reverend Samuel Brown as the reason for his discontent and alienation. He also showed that an individual could question the reverend's authority and the authority of the entire church.

In a little over twenty years, Samuel Brown would be at the center of a church division that would erode the very bases of church governance and the church covenant itself. Who then was this unfortunate man and how did he help guide and govern? As noted earlier, Brown graduated from Harvard in 1709. He was a very astute man and a practicing lawyer; John Sibley noted that one time Brown managed to spot a con man and expose him as a fraud. A man came to Abington asking for charity, claiming he had been

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[78] Cotton Mather, *Ratio disciplinae fratrum Nov-Anglorum : a faithful account of the discipline professed and practised, in the churches of New-England : with interspersed and instructive reflections on the discipline of the primitive churches* (Boston: 1726), 158 Accessed February 15, 2015, http://galenet.galegroup.com.argo.library.okstate.edu/servlet/Sabin?dd=0&locID=stil74078&d1=SABCP02285400&srchtp=a&c=1&an=SABCP02285400&df=f&d2=173&docNum=CY3802250298&h2=1&vrsn=1.0&af=RN&d6=173&d3=173&ste=10&stp=Author&d4=0.33&d5=d6&ae=CY102250126

[79] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,*1723, 6.

imprisoned by the Turks who removed his tongue. Whereupon Brown "put his finger into the Imposters Throat, which obliged [the con] to produce his Tongue or be choaked."[80] This action, along with the deacon Lincoln affair, shows Brown was not only astute but also forceful. From his detailed record keeping, it is safe to assume he was very meticulous and kept a close eye on the proceedings and decisions of his congregation. Such a proactive attitude may not have endeared him to some of the laity.

Brown was also well off financially. Records from 1738 of the Superior Court of Judicature in Suffolk show that Brown was a creditor to a Jacob Cooke of Abington for a total of £46 in bills of credit. Even taking into account that the inflation rate for Bills of Credit in New England in 1738 was 5.00 £/£st, Brown loaned, at the least, the equivalent of over £9 sterling. This amount was probably even more at the time of its loaning, in 1735.[81] Cooke proved unable to pay back the sum and tried to appeal the case on the fact that his name was Jacob Cooke Jr. but the writ only said Jacob Cooke. The court denied the appeal and Cooke paid the remaining £27 plus court fees.[82]

Besides loaning money, Brown owned five slaves.[83] Slavery was not widely prevalent in Massachusetts. As of 1754-1755, only 2,423 blacks lived in Massachusetts and only 121 in Plymouth County.[84] Two of his slaves, Flora and Tony, became church members. Tony repented of his "sinfull life & Declared how God had met him & wrought

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[80] *Boston Newsletter* April 19, 1733. Cited in John Langdon Sibley's, *Biographical sketches of graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts* (Boston: Massachusetts Historical Society,) 480.
[81] Bennett T. McCallum, "Money and Prices in Colonial America: A New Test of Competing Theory," *The National Bureau of Economic Research,* No. 3383, (June 1990):11. Accessed February 15, 2015, http://www.nber.org/papers/w3383.pdf.
[82] "Samuel Brown Vs. Jacob Cooke," *Records of the Superior Court of Judicature of Suffolk County,* 1738.
[83] Benjamin Hobart, *History of the Town of Abington, Plymouth County, Massachusetts, from Its First Settlement,* (Boston: T. H. Carter and Son, 1866), 251.
[84] Edgar J. McManus, *Black Bondage in the North*, (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1973), 199.

upon him & was Baptized" in December of 1741.[85] The church admitted him into the ordinance of communion in October of 1742.[86] The church brought Flora into communion in June of 1742.[87] A third slave ran away. Brown placed a newspaper ad in the *Boston Evening Post* on October 5, 1747. He offered a reward of £3 for the return of his runaway slave, a 20 year old named Cuffy, to "whoever shall take up said servant, and bring him to his said Master."[88]

Despite Lincoln's accusation of misconduct, Brown governed his church according to the Cambridge Platform, formed in 1648 to direct the management of Congregational churches. As fastidious as Brown was, it should be unsurprising that he followed closely the platform's blueprint for ecclesiastical government. The Cambridge platform declares the "[g]overnment of the church…a mixt [g]overnement" with a monarchy, Christ, a democracy, the Brotherhood, and an aristocracy, the presbytery.[89] Church administration then must be considered concurrent, with power divided between the congregation and the presbytery. "No Church-Act [could] be consummated or perfected without the consent of both" the pastor and the brethren.[90] We see this ideal practiced in all the censures Reverend Brown presided over; though Lincoln placed blame on Brown, the church voted to carry out his recommended censures.

We also see Brown's commitment to concurrent government in his provision for the ordinance of communion. The pastor and the membership controlled communion

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[85] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1741, 23, 25.
[86] Ibid., 23.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Antonio T. Bly, Ed., *Escaping Bondage: A Documentary History of Runaway Slaves in Eighteenth-Century New England, 1700-1789* (Lanham, Maryland: Lexington Books, 2012), 56.
[89] *The Results of Three Synods*, 21
[90] Ibid., 24.

concurrently. The pastor implemented the ordinance and the church controlled the finances. Communion was a key point in a church covenant. When a group of people covenanted together as a church, they agreed to "give up themselves unto the Lord, [and] to the observing of the Ordinances of Christ," which included Communion.[91] Samuel Brown allowed for concurrent government in the laying of the Lord's Table by taking a yearly vote for its provision. The church first voted in March 1725, in which it decided that provision would be provided through free contribution. If free contribution did not raise enough funds, then the "[church] should make it good to the Deacon" for taking care of the communion linens and vessels.[92]

Reverend Brown may have been responsible for administering the ordinance, but he left financial details to the church. The church voted to renew the system of free contribution every year from 1725 to 1732. In the years after, this process would continue on an irregular basis. Whenever the church went into debt to the deacon, it would make good through a "contribution of ye Brethren of ye Church."[93] The church as a whole voted on communion provision and as a whole was responsible for it. The church also voted on how the deacons were to spend money willed to the church. For example, the church voted to use money left to it by deacon French in 1743 for "Two Tankards & four Bekers."[94] Thus, both the minister and the laity held power over the ordinances concurrently. However, the open-ended arrangement that required yearly voting, while

[91] Ibid., 8.
[92] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1725, 7.
[93] Ibid., 1732, 9.
[94] Ibid., 1743, 11.

flexible, left gaps in the records during times of tension and fighting. The most noticeable gap in the records extends from 1744 to 1747.[95]

The gap in the communion records can be seen as a sign of the breakdown of the ecclesiastical government proscribed by the Cambridge Platform due to individualism. One sees then that while Reverend Brown may have been a confrontational man he was also mindful of his role as a pastor adhering to the government outlined in the Cambridge Platform. The contention found in the Church of Abington was not the result of some heresy or shortcoming on Brown's part but a sign of growing individualism. The Great Awakening would foster individualism to such an extent that commitment to the Cambridge Platform could no longer control and govern the church community.

However, as the 1730s began, the breakdown of ecclesiastical government still lay in the future. Even though there were stirrings of individualism and family factionalism in the 1720s, the 1730s were a peaceful time for Abington. There were only two censures during the decade, one for fornication and another for drunkenness.[96]

Abington's tranquility in the 1730s was slightly at odds with the churches around it. Massachusetts Congregational Churches had a much more tumultuous decade. To discover why there was a discrepancy, one needs to examine the disciplinary cases. In the mid-eighteenth century 40% of women had children only eight and a half months after their wedding compared to 10% in the 1600's.[97] Oberholzer also noted this increase; five of the sixteen churches he looked at show the highest number of fornication cases in the

[95] Ibid., 1744-1747, 11-14.
[96] Ibid., 1731-1738, 9-10.
[97] Steven Mintz and Susan Kellogg, *Domestic Revolutions: A Social History Of American Family Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1988), 41-42.

1730s. He suggested two reasons for this upswing: the removal of fornication as a crime in civil court and the arrival of the Great Awakening. The Great Awakening could have caused a perception of increased cases through stricter discipline, or the upswing could have been the result of misplaced passions left over from the Great Awakening.[98]

However, there seems to be no connection between the Great Awakening and fornication cases in Abington. There was only one case in the 1730s and no cases in the 1740s when certain church members started to divide along Old Light/New Light lines.[99] Granted, this lack of fornication cases may be a direct result of the infighting and the chaos it wrought on the governance of the church. Abington may have been so focused on the religious divide in the 1740s, and the church's government so unstable that the church overlooked fornication or could not properly address it for fear of creating more contention. However, this explanation does not provide answers for differences in the 1730s. Oberholzer's speculation about civil action is also not viable. If the Congregational churches in Plymouth County were attempting to compensate for a lack of civil oversight, there would not be a discrepancy between Abington and the rest of Plymouth County. Besides, civil oversight of fornication cases continued throughout the 1740s in Plymouth County. The court records show fornicators were fined £4 to £5 through the 1740s.[100] What then caused the increase of fornication cases and disciplinary cases as a whole in Plymouth, and why does Abington not reflect this increase?

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[98] These theories are attributed to Henry B. Parkes and Charles Francis Adams respectively. Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints* 130; 254; 238-239.
[99] Cooper, *Abington Church Records* 1731-1749, 8-16.
[100] David Thomas Konig, Ed., "Volume 2 General Sessions of the Peace 1719-1749" *Plymouth Court Records 1686-1859* (Wilmington, Delaware: Michael Glazier Inc, 1978), 265.

There are no answers to be found in the single drunkenness case Abington adjudicated in the 1730s, as it is hard to say much about the trends of intoxication cases. Oberholzer notes that because of a lack of records "the figures on alcoholism show no significant trends."[101] Plymouth County is shown to have only had 5 cases involving intoxication during the time of 1730-1769, but in the forty years before there were 14 cases. Despite Plymouth's numbers, total intoxication cases remained nearly the same in Massachusetts from 1690-1769.[102] Abington clearly does not match Plymouth's slight rise from 1690-1730 and remains constant. Cases of intoxication and continued intemperance no doubt say more about the health and wellbeing of the person than of the church. William Hersey, who the church censured in 1738 for intoxication and "Vowing and Swearing & uttering…other Vile Terms[,]" would be censured again for "Vile & unchristian Deportment" resulting from alcohol abuse in the 1740s.[103]

However, if one looks at the number of church absences, one starts to see the answer to the discrepancy between Abington's disciplinary records and wider disciplinary trends of the 1730s. Oberholzer found that absences in Plymouth County for 1730-1769 increased from previous years from two to ten absences. Abington would parallel this increase in the 1740s but not the 1730s. However, there was clearly an increase of absences throughout Massachusetts in the 1730s as the total number of absences nearly tripled the previous decade's number, giving a total of eighteen.[104] Cooper also noted this trend, as he found "[o]fficers in Beverly, Brewster, Boston's First

[101] Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints,* 153.
[102] Ibid., 259-260.
[103] Cooper, *Abington Church Records* 1738, 1746 10-12.
[104] Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints,* 252-253.

and Third Churches, Framingham, Haverhill, Longmeadow, Wakefield" all criticized absenteeism in the 1730s.[105]

While Abington did not have any absences in the 1730s, one can see the effect of surrounding absences on Abington via the increase of new members. On July 28th, 1738 the church voted:

> "That Its highly reasonable That Those That are Members of other Chh's & having trans=planted ThemSelves. & become Inhabitants here Should gett Letters of recommendation from y^{e} Chh, whereto they Stand Members, & put y^{m} Selves thereby under y^{e} Watch of this Chh or else be looked upon as Disorderly."[106]

From this one can tell that people were coming to Abington without going through the proper procedures and most likely absenting themselves from their old churches, eschewing ecclesiastical rules. Furthermore, this vote came right in the middle of a lull in church admittance of new members. From May of 1738 to September of 1739 the church admitted no new members. This drop indicated an admissions system clogged by disorderly requests for admission into the church of Abington. By the fall of 1739 the church allowed new admissions and welcomed three new members.[107] If the lull had been anything besides temporary confusion, it would have lasted longer, possibly until the Great Awakening prompted the entrance of numerous new church members to Abington in 1742.[108]

The increasing absenteeism in Massachusetts shows a growing neglect of church government throughout Massachusetts, because members were no longer following the

[105] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 186-187.
[106] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,*1738, 9.
[107] Ibid., 1738-1739, 17.
[108] Ibid., 1742, 20-21. Forty New members joined in 1742.

rules laid out by the Cambridge Platform. According to the platform, the laity were not allowed to "remove or depart from the Church… as they please" because it had a ruinous effect on the church.[109] Therefore, members were required to inform their church of their removal and receive its approval. There were certain "Just Reasons" the church would accept in explanation. These explanations included fleeing the temptation of sin, escaping persecution, or because of the need for food or the need to make a living. If a member left for any other reason the church considered the absence disorderly.

Those that left with the blessing of their church received letters of dismission and testimony so that they could go to a new church. Such letters insured the new church did not "receiv[e] Deceivers, and false Bretheren."[110] Without such letters, the new church would be unable to tell if the new members were truly brothers and sisters in the covenant or hypocrites, having never heard their confession of faith nor knowing them by word and action. The dismission process assured that people could not leave the covenant without good cause and helped ease the transition to another church. It also kept a person under the auspices of a church at all times, because even with a letter of dissmission a person remained a member of that church until a new church had received them.

If a person planned to leave for a time and then return to their home church they could ask for letters of recommendation. In this way, the church always knew where its members were. The church did not allow absence or separation because of contempt, covetousness, contention, and schism as it was a danger to the church.[111] Such splintering

[109] *The Results of Three Synods*, 31.
[110] Ibid., 33.
[111] Ibid., 32.

would reduce the number of members and cause confusion through continual membership movement and turn-over.

Yet some church members had abandoned the dismission and recommendation process found in the Cambridge Platform, the results of which were increasing numbers of absentees throughout Massachusetts and new members in Abington. They had received enough members who did not follow the proper procedure to take a vote, reminding said transplants of their disorder. While it is easiest to trace the growing neglect of church governance through absenteeism, such disregard of ecclesiastical government would affect all disciplinary statistics. "The disintegration of…church order" meant that church rules would be more willingly violated as commitment to the church covenant wavered.[112] This lack of commitment can be seen as an increase in cases.

Cooper suggests two reasons for the breakdown of church government, the questioning of *Sola Scriptura* and an increasing trend toward individualism. If church governance was no longer considered backed by scripture, if it was manmade, then nothing stopped the questioning of that governance or changes in its practice. Individualistic leanings meant less consideration for the well-being of the community and covenant of the church and lessened the need for accord.[113] Growing neglect of church government in Massachusetts brought disorderly members to Abington throughout the 1730s. However, Abington's ecclesiastical government would not falter until the 1740s.

The 1720s were a time of rising individualism and contention for the church of Abington. This contention and individualism can be seen in the refusal of wrongdoers to

[112] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 160, 176.
[113] Ibid., 175-176.

follow church discipline, the multiple church councils needed to resolve basic issues, and the creation of family factions. The religious divisions of the Great Awakening amplified this growing individualism and led to the destruction of the ecclesiastical government in the 1740s. Division took a firm hold on Abington in the 1740s through the revival of lay factionalism and misgivings about Reverend Samuel Brown first seen in the 1720s.

CHAPTER II

A PRIVATE LITTLE WAR

The 1740s brought the charismatic Anglican minister George Whitefield and the Great Awakening to Massachusetts.[114] It was a time of religious division, a general increase in cases of church discipline, and the continued waning of the influence of ecclesiastical government.[115] While the Great Awakening brought spiritual revival, it did not bring a return of church harmony or focus back on to church governance. To the contrary, pastors and lay men chose instead to focus on major theological issues rather than church governance, and in many communities doctrinal divides followed frayed communal bonds.[116] Abington would be impacted by all these elements by the middle of the 1740s, as latent seeds of church contention ripened into open dissent. Individualism as manifested in town rivalries, family factionalism, and religious division reached such a height that the church ruptured and dismissed its pastor of thirty-eight years.

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[114]Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 190.

[115] Oberholzer finds in a sample of eight churches influenced by the Great Awakening that total censures rose from 111 in the 1730s to 145 in the 1740s. Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints,* 261.

[116] Ibid*.,* 237, 238; Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 190-196.

Negligence in matters of church government in Abington stemmed from and signified communal break down, rising individualism and the loss of deference to authority. All these factors are evident in Abington's disciplinary cases and multiple councils in the 1740s. The most telling of the cases are those involving actions taken directly against Reverend Samuel Brown, who enjoyed the leading position of authority in the church community.[117]

The first disciplinary case of the decade, dating from September of 1741, clearly demonstrated the ongoing consequences of rising individualism. The case, a charge of falsehood and theft, the first in twenty-nine years, involved multiple people. James Lovell, a member of the church since 1729, apparently took shingles and timber off of the land of non-member Joseph Truant, who had previously sold them to two others, Joseph Gurney and longtime church member William Hersey.[118] When the case came before the church, Lovell claimed he had bought the goods from Truant but he could not prove it "to the Satisfaction of y^{e} Chh,"[119] which asked him to refrain from communion until the situation was sorted out. But, instead of accepting the church's decision and acquiescing to its judgment, Lovell continued to defend his actions. Lovell claimed that had he not taken the shingles, Truant would not have given Lovell what he bargained for. This explanation upset the church even further. They tried to show the "Injustice[,]… Sin &

[117]Cooper, *Abington Church Records* 1741-1749, 10-16.
[118] Ibid., Could mean Hersey Sr. or Jr. 1714, 1729, 1731, covenant, 2.
[119]Ibid, 1741, 10.

folly" of forcing a deal but Lovell would not listen to their counsel. As a result the church suspended Lovell from communion.[120]

Evidence of the growing individualistic tendencies appears throughout the case.[121] Lovell, out of fear that he would not get the deal he wanted, simply stole the property of a fellow town member rather than running the risk that he would not get the timber and shingles he wanted. When confronted by the church, Lovell continued to argue his case instead of agreeing to the church's decision, which had not even put him under censure.[122] His refusal to heed the church ruling compromised church authority.

Lovell's case would not be the only one to tear at the communal bonds of Abington. Joseph Bates, no doubt related to Edward Bates, the deacon at the time, confessed to dishonesty in December of 1746.[123] When asked where he had gotten some mutton he was taking to market, Bates lied and said he had bought it from Jacob Palsbury. He also lied again when he had said he "found" the knife of fellow church member Ezekiel Reed.[124] Bates confessed to his misdeeds and his case was not as aggravated as James Lovell's. However, it still signified the lessening hold of communal obligations, Bates lied to and apparently stole from other members of the local community.

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[120] Ibid.
[121] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 174-175
[122] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1741, 10.
[123] Benjamin Hobart, *History of the Town of Abington,* 90; Records do not say when Joseph Bates entered the church.
[124] Reed had been a member of the church since 1744. Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 1746, 12, 24.

James Glide's theft earlier in 1746 was no doubt the most egregious example of theft because Pastor Brown was the victim. Apparently, Glide had lost all sense of deference towards his pastor. Glide eventually repented for "Robbing Mr Browns Cherrytrees & for his Insolent Deportment."[125] Glide's confession of "Insolent Deportment" implies that he had already been confronted with the crime and responded insolently.[126] Whether the church, someone in the community, or the pastor himself instigated this confrontation, Glide's insolence showed an utter disregard for the authority of both the church and Samuel Brown.

Abington's two, possibly three incidents of theft in six years, after 29 years without a single occurrence, is surprising. Such actions bred anger and mistrust amongst the town. Theft disrupted communal harmony, signifying and furthering the breakdown of communal goodwill.[127] Along with the communal erosion, Samuel Brown witnessed attacks on his own authority due to religious division. The robbing of his cherry trees might be seen as an isolated incident. Far more serious were efforts by many of the congregation, to undermine Samuel Brown's ministry and even to remove him from office. The campaign for Brown's removal began in June 1744 when dissatisfied members brought charges against Brown. These charges "respect[ed] D[o]ctrines Delivered by him in publick & Private."[128] This disagreement, like most during the Great

[125] Ibid, 1746, 12.
[126] Ibid.
[127] Ibid., 1714-1746, 1-10, 10-12.
[128] Ibid., 1744, 11.

Awakening, was doctrinal in nature and did not concern church government or discipline, which continued to decline in relevance.

What were these doctrines that the discontented considered unsound? According to Aaron Hobart, Abington's local historian, the doctrines were as follows:

1. That godly sorrow is preliminary to true and saving faith.
2. That the seed of grace is implanted in the soul before conversion, and there grows till it is ripe for the new birth.
3. That our being thankful for mercies received, moves God to bestow more.
4. That the tears of unfeigned repentance (as it was alleged he had said in a sermon) would quench the fiery stream of God's wrath.[129]

These doctrines might be seen considered slightly Arminian in tone. Arminianism stepped away from the Calvinistic teachings of predestination. Arminian theology suggested that human action, like "persever[ing] in Faith and Obedience" led to salvation.[130] Salvation through human action contradicted the Calvinistic emphasis on the divine will and grace of God. If human action had any impact on salvation then "the Will of Go[d] [was] subservient to the Will of Man[.]"[131] Mainstream Calvinists believed faith

[129]Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 40.
[130] John White, "New England's lamentations: Under three heads, the decay of the power of godliness; the danger of arminian principles; the declining state of our church-order, government and discipline. : With the means of these declensions, and the methods of our recovery." (Boston: T. Fleet, at the Sign of the Heart and Crown in Corn-Hill, 1734), 18 [electronic resource]. *Early American Imprints*, Series 1. Vol. no. 3854, 18. Accessed March 9th 2015.
[131] White, "New England's lamentations", 19.

and other good works were not prerequisites but rather signs of election, an election that was already predestined and in accordance with God's will.[132]

Brown's detractors thought his messages implied that he believed salvation stemmed from human influence, and that certain conditions must be met before salvation. For the dissenters the idea that "godly sorrow is preliminary to true and saving faith" was seen as a claim that people must have "godly sorrow" before they are saved. Therefore, salvation was not in God's hands but in those of the man or woman's as he or she strived for "godly sorrow." But Puritans had long accepted and used the idea of "godly sorrow." Even New Light pastor Jonathan Edwards believed "faith [was] accompanied with repentance, and a sense of sin and godly sorrow for it."[133] The only difference between Edwards' and Brown's idea of "godly sorrow" was when it manifested. Brown said "godly sorrow" came before faith not with it. Detractors doubtless fixated on this difference. The second doctrine said that the "seed of grace" came before Salvation. While Calvinism believes no one can be saved or have faith but through the grace of God, to say that grace came before salvation yet again put limitations on election and thus on God.[134]

The last two complaints, while not implicitly connected to salvation, were interpreted by the discontented as further promotion of human action and divine

[132]White, "New England's lamentations", 18-19.
[133] Jonathan Edwards, "Blank Bible" *Jonathan Edwards Center at Yale University*, 219-220. http://edwards.yale.edu/ [Accessed July 14, 2015].
[134] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 40.

limitation. The first, that one's thankfulness moved God to give more mercies, is self-explanatory enough, human influence yet again dictated God's actions and will. The final charge was similar in cause and effect; repentance stopped God's wrath, thus human action controlled God. However, Puritans often urged repentance by pointing to the wrath of God or the fear of damnation. The Cambridge Platform promotes disciplining through just this fear. And Brown was certainly not the first Puritan minister to imply such a thing. During an Excommunication in 1720 Reverend John Barnard, pastor of the First Church of Marblehead, warned that the excommunicate's crimes were so bad that one must think it "will bar her entrance into the Kingdom of Heaven if unrepented of."[135] Borne of the anger and resentment, the last two doctrinal issues prove trivial.

In response to these charges, Brown explained himself and the church took a vote on whether a council should be called. Despite a large vote to the negative, the dissatisfied minority continued to push for a council. "Some [of the] [d]issatisfyed yet manifest[ed] their [d]esires to [c]all a [c]ouncil," showing an individualistic desire to put their own interests ahead of the will of the church.[136] Much like James Lovell, church goers decided the mind of the church did not matter if it conflicted with their own views.

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[135]Samuel Dana, *A discourse on the history of the First Christian Church and Society in Marblehead : delivered to his people January 7, 1816* (Boston: Samuel T. Armstrong, 1816), 17. Hathi Trust Digital Library. http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=hvd.hxhcu2;page=root;seq=24;view=1up;size=100;orient=0;num=14 [Accessed November 15, 2012].; Excommunication of Sarah Wescott, September 11, 1720, "Marblehead, Mass. First Church, Church Records 1684-1800" *Church Record Collections*, Congregational Library, Boston. http://www.congregationallibrary.org/resources/digital/book-coll, 137.

[136] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 11.

Precedent promoted individualism and led to a startling attack on Brown's doctrine. Brown's authority had been attacked previously. Deacon Lincoln called a unilateral council in December of 1723, blaming Reverend Brown for the offense.[137] This case set a precedent for questioning ministerial authority. Indeed, it should be remembered that Abington hosted multiple councils in the 1720s. This experience also created a precedent to ask for a council in the face of disagreement. Dissenters considered calling a council a natural way to promote their minority view. This idea is supported by the actions of the dissatisfied. Even though the church voted down the measure to call a council, the dissatisfied continued to push. Every big and divisive disciplinary case in the past resulted the calling of a council, and bringing charges against the pastor for doctrinal discrepancy was a far more significant case. While Brown had been personally attacked in the 1720s, his doctrine remained untouched. The 1720s saw a personal attack on Brown, but the 1740s brought attempts from some laymen to question his doctrine. Before the laity had deferred to the pastor in questions of doctrine because of his expertise and position in the church community.[138] The questioning of the pastor's doctrine showed a significant break of communal bonds as some of the laity refused to give the deference due Brown because of his position of authority.

Minister Solomon Reed emboldened the dissenters to attack Brown's doctrine. The aid of ministerial support validated the dissenters' views and gave them a source of

[137] Ibid., 1723, 6.
[138] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 22-23.

authority to back their own beliefs. With two conflicting authorities, individual belief became the deciding factor. The laity, no longer deferential to one authority, could choose which minister to support. Reverend Reed, born in Abington in 1719, graduated from Harvard in 1739. And though there is a strong possibility he studied under Reverend Brown, he followed Whitefield, taking the latter's sermons to such extremes as to separate from the mainstream churches.[139]

Reed spurred the New Light faction within the church to ask for a council in 1744. The contention did not merely pit minister against laity but stemmed also from inter-ministerial strife. A pamphlet written in 1746 indicated Reed as leader of Brown's opposing faction and the one who pushed for a council, even though he never heard the sermon in question.[140] A New Light and soon to be a separatist, Reed held differing theological doctrines adopted when traveling with Whitefield in 1744.[141] Because of his ministerial standing, his words had credence and his viewpoints gained support. Abington's history of church councils and the previous accusations leveled at Reverend Brown rendered a council an inevitability, especially with the support of Reed.

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[139]John Langdon Sibley's, *Biographical sketches of graduates of Harvard,* 398; Jacob Whittemoore Reed, *History of the Reed Family in Europe and* America (Boston: John Wilson and son, 1861), 35.

[140] Ebenezer Morton, "More last words to these churches. In answer to a pamphlet published by the Rev. Mr. John Cotton of Hallifax, entitled, Seasonable warnings to these churches. By Ebenezer Morton, one of the committee of that precinct in Middleborough which is taken to task in said pamphlet. [Eight lines from Hudibras]," (Boston: Printed and sold by Thomas Fleet, at the Heart and Crown in Cornhill, 1746), 11. [electronic resource]. Early *American Imprints*, Vol. no. 5813. Accessed March 9, 2015.

[141] Reed's journal excerpt as found in John Ludovicus Reed, *The Reed Genealogy Descendants of William Reade of Weymouth Massachusetts From 1635 to 1902,* (Baltimore: Baltimore Press, 1901), 184. Found on Archive.org. Accessed March 9, 2015.

The church answered the dissatisfied's demand for a council with a compromise that the faction at first refused. The dissatisfied made no attempt to preserve the community through compromise. The church agreed to call a council if the dissatisfied would pay for it; seeing little reason to pay for a council it did not want. Councils, the church understood, were expensive. Other churches spent money and time traveling to the council; the records from the First Church in Dorchester note their deacon was reimbursed £16 for his trip to Abington to sit at one of the many councils called in the 1720s.[142] Once the invited Reverends, elders, and lay representatives were in town, the Abington church would need a place to put them up, and a place for them to convene. At length, the attempt to compromise on the council fell through. The dissenters refused to pay; the "offe[r] was not Closed wth by the Dissatisfyed."[143]

This failure to compromise did not end the malcontents' demand for a council. The church would meet again at the dissatisfied's request in July of 1744. After a false start on the 27th when there were not enough of the dissatisfied present, the disgruntled members fought again for their cause. Perhaps realizing they would not get their council any other way, they agreed to pay. The church held the dissatisfied financially responsible for the "Calling and entertaining [of] y^{e} Sd Councill y^{t} Should Come."[144]

[142] First Church, *Records of the First Church at Dorchester,* 134.
[143] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 11, 15.
[144] Ibid., 1744, 11.

The results of the council reflected the sentiments of the ministers on it. Many of these pastors appear multiple times in the records as they made up a network of nearby churches that would be called for councils, ordinations, and to preach in each other's pulpits.[145] To ensure a fair outcome both the dissatisfied, and the majority were allowed to choose four churches and their pastors. If a chosen church could not attend, then "either of Sd Partyes Should have Liberty to Chose any other Chh…& y^{t} an equall Number of each Partys Chusing [who?] Should Set in Sd Councill."[146] In this way the church insured the council would not be biased toward one side or the other and would give a balanced ruling about Reverend Brown's doctrine.

The dissenters chose Reverend Leonard of Plymouth, "Mr Weld of attleburroh[,]…Mr Cotton of Hallifax & his Chh[,] & Mr Crocker" of Taunton.[147] All of these pastors fell on the New Light side of the Great Awakening divide. This meant they agreed with the revivals and with new emphasis on individual conversion and personal connection to the indwelling spirit of God.[148] The disatissfied chose their council members as one would expect, considering their ties to Reed and their attack on Brown's supposedly Arminian beliefs.

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[145] Ibid, 1714-1749; "Diaries of Rev. William Smith", *Proceedings of the Massachusetts Historical Society* 42 (October 1908-June 1909); American Antiquarian Society*, The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman 1749-1750*. Ed. Francis G. Walett. 43, 142-143. http://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517709.pdf [Accessed July 1, 2015]

[146] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 12.

[147] Ibid., 1744, 11.

[148] George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards A Life,* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), *179-180.*

Who were these pastors chosen by the discontented? Reverend John Cotton of Halifax was the most moderate of the New Lights chosen. He considered the revival as a work of God and regarded the negative reports of "enthusiasm", as exaggerations spawned by Arminians. Cotton believed most reports accusing churches of enthusiasm resulted from the actions of a few disruptive members. Cotton himself did not allow enthusiastic outbursts in his church, and even deemed them a sin.[149]

Reverend Weld of Attleborough was also a New Light and friend of Solomon Reed. Weld had received Reverend Eleazer Wheelock, the fiery itinerant, to preach to his congregation in 1741.[150] He had earlier tried to get Reverend Reed's pupils admitted to Cambridge.[151]Josiah Crocker of Taunton considered the revivals "a wonderful reformation".[152] He would make note of the various individual conversions in his flock, and supported the revivals in Plymouth and Attleborough. He also attended a meeting in 1745, along with Reverends Leonard and John Cotton, in which a testimony was written attesting to God's involvement in the Great Awakening. The Divine Spirit was "enlightening [their] minds, awakening [their] consciences,.. and changing [their] hearts."

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[149] Joseph Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion in the Time of Edwards and Whitefield*, (Boston: Tappan and Dennet, 1842), 176-178.
[150] Ibid., 202; Alex de Sherbinin, *Eleazer Wheelock: The Man and his Legacy Three hundred years after his birth, Dartmouth still owes much to its founder,* (April 2011) http://www.columbia.edu/~amd155/Wheelock_Biography.pdf. Accessed March 9, 2015.
[151]Fredrick William Loetscher Ed., *Papers of the American Society of Churchy History Second Series Volume VI,* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1921), 479. https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=2YIAAAAAMAAJ&printsec=frontcover&output=reader&hl=en Accessed March 9, 2015.
[152] Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion,* 168.

[153] Reverend Nathanael Leonard from the First Church in Plymouth not only went to the meeting in 1745 he also gave an account of the revival in his church saying that "the Gospel came unto us, not in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost."[154]

While the dissatisfied were very deliberate in their choices one cannot forget that the pastor and church called four churches of their own, in order to keep the council balanced. They chose: Nathanael Eells of the Second Church of Scituate, Ebenezer Gay of Hingham, Samuel Dunbar of Stoughton, and William Smith of Weymouth.[155] All of these pastors were Old Lights, who opposed the excesses of the Great Awakening. All, (including Samuel Brown himself) would go on to sign "The Sentiments and Resolution of an Association of Ministers, convened at Weymouth, January 15, 1745, concerning the Rev. Mr. George Whitefield." This resolution stood against the enthusiasm, confusion and bitterness they believed Whitefield caused with his preaching, not to mention the irregularity of having an Anglican minister preside over communion in a Congregational church.[156]

Reverend Nathanael Ells explained why he refused to invite Whitefield to his pulpit in "A letter to the Second Church and congregation in Scituate." He explained that

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[153] Ibid., 169-171, 400-401.
[154] Ibid., 160.
[155] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 11-12. Churches and pastors ascertained by cross-checking with those with a close connection with Brown.
[156] Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion*, 356-358. Tracy says: "They were 'surprised and grieved,' that he, a priest of the Church of England, should administer the Lord's Supper in Congregational churches."

Whitefield was "no real friend to the Ministers and Churches of Christ."[157] His reasons for this belief included Whitefield's encouragement of religious enthusiasm and disruptive outbursts, his preaching in places without the consent of the pastor, and finally, his direct attack on the worthiness of ministers, calling into question the state of their souls.[158]

William Smith of Weymouth, an Old Light minister who hosted the meeting that occasioned the Sentiments and Resolution of 1745, shared a similar theological outlook with Brown. He was also on friendly terms with him. Smith's Diary recorded their amiable relationship. In 1741 he noted "Mr. Brown…here upon a F[rien]dly visit."[159] Having a friend with similar views on the council insured Brown had someone on his side.

The result of the council is not found in the Abington records, but we can follow its course through the Halifax Church records, recorded by New Light moderate John Cotton. Halifax received a letter requesting that the church send a delegation to a council at Abington on July 31st 1744, a day after Abington sent the missive. The church voted to attend and chose delegates. Cotton recorded the result of the council almost a month later on August 28th. The balanced council favored neither side. It "severely faulted," Reverend Brown for "erroneous Doctrine & several dark expressions in his sermons,"

[157] Nathanael Eells, "A letter to the second church and congregation in scituate:" (Boston: Printed for D. Gookin, 1745), 8. [electronic resource]. *Early American Imprints,* Vol. no. 5583. Accessed March 9, 2015.
[158] Ibid., 9
[159] Massachusetts Historical Society, "Diaries of Rev. William Smith", 455.

while criticizing the discontented for pressing some of the charges which were insignificant and without proper proof.[160] The council found neither side fully innocent. The records remain silent about any council recommendations. However, any advice given by the council would not solve the ideological division between the pastor and New Light brethren. And this would not be the last attempt by the dissent to attack Brown.

Several members continued to show their disapproval of Reverend Brown and his doctrines through attacks on his authority and their continued absence from church. The robbing of Samuel Brown's cherry trees happened about a year after Abington church called the first council. While the act cannot be connected directly to the ongoing theological dispute, the nature and insolence of the attack damaged Brown's beleaguered authority. In December of 1746 Solomon Reed repented of his comment that Reverend Brown's conversation was "frothy & Vain."[161] Brown and the church forgave Reed, but all was hardly well. That same meeting Reed asked for a dissmission to leave for another church. That church was the Second Church of Framingham, a town over 30 miles to the Northwest of Abington.[162] Reed then was not only leaving the church but also the town for the sake of his calling. He was called to be the minister of the Second Church of Framingham.[163]

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[160] *"Records of the Church of Christ in Halifax, 1734", Archive.org,* 108. https://archive.org/stream/recordsofchurch00unse#page/108/mode/2up Accessed March 9, 2015.
[161] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1746, 13.
[162] *Distance Between Cities* http://www.distance-cities.com/distance-framingham-ma-to-abington-ma [Accessed July 14, 2015]
[163] Reed, *History of the Reed Family in Europe and* America, 358.

The Second Church of Framingham had just been formed by New Light separatists who had split from the First Church of Framingham in November 1746. They had supposedly been "embodied into a church" by an ecclesiastical council, but the First Church of Framingham refused to dismiss its members to the Second Church and the civil government refused to relieve members of the Second Church from the First Church Tax, which paid for the upkeep of the First Church, as late as 1752.[164]

Reed's call to Framingham brought more conflict to Abington. Brown sided with the Old Light First Church of Framingham and refused to allow a vote for Reed's dismission because the Second Church of Framingham was not "a [church] regularly imbodyed." In the face of Brown's resolution, Reed requested a vote on whether he would have been dismissed if the church "had been Regularly Sett off, & Imbodyed". The church voted in the positive and apparently Reed took that as close enough to qualify as a dismission. Reed is not brought up again in the Abington Church Records; he was in Framingham ministering to his separatist congregation by January of 1747.[165] Had Reed been dismissed through the proper channels it would have been recorded with the other dismissions. Therefore Reed chose to separate completely, breaking his covenant with the church community.

[164] J. H. Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts early known as Danforth's Farms, 1640-1880; with a genealogical register* (The Town of Framingham, 1887), 212-213.
[165] Cooper, Abington Church Records, 1746, 13; Temple, *History of Framingham, Massachusetts,* 212.

One sees then how doctrinal differences alienated two ministers who should have been working together for a similar cause. This followed the more general trend of bitter ministerial strife evident in other churches.[166] The divide was bitter enough for Reed to publicly insult another minister and for Reverend Brown to block his dismission. Ministerial contention eroded ministerial authority because it showed pastors to be fallible; both could not be right in their views. New Lights likely perceived Brown's actions regarding Reed as irregular in that Brown did not allow a church vote simply because of his doctrinal disagreement with Reed. This emboldened them to call another council. Conversely, Old Lights saw Reed's departure as a breach of covenant.

Reverend Reed's irregular departure shows the main difference between Separatists and New Lights. The church covenant truly held no power over Reed. He willingly broke the church covenant of Abington for the sake of his own church in Framingham, because he believed Abington's covenant had been corrupted. C.C. Goen notes in *Revivalism & Separatism in New England, 1740-1800* that while New Lights tried to stop Arminianism's spread in the Congregational churches, Separatists decided "they could not remain under…the established clergy."[167] It was better to create a new church than to try and save the corrupt mainstream churches. The dissatisfied at Abington would follow Reed's example by absenting themselves, though they never fully separated. They were much more interested in removing Brown from his office than in

[166] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 190
[167] C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England, 1740-1800 Strict Congregationalists & Separate Baptists in The Great Awakening*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 43.

joining a new church. For this reason they cannot be considered true separatists but they went to similar extremes separating themselves for some time while continuing their attack on Reverend Brown.[168]

The animosity between Brown and Reed involved more than doctrine. Familial ties and the church's history of strife bedeviled Brown. During the Great Awakening several people joined the church of Abington. From 1740 to 1744 seventy-three people were admitted to the church, including Solomon Reed and eight of his family. Four people from the Hersey family also joined.[169] The Hersey family was connected to the Reed family through marriage, as Sarah Hersey was married to Jacob Reed, the uncle of Solomon Reed.[170] The Hersey family had also been in continual conflict with the church. This conflict started in the 1720s with the fornication case that split the church and continued all the way up to August of 1746 when the church charged William Hersey Sr. with unchristian like demeanor caused by intoxication. Captain Joseph Hersey verbally attacked Brown in June of 1747. In this case, Captain Hersey implied that he was happy Samuel Brown was sick and would be "Glad if he should Never Go into the pulpit again."[171] Brown forgave him, but noted in his records that the words were "very unchristian like."[172] This comment shows Brown's aggravation with the open hostility of the remark. Thus, though not directly connected, new members and their ideological

[168] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1746-1749, 13-16.
[169] Ibid., 1740-1744, 19-21.
[170] John Ludovicus Reed, *The Reed Genealogy Descendants of William Reade,* 27, 24.
[171] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1747, 14.
[172] Ibid.

beliefs brought in during the Great Awakening amplified a history of conflict from the 1720s that boiled under the surface.

Another way brethren displayed displeasure with or apathy for the church was by absenting themselves from church. Abington had only two absentees noted by name in the 1740s. However we know the church experienced mass absenteeism during this time, which led to such an extensive break down of ecclesiastical government that "[n]othing was [d]one" about the absenteeism when brought up at a church meeting.[173] Cooper asserts that apathy could be seen in church congregations starting in the 1730s and it is possible Abington's absenteeism was a mark of that.[174] However, the truant members could have withdrawn themselves out of anger, like former deacon Joseph Lincoln did. Lincoln absented himself and when he did return he placed the blame on Reverend Brown. He was still incensed enough to call a council himself despite the opposition of the church.[175]

The first absence of the 1740s occurred in March of 1744. The church sent a committee of deacons Shaw and Bates, and Jacob Reed to Alexander Lofur to determine why he was "Withdrawing himself from Communion."[176] A few months after this committee formed, the first council over Reverend Brown convened overshadowing everything else, and we do not hear of Lofur's case again until June of 1748. At this time

[173] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1749, 16.
[174] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 169.
[175] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1723, 6.
[176] Ibid., 1744, 11.

the church admonished Lofur for being absent from church "communion for years past & having Given No Satisfaction" as to the reasons for his absence.[177] Nothing more is said of Alexander Lofur during Reverend Brown's tenure. The four year gap in Lofur's case suggests a lessening influence and efficiency of the church government. The church committee could not get answers from Lofur because he had no intention of going back to Abington. Because the church had lost its grasp on Lofur, the committee was powerless and eventually became swept aside by doctrinal issues.

Nathan Gurney was the second absence mentioned. Gurney joined during the influx of members in 1741.[178] Late in the year of 1746 the church confronted Gurney not just for absenting himself from church but for going to the church in Weymouth. Gurney did not leave out of anger or offense with Reverend Brown, but with a fellow member, Nicholas Shaw. While his motivation for offense is not recorded, the church seemed unimpressed with Gurney's explanation, finding no grounds for insult. It then notes that Gurney failed to attempt to resolve the problem. One might assume that Gurney absented himself solely out of anger with Shaw, but Gurney went on to reveal his spite for the church and church-covenant itself by saying that if refusing to mend the breach "was a Violation of ye [church] Covenant he Should be Glad if he had a heart to Do it oftener."[179] Not only did Gurney violate the church-covenant through his actions, he declared his wish to purposely violate it. He no longer felt bound to the church and

[177] Ibid., 1748, 14.
[178] Ibid., 1741, 20.
[179] Ibid., 1746, 13.

community he covenanted with. Thus the covenant, and church, as with Lofur, lost any power over his actions because of a lack of commitment.

While these are the only absences specifically noted in the 1740s, they are hardly the only ones. Many church members left without giving a reason. February of 1749 brought with it a fairly routine charge of intoxication against brother Nathanael Symms. His judgment however, had to be put off as "Some of ye evidence [was] absent."[180] This evidence would have most likely been witness testimony much like the cases that came before it. But this time, the witnesses needed were absent from the church meeting. This belief is further strengthened by Brown's use of the word absent to describe the evidence.

The absences found in Abington's church meetings in the 1740s stemmed, as did the declaration of Brother Gurney, from spite. A sizable minority of people were upset with Samuel Brown for what they saw as continued doctrinal failings. Some may have become disillusioned with church government, and thus absented themselves rather than sit under his ministry. The fact that the church addressed the absentees as a group, "Separate Brethren," implies that as a whole the church saw the absentees as a faction within the congregation.[181] Contention between the two apparent factions, caused by the rise of individualism, created a vicious cycle that contributed to increased hostility and eventually the collapse of Abington's church government.

[180]Ibid., 1749, 15.
[181] Ibid., 1749, 16.

Clearly, Samuel Brown had no idea how to recover from this cycle. He attempted to follow normal ecclesiastical procedures in his attempt to bring separating members back to the church. Following the concurrent government of the Cambridge Platform, Brown brought the problem of the growing absences and possible schism before the church in March of 1749. The members voted on whether they should call on the "Separate Brethren to an account for their Separating & absenting [themselves]".[182] Unfortunately for Reverend Brown and his congregation, ecclesiastical government and its hold on the people had deteriorated to such an extent that the normal avenues of church action were no longer viable. The questions about the Separating members caused "Such Confusion…That Nothing was Done upon it" and the church never resolved the vote.[183]

The First Church of Abington, deprived of its main tool to maintain order and authority, finally fell into confusion when confronted with a major disciplinary issue, mass absences. The only options the church had to control insolent members were the censures of admonition and the now rarely used excommunication, and these had lost power as a part of the failing ecclesiastical government. These censures operated through fear for one's immortal soul, urging introspection and repentance.[184] However, as the case of Nathan Gurney illustrates, some of the laity did not feel fear or guilt for breaking the church covenant and were brazen in the face of church discipline. Gurney, Lofur, and

[182] Ibid., 1749, 14.
[183] Ibid., 1749, 16.
[184] *The Results of Three Synods*, 36.

James Lovell all continued to fight or ignore the church even under threat of censure. Therefore, discipline no longer invoked a spirit of remorse. Why would they fear for their souls if they felt they were in the doctrinal right? After all, to consent to wrongdoing or erroneous doctrine was a sin. They were only following congregational teaching.[185] However, as James Cooper points out, following this teaching, breaking the church covenant in favor of personal interpretation, is a further sign of individualism.[186]

Abington's absenteeism follows trends seen throughout Massachusetts during the 1740s. These trends should be considered a symptom of deterioration of ecclesiastical government's influence and control. Excluding schism, Emil Oberholzer reports a total of twenty-nine absences from 1740-1749 in the churches he examined. That is 11 more than what he found for the previous decade, and a 61% increase. Part of that increase might be a by-product of harsher censure practices caused by the revival, but even then not every church was New Light and a 61% increase in absences would be difficult to achieve via New Light censure practices alone.[187] Therefore, it is most likely that the increase in absences was a continuing symptom of the destruction of church government and (in some cases) in-fighting as seen throughout the 1730s and now in Abington.

Just because many were absenting themselves does not mean the attacks on Reverend Brown stopped. Doctrinal issues motivated most dissent but were there any

[185]Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church-Discipline,* 197.
[186] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 195-196.
[187] Oberholzer, *Delinquent Saints,* 253.

other factors? To answer this question one must examine the identities of the church's discontented. Charges would again be brought against Samuel Brown and a council requested in August of 1748. The meeting had been called at "ye Desire of Jacob Porter[,] Thomas White[,] & Joseph Hersey."[188] It should be noted that both Hersey and Porter had close connections to the Reed family. As previously mentioned, the Hersey family was married into the Reeds, and the Porters had owned land next to the Reeds.[189] Reverend Brown agreed to a council but one was never called because of drought conditions. This did not mean the charges were dropped. The church called a meeting in September, at which it determined the number of the dissatisfied by having them "Move to ye other Side of ye Meeting house."[190] Fourteen of forty members moved, a sizable minority (over a third) but still a minority.[191] This was an unfortunate position for the discontented. The dissatisfied minority could not affect any change through church government, but proved numerous enough to disrupt the normal working of the church if the majority ignored their desires.

The effects of individualism can be seen in the makeup of the factions spawned by the dissension. Theological dissension followed the old lines of inter-family contention. Much like the factions in the 1720s over the Hersey fornication case, theological factions seemed to be built along familial connections. However, this time the

[188] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1748, 14. (Hersey would later reverse his position saying he signed the charges without reading them.)
[189] John Ludovicus Reed, *The Reed Genealogy Descendants of William Reade,* 27, 24.
[190] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1748, 14.
[191] Ibid.

divide was over theology instead of discipline. The divide in the church was clearly sparked by the New Light teachings of Revered Reed, and his extended family and supporters. The break down into familial groups makes sense if one continues to see the contention as the splitting of communal bonds. As the church community broke apart the laity retreated to their closer and more stable communal bonds, their family and neighbors.

Furthermore, the social position of some of the leading dissenters would give the New Lights more clout in the town and church. The leaders of the faction were the only ones mentioned by name in the records. These leaders also happened to be leaders in town society. Among them, both Joseph Hersey and Jacob Porter served as selectmen, for four and three years respectively.[192] Jacob Porter would go on to serve as a representative for Abington to the General Court in 1753-1754, 1756, and 1758.[193] One should not read too much into the higher positions held by some of the discontented. C.C. Goen denies any such social division in his work on Separatists, *Revivalism & Separatism in New England, 1740*-1800 and the Abington Church records offer nothing to upset such a conclusion.[194] However, the dissatisfied's connection to town government would prove problematic for Brown. His handling of Reverend Reed would have demonstrated to the

[192] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 141.
[193] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 125; "The following Gentlemen Are Returned to Serve for & Represent the Several Town," *Boston Gazette* (Boston, MA), June 5, 1753. http://www.genealogybank.com/gbnk/newspapers/doc/v2%3A1036CD2E61FB47A0%40GBNEWS-10444F531BAAC880%402361486-10444F53323E167A-10444F5365EF65B2/ Accessed March 10, 2015.
[194] C. C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England,* 191.

New Lights that the ruling of the earlier council had done very little to change things. The time had come to appoint another council and this time the grievances of the discontented were specifically outlined in the church records as a list of charges.

This second list of charges again showed the predominance of doctrinal issues. The dissatisfied brought the list before the church, which decided if the charges would be put before the council. Because the first council believed the dissatisfied had brought some unimportant charges, it is possible that they brought the accusations against Brown before the church as an attempt to avoid such problematic charges. The church agreed to bring all the charges before the council. The first of the charges concerned Reverend Brown's doctrine. The second charge stated that Brown allowed pastors "Not friendly to ye Great & Soul humbling Doctrines of the Gospell" to minister to the church.[195] The dissatisfied only brought up issues of church government after they had addressed all doctrinal charges, accusing Reverend Brown of arbitrariness in its execution. Jacob Porter, one of the ones to call the meeting, incriminated Brown's moral character by accusing him of lying. The final vote served as a catch all for any other charges that might arise, allowing the dissatisfied to lay any other charges they "Should Seasonably bring In" before the council.[196]

While the church voted on the charges, the record does not reveal the finer points of what they entailed. The doctrinal charge was most likely similar to the ones presented

[195] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,, 1748,* 15.
[196] Ibid.

in 1744.[197] The New Lights' heavy emphasis on the indwelling saving Grace of God continued to sensitize them to the more Arminian and Old Light aspects of Reverend Brown's teaching and inclined them to see it as heretical. The second charge allowing doctrinally unsound ministers to preach in the church was also probably connected to the perceived doctrinal discrepancy.

The second charge does not say which preachers taught heretical doctrine, but other sources prove that Brown allowed others to preach. Fellow Old Light William Smith, noted in his diary that he preached in Abington in September of 1739.[198] It is likely that the dissatisfied judged such Old Light teachings similarly to Reverend Brown's and found them heretical. Ministerial duties included protecting their flock from "Men of corrupt principles" such as Quakers, and Anabaptists.[199] This responsibility extended to the heresy of Arminianism.[200] In the eyes of the discontented, Brown had not guarded the pulpit but opened it up to those who taught the same heretical teachings he professed.

The aggrieved also charged Brown with being arbitrary in his conducting of church government. This charge seems to be the only one connected to ecclesiastical government and the dissatisfied brought it not in an effort to salvage the government, but because of its links to the doctrinal issue. Abington's disciplinary record shows that

[197] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 40.
[198] Massachusetts Historical Society, "Diaries of Rev. William Smith", 453.
[199] Eells, "A letter to the second church and congregation in scituate:", 4.
[200] Ibid.

Brown let the church lead in such matters; the church voted on whether or not committees should be formed to seek out truant members, or if accusers had presented enough evidence for censure. The only time the records confirm that Brown actively compromised the church's authority was when he refused to let the church vote on the dismission of Reverend Solomon Reed. The church most likely referred to this interference when they accused Brown of arbitrariness. The charge concerning church government then was likely connected to the ongoing doctrinally fueled fight.[201]

Church government was now being exploited to further theological division. Brown used ecclesiastical governance to bar Reverend Reed from leaving. Reverend Reed called for a hypothetical vote and left when the church hypothetically dismissed him, ignoring Reverend Brown's objections. Reed's theological calling meant more to him than actual church government. And now the dissenters used Brown's imprudent actions against him by bringing charges of "arbitrariness In [church] Meetings & Government" before the Council.[202]

Once the charges were set, the church had to choose the members of the council in a way that would be balanced, allowing each side allies. The council would again be split between Old Lights and New Lights with each side choosing two out of the three suggested churches and their pastor. The records do not list who was finally chosen, but the suggested members were similar to the 1744 council. Samuel Brown and his

[201]Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744, 1746, 1748, 11, 14, 15, 16, 13.
[202]Ibid., 1748, 15.

supporters again wanted the Old Light representatives from Hingham, Weymouth and the Second Church in Scituate. The dissatisfied wanted two churches called to the 1744 council, the churches of Halifax and Attleborough, and the Second Church of Wrentham.[203] Yet again the council would be split between Old and New Lights.

Elias Haven was pastor of the Second Church of Wrentham and a New Light. The revival which started in Wrentham in April of 1741 brought 89 new members into the Second Church from 1741 to August of 1743.[204] In 1743 Haven signed a testimony to declare "there has been a happy and remarkable revival of religion…through an uncommon divine influence."[205] Thus the council was once again balanced in number and doctrine.

The council yet again took the middle ground in its decision. Abington's records contain only a couple of lines about the council, saying that it met in December of 1748 and that Reverend Brown was "cleared… of all s[ai]d Matter of Charge."[206] The Halifax records sheds a little more light on the council's proceedings. The pastor and the dissatisfied compromised by agreeing to "call a Colleague pastor."[207] If the church of Abington agreed to call a New Light co-pastor, then the discontented would have someone to minister to their needs and perhaps to make sure Reverend Brown avoided

[203] Ibid.
[204] Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion*, 121-125.
[205] Ibid. 296.
[206] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1748, 15.
[207] *"Records of the Church of Christ in Halifax, 1734",* 112.

the "erroneous Doctrine &…dark expressions" the 1744 council faulted him for.[208] This compromise may have stabilized the situation, but it is impossible to say with certainty. After agreeing to compromise, the church refused to vote on calling another minister until the New Lights had absented themselves. Such delay showed little drive to compromise or bring communal harmony back to the church.

The church did not vote on whether to bring in an assistant minister until March of 1749, three months after they agreed to the compromise. One can only speculate what caused the delay but the resulting consequences are fairly evident. By the time the church voted on the assistant, the New Lights were absenting themselves en masse. While meeting to discuss a co-pastor, the church also discussed what should be done with the "Separate Brethren" who were absenting themselves, and then fell into confusion. Therefore, there were very few of the dissatisfied in attendance to vote for an assistant pastor.[209] The Old Lights must have carried the vote and, seeing as they had little quarrel with Brown, they did not see a reason for the extra expense. The vote for the assistant pastor failed.

Money (or lack thereof) may have been a factor in how the Old Lights voted and in why they waited so long to vote on an assistant, but it was not the main concern. The attendees, mostly Old Lights, opposed the election of another minister because of the doctrinal contention with the discontented that had splintered the community. The New

[208] "Records of the Church of Christ in Halifax, 1734", *Archive.org,* 108.
[209] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1749, 16.

Lights and their supporters also used monetary factors to further their theological cause; leading dissenters refused to contribute to Reverend Brown's salary. The town of Abington had not paid Reverend Brown according to his contract since 1744.[210] When the church called Reverend Brown to Abington it agreed that he would start at a yearly salary of £48. This would be raised until it reached £70 a year. According to Aaron Hobart, the town records show a decrease in Reverend Brown's salary from £300 in Bills of Credit to only £70 in February 1748. Considering the depreciation at the time, Hobart estimates that £70 equaled £10 sterling at most. However, this change in salary was probably not monetarily motivated as Daniel Reed, second cousin of Solomon Reed, was a selectman during this time, having been elected in 1744 and serving 15 years.[211] The vote would probably have been backed by previous selectmen Obadiah Reed (Solomon Reed's brother, and later New Light clerk), Jacob Porter and Joseph Hersey, the very (closely connected) men who led the drive for a council later that year.[212] The idea that money motivated the factions' actions is further discredited by the salary given to the next pastor Reverend Dodge. His salary would be larger than the one promised to Reverend Brown.[213]

The whole town, not just the church, grew divided. The decision to reduce Reverend Brown's salary was far from unanimous and many protested the change

[210] Konig, Ed., "Volume 2 General Sessions of the Peace 1719-1749", 268.
[211] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 141; John Ludovicus Reed, *The Reed Genealogy Descendants of William Reade,* 65.
[212] John Ludovicus Reed, *The Reed Genealogy Descendants of William Reade,*38.
[213] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 39, 40, 44

proclaiming their "detest [for] the proceedings of the meeting."[214] Nevertheless the vote passed. Such contention at a town vote shows how ecclesiastical strife flowed out from the church and disrupted town governance and operations. Strife at the town level served to heighten the church division.[215]

We see continued church contention and factionalism in a church vote over the proper procedures brethren were expected to take with those who had offended them. When a member of the church became offended with another they were expected to take steps privately to resolve the disagreement. Only once private intervention failed should the aggrieved party bring the case before the church and request suspension of the offender from the Lord's Table.[216] Abington voted in December of 1746 that the pastor should refuse any request to bar a member from communion, if the injured party had not attempted to reach such private resolution.[217]

This vote suggests members of Abington no longer took private action according to standard procedures of church governance but waited until communion to seek to bar the offender from the Lord's Table. Some members increasingly violated the church government and attempted to use church discipline to hurt fellow members. Brown's solution to this development, as with the separating members, was to adhere strictly to the Cambridge Platform and its idea of concurrent government. He left the problem to the

[214] A quote of the town records found in Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 41.
[215] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 41.
[216]*The Results of Three Synods*, 34-35.
[217] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1746, 12.

laity to vote on. While this vote may have helped the problem at hand it did nothing to get at the root of church division or change the underlying belief of certain church members that it was permissible to abuse church discipline to further one's factional interest.

> It was put to Vote whether It be regular for any Brother or Sister of y^{e} Chh y^{t} had Just Matter of offence against a Brother or Sister of Sd Chh, & has (thọ there has been sufficient time for y^{e} taking y^{e} Steps [?] Directed to) yet Suspended y^{e} Matter of Making up y^{e} Difference till y^{e} Day or time of Administration, & Then att that time Shall lay a Bar to obstruct Such offenders Partaking & Not before whether Such a Bar ought to be Rejected by y^{e} Pastor & It was Voted In the Affirmative.[218]

Only a few days after the vote to prevent members from speaking out during communion, two members' anger turned to violence. Christopher Askins confessed to hitting Benjamin Noyes. Little is known of what spurred the incident. Askins simply asked forgiveness and acknowledged his rashness that he "[through] Sud=den passion…Broke ye Peace."[219] Still this event was the only incident of violence in the Abington records during Reverend Brown's tenure. Even if not directly related to the theological divide in church, it, like the theft cases, shows a breakdown of communal harmony.

In response to the church's refusal to follow the council's decision, the dissatisfied convened an independent meeting. They elected Justice Pool moderator and

[218]Ibid..
[219] Ibid.

Obadiah Reed served as Clerk. The group voted to remove Reverend Brown from office and called a council of their own to assist in the matter. As with deacon Lincoln, a council was called independently of the church majority because the dissatisfied felt unfairly treated. They had asked multiple times for the dismissal of Reverend Brown and the church refused.[220]

While they had the right to call a council, the unilateral effort to remove the pastor by a third of the church violated the church government. The church as a whole had the right to ordain and dismiss, a "Council of other Churches…directing thereto."[221] But for a part of the church to call a council for the sake of dismission shows a grievous breakdown in the church. The New Lights felt the church majority had ignored their requests. Numerous councils and agreements had failed to solve the problem so now the faction circumvented the rules of ecclesiastical government in an attempt to achieve their ends, first through mass absenteeism and finally a unilateral vote on removal.

This unilateral action was done despite Brown's call to desist in such action. Ignored, Brown asked for the church to call a council of their own, in August of 1749 to "Judge In & of y^{e} Proceedings of the Dissatisfyed In their Calling a Meeting…& Their

[220]Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 42; *"Records of the Church of Christ in Halifax, 1734",* 113.
[221] *The Results of Three Synods*, 22.

Voting the Past[r] out of his office." [222] This council would join with the New Light's council if agreeable to the Church and reach a resolution.[223]

The council called by Brown and the church included several churches and Old Light ministers that had been called throughout the struggle. Besides the now familiar names of Situate, Hingham and Weymouth, Hannover and Pembroke were added to the council. Reverend Daniel Lewis was the pastor at the Church in Pembroke, and like the others was an Old Light.[224] Benjamin Bass of Hannover, however, was actually of New Light leaning. He signed the same testimony in favor of the Great Awakening as Elias Haven in 1743.[225] Choosing Bass broke Brown's trend of calling purely Old Light pastors. Brown probably included a New Light church because the council judged the actions of the New Light discontented not Brown's personal religious doctrine. It would make sense to call a New Light pastor to help deal with New Lights.

There is no mention in Abington's church records of who the New Lights called to their council nor is the result recorded. Luckily, Halifax was one of the churches called to the New Light's council and its voluminous records once again gave insight to the council's results. The two councils called agreed to join together and came to the decision that "Mr. Brown [should] consen[t] to ask a dismission upon certain terms."[226] These

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[222]Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1749, 16.
[223] Ibid.
[224] J.M. Bumsted, *Pilgrims' Progress: The Ecclesiastical History of the Old Colony, 1620-1775*, (New York: Garland Publishing, 1989), 362.
[225] Tracy, *The Great Awakening: A History of the Revival of Religion*, 301.
[226] *"Records of the Church of Christ in Halifax, 1734",* 113.

terms were that he receive an annual payment of £100 in old tenor, that he not pay taxes, and that Abington would pay the salary due him. Reverend Brown had taken the town of Abington to Court earlier that year in an attempt to retrieve his salary.[227]

His letter asking for dismission is as follows:

"Brethren of the town,
In Consideration of the difficulties which attend
My continuance in the work of the ministry among you,
I desire you grant me a dismission therefrom.
SAMUEL BROWN"[228]

From this letter one can see that Reverend Brown no longer knew how to stop the contention in the congregation or repair the broken communal bonds. Theological division had turned old grievances into open opposition. The religious differences stemming from the Great Awakening and rising individualism dissolved Abington's church government to such an extent that even an ideologically mixed council had come to the conclusion that Brown's stepping down was for the best. But would a simple change of pastor heal the many years of division and save the church from disintegration rooted in rising individualism? Adherence to the Cambridge Platform on Brown's part had not saved church harmony or his position. The answer to this question would come more quickly than expected, as Brown would die mere weeks after the council.[229] It would take some time for Abington to choose a new pastor, Ezekiel Dodge of

[227]Konig, Ed., "Volume 2 General Sessions of the Peace 1719-1749", 268; Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 43.
[228] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 43.
[229] Massachusetts Historical Society, "Diaries of Rev. William Smith", 458. William Smith has the entry "Mr. Brown Buried." Dated September 14th 1749.

Shrewsbury. To him would be left the weighty task of rehabilitating the Church of Abington.

CHAPTER III

THAT WHICH SURVIVES

By the end of the 1740s Abington's ecclesiastical government had collapsed in a chaotic mess of religious division and broken communal bonds. To help reestablish itself the church turned to Reverend Ezekiel Dodge and the process of rationalization, the "clarification, specification, and systemization of… ideas" to stabilize the church government.[230] In this way the church was able to make a more efficient government and mold the church's doctrine to the wishes of the membership, creating a more individualistic theology that more closely aligned with the beliefs of the New Lights and the new pastor but did not alienate the Old Lights. In what seems contrary to Max Weber's sociology of Rationalization, which claims rationality leads to disenchantment or secularization, rationality promoted Congregational churches but did not lead to secularism. This rationalization process might be mistaken for declension but in truth its progression did not lesson the religiosity of Abington church members.

[230] Chee Kiong Tong, Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore, 5.

Theology motivated contention in the Church of Abington and also the hiring of Ezekiel Dodge. Abington had refused to pay Brown for several years because of Old Light/New Light division. The continual infighting between Old and New Lights led to Brown's eventual resignation. In need of a pastor Abington turned to Dodge. The church paid Dodge, ordained in May of 1750, £111 2s 2d for his first three years. His final salary would be £73 6s. 8d. This was £3 more than the salary that the town had refused to pay Brown. What then were the new minister's theological leanings? What type of pastor did the divided congregation of Abington finally decide on?[231]

Ezekiel Dodge had theological views similar to the dissatisfied. New Light in leaning, he subscribed to Reverend Jonathan Edwards' *Life of David Brainerd* and had met Edwards himself. Dodge heard him speak before an ecclesiastical council. Considering the timing of Dodge's graduation from Harvard, July of 1749, it is possible the council might have been the one called in December 1749 to first discuss the communion controversy that divided Edwards from his congregation. Jonathan Edwards had shifted from his predecessor Stoddard's inclusive communion to a more exclusive one favored by the New Lights.[232] We will see this trend toward exclusivity in Abington also.

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[231] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 39, 40, 44.

[232] John Langdon Sibley's, *Biographical sketches of graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts*; Jonathan Edwards, *An account of the life of the late Reverend Mr. David Brainerd, Minister of the Gospel, missionary to the Indians, from the Honourable Society in Scotland, for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge, and Pastor of a church of Christian Indians in New-Jersey. Who died at Northampton in New-England, Octob. 9th 1747. in the 30th year of his age: chiefly taken from his own diary, and other*

While Dodge had met and knew of Edwards, Joseph Bellamy may have also influenced his theology. Reverend Bellamy preached at Bethlehem, Connecticut. Bellamy highlighted "moral fruit," the signs of being an elect, virtue, good works, more than Edwards, taking the middle ground between Edwards and the staunch Old Light, Reverend Charles Chauncey, who thought one found the elect through "moral fruit." Aaron Hobart notes in his history of Abington that Dodge was "disposed to regard and value the fruits of morality and piety."[233] Like Edwards, Bellamy promoted stricter communion requirements.[234] It seems that Bellamy and Dodge knew of each other at the very least through mutual acquaintance. We can assume this with some certainty because Dodge's student, Samuel Niles Jr., finished his training under Bellamy.[235] The two would have known of each other through New Light Reverend Ebenezer Parkman, preacher at Westborough, Massachusetts. Parkman was an old friend of Dodge's. Dodge came over often during his university days. They dined together and discussed sermons. Dodge's

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private writings, written for his own use. (Boston: David Henchman, in Cornhill, 1749) [electronic resource]. Early American Imprints, Series 1. no. 6311 [Accessed July, 1 2015]; Kenneth P. Minkema, *A Chronology of Edwards' Life And Writings* http://edwards.yale.edu/files/JE%20Chronology.pdf [Accessed July, 1 2015] Michael J. McClymond, *The Theology of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 84.

[233] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington*, 72; David C. McCollum, *A Study of Evangelicals and Revival Exercises From 1730--1805: Tracing the Development of Exercise Traditions Through the First Great Awakening Period* (Proquest LLC, 2009), 73; Mark Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England : The Origins of the New Divinity in Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 60.

[234] Ibid., 146.

[235] Aaron Hobart, *An Historical Sketch of Abington*, 77.

friendship with Parkman continued into his ministry and Parkman participated in Dodge's ordination.[236]

A New Light influenced by Edwards, Parkman may have facilitated encounters between Dodge, Bellamy, and Edwards. Edwards stayed the night at Parkman's house in 1739, he taught at Parkman's church during 1742, and he also corresponded with Parkman.[237] In addition, Bellamy would come see Parkman in person in May of 1750 to bring letters from Edwards requesting both pastor and church to help with a council set for June 19th. While Parkman did not end up going, this council would end up being the final council called before Northampton dismissed Edwards.[238] Considering the friendship between Dodge and Parkman, it is possible that Dodge and Bellamy or Edwards could have run into each other more than once.

In any case, Dodge certainly would have learned from Parkman the New Light theology of Edwards and Bellamy. There is even evidence that Westborough required New Light inspired confessions of faith, as they are alluded to in Reverend Parkman's diary. "Mr. Charles Brigham['s] very long relation" caused a late evening after service in

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[236] American Antiquarian Society, *The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman 1749-1750*. Ed. Francis G. Walett. 43, 142-143. http://www.americanantiquarian.org/proceedings/44517709.pdf [Accessed July 1, 2015].
[237] Heman Packard De Forest, *The history of Westborough, Massachusetts. Part I. The early history*, (Westborough, MA: Westborough, 1891), 123. https://archive.org/stream/historyofwestborm00defo#page/122/mode/2up [Accessed July 2, 2015]; *The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman 1749-1750*, 148. Jonathan Edwards, "Letter to the Reverend Ebenezer Parkman" *Jonathan Edwards Center,* 291-293. http://edwards.yale.edu/archive?path=aHR0cDovL2Vkd2FyZHMueWFsZS5lZHUvY2dpLWJpbi9uZXdwaGlsby9nZXRvYmplY3QucGw/cC4xNToyODQud2plbw== [Accessed July 2, 2015].
[238] Minkema, *A Chronology of Edwards' Life And Writings; The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman 1749-1750,* 151.

August 1749.[239] Parkman also helped a Mrs. Miller with her faith relation in August of 1749. The *History of Westborough* confirms that faith relations became a requirement at some point before the 1780s.[240]

New Light leaning Reverend Dodge had a relatively peaceful career as the pastor of Abington. In 20 years he baptized 742 people and admitted approximately 105 people into communion. The number admitted constitutes about half of the number admitted under Samuel Brown, 207. When one takes into account that Brown presided over the church almost twice as long as Dodge this would make sense. Dodge's large number of baptisms likely signified a growing town. Brown admitted one member into communion for every 2.5 baptized, Dodge admitted one member for every seven baptized. In this comparison the number admitted seems low but, considering the more stringent communion requirements and the influx of members during the Great Awakening, this drop is unsurprising. During Dodge's ministry communion numbers stabilized and baptismal numbers grew. In comparison, the church admitted only seven members from 1744 to 1749; most of these transferred from other churches and were not new members.[241]

Because Reverend Dodge was a New Light, the dissatisfied favored him. But the theological preference was only a start. How did Reverend Dodge rebuild the

[239] *The Diary of Ebenezer Parkman 1749-1750,* 84.
[240] De Forest, *The history of Westborough*, 205.
[241] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1744-1749, 23-24; Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 44- 45.

ecclesiastical government and church covenant to the satisfaction of both Old and New Lights? To answer this one must turn once more to the church records.

Once Reverend Dodge was settled in Abington, he presided over a series of reform votes. These votes included changes to communion finances and the storage of communion vessels. During the turmoil of the 1740s the church had ignored the accounts for the supplying of the Lord's Table. Now it voted to have the deacons "Render an account To ye Chh once a year."[242] This insured that the accounts would not be left for years when the church faced more pressing issues. It also brought a sense of normality and understanding by laying out what was expected, rebuilding church government after the issues associated with Brown and internal discord.

The church also voted to have the minister hold the communion vessels for a time. Abington historically had a problem with a deacon. The church removed deacon Lincoln for falsehood, who then absented himself, and finally called a council unilaterally against Reverend Brown.[243] Considering the events surrounding the removal of deacon Lincoln, a reform minded church might worry about putting the sacramental vessels in the hands of a church member who might absent himself. With the timing of the vote so close to his arrival, it might have been a suggestion of Reverend Dodge. Either way, Dodge kept the communion vessels. This procedural change gave Dodge greater control over the Lord's Table and strengthened his pastoral authority.

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[242] *Abington Church Records 1750-1757*, Transcribed by author, 1750, 9.
[243] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1723, 5.

In these two votes we see examples of the two different reactions of ministers to the growing individualism in local churches, rationalism and authoritarianism. James Cooper points out that some ministers increasingly enacted authoritarian control in the face of the lay infighting and contention over church government. We see it in the creation of clerical societies and the attending push to professionalize.[244] Cotton Mather's *Proposals* attempted to make the system more authoritarian by making a standing council and giving it final authority in making decisions and resolving disputes. Many fellow clergy resisted such authoritarian actions as a threat to the Congregational Way. Mather's father, Increase Mather, fought his own son's *Proposals.* Nevertheless, the question still remained how to gain control of a congregation that was becoming more and more a group of individuals rather than a community, and how to rebuild the damaged foundation of ecclesiastical government.[245]

Having Reverend Dodge hold the communion vessels strengthened his pastoral authority, as the church voted to centralize power. However, this move is nowhere near as drastic as the ideas mentioned in the *Proposals.* It would seem then that Reverend Dodge used authoritarianism sparingly. Instead of a straight authoritarian approach, Dodge and his church relied on a different tactic, that of rationalization.

[244] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,*161, 149.
[245] Ibid., 150-152, 134

Rationalization, as previously mentioned, is the "clarification, specification, and systemization of… ideas" [246] We see the systemization of any organization, including religious ones like the church of Abington, through the start of administrative systems and bureaucracy.[247] Abington began to create a new rational administrative system in its vote over communal finances. Instead of solely leaving it in the hands of the congregation to decide each year how to handle the communion finances and the debt (if any) owed to the deacon, the church created a systemized process. This process insured that the deacons gave yearly accounts, and that the church provided for the Lord's Table. This would be the first of many votes that laid out new or reiterated existing rules in such a way as to restructure ecclesiastical government in a more logical and consistent manner.[248]

Dodge's rationalization is startling when looked at through the lens of Weber's theory of rationalization as seen in his famous work *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism.* The first divergence from Weber's theory is that this rationalization did not result from the Puritan idea of a calling and the driving need to succeed in said calling to prove oneself as one of the elect. Weber believed that the Puritan's idea of a calling led them to work hard and save money. This accumulation of capital for capital investment,

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[246] Chee Kiong Tong, *Rationalizing Religion: Religious Conversion, Revivalism and Competition in Singapore,* 5.
[247] Bryan S. Turner*, Classical Sociology.* (London: Sage Publications, 1999), 14.
[248] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1750, 9. There was a vote for a new record book before this but there is not enough information on why a new book was deemed necessary to say it was a sign of rationalization.

and the subsequent shift towards a capitalistic society resulted in rationalization. However, in Abington we see rationalization not as a response to capitalistic society, but as a response to the growing concept of individualism, which had destroyed the church community.[249]

Weber did not deny the importance of individualism. He noted that Calvinism was an individualized religion. A man or woman had to go on their own journey to salvation without relying on his or her priests (for absolution or saving sacraments) or on their brethren.[250] Weber also did not deny that individualism and capitalism were intertwined with one another. Rationalization required growing individualism and resulted in a more personal and individualized religion.[251] Nevertheless, Weber focused more on the connection between the Puritan work ethic and rationalization. Individualism played a much more significant role in Abington. Contention and theological differences stemmed from the dissatisfieds' more individualistic religious views and goals, the New Light focus on a personal relationship with God and the importance of his saving grace. Therefore, individualism was not one of many pre-conditions to rationalization, but its key factor.

Another even more important point of discrepancy is Weber's idea that rationalization leads to secularization, that the "religious roots died out slowly, giving

[249] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 100-101.
[250] Ibid., 60-61.
[251] Ibid., 33-34; edited by James A. Beckford and John Walliss, *Theorising Religion: Classical and Contemporary Debates*. (Ashgate, 2006), 35, 50.

way to utilitarian worldliness."[252] In Abington one does not see the secularization of religion but instead a pastor adapting rationalization to save church government. Rationalization was, in part, a response to the fracturing of old systems, like community, caused by individualism and Dodge used it as such. The rationalization of religious structures then should not be seen as signs of secularization, but treated as a church saving adaptation. This rationalization of church government co-existed peacefully with the New Light theology which one could argue was as religious as Old Light doctrine, with its emphasis on the indwelling spirit of God.[253]

Through a close examination of the Abington Church records and the pastorate of Reverend Dodge, one sees an increase of rationalization of church government without any attendant secularization of doctrine. Weber postulated a theory of disenchantment, that rationalization must ultimately lead to secularization and the loss of religion's shaping power as a strong social construct.[254] However, the church records of Abington under Dodge's stewardship do not support this conclusion. During this time we do not see an apathetic laity, but individuals working to stabilize a church and promote a theology supported by individual consent.

But why do we see such a discrepancy between Weber's theory and actuality? The answer can be found in Weber's methodology. Weber focused on religious actors

[252]Turner, *Classical Sociology,* 14; Weber, *The Protestant Ethic,* 119.
[253] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards A Life*, 179-180.
[254] Weber, *The Protestant Ethic* 119; Walliss, *Theorising Religion*, 106.

including "magicians, priests and prophets."[255] In Puritanism this would translate to a focus on the ministers, their doctrine, and their emphasis on ecclesiastical government from the formation of the Cambridge Platform, to fears of church disorder and governmental collapse in the 1730s.[256] However, it would be a superficial study done at the expense of a more thorough examination of the church membership.

In this way, Weber would have noted the shifts and changes in church government toward a more rational system as ministers tried to stymie the disintegration of ecclesiastical government, but would miss the more theological focus of the church members. Weber notes the more individualized faith, but not the intense focus of the laity on religious doctrine itself. This top down view tends to give a one sided view that puts too much emphasis on secularization. In truth rationalization stabilized church governments and saved them from destruction at the hands of the forces of individualism and theological contention.

The proto-rationalized system of the Cambridge Platform, a precursor system that had rational aspects, but was not fully rationalized because of its reliance on community rather than a clearly defined and organized structure, proved ineffective against individualization. Samuel Brown had been unable to find a way in the Cambridge Platform to stop the governmental collapse of his church. As communal ties broke down in the face of growing individualism the Cambridge Platform had no way to preserve

[255] Ibid., 62.
[256] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,*160.

church government and the church covenant. This made the system collapse with the increased pressure of a dissident laity.

The Cambridge Platform relied on communal bonds to support ecclesiastical government because it had no other effective check to lay power. The Cambridge Platform created a concurrent government between God, the laity, and the presbytery.[257] However, the reliance on community prevented the system from being considered fully rationalized. As noted in an earlier chapter, the vote of the laity limited Brown's actions in executing church censures and running ecclesiastical government. In turn the Cambridge Platform expected the laity, once they had chosen a minister, to "most willingly submit to their Ministry in the Lord." [258] However, communal ties and pressure were the only way to insure individuals submitted to a pastor chosen by the majority.

Both censures and church councils operated partially through communal pressure. A part of excommunication or suspension was separation and isolation from church members, a removal of community interaction. But as communal feeling decreased and the numbers in other denominations increased, censure ceased to be an effective means of redress.[259] Councils also worked through peer pressure. The status of a congregation as an independent church without direct oversight made enforcement of council decisions difficult. Because of fear of the abridgment of church independence, councils held a more

[257] *The Results of Three Synods*, 21.
[258] Ibid., 17.
[259] Brown, "The Keys of the Kingdom", 251-252.

advisory role.[260] Churches heeded council decisions only if they respected the council's judgment and position as part of the church community. Although one church did not hold authority over the other, they could admonish each other because of their connection as a part of this church community.[261] As individualism grew the power of church councils to check the power of church laity waned.[262]

Communal ties were also fundamental to church covenants. The church covenant allowed members to "have Church Power one over another mutually."[263] Submission to the church covenant empowered the church as a community to watch and discipline its members. However, growing individualism stripped this communal power from church communities in much the same way it affected councils. Symptoms of the lessening of the church community's power was seen first in the increase in councils for routine cases. Councils were called on routine cases because of the refusal of members to recognize and submit to church members' disciplinary decisions.[264]

This refusal to submit to communal pressure led some to disregard the power of the church community and the church covenant on which it stood. One can see an example of this disdain in Abington member Nathan Gurney who wished he could break

[260] Mather, *Ratio disciplinae fratrum Nov-Anglorum* 160; Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 150-151.
[261] *The Results of Three Synods*, 40.
[262]Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 120, 143, 150-51,
[263] *The Results of Three Synods*, 8.
[264] See the Hersey fornication case in chapter 1 of this thesis as an example. Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 176.

the church covenant more.[265] But if the laity no longer acknowledged the binding power of the church covenant and "the Frame of Society" it constituted, then the practices of the Cambridge Platform were ineffective.[266] Church discipline and government only worked when the members submitted themselves to the covenant and thus to church discipline and each other through mutual watch.[267]

Church governance unraveled as the community and covenant became less and less important. As there was no longer a way to enforce the Cambridge Platform, a new system had to be found. An authoritarian way might have been possible but as noted before there were numerous protests to this change. Because of the tradition of lay participation inherent in Congregational Churches, and the proto-rational nature of the Cambridge Platform, a rational system was the best choice.[268] A rational system would not need an autocratic leader to maintain order or a covenanted community; instead order would be kept through a systematic structure which the church would vote on and mutually consent to implement. In this way, popular participation would be preserved, though members would not be as involved in the ecclesiastical government's running on a daily level, for example the church no longer voted yearly on communal finances. Also, committees were formed to address absentee members and find their reason for absence.

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[265] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1746, 13; For more info see chapter 2.
[266] *The Results of Three Synods*, 8.
[267] *The Results of Three Synods*, 30.
[268] Cooper says lay participation was still important into the eighteenth century, Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties,* 158.

However, church discipline and the role of the lay vote remained the same.[269] It should be noted that rationalization did not mean a complete withdrawal from the church covenant but a reinvention of it as a regulated organization instead of a community.

Dodge's first step had been to systemize when the communal accounts were addressed, trying to bring order to the church's financial affairs which had been overlooked for several years. The next step, the church voted on the deacons. It is specifically noted that the vote was a written vote.[270] This was a much more formalized system of voting than what was seen during the church's difficulties with Reverend Brown. During that time the dissatisfied had to show their displeasure by moving across the room.[271] The church used this voting method again in a difficult discipline case under Brown. This form of voting opened the minority to communal pressure of the majority and might have skewed voting results. Voting like this was also very physical and transient, unlike written voting that would, at least for a small amount of time, leave a record of the vote. This did not mean that other means of voting were entirely removed; voting by silence was used by Dodge in minor disciplinary cases.[272] However, for a vote as important as the position of deacon the records specifically mentioned a written vote, the first written vote in the Abington Church Records. We see yet another step toward a rational system.

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[269] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1755, 17.
[270] Ibid., 9.
[271] Cooper, *Abington Church Records*, 1748, 14.
[272] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1756, 18.

The process of dismission, recommendation, and admission would also be clarified and rationalized. The admission and dismission processes had become particularly problematic in Abington. Starting in the 1730s when people from other churches irregularly joined Abington, and culminating with the temporary removal of the separatists, the process of admission and dissmission set out by the Cambridge Platform had been overlooked and broken numerous times, despite earlier votes against such action. To restore order to the process, a vote was passed in 1752 that "persons who are Dismissed from other [churches] & recommended to this shall have their Dismission & recommendation read some time before they are named in to ye [church]."[273]

The Cambridge Platform required recommendations and dismissions so that churches would know their prospective member was in good standing, however there were no other specifications.[274] The vote in 1752 reiterated the Cambridge Platform and clarified the role of dismissions and recommendations. The vote served as a pointed reproach to those who had entered the church without recommendations or before they were read. This vote laid out the proper procedure so that the whole church would know an individual's status. Such a vote showed that Abington sought to preserve the Cambridge Platform, but also wanted to rationalize it and adapt it to the new realities of an individualized laity.

[273] Ibid., 1752, 12.
[274] *The Results of Three Synods*, 32-33.

The church needed clarification not only for the admissions process, but also for the church covenant itself. The same day the church voted on admissions it also voted that those admitted became a participant in the church covenant and thus "Under ye Discipline of it."[275] Such a vote would seem unnecessary, as the connection between admission, church covenant, and church discipline was a fundamental part of the ecclesiastical government and at the core of the Congregational Way. This connection can be found in the Abington Church from the very beginning. The church covenant makes very clear that those joining the church "yield [themselves] to ye Discipline & power of [Christ] in his [Church]" and thus to all censures.[276] Why then would the church need to vote on something that was already in the church covenant?

Quite simply, the church covenant had lost power over the membership. The covenant and the ecclesiastical government that it set up had been unable to solve the internal issues with Reverend Brown. Because of the covenant's failures and the undermining of the church community, the laity no longer respected the covenant. To help undo the damage done to the integrity of the church government after years of infighting the members voted to reaffirm the basics of the church covenant, to clarify, so there would be no confusion or contention among themselves or the new members. With

[275] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1752, 12.
[276]Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* Abington Covenant.

this vote the church members resubmitted themselves to the church covenant, and as we shall see, placed it in a rational system of theology of their own creation.[277]

It should be noted the church took a vote over admissions and dismissions in the 1730s under Samuel Brown when similar issues with the admittance of members appeared. This vote promoted submission to ecclesiastical government according to the Cambridge Platform saying it was "highly reasonable" for transfer members to put themselves "under ye Watch of this Church."[278] However the vote was less precise on the specifics of the admission process, not mentioning when or who should read the letters of recommendation. The lack of specification showed a lesser degree of rationalization. Also the resulting vote did not call for a reaffirmation of the covenant to the same extent. The church split the 1752 vote on admissions and dismissions into two separate votes. The first vote, as discussed, emphasized the role of dismissions and recommendations but said nothing of the church covenant. This meant the church could have simply affirmed that recommendations needed to be received before admittance and left it at that. Instead, they specifically called another vote to affirm the connection between church membership and church discipline. The vote in 1752 reminded the people of their long flouted covenant and the responsibilities inherent within it while at the same time ensuring that a now individualized congregation agreed to the system.[279] In addition, considering the step towards rationalization with the 1750 written vote over

[277] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1752, 12.
[278]Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* 1738, 9.
[279] Ibid.; Hendrex, *Abington Church Records*, 1752, 12.

deacons it is probable that the 1752 vote was closed and more impartial than the one in the 1730s.

One can see a clear pattern now: the church voted on different parts of church governance so that the running of the church could be rationalized into a system that the laity understood and clearly consented to. In this way the strife of the past would be overcome. However, the laity restructured and reaffirmed not just the running of the church government. There had been such discontent about the religious doctrine of the church it should come as no surprise that the church addressed this too.

The first step taken in creating a more rationalized system of belief was to choose a confession of faith which the church could subscribe to. Prior to these reforms, Abington did not have a confession of faith. The Cambridge Platform focused almost exclusively on church government, what constituted a church, how one was formed and how one functioned as a community of believers. This focus was mirrored in Abington's church covenant. Abington's covenant was very vague about the specifics of the religious doctrine that the church community followed, simply stating they would walk "in all Wayes…agreeable to ye –prescriptions of his holy Word."[280] A faith confession would clarify doctrinal points not in the Cambridge Platform, systemize the doctrine agreed upon by the church, and hopefully help prevent further dissension. According to Abington historian, Aaron Hobart, the catechism chosen was *The Shorter Catechism of*

[280] Cooper, *Abington Church Records,* Covenant.

the Westminster Assembly of Divines. Abington probably used not the whole catechism but only the Westminster Confession of faith.[281]

The Westminster Confession, or a variation of it, had been widely used by Congregational Churches since the 1680's, but this is the first record of its usage in Abington. A synod of Congregational churches took the Savory Declaration, a confession of faith that was essentially the Westminster Confession with "some small variations[,]" added a few more changes, and adopted it in 1680.[282] This adoption was a step in the rationalization of Congregational churches. Before this synod the New England congregations did not have a written confession. Nor did ministers feel such a thing was needed, as their principles "[were] well known," being based on scripture.[283] Even the preface to the confession itself focuses on the confession's use as a tool to quiet critics, instead of any need for religious guidelines. The synod's agreement was only the start. Even with the synod's endorsement, it was up to individual churches whether they would accept it.[284]

It was not until the arrival of Reverend Dodge in 1750 and the resulting process of rehabilitation and rationalization that the Abington church adopted the Westminster Confession. By this point there had been so much strife over doctrine, the laity could no

[281] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 45.
[282] "The Cambridge and Saybrook platforms of church discipline, with the Confession of faith of the New England churches, adopted in 1680; and the Heads of agreement assented to by the Presbyterians and Congregationalists in England in 1690." (Boston: T.R. Marvin, 1829), 73. As found on https://archive.org [Accessed July 2, 2015].
[283] Ibid., 72.
[284] J. William T. Youngs, *The Congregationalists*, (Greenwood Publishing Group, 1998), 52.

longer assume that the church's "scripture" based tenets were agreed to or even known. This confession clarified the church's belief system and gave the laity a point of agreement. Because the congregation mutually agreed to abide by the beliefs outlined in the confession, the laity had a point of reference that everyone agreed on. When contention surfaced they were able to go to it to resolve disputes.

The confession rationalized the Church of Abington's belief system and even appealed to New Light theology and Dodge's personal principles. Jonathan Edwards' himself affirmed the Westminster Confession of faith, saying "there would be no difficulty" in following the confession.[285] Joseph Bellamy stood "for the great doctrines of the gospel as set forth in the Westminster confession of faith" opposing Arminian tendencies. [286] To Bellamy, the Westminster Confession and the Catechisms were a "system of religion agreeable to the word of God."[287] The Confession emphasized the role of God's grace as the only means of salvation. God's election or calling of a sinner was of "God's free and special grace alone not from anything…foreseen in man."[288] In this way the Westminster Confession reflected the New Lights' focus on saving grace, a

[285] Alexander Viets Griswold Allen, *American Religious Leaders Jonathan Edwards,* (Cambridge, the Riverside Press, 1889), 271.
[286] Joseph Bellamy and Tryon Edwards*, The works of Joseph Bellamy, Volume I.* (Boston: Doctrinal Tract and Book Society, 1853), IV.
[287] Ibid., xxvii.
[288] *The Confession of Faith,* 47-48. Found at http://opc.org/documents/CFLayout.pdf. [Accessed July 2, 2015].

doctrine they believed Arminian leaning Old Lights had violated by allowing unregenerate people into the church covenant.[289]

One can see a doctrinal basis for the New Light argument for a more exclusive church covenant in the Westminster Confession. The confession states that the "ability to do good works is… wholly from the Spirit of Christ."[290] The unsaved were unable "upon any pretense of good intention" to truly do good.[291] Therefore the unregenerate would be unable to own the covenant, to "fulfill the divine commands to repent and turn to Christ."[292] In Joseph Bellamy's view, a sinner's attempt to join the covenant led to him or her "mak[ing] a false and lying profession."[293] Bellamy further constricts the church's ability to include the unconverted in any way by denying the existence of any covenant outside of the covenant of grace. This was a direct attack against the Half-way Covenant; Bellamy claimed such covenants for the unsaved who sought God's grace were "not of heaven but of men."[294] Therefore, the Half-way Covenant with its inclusion of the unconverted was an invention of man and not based in scripture. This viewpoint, backed by the Westminster Confession, vindicated the New Light's view of church membership.

Seeing how the Westminster Confession promoted and rationalized New Light beliefs, it is unsurprising that the church in Abington would choose to follow it.

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[289] Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England,* 146-147.
[290] *The Confession of Faith,* 69.
[291] Ibid.
[292] Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England,* 146
[293] Joseph Bellamy quote found in Ibid., 146.
[294] Ibid., 147.

However, the church did not stop there; it took the professed doctrine to its logical conclusion. In 1751, the church added requirements to their admissions process for new members (as opposed to transfer-members). Prospective members were now required to "give some account of their faith & ye reason of their hope for ye satisfaction of our Rational charity."[295] The giving of conversion relations was hardly a new practice and had been seen in Abington, Brown's slave Tony had confessed "of his former & Sinfull life & Declared how God had met him & wrought upon him" before Brown baptized him.[296] However, the church did not have a faith relation requirement until 1751 and very few volunteered their own relations before then. Implementing such a requirement promoted the two biggest forces on the Church of Abington in the 1740s and 1750s, rationalization and growing religious feeling.[297]

The conversion process, as Weber notes, was one of the main aspects of Puritanism that was individualized. So it makes sense that the process surrounding conversion rationalized in Congregational churches first. Conversion relations created a rational system by which the church could distinguish the elect from the masses. This system had become so codified over the years that relations could be broken down into steps: hearing the word and possible misfortune, "knowledge of the law", recognition of sins, conviction of one's sins, the beginnings of faith and a fight with despair and doubt,

[295]Hendrex, *Abington Church Records,* 1751, 10.

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[297] Edmund Morgan finds clear evidence for faith relations in Plymouth church in 1669, Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints The History of a Puritan Idea* (New York University Press, 1963), 61.

assurance, grief over sin and a desire to follow God.[298] A faith relation should not skip any steps nor should it sound manufactured. One could almost consider pastors and churches analyzing faith relations for authenticity scientists bound by the laws, the steps of conversion.

These steps rationalized the conversion process, after its individualization, but the result was not one of secularization. In fact conversion relations signified the increased importance members assigned to religious doctrine and continued lay piety. Conversion relations were a result of the wish to purify the visible church. New Lights, like Edwards, wanted stringent admission policy because of a strengthening of religious sentiment, a wish to preserve and purify the church from false professions, and the inventions of man that Joseph Bellamy warned about.[299]

While the vote adding conversion relations was the most significant vote on theology, it was not the only one. In December of 1752, the church voted that it would allow "Baptized persons to own ye Cov^{t} & secure Baptism for their children."[300] This vote reaffirmed the Half-Way Covenant. This decision went against Jonathan Edwards and Joseph Bellamy's beliefs, and the purifying impulse of the New Lights.[301] Considering his probable influence on Dodge, one might be surprised. However, one

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[298] Morgan, *Visible Saints,* 68-60.
[299] Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards A Life,* 320; Valeri, *Law and Providence in Joseph Bellamy's New England,* 146.
[300] Hendrex*, Abington Church Records*, 1752, 12.
[301] M.X. Lesser, *Reading Jonathan Edwards: An Annotated Bibliography in Three Parts, 1729-2005,* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2008), 185.

cannot forget the Old Light majority. It is possible that even though stricter admission requirements were passed, the abolishing of the Half-Way Covenant was too radical for the moderate majority. The continuation of the Half-Way Covenant shows that the Old Lights did not abandon their beliefs when confronted with New Light doctrine. Instead they fought for their own beliefs and doctrine, the Half-Way Covenant, and we see their impact on the final result. Abington created a religious doctrine tailored to the beliefs of the lay members rather than deferring to the beliefs of any one pastor. But why have the vote in the first place? The Half-way Covenant had already been a part of church government. They were simply voting to keep the way "practiced by this [Church] from ye beginning."[302] Why was there a need to restate church tradition? The vote allowed the New Lights to at least give their opinion and it reaffirmed church practice, placing it in written form in the church records and curtailing doubts and arguments. It was a further rationalization of the theology of the Church of Abington. The church mutually agreed upon and wrote down their theology, tailor made through church vote. It was not a theology that strictly followed Bellamy, Edwards or Chauncey, but through its creation, and setting in a rational system it brought peace to Abington.

Abington's focus on ecclesiastical government along with theological doctrine should not be misconstrued as a return to communal bonds. Specified and clarified rules, and doctrine agreed upon by the laity, now replaced communal pressure. The laity were no longer held in check by deference to a community leader, the pastor, but by their own

[302] Hendrex*, Abington Church Records*, 1752, 12

personal agreement. The church no longer left its theological doctrine as simply *Sola Scriptura,* but set out its theology to be agreed upon by the individual. The church of Abington removed the need for communal controls and used rationalization to adapt to individualization.

Max Weber believed religion had little place in a rationalized and scientific world, and he did not expect rationalization to promote religion. To Weber religion was to become more individualized and mystical. Modern science considered religion irrational. Science no longer had any base in religion and vice versa; this meant that religion could only turn to the other-worldly, continuing to lose ground in the secularized world.[303] It would seem logical that the individualization of religion and its shifting of focus to the purely internal and emotional could possibly have led to it losing prominence in a society, but this is not the end result seen in Abington.

Reverend Dodge and Abington used rationalization to create a system of theology which focused on an individual's conversion and purity, and led to a stable, harmonious church. As seen earlier, the number of baptisms and those admitted to communion remained similar. The church did not lose ground in membership nor was there continued mass absenteeism. Dodge's pastorate would be peaceful and harmonious without a single council called. From 1750-1757 there was one fornication case, one absentee case not related to another case, one case of theft, one case of intoxication, and one rather

[303] Edited by Peter Hamilton, *Max Weber Critical Assessments Volume 4.* (Routledge, 1991), 155.

complicated accusation of falsehood. Rationalization then did not damage the church's position but instead stopped the contention and stabilized church government by clarifying belief systems and forming church government according to those systems.[304]

Reverend Dodge was not the only one to use rationalization in the service of religion. Cooper notes that church affirmation of the tenets of the Cambridge Platform was used as an attempt to stabilize many churches, including the Ninth Church of Boston which proclaimed its adherence to the Cambridge Platform in 1736.[305] However without the other changes, such as creating a system of theology, this was not always effective due to the proto-rationalized nature of the Cambridge Platform. The Platform could not stabilize church government by itself because its prescriptions lacked specificity and were "often the subject of varying interpretations."[306] The need to go further in rationalization than a recommitment to the Cambridge Platform was felt and acted upon. Like Abington, the First Church of Beverly reexamined "their covenant, the foundations of their church, and church government in general" in an attempt to revitalize the church.[307]

While rationalization helped Congregational churches, it also changed them. Often while popular participation was not removed, the laity's control over day to day activities was reduced, as a more efficient and less stress inducing bureaucratic system

[304] Hendrex, *Abington Church Records,* 1750-1757, 9-19.
[305] Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 162.
[306] Ibid.
[307] Ibid., 162, 186.

was introduced. This system was a committee of laymen meant to oversee the church's discipline as opposed to subjecting the whole congregation to a vote. A few of the churches that created these committees directly cited the wish to avoid controversy and contention. One should not see this change as a declension but a rationalization. Ecclesiastical government was made efficient to avoid further fighting but does not mean there was a drop in religiosity.[308]

Thus one sees in Abington not a declension of religion but rather a rationalization of church government in response to individualization. Rationalization stabilized Abington after it was affected by forces of individualization, religious dissension, and internal strife during the Great Awakening. The processes of rationalization included: specification, clarification, and efficiency, allowing the Church of Abington to rebuild the failing church government and shape it to the religious sensibilities of individuals. This allowed for a stepping away from outmoded communal bonds and start the process of adapting to the modern world. Religion would focus not so much on church government but the beliefs of the individual, which would allow for the continuance of religion as a social force into modern times rather than secularization breeding declension of religious belief.

[308] Ibid., 200.

CONCLUSION

THE UNDISCOVERED COUNTRY

Once the church put a rationalized system in place Abington became peaceful. Abington flourished under Dodge's pastoral care until his death in 1770.[309] He was "Much beloved and respected by his people."[310] His legacy of church harmony was also one of adaptation. Harmony would not have been possible if Dodge and the First Church of Abington had not adapted to the growing individualism of church members.

Churches continue to use rationalization today. The mainly American institution of the Mega church and its satellite campuses result from the extreme rationalization, also known as "McDonaldization" of religion.[311] These churches are organized for maximum efficiency, calculability, predictability and control.[312] Mega churches continue to grow in

[309] Benjamin Hobart, *History of the Town of Abington,* 98.
[310] Aaron Hobart*, An Historical Sketch of Abington,* 72.
[311] John Drane, "From Creeds to Burgers: Religious Control, Spiritual Search and the Future of the World." Ed. By James A. Beckford and John Walliss, *Theorising Religion Classical and Contemporary Debates.*
[312] George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Los Angeles: SAGE Publications, 2015).

number. Between 2005 and 2012 the number of Mega Churches had grown 25%.[313] Churches have also retained greater social influence in the United States then elsewhere. Almost four in ten Americans reported going to church in the last week in a 2013 Gallup poll.[314] In comparison a European Social Survey completed in 2004 revealed only 10% to 15% of people attended weekly religious service in England and less than 10% attended in France.[315] This percentage gap and the popularity of Mega churches points to the continued survival and adaptation of American churches. Rationalization has allowed religion to keep up with the United States' individualizing society. But where do churches go from here? Will religion find a way to continue rationalizing beyond the Mega Church or has religion finally found itself trapped in Weber's iron cage, unable to adapt further?

While churches still wield social influence, there are signs of coming change. A poll taken in June of 2015 finds that only 42% of people have confidence in churches or organized religion.[316] It remains to be seen how churches will react to this change. However, it might be time for churches to pioneer a new system of church government,

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[313] *Hartford Institute For Religious Research,* "Fast Facts About American Religion." http://hirr.hartsem.edu/research/fastfacts/fast_facts.html [Accessed July 14, 2015].
[314]"In U.S., Four in 10 Report Attending Church in Last Week" *Gallup*, 2013. http://www.gallup.com/poll/166613/four-report-attending-church-last-week.aspx [Accessed July 14, 2015]
[315]"Religion in Europe: Trust Not Filling the Pews" *Gallup,* 2004. http://www.gallup.com/poll/13117/religion-europe-trust-filling-pews.aspx [Accessed: July 14, 2015]
[316] "Confidence in Religion at New Low, but Not Among Catholics" *Gallup,* 2015. http://www.gallup.com/poll/183674/confidence-religion-new-low-not-among-catholics.aspx [Accessed: July 14, 2015]

much like the First Church of Abington changed from a communal based church government to a rationalized one in the face of growing individualism.

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