

“POPE” OR PERSUADER?
THE INFLUENCE OF SOLOMON STODDARD
IN NORTHAMPTON AND WESTERN NEW ENGLAND

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Chapter I

Introduction

During his six-decade Northampton ministry Solomon Stoddard became one of the most recognized and influential ministers in all of New England. Contemporaries, in fact, acknowledged his powerful influence by referring to him as the “Northampton autocrat” and as the “Pope of the Connecticut Valley.”¹ One contemporary, the Reverend Benjamin Coleman, moreover, recognized the Northampton minister as a “Peter among the disciples” and as “a Prophet and a father not only to the neighboring churches of his own country, but also to those of the whole land.” Stoddard’s son-in-law and minister of the church at Hatfield, William Williams, argued that Stoddard “commanded reverence from all that saw him, as if the God of nature had suited his very aspect to the work he design’d him.”² His grandson and heir to the Northampton pulpit, Jonathan Edwards,

¹ See Increase Mather’s introduction to John Quick’s work, *The Young Man’s Claim Unto the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (Boston, 1700) and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, a Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 515 note 2. Here, for the first time, Stoddard’s ecclesiastical opponent, the Reverend Increase Mather of Boston, referred to the Northampton minister as a “Congregational Pope.” Although considered derogatory at first, the popular moniker eventually became a title signifying the respect and power many attributed to him.

² George S. Claghorn, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*,. 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XVI, 381-382, 385, see also Smith, ed., *Works*, II, 144-146. Benjamin Coleman’s remarks are cited in Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 19 see also William Williams, “The Death of a Prophet Lamented and Improved in a Sermon Preached at Northampton February 13, 1729. On the Day of the

likewise acknowledged “a vast veneration the people had for Mr. Stoddard’s memory, which was such that many of them looked on him almost as a sort of deity,” adding that “they esteemed his sayings as oracles” and that “without question the religion and good order of the county, and their purity in doctrine, has under God, been very much owing to the great abilities and eminent piety of my venerable and honored grandfather Stoddard.” Even Stoddard’s great grandson, Timothy Dwight, believed the Northampton minister “possessed probably more influence than any other clergyman in the province during a period of thirty years,” explaining that Stoddard became so revered that even members of the Native-American tribes from Western New England referred to him as the “Englishman’s God.”³

Despite the vast influence Stoddard seemed to wield over his Northampton Church and its surrounding area, the frontier minister had many outspoken opponents. As a Presbyterian-leaning clergyman in Congregationally-minded New England, his ideas on church government often drew the ire of his ministerial colleagues. Clergymen throughout New England feared that if some of Stoddard’s unorthodox views spread, New England’s ecclesiastical system would fail and its people would become corrupted.⁴ Many of his opponents felt, moreover, that he was “assaulting the state of [the] churches”

Internment of the Reverend, Pious, and Learned Mr. Solomon Stoddard” in *Evans Manuscript Collections* no. 3239, 19.

³ Barbara Miller Solomon, ed., *Timothy Dwight’s “Travels in New England and New York,”* 5 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), vol 1, 241-242.

⁴ Increase Mather, *Order of the Gospel Professed and Practiced by the Churches of Christ in New England* (Boston, 1700), 5-9 and Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 172-176. Here, Increase Mather indicates that if Stoddard’s unorthodox polity continued to spread, it could lead to the decline of the “New England way” and to the downfall of the people.

and that his doctrines and practices could cause “the beginning of New England’s apostasy.”⁵

Given their extreme fear of his views, many of Stoddard’s opponents attempted to combat his growing influence by downplaying his significance over the ecclesiastical affairs of his church and the valley. They argued that he found little if any success in governing his church as an “autocrat” and that his “Pope”-like authority over the valley was an inaccurate perception of the frontier clergyman. Edward Taylor, a nearby minister and opponent of Stoddard, for example, suggested that because Stoddard allowed his congregation to debate and vote on all important ecclesiastical affairs, his image as an “autocrat” over the Northampton Church did not fit reality.⁶

Eighteenth-century attempts to reduce Stoddard’s significance has caused an enormous amount of confusion among modern scholars. Using Stoddard’s opponents as

⁵ James A. Goulding, “The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 505. Here, Goulding quotes from a letter signed by nine Congregational clergymen writing against Stoddard’s “unhappy novelties.” See also Norman S. Grabo, “Edward Taylor on the Lords Supper” *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 12 (January 1960), 24-26 and Goulding, “Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers,” 412.

⁶ Davis, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 63 and Solomon Stoddard, *Guide to Christ* (Boston, 1714), introduction. In a letter from Taylor to Stoddard, the author notes that Stoddard was compelled to hold councils with his church to debate his innovations, suggesting that the Northampton “autocrat,” did not have absolute authority over his congregation if he was forced to hold days of debate in order to implement a new policy. Increase Mather’s introduction to Stoddard’s 1714 work, *Guide to Christ*, also minimizes Stoddard’s role as a threat to the New England Way. He argues that Stoddard was a harmless brother whose ideas simply differed from his own. Even Jonathan Edwards, who once called Stoddard a “sort of deity” and an “oracle,” downplayed Stoddard’s influence over Northampton and the area by suggesting that even the “oracle” could not keep the church from being split over unnamed issues and that his ministry caused “great wounds” that would carry over to his ministry. See Claghorn, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XVI, 381-382, 385, see also Smith, ed., *Works*, II, 144-146

their main sources, historians have argued that the Northampton minister must have possessed minimal influence over his church and the region. “Stoddard’s views,” historian Harry S. Stout explained, “were not accepted even by many of his fellow ministers in the Connecticut River Valley, and within the churches lay people generally resisted his ‘Presbyterian’ sentiments.” Paul Lucas, possibly the foremost scholar on the early history of Western Massachusetts, agreed with Stout, maintaining that “Solomon Stoddard never successfully curbed or abrogated the power or unity of the fraternity in Northampton,” noting that “for much of his life, Stoddard was a maverick, revered personally but opposed by nearly everyone, including the members of his own church.” The notion of him as “‘Pope’ of the Connecticut Valley,” he concluded, was “a myth.”⁷

Other scholars, however, have stressed Stoddard’s enormous influence over his congregation and the entire Connecticut Valley. Using the contemporary sources that extolled Stoddard’s power and importance as an “autocrat” and “Pope,” these historians assume that Stoddard’s influence over Northampton and the entire region became very considerable. George Marsden, for example, argued in his 2003 work, that Stoddard was “the center of gravity in western Massachusetts.”⁸ Perry Miller took Stoddard’s titles very literally. He asserted in 1953, that Stoddard ruled Northampton and its surrounding

⁷ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986), 99n, Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 158, Paul Lucas, “An Appeal of the Learned: The Mind of Solomon Stoddard” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (April, 1973), 261.

⁸ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life* (New Haven, Yale University Press, 2003), 124.

area as an ecclesiastical autocrat and that he won the title of “Pope” by “forcing his will” on the people.⁹

Despite the great differences of opinion among modern historians concerning Stoddard’s influence over his church and the valley, Miller’s celebrated assertion that Stoddard acted as an ecclesiastical autocrat in Northampton has ultimately muddled several larger issues. Much of the recent Stoddardean scholarship has reduced the debate to questions over the degree of his power rather than the significance of his ministry. Historians have spent so much time trying to refute Miller’s claims concerning Stoddard’s supposedly autocratic ways that they have unintentionally diminished Stoddard’s larger influence. Thomas and Virginia Davis, for example, argue that since the Northampton minister did not “force his will on his congregation,” as Miller contended, the man could not rightfully be considered the autocrat of Northampton or the “Pope of the Connecticut Valley,” and they leave the discussion there.¹⁰ Other twentieth-century historians, attempting to refute Miller’s “Pope” argument, also argue that autocracy was never achieved in Northampton and that Stoddard’s attempts to control the church in a dictatorial fashion met with little or no success in his own parish and even less in nearby towns. In his recently published work on Congregationalism in early New England, James F. Cooper claims that “historians have yet to produce evidence that

⁹ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 228-230. Using as sources the written comments by Stoddard’s descendants and those made by grieving admirers just after his death, Miller attempted to show that Stoddard “possessed probably more influence than any other Clergyman in the province, during a period of thirty years.” He achieved this influence, moreover, through forcing his will upon his congregation.

¹⁰ Davis, *Solomon Stoddard versus Edward Taylor*, 17-18.

significant numbers of ministers in Massachusetts (even on “the frontier”) began to exercise the more autocratic powers of local church government that Stoddard advocated in his published writings.” Despite these assertions, however, Cooper does acknowledge that “little is known even about specific practices within Stoddard’s own church.”¹¹ By focusing on the issue of autocracy, in short, historians have learned little about Stoddard’s true influence in his own church and in the surrounding area.

Considering all the questions raised by contemporary sources and by modern historians, it is perplexing that no definitive work has been written about this controversial figure’s life, achievements, and contributions to Puritan theology. Although several twentieth-century historians have at least indirectly discussed Stoddard’s role in the Connecticut River Valley, as an early evangelist, a unique theologian, and as the grandfather of Jonathan Edwards, none have looked at how his Presbyterian views on church government effected his own congregation and Western New England as a whole.

Given that Stoddard seems to have been influential, albeit little understood, why have these key questions concerning his sixty-year Northampton ministry not been addressed? Part of the answer rests in the fact that his now more famous successor and grandson, Jonathan Edwards, greatly overshadows him. Interestingly enough, much of the information we have concerning Stoddard’s ministry has come as a result of scholarship focused on Jonathan Edwards’s Northampton tenure. Patricia Tracy, George Marsden, Harry S. Stout and other Edwardian scholars, in an effort to provide

¹¹ Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York, 1986), 99n, Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 158, Paul Lucas, “An Appeal to the Learned: The Mind of Solomon Stoddard” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (April, 1973), 261 and James F. Cooper Jr., *Tenacious of their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York, 1999), 9, 180, 181.

background information on Edwards's life, or as a side-note to their larger subject, have contributed enormously to modern perceptions of Solomon Stoddard.¹² Edwards's modern popularity has diverted historians from conducting a detailed examination of Stoddard's influence over Northampton and the region.

Another reason Stoddard's life has not yet been chronicled rests in problems of accessibility to reliable sources. Although the Northampton minister published various works, preached thousands of sermons, and was venerated by numerous admirers, historians have suggested that "there is not enough information for anyone to write a biography on Stoddard."¹³ Nevertheless, many questions on Solomon Stoddard's influence and authority can be addressed through a creative examination of his church and the churches that surrounded Northampton. His popularity within Northampton, for example, can be evaluated and understood by looking at the makeup of the congregation. Their unique backgrounds help to explain how he became so popular in Northampton. The Northampton Church records kept by Stoddard and later by Edwards also provide much needed information about Stoddard's ecclesiastical polity and its reception among the Northampton brethren.

An examination of the church records from the surrounding towns casts light on the extent to which Stoddard's policies became implemented and practiced in other

¹² A large part of what modern historians have written about Stoddard are a direct result of studies done on his more famous grandson. Patricia Tracy, and George Marsden, for example, in their recent works on Jonathan Edwards, focus their first chapters on his background, emphasizing primarily the role that Solomon Stoddard played. See Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, introduction and chapter 1 and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, introduction, chapter I and II.

¹³ James A. Goulding, "The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 196n.

churches, or the extent to which his ideas on ecclesiastical administration met with resistance. By examining the sermons preached in those churches and the correspondence exchanged between Northampton's neighboring ministers, further details concerning Stoddard's authority over the valley's churches will be revealed.

The nature of his authority outside of Northampton can also be illuminated through a look at the family alliances he built throughout the valley. As a part of a large and influential family, Stoddard's various relationships with some of Western New England's most powerful leaders would become extremely important. These ecclesiastical, economic, and political alliances would ultimately strengthen Stoddard's influence over his own parishioners and the entire region.

Finally, his successes as a Presbyterian can also be traced by looking at the results of the associations he formed. How successful was his attempt, for example, to establish a Presbyterian-like consociation of ministers whose decisions in all ecclesiastical affairs were intended to be binding? Correspondence among the members of the association and the few remaining notes from their sessions, permit us to gauge these achievements. The reaction of the various churches in Hampshire County to his association also sheds light on the influence of Stoddard's Presbyterian association. Their acceptance or resistance to his ministerial council illuminates Stoddard's true authority over the ecclesiastical practices of valley.

Although most historians, like Cooper, confess that "little is known" about Stoddard's practices in Northampton and his influence over the valley, many of these same historians believe that since his attempts to achieve autocracy were never reached, he must not have held as much sway as Perry Miller initially thought. Through a creative

examination of various sources yet available, however, the true nature of his power and extent of his influence over the valley can finally be understood. Contrary to Miller's assertions, Stoddard never tried to force his will on anyone, but instead worked within the system to persuade members of his church and the surrounding clergymen to accept his Presbyterian forms of church government. Although no autocrat, Stoddard found an enormous amount of success in implementing many of his Presbyterian views within his own church and in other valley churches through the power of his personality and through his numerous ecclesiastical, political, and economic connections.

In order to understand the true nature of Stoddard's influence over his church and the valley, a consideration of the ecclesiastical conditions Stoddard found upon his arrival in Northampton is first necessary. The first chapter of this work, then, places Solomon Stoddard in his ecclesiological context. Stoddard would attempt to implement Presbyterianism in a colony that was thoroughly Congregationalist. It is important to note the consequences of attempts by his predecessors to implement Presbyterian changes. New England's ordinary churchgoers became defensive and tenacious of the rights afforded them under the rule of Congregationalism. Clergymen and lay members alike were careful to defend those components that differentiated them from their Presbyterian counterparts. They were especially vigilant in defending themselves against Presbyterian practices that might limit lay participation in the decision-making processes of the church, practices that might allow non-visible saints to be members and partake of the Lord's Supper, or any procedure that might infringe upon the sovereign power of the individual congregations. This defense of Congregationalism in the face of Presbyterian threats is nowhere better illustrated than in the cases of Peter Hobart in Hingham and

Thomas Parker in Newbury. A thorough examination of these cases enables us to see the lengths to which the lay members were willing to go in order to repel any threats to their Congregational liberties, and the support they received from many of the colony's religious and secular leaders. Despite decades of fighting with their churches, Parker and Hobart never succeeded in compelling their flocks to accept their Presbyterian governments.

In light of the Congregationalist's adamant refusal to accept Presbyterian polity, Stoddard's successes in Northampton are all the more astonishing. Why did he succeed when others had failed? To a significant degree, the answer to this question rests in an examination of the congregation itself; the topic of the second chapter. Why did they choose to accept Stoddard's Presbyterian beliefs even though other congregations fought tooth-and-nail against their ministers? The ecclesiastical foundations of the members of the Northampton congregation hold the key to understanding this mystery. Chapter two examines the backgrounds of these freethinking Congregationalists who eventually settled in Northampton. Many of the immigrants to Northampton, who would form the backbone of the church, seemed more sympathetic to Presbyterian church government than did the members who had rejected Presbyterianism in Newbury and Hingham. A large part of these Northamptonites had migrated from New England's East Coast with their clerical leaders in order to practice the more liberal, Presbyterian-like, church-admission policies they favored. Many such immigrants eventually settled in Northampton, making it a perfect seedbed for future Presbyterian reforms.

Chapter two concludes by looking at the development of Northampton's ecclesiastical polity between the town's settlement in 1654 and Stoddard's arrival in

1669, allowing us to observe the budding Presbyterian structures upon which the young minister would eventually build. Deeply concerned about their ability to continue liberal admissions once in Northampton, the congregation actually forced its first minister, Eleazer Mather, to adopt a very liberal Halfway Covenant in the mid 1660s, despite his long-held opposition to the reform. That the congregation ultimately passed a very tolerant Halfway Covenant in Northampton without the consent of their first pastor indicates the extent of their dedication to relaxed admission policies.

Like many in his congregation, Solomon Stoddard also arrived in Northampton with certain pre-formed Presbyterian views. During his time at Harvard and later as a Chaplain in Barbados, as chapter three will demonstrate, the young clergyman became an advocate of Presbyterian administration. Contrary to most historians, who argue that Stoddard developed his views on church government only after his arrival in Northampton, a closer look at the sources reveals his devotion to Presbyterian ideals developed even before his call to the Western Massachusetts town.¹⁴ While at Harvard, Stoddard studied the early Scottish and English Presbyterians. Rather than taking the first ministerial post that came available upon his graduation, Stoddard opted to spend his post-graduate years serving as Harvard's first librarian and as a chaplain to Governor Daniel Searle in Barbados. Only after his return from the Caribbean did the Presbyterian-leaning clergyman accept an offer from the liberal Northampton congregation to serve as its minister. Probably realizing that his Presbyterian ideas stood little chance of success in most congregations, Stoddard had prepared to move to England when the Northampton

¹⁴ Even though Stoddard was well known for his Presbyterian beliefs, most scholars believe that his Presbyterianism was a result of his exposure to the frontier environment. See, for example, Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 257.

hiring committee convinced him that he would fit well into their already liberal church. His ability to become a powerful Presbyterian figure in Northampton, then, makes more sense when considered in its larger context.

Upon his arrival in Northampton, as the fourth chapter will discuss, the young minister gradually began to make public his Presbyterian beliefs. His ultimate success in implementing his Presbyterian forms of church government in Northampton, the chapter explains, came as a direct result of his ability to persuade his already tolerant congregation to accept his innovations. Building on their common beliefs concerning baptismal requirements, Stoddard used his charisma and his vast familial connections to sway his parishioners to take the next step, which would allow for completely open communion. Once they accepted his ideas on open communion, he then convinced them to accept his ministerial association. Stoddard became so esteemed and beloved in their eyes, that by the end of his ministry, they freely gave him veto power over all ecclesiastical decisions. By persuading his congregation to take one step after another, Stoddard demonstrated his enormous influence over the church. Although he never practiced the dictatorial power attributed to him by Miller, by the conclusion of his sixty-year ministry, Stoddard's persuasive abilities wielded him an enormous power over the church. The title of "autocrat" he received from modern and contemporary informants probably reflected his influence over the church more than his governmental style. Perhaps it is for this reason Jonathan Edwards thought the people looked on him as a "sort of deity."¹⁵

¹⁵ Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 385.

Stoddard's successes in Northampton notwithstanding, the "Pope" of the Connecticut River Valley also became influential outside his own congregation. Beginning with an analysis of the Synod of 1679, in which Stoddard persuaded his Congregational peers to make membership requirements more vague, thereby allowing any church to ease its restrictions on admissions, chapter five will demonstrate how the Northampton pastor methodically extended his authority to neighboring towns. The scope of his influence can be seen by examining the reactions to his doctrines from the nearby churches. That some nearby churches did implement his Presbyterian practices in their own congregations demonstrates his persuasiveness over the lay and clerical leaders throughout the area. His ability to establish a binding council of ministers known as the Hampshire Association, despite some of its failures, furthermore demonstrates the influence the Northampton minister had over many of the clergymen in Western New England. Finally, an analysis of the successes and failures of this association allow us to gauge the influence Stoddard exerted outside of his own congregation.

The final chapter of this work will focus on Solomon Stoddard's legacy in Northampton and the Connecticut River Valley. Although he exerted a tremendous amount of power during his lifetime, his Presbyterian practices and evangelical spirit continued for decades after his death. Many of the churches that adopted Stoddardean polity continued to expand such practices even after his passing, while his Hampshire Association also remained functional. A number of his books on preaching became popular during the Great Awakening and his preaching style, which had produced five "harvests" during his Northampton ministry, was mimicked by ministers seeking similar

success. His influence over the valley, therefore, must be measured by examining both his lifetime achievements and the legacy he passed on to future generations.

In general, an examination of Solomon Stoddard's life and legacy will reveal a great deal concerning his significant influence in Northampton and the surrounding towns. Although Stoddard did not rule as an autocratic "Pope" over his congregation or any of the surrounding areas, his persuasive abilities, charismatic personality, and vast connections would allow him to govern Northampton effectively and to greatly influence the region despite his Presbyterian leanings. Stoddard found success in convincing the congregation to accept his own admission requirements to membership and the Lord's Table. His long life and tenure as minister in the small frontier town along with his charismatic personality also allowed him to diminish Northampton's congregational autonomy as they granted him veto power and their approval of the Hampshire Association. This association, finally, would permit Stoddard to spread his Presbyterian views on church government to several of the adjacent communities.

Solomon Stoddard's life, in summary, is a shell that present day historians have just begun to crack. His significance to the history of Congregationalism in Puritan New England, beyond his unique theology and connection to Jonathan Edwards, is certainly more profound than many modern scholars have thus far acknowledged. Despite New England's extreme fear of and intolerance toward non-Congregational forms of church government, Stoddard found much success in implementing Presbyterian polity in his Northampton Church and the neighboring congregations. He provides an excellent case study of how an innovative minister's persuasive interactions with a likeminded congregation could result in open communion, increased clerical authority, and

submission to binding, Presbyterian-like outside councils. His enormous successes in Northampton enabled Stoddard's ideas to be accepted by both lay and clerical leaders throughout Western New England. Although his success as a Presbyterian in a devoutly Congregational society makes Solomon Stoddard an important figure of colonial history, uncovering how he achieved that success despite the opposition of his many foes, makes him a figure worth our current attention.

Chapter II

The Development and Defense of Congregational Polity in Early New England

Upon learning in 1677 of Solomon Stoddard's intention of opening the doors of church membership and access to the Lord's Table to all professing Christians, an alarmed Increase Mather complained to the Massachusetts General Court that such "Presbyterian" views would set a dangerous precedent for New England. "I wish there be not teachers found in our Israel," he declared, "that have espoused loose large principles here, designing to bring all persons to the Lord's Supper, who...never had experience of a work of regeneration in their souls."¹⁶ Like other Congregational ministers in New England, Mather feared that Stoddard's practices would contaminate the pure churches the colony's founders had established and lead to the decline of New England's ecclesiastical system of government. If Presbyterianism spread, he believed, New England's demise would be certain.¹⁷

Although New England's Congregationalists feared all forms of Presbyterianism, most ministers, including Stoddard's neighbor, Edward Taylor, pastor of the Westfield Church, felt that Stoddard's specific form of polity was especially dangerous and could

¹⁶ Quoted in Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960), 280n.

¹⁷ Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 168.

lead to “New England’s apostasy.”¹⁸ Unlike previous Presbyterians in New England, Stoddard seemed to exert a stronger influence over the ecclesiastical practices of his church and its surrounding area than did his Presbyterian predecessors. Popularly known during his lifetime as the “Northampton autocrat” and as the “Pope of the Connecticut Valley,” Stoddard appeared—at least from a contemporary standpoint—to be sufficiently powerful to change New England’s ecclesiastical polity.¹⁹

This contemporary assessment is baffling considering the great success his opponents enjoyed in defending their polity throughout New England prior to Stoddard’s ministry. In order to appreciate the magnitude of Stoddard’s later achievements, then, it is necessary to understand the nature of both Congregationalism and Presbyterianism in New England, and the tenacity with which its adherents defended their polity against previous Presbyterian threats. Although theologically similar, the advocates of each form of church government maintained that only their system complied with God’s written word and that any deviation from their preferred government would lead to serious eternal consequences.

The major arguments between the Congregationalists and their Presbyterian counterparts concerned administrative functions: such as the extent of ecclesiastical

¹⁸ See Norman S. Grabo, “Edward Taylor on the Lords Supper” *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 12 (January 1960), 24-26 and Goulding, “Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers,” 412.

¹⁹ See Increase Mather’s introduction to John Quick’s work, *The Young Man’s Claim Unto the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (Boston, 1700) and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 515 note 2. Here Mather calls Stoddard a minister attempting to make himself a “Congregational Pope.” Although considered derogatory at first, the popular moniker eventually became a title signifying the respect and power many attributed to him.

autonomy each church should enjoy, the amount of influence a minister should exert over his church, and even the qualifications for church membership. These governmental arguments normally stemmed from differing interpretations of scripture and appeals to logic.

Congregationalists, who considered each church completely autonomous, argued that under no circumstance should an outside body exert any amount of binding authority over a particular congregation. They greatly feared the Presbyterian practice that allowed synods and other governing bodies the power to bind particular churches to its decisions, as it infringed on a congregation's right to self-rule. It comes as no surprise, then, that they strongly opposed the power of "Popes, Arch-bishops, Lord-bishops, Suffraganes, Deacons, Arch-deacons, Chauncellors, Parsons, Vicars, Priests, Dumb-ministers, or any such like."²⁰

Presbyterians, on the other hand, believed that without any higher binding authority than the local congregation, internal conflicts would rarely be resolved and that civil authority would be the only means of settling disputes. As a result of these debates over church administration, Congregational and Presbyterian forms of ecclesiastical government experienced sporadic intervals of growth and decline throughout the kingdom at the end of the sixteenth and beginning of the seventeenth centuries.

Realizing that truly autonomous churches would be difficult to establish in Old England--given the Anglican tradition of practicing hierarchical forms of church government--thousands of Congregationally-minded Puritans flocked in the second and

²⁰ Walker, *Creeds*, 79. Here Walker gives the text of a petition from 1603, which he titles *The Points of Difference Between Congregationalism and the Church of England*. Also found in Johnson and Ainsworth, *Apologie or Defence of svch True Christians as are commonly (but vniustly) called Brovvinsts: ect.*, 1604, 36-38.

third decades of the seventeenth century to New England to establish their preferred forms of church government. Having gone to such lengths to practice Congregationalism unimpeded, the early settlers of New England did everything in their power to eradicate any threat to their established system. Anything that seemed to infringe on congregational autonomy became looked upon with trepidation and cynicism.²¹ Even ministerial councils convened in New England only to offer advice and suggestions to independent churches at a congregation's own request and the conclusions of synods were only considered advice. "Each Congregation," the American divine, Thomas Hooker argued, "hath sufficient power in her self to exercise the power of the keys, and all Church discipline in all the censures thereof."²² The later *Cambridge Platform*, which codified Congregational government in New England, clarified the point, stipulating that synods and classis "shall put forth no authoritative act (but consultative only) touching members of other churches."²³ Only after prayerful consideration and hours of debate did

²¹ Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill, 1991), 171. Foster argues that attempts at interchurch organization "always ran head on into lay resistance." See also, Alexander Blaikie, *A History of Presbyterianism in New England* (Boston: Alexander Moore, 1881), Leonard J. Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition: A Re-examination of Colonial Presbyterianism* (Freeport, NY: Books for Libraries Press, 1949), 16, 17; Robert Ellis Thompson, *A History of Presbyterian Churches in the United States* (New York: Christian Literature, 1895), Sydney E. Ahlstrom, *A Religious History of the American People* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 151-165, and Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 197-200.

²² Walker, *Creeds*, 144. Here, Walker gives the text of Hooker's *Principles of Congregationalism* first published in 1645.

²³ See this portion of the *Cambridge Platform* in Walker, *Creeds*, 198. See also, Cooper, *Tenacious of Their Liberties*, 77-78. Even the *Platform* itself, the result of a New England-wide synod, was met with fear and suspicion by many lay members. In the months before the meeting at Cambridge, Cooper argues, the ministers of the individual

the decisions of a synod normally receive approval by individual New English congregations, and even that was not guaranteed. The “Halfway Covenant,” a result of the Synod of 1662, for example, did not gain approval by most churches for decades.²⁴ Preservation of church autonomy became a priority for both the lay and clerical leaders of New England. Any attempt to give more than non-obligatory counsel to an individual church, seemed to early New Englanders, a usurpation of a congregation’s god-given rights.

Unlike their Presbyterian counterparts, moreover, New English Congregationalists believed that the laity had the right to both choose their minister and to rule jointly with him as governors of the church. The “government of the church,” the 1648 *Cambridge Platform* maintained, “is a mixt Government,” which gives the “body or brotherhood of the church...power from Christ,” and “resembles a Democracy.” Hence, the power “granted by Christ to the body of the church and Brotherhood” allowed these Congregationalists the privilege of choosing their own officers, admitting new members, removing or dismissing current members, as well as the power to censure, admonish,

congregations had to laboriously try to convince the reluctant laity to elect representatives to attend the synod. Some churches, such as Boston and Salem, refused to send delegates. Once the platform was completed and sent out to the various churches, the laity read and reread the platform. Only after they understood the platform to reinforce Congregational principles, did they ratify it.

²⁴ Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1969). Utilizing several church records from various congregations in New England, Pope convincingly demonstrates that the Halfway Covenant of 1662 was a hot topic of debate throughout the churches. Using specific examples, he shows that in most cases, the lay members were not willing to immediately accept the terms of the Synod. Most, he argues, were divided over the subject for lengthy periods and when they did finally accept it, if at all, the covenant was distorted to fit their specific philosophy.

excommunicate and restore members to communion.²⁵ In short, the government of the church under Congregational rule, although mixed, resided in a large part in the hands of the laity.²⁶

Presbyterians, who considered ministers the ultimate authority over an individual congregation, attacked Congregationalists not only on the basis of scripture, but also on practical grounds, arguing that lay participation interrupted the work of the clergy who found it bothersome and time-consuming to instruct the often unschooled brethren in judging and ruling the church. “If all members...judge and govern” one seventeenth-century Presbyterian explained, “it must needs interrupt the work” and inevitably cause “confusion and disorder.”²⁷ The democratic components of Congregational government, furthermore, limited the power of ministers, who had been specifically trained to govern their churches effectively. For this reason, English and Scottish divines agreed in the *Westminster Confession* that ecclesiastical authority should not be vested in the laity given that “the Lord Jesus, as king and head of the Church, hath therein appointed a government in the hand of church officers.”²⁸ In practical terms, then, Congregational government did not seem to be a viable option for most Presbyterians.

Despite these criticisms, however, New England’s Congregationalists insisted that member-governed churches would function efficiently. They even counter-attacked by

²⁵ *The Cambridge Platform*, printed in Walker, *Creeds*, 217-218.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, and Trinterud, *The Forming of an American Tradition*, 16-17.

²⁷ James Noyes, *The Temple Measured or a Brief Survey of the Temple Mystical, which is the Instituted Church of Christ* (London, 1647), 30-33.

²⁸ *The Westminster Confession of Faith* (London, 1643), chapter XXX, article I.

arguing that Presbyterian government seemed impractical given that ministerial influence over a particular congregation could not be properly checked under Presbyterian guidelines. Presbyterianism, most Congregationalists maintained, gave too much power to ministers at the expense of the brethren. They argued that such forms of Presbyterian government infringed on what they considered their God-given lay rights. “The Presbyterian,” Edward Johnson declared in his 1651 publication, *Wonder-Working Providence*, “robbed the particular Congregations of their just and lawful privileges, which Christ hath purchased for them.”²⁹

Beyond these disagreements over the internal governmental functions within each church, Congregationalists and Presbyterians also fought over membership qualifications. Most Presbyterians believed that since only God knew who would be saved in his eternal or “invisible” kingdom, all sincere candidates for church membership, or what they considered God’s “visible” kingdom on earth, needed to be admitted as full members of the church. “The visible church,” the Presbyterian-leaning *Westminster Confession* maintained, “consists of all those throughout the world that profess the true religion, together with their children.”³⁰ These Presbyterians, moreover, felt that any attempt to debar a sincere Christian from membership in God’s earthly kingdom ultimately usurped God’s prerogative in judging the heart. Like the servants in Christ’s parable of the wheat and tares, members and ministers of God’s visible church had no authority to separate the elect from the non-elect. Given that “the field is the general visible church,” the

²⁹ J. Franklin Jameson, ed., *Johnson’s “Wonder-Working Providence,” 1628-1651* (New York, 1910), chapter xxxvii.

³⁰ *Westminster Confession*, chapter XXV, article II.

seventeenth-century Scottish Presbyterian, George Gillespie argued, “to the world’s end, there will be a mixture of good and bad.” Gillespie, among others, contended “against the immoderate zeal of those who imagine to have the Church rid of all scandalous and wicked persons, as wheat without tares, corn without chaff, a flock of sheep without goats.”³¹ All sincere candidates free from overt transgression, then, most Presbyterians maintained, should be admitted to full church membership and to all of the rights membership brought.

New England’s Congregationalists, however, sought to establish churches made up of only saints who could convincingly demonstrate the signs of their salvation or “regenerative” status. Any candidate not able to display such signs would be barred from membership in Christ’s “visible” church, from participation in ecclesiastical decisions, and from access to the Lord’s Table. By so doing, these Congregationalists hoped to mimic God’s eternal kingdom. The Presbyterian view of allowing completely open membership, they felt, would pollute God’s “visible” kingdom on earth with people who would not comprise God’s “invisible” kingdom in heaven.³²

³¹ George Gillespie, *Wholesome Severity Reconciled with Christian Liberty* (London, 1644), Part III, Objection V. See also, Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries; or, A peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland Against Congregational Independency* (London, 1644), 263-268. Interestingly enough, as chapter III will point out, Solomon Stoddard became a devoted disciple of Rutherford’s system of ecclesiastical government.

³² Because saving faith came from God only and could not be acquired by simply desiring or professing to have it, tests to determine the sincerity and acceptability of each applicant were eventually developed and implemented throughout New England during the first ten years of settlement. See James K. Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop’s Journal “The History of New England,”* 1636-1639, 2 vols. (New York, 1908), I, 215. See also Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 39. Even though there was no colony-wide procedure established for testing a person’s eligibility for membership, each congregation had a testing procedure that usually

Restriction of membership to visible saints, however, only became implemented in New England a few years after its first settlers arrived. Although the London-Amsterdam Church affirmed as early as 1596 that none are “to bee received into their communion as members, but such as doo make confession of their faith, publickly desiring to bee receued as members and promising to walke in the obedience of Christ,” barring sincere candidates from the visible church never became popular in England. Not until the mid-1630s, historians Williston Walker and Edmund S. Morgan argue, did American Congregationalists finally begin demanding proof of regeneration from candidates for membership.³³ Since Congregational rule allowed each parish to exert

required a rigorous interview with the local minister and a relation of an applicant’s regenerative experience to the members of the congregation, who would vote for or against the applicant based on the evidence submitted. One such applicant, Roger Clapp of Dorchester, admitting that his “state was good,” recorded in his memoirs that the Lord gave “room in the hearts of his servants so that I was admitted into the Church fellowship at our first meeting.” His gratitude that God “should elect me and save such a worthless one as I,” he wrote, “did break my very heart.” Only after passing such tests could the candidate become a member and receive all the privileges associated therewith. See Roger Clap, *Memoirs* (Boston, 1731), 21-23.

³³ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 71. Omission of non-visible saints from church membership was an American phenomenon. See Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 65-66, 88. Tests for potential members, Morgan argues, developed over a ten year period after the non-Separatists arrived in New England. Salem, the first gathered church by Non-Separatists in Massachusetts, did not require a public or private confession of faith as a condition of church membership. See Walker, *Creeds*, 116-118, and Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 85. The text of the covenant and creed of the Salem church, reprinted by Walker, makes no mention of any requirement for a potential member to give a confession of faith. By 1635, just few years after the establishment of the Salem church, however, the recently settled inhabitants of Newtown were told they had to “make confession of their faith, and declare what work of grace the lord had wrought in them.” Cited in James K. Hosmer, ed., *Winthrop’s Journal “The History of New England,”* 1636-1639, 2 vols. (New York, 1908), vol. 1, 215. See also, Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 100. Within a few short years of settlement, restrictive membership became a hot topic of discussion in Eastern Massachusetts as almost every church began implementing strict requirements.

complete autonomy, determining a person's qualifications for membership varied from church to church, though most churches conformed by the mid-1630s.

As New England's Congregational polity evolved, opposition to its strict provisions also developed among a number of the colony's congregations and its ministers—many of whom came to the New World assuming tolerant membership policies would be practiced. Professions of faith and other means to restrict membership to the visibly elect, then, became a topic of heated debate by the early 1630s. Although most of New England's Congregationalists favored restricting church membership to a select group of regenerate saints, some lay members and ministers opposed these intolerant admission policies. One such minister, the Reverend John Warham of Dorchester, who had emigrated with his church from England in 1630, opposed from the very start New England's attempts to debar unregenerate yet worthy Christians from membership in the church and access to the Lord's Table. In a letter to Governor Bradford, Deacon Samuel Fuller of Plymouth referred to an interesting conversation he had with Warham on the subject of the qualifications necessary for admission to the visible church. He recalled that Warham, much to his surprise, favored allowing the visible church to consist of a "mixed people" of the godly and the openly ungodly. The topic of debate between the two men seemed of such significance, Fuller recalled, that "I had conference with him till I was weary."³⁴

Despite Fuller's best efforts to convince him otherwise, Warham continued to advocate relaxed admission standards arguing that "some churches, failing to realize that

³⁴ Quoted in Henry R. Stiles, *The History and Genealogies of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut, 1635-1891* (Hartford, 1891), vol. 1, 196.

the rule of membership is sanctity, not eminency, refused to join the churches for want of evidence when others may see that in them—that they themselves cannot, but think by false rules that they have no right to.”³⁵ The Dorchester minister and congregation became so steadfast in their advocacy for liberal requirements, moreover, that they later moved as a body to Windsor, Connecticut so they could finally practice their tolerant membership polity without continual opposition from surrounding churches.³⁶ The year before, in fact, Edmund S. Morgan suggests, Thomas Hooker and his congregation had also moved to Connecticut to practice eased membership requirements.³⁷

Connecticut would eventually become the destination for many congregations who sought to implement more open admission practices. Richard Bushman and Paul Lucas, who have written extensively on ecclesiastical practices in Connecticut, in fact, both agree that Western New England in general, and Connecticut in specific, practiced a more “moderate” form of Congregationalism than their eastern counterparts, advocating increased clerical authority and a more relaxed standard for baptism.³⁸

While seeds of dissent over admission policies began to spread through some of New England’s churches in the mid 1630s, the following decade brought even further attempts by some of the colony’s ministers to implement Presbyterian forms of

³⁵ Quoted in Foster, *The Long Argument*, 183.

³⁶ See Chapter 2 for more details on Warham’s move to Connecticut. Interestingly enough, Stoddard became Warham’s son-in-law when he married the venerable clergyman’s daughter, Esther.

³⁷ Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 108.

³⁸ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 25, 26, 37-44. Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut, 1695-1765* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 148.

ecclesiastical administration in their respective churches. The signing of the *Westminster Confession* in London in 1643, which outlined a Presbyterian form of church government for the kingdom, emboldened several Presbyterian sympathizers to advocate their preferred forms of ecclesiastical polity. With sanction from Westminster, Presbyterian-leaning clergymen in New England, such as Peter Hobart of Hingham and Thomas Parker of Newbury, vigorously strived to compel their congregations to accept their Presbyterian practices.³⁹

The cases of Hobart and especially Parker are noteworthy to this study as they provide excellent examples of the intensely negative response Congregational Puritans imposed against perceived threats to their forms of church government. Their cases also reveal how and why each minister failed in their efforts to practice Presbyterian-like polity, and expose the true magnitude of these failures. Despite their best efforts, neither man would ever gain the support of its members nor find any success in their attempts to implement Presbyterian polity in their respective churches.

Although few sources remain chronicling Peter Hobart's ministry in Hingham, the scanty sources available from outside the church itself indicate that he favored Presbyterian forms of church government and that his attempts to force his congregation to comply with his views ended in division and failure. In true Presbyterian fashion, Hobart sought to rule the church without consulting the fraternity on significant ecclesiastical decisions. On one occasion, in fact, Governor John Winthrop criticized the Hingham minister for managing ecclesiastical affairs "without the churches advice,"

³⁹ See, *Westminster Confession*, and Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 137-140.

noting that his efforts to do so left the church “divided into parts.”⁴⁰ Writing during the controversy that divided Hingham, Edward Johnson lamented in his *Wonder-working Providence* that many members of the church in that town were “lessened by a sad unbrotherly contention, which fell out among them, wasting them every way...to the great grief of all other churches, who held out the right hand of fellowship unto them in brotherly communion.”⁴¹

Hobart’s efforts to rule Hingham without lay consent, not surprisingly, drew the ire of lay and clerical leaders throughout New England, as well as those laymen within his own congregation. Despite the attempts undertaken by outside councils and assemblies to resolve the Hingham affair, Hobart’s insistence that all ecclesiastical decisions rested entirely with him, divided the church for decades, only concluding with his death in 1679.

Like his Hingham counterpart, Thomas Parker of Newbury similarly preferred Presbyterian forms of church administration. Historian Stephen Foster, in fact, considered Parker even more inclined toward Presbyterianism than Hobart, labeling him “the only avowed Presbyterian in the Bay Colony.”⁴² The well-documented disputes over church polity in Newbury demonstrate that, like Hobart, Parker also dismally failed in his attempts to coerce his flock to adhere to his Presbyterian-leaning polity. His case further reveals the alarm with which New England’s ecclesiastical leaders reacted to Presbyterian threats.

⁴⁰ Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, vol. 2, 244-245.

⁴¹ Jameson, *Johnson’s Wonder-Working Providence*, chapter xxxvii. See also Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 7-10.

⁴² Foster, *The Long Argument*, 209.

As long-time ministers of the Newbury Church in Wiltshire, England, Thomas Parker and his ministerial assistant, James Noyes, presided over an English congregation that adhered to at least some forms of Presbyterian polity.⁴³ In 1634, the two Presbyterian clergymen led a group of their parishioners and countrymen, consisting of about 100 men, women, and children, to New England where they founded a small settlement they named Newbury, along the banks of the Quascacunquen River in Eastern Massachusetts. Once in New England, Parker and Noyes's small group was joined by what John Winthrop called "diverse others of the new comers" who had arrived from various English towns.⁴⁴ Together, this assorted group named Thomas Parker its pastor at the gathering of the church later that year.

Although Parker and Noyes possessed certain Presbyterian sympathies, the "newcomers," who had recently joined the Newbury settlers, must have been unaware of their leanings when the duo first began preaching among them. It seems that from the beginning of their ministries in New England, Parker and Noyes tried to appear to be dedicated to the principles of Congregational government despite any Presbyterian leanings they may have held. In a later statement, recorded in the Salem court records, one of the newcomers, John Pike, among others, claimed he "was present at the gathering

⁴³ Robert Lord Goodman, "Newbury, Massachusetts, 1635-1685: The Social Foundations of Harmony and Conflict" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1974), 35-41, 119-120. Here, Goodman suggests that Parker and Noyes' parishioners who had come with him from England were not "surprised to hear their Presbyterian ideas preached from the pulpit" once in New England.

⁴⁴ Hosmer, *Winthrop's Journal*, vol. 1, 125-126. See also, Joshua Coffin, ed., *A Sketch of the History of Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury* (Boston, 1845), 11, and Robert Lord Goodman, "Newbury, Massachusetts, 1635-1685: The Social Foundations of Harmony and Conflict" (Ph.D. diss., Michigan State University, 1974), 56.

of the church at Newbury,” where he heard Parker “preach a sermon on the eighteenth of Matthew, seventeenth verse,” in which he “did much instruct and confirme us in that way of church discipline which as I understood he then preached for, namely, the congregational waye.” Pike recalled, moreover, that Parker allowed the brethren of the church a voice to act in admissions and in “expressing their voats therein by lifting up of the hand,” as most Congregational Churches allowed. This form of government, Pike recalled, allowed the congregation to “continue together lovingly a considerable number of yeares until other doctrine began to be preached amongst us.”⁴⁵ By convincing the newcomers that they practiced Congregational government, then, Parker and Noyes continued to receive the support of their former English congregation and also earned the backing, however temporary, of the other inhabitants of the town.

Although Parker and Noyes initially hid their Presbyterian views, they soon began to show their true characters by openly expressing various Presbyterian sentiments to the Newbury congregation. By the early 1640s, in fact, Parker and Noyes, in true Presbyterian fashion, began to relax the strict requirements for admission to the church. One observer, Thomas Lechford, noted in 1642, that “although some churches are of

⁴⁵ *Salem Court Records*, 152. Also cited by Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 16-17. This testimony was sworn in court by John Pike on 30 March, 1669, in response to a contention in the Newbury church over Parker’s continued insistence on using Presbyterian polity. Pike, among others, was attempting to demonstrate that Parker had either disguised his beliefs on church government in order to be accepted as pastor or had changed his philosophies after being called. Whatever the case, many members of his congregation were upset that Parker was no longer practicing Congregational polity in the Newbury church.

opinion that any may be admitted to church fellowship that are not extremely ignorant or scandalous,” only Newbury seemed “very forward to practice” this opinion.⁴⁶

Beyond advocating open membership practices for Newbury, the two unorthodox clergymen further sought to govern the church as true Presbyterians by limiting the rights of the fraternity. Like their Presbyterian counterparts in England and Scotland, Parker and Noyes felt it caused an enormous burden for the elders to teach the laity how to rule the church. In his 1647 publication, *The Temple Measured*, James Noyes explained that the body of the church “is to be carried, not to carry, to obey, not to command, to be subject, not to govern.” It “is a double labor for the elder,” he furthermore argued, “to instruct the church how to judge.” All the extra effort, Noyes indicated, interrupted the work of the elders and allowed some of the youthful, ignorant and unreasonable members an opportunity to cause confusion and disorder within the church.⁴⁷ Congregationalism, Noyes and Parker felt, besides being scripturally unsubstantiated, also appeared to be impractical.

It comes as no surprise that the first reports of Parker and Noyes’s Presbyterian activities emerged in the early 1640s, the very time the Presbyterian-leaning *Westminster Confession* received approval from English and Scottish divines.⁴⁸ Their decision to

⁴⁶ Quoted in Goodman, “Newbury, Massachusetts,” 120.

⁴⁷ James Noyes, *The Temple Measured or a Brief Survey of the Temple Mystical, which is the Instituted Church of Christ* (London, 1647), 30-33, also quoted in Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 72. Goodman indicates in “Newbury, Massachusetts,” 123, that even though Noyes’ assertion “left little room for lay participation,” it was “applied less rigorously” than it was preached.

⁴⁸ Interestingly enough, in December, 1643, Parker wrote a letter to a friend in the Westminster Assembly complaining about his situation in Newbury. He argued that “although we [Parker and Noyes] hold a fundamental power of Government in the

express strong Presbyterian sentiments, however, alarmed some of the surrounding clergymen who feared that their advocacy for such administration, coupled with the recent acceptance of the *Westminster Confession*, might lead other ministers to also implement Presbyterian polity in their churches. They became so frightened, in fact, that a meeting consisting of “all the elders of the country” was called at Cambridge in 1643, according to John Winthrop, because “some of the Elders went about to set up some things according to the presbytery as of Newbury.”⁴⁹ After some discussion among the elders present, the governor records that “the assembly concluded against some parts of the presbyterial way, and the Newbury ministers took some time to consider the arguments.”⁵⁰ While the council did not deter the Newbury clergymen from continuing to use Presbyterian governance, the mere fact that “all the Elders of the country” actually met to discuss the governmental functions of one individual congregation, suggests the extent of New England’s alarm to any Presbyterian threat. Winthrop’s observation that the meeting convened because “some of the Elders went about to set up some things according to the presbytery as of Newbury” must have further frightened orthodox Congregationalists.⁵¹ If others outside of Newbury favored some aspects of Presbyterian

People, in respect of election of ministers and of some acts in cases extraordinary, as the want of ministers, yet we judge, upon mature deliberation, that the ordinary exercise of Government must be so in the Presbyters as not to depend upon the express votes and suffrages of the People.” See *True Copy of a Letter written by Mr. T[homas] P[arker] ...Declaring his Judgment touching the Government practiced in the Chs. Of N.E.* (London, 1644). Also quoted in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 138-139 n. 7.

⁴⁹ Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, vol. 2, 139, and Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 39.

⁵⁰ Hosmer, *Winthrop’s Journal*, vol. 2, 138-139.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 139, and Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 39.

polity as Winthrop suggested, stopping the first domino from falling in Newbury would seem a considerable priority.⁵²

The feelings of apprehension and fear felt by orthodox Congregationalists from outside of Newbury undoubtedly echoed the anxiety also felt by those within the church who believed their scriptural rights had been directly violated by Parker and Noyes. Their change in polity frightened the Newbury Church to such a degree that a multi-decade dispute with the minister and his assistants began not long after the ministerial meeting. Joshua Coffin, in fact, observed in his *History of Newbury*, that by 1645, “the difficulty commenced between Mr. Parker and the church concerning church government and was not finally settled till 1672.”⁵³

Although difficulties began between Parker and the church in the early 1640s, the Newbury records reveal little more concerning ecclesiastical disputes before the arrival of John Woodbridge in 1663.⁵⁴ Perhaps the rebuke Parker and Noyes received by the 1643 assembly caused them to reconsider some of their more controversial forms of Presbyterian government. Whatever the reason, however, the duo did not again push

⁵² The deliberations and findings of the council are also recorded by Parker and an unnamed participant at the Cambridge meeting. See Parker, *True Copy of a Letter*, and unknown, *A Reply of two of the Brethren to A.S..., and some modest and innocent touches on the letter from Zeland, and Mr. Parkers from New England, etc.*, (London, 1644), 7. In this interesting letter, the author records that “we have had a synod lately, in our College, wherein sundry things were agreed on gravely; as 1. That the votes of the People are needful in all admissions and excommunications, at least in way of consent; all yielding to act with their consent.” A rough sketch of the meeting is also recorded in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 137-141.

⁵³ Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 44.

⁵⁴ See Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 44-70. Even though Parker and Noyes continued to practice some aspects of Presbyterian government in the church, no major disputes arose within the congregation until after the death of James Noyes.

Presbyterian polity until John Woodbridge's reenergizing appearance twenty years later. That some Presbyterian polity continued to be practiced in the meantime, however, seems evident by a handful references from the town records and from outside observers. In *Wonder-Working Providence*, published in 1651, Edward Johnson acknowledged that Parker and Noyes acted "very lovingly toward their people, permitting them to assist in admitting of persons into church society, and in church censures." But he added that "in case of maladministration they assume the power wholly to themselves."⁵⁵

Unlike orthodox Congregational ministers, then, who under no circumstances assumed additional powers for themselves, Parker and Noyes apparently continued to usurp fraternal authority even during the period of relative calmness. Cloaked as Congregationalists, the Presbyterian elders from Newbury avoided, at least temporarily, the major fighting that would later factionalize the small New England town by occasionally allowing the brethren a voice in church administration. The occasional usurpation of power that Parker and Noyes seized, for reasons of "maladministration," however, did not go unnoticed by the Newbury laity. Their displeasure with the elders' church government caused them to cut Parker's pay. Newbury town records indicate, in an entry from 1664, that "a major part of the towne voted that Mr. Parker should have but sixty pounds per year." This pay-cut, Coffin argued, occurred as a deliberate "manifestation of their disapproval" of his changes in church government.⁵⁶ Although the major hostility between Parker and his congregation had not yet begun, the

⁵⁵ Jameson, *Johnson's Wonder-Working Providence*, chapter xxi and Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 54.

⁵⁶ Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 69. Also see the entry in the *Newbury Town Records*, October 26, 1664.

congregation's decision to cut Parker's pay implies that tensions between the minister and the brethren did exist even during the two-decade lull.

The death in 1656 of Parker's ministerial assistant, James Noyes, did little to slow Parker's efforts to rule Newbury according to his Presbyterian beliefs. Although the death of Noyes offered Parker a chance to reconsider or tone down the Presbyterian polity that threatened to divide his church, the loss of Noyes prompted the hiring of another assistant, Parker's cousin, John Woodbridge. A staunch Presbyterian, Woodbridge actually renewed and reenergized Parker's efforts to practice Presbyterian government in Newbury. Together the two new associates, with similar views on church administration, led the church into one of the most divisive periods in its early history.

With John Woodbridge at his side, Parker began to push his Presbyterian polity more than ever on an unwilling church. "The primary cause of the disturbances," which reemerged in Newbury in 1669, Coffin confirmed, stemmed from a "change of sentiment...respecting church government and discipline." Although more a revealing than "change" of sentiment, the debates over church polity caused by their new openness became so intense and polarized that only "an appeal to the civil authority," his parishioners felt, could resolve the animosity between the minister and his supporters and the anti-Parker faction.⁵⁷ Those who supported Parker, for the most part, had come with him from England and knew of his Presbyterian sentiments, while his major opponent, Edward Woodman, who had settled in Newbury in 1635, the year of its founding, led the anti-Parker party comprised largely of those "newcomers" who had not come with Parker and Noyes from Wiltshire England. Polarized in this way, each side began to accuse the

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 72.

other of causing the problems in Newbury. In a letter to the court at Ipswich dated 13 March 1669, the pro-Parker party accused Woodman and his supporters of slander against Parker and Woodbridge. They recalled in the letter that Woodman had interrupted a peaceful meeting earlier that month, accusing Parker in front of all present, of being “an apostate and backslider from the truth,” saying that “he would set up a prelacy, and have more power than the pope.” Parker, Woodman further proclaimed, was responsible for “all our contention and misery.”⁵⁸

Rather than denying what Woodman had said, his supporters tried to justify his claims by accusing Parker of governing the church without the consent of the members. In a deposition from the anti-Parker party, Richard Bartlett, James Ordway, and John Emery testified that “Mr. Parker in a public meeting said that for the time to come I am resolved nothing shall be brought into the church, but it shall be brought first to me, and if I approve of it, it shall be brought in” otherwise, they recalled, “it shall not be brought in.”⁵⁹ Woodman’s “slanderous” remarks, they insisted, only came as a response to Parker’s blatant attempt to rule the Church without lay consent; comments that seemed justified considering Parker’s usurpation of their Congregational rights.

After hearing all the evidence from both sides, the Quarterly Court issued its ruling. Although the case against Woodman seemed solid, given that numerous parishioners had witnessed his outrageous behavior and that he never denied their accusations, it is surprising that the court could only reach a split decision. The sentence

⁵⁸ The letter can be found in the records of the quarterly courts at Salem. The extract above was taken from a reprint of the letter in Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 74.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 74.

for his violation, issued 30 March, 1669, ordered that “Mr. Woodman shall be seriously and solemnly admonished and enjoined to make a publique confession at the next publique town and church meeting at Newbury of his sinful expressions,” or that he pay a fine of five pounds. Two judges from the Quarterly Court, however, dissented in this seemingly clear-cut decision. In a rare rebuttal to the ruling, the two dissenting judges sent a letter to Newbury acknowledging that although Woodman had made a mistake by slandering Parker, “a great part (if not a greater part) of that church doe stand for the congregational way of church government and discipline to be exercised among them,” which “is the way the churches here doe profess to the whole world to be in the way and only way according to the gospel of Christ.” Any deviation from the “only” government of Christ, especially when it infringed on lay prerogatives, as Parker and Woodbridge had, seemed a “burden and a grievance” to the brethren given “that they have not freedom in that respect...as by the word of God they ought to have, and other churches have in this country.”⁶⁰

Despite the court finding Woodman guilty of slander, the unusual episode demonstrates that even outside leaders supported of the plight of the laity who only sought to have their god-given Congregational rights restored. Even though Woodman never denied slandering Parker, the argument that his statements seemed justified under such conditions ultimately earned him a victory in the case. The split decision and later letter in support of the Woodman party provided outside sanction and support to the anti-Parker faction in its efforts to free the church from Presbyterian rule at Newbury.⁶¹ Their

⁶⁰ The verdict from the court and the letter from the two in opposition to the sentence can be found in Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 75-76.

support in this early episode may have contributed to Woodman's continued attacks on Parker and Woodbridge.

Despite their fear that Presbyterianism would spread outward from Newbury, New England's elders found it difficult to assist the anti-Parker party in its resistance to Newbury's Presbyterian administration. Given that councils, assemblies, synods, and other forms of hierarchical church government had no binding authority over a particular congregation, outsiders could only offer their advice. Furthermore, New England's form of Congregationalism, although codified by the *Cambridge Platform*, often varied in practice from church to church. Even the Platform itself, generally acknowledged as New England's ecclesiastical constitution, could be interpreted in a variety of ways. Its vagaries would even allow Presbyterians such as Parker and his supporters to justify their forms of church polity.

Less than one month following the decision of the court, Parker's supporters attempted to use the Platform as proof that Woodman, not Parker, had been the cause of the problems in Newbury. In a letter to the court on 28 April, 1669 Parker's allies contended that the Woodman party had misled the court regarding lay participation in Newbury, pointing out that lay support for ecclesiastical decisions had been granted by the elders in the form of "silent consent." Citing the *Cambridge Platform*, the pro-Parker party insisted that if its authors "thought it convenient to vote by speech and silence, rather than by lifting up the hand," then Parker's system of allowing participation in church administration through "silent consent" certainly would be legitimate.⁶²

⁶¹ Goodman "Newbury, Massachusetts," 137. Goodman argues that the split decision of the court only made the issue more ambiguous and that both sides claimed vindication.

Woodman's disruptive opposition to this perfectly valid Congregational practice, they believed, should be strongly punished by the court.

Although silence would have signified consent in most congregations, the Woodman faction felt that Parker's method of manipulating the practice allowed for no consent or opposition at all. Insisting that Parker's practice of granting the brethren a voice in church administration only through "silent consent" usurped their fraternal rights, Woodman and his supporters refused to partake of the communion administered by the elders of the church. Also appealing to the *Cambridge Platform*, they argued that "if the church have power to choose their officers and ministers, then in cases of manifest unworthiness, and delinquency they have power also to depose them."⁶³ His party, realizing that they constituted a majority of the church, then, began to meet separately as a church and act, according to Coffin, "as if they were the church."⁶⁴

In the absence of Woodman and his supporters from their meetings, Parker's party invited representatives from nine churches to convene in Newbury to consider the problems that divided his congregation. Since Woodman would not attend the sessions or convey his grievances to the assembly, the council had no choice but to rule in favor of Parker. They found Woodman and his followers guilty of illegally establishing a church "against the consent and prohibition of their pastor," stating that everything "done by them as church acts are null." They furthermore recommended that both parties "study to

⁶² Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 76-78.

⁶³ Walker, *Creeds*, 215.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 79.

be quiet, to follow after things, which make for peace and wherewith they may edify one another.”⁶⁵

Although members of the court did not feel overly sympathetic to Parker’s cause, they remained uneasy about deciding in favor of Woodman’s majoritarian ideology. Had they ruled in favor of Woodman, the court would have condoned the laity’s attempts to usurp ministerial power. During the second and third generations after settlement, historians such as Paul Lucas argue that ministers “fell from power” and “little remained to control or channel popular energies.” This rising power of the fraternity ultimately “limited or nullified the independence of the minister.”⁶⁶ The increasing demands of the brethren to gain more power for themselves at the expense of the clergy frightened New England’s leaders almost as much as Presbyterianism frightened its lay members.⁶⁷ Hence, maintaining a positive balance of power sometimes meant ruling against such anti-Presbyterian forces as those represented by the Woodman party.

Given that outside councils exerted no real authority over the town’s ecclesiastical government, many outside of Newbury found it difficult to help the town resolve its

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 78-80.

⁶⁶ Although referring specifically to Western Massachusetts and Connecticut, Paul Lucas’ observations concerning a loss of ministerial authority in the second and third generations became a concern for all of New England’s clergymen. See Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, NH, 1976), 86, 114.

⁶⁷ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 105-113. Here Miller argues that during the controversy surrounding the halfway covenant, many lay members refused to heed the advice of the General court and the council of elders, attempting to make the vote of the minister count as only one. Groups of laymen often banded together to block the minister’s followers in order to control the vote of the church. Attempts to nullify the clerical vote demonstrated the ultimate desire the laity had to dominate the church administration in the mid-1660s.

controversy. Over the next few years, in fact, four more councils convened to offer advice, while the Massachusetts General Court also assembled to mediate the dispute. Despite their best efforts, however, the problems in Newbury became worse than ever as Woodman's faction suspended Parker while Parker's supporters withdrew communion from the Woodman majority. The debates became so heated, in fact, that Parker even sought to present his case before the Arch-bishop of Canterbury in England.⁶⁸

More than posing a simple threat to their democratic rights as church members, Woodman's Congregational party also felt threatened by Woodbridge and Parker's coercive attempts to set Presbyterian standards for church admissions. The liberal admissions policies advocated by Parker, Noyes, and Woodbridge further fueled the fire of contention against the ministerial faction. For this reason, a Woodman supporter and minister of the nearby town of Rowley, Samuel Phillips, in a letter to Parker, scolded the minister, maintaining that "personal examination is required" in order to partake "of that ordinance," otherwise one is "not to eat the Lord's supper."⁶⁹ The three major points over which Congregationalists and Presbyterians disagreed, concerning who should rule the church, congregational autonomy, and the requirements for membership and

⁶⁸ Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 109, contains the testimony of Edward Lumas of Ipswich, who claimed to see a copy of a letter Parker sent to the Lord Arch Bishop of Canterbury for help and relief in the Newbury case. See also, Goodman, "Newbury, Massachusetts," 165-167. Citing the records from the Quarterly Courts of Essex County, the author, shows that many within Newbury testified that they had, on occasion, heard Parker speak of presenting his case to the Arch-Bishop of Canterbury in an attempt to vindicate his position in the controversy.

⁶⁹ A copy of this letter, dated January 16, 1672, is located in Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 105.

admissions to the Lord's Table, continued to be debated between both sides, with neither side giving in to the other.

Ultimately, however, the long dispute between Parker's Presbyterian party and Woodman's Congregational party ended with a Congregational victory. While Parker was in a very unstable and almost completely blind condition, just four years before his 1677 death, his opponents forced his assistant, John Woodbridge, to retire. Citing the most recent council's advice that Woodbridge "not impose himself or his ministry upon this church, but that they have the liberty...to choose their own minister," Woodman's faction replaced Parker's Presbyterian assistant with the Congregationally-minded John Richardson.⁷⁰

In a weakened physical condition and without the support of a likeminded assistant, Parker could no longer impose his Presbyterian governance on the Newbury Church. His life-long attempt to govern Newbury in Presbyterian fashion nevertheless reveals a great deal about New England's ecclesiastical system. Most importantly, the Newbury case demonstrates how entrenched the "New England Way" had become in Massachusetts. Despite the weaknesses of outside councils, a discernable favoritism toward the Congregational-leaning Woodman party is evident in the advice given to Newbury. Other than their efforts to prevent Woodman from violating practices in setting up his own church, most of the outside advice called for Parker to allow Congregational rule in his church. Even though Parker's supporters claimed that his system of granting silent consent conformed with Congregational principles, for example, the General Court suggested that "whereas our Lord Jesus Christ hath given liberty of

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 110-112.

voting in all their own concerns to the whole church it necessarily follows that the judgment of the whole church should be clearly manifested... (by) the lifting up of hands.”⁷¹

Despite their obvious favoritism toward Woodman’s Congregational party, the failed efforts of each outside council to resolve the conflict in Newbury also confirmed to most Presbyterians the innate weaknesses of Congregational rule. Without binding authority above the congregation itself, the internal disputes that divided Newbury could not be settled. Even appeals to the *Cambridge Platform* proved fruitless. The Platform, after all, had been used by both groups to support their own viewpoints and to deny the assertions of the other.⁷² Given the autonomy of each parish under Congregational rule, then, it comes as no surprise that Presbyterianism occasionally surfaced in some of New England’s churches despite the protests of outside Congregational leaders. The brethren themselves, the Woodman party demonstrated, could be the only real obstacle in the path of an unorthodox minister.

The brethren of the church, the Newbury situation further verifies, knew and defended what they considered to be their god-given right to rule jointly with the minister in all ecclesiastical decisions. In a letter to an assembled council in 1670, in fact, they affirmed that “we own Hooker’s Polity, Mr. Mather’s catechisme, Mr. Cotton’s Keys,”

⁷¹ Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 110-112.

⁷² Parker’s allies, as shown previously, had cited the Cambridge Platform as justification for government by silent consent. His enemies, conversely, had on several occasions, accused Parker of taking too much power and not giving the brethren true consent in church government as the Platform specifically mandated. See, for example, Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 86-87, 92, 95-97.

and “we abide constant to those principles and will not turn Presbyterians.”⁷³ “As for our controversy,” they later argued, “it is whether God hath placed the power in the elder, or in the whole church, to judge between truth and error, right and wrong, brother and brother, and all things of church concernment.”⁷⁴

That Parker, Noyes, and Woodbridge ultimately failed despite their English connections to many within the church, however, testifies to the strength of New England’s Congregational system.⁷⁵ The Hingham and Newbury situations show that the laity themselves had become tremendously committed to the New England Way.⁷⁶ Because the people became “so tenacious of their supposed rights, and so exceedingly jealous of every...encroachment on their power,” the Newbury historian, Joshua Coffin reasoned, the town suffered numerous difficulties between “the ministers and the people.”⁷⁷

Like those vigilant churchgoers from Newbury and Hingham, the congregation that Stoddard would meet upon arrival in Northampton must have also understood New

⁷³ A copy of the letter from the Woodman party to the council is included in Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 86-87.

⁷⁴ See Goodman, “Newbury, Massachusetts,” 141-142 and Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 86-87, 92, 95-97.

⁷⁵ Goodman, “Newbury, Massachusetts,” 35-41, 119-120. Goodman argues, that the part of the congregation that followed Parker and Noyes from England were not “surprised to hear their Presbyterian ideas preached from the pulpit.” Those who came from other areas and at different times, however, were not aware of Parker and Noyes’ attitudes on church administration and formed the backbone of the resistance to Parker’s practices.

⁷⁶ Cooper reaches this same conclusion in his summary of the Newbury case. See Cooper, *Tenacious of their Liberties*, 68-70.

⁷⁷ Coffin, *History of Newbury*, 73.

England's ecclesiastical system and their lay rights very well. Their failure to rebel in any major degree against Stoddard, however, does not fit the Hingham and Newbury patterns. Despite the failures of a few prior Presbyterians, Solomon Stoddard, who accepted a post in Northampton at the very time Parker became engulfed in his ecclesiastical controversy, would successfully implement various forms of Presbyterian government on a congregation that shared few personal ties with him. Stoddard's ultimate success in limiting lay participation, in restricting congregational autonomy, and in liberalizing admission procedures, then, seems difficult to imagine given the resounding defeats that Hobart and Parker suffered. Unlike Parker, in fact, Stoddard became a beloved minister in Northampton despite his Presbyterian practices. The congregation Stoddard encountered upon his arrival in Northampton, moreover, surrendered with little argument, some of the rights those in Hingham and Newbury had contended over decades. Why did Northampton do so? Were they in some way predisposed to Presbyterianism? Were they even true Congregationalists? The answer to these questions will help explain how Solomon Stoddard became so successful that many contemporaries considered him the "Pope of the Connecticut Valley."

Chapter III

The Origins and Ecclesiastical Foundations of the Early Northampton Settlers

During his six-decade ministry, Solomon Stoddard exerted an enormous amount of influence over his Northampton congregation. More than twenty years after Stoddard's death, in fact, his grandson and heir to the Northampton pulpit, Jonathan Edwards, reflected on his predecessor's vast power over the church. "The people being brought under him and with a high veneration for him," he remembered, "naturally were led to imitate him. Especially their officers and leading men seemed to think it an excellency to be like him." His parishioners held him in such high regard, he argued, that the great "oracle" appeared to them almost as a sort of god.⁷⁸

Given Peter Hobart and Thomas Parker's failures in implementing Presbyterian polity in Hingham and Newbury, it seems very unusual that Stoddard became esteemed so highly by his Northampton Church. He was, after all, an offbeat minister who often criticized the same Congregational polity that had been tenaciously defended by the Hingham and Newbury members. Unlike Parker and Hobart, who fought for years over church practices, however, one historian observed, Stoddard "faced little opposition from

⁷⁸ George S. Claghorn, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XVI, 381-382, 385.

the church when he introduced his innovations.”⁷⁹ How could he have achieved such a powerful influence over his church in light of the complete failures of his Presbyterian predecessors? Part of the answer to this difficult question lies in the unique circumstances of Northampton’s settlement, the ecclesiastical backgrounds of its settlers, and the distinctive forms of church government they established even before Stoddard’s arrival.

Certainly Stoddard’s congregation must have differed from Hobart and Parker’s for him to have enjoyed any amount of success as a Presbyterian in Northampton. That his church ultimately accepted his Presbyterian forms of ecclesiastical administration probably demonstrates Stoddard’s abilities and charismatic personality, but more importantly, his success reflects the disposition of the Northampton church members themselves. A broad look at Northampton’s uniquely Presbyterian environment followed by closer examination of the original inhabitants, their ecclesiastical backgrounds, and the early years of Northampton’s settlement, then, helps cast light on how Stoddard became such a powerful presence in the Western Massachusetts town.

Long before the church was gathered in 1661, and even before the first immigrants arrived in Northampton in 1655, a distinct Presbyterian disposition seemed to be evident among the organizers of the settlement. John Pynchon and Elizur Holyoke, among the most prominent citizens of Springfield, Massachusetts just south of Northampton, who petitioned the General Court in 1653 for permission to settle the

⁷⁹ James A. Goulding, “The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 339n.

uninhabited land, came from a tradition of Presbyterianism.⁸⁰ Although neither of these men ever settled in Northampton, both became large land owners and influential figures in the new settlement. These two, in fact, along with another Springfield resident, Samuel Chapin, were “appointed by the General Court of Massachusetts to lay out the land.”⁸¹ Both John Pynchon and Elizur Holyoke, moreover, were related to each other through marriage.⁸² John Pynchon’s father, William, who was Elizur Holyoke’s uncle, had been convicted in 1651 of heresy and compelled to flee to England for his unorthodox views on church doctrine, most of which he published in the book, *The Meritorious Price of Man’s Redemption*. Before Pynchon’s exile, however, his lesser-known publication, *The Jewes Synagogue*, caused a major stir among clergymen throughout New England. In this work, Pynchon argued that ancient synagogues provided correct models of church government, insisting that New England contradicted scripture by allowing only visible saints to be full members of the church.⁸³ Certainly his attacks on New England’s Congregational polity and advocacy for the ancient Presbyterian forms of church government made the Springfield magnate a threat to his orthodox neighbors. His relentless promotion of ancient Jewish polity compelled

⁸⁰ James Russell Trumbull, *History of Northampton Massachusetts from its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols., (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing Co., 1898) vol. 1, 6-12.

⁸¹ *Northampton Proprietor’s Records, 1653-1731* (L.D.S. microfilm copy # 0892048), 2.

⁸² John Pynchon and Elizur Holyoke were cousins. Their fathers, William Pynchon and Edward Holyoke, were in-laws by marriage.

⁸³ Michael W. Winship “William Pynchon’s ‘The Jewes Synagogue,’” *New England Quarterly*, vol., 71 (June, 1998), 294.

historian Michael W. Winship to acknowledge that “Pynchon was clearly part of a Massachusetts Presbyterian circle.”⁸⁴

Winship further argued that Pynchon’s brother-in-law, Edward Holyoke, the father of Northampton founder, Elizur Holyoke, also “expressed Presbyterian sympathies.”⁸⁵ The church from which all three founders came, moreover, practiced Presbyterian-like admissions requirements. Stephen Innes acknowledged in his history of the town, that “although comprised of believing Christians, Springfield failed to make rigorous efforts to distinguish the unregenerate from visible saints.”⁸⁶ Although John Pynchon and Elizur Holyoke never became as overtly Presbyterian as their fathers, these two influential men, crucial to Northampton’s founding, could appropriately be considered a part of a tradition of Presbyterianism in Western New England.

Like the two most prominent founders of the city, Northampton’s earliest settlers must have also shown some inclination toward Presbyterianism even before their arrival in Northampton. Although the whereabouts of every settler cannot be obtained from the scanty records available, a majority of the settlers that can be traced came from other locations in New England where liberal membership and other forms of Presbyterian administration were practiced. Of those who settled before Stoddard’s arrival in 1669, eighty-one can be traced back to the towns from which they came. If these eighty-one

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 296.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶ Stephen Innes, *Labor in a new Land: Economy and Society in Seventeenth-Century Springfield* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), 124. He also argues that in Springfield, there was a “high rate of antisocial behavior among freemen (who were fully admitted Church members).”

early inhabitants represent an accurate reflection of the larger population, as the evidence indicates, then a majority of Northampton's early settlers migrated from the towns of Windsor and Hartford, Connecticut, and Dorchester, Massachusetts.⁸⁷ To better understand the ecclesiastical leanings of the early Northampton congregation, an examination of the ecclesiastical history of the towns from which a majority of the early church members originated is essential.

Besides providing the largest portion of Northampton's earliest immigrants, the towns of Windsor and Dorchester also shared a common past that reached all the way back to old England. Both towns, interestingly enough, had been settled by colonizers from Dorchester and various nearby towns in Dorsetshire, England. As part of an early

⁸⁷ Sylvester Judd, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records, 1630-1820*, 6 vols. (Microfilm number 086156, Genealogical Society of Utah), vol. 4, 2-565. This volume of the "Judd manuscripts" contains notes taken from the Northampton Church Record books and other sources, chronicling in some detail the lives of the earliest settlers of Northampton. A large percentage of settlers, it indicates, either came directly from Dorchester Massachusetts or came from Windsor Connecticut after they had separated from the Dorchester church a few decades earlier. Among the eighty-one early residents of Northampton identified by Judd, twenty-one came from Windsor, or about twenty-six percent, seventeen came from Dorchester, or about twenty-one percent, and fourteen came from Hartford, comprising about seventeen percent of the total population. Immigrants from these three cities, then, composed about sixty-one percent of Northampton's original inhabitants. The remaining thirty-nine percent of the initial settlers came from twelve different towns in Massachusetts and Connecticut. Although the total population of Northampton cannot be determined from Judd's list, the eighty-one residents whose places of origin can be determined must have comprised a majority of the town. Another town historian, James Russell Trumbull, indicated that by 1660, only 57 men owned home lots in town. See James Russell Trumbull, *History of Northampton Massachusetts from its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols., (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing Co., 1898) vol. 1, 86-102. Kevin Sweeney, furthermore, acknowledged that "a majority of settlers who established the towns of Northampton, Hadley, and Hatfield in the 1650s and 1660s had come from the Connecticut towns of Windsor, Hartford, and Wethersfield." See Kevin Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 115-152.

fleet that arrived in New England in 1630, the Dorchester immigrants came as a group organized by the minister John White of Dorchester, who possessed, according to historian David Underdown, an “overwhelming” influence over the English town. In presiding over what Underdown called “the most Puritan town in England, a godly community akin to Calvin’s Geneva, or the ‘city on a hill’ that John Winthrop was soon to be creating at Boston in New England,” White considered it his duty to create “a safe haven for Puritans” in the New World. As a result, the Dorchester clergyman organized the 1630 company that would immigrate to New England.⁸⁸

Rather than accompany his countrymen and parishioners to the New World, however, White simply organized the party that would be led by his hand-picked colleague, the Reverend John Warham, a minister of the nearby Church of England in Exeter. Unlike many of those who would settle in New England, both White and John Warham opposed restricting church membership to only those saints who could demonstrate their “regenerative” status. White’s goal for the church that would be gathered in New England, according to Underdown, “was to establish a settlement that would be in full communion with the Church of England, and would allow open, rather than restricted church membership, just as White’s own parishes did.”⁸⁹

Although White had certainly been a major influence in the lives of those who had immigrated to Dorchester, once in the New World, John Warham would assume White’s old stature as an extremely influential figure within the congregation. As

⁸⁸ David Underdown, *Fire from Heaven* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 5, 93-95.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 133-134. See also, Ebenezer Clapp Jr., ed., *History of the Town of Dorchester by a Committee of the Dorchester Antiquarian and Historical Society* (Boston: 1859), 16-18.

graduate of Oxford and as a descendant of the Archbishop of Canterbury, William Warham, who had died in 1532, John Warham commanded the respect of his little flock.⁹⁰ As a highly influential minister, then, he convinced many from within his own Exeter congregation to join the company that would settle New England. One member of his English congregation, Roger Clapp, recalled in his memoirs that he “took such a liking unto the Reverend Mr. John Warham that I did desire to live near him.”⁹¹ Clapp and several of his peers from Exeter joined with assorted families and individuals from Dorchester to make the journey to their new home in Eastern Massachusetts.

During Warham’s early tenure as minister of the Dorchester Church, clergymen and congregations throughout New England became more restrictive in their qualifications for church membership. Tests to determine a candidate’s saving faith and true visible sainthood began to be employed in various congregations as early as 1635.⁹² Warham’s refusal to submit to the strict admission standards that most other churches adopted, however, made him atypical for his day and locale. Many of the neighboring clergymen seemed surprised to hear of Warham’s continued resistance to the growing popularity of practicing exclusive membership. Deacon Samuel Fuller of Plymouth, in fact, mentioned in a letter to Governor Bradford that “I have been at Mattapan, at the request of Mr. Warham. I had conference with him till I was weary. Mr. Warham holds

⁹⁰ Henry S. Stiles, *The History and Genealogies of Ancient Windsor, Connecticut; 1635-1891*, 2 vols. (Hartford: Press of the Case, Lockwood, and Brainard Company, 1891), vol. 1, 21.

⁹¹ Roger Clap, *Roger Clap’s Memoirs with an Account of the Mary and John* (Boston, 1731), 15-16.

⁹² See Chapter 1, 1-9 on the development of Congregational polity in early New England.

that the visible church may consist of a mixed people, godly and openly ungodly, upon which point we had our conference, to which, I trust, the Lord will give a blessing.”⁹³

Given Warham’s strong advocacy for tolerant membership requirements, it comes as little surprise that he and his congregation decided to move away from the restrictive atmosphere of Massachusetts Bay. Historians Edmund S. Morgan and Robert J. Taylor, in fact, have also reached this conclusion, arguing that pressure to submit to restrictive church admission policies compelled Warham to lead almost all of his flock to a new settlement on the shores of the Connecticut River in the spring, 1636.⁹⁴ In moving to Windsor, then, Warham and his congregation demonstrated their dedication to less restrictive membership requirements.

The Windsor parishioners became zealous defenders of their chosen polity. During their long history in Windsor, they continued to practice liberal admission standards. Rather than compelling applicants to relate their personal regenerative experiences to the entire congregation publicly, as almost every other church in New England required, the Windsor Church only sought to insure a candidate’s sincerity and faith through a private relation to one of the church officers. Recent historians now believe that true “regeneration” was not even required for full admission to the Windsor Church before 1647. One such historian, Paul Lucas, in fact, argues that Warham’s

⁹³ Stiles, *Ancient Windsor*, vol. 1, 196. The dialogue between Warham and Fuller is examined in more detail in the first chapter of this work.

⁹⁴ See Robert J. Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut, A History* (New York: 1979), 10 and Clapp, *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 148. Here, Taylor argues that Warham’s fear of tightened membership requirements caused the minister and his congregation to move to Windsor, Connecticut. Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 108 also suggests that Warham’s Dorchester Church moved out near Thomas Hooker’s congregation, which had migrated to Hartford, Connecticut the year before for the same reasons.

Windsor Church employed the “same practice” of “open communion” that Solomon Stoddard’s Northampton Church eventually would observe.⁹⁵ Even town historian, Henry Stiles, acknowledged that any sincere attempt to convey an experience of faith to the elders resulted in approval. Their personal testimonies of saving faith, he indicated, simply served as a cover for loose admission practices as the profession simply became “a mere form” in Windsor.⁹⁶

Years later, when talk of liberalizing membership requirements through a “Halfway Covenant” began to emerge throughout New England, moreover, Windsor deliberated the idea, promptly drafting their own version of the covenant. Windsor, in fact, became the first congregation in all of Connecticut to implement the Halfway Covenant.⁹⁷ Their version of the new covenant, according to church records, allowed the children of “adult persons, be it husband or wife,” to be baptized as long as the parent was willing to “present themselves to the Elders...and declare to their satisfaction their knowledge” of the principles of the church and to “own their father’s covenant.” This version of the Halfway Covenant, surprisingly enough, first came into practice in Windsor on January 31, 1658, more than four years before the famous Halfway Synod of 1662 approved similar provisions.⁹⁸

⁹⁵ “An Appeal to the Learned: The Mind of Solomon Stoddard” *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (Apr, 1973) 276-277. See also Windsor “Creed and Covenant,” adopted Oct. 23, 1647, Rev. Henry Rowland’s “Brief History of the Windsor Church,” *Windsor Church Records*, III, Conn. State Library, Stiles, *Ancient Windsor*, 172-173, and George L. Walker, *History of the first Church in Hartford, 1633-1883* (Hartford, Connecticut, 1884), 429-431.

⁹⁶ Stiles, *Ancient Windsor*, vol. 1, 99.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 196.

Despite being in favor of the Halfway Covenant for so long, Warham's views abruptly changed in 1664. Church records indicate that much to the dismay of his parishioners, Warham only practiced the church's version of the Halfway Covenant "until March 19, 1664, which day he declared to the church that he had met with such arguments against the practice concerning the baptizing of members children," that he could no longer maintain the practice he had long advocated "without scruple of conscience." Whatever the reason for his change of mind, he carried out his vow to discontinue the use of Windsor's Halfway Covenant. The church record book verifies that the practice ceased about the time of Warham's change of mind, as the last halfway member's baptism occurred on March 12, 1664.⁹⁹

It seems likely that Warham also changed his stance concerning the admission of full communicants at this time. A statement from Cotton Mather's *Magnalia* indicates that Warham probably discontinued the admission of full communicants because of doubts he possessed about his own regenerative status. Upon Warham's death, Mather recalled that "when he has administered the Lord's Supper to his flock," he faced great "dejections of his mind, which persuaded him that those blessed seals did not belong to him." This feeling, Mather further indicates, "did not fully leave him till his death."¹⁰⁰

⁹⁸ *Records and Documents of and Relating to the Town of Windsor, Connecticut, 1639-1703* (Hartford: Connecticut Historical Society, 1930), 21, 58. The date in which this practice was put into place in the Windsor Church, January 31, 1657, is recorded using the old calendar. The actual date, in modern terms, was January 31, 1658. All dates recorded in the text of this work, it should be noted, are modified to our current calendar.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 21-23.

¹⁰⁰ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (Boston, 1702), I. 442.

Lucas furthermore indicates that Warham's system of allowing all professing Christians to become full communicants probably ended even before this time.¹⁰¹

Despite the protests of their minister, Warham's congregation continued to be very liberal in their admission standards. They became so dedicated to continuing their open membership policies, in fact, that they turned their backs on their long-time minister when he changed his opinion on the subject, eventually compelling him to readopt the Halfway Covenant in the last years of his life. The brethren of Warham's Windsor Church became extremely upset with his change of heart, actually foreshadowing Jonathan Edwards' later problems in Northampton. They demanded that relaxed admission procedures be followed. The controversy that started in March, 1664, when Warham refused to administer the provisions of the Windsor Halfway Covenant, so aggravated the brethren of the church that in October, less than seven months later, they sent a letter to the General Assembly of Connecticut asking for their help in the matter. Signed by seven from the Windsor Church, the letter complained that "wee and ours are not under the due care of an orthodox ministry that will in a due manner minister to us those ordinances that we stand capable of, as the baptizing of our children" and "being admitted...to the Lord's Table." They furthermore argued that they would not contribute "to the maintenance of any minister or officer of the church that will neglect or refuse to baptize our children and take care of us." Given the significance of their conflict with the minister, the authors concluded their letter by requesting that "matters of less moment may be omitted till this be ishued."¹⁰²

¹⁰¹ Lucas, "The Mind of Solomon Stoddard," 276-277.

¹⁰² A copy of the letter is in Stiles, *Ancient Windsor*, 190-195.

Warham, being in his seventy-third year and only two years away from death, received an assistant to help with his duties in the church. The calling of Nathaniel Chauncey to the position in 1667, allowed the brethren to override their aged minister in important matters of church polity. Under the guidance of their new leader, the members successfully reintroduced the Halfway Covenant in June, 1668, notwithstanding any objections Warham may have raised.¹⁰³

Admission requirements for full communion under Chauncey's leadership, however, became more restrictive than before Warham's change of polity in 1664. The new procedure required potential candidates to publicly present themselves before the church for full communion.¹⁰⁴ The controversy over church admissions in Windsor, then, did not end with the death of Warham. A further division occurred when a new church was formed in March, 1670 under the leadership of Benjamin Woodbridge, an avowed Presbyterian. This new church became even more liberal in its admissions than the church had been before Warham's change of polity. The church seemed to be openly Presbyterian in its nature. Simon Bradstreet recorded the union of the Presbyterian-leaning minister with the liberal congregation in his journal. "Mr. Benjamin

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, 196-199. Whether Warham assented to the covenant or not, is not specifically stated in the records. It seems likely, however, that the congregation forced the covenant upon an unwilling minister, as the church records do explicitly indicate that the covenant was brought back to use just two years before Warham's death while the long-time minister was suffering from poor health. These circumstances suggest that in his weakened state, the brethren probably forced the reform on the vulnerable minister.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

Woodbridge,” he noted on March 18, “was ordained minister of the Presbyterian party (as they are accounted) of Windsor.”¹⁰⁵

Although many remained in long enough to see the a Presbyterian church formed in Windsor, the long and divisive fight that came about when John Warham changed his stance on membership requirements and the Halfway Covenant caused many Windsor parishioners to seek a new location where they could practice their preferred policies unmolested. Rather than remaining in the restrictive Windsor Church, many of the lay members who had followed Warham to Windsor in order to practice liberal admission policies departed from town during the controversy in order to practice their beliefs elsewhere. As a general trend in Connecticut, Richard Bushman indicated, parties dissatisfied with their church’s polity “withdrew from the church to form separate societies or to move to new plantations where they might shape polity to their own convictions.”¹⁰⁶ Many from Windsor moved to Simsbury, Connecticut where they established a church tolerant in its admission requirements, while others migrated to already-established parishes in Western New England.¹⁰⁷

One of these locations to which many Windsor residents fled was the newly settled town of Northampton, Massachusetts just north on the Connecticut River. This new settlement, after all, had only gathered its church three years prior to the Windsor controversy, and had already been settled by numerous Windsor immigrants who came in

¹⁰⁵ This excerpt from Bradstreet’s journal is cited in Stiles, *Ancient Windsor*, 198-209.

¹⁰⁶ Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and Social Order in Connecticut, 1695-1765* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1967), 148.

¹⁰⁷ Taylor, *Colonial Connecticut*, 118.

the late 1650s possibly as a result of Windsor's change from completely open communion to more restrictive forms for full membership. Although it is difficult to determine exactly how many Windsor residents moved to Northampton during the church controversy, the Judd manuscripts do note that of the eighty-one early settlers whose places of origin can be determined, twenty-one of them, or about twenty-six percent of the represented population, came from Windsor between 1655 and 1670, during the Halfway Covenant controversy and in the years following the change in full membership requirements.¹⁰⁸ Many of those who fled to Northampton from Windsor during the church controversy probably immigrated as a result of their ties to Northampton's Ruling Elder, John Strong, who had emigrated from Windsor in 1661. Perhaps some likewise came as a result of ties to an original pillar of the Northampton Church, David Wilton, or to other churchgoers who had also come from Windsor before the outbreak of hostilities.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁸ Judd, *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records*, IV, 2-565. This extensive register contains a brief outline of the lives of many of Northampton's earliest inhabitants. These records indicate that of the eighty one settlers who arrived before Stoddard's ministry (whose place of origin can be determined), twenty-one came from Windsor.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 427-428, 504, 561 and vol. 5, 1. It is difficult to determine exactly when the immigrants from Windsor arrived in Northampton. Judd's records, which contain an account and background for many of the earliest settlers, in most cases, simply state that an individual was "one of the first to settle this land" or "an early settler of Northampton." Although the records rarely list the year in which a person migrated from Windsor to Northampton, it seems probable that several families did move during the time in which controversy over admission policies raged in Windsor. Caleb Pomeroy, for example, arrived in Northampton from Windsor sometime between July of 1666 and May of 1669. Birth records for his first and second born give us this information. Judd mentions that his first child was born in Windsor in 1666 and that his second was born in Northampton in 1669. His father, Eltweed, arrived in Northampton from Windsor in 1672. This happens to be one of the rare cases in which the Judd Records specifically

Whether Northampton's immigrants from Windsor settled in town before, during, or after the Windsor Church controversy occurred, however, it is safe to assume that most, if not all of them, continued to promote liberal admission requirements in their new church. Certainly Elder John Strong advocated loose admission policies in Northampton. In 1669, in fact, he and all the Windsor immigrants voted in favor of Northampton's very liberal Halfway Covenant and he later became Solomon Stoddard's chief assistant during the clergyman's first thirty years as minister.¹¹⁰

A large number of immigrants that came from Dorchester, the city Warham and his congregation had left behind, would also unanimously approve Northampton's Halfway Covenant and support Stoddard's tolerant church membership policies, as would members hailing from Hartford. Considering that twenty-one percent of Northampton's earliest inhabitants, including its first minister and three of its seven original pillars came from the town of Dorchester, a quick examination of its history is also in order, as is an examination of Hartford.

gives the date of an arrival. Although Samuel Marshall's date of settlement in Northampton is difficult to discern, the Judd manuscript notes that Marshall was raised in Windsor and that he had his first child baptized on August 27, 1676 in Northampton. It is highly probable that he also arrived during the Windsor Church controversy.

¹¹⁰ John Strong, who came from England with Warham considered tolerant admission standards significant enough to follow Warham to Windsor in 1636 and to eventually become Stoddard's right-hand man in Northampton until his death in 1699. The liberal Northampton Halfway Covenant, which will be considered in detail later in the chapter, was "voted and unanimously agreed by the Church at Northampton." See the *Northampton Church Records from the Old First Book, 1661-1846* (Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Salt Lake City, Utah, Film # 186160), proposition 1 of the document entitled "Propositions concluded on by the church at Northampton on the 29th of the 10th month and 12th of the 11th month: Respecting the duty of the Children of the Covenant and the due and orderly Management thereof."

The 1636 departure of John Warham and his congregation from Dorchester to Windsor left so few members in the abandoned town that the remaining churchgoers determined that “reorganization was desirable.”¹¹¹ Unfortunately for those left behind, however, their ability to continue practicing liberal admission policies became curtailed by their minority status in the church when the Reverend Richard Mather and the nearly 100 passengers that came with him from England took the vacated places the Windsor parishioners left.¹¹² These new settlers of Dorchester, unlike the first inhabitants, had emigrated from Lancashire in Northern England and practiced more restrictive membership requirements than Warham’s congregation observed before their migration. Richard Mather, however, although from the same area as the rest of his congregation, never favored the narrow baptismal demands many of New England’s clergymen advocated, but instead sought to practice tolerant baptismal standards.

Mather’s attempts to liberalize baptismal requirements in his new church met with little success. Despite his best efforts, his parishioners did not begin to practice the Halfway Covenant in Dorchester until December, 1676.¹¹³ From early on, however, the minister made several attempts to enact relaxed baptismal policies. Historian, Ross W. Beals, contends that “as early as 1645 the Reverend Richard Mather of Dorchester had urged an extension of baptism.”¹¹⁴ In a manuscript entitled *A Plea for the Churches of*

¹¹¹ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester in New England, 1636-1734* (Boston: 1891), xxii.

¹¹² Clapp Jr., *History of the Town of Dorchester*, 148 and *Records of the First Church at Dorchester*, xxii

¹¹³ *Records of the First Church at Dorchester*, 99.

Christ in New-England, written in 1645, Mather expressed his opinion that “if it be said the Parents are not confirmed members, nor have yet been found fit for the Lords Table, I conceive this needs not to hinder their Infants from Baptisme”¹¹⁵ Records from the Dorchester Church also show that in 1654, 1657, 1660, and 1668, Mather attempted to persuade his church to extend baptism. On one occasion, in the fall, 1660, the Dorchester clergyman requested that his congregation remain after the evening exercise to discuss a pressing matter. “Mr. Mather,” the church records indicate, “made report to the church of the great desire of the wife of James Minot to have her children baptized though as yet neither she nor her husband were judged meet to come to the Lord’s Table.” Before a vote could be taken, Mather strenuously advocated on behalf of the Minot children. His efforts, nevertheless, could not persuade all present to accept the children as half-way members. His congregation never reached a decisive judgment in the matter.¹¹⁶

Mather’s advocacy for liberal baptismal requirements, however, did not fall completely on deaf ears. By 1660, large numbers of the congregation had been convinced by Mather to accept his tolerant halfway practices. A majority, in fact, did support their minister. Church records indicate that in the Minot case, the children received the support of almost everyone in the congregation.

¹¹⁴ Ross W. Beals, “The Halfway Covenant and Religious Scrupulosity: The First Church of Dorchester, Massachusetts, as a Test Case,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 31 (1974), 467.

¹¹⁵ A portion of this manuscript is recorded in Walker, *Creeds*, 252.

¹¹⁶ *Records of the First Church of Dorchester*, 55. See also Beals, “The Halfway Covenant,” 468.

More than an advocate of tolerant baptismal Standards, Mather also attempted to make the requirements for full membership more relaxed than some of New England's orthodox ministers. Although nowhere near as permissive as Stoddard would become, Mather seemed to push lightly in the direction of easier membership requirements, ultimately advocating some procedural modifications that would allow reluctant yet worthy candidates some leeway. In a case from 1664, for example, Mather attempted to allow candidates a chance to be admitted to full communion without a public confession of regeneration. The records show that all but two members of Mather's congregation agreed to allow "several young men in the town" into church fellowship if they would simply give their confessions in private and "by writing declared publicly to the church."¹¹⁷ Given that Richard Mather strongly favored the provisions of the Halfway Covenant and modifications that would allow some toleration for full communicants, Northampton's call of his son, Eleazer, as the first minister, comes as no surprise. The significant members who accompanied Eleazer Mather to Northampton, including William Clark, Henry Cunliffe, and Henry Woodward, all pillars of the church at its gathering, like many from the Dorchester congregation, also must have favored Richard Mather's positive stance on the Halfway Covenant and the qualifications for full membership--given their later approval of Northampton's very tolerant Halfway Covenant and their eventual support of Stoddard's membership practices.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁷ *Church Records*, 47-51, 62.

¹¹⁸ Although the views of Clark, Cunliffe, and Woodward are nowhere expressed in writing, their unanimous vote in favor of Northampton's very tolerant Halfway Covenant in spite of Eleazer Mather's objections to it, demonstrate their adherence to the practice. See the *Northampton Church Records*, proposition 1 of the document entitled "Propositions concluded on by the church at Northampton on the 29th of the 10th month

Like many of the settlers from Dorchester and Windsor, the Hartford parishioners who would settle Northampton generally practiced more liberal admission policies than the rest of New England. Thomas Hooker, the first minister of the Hartford Church, certainly wanted members of his congregation to be accounted among the visible saints, but also sought to allow his parishioners more access to church membership than many from Eastern Massachusetts offered. This “flexibility” that Hooker could find in Connecticut, away from the Bay, Edmund S. Morgan suggested, proved to be a major factor in his decision to migrate with his congregation from Eastern Massachusetts to Hartford, Connecticut in 1636.¹¹⁹ Although Hooker’s Hartford Church would never practice the open admission policies most Presbyterians advocated, his requirements for full membership became much more tolerant than almost every other church in New England. His biographers agree that “even hypocrites could join Thomas Hooker’s church.”¹²⁰ In his *Survey of the Summe of Church Discipline*, Hooker argues that Externally, those are within the covenant, who expressing their repentance, with their profession of the truth, ingage themselves to walk in the waies of God, and in the truth of his worship, though they have not for the present that sound work of faith in their hearts, and may be shall never have it wrought by Gods spirit in them.¹²¹

and 12th of the 11th month: Respecting the duty of the Children of the Covenant and the due and orderly Management thereof.”

¹¹⁹ Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 102-107.

¹²⁰ Frank Shuffelton, *Thomas Hooker, 1586-1647* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 169 and Sargent Bush, *The Writings of Thomas Hooker: Spiritual Adventure in two Worlds* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980), 118.

¹²¹ Thomas Hooker, *A Survey of the Summe of Church Dicipline* (London, 1648), I, II 36-37. Also quoted in Shuffelton, *Thomas Hooker*, 170.

Like in Newbury, the Hartford elders controlled church admissions. Candidates for full communion were only required to give a relation of faith privately to the elders, rather than a public expression of regeneration, after which the congregation would simply rubber-stamp the recommendations of the clergy.¹²² At least one chronicler of the early Hartford Church suggests that by the mid 1640s, the congregation “had already been effectively silenced in matters of admission.” In true Presbyterian style, then, almost all authority to admit members into the church became subject to Hartford clergymen.¹²³

That the Hartford congregation itself was more liberal in terms of baptismal requirements and admission of full members than most in New England seems manifest by their replacement of Thomas Hooker, upon his death in 1647, with the even more Presbyterian-leaning minister, Samuel Stone. Stone’s parishioners undoubtedly knew of his Presbyterian-like polity when they hired him to lead their flock. No stranger to Hartford’s churchgoers, he had served as Hooker’s assistant since 1633, and as Hooker’s greatest ally in the easing of Hartford’s membership requirements. Like Hooker, Stone became an advocate for extended baptism. Three years after Hooker’s death, in fact, Walker argues that Stone became “fully committed to the Half-Way Covenant theory.”¹²⁴ In a letter to Richard Mather of Dorchester in 1650, the new Hartford minister threatened that “unless there be some conference of Elders this year in the Bay...our churches will

¹²² Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), 30.

¹²³ Baird Tipson, “Samuel Stone’s ‘Discourse’ Against Requiring Church Relations,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 46 (Oct., 1989), 788.

¹²⁴ Walker, *Creeds*, 254.

adventure to practice according to their judgment, i.e., take in all such children as members.”¹²⁵

Stone’s Presbyterian-like governance also seemed evident when he relaxed the profession of faith expected from potential members.¹²⁶ Going far beyond the Halfway Covenant, in fact, Stone, like Stoddard after him, advocated that full membership should be granted to all but the non-scandalous. In what he titled “A Discourse against the binding of Persons to make a relation of the time & manner of there Conversion in order to there Admission to the Church,” Stone argued that a congregation had no right to force applicants to relate a regenerative experience as a condition of membership. Stone even argued in his “Discourse,” that the congregation had no right to require a relation of grace, and neither did the elders themselves, insisting that “many that are godly make such poore relations that the hearts of understanding men are unsatisfied and troubled.”¹²⁷ Since compelling candidates to give a regenerative experience could not be properly used in New England’s churches, Stone concluded that the only obligation required of a candidate was a willingness to be in “subjection to the gospel and divine ordinances” and to have a “blamlesse life and conversation.”¹²⁸

Stone’s Presbyterian tendencies, moreover, affected not only his membership practices, but also the manner in which he governed the church. As minister, Stone constantly sought to diminish the power of the fraternity while increasing his own. In an

¹²⁵ Quoted in Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 20.

¹²⁶ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 31-37.

¹²⁷ Tipson, “Samuel Stone’s ‘Discourse,’” 788-791.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, 789-790.

acutely Presbyterian sense, Stone felt that the elders, not the congregation possessed ultimate authority over the church. He became widely acknowledged during his lifetime, in fact, for his controversial statements concerning how church government should operate. He argued that the clergy represented “a speaking aristocracy in the face of a silent democracy.”¹²⁹

Although most modern historians concede that both Hooker and Stone practiced more liberal admission requirements than most of their contemporaries, and that Stone specifically advocated Presbyterian forms of church government, many assume that the Hartford Church controversy, which lasted from 1653 to 1659, began as a result of the changes of polity concerning the enlargement of baptism. Some historians, in fact, link the Hartford conflict with the Halfway Covenant Synods of 1657 and 1662. Walker, however, claims that “no opinion is more erroneous;” insisting “there is no evidence that the extent of baptism was one of the dividing issues between 1653 and 1659 in the Hartford Church.”¹³⁰ The problems in Hartford, he argues, came from a “personal dispute” between Stone and William Goodwin, the Ruling Elder, over which man should inherit the vacant pulpit left after Hooker’s death.¹³¹ Hence, the Hartford immigrants, who comprised seventeen percent of Northampton’s early population, did not necessarily settle as refugees seeking asylum from Stone’s membership requirements. As former members of Hooker and Stone’s congregation, these immigrants always supported

¹²⁹See, for example, Christopher Grasso, *A speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 1.

¹³⁰ Walker, *Creeds*, 256-257.

¹³¹ *Ibid.*

tolerant membership policies and most probably leaned toward Presbyterian forms of church government. The significant members of the Northampton Church, who had immigrated from Hartford, including Thomas Root, an original pillar of the Northampton Church, Zechariah Field, a selectman chosen in 1661, William Holton, one of the original settlers of Northampton and an early deacon of the church, all voted in favor of Northampton's liberal Halfway Covenant in 1669.¹³² In all likelihood, these tolerant settlers from Hartford fit in nicely with those who joined them from Windsor and Dorchester.

It seems clear that a majority of the earliest inhabitants of Northampton favored liberal baptismal and church membership requirements and that many of them had even been exposed to various other forms of Presbyterian governance before their arrival in the new settlement. Sixty-one percent of Northampton's earliest settlers, including six of seven original pillars, its minister, ruling elder, and first deacon, immigrated from the Windsor, Dorchester, and Hartford Churches, and that the town's organizers and largest land owners came from a tradition of Presbyterianism. It comes as no surprise, then, that the newly formed Northampton Church would try to practice some forms of Presbyterian polity. Its large population of churchgoers who advocated lenient admission practices would have to wait for almost a decade after settlement, however, before they could enact their tolerant admission policies.

¹³² For information on the Hartford immigrants listed above, see Judd, *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records*, IV, 235, 257, 457. See also the "unanimously agreed" Halfway Covenant in *Northampton Church Records*, under the heading "Propositions Concluded..."

The assorted group who settled Northampton from all over New England needed to come together to form a community and a church years before Solomon Stoddard would set foot in the town. The organization of a church, the call of the minister, and the early ecclesiastical administration within that church would mold and prepare the congregation for Stoddard's innovations.

Given that many of Northampton's leaders and lay members began filtering in from Presbyterian-leaning circumstances as early as its settlement in 1655, it seems odd that they would hire Eleazer Mather, the strictly orthodox son of Richard Mather, as the full-time pastor of the church at its gathering in the spring, 1661.¹³³ Their new minister, surprisingly enough, considering the liberal backgrounds from which most of the early settlers had come, advocated very restrictive requirements for both baptism and membership. Although it is difficult to ascertain precisely why the congregation chose to maintain the services of a minister who held views different than their own, there are several possible reasons for their actions.

Their decision to hire the strict clergyman as their first minister may have been more a matter of necessity than choice. Realizing that their newly-formed town on the western frontier was not the ideal location for an aspiring minister to serve, it is likely that many residents of Northampton would readily accept any qualified clergyman willing to consent to their request. Springfield, just a few miles south, after all, had numerous difficulties finding and maintaining qualified ministers. The town, according

¹³³ *Northampton Church Records from the Old First Book, 1661-1846* (Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Salt Lake City, Utah, Film # 186160), under the date 18-4-1661.

to Stephen Innes, did not even have a minister “during most of the 1650s.”¹³⁴ Locating, hiring, and ordaining another qualified minister in Northampton, then, may have been more trouble than most were willing to endure.

It is furthermore likely that many of the original inhabitants of Northampton from Windsor and Dorchester felt enthused about the idea of having the minister come from their original place of settlement in New England. Many in the Northampton congregation, after all, shared ties with the town of Dorchester.¹³⁵ Extending those ties by hiring Eleazer Mather as their first minister would seem to have made sense to many early inhabitants.

Their ties to Dorchester and especially their high regard for Richard Mather, moreover, had to have been a compelling factor in Northampton’s decision to hire Eleazer. So esteemed was Richard Mather by many Northamptonites that one inhabitant who died in 1673, left Warham Mather, Eleazer’s son, “a legacy of five pounds,” due to the contributor’s “profound respect for his progenitors and in particular his grandfather Mr. Richard Mather.”¹³⁶ Hiring the son of the minister that many in the congregation

¹³⁴ Innes, *Labor in a New Land*, 46, 147. Innes argues that even the minister they did eventually hire after almost a decade without, openly expressed his concerns about the town’s ability to sustain a minister.

¹³⁵ A large number of the original inhabitants of Northampton came from Windsor Connecticut. Most of these Windsor settlers had emigrated in 1636 with John Warham from Dorchester Massachusetts. The connection between Northampton’s Windsor immigrants and its large population of Dorchester immigrants, may have been one of the reasons many Northamptonites wanted to hire Eleazer Mather, who had grown up in Dorchester.

¹³⁶ A copy of this segment from Henry Cunliffe’s will can be found in Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 117.

knew and loved probably made perfect sense to those who had immigrated from Dorchester and Windsor.

Significantly, those familiar with Richard Mather's tolerant baptismal practices, who themselves became advocates of loose baptismal requirements, probably either assumed that Eleazer held similar views to his father or felt hopeful that he would eventually succumb to his father's policies. The Northampton congregation, no doubt, must have been shocked to find that Eleazer advocated his brother Increase's orthodox polity rather than his father's more tolerant practices. Their later actions against Mather's strict baptismal requirements seem to confirm that they hired a minister whose polity was either not known or not shared by the congregation.

Perhaps one of the final motivating factors that led early Northamptonites to hire Eleazer Mather came from their hope that the new clergyman would bring with him additional settlers to the small town. Trumbull indicates that this may have been the case. Hiring the son of the well-known Dorchester clergyman, Richard Mather, he argues, came because many in the town believed "his influence would be of great service in inducing emigrants to remove to Northampton."¹³⁷ Their hope that Mather would bring new settlers to the town became a reality as twenty-one percent of the early Northampton congregation came from Dorchester in the late 1650s and early 1660s as a result of his hiring.¹³⁸ Among the signers of the original church covenant, in fact, at least ten had

¹³⁷ James Russell Trumbull, *The History of Northampton from its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols., (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing Co., 1898), 79.

¹³⁸ Judd, *Genealogies and Church Records*, IV.

come as a direct result of the pastor's influence.¹³⁹ Among these was John Strong, who became one of the pillars of the church and the first ruling elder in Northampton. Henry Cunliffe, a selectman, commissioner, and pillar of the church also came from Dorchester with Mather.¹⁴⁰ Three of the seven pillars of the Northampton Church, in fact, had come from Dorchester. The small outpost on the New England frontier certainly benefited from the introduction of these significant men to their village and from the population increase their families brought. This demographic influx brought on by the Dorchester migration, Trumbull argues, "brought new life and energy to the enfeebled town."¹⁴¹ Whatever their reason, however, the Northampton congregation did hire the young Dorchester clergyman as their first pastor and were later compelled to force their own baptismal and membership requirements on him.

If the Northampton congregation seemed unaware of Mather's leanings regarding baptismal requirements and the Halfway Covenant before his ordination in 1661, they certainly found out soon thereafter. When the famous Halfway Synod met in Boston a year later, Eleazer Mather, despite his father's approval of the covenant, supported his brother, Increase, against the majority of clergymen who approved its provisions.¹⁴² His

¹³⁹ Although probably more than ten signed the original covenant, the origins of each signer cannot be determined from the scanty sources available.

¹⁴⁰ The identities of the original signers of the covenant are found in the *Northampton Church Records*, 18-4-1661 and Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 86-117. Their places of origin and date of arrival in Northampton can be ascertained using the *Judd Manuscripts*, 121, 173, 183-187, 504, and the *Northampton Town Records*, 7,10 indicates that Mather was granted land by a town vote on January 4, 1659 and that home lots for Mather's "Dorchester friends" were granted on November 25, 1659.

¹⁴¹ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 80.

life-long resistance to the Halfway Covenant led, six years later, to a disruptive dispute with his congregation, which desperately sought to practice liberal membership requirements.

Although the town and church records remain silent about the relationship between the minister and the congregation on the subject of extending baptism and membership before they approved the Halfway Covenant in late 1668, it is clearly evident that most churchgoers opposed Mather's orthodox admission practices. Given that they favored tolerant admission policies while their minister opposed any plan that would lessen church membership requirements, the brethren of the Northampton Church secretly drafted a Halfway Covenant sometime during the mid 1660s that they intended to implement at the first opportunity available. Despite their minister's disapproval of the Halfway Covenant, the congregation decided to submit their halfway measures to a vote in the winter, 1668, when Mather fell ill and appeared to be on his deathbed. Each and every member of the church, astonishingly enough, voted in unanimous favor of the Halfway Covenant's conditions. In its first article, in fact, the covenant itself boldly acknowledged that upon a vote, the proposals were "unanimously agreed by the Church at Northampton."¹⁴³ That the vote was unanimous despite Mather's opposition to the covenant verifies that the members had been considering a more liberal standard of admission long before the vote had ever been taken, but had only acted upon those desires when their minister seemed to be dying. Trumbull argues in his sketch of

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, 201-202.

¹⁴³ *Northampton Church Records*, Proposition 1 of the document entitled "Propositions concluded on by the Church at Northampton on the 29th of the 10th month and 12th of the 11th month: Respecting the duty of the Children of the Covenant and the due and orderly Management thereof."

Northampton, furthermore, that “the apparent unanimity of the church, when the propositions came up for action, indicates that the people, familiar with the subject, had already decided upon their course of action.”¹⁴⁴ Their unanimity against the minister, certainly a rarity for New England, ultimately demonstrated the determination with which Northamptonites defended their preferred membership practices.

The most shocking aspect of the Halfway Covenant episode, however, was the covenant itself. Northampton’s churchgoers went even beyond the recommendations of the 1662 Synod, moving away from the principles the founders of the colony had diligently labored to establish. They sought to admit candidates to halfway membership not based on a parent or grandparent’s standing in the church, but on the community’s assessment of a moral life. Unlike almost every other church in New England, which restricted halfway membership to only the direct descendants of baptized adults, Northampton extended the privilege to all churchgoers regardless of their parent or grandparent’s standing in the church. The blood-link to membership, which the 1662 Synod considered significant in at least maintaining the spirit of the New England Way, seemed of no concern to Northampton’s fraternity. Their extremely lengthy and detailed Halfway Covenant explicitly stated in its very specific fifth proposition that halfway membership belonged to more than just the children and grandchildren of baptized members.¹⁴⁵ The qualifications for partial membership in Northampton, according to the

¹⁴⁴ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 202.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 147, the author argues that the Northampton covenant was much more explicit and detailed about the qualifications for Halfway membership than almost all of the other churches in New England. Their covenant expressed a particular exactness rarely seen in church records.

unanimously-approved covenant, permitted any believer who possessed “the lowest degree, understanding, and believing the Doctrine of faith, . . . not Scandalous in life” and willing to subject themselves “to the Government of Christ,” although not judged worthy of the privileges of the Lord’s Supper, to be “entered into a state of membership, and have their Children Baptized.”¹⁴⁶ Hence, any Northamptonite that lived an upright life now became a candidate for limited membership. The members under this Halfway Covenant would have no link (either themselves or their ancestors) to a vivid experience of grace.

Despite adopting the covenant later than some of Western New England’s churches, the Northampton Halfway Covenant was much more tolerant in its baptismal requirements than its New English counterparts. Robert G. Pope suggests in his comprehensive study of the Halfway Covenant, in fact, that, with the possible exception of Salem, Northampton went further beyond the recommendations of the 1662 Synod than any other church in all of New England.¹⁴⁷ Their approval of such an unorthodox version of the Halfway Covenant, despite Mather’s opposition, ultimately showed their almost radical dedication to tolerant baptismal practices.

¹⁴⁶ *Northampton Church Records*, proposition V. See also Pope, *Halfway Covenant*, 148-150.

¹⁴⁷ Pope, *Half-Way Covenant*, 146-151. Pope indicates that in most of the churches in New England, the clergy were the ones attempting to compel reluctant lay members to accept the covenant. When these churches finally did accept the Halfway Covenant, they usually adopted a very strict form that coincided closely with the recommendations of the Synod of 1662. Northampton was certainly unique as the opposite occurred. The laity, he indicates, forced a very liberal covenant on an unwilling minister. Certainly the lay members in Northampton, Pope allows, were different than most of their lay counterparts throughout Eastern and Western New England. With the possible exception of Salem, Northampton “carried the recommendations of the synod the farthest beyond orthodoxy” of any Puritan congregation in the New World.

The young Northampton preacher felt betrayed by his congregation's approval of a measure he had fought so hard to prohibit during his seven-year tenure in the newly organized town. They had, after all, forced the very broad covenant on an esteemed clergyman who could not properly defend his position on the matter. As he would make clear in his eventual response, Mather felt shocked and angered to find that his congregation had not only adopted a variation of the Halfway Covenant, but that they had gone far beyond the recommendations of the 1662 Synod. To his horror, he discovered that his church had actually proposed to allow both the children of unregenerate members to be baptized and all the non-scandalous Christians in town.¹⁴⁸ This step, as Mather saw it, seemed to constitute a movement toward the total dissolution of the New England Way.¹⁴⁹ The Northampton Church had effectively cast off one of New England's longest standing traditions, opening the way for the unrestricted membership and access to the Lord's Table that Stoddard would later advocate.

Although Mather would die just six months after his church approved the Halfway Covenant, during his few remaining months of adequate health the orthodox

¹⁴⁸ *Northampton Church Records*, Proposition 5 of the Halfway Covenant and Robert G. Pope, *The Half-Way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 147. In his study of how the Halfway Covenant was implemented throughout New England, Pope argues that Northampton, unlike the rest of Massachusetts, "demanded adoption of the Halfway Covenant, and the minister resisted the innovation." He further argues that when Mather read the covenant for the first time, he "discovered to his horror that the parish wanted not only the Halfway Covenant, but that it intended to open church membership to all godly inhabitants."

¹⁴⁹ Eleazer Mather, *A Serious Exhortation*, 13-21 and Philip F. Gura, "Preparing the Way for Stoddard: Eleazer Mather's Serious Exhortation to Northampton" *New England Quarterly* vol. 57 (June 1984) 240-249. Here Gura argues that Mather was concerned that the very liberal Northampton Halfway Covenant was the first step in the ultimate destruction of Congregationalism in New England.

minister would strongly challenge his congregation's acceptance of such an unorthodox covenant. His ultimate expression of disappointment and admonition to his church would be one of the legacies that remained in Northampton even after Stoddard's ordination as their minister. In one of the final sermons delivered by Eleazer Mather, the dying pastor cautioned his defiant flock to look upon their lives and to ask themselves why they had approved of such a lenient covenant.

In this famous sermon entitled, "A Serious Exhortation to the Present and Succeeding Generation in New England," delivered in Northampton on July 10, 1669, just two weeks before his death, Mather condemned the church for adopting the liberal Halfway Covenant.¹⁵⁰ He argued that Northampton's unorthodox remedy to a New England-wide problem would only provide a temporary solution to a larger crisis. "Precepts without patterns will do little good," he explained. Although their Halfway Covenant would give them the titles and rights that other members in New England also enjoyed, those titles and rights, he argued, contained no significance if its advocates did not live according to Christ's word. Only by living their religion could a parent teach a child effectively. Although his parishioners could become members through the new covenant, the outward designation did not always signify inward piety and this failure would both hurt the parent and the child who could easily see and would often emulate the example set by unworthy predecessors. Mather argued that the parents of these children "must lead them to Christ by examples as well as counsel; you must set yourselves first, and speak by lives as well as words; you must live religion as well as

¹⁵⁰ Eleazer Mather, *A Serious Exhortation to the Present and Succeeding Generation in New England* (Boston: 1678), 32 pp. See Evans film # 254.

talk religion.”¹⁵¹ His congregation, he felt, lacked the sincerity true members of Christ’s visible church needed. “He that hath no interest in God,” Mather further expounded, “cannot insure any interest to others. He that hath only a visible interest, an interest in the visible Covenant, he can do no more for his child but leave that unto him.”¹⁵²

He further explained that the purpose for that Halfway Covenant, which had been approved by the Synod of 1662, was to allow for the baptism of innocent children whose parents had not yet met the requirements for full membership. Despite his opposition to the Halfway Covenant, however, he probably could have at least been inclined to cooperate with the provisions of the 1662 Synod. Their bold attempt to go beyond the synod’s recommendations, by allowing any moral person in the community to be admitted to partial membership, however, seemed to him a reflection of the degenerate state of his parishioners. Unlike elsewhere in New England, where the laity identified a need for at least some sort of link to a regenerate saint, in Northampton, churchgoers wanted to be members even though they were not converted.¹⁵³ The very liberal Halfway Covenant his congregation sought to implement, he contended, was not for the good of future generations, but to cover the sins of the parents, and to permit them the ability to attain partial membership despite their wickedness. By so doing, he explained, the “ordinances are an unprofitable and empty thing void of spiritual advantage,” becoming “bad bargains” that make the member “lose rather than gain by them.”¹⁵⁴

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 20.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 18-19.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 17.

Before the provisions of Northampton's uniquely tolerant halfway covenant could actually be practiced, however, Eleazer Mather died. The new covenant, Trumbull mentions, although adopted previous to Stoddard's arrival later that year, only came into "working order within two months of his settlement." Once in practice, Trumbull also indicates, the covenant became amply utilized as 160 churchgoers took advantage by becoming halfway members over the next four years.¹⁵⁵

The six-month fight with their pastor and unanimous victory of the congregation, however, demonstrated how significant this matter seemed to Northampton's churchgoers. Over the course of seven long years the Northampton congregation eventually forced their very liberal admission policies on an unwilling minister. The lessons they learned from their dealings with Mather undoubtedly made them cautious about choosing another pastor that would deter them from practicing the very open membership policies they preferred. Mather's utter refusal to bend to the wishes of the congregation, then, must have compelled them to replace him with a new minister who would be open enough to allow for the implementation of their uniquely charitable Halfway Covenant.

Hence, the hiring of Solomon Stoddard as Eleazer Mather's replacement enabled the liberal, almost Presbyterian-like congregation to be united with a Presbyterian-leaning clergyman that favored extremely generous membership and baptismal requirements. Their distinct union would ultimately permit Stoddard the liberty to explore and eventually exercise the Presbyterian views he had developed before his call to the frontier

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

¹⁵⁵ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, II, 53.

town. This union furthermore would allow the young clergyman to blur the distinction between full and halfway membership early in his ministry.¹⁵⁶ Stoddard would even go beyond the already liberal Halfway Covenant that Mather's congregation had approved.¹⁵⁷ Under Stoddard, full standing members would not only lack familial ties to a baptized member, but also the regenerative experience almost every other church in New England required.

To fully comprehend just how Stoddard was able to take an already liberal congregation even further in terms of open church admissions and other forms of Presbyterian governance, it is essential to examine the man himself. Like those in his congregation, Solomon Stoddard's background and experiences shaped many of his perceptions on church government even before his arrival in Northampton. His openness concerning church admission requirements, for example, already seemed to be a principle to which he was dedicated. His ideas on ecclesiastical administration, likewise, came as a result of his experiences in the pre-Northampton years. Therefore a significant basis for Stoddard success in Northampton would stem from earlier experiences. This preparation,

¹⁵⁶ See *Northampton Church Records*, 23. Whether his church was aware of it or not, by the middle of 1677, Stoddard no longer listed the full and halfway members on separate ledgers. Both were listed together as full members. See also Chapter IV of this dissertation.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 21-24. The earlier Halfway Covenant specifically stated that members who came into the church under its provisions were "only in a state of Education in Christ's house." It furthermore warned these members that they should "not essay the breaking in upon the privileges of Lords Supper and votting, until they shall bee judged upon due Examination" to be among the visible saints, who were able to bring forth "an experimentall Worke of faith." Only after the appearance of this work of faith could a parishioner be considered "a member of this church in full communion" and to be a "partaker of all such privileges as by the rules of Christ" belongs to them.¹⁵⁷ Their openness in baptismal and membership requirements notwithstanding, the inhabitants of Northampton did require a regenerative experience to achieve full membership.

as chapter three will describe, led Solomon Stoddard on an unlikely path from Harvard to a short ministry in Barbados and eventually to the small western outpost of Northampton, Massachusetts.

Chapter IV

Solomon Stoddard's Preparation for the Northampton Pulpit

In 1669, Solomon Stoddard accepted Northampton's invitation to preach among them as a trial minister, finally becoming their ordained Pastor in 1672. The young clergyman, however, did not accept the call to the Northampton pulpit on a whim, nor could his union with a Presbyterian-leaning congregation be considered a mere happenstance. Before his arrival in Northampton, Stoddard had already developed his Presbyterian attitudes. During his Harvard tenure, Stoddard had become familiar with the works of Samuel Rutherford, an influential Scottish Presbyterian, and had begun to advocate his system of church government. The two years he would spend in Barbados after graduation further entrenched his Presbyterian views. Only after forgoing a move to England and undergoing a three year trial period, in which he familiarized himself with the views of the Northampton congregation, was Stoddard finally willing to accept the ministerial position. Due to his close fit with the already Presbyterian-minded fraternity, the extreme feuding and infighting over church government that had existed in Hingham, Newbury, and elsewhere would never plague Northampton during Stoddard's six-decade tenure.

Like most members of his congregation, Stoddard brought preconceived notions on ecclesiastical administration with him to Northampton. Because the "Government of the church," as the Cambridge Platform made clear, "is a mixed government," that

included components of “a democracy,” Stoddard could not force his administration on an unwilling church, as Hobart and Parker had attempted, any more than the church could force its government on him. Although the body of the church theoretically possessed more authority than the minister under Congregational government, since “they are a church before they have officers,” the dispute that had just ended between Eleazer Mather and the Northampton Church demonstrated the danger of contrary opinions over ecclesiastical administration.¹⁵⁸ The meeting between a Presbyterian-leaning congregation and a Presbyterian-leaning minister happened as a planned, cohesive union between likeminded parties. Their agreement over the basics of church government provided a solid foundation upon which the outspoken minister could build a following in Northampton and throughout the Connecticut Valley.

Twentieth-century historians of early Western New England have mistakenly argued that Stoddard’s Presbyterian views on church government developed only after his arrival in the frontier city, maintaining that his decision to accept the Northampton position was in no way linked to his previous Presbyterian leanings. Numerous historians make clear that his opinions on ecclesiastical polity came not as a result of his previous exposure to Presbyterianism, but as a result of his contact with the wilderness environment that dominated life in Northampton. His views on church administration, some historians have maintained, developed out of the necessities frontier life demanded. Perry Miller, for example, argued that Stoddard’s Presbyterian membership requirements served as a practical necessity in Northampton. Because of the town’s remoteness on the

¹⁵⁸ See *The Cambridge Platform* in Williston Walker, *Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960), 217-218.

western frontier, Miller argued, Stoddard was compelled to treat the congregation and the entire town “as the church,” baptizing all believing adults and admitting them to the Lord’s Supper. “The source of his conviction,” Miller observed, “was the fact that in Northampton, all men, and not church members alone, worked shoulder-to-shoulder when raising the frame of a house or of a church,” and therefore all believing Christians in town should be candidates for full membership. Stoddard’s “so called Presbyterianism,” Miller further explained, seemed “a reflection of his surroundings,” and his environment, rather than as a consequence of previous exposure to Presbyterian philosophy.¹⁵⁹ Paul Lucas, like Miller, suggested that Stoddard accepted the post on the Connecticut River not because it stood to allow him to implement any pre-existing Presbyterian ideas, but because he enjoyed physical labor and wanted to work with rural farmers and tradesmen rather than cosmopolitan urbanites. Despite Stoddard’s excellent pedigree and resume from Harvard, Lucas felt that the man “who could have had any post he wanted,” assumed the Northampton position, one “few wanted,” because he had little interest in the “finer things of civilization” and because he “gloried in physical toil.”¹⁶⁰

Although Stoddard may have enjoyed the challenges frontier life demanded, his acceptance of a call that “few wanted” resulted from shared views over church

¹⁵⁹ See Perry Miller, *The New England Mind: From colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 257 and James A. Goulding “The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism” (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 6. Like Miller, Goulding argues that Stoddard adapted his ideas on church government to suit the situation in Western Massachusetts.

¹⁶⁰ Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society along the Connecticut River* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1976), 145-146. Interestingly enough, Lucas acknowledged Stoddard’s devotion to the Scottish Presbyterian apologist, Samuel Rutherford, while at Harvard, yet failed to connect Stoddard’s Presbyterian-like polity to his acceptance of a ministerial position unique to his ambitions. See 149-151.

organization, not his love of physical toil. An examination of Stoddard's life before his long ministry in Northampton reveals his dedication to Presbyterian government developed long before his exposure to the frontier environment of Northampton and that he was determined to implement this polity in Western Massachusetts.

Born in 1643, the son of wealthy Boston parents, Anthony and Mary Downing Stoddard, Solomon learned early on the importance of deference and authority. Both parents gave the young man a link to the great families of New England. His father had come to Boston from England in 1639 and became a freeman a year later. As a successful merchant and respected member of society, Anthony Stoddard became a Representative to the General Court in 1650, a position which he held off-and-on for more than twenty-two years. Stoddard was also a leading figure in the First Church of Boston. Solomon Stoddard's mother, Mary Downing, was the daughter of the Honorable Emmanuel Downing of Salem. Her mother, Solomon's grandmother, Lucy Downing, was John Winthrop's sister.¹⁶¹ Her mother's sister, furthermore, was married to Governor Bradstreet. Years later, Solomon would similarly utilize family alliances to build a powerful ecclesiastical network in Northampton and throughout the Connecticut Valley, marrying his own daughters, for example, into significant clerical families.

These important family connections along with the wealth accumulated over years of successful business dealings also allowed Anthony Stoddard to educate his young son at a grammar school in Cambridge under the care of Master Elijah Corlet. After some

¹⁶¹ Charles and Elijah W. Stoddard, *Anthony Stoddard of Boston Massachusetts: A Genealogy* (New York: JM Bradstreet and Son, 1865), 1-12 and James Russell Trumbull, *The History of Northampton from its Settlement in 1654*, 2 vols., (Northampton: Press of Gazette Printing Co., 1898), Vol. 2, 52-53.

time there, in the spring, 1658, at the age of fourteen, Solomon advanced to Harvard College.¹⁶² Four years later, in 1662, he received his B.A. Following graduation, Stoddard remained at Harvard where he received an M.A. in 1665, served as a fellow or tutor in 1666, and became the college's first librarian later that same year.¹⁶³ When, for unexplained reasons, Stoddard embarked on a two-year journey to Barbados in 1667, he finally left Harvard, the place where he had spent more than nine of his most formative years. Given that the Harvard experience helped to mold his opinions on ecclesiastical polity, this decade of his life is extremely significant in understanding the man and his eventual administration in Northampton.

Although many modern historians acknowledge that Stoddard eventually became an advocate of Scottish Presbyterianism, few have linked his later writings, sermons, and practices to his Harvard training.¹⁶⁴ The Scottish Presbyterianism he later expressed were formulated and developed during the Harvard years. Despite a lack of records detailing Stoddard's time at Harvard, his still extant college book register does confirm that he studied the Presbyterian theologian, Samuel Rutherford, before his arrival in Northampton. His book list from 1664, considered one of the earliest known documents of its kind by an American college student, provides an illuminating list of works owned

¹⁶² See Clifford K. Shipton's continuation of John L. Sibley's multivolume biographical series entitled *Sibley's Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts*, (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1873-1975 [vols. 1-3 by Sibley; vols. 4-17 by Shipton]), vol. 2, 111.

¹⁶³ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, 112.

¹⁶⁴ See Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 147-150, 151-152. Paul Lucas is one of the few historians who makes the Harvard connection. He argued that Stoddard read Presbyterian works at Harvard and became devoted disciple of the Scottish Presbyterian, Samuel Rutherford.

by the young scholar. This register of over eighty books, covering numerous subjects from language to science to the classics and religion, is highlighted by five works from the Scottish-Presbyterian apologist, Samuel Rutherford, including his famous publication on ecclesiastical administration entitled *The Due Right of Presbyteries*.¹⁶⁵ That Stoddard read Rutherford while at Harvard indicates that he familiarized himself with the concepts he would advocate in Northampton before his ministry even began. With the exception of Cicero, only Rutherford penned at least five works on the list. William Aimes is the only other author who penned more than two of the remaining books on the extensive register.¹⁶⁶ Moreover, as Paul Lucas observed, Stoddard's library, unlike other personal collections of the time, lacked "the standard works of English and New English Congregationalism," such as Hooker and Cotton.¹⁶⁷

Stoddard's book collection is thus unique compared with those of his colleagues, whose book lists are yet extant.¹⁶⁸ Increase Mather's 1664 library catalogue, first published by Julius Tuttle in 1910, for example, lists few Presbyterian authors. Whereas Stoddard had five books written by Rutherford, Mather--whose library was much more extensive due to an inheritance from his father--only had one work by the Scottish Presbyterian. The single work by Rutherford among Mather's more than one hundred

¹⁶⁵ Norman S. Fiering, "Solomon Stoddard's Library at Harvard in 1664" *Harvard Library Bulletin* vol. 20 (1972) 255-269. In this article Fiering provides an annotated list of the eighty books owned by Stoddard in 1664. This list, he argues, is unique in that it is among a very limited number of extant book lists from the early years of Harvard.

¹⁶⁶ The list provided by Fiering shows that Stoddard owned five works by Rutherford, five by Cicero, and four by Aimes. No more than two books by any other author exists is on the list.

¹⁶⁷ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 60

¹⁶⁸ Fiering, "Solomon Stoddard's Library," 255-269.

listed books was his *Exeritationes de Gratia*, rather than his famous work on Presbyterian polity, *The Due Right of Presbyteries*.¹⁶⁹ As we might expect, Mather did possess numerous works by orthodox Congregational apologists such as Hooker and Cotton.¹⁷⁰

Samuel Rutherford, Stoddard's Scottish "mentor," as Lucas called him, opposed the New England Way, favoring instead, binding consociations of ministers, increased clerical authority, and non-restrictive membership.¹⁷¹ Unlike New England's Congregationalists, Rutherford opposed strict congregational autonomy, advocating instead that churches commune with each other through subjection to authoritative synods. Christ, Rutherford argued, gave the ordinances, the ministry, and church administration to the entire visible church rather than to individual congregations. Within the congregations themselves, Rutherford believed that the officers of the church, not the fraternity, had been endowed with the keys of the kingdom. The intervening power of the brethren in Congregationalism, Rutherford argued, proved a usurpation of God's keys. Finally, Rutherford advocated that all moral Christians be admitted as members of the visible church. Rather than subjecting potential candidates to tests that would

¹⁶⁹ Julius Tuttle, "Libraries of the Mathers" *Proceedings of the American Antiquarian Society* vol. 20 (Fall 1910) 269-356. Although this article examines the libraries of Richard, Increase, Cotton and their descendants, page 280-285 contains "a catalogue of books belonging to Mr. Increase Mather 8. 18. 1664 at Boston in New England." Despite owning many more books than Stoddard, Mather only had one book by Rutherford on his extensive list.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 149-151. Although Lucas considered Stoddard a disciple of Rutherford while at Harvard, he, like most historians, failed to connect Stoddard's Harvard Presbyterianism with his acceptance to Northampton's call. An understanding of Northampton's already Presbyterian-leaning fraternity would first be requisite to fully comprehend the connection.

demonstrate their regeneration, Rutherford advocated that church membership be extended to all sincere Christians. Although some hypocrites would certainly be admitted under this broad plan, Rutherford suggested that only God truly knew who they were.¹⁷²

Strict membership requirements, fraternal prerogative in church administration, and congregational autonomy, all of which played a significant role in New England's Congregational society, thus came under attack by Rutherford. These three aspects of church government, not surprisingly, became exactly what Rutherford's disciple, Solomon Stoddard, would advocate during his Northampton ministry. During his later life, Lucas argued, "Stoddard showed his indebtedness to Rutherford whose books he read and admired while a student and tutor at Harvard."¹⁷³ In his 1700 publication, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches*, Stoddard argued, just as Rutherford had, that all Christians who live a good life, understand the doctrine, and who desire to be close to Christ, are acceptable as candidates for church membership without proof of regeneration. Visible saints, he explained, often became excluded from membership under Congregational rule because of its strict admissions requirements. Like Rutherford, Stoddard believed that rejecting a worthy candidate, except in cases of overt

¹⁷² Samuel Rutherford, *The Due Right of Presbyteries, or a Peaceable Plea for the Government of the Church of Scotland* (London, 1644), on Synods and binding associations see 300-301, 289-308, 384-386, on church officers see 7, 10-19, 190-199, 289-291, and concerning admission to the visible church see 242-244, 253-254, and 265-266.

¹⁷³ Paul Lucas, "An Appeal to the Learned: The Mind of Solomon Stoddard" *The William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 30 (Apr, 1973), 266.

immorality or ignorance, “denied the meaning of Christ’s death.”¹⁷⁴ “A visible profession of the Truth and Doctrine of godliness,” Rutherford had argued in 1644, “is that which essentially constitutes a visible church and every member of the visible Church.”¹⁷⁵

Echoing the Scottish divine almost sixty years later, Stoddard argued that “such as do make a serious profession of the true religion, are Visible Saints.”¹⁷⁶

Like Rutherford also, Stoddard believed in limited fraternal power and increased clerical authority. The laity, he argued, must not “judge and rule in the church,” especially since many were young, uneducated, or otherwise unqualified. Although Stoddard’s system would allow the fraternity to choose the elders of the congregation, the minister, he believed, possessed final authority. “The members of the Church are to be obedient to the elders and therefore not to controul them in their government.”¹⁷⁷ “The Minister,” not the members, he furthermore argued, “is to judge who is to be Baptized and Admitted to the Lords Supper.”¹⁷⁸

Finally, Like Rutherford, Stoddard also promoted binding synods and national church structures.¹⁷⁹ Moreover, rather than simply advocating these views in writing,

¹⁷⁴ Stoddard, *Instituted Churches*, 5-6, 18-19, 22. See also Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned, Being a Vindication of the Right of Visible Saints to the Lord’s Supper, though they be Destitute of a Saving work of God’s Spirit on their Hearts; Against the Exceptions of Mr. Increase Mather* (Boston: 1709).

¹⁷⁵ Rutherford, *Due Right*, 285.

¹⁷⁶ Stoddard, *Instituted Churches*, chapter II.

¹⁷⁷ Stoddard, *Instituted Churches*, 25-30.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter IV.

Stoddard would eventually attempt to establish an association of ministers in Hampshire County which would possess binding power over all member churches. The Association's fifth article, in fact, proclaimed that it was the duty of each minister and church to "be subject to a Council of the Churches of the County, until there be some superior Council set up in the Province Unto which we may appeal."¹⁸⁰

Given that Stoddard possessed Rutherford's works while at Harvard and that his later philosophy bore numerous similarities to the Scottish system of church government, he clearly entered his Northampton ministry with numerous Presbyterian tendencies. Beyond simply reading Rutherford, however, Stoddard most likely reinforced his views on expanding membership through practical experience. During the debates over the Halfway Covenant that took place in Boston during his Harvard tenure, Stoddard unquestionably found himself in the company of various New English divines that pushed for and ultimately approved a covenant that made membership more accessible. According to Paul Lucas, Harvard was the "hotbed" of debate over church membership.¹⁸¹ That Stoddard actually became an active participant in these events seems evident by the few sources available. His commonplace book, as an example, is filled with notes from lectures and sermons delivered by John Norton and Jonathan Mitchell, who stood at the forefront of the struggle favoring the new liberalizing covenant.¹⁸² Stoddard, furthermore, must have been extremely interested and tied to the

¹⁷⁹ Rutherford, *Due Right*, 365-370. The author argues that the decisions of synods and Presbyteries are binding acts of church authority.

¹⁸⁰ See the document entitled "A meeting of the ministers of Hampshire at Northampton" in the *Northampton Church Records*, 21.

¹⁸¹ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 150.

later arguments over halfway membership that led to the creation of Boston Third Church, given that his father, Anthony, played a significant role in the dispute.¹⁸³ Despite Boston's reputation as the hub of Congregationalism in New England, then, the debates over the Halfway Covenant must have affected numerous students training at Harvard during Stoddard's tenure. Stoddard most likely knew all of these future ministers, as each class during his tenure as student and librarian at Harvard averaged just over eight students.¹⁸⁴ Many of these students, moreover, eventually attempted to enlarge baptism and some would seek to govern their churches in very Presbyterian fashions.

Certainly at least some Presbyterian sympathy, the evidence indicates, must have been present at Harvard during the late 1650s and early 1660s.¹⁸⁵ An examination of the classmates with whom Stoddard became most familiar, from 1659 to 1664, finds a significant number of Presbyterians present. Of the eighteen graduates who entered the ministry upon completion of their degrees during these five years, thirteen took posts outside of Massachusetts, including ten who preached for all or at least part of their

¹⁸² See Fiering, "Solomon Stoddard's Library," and Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 150.

¹⁸³ For an excellent overview of the Third Church Controversy, see Larzer Ziff, *Puritanism in America: New Culture in a New World* (New York: The Viking Press, 1973), 183-191.

¹⁸⁴ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2. A quick look at this volume of Sibley's *Harvard Graduates* shows that during Stoddard's nine-year tenure at Harvard, only seventy-three students ever graduated. Each class, then, averaged just over eight students. Undoubtedly Stoddard knew most of those who graduated during this period very well.

¹⁸⁵ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 60. Although Lucas provides little specific evidence, he does postulate that Harvard had an abnormal amount of Presbyterian sentiment during Stoddard's time there.

careers in Connecticut, and at least eight openly leaned toward Presbyterianism during their ministries.¹⁸⁶

James Noyes, a 1659 graduate and son of the Presbyterian assistant minister James Noyes of Newbury, for example, became the pastor of the Stonington Connecticut Church after his graduation from Harvard. Robert G. Pope argues that Noyes became so liberal in his membership requirements that, like Stoddard in Northampton, Noyes “transformed the Stonington church into a comprehensive parish.”¹⁸⁷ He furthermore became a leading delegate at the Saybrook meetings in 1708 that adopted very Presbyterian-leaning articles for church government in Connecticut.¹⁸⁸ His brother, Moses, who graduated the same year and whose name also appears on the proceedings of the Saybrook Platform, like his brother and father, leaned toward Presbyterian forms of church government. Sibley, in fact, records that in matters of ecclesiastical discipline, “some say that he was a Presbyterian.”¹⁸⁹ Samuel Willard, also from the class of 1659, became a well-known minister in Groton and Boston. His openness in church admissions became so notorious that an acquaintance once wrote a letter to the Bishop of London explaining that he “baptiseth those who are refused by the other churches, for which he is

¹⁸⁶ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, see the graduating classes of 1659-1664. Those who exhibited Presbyterian sympathies during their ministries include Samuel Willard, Samuel Cheever, James Noyes, Moses Noyes, Simon Bradstreet (of New London, Connecticut), Israel Chauncy, Joseph Whiting, and John Woodbridge.

¹⁸⁷ Pope, *Half-way Covenant*, 119.

¹⁸⁸ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 502. James Noyes is listed here as a delegate at the Saybrook meeting.

¹⁸⁹ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, class of 1659 and Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 502.

hated.”¹⁹⁰ Willard, like Stoddard, argued that mere men, who could only see the outward signs of grace, had no right to judge a candidate’s fitness for membership, explaining that conclusions based on external signs “usurp God’s prerogative in judging the heart.”¹⁹¹

After Stoddard received his M.A. in 1665, at least six of the ten future ministers still attending Harvard between 1665 and 1668, (during Stoddard’s years as a librarian and fellow) also turned toward Presbyterian forms of church government.¹⁹² Abraham Pierson, for instance, the son of a Presbyterian-leaning minister from New Haven Connecticut and later from Newark, New Jersey, exhibited his father’s tendencies toward Presbyterian polity. Upon his graduation from Harvard, Pierson joined his father in the ministry at Newark. Although Pierson’s father practiced what Sibley called “moderate Presbyterianism,” when Abraham took sole possession of the ministry upon his father’s death, he began “introducing more rigid Presbyterianism into Newark.”¹⁹³

Even many of those classmates not considered true “Presbyterians,” favored the Halfway Covenant and an easing of admission standards. One such graduate, Nathaniel

¹⁹⁰ This letter is quoted in Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2, 17.

¹⁹¹ Samuel Willard, *The Peril of the Times Displayed or the Danger of Men’s taking up with Forms of Godliness, But Denying the Power of it* (Boston: B. Green and T. Allen, 1700), 143-147 and Stephen Foster, *The Long Argument* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 279.

¹⁹² Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, classes of 1665-1668. Among those who entered the ministry were Presbyterians such as Gershom Hobart, son of Peter Hobart of Hingham, his brother Nehemiah, and James Noyes’ son Nicholas. One of Peter Hobart’s sons, who also graduated at this time, interestingly enough, “renounced his religion and became a Romanist,” ultimately achieving the rank of Cardinal.

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, 255. Sibley recounts that “Pierson tradition says he (Abraham) had imbibed moderate Presbyterianism from his father and when at Cambridge College, he had received strong prejudices against Plymothean independency; and after his father’s death he was introducing more rigid Presbyterianism into Newark.”

Chauncey, a member of the class of 1661, hired after his graduation to assist the aged John Warham of Windsor, proved himself pivotal in helping the congregation force the liberal Halfway Covenant on the old minister, who had discontinued the practice years earlier.¹⁹⁴ Josiah Flynt, a major advocate of more liberal standards for church admissions from the class of 1664, took a post in Dorchester Massachusetts, where he at long last convinced the congregation to adopt the Halfway Covenant in a church that refused Richard Mather's repeated attempts.¹⁹⁵ Stoddard's readings of Rutherford and attendance of Norton and Mitchell's lectures, coupled with his ministerial training during a time when Presbyterian sentiment resonated with many at Harvard, helped the young man develop the philosophy he would later implement in Northampton.

Although Stoddard's inclination toward Presbyterianism must have developed during the Harvard years, the two years he spent in Barbados after his Harvard tenure probably solidified those Presbyterian beliefs even further. Given that Stoddard had already graduated and that he "could have had any post he wanted," it seems strange that he chose to remain at Harvard after receiving an M.A. and even more strange that he chose to leave New England rather than find a job in his native country.¹⁹⁶ Why, then, did Stoddard go to Barbados?

¹⁹⁴ See the discussion on the Windsor dispute in chapter two of this dissertation and Shipton's *Harvard Graduates*, class of 1661.

¹⁹⁵ Robert G. Pope, *The Half-way Covenant: Church Membership in Puritan New England* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 187-188. Pope argues that Flynt was a big advocate of the Halfway Covenant and instrumental in its implementation at Dorchester. See also Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2, 149-152.

As a Presbyterian-leaning minister in a Congregational society, Stoddard probably felt little enthusiasm for ministerial positions at locations where he felt his ideas would stand little chance to succeed. Presbyterian clergymen such as Peter Hobart of Hingham and Thomas Parker of Newbury, after all, had already proven how divisive Presbyterian polity could be to New English congregations.¹⁹⁷ Their failures had undoubtedly come to Stoddard's attention through his various classmates with direct ties to the controversies. Two of James Noyes's sons, James and Nicholas, who graduated in 1659 and 1667 respectively, and John Woodbridge's son, John, who graduated in 1664, knew Stoddard and surely kept him apprised on the Newbury situation. Peter Hobart's two sons, Nehemiah and Grishom, who both graduated in 1667, likewise must have communicated their father's troubles in Hingham.¹⁹⁸

Hoping to institute his Presbyterian ideas, but seeking to avoid a repeat of the Hingham and Newbury situations, Stoddard probably waited at Harvard for the right position to come available. Although ministerial posts opened in Groton Massachusetts in 1663 and Dover New Hampshire in 1666, as well as an assistant position in Concord Massachusetts in 1667, and possibly elsewhere after Stoddard's graduation, the young clergyman chose to remain in Cambridge until he embarked for Barbados in 1667.¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁶ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 146. Stoddard's pedigree, education, and teaching abilities undoubtedly made the young graduate a very attractive prospect for any clerical position in New England

¹⁹⁷ See chapter 1 of this dissertation and Joshua Coffin, ed., *A Sketch of the History of Newbury, Newburyport, and West Newbury* (Boston: 1845), 10-112.

¹⁹⁸ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2, classes of 1659, 1664, 1667.

¹⁹⁹ From the scant records, it is impossible to tell if Stoddard was offered any of the above-mentioned positions. That there were positions open for recent Harvard graduates,

Although it is not specifically known why Stoddard chose to go to Barbados rather than find a ministerial position, it is probably safe to assume that he felt apprehensive about all three of the posts that came available. Groton, at least, was an unknown entity. The Eastern Massachusetts town had only recently been settled and sought its first pastor in 1663.²⁰⁰ Dover was only fifteen miles from Boston, the hub of New England Congregationalism, and Concord was a well-established Congregational stronghold with a very orthodox clergyman, Peter Bulkley, as its minister.²⁰¹ Furthermore, Stoddard probably knew of Barbados's reputation as a stronghold for the Presbyterian movement in the western Atlantic.

Whatever the reason, Stoddard chose to accompany the former governor of Barbados, Daniel Searle, on a two year expedition to that island. While in Barbados, Stoddard served as Searle's chaplain and as a preacher to the English, Irish, and Scottish dissenters who had been sent there to cultivate the rich sugar fields. His time in the West Indies allowed him to work with Presbyterian clergymen and to see operating

however, is clear when one examines Sibley's notes on the graduating classes of the time. Samuel Willard, who graduated in 1659, accepted the position in Groton, Moses Fisk, from Stoddard's 1662 class, accepted the Dover post, and Joseph Estabrook, from the class of 1664, was ordained the colleague of Edward Bulkley of Concord in 1667. Although these three open positions can be easily established by looking at the ministerial jobs taken by Harvard graduates in Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2, certainly other jobs not mentioned by Sibley were available for a qualified clergyman like Solomon Stoddard.

²⁰⁰ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2, 16-18. Samuel Willard became the first pastor of the Groton Church in 1663.

²⁰¹ Cotton Mather, *Magnalia*, vol. 2, 399-404. In Mather's short biography of Peter Bulkley's life, the author argues that the Concord minister was an orthodox Congregationalist, labeling his first publication, *The Gospel Covenant*, "a judicious and savory treaty."

Presbyterian churches. Those experiences undoubtedly reinforced his pre-formed Presbyterian sentiments.

Barbados, which had been in English hands since the mid-1620s, served as a location where English prisoners, especially those captured in foreign wars, could be sent to work off their sentences.²⁰² While the plantation owners hoped to make money, live excessively, and return to England in financial glory, the multitude of Scottish and Irish servants on the island raged almost out of control. “For every honest man,” on Barbados, it was recorded in 1710, there “were ten thousand knaves.”²⁰³ Since island authorities found it difficult to control the more than eight thousand Irish servants and thousands of Scottish prisoners living on an island, which measured less than 266 square miles, ecclesiastical influence played a very significant role.²⁰⁴

Unlike Congregational New England, however, the island had a history of religious diversity. By the time Stoddard arrived, eleven officially recognized parish churches functioned on the island, of which the Anglicans, Quakers, and Presbyterians made up a majority.²⁰⁵ None of the officially recognized churches of the island,

²⁰² Vincent T. Harlow, *A History of Barbados, 1625-1685* (New York: Negro University Press, 1969), 8-10.

²⁰³ For this quotation from Thomas Walduck, see Richard S. Dunn, *Sugar and Slaves: The Rise of the Planter Class in the English West Indies, 1624-1713* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 340.

²⁰⁴ Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker, *The Many-Headed Hydra: Sailors, Slaves, commoners, and the Hidden History of the Revolutionary Atlantic* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2000), 123. For area of the island, see geography.about.com/library/Barbados.htm. The island, according to the site, only has 97 km (about 60 miles) of coastline. See also Harlow, *History of Barbados*, 117.

however, were Congregational. A 1669 report to the King, moreover, described the dominant church on Barbados as “Presbyterian.”²⁰⁶ Because of its large number of Irish and Scottish Presbyterians, the island became such a foundation for the Presbyterian movement in the Western Atlantic that it served as a significant proving ground for several of America’s earliest Presbyterians. The Irish-born Reverend Francis Makemie, known as “the father of the Presbyterian Church in America,” made several trips to Barbados in the 1680s and 1690s. After he “diligently spread Presbyterianism in Barbados,” as well as Virginia, Maryland, and elsewhere, Makemie became one of the chief organizers of the first American Presbytery in 1706.²⁰⁷ If Stoddard imbibed in Scottish-Presbyterianism before his arrival on the island, then his experiences while on the island must have further enforced his ecclesiastical leanings.

When his two year stint in Barbados came to an end in 1669, Stoddard determined to move to England. While passing through Boston on his journey to England, however, the Northampton delegation, which had just lost its pastor, Eleazer Mather, “persuaded” Stoddard “to remain in the colony and take its vacant pulpit.”²⁰⁸ The representatives,

²⁰⁵ Babette M. Levy, “Early Puritanism in the Southern and Island Colonies” *American Antiquarian Society* vol. 70 (April, 1960), 296.

²⁰⁶ Larry D. Gragg, “A Puritan in the West Indies: The Career of Samuel Winthrop” *William and Mary Quarterly* vol. 50 (Oct., 1993), 768-786. See also Harlow, *History of Barbados*, 334. See also, Levy, “Early Puritanism,” 296.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 139-148.

²⁰⁸ Lawrence E. Wikander, ed., *The Northampton Book: Chapters from Three Hundred Years in the Life of a New England Town, 1654-1954*, (Northampton: 1954), 13. See also Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 210.

Trumbull argues, barley snagged Stoddard before his voyage to England. His baggage apparently was already “on board a vessel which was to sail the next day.” Although he eventually consented to their offer, he did not give up his journey easily. Only after finally “yielding to the earnest solicitations” of an unnamed “friend” and the “committee from this town,” Trumbull notes, “the proposed voyage was relinquished and he decided to come to Northampton.”²⁰⁹

Given that Stoddard leaned toward Presbyterianism and that he had not sought other pulpits before the Northampton delegation approached him concerning their vacancy, why did the young minister finally acquiesce to Northampton’s request? Although it is impossible to know with certainty why Stoddard accepted the post, it seems likely that he accepted the trial offer after the hiring committee filled him in on Northampton’s ecclesiastical leanings. Their “persuasive” powers, along with his previous familiarity of the town’s ecclesiastical history finally compelled him to at least accept their trial offer.

Despite never setting foot in Northampton before his call in 1669, Stoddard had undoubtedly heard of the town, its inhabitants, and even its very liberal Halfway Covenant from a number of students with him at Harvard who were familiar with the small interior town. Given that only seventy-three students graduated during Stoddard’s nine year Harvard tenure, he probably knew each student very intimately.²¹⁰ Caleb Watson, from the class of 1661, had grown up in Hadley, directly across the Connecticut

²⁰⁹ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 210.

²¹⁰ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, vol. 2., classes 1659-1668. Only 73 students graduated from Harvard during Stoddard’s tenure, an average of just over eight per year. Those classmates familiar with Northampton surely communicated their observations of the Presbyterian-leaning congregation to Stoddard.

River from Northampton. John Holyoke, one of only five classmates to graduate with Stoddard in 1662, was the son of one of Northampton's principle founders, Elizur Holyoke, of nearby Springfield. Elizur's cousin, Joseph Pynchon, from the class of 1664, was also the son of one of Northampton's chief founders, John Pynchon. Finally, John Filer, a 1666 graduate, had grown up in Windsor, a town that provided more original inhabitants of Northampton than any other.²¹¹ These five students, with whom Stoddard had been acquainted, must have told the aspiring minister about Northampton's settlement and its unique ecclesiastical history. His familiarity with the town and his deliberations with the Northampton delegation, which most likely reinforced his preconceived notions on their Presbyterian inclinations, led the young minister to forgo his move to England and to accept their call as a probationary preacher.

His trial period, which lasted from his call in 1669, until his ordination on September 11, 1672, allowed both Stoddard and his new congregation to familiarize themselves with each other's ecclesiastical polity.²¹² Considering what Stoddard had observed in Hingham and Newbury, and what the Northampton church had just endured with Eleazer Mather, neither party seemed overly zealous to repeat a similar situation in the frontier parish. Perhaps for this reason Stoddard's trial period lasted for three full years before he finally became ordained. The long trial period helped the congregation realize that Stoddard shared many of their ecclesiastical views and also allowed the minister

²¹¹ *Ibid.*, vol. 2., class of 1661, 1662, 1664, and 1666.

²¹² Stoddard first began preaching in Northampton in the late summer, 1669, and was not finally ordained minister until three long years later, on September 11, 1672. *Northampton Church Records from the Old First Book, 1661-1846* (Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Salt Lake City, Utah, Film # 186160), 24. See also, Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 210-213.

himself to make certain that his congregation did, indeed, lean toward Presbyterian governance as his classmates and the delegation had most likely indicated. During the probationary period, Stoddard surely read and scrutinized the tolerant Halfway Covenant his Northampton congregation had unanimously approved. That he quickly implemented this covenant shortly after his arrival, demonstrates at the very least, his familiarity and compliance with the controversial document.²¹³ Northampton's extension of the call to Stoddard as full-time minister after a long trial period, and his acceptance of that call, despite his qualifications for any post in New England, indicates that both parties felt optimistic that a union between the two would result in a successful and long-lasting pastorate.

Although Stoddard's agreement with his congregation over admission policies allowed him to implement liberal membership requirements within a few years of his arrival at Northampton, the trust and deference he received because of his compliance to the church's will enabled the long-time pastor to persuade his congregation to extend his other Presbyterian practices. His unique situation in Northampton coupled with his very influential personality ultimately made Solomon Stoddard a significant power in Northampton and Western New England. Though labeled an "autocrat" by some contemporaries and a "negligible force" by some modern historians, the Northampton minister would attain substantial power over his Northampton Church and much of the Connecticut Valley over the course of his six-decade ministry. How he accomplished

²¹³*Ibid.*, 2-6, 7-12. Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, II, 53. Although Northampton's controversial Halfway Covenant was adopted previous to Stoddard's arrival, Trumbull argues that it was only "put into working order within two months of his settlement."

such a feat as a Presbyterian in a strictly Congregational colony, then, will be the subject of the following chapters.

Chapter V

The Influence of Solomon Stoddard in Northampton

Solomon Stoddard's sixty-year Northampton ministry has been shrouded in mystery for almost three centuries. Since his death in 1729, biographers and historians have viewed the Puritan minister in many different lights. Recent chroniclers have questioned his control over the Northampton Church, arguing that his tenure was marred by serious ecclesiastical disputes within his own congregation, a lack of trust for his ministry, and repeated setbacks in the implementation of his Presbyterian agenda. Paul Lucas, one of western New England's foremost scholars, suggested that Stoddard was "opposed by nearly everyone, including the members of his own church." Agreeing with other historians, Lucas argued furthermore that since Solomon Stoddard never "curbed" or "abrogated" the power of the brethren in Northampton, he therefore could not have been as powerful an influence as some have concluded.²¹⁴ The image of Stoddard as a powerful force over the church, in short, never reflected reality in Northampton.

²¹⁴ Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1735* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 158. See also Philip Gura, "Preparing the Way for Stoddard: Eleazer Mather's Serious Exhortation to Northampton" *New England Quarterly* vol. 57 (June 1984), 240-249. In this interesting article, Gura argues that the fight between Eleazer Mather and the Northampton congregation carried over to Stoddard's ministry. The result of the battle over the Halfway Covenant caused most in the congregation to question ministerial authority and to eventually demand that Stoddard defend every one of his innovations, thus lessening his supposed autocratic powers. Steven Foster, *The Long Argument: English Puritanism and the Shaping of New England Culture, 1570-1700* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1991), 171, also

Other historians, however, argue that Stoddard dominated his own church. In contrast to Lucas, James Goulding, who wrote a lengthy book on Stoddard's controversy with the Mather family, claimed that "Stoddard faced little opposition from the church when he introduced his innovations."²¹⁵ Perry Miller, moreover, felt that Stoddard dominated the church and town by "forcing his will" upon them. This behavior allowed him to acquire more influence over the region than any other minister for a period of more than thirty years.²¹⁶ His weight in matters of ecclesiastical discipline seemed so enormous in Northampton that it even carried over to many of the surrounding churches.²¹⁷ Because of his vast ecclesiastical influence, Stoddard became known as the "Northampton autocrat" by many contemporary associates; a title that has carried over to modern historians.²¹⁸

Given the differences of opinion and the uncertainty concerning Stoddard's ecclesiastical significance within the Northampton Church, a critical examination of his

argues that movements toward "liberal baptismal membership"—which Stoddard strongly advocated—"always ran head on into lay resistance."

²¹⁵ Goulding, "Stoddard and the Mathers," 339n.

²¹⁶ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 228-230. Using the written comments by Stoddard's descendants and those made by grieving admirers just after his death, Miller attempted to prove that Stoddard forced his will on his congregation and that he really did rule the church and town as an ecclesiastical autocrat.

²¹⁷ See chapter V for more on Stoddard's influence throughout the valley. See also, George S. Claghorn, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XVI, 385, Patricia J. Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 19 and William Williams, *The Death of a Prophet Lamented and Improved in a Sermon Preached at Northampton, February 13, 1729. On the Day of the Internment of the Reverend, Pious, Learned Mr. Solomon Stoddard* (Boston, 1730), 19.

²¹⁸ Miller, *Colony to Province*, 227-235.

lengthy ministry seems essential. Did Stoddard, as Perry Miller suggested, make himself the dictator of Northampton or did he work within the congregational system to reform the church?²¹⁹ Did he actually find success in implementing his Presbyterian ideas in Northampton? Was he in fact opposed by “nearly everyone” in his congregation, as Lucas suggested, or did he face very little opposition from the church as Goulding assumed? If Stoddard ultimately succeeded in implementing his Presbyterian agenda at Northampton, how did he do so in light of Parker and Hobart’s dismal failures in Newbury and Hingham?

A large part of the answer to these intriguing questions rests in the personality of Solomon Stoddard and the unique theological assumptions of his Northampton congregation. Stoddard’s widely-acknowledged personal charisma and success as an evangelistic preacher coupled with his strong military, business, and family connections helped him build his influence in Northampton and throughout the valley. His congregation’s predisposition toward tolerant baptismal and membership requirements, furthermore, would eventually allow the increasingly powerful minister to persuade his church to consider and accept his Presbyterian-like initiatives. His charismatic leadership, powerful connections, and unique situation in a tolerant Northampton Church, then, would be the secret to any successes that he would achieve during his six decade ministry.

A large amount of Stoddard’s unparalleled influence, it seems, emerged from his unique charisma and alluring personality. As a stern yet sensitive man, Stoddard, according to his son-in-law, William Williams, always appeared “comely and grave,”

²¹⁹ Perry Miller, “Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729” *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 34 (1941), 298.

commanding “reverence from all that saw him.” Williams acknowledged furthermore that “his conversation was also grave, but delightful and very profitable, accompanied with a very sweet affability and a freedom from moroseness.” The Northampton clergyman also possessed a “quickness of apprehension, strength of memory, together with a clear and solid judgment.”²²⁰ His personal abilities and charisma enabled the long-time minister to influence his congregation and all those with whom he came in contact. The people in his Northampton congregation, Jonathan Edwards later affirmed, had such a “high veneration for him,” that they that they eventually began to “imitate” his mannerisms. Northampton’s ordinary churchgoers as well as its rulers, Edwards further acknowledged, considered it a great compliment to “be like him.”²²¹

Stoddard’s physical traits suited him well for life on the frontier and enabled him to connect with the type of people who lived and toiled along side him. “In Northampton,” Miller explained, “all men...worked shoulder-to-shoulder when raising the frame of a house or of a church.”²²² Stoddard’s desire and ability to work along side his parishioners must have given the frontier minister a “man-of-the-people” type of reputation. In fact, he genuinely liked working with the less cultured people of the frontier. Presiding over a cosmopolitan church, Lucas argued, never appealed to

²²⁰ Williams, *Death of a Prophet*, 24-27.

²²¹ Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 382.

²²² Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 257.

Stoddard.²²³ His approachability and blue-collar mentality earned him the respect of his parishioners despite his aristocratic background.

Stoddard's excellent pedigree, refinement, and secular education also contributed to his personal aura. Many residents of Northampton recognized and venerated him for his vast knowledge and considerable learning. He had, after all, obtained two degrees from Harvard and had served as the college's first librarian before preaching in Barbados for two years. Stoddard's education and experience, his son-in-law, William Williams argued, provided him with "an uncommon measure of useful learning...especially in divinity." His unparalleled training, Williams furthermore suggested, earned Stoddard "a spiritual and experimental knowledge of the truth."²²⁴ This generally-acknowledged wisdom, especially in ecclesiastical matters, gave him a distinct advantage over his largely under-educated parishioners. Their recognition and appreciation of his superior intellect and education made him a revered authority on all important pragmatic and ecclesiastical decisions; a minister worthy of his congregation's deference.

Stoddard's charismatic personality also enabled him to be a very effective preacher. His ability to manipulate an audience, bringing many to conversion, earned Stoddard a reputation as one of the greatest preachers of his day. As a revered preacher, Stoddard not only gave sermons and lectures in his Northampton Church and the surrounding churches, but also received invitations to preach at Harvard's commencement ceremonies each year. This annual tradition allowed the frontier

²²³ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 146.

²²⁴ *Ibid.*, 24.

clergyman to address packed audiences “expecting and glad to hear from him.”²²⁵

Despite his open membership practices, Trumbull argued, he “preached earnestly and powerfully upon the necessity of regeneration and a holy life in order to salvation.”²²⁶

The role of a minister seemed crucial in Stoddard’s estimation. “Men would not put their lives in the hands of an unskilled physician,” he acknowledged, “or trust their ship with an unskillful pilot, or and intricate case...with an unskillful lawyer.” Like doctors, shipmasters, and lawyers, he argued in *The Defects of Preachers Reproved*, ministers also needed to be skillful in guiding sinners to Christ. Even more important than a doctor, who exerted some power over the temporal life, Stoddard affirmed, were God’s preachers who could bring conversion to a sinner’s eternal soul. “Conversion,” he argued, “is a great change from darkness to light, from death to life, from the borders of despair to a spirit of Faith in Christ.” Bringing people to a faith in Christ through sincere conversion, he believed, was the duty of every minister.²²⁷

One of the most effective ways to bring a sinner to Christ, he suggested, could be achieved through humiliation and fear. “When Men don’t preach much about the Danger of Damnation,” he wrote, “there is want of good Preaching.” An emotionless approach, furthermore, would not entice sinners to come to God. “If sinners don’t hear often of Judgment and Damnation, few will be converted.” As “sons of Thunder,” Stoddard argued, ministers needed to compel sinners to “betake themselves to Christ for refuge.”

²²⁵ Quoted from *The Boston Weekly Newsletter* (February, 1729) and Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, II, 62-63.

²²⁶ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, II, 56.

²²⁷ Solomon Stoddard, *The Defects of Preachers Reproved* (Boston, 1724), 1-9.

Charismatic preachers, full of emotion, he concluded, could strike fear into the hearts of their listeners. “Reason will govern Men in other Things, but it is Fear that must make them diligently to seek Salvation.”²²⁸ Stoddard’s preaching, therefore, became emotion-packed and energetic. His evangelistic teaching style, Patricia Tracy argued, bordered on “psychological manipulation,” as he stressed the dangers of hell and life without conversion in order to traumatize those in attendance.²²⁹ Rather than reading his sermons, moreover, Stoddard only used scanty notes and often preached from memory, allowing him to focus on his audience and to use more expression and zeal.²³⁰

Within his own church, Stoddard’s captivating sermons earned him hundreds of conversions during his long ministry. Jonathan Edwards surmises that because Stoddard was “eminent and renowned for his gifts and grace, so he was blessed, from the beginning, with extraordinary success in his ministry in the conversion of many souls.”²³¹ On five separate occasions, the records specify, large numbers of parishioners converted to Christ. The *Judd Manuscripts* indicate that “there were revivals in religion in 1679, 1683, 1690, 1712, and 1718.” Judd also records that these “harvests,” as they became known, “were extensive, and many were added to the Church.”²³² Stoddard’s Northampton revivals became so successful, Benjamin Coleman tells us, that “people ask

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

²²⁹ Patricia Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 31.

²³⁰ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 119.

²³¹ Smith, ed., *Works*, II, 145.

²³² *Judd Manuscripts*, V, 1.

what they must do to be saved.”²³³ His great effectiveness as a preacher made Stoddard, according to Miller, “the first great revivalist in New England.”²³⁴

Given that Stoddard was educationally and intellectually superior to most in Northampton and the entire Connecticut Valley, and that he possessed the physical and mental abilities to be a successful frontier preacher, it comes as no surprise that he quickly gained the trust and respect of his parishioners. The strong deference for Stoddard as a significant ecclesiastical leader proved critical throughout his Northampton ministry.

His enormous ecclesiastical influence notwithstanding, Stoddard also emerged as an extremely successful force outside the religious realm. The Northampton minister became a powerful military figure, an accomplished businessman with strong family connections, and an individual of substantial personal wealth. Stoddard’s ability to succeed in both the ecclesiastical and secular world further enhanced his reputation in Northampton and the Connecticut Valley.

Early in his Northampton tenure, Stoddard gained a distinct reputation throughout New England as a strong military leader and knowledgeable advisor over Indian affairs. His letters to Boston during King Phillip’s War kept his contemporaries on the coast informed of Indian movements and battles taking place on the frontier. One such letter, dated September 15, 1675 described a particular battle at Whatley in which “we lost six men.” He notified them, however, that “of the Indians as we hear by a squaw that was

²³³ Quoted in Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 19.

²³⁴ Miller, “Solomon Stoddard,” 319.

taken, and by three children that came to our town from them the day after, there were slain twenty six.”²³⁵ Stoddard’s ability to recount the events that took place in each battle, and to glean information from the natives, as he did in the above instance, made him a valuable asset to his fellow countrymen. His advice during King Philip’s War and other Indian battles strongly affected the policies of the government. After a particularly fierce battle in 1703, in fact, Stoddard recommended the use of dogs to “hunt Indians as they do Bears.”²³⁶ Given his esteem throughout New England as an effective Indian agent, Massachusetts passed an act three years after this recommendation, in 1706, for the raising and training of dogs to help secure the western frontier. Two years later, in fact, both Massachusetts and Connecticut paid money from their treasuries to fund this project and the dogs were actually used on a regular basis into the late eighteenth century.²³⁷ Given the nature of the Indian conflicts and the need for good transportation as a military and economic benefit, Stoddard recommend that a road linking many of New England’s western cities to Boston be built. Based on his advice, a road connecting these various cities was constructed in the early eighteenth century.²³⁸ Given that his proposals often

²³⁵ This letter is quoted in George Madison Bodge, *Soldiers in King Philip’s War: A Concise History of the Indian Wars of New England 1620-1677* (Baltimore: Genealogical Publishing Company, 1906), see chapter 7.

²³⁶ Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, South Hadley, Amherst and Granby* (Springfield, MA: Picton Press, 1905), 272.

²³⁷ Frederick Jackson Turner, *The Frontier in American History* (New York: Dover Publications Inc, 1996), chapter 2. See also, Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 515n.

²³⁸ See Miller, “Solomon Stoddard,” 279 and Goulding, “The Controversy between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers,” 211.

resulted in the implementation of actual governmental policy, Stoddard's reputation as a secular leader must have been considerable.

As a distinguished military leader and liaison between the English and native tribes, Stoddard garnered recognition from both sides of the conflict for his vast abilities. "The very savages," Timothy Dwight explained, "felt toward him a peculiar awe." As an individual who was "regarded with reverence which will scarcely be rendered to any other man," the native Indian tribes considered the Northampton minister to be a sort of deity. Dwight in fact recounts that on one occasion when Stoddard was riding from Northampton to Hatfield, "an ambush of savages lined the road. It is said that a Frenchman directing his gun toward him was warned by one of the Indians...not to fire, because 'that man was the Englishman's God.'"²³⁹

His role as a leader in this continuous conflict added to Stoddard's aura among local townspeople in Northampton. Although many western historians suggest that frontier life led to enhanced freedom, the walls around Northampton symbolized the confining nature of life stemming from conflicts with the Indians and the French. Living far from any useful help caused much fear and anxiety among the townsmen. As a heroic protagonist in this life and death struggle, Stoddard exerted tremendous influence over this isolated settlement. His magnetism as a military figure coupled with his role as a guardian over their souls, strengthened his rule of Northampton. Stephen J. Stein, in fact, argues that his focus on the theological, psychological, and ecclesiastical aspects of the town "allowed his people to cope" with the stresses and anxiety constant warfare

²³⁹ Barbara Miller Solomon, ed., *Timothy Dwight's Travels in New England and New York*, 5 vols. (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1969), I, 241.

brought.²⁴⁰ Their ability to find comfort in Stoddard undoubtedly brought him added clout in the frontier city and the entire region.

More than just a military and ecclesiastical leader, Stoddard also exerted an enormous amount of influence through his many family connections to Northampton's leading men. Stoddard's direct familial relationship to several of western New England's most influential ministers certainly enhanced his power outside of Northampton, but his connection to the Warham family and to Northampton's greatest politician gave him the strength he needed to rule the frontier town as a comprehensive leader.²⁴¹

When Stoddard accepted Eleazer Mather's vacated pulpit in 1669, he also filled the vacancy Mather left in his own family. Esther Warham, the daughter of Reverend John Warham of Windsor Connecticut and widow of Eleazer Mather, married the new Northampton minister shortly after his arrival.²⁴² Together the couple raised Esther's three fatherless children and the eleven Stoddard would sire. His marriage to Esther gave him a connection to one of the most recognized families in town. Although John Warham himself never resided in Northampton, many of the town's inhabitants had emigrated from Windsor, where Esther's father exerted a substantial amount of

²⁴⁰ Stephen J. Stein, ed., *Jonathan Edwards, Writings, Text, Context, and Interpretation*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 70-71.

²⁴¹ Stoddard's connection to several of Western New England's most prominent ministers is crucial to understanding his influence outside of Northampton and is examined in detail in the following chapter.

²⁴² *Judd Manuscripts, IV*.

influence.²⁴³ Stoddard's link to this important family became a crucial feature in his rise to power over the small frontier outpost.

Stoddard's son, John, born February 17, 1682, also facilitated his ascent in Northampton. The minister's eighth child became the town's most dominant eighteenth-century secular leader.²⁴⁴ Unlike his father and several other family members, John Stoddard showed no inclination toward the ministry. He focused instead on a career in politics, business, and the military. Following his graduation from Harvard in 1701, at the age of nineteen, John Stoddard became a member of the Deerfield Garrison, later serving as second in command over all of western Massachusetts.²⁴⁵ By 1710, he became Mayor of Northampton, and between 1716 and 1748, he served as Judge and Representative to the General Court almost continuously.²⁴⁶ John also became the most frequently elected selectman and moderator of town meetings in the first half of the eighteenth century.²⁴⁷ During many of these years he also served as Justice of the Peace. His vast knowledge of the Indian tribes and experience in war also secured him the

²⁴³ See chapter two of this dissertation. John Warham, it argues, became a major catalyst in the migration from England to Dorchester Massachusetts, and later to Windsor Connecticut. His influence over the inhabitants of the town was certainly sizeable.

²⁴⁴ The *Northampton Church Records*, (unclear page number) provides a list of Esther and Solomon Stoddard's children. Although Esther had three children from her previous marriage to Eleazer Mather, she bore eleven more with Stoddard. John was her seventh with her second husband. See also, *Judd Manuscripts*, 499-502.

²⁴⁵ See Clifford K. Shipton's continuation of John L. Sibley's multivolume biographical series entitled *Sibley's Harvard Graduates* (Boston, 1873-1975 [vols. 1-3 by Sibley; vols. 4-17 by Shipton]), vol 5, 96.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 97 and Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 149-150.

²⁴⁷ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 150.

position of Lieutenant-Colonel at the age of thirty four. He became so significant as a secular leader, Dwight argues, that “the civil and military concerns of this county, were for a long time under his supreme control.”²⁴⁸ In the words of his nephew, Jonathan Edwards, “He was probably one of the ablest politicians that ever New England bred.”²⁴⁹

John Stoddard’s many successful business ventures, vast wealth, and marriage alliance also contributed to his influence over the town and valley. “Everyone—county residents and provincial governors alike—knew that whatever was distributed in Hampshire County came only with the approval of Colonel Stoddard.”²⁵⁰ As a wise land speculator, John also became the richest man in Northampton and one of the largest landowners in all of Massachusetts.²⁵¹ His landholdings alone were conservatively appraised at a whopping 17,184 pounds at time when the average estate’s landholdings were valued under 383 pounds. John Stoddard’s personal property additionally appraised at 18,000 pounds, an enormous amount given the average of 284.²⁵² His marriage to Prudence Chester, the daughter of two of Wethersfield’s most prominent citizens, further

²⁴⁸ Miller, ed., *Timothy Dwight’s Travels*, I, 242.

²⁴⁹ Jonathan Edwards, *A Strong Rod Broken and Withered. A Sermon Preach’d at Northampton, on the Lord’s Day, June 26, 1748* (Boston: 1748), 18.

²⁵⁰ Gregory H. Nobles, *Divisions Throughout the Whole: Politics and Society in Hampshire County, Massachusetts* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 30 and George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 114-115.

²⁵¹ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 46.

²⁵² Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, V, 117-118, Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 150, and Terry L. Anderson, “Economic Growth in Colonial New England: ‘Statistical Renaissance’” *Journal of Economic History* vol. 39 (Mar., 1979), 250. The above averages, taken from a survey of Hampshire County wills, is even more astonishing when it is considered that the totals are based on estate values in 1774, twenty-six years after John’s death.

entrenched his influence in Northampton and the valley. Sibley claims that “if [John] Stoddard hitherto appeared the leader of the valley,” then his marriage into such a renowned family ultimately made the aristocratic figure now seem “its lord.”²⁵³ Solomon Stoddard’s relationship with his son, Northampton’s most significant secular leader, furthered his immense clout in the town. Pastor Stoddard, Tracy argued, “had an effective secular deputy in his son Colonel John.”²⁵⁴

If Solomon Stoddard’s influence benefited from his son’s illustrious rise through the secular ranks, then it grew even greater when John became his father’s strongest ecclesiastical ally as well. Given that John “inherited his father’s idea that one should not be to niggardly in extending baptism and Church membership to those who were a little unorthodox but sincere in their beliefs,” they formed an effective team of likeminded rulers.²⁵⁵ Although not in the ministry, John Stoddard possessed such “a great degree of understanding in things belonging to Christianity,” Edwards later acknowledged, “that I scarce knew the divine whom I ever found more able to enlighten the mind in cases of conscience.”²⁵⁶ With a distinguished secular and ecclesiastical leader at his side, Solomon Stoddard presided over almost every aspect of Northampton society.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 108.

²⁵⁴ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 47.

²⁵⁵ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, V, 108, and Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 132-133. Edwards mentions an instance in which he discussed with Colonel Stoddard the fact that Irish Presbyterians wanted baptism for their children even though they “lived in neglect of the ordinances of the Lord’s Supper.” John Stoddard thought “they ought to be looked upon as Christians and their children received to baptism; because however trivial the foundation of their scruples were, yet though ignorance they might be honest and conscientious in them.”

Although less well-known than John, Solomon Stoddard's son-in-law, Joseph Hawley, who married his tenth child, Rebecca, also proved to be an avid supporter and ally. A deacon in Stoddard's Northampton Church, Hawley provided much-needed support for his father-in-law's various innovations. Just as his son John provided Stoddard with an important secular ally, Miller suggests, Hawley served as one of Stoddard's most important ecclesiastical deputies in Northampton, enabling him to rule the church effectively. Miller argues, furthermore, that Stoddard "was seeing to it that his elders and deacons, Pomeroy and Hawley, were extracting out of the rates the most princely salary any cleric outside Boston enjoyed."²⁵⁷ The deacon became so loyal to Stoddard's memory that even after Stoddard's death he continued to advocate his father-in-law's policies on ecclesiastical government as one of Jonathan Edwards's chief opponents in Northampton.²⁵⁸

Despite his family connections to Hawley, John Stoddard, and some of Northampton's most significant men, Solomon Stoddard's successful business ventures and considerable wealth helped him solidify his own position within the Northampton economy. As a son of the well-known Boston merchant, Anthony Stoddard, (ironically, a bitter opponent of membership innovations) Solomon was uncommonly successful in his commercial dealings despite his circumstances as a frontier minister. A man of "practical business talents and excellent judgment," Stoddard used whatever capital he possessed to

²⁵⁶ Edwards, *A Strong Rod Broken*, 18-22. Miller, ed., *Timothy Dwight's Travels*, V, 242.

²⁵⁷ Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 325.

²⁵⁸ Chris Armstrong, "Preacher in the Hands of an Angry Church" *Leadership Journal* vol. 25 (Winter, 2003), 52-55.

further his wealth.²⁵⁹ The Northampton Proprietor Records are replete with entries chronicling his various investments in real estate. Although he inherited Eleazer Mather's home and property when he married his widow Esther, Stoddard also received a one-acre home lot inside the town limits plus four additional parcels of land in the Great Rainbow, Little Rainbow, Winter's Field, and Walnut Tree divisions outside of the city.²⁶⁰ To his existing property he also added six acres of land purchased from Increase Turner "for a considerable sum of money" in 1679, "Mr. Pynchon's Meadow" in 1680, a home lot from Matthew Clesson in 1684, a portion of the "upper meadow" from Joseph Parsons in 1692, and at least four other plots of land in Mountain Division, Long Division, Little Division, and near Mill River.²⁶¹ At a time when the average estate was valued at 402.75 pounds, Stoddard's vast estate was valued at the time of his death in 1729, at the considerable sum of 1126 pounds, which figure does not include his 426-book library that also contained 491 sermons and pamphlets, his valuable writing apparel, and several hundred pounds of bonds due in Boston.²⁶²

Although Stoddard's economic power is difficult to gage, given the absence of detailed information in the town records concerning all of his investments, the records do seem to indicate that he was influential economically. In addition to his many real estate

²⁵⁹ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, I, 374.

²⁶⁰ *Northampton Proprietor's Records, 1653-1731* (Northampton: LDS Microfilm No. 0892048), 361-363.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 361-365, 423, 435, and 438.

²⁶² Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 65. See also Anderson, "Economic Growth," 250. In a survey of Hampshire County, Massachusetts between 1700 and 1709, Anderson concluded that the average estate amounted to 248.32 pounds of wealth and 154.43 pounds worth of land holdings, which totals 402.75 pounds.

ventures, for example, the town records do acknowledge that Stoddard also became the co-owner of a successful saw mill.²⁶³ This mill and his other business endeavors certainly helped fuel the economic prosperity of the town and increased his economic influence. All the devotion he gave to these various business projects, Trumbull contended, “resulted in great advantage to the community.”²⁶⁴ Unlike many of New England’s congregations who fought with their ministers over salary issues, moreover, the Northampton records contain no mention of any dispute over ministerial compensation during his sixty-year tenure. Not only was he the highest paid minister outside of Boston, but his pay raises, Trumbull mentions, came “without his solicitation.”²⁶⁵ The sources also give further indication as to Stoddard’s generous nature. In 1695, an entry in the town records specifies that “Mr. Stoddard relinquished all debt of the town to him.”²⁶⁶ His ability to help the town economically through his generosity and his business ventures certainly must have elevated his status among the people. Northampton’s residents probably recognized these contributions and felt even more deference toward him for his powerful economic role.

Although Stoddard’s estate was valued higher twenty years later, it was still much higher than the average estate’s value on the eve of the Revolution in 1774. Anderson argues that the average estate’s total value in 1774 was 667 pounds, almost half that of Stoddard’s thirty-eight years earlier.

²⁶³ *Town Records for the City of Northampton, 1654-1754* (Northampton: Forbes Library, microfilm reel No. 56), 76. In an entry dated April 25, 1689, Stoddard and Joseph Parsons are granted permission to build a mill.

²⁶⁴ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, II, 64.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, I, 546. See also Miller, *Colony to Province*, 325.

²⁶⁶ *Town Records*, entry dated 1695.

Despite the deference he acquired as both an economic and religious leader, by the time of his ordination in 1672, Stoddard's goal of establishing a Scottish-Presbyterian system of church government in the frontier city still seemed a difficult task. Stoddard's first step in implementing Samuel Rutherford's Presbyterian system required that he take the Northampton Church even beyond their already broadminded admission practices. He consequently began his ministry by quickly implementing the Halfway Covenant, which the congregation had approved, but not yet practiced. Within two months of his settlement, in 1669, Stoddard put the covenant into effect, baptizing sixty children within a six month period and one hundred more over the next four years.²⁶⁷ Certainly his congregation, which had unanimously passed the innovation, felt pleased with Stoddard's eagerness to practice its provisions so quickly.

Notwithstanding its generous conditions for halfway membership, the Northampton covenant made it clear that full church membership only belonged to visible saints who could bring forth "an experimentall Worke of faith."²⁶⁸ Regeneration, the church stipulated, was required for participation in all the privileges church membership brought. As a Scottish-Presbyterian, however, Stoddard opposed restricting membership to any non-scandalous applicant. He advocated that all devout Christians free from overt transgression receive unconditional admittance to the church as full-standing members with the right to partake of the Lord's Supper, have their children baptized, and vote in ecclesiastical matters. Despite the covenant's specific mandate to

²⁶⁷ *Northampton Church Records* 2-6 and Trumbull, *The History of Northampton*, II, 53-54.

²⁶⁸ *Northampton Church Records*, dated October 29 and November 12, 1668, 21-24.

the contrary, within five years of his 1672 ordination, Stoddard cast aside the separate ledger he had been keeping which categorized the full and halfway members of his parish. He began, instead, in 1677, to make no distinction in his meticulous records concerning membership status. He listed all members in one category: full communicants.²⁶⁹

Stoddard's failure to distinguish between full and halfway members, however, produced little resistance in Northampton. The church records and pens of his contemporaries remain silent concerning any kind of an internal dispute over the matter. His congregation certainly knew of his opinions on open membership given his public arguments in the 1679 Reforming Synod against the requirement for candidates to "make a relation of the work of Gods Spirit" in order to become full members.²⁷⁰ Historians such as Perry Miller have therefore assumed that Stoddard's church immediately began practicing open membership in 1677.²⁷¹ Two important outside sources, however, clearly dismiss these assumptions and show that Stoddard's open way did not become practiced until 1688, eleven years after he changed the membership ledger.

In a letter dating from 1681, four years after the church supposedly began to practice open membership, John Russell observed in his correspondence to the Reverend Increase Mather of Boston, that within his Northampton Church "our good brother

²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 7-35 and Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 54. Trumbull acknowledges that by 1677, "the unregenerate were admitted as communicants," which practice remained, he argues, until five years after Stoddard's death.

²⁷⁰ Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned* (Boston: 1709), 93-94 and Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 280n.

²⁷¹ Miller, "Solomon Stoddard," 297-300. See also Goulding, "Solomon Stoddard versus the Mathers," 5-7.

Stoddard hath bin strenuously promoting his position concerning that right which persons sound in the doctrine of faith, and of (as he calls it) a holy Conversation, have to full Communion.”²⁷² His observations indicate that Northampton had not yet put the innovation into practice. Edward Taylor, Stoddard’s ecclesiastical opponent from nearby Westfield, also helps dispel all doubt about Northampton’s previous practices. Not until 1688 did Taylor acknowledge in his commonplace book that Stoddard “hath held one day of Debate with his Church and hath fixt upon an other” because he “is about to cast off Relations and to bring all above fourteen years of age, that live morally...to the Lords Supper.”²⁷³ Stoddard’s movement toward open communion, therefore, must not have been practiced in Northampton until at least 1688.

Given that his church held two days of debate over the proposed changes, it seems likely that the brethren did at least feel concerned over this important matter. As apprehensive as they may have been, the days of debate nevertheless ended with such widespread support for the practice that Edwards later acknowledged that his parishioners remembered that open membership had been “established in Northampton without so much as one opposer to it.”²⁷⁴ While Stoddard’s neighbor, Edward Taylor, did acknowledge the debate over the subject of open communion in 1688, nowhere does he infer that Stoddard’s church actually became divided over the issue, which Taylor

²⁷²See John Russell to Increase Mather, March 28, 1681, “The Mather Papers,” Mass. Hist. Soc., *Collections*, 4th Ser., VIII (1868), 83-84.

²⁷³ Davis, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 10.

²⁷⁴ Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 385.

certainly would have happily noted as a foe of open membership practices.²⁷⁵ That the doctrine became implemented and actually practiced is further verified in the early church records. The *Judd Manuscripts* indicate that once the initial wave of parishioners gained admittance to the church as full members in the early 1660s, before Stoddard's arrival, very few subsequent churchgoers became full members during Eleazer Mather's later ministry and Stoddard's early years. Between 1665 and 1688, the church admitted only ninety-one persons to full communion, an average of just under four per year. From the time Stoddard's more accessible system first became practiced in 1688, until his death in 1729, however, 576 were admitted as full members, an average of over fourteen per year.²⁷⁶ This surge in yearly membership averages suggests that Stoddard's open membership policies did gain the acceptance Edwards described and that its provisions actually became practiced. The question that remains, however, is why, given their unanimous approval of Stoddard's open membership practices in 1688, was there a decade long gap between the time when Stoddard began recording all members as full communicants and the actual implementation of this practice?

Although there is no way to know exactly what happened, it seems likely that Stoddard's record keeping methods were not known to the members of the congregation. The records, after all, remain silent about any debate or vote over the subject in 1677. Perhaps this change in record-keeping, despite a lack of evidence concerning a discussion over the matter, has caused historians such as Perry Miller to see Stoddard as an "autocrat."

²⁷⁵ Davis, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 10-18.

²⁷⁶ Sylvester Judd, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records, 1630-1820*, 6 vols. (Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Utah, film No. 086156), vol. 5, 1-2.

Whatever the case, however, it is clear from outside sources that relaxed membership requirements were not officially recognized by the body of the church until 1688.²⁷⁷ Rather than forcing his Presbyterian opinions on a reluctant laity as Miller assumed, Stoddard's approach seemed more subtle and calculated. In the aforementioned circumstances, Stoddard introduced his open membership policies early in his ministry, but did not bring the controversial innovation to a vote until more than a decade later. Certainly his church knew that he intended to open membership requirements even before he held days of debate in 1688, given his role in the Synod of 1679 and his oft-cited promotion of such measures in Northampton.²⁷⁸ "For more than a decade," Thomas and Virginia Davis argue, Stoddard tried to "persuade" his congregation "to accept his positions," finally putting it to a vote in 1688.²⁷⁹

Although Stoddard's charismatic personality, vast knowledge, and skills as a preacher earned him the respect of his congregation, his influence alone, as powerful as it may have been, may not have convinced his Northampton's parishioners to unanimously approve his open membership policies. Their predisposition to tolerant membership requirements, however, along with Stoddard's careful decade-long introduction of open membership practices, allowed the Northampton minister to successfully implement his Presbyterian-like polity. Without their inclination toward broadminded admissions, as shown by their backgrounds and extremely open Halfway Covenant, the congregation might not have been swayed to such a degree. Stoddard's immediate acceptance of their

²⁷⁷ Davis, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 10-18, Sylvester, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records, 1630-1820*, vol. 5, 1-2, and "The Mather Papers," 4th Ser., VIII (1868), 83-84.

²⁷⁸ See, as an example, "The Mather Papers," 4th Ser., VIII, 83-84.

²⁷⁹ Davis', *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 18.

tolerant covenant upon his arrival in Northampton and his methodical movement toward even more open requirements over an eleven-year period ultimately allowed him to persuade his congregation to conform to his will. By allowing them a voice in the matter, the two sides settled upon a decision they could unitedly accept. Through persuasion rather than force, Stoddard implemented his open membership policies on an undivided church.

Opening membership to willing residents, who may never have otherwise been included, extended Stoddard's influence over additional Northampton citizens, and brought him loyal disciples that would show their indebtedness to him by supporting his future Presbyterian initiatives. By permitting all upstanding Christians to enter the church as full members, Stoddard solidified his authority over the entire community. This Presbyterian innovation, which brought all Northampton residents under his jurisdiction, allowed the increasingly powerful minister to exert an even larger influence over the town. Stoddard, as Perry Miller explained, in identifying the church no longer with visible saints only, but the entire town, solidified his authority over the town in a way no other New English minister possibly could.²⁸⁰

While admission changes went smoothly, Stoddard's other main Presbyterian conviction--that New England's Congregationalists placed too much power in the hands of the fraternity at the expense of the clergy--however, seemed an obstacle almost too great to overcome for even a man of his influence. The brethren of his church, after all, had always fought diligently to maintain their fraternal prerogatives, as was evident when

²⁸⁰ Perry Miller, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729" *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 34 (1941), 298.

the church forced its innovative halfway covenant upon its reluctant minister, Eleazer Mather, in 1669.²⁸¹

Unlike his congregation, Stoddard believed that the apostles, who passed their authority to the modern day clergy, never “did advise with the Church” on who should be admitted, claiming furthermore that “the laity should not judge and rule in the church.”²⁸² Considering how tenaciously the Northampton fraternity guarded its Congregational rights against their first minister it would seem extremely difficult for Stoddard to rule over the church in a manner consistent with his writings. The question that must be answered, then, is whether or not Stoddard ever ruled over Northampton as a repressive minister. If so, how did he succeed in light of the brethren’s zealously in guarding their Congregational rights?

Despite allowing his congregation the same rights almost every other New English congregation possessed, Stoddard’s enormous influence in Northampton allowed him to attain ministerial powers few of his peers could match. Lucas, in fact, argued that during the second and third generations, Connecticut Valley ministers often “fell from power,” and “little remained to control or channel popular energies.”²⁸³ Stoddard,

²⁸¹ See chapter II for a narrative of Eleazer Mather’s disputes with the Northampton church. The members, it shows, not wanting to submit to his strict baptismal requirements, forced a very liberal Halfway Covenant on the dying minister. After Stoddard’s ministry, his grandson, Jonathan Edwards, who took over the Northampton pulpit, was ousted by the fraternity for his attempts to restrict membership. These examples show that both before and after Stoddard’s tenure, lay prerogatives were extremely important to the Northampton saints.

²⁸² Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God* (London: 1700), 25-30

²⁸³ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 132.

however, seemed to be an exception to Lucas's general observation, as the frontier minister obtained almost sole control over church admissions and a rare veto power over all ecclesiastical decisions.²⁸⁴ This "negative voice," which appears to have been freely given to Stoddard by the congregation, ultimately gave the Northampton minister more authority over his church than probably any other minister in all of New England.²⁸⁵ Although church votes continued to be taken throughout Stoddard's lengthy ministry, his ability to nullify any decision in opposition to his own ultimately made him a powerful figure in the frontier city.

This unique veto power, along with Stoddard's autocratic reputation as a secular and ecclesiastical leader has unfortunately led a few historians to assume that he ruled the church and town as a domineering "autocrat." By "forcing his will" on the church and by opening membership requirements to all townsmen, Perry Miller contended, Stoddard "identified the visible church no longer with the communion of saints, but with the town meeting—where he himself was dictator and lawgiver."²⁸⁶ Although Miller's assertion concerning Stoddard's autocratic authority has been disputed by most subsequent historians, his hypothesis did not come without some factual basis. Stoddard's writings,

²⁸⁴ David D. Hall, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XII, 54 n. See also, Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 132. Here Lucas acknowledged that in Northampton the church "placed most of the responsibility for determining an applicant's fitness in the hands of the minister."

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 54 n. It seems likely that Stoddard's veto power was bestowed from the Northampton congregation upon him for his adherence to their beliefs. Hall points out that because of his disputations with the Northampton Church years later, "Jonathan Edwards had lost the 'negative voice' (or veto) over Congregational actions that Stoddard had exercised." See also Kenneth Pieter Minkema, "The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1988), 190.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

after all, advocated increased clerical authority and fraternal submission to ministers and ruling elders. “The Elders are to Rule over the Church,” he argued in his 1700 Publication *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches*, “not to be over-ruled by the Brethren.” “The members of the Church,” Stoddard continued, “are to be obedient to the Elders, therefore not to controul them in their Government.”²⁸⁷ Given his reputation as a powerful force over both the secular and ecclesiastical affairs of the town and his strong advocacy for increased clerical authority, Miller’s assumption concerning Stoddard’s authority seems well founded.

Whether he ruled over the church in a manner consistent with his writings, however, is another story. It has been difficult for historians to determine given their failure to conduct an in-dept analysis of the Northampton records. Even Stoddard’s contemporaries assumed that he possessed the autocratic powers he advocated in his writings. Although few of Stoddard’s peers knew the reality of his situation in the frontier town, most at least knew that he exerted a “negative voice” or veto power over the ecclesiastical decisions of the Northampton Church and they therefore assumed that he ruled the church as a “Pope” or “autocrat.”²⁸⁸ His title of “Northampton Autocrat,” then, cannot be attributed solely to Miller and other modern historians, given its origin with contemporary ministers.

²⁸⁷ Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God* (London: 1700), chapter V.

²⁸⁸ David D. Hall, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*,. 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XII, 54 n. Stoddard’s title of “Pope,” George Marsden believes, became popular when Increase Mather wrote in the introduction to John Quick’s 1700 publication, *The Young Man’s Claim Unto the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper*, that Stoddard’s views on ministerial authority were attempts “to make himself a Congregational Pope.” See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 515 note 2.

Stoddard's image as an autocrat, however, has come under recent attack. Despite his numerous works espousing clerical supremacy, the practices within his church could have easily been different. Recent historians, such as James F. Cooper, have shown that the actual practices within New England's churches did not always mirror its ministers' outward expressions.²⁸⁹ Edward Taylor, for example, who ministered over neighboring Westfield, remembered that whenever Stoddard sought to implement a new policy in Northampton, he allowed the brethren to vote and debate the subject as was the case when he began allowing all moral Christians to partake of the Lord's Supper.²⁹⁰ The Northampton Church Record Book, furthermore, contains documentation of votes taken throughout Stoddard's ministry. As late as 1715, the proposals of the Hampshire Association, as another example, "were read in the Church of Northampton and after some discourse voted in the affirmative."²⁹¹

Although most recent historians acknowledge that Stoddard allowed his congregation to vote and debate significant ecclesiastical decisions in the church, his veto power over their decisions nevertheless gave him a larger voice than most ministers possessed. While it is true that Stoddard possessed a "negative voice" over his congregation, that power, however, did not come as a result of his "autocratic" influence.

²⁸⁹ James F. Cooper Jr., *Tenacious of their Liberties: The Congregationalists in Colonial Massachusetts* (New York, 1999).

²⁹⁰ Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor: Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 2 vols. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), II, 10-18.

²⁹¹ *Northampton Church Records from the Old First Book, 1661-1846* (Microfilmed by the Genealogical Society of Salt Lake City, Utah, Film no. 186160), see the comments following the document entitled "At a Meeting of the Ministers of Hampshire at Northampton."

Despite the assertions of historians such as Kenneth Minkema, who maintained that Stoddard's veto power over the church gave him "supreme control," it must also be noted that the congregation itself had granted that veto power to Stoddard and therefore reserved the right to rescind that power if abused, as they would do during Edwards' ministry.²⁹² The church's ultimate power over the veto and Stoddard's continual use of democratic government, regardless of his written assertions to the contrary, made him more like his clerical counterparts in Massachusetts than an "autocratic" minister.

Whether or not he ever used this veto, moreover, is unknown. The church and town records give no indication of any circumstance in which Stoddard used his veto power. Their silence in this matter probably indicates that Stoddard rarely if ever used this unprecedented power. Although the veto gave him probably more influence than that of his peers, his sparing use of it demonstrated his scrupulous use of power. This scrupulosity in all likelihood helped to further earn him the trust and respect of his parishioners. Unlike Parker and Hobart, who attempted to force their opinions on unwilling congregations, Stoddard's calculated use of the powers granted him allowed him to build on the beliefs he shared with his congregation and use his well-honed powers of persuasion to gain a loyal backing in the western town.

Having consolidated his authority Solomon Stoddard moved to implement other Presbyterian practices in his Northampton Church. Just over two decades after the

²⁹² David D. Hall, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), XII, 54 n. Here, Hall explains that Jonathan Edwards lost the "negative voice" Solomon Stoddard had exercised in Northampton. See also Kenneth Pieter Minkema, "The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1988), 190.

church accepted and practiced his open membership policies, the Northampton clergyman made a further effort to bring Presbyterianism into his church by seeking to establish an outside council of ministers, whose decisions would be binding over all the churches represented. The six clergymen that would approve the original proposals for the new “Hampshire Association,” affirmed this binding authority in their signed declaration, stating “that we acknowledge a power in ecclesiastical Councils...because we find the constitution of a superior power over particular congregations in the Old Testament,” arguing that “the primitive churches were subject to the apostles and therefore had no absolute power in themselves.” They furthermore proclaimed that because mere “advice is insufficient,” a council must “have power to rectify maladministration in particular congregations.”²⁹³

Although some outside of Northampton protested Stoddard’s efforts to create a binding ecclesiastical council in Hampshire County, those within his church appear to have been supportive. In a vote taken just one month after the document was approved by the council of ministers, the Northampton Church also lent its assent to the provisions. Recorded just below the Hampshire Association’s proposals is a separate entry indicating that “these proposals were read in the Church of Northampton and after some discourse

²⁹³ See the *Northampton Church Records*, 21. The first records from the Hampshire Association are recorded in the Church record book under the title, “at a meeting of the ministers of Hampshire at Northampton. Dec, 9, 1714. It was agreed to make these proposals to the Churches.” The proposals, some of which are cited above, gave binding power over the individual churches to the association. Although the proposals met with different results in the various congregations represented, the clergymen who signed the document were certainly in favor of the council’s provisions. They were, as listed on the document, Solomon Stoddard of Northampton, John Williams of Deerfield, William Williams of Hatfield, Daniel Brewer of Springfield, Isaac Chauncey of Hadley, and Nathaniel Collins of Enfield.

voted in the affirmative.”²⁹⁴ Edwards later acknowledged this fact by telling his constituents that it became “the determination of your forefathers thirty-six years ago that they would be subject to a council of the churches of the county.”²⁹⁵

Northampton’s vote to be subject to an outside council of ministers once again challenged the New England Way by compromising the independence of the church and by surrendering at least some of the fraternity’s Congregational rights in determining its own ecclesiastical polity. Why in 1715 did the Northampton congregation voluntarily submit to an outside council that they knew, at least in theory, would undermine their fraternal rights, especially in light of the church’s history of tenaciously guarding their congregational privileges as they did with their first minister, Eleazer Mather?

Part of the answer lies in the ecclesiastical history of western New England. Unlike the east coast, western New England had a reputation in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries for practicing subtle forms of Presbyterian government. As we have seen, as early as 1635 and 1636, ministers such as Thomas Hooker and John Warham began leading their flocks away from Massachusetts Bay in an effort to practice the more liberal, Presbyterian-like baptismal requirements they favored.²⁹⁶ Connecticut especially became the hotbed of New England Presbyterianism when it adopted the Saybrook Platform in 1708, a proposal termed by Williston Walker as “an interpretation

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21. The proposals were accepted by the Northampton Church on January 11, 1715.

²⁹⁵ Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 314.

²⁹⁶ See Chapter II. See also Morgan, *Visible Saints*, 108. Here Morgan argues that John Warham deliberately moved out by Thomas Hooker’s Hartford settlement in 1636 so that his congregation could practice the less restrictive baptismal requirements they preferred.

not far removed from Presbyterianism.”²⁹⁷ Although George Marsden argues that across the border in the more “congregationally-minded” area of Massachusetts, the Hampshire Association was “the best they could do” in terms of Presbyterian administration, the supporters of Stoddard’s council of churches, nevertheless, must have been influenced by the Presbyterian atmosphere of the Connecticut Valley. Almost half of Northampton’s earliest settlers, after all, had immigrated from Windsor, Hartford, and other areas of Connecticut.²⁹⁸

As he did when introducing open membership practices into his Northampton Church, Stoddard employed subtle means to persuade his parishioners to accept his new Presbyterian association. Rather than exercising the powers of coercion, the crafty Northampton minister convinced his congregation to accept his ministerial council through his enormous influence. Fourteen years before the association formed, in fact, Stoddard had argued against the popular Congregational assumption that each particular church should enjoy complete independence. In his 1700 publication, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches*, Stoddard argued that “none are to be Members of Instituted Churches, but those that are Members of the Catholick Church. Particular Churches are but parts and branches of the Catholick Church, they are the Churches of God.”²⁹⁹

Stoddard prepared his flock to accept the Hampshire Association not only through his writings, but also through practice. Years before the association met to make

²⁹⁷ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 508-511.

²⁹⁸ For a discussion on the ecclesiastical backgrounds and origins of the early Northampton settlers, see chapter II.

²⁹⁹ Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches Explained and Proved from the Word of God* (London, 1700), chapter II.

Stoddard's council of ministers a reality, clergymen from the various churches of Hampshire County met every six weeks in a different town for a mid-week lecture.³⁰⁰ Although little is known about the nature of these meetings, five of the six original members of the Hampshire Association attended these gatherings regularly, where they most likely sought and gave each other advice on important ecclesiastical matters. The emergence of Stoddard's ministerial council in 1714, then, must have come as little shock to his Northampton parishioners.

Although his congregation's affirmative vote gave Stoddard's ecclesiastical council a measure of outside control over the affairs of the Northampton Church, thereby potentially limiting his own power within Northampton, his ultimate control over the association allowed him to maintain a powerful influence over his church and to further extended his power within other churches. "The plain design of that vote" Edwards acknowledged, "was that all the Churches of the county taken together should be consociated as a standing council, agreeable to Mr. Stoddard's Presbyterian principles, who, was the first mover in that affair."³⁰¹

While it is true that Stoddard's Presbyterian governance in Northampton put him at odds with many of the Congregational ministers of New England, his attempts to use the supper as a converting ordinance, went beyond even what his Presbyterian supporters could bear. His insistence that "the Lords Supper is appointed by Jesus Christ," not only for the strengthening of grace, but for "the begetting of grace," caused more stir among

³⁰⁰ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, 127 and Goulding, *The Controversy between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers*, 356.

³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

New England's clergymen than any other belief he advocated.³⁰² Increase Mather's 1700 publication, *Order of the Gospel*, acknowledged as much by noting that all Congregationalists, Presbyterians, and even many within the Church of England alike "rejected" the idea that sacraments served as a converting ordinance."³⁰³ Edward Taylor furthermore argued that every New English divine "for 80 years" had been against the idea that the Lord's Supper served as a converting ordinance, arguing furthermore that "multitudes in all the gospel times say so." Stoddard, he believed, was isolated as just one against "100 or 1000" divines, equal to or "multitudes above" Stoddard in grace and learning, who opposed converting ordinances.³⁰⁴ Given that New England's Presbyterians and its Congregationalists alike abhorred the notion that unregenerate Christians use the Lord's Table as a means of conversion, it makes sense that many of these frightened clergymen urged Stoddard to cease his arguments for such unorthodox beliefs. In a letter from nine prominent clergymen writing against Stoddard's "unhappy novelties," the unorthodox minister was blamed for "assaulting the state of our churches."³⁰⁵ Increase Mather, went so far as to argue that Stoddard was responsible for the decline of the New England Way and for corrupting the people.³⁰⁶ His neighbor and

³⁰² A copy of Stoddard's address to his congregation is found in Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor: Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard*, 2 vols. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), II, 131.

³⁰³ Increase Mather, *The Order of the Gospel Professed and Practiced by the Churches of Christ in New England* (Boston, 1700) 176.

³⁰⁴ Davis', *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 46.

³⁰⁵ Quoted in James A. Goulding, "The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 505.

ecclesiastical opponent, Edward Taylor, among others, also affirmed that Stoddard's unorthodox practices caused "the beginning of New England's apostasy."³⁰⁷ Despite these opponents, however, Stoddard's controversial belief became accepted and even practiced in the Northampton Church.³⁰⁸ Given the universal opposition to this doctrine by almost everyone outside of Northampton, how did Stoddard convince his church to approve such a practice?

As with his past innovations, Stoddard slowly and methodically introduced his ideas on the converting power of the sacraments. Once he gained Northampton's support for his open membership practices in 1688, which also opened the Lord's Supper to all moral, yet unregenerate Christians, Stoddard set about to justify the practice by convincing his congregation that the sacraments could be used as a means of obtaining the grace they ultimately sought as uncertain saints. In a sermon preached in the Northampton Church in 1690, Stoddard cited Galatians 3:1, arguing that the ancient Jewish Passover had been instituted among the Israelites as a means for them to obtain grace. "As the Passover of old was," he explained, "the Lords Supper now is appointed for Conversion." He taught furthermore, that although almost all New Englanders accepted the Supper as a means of strengthening grace, "the same arguments that nourish

³⁰⁶ Mather, *Order of the Gospel*, 5-9 and Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 172-176.

³⁰⁷ See Norman S. Grabo, "Edward Taylor on the Lords Supper" *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 12 (January 1960), 24-26 and Goulding, "Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers," 412.

³⁰⁸ During his fight with the Northampton Church, Edwards acknowledged that "the Brethren are of opinion that the Lord's Supper is a converting ordinance." See *The Result of a Council of Nine Churches met at Northampton, June 22, 1750* (Boston, 1750), 3.

faith do beget it.”³⁰⁹ Using a combination of scriptural insights and appeals to reason, Stoddard, once again, persuaded the church to accept his position on the controversial doctrine. The note-taker who recorded this sermon, in fact, subtitled it “some notes of the said Mr. Stoddards touching the Lords Supper as a converting Ordinance preacht before he urged his Church to the Practice thereof.”³¹⁰ Although the church had clearly begun practicing open communion two years earlier, Stoddard’s advocacy that the supper served as a converting ordinance demonstrated his commitment to strengthening each parishioners understanding of the importance of participating in the sacrament even if they were never fully converted. Northampton’s support for Stoddard’s unique innovation, then, did not come through coercion as some have assumed, but through the careful persuasion of a highly influential and charismatic leader who ultimately let the congregation decide for itself.³¹¹ Coercion and autocracy, as Hobart and Parker proved, rarely if ever produced peaceful and long-lasting support for ecclesiastical innovations. Democratic church practices, however, gave Stoddard the support he needed and allowed this very controversial doctrine to be practiced in Northampton for many years.

Given that Stoddard became a widely recognized minister who exerted enormous secular power as a high profile military and political leader with vast wealth and family

³⁰⁹ Davis’s, *Stoddard versus Taylor*, 131, 132.

³¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 129.

³¹¹ Although there is no entry in the Church records concerning a vote over whether or not the church accepted or rejected Stoddard’s ideas on the converting power of the sacraments, Edwards later acknowledged that “the Brethren are of opinion that the Lord’s Supper is a converting ordinance,” signifying their acceptance of the controversial doctrine. See *The Result of a Council of Nine Churches met at Northampton, June 22, 1750* (Boston, 1750), 3.

connections, it is difficult to understand how modern historians could consider the clergyman only minimally influential in Northampton. How is it, for example, that Paul Lucas could argue that Stoddard was “opposed by nearly everyone, including the members of his own church?”³¹² An understanding of the sources most often used to refute Stoddard’s importance can clarify the misconceptions many scholars have perpetuated.

In a letter to the Reverend Thomas Gillespie dated July 1, 1751 from Stockbridge Massachusetts, Jonathan Edwards, discussed his dismissal from the Northampton pulpit with his colleague.³¹³ Having been discharged as pastor for his refusal to continue Stoddard’s open membership requirements, the former Northampton pastor argued that even as a “sort of deity,” Stoddard could not control all aspects of the church and town, mentioning that “in one ecclesiastical controversy in Mr. Stoddard’s days,” which he does not explain in any way, “the heat of the spirit was raised to such a height, that it came to hand blows.”³¹⁴

Although this letter could be used to show Stoddard’s lack of control over his own congregation, this source must be considered in its context and in comparison to other observations of Stoddard’s ministry. Certainly Stoddard’s views did not always meet with unanimous approval, but to accept Edwards’s recounting of one isolated event as proof that Stoddard’s rule over the church was ineffective and often resisted, puts too much stock into one fleeting remark. Edwards had written this letter, after all, just a short

³¹² Lucas, “Appeal to the Learned,” 261.

³¹³ Claghorn, ed., *Works*, XVI, 380-387.

³¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 381-382.

time after his dismissal from the Northampton pulpit, where he was never able to escape Stoddard's long shadow. He simply lashed out at the man he once called an "oracle," in an attempt to justify his own failures. The recently released pastor, whose career, one Edwards biographer saw as "a drama played out...on the stage of Solomon Stoddard's Northampton," unquestionably considered his grandfather an extremely influential leader with relatively few noteworthy controversies during his six-decade tenure in Northampton. During more peaceful periods, Edwards often referred to Stoddard's ability to maintain peace in Northampton. In his 1737 publication, *The Faithful Narrative*, in fact, Edwards explained that "without question the religion and good order of the county, and their purity in doctrine, has under God, been very much owing to the great abilities and eminent piety of my venerable and honored grandfather Stoddard. I suppose we have been the freest of any part of the land from unhappy divisions and quarrels in our ecclesiastical and religious affairs."³¹⁵ Despite his reference to an ecclesiastical dispute that came to fists, Edwards himself had acknowledged on other more peaceful occasions that Stoddard's influence had been the cause for freedom from "unhappy divisions and quarrels."

The other often-cited reference to Stoddard's ineffectual leadership in Northampton came from one of his greatest opponents, Edward Taylor. As pastor of the nearby church at Westfield, Taylor feared that Stoddard's advocacy of doctrine "inconsistent with Congregationall Principalls," would "influence neighbour Churches with Disturbance."³¹⁶ In response, Taylor wrote numerous tracts and letters attempting to

³¹⁵ Smith, ed., *Works*, II, 144-146.

confute Stoddard's doctrines and to diminish his importance in Northampton and Western New England. He observed in one of these letters that when Stoddard announced a particular innovation to his congregation, rather than forcing it upon them, he allowed them to reach their own decision through debate and election.³¹⁷ Given that Stoddard allowed his church to debate and vote for or against his proposals, historians have assumed that the Northampton "autocrat's" power was no greater than other Congregational clergymen. The Davis's, in fact, who edited the letters between Stoddard and Taylor, argue that because "he did not 'force his will' on his congregation," the picture of Stoddard which emerges "is not that of a veritable 'Pope.'"³¹⁸

Although Stoddard never attempted to "force his will" upon his congregation, and continually allowed them to debate and vote upon the various innovations he implemented in Northampton, it must be remembered that due to his extremely well-developed powers of persuasion, Stoddard did, in fact, receive the backing of his congregation on every one of his ecclesiastical innovations. Although he always allowed them a voice, they always seemed to vote for his resolutions. Perhaps his persuasive powers and their ultimate like-mindedness concerning Northampton's ecclesiastical polity led them to voluntarily grant Stoddard veto power; a power unparalleled in all of New England. Although he never sought to become the powerful autocrat that some

³¹⁶ Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor: Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), II, 11. The second volume of this work examines the numerous letters written between Stoddard and Taylor over Stoddard's Presbyterian practices. These letters clearly demonstrate that Taylor was an outspoken opponent of Stoddard.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 17-18.

have mistakenly labeled him, Stoddard probably possessed more influence over the ecclesiastical polity of his church than any other minister of his era.

Stoddard's congregation did not simply accept their minister's unique polity half-heartedly or in an insincere manner, but as true devotees of his practices. Half a century after his death, in fact, Edwards was dismissed from the pulpit because he refused to acknowledge Stoddard's most controversial doctrine that the Lord's Table could be useful in conversion. "The unsettled and broken state of the first Church in Northampton," the council records from 1750 indicate, stemmed from the difference of opinion "that the Lord's Supper is a converting ordinance and consequently that Persons if they have a competency of knowledge and are of a blameless life may be admitted to the Lord's Table."³¹⁹ The fraternity in Northampton became so dedicated to this principle that Edwards ultimately lost his pastorate, in part, for his failure to recognize that the Lord's Supper functioned as a converting ordinance.

Solomon Stoddard's charismatic personality, wealth, prestige, family connections, and his congregation's veneration for him ultimately made him a powerful figure in the frontier city. Because of the tremendous respect and admiration he received throughout Northampton, Stoddard successfully convinced his parishioners to accept and practice all of his Presbyterian innovations, including his radical doctrine that the Lord's Supper could be used to obtain grace. Unlike Hobart and Parker in Hingham and Newbury, however, Stoddard experienced very little contention in Northampton over his Presbyterian practices because he used the powers of persuasion, not force. His

³¹⁹ *The Result of a council of Nine Churches met at Northampton, June 22, 1750* (Boston: 1750), 3.

parishioners trusted him so much, in fact, that he earned veto power over Northampton's ecclesiastical decisions and autonomy within the Hampshire Association. Whereas Parker's salary was cut for his Presbyterian innovations, Stoddard received pay increases without even asking.³²⁰ Although no autocrat, Stoddard's successes in Northampton made him one of the most influential ministers in colonial New England. Certainly, as town historian, James Russell Trumbull explained, "In spiritual matters he ruled the town with a firmness and authority that was seldom disputed."³²¹

³²⁰ Trumbull, *History of Northampton*, I, 546.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, II, 62.

Chapter VI

“Pope” or Persuader?

The Influence of Solomon Stoddard on Western New England

In his 1700 introduction to an important ecclesiastical treatise, the Reverend Increase Mather of Boston referred to Solomon Stoddard as a power-hungry minister attempting “to make himself a Congregational Pope.”³²² Although considered derogatory at first, Stoddard’s title as “Pope of the Connecticut Valley,” would become increasingly popular during and after his lifetime. Contemporaries, such the Reverend Benjamin Coleman, acknowledged Stoddard as “a Prophet and a father not only to the neighboring churches of his own country, but also to those of the whole land,” while descendants such as Timothy Dwight, a later President of Yale College, acknowledged him as the most influential clergyman in the province over a 30 year period.³²³ Perry Miller’s 1953 publication, *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province*, picked up on this early perception. He asserted that after Solomon Stoddard “won the title of ‘Pope’” in Northampton, he methodically expanded his influence by making the city “a fortress,

³²² See Increase Mather’s introduction to John Quick’s work, *The Young Man’s Claim Unto the Sacrament of the Lord’s Supper* (Boston, 1700) and Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 515 note 2.

³²³ Quoted in Patricia Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards, Pastor: Religion and Society in Eighteenth-Century Northampton* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1979), 19. See also, Dwight, *Travels*, IV, 240-241.

then a throne,” until he eventually “dominated the Connecticut Valley down to New Haven.” In attaining such an enormous amount of influence over the affairs of the valley, Miller suggested, Stoddard eventually “uprooted the New England Way.”³²⁴ Notwithstanding the substantial veneration many contemporary ministers and descendants felt for Stoddard, subsequent historians have cast doubt on the extent of his power over the Connecticut Valley. They argue that neither his doctrines nor his practices met with wide acceptance in the valley’s churches. “Few if any of the clergy,” David D. Hall explained, ever “appropriated the concept of the Lord’s Supper as a converting ordinance.”³²⁵ “The picture of Stoddard which emerges” from the sources, Thomas and Virginia Davis further observed, “is not that of the veritable ‘Pope’ of the Connecticut Valley.”³²⁶

Although Stoddard’s views did not suddenly revolutionize or “uproot” Congregational practices throughout New England as Miller suggested, the modern conception of Stoddard as a figure who exerted very little influence is equally erroneous. Stoddard’s significance does not lie in his overnight transformation of New England’s ecclesiastical polity, but rather in his paving the way toward an easing of church

³²⁴ Perry Miller, *The New England Mind, From Colony to Province* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1953), 228-230. Using as sources the written comments by Stoddard’s descendants and those made by grieving admirers just after his death, Miller attempts to prove that Stoddard “possessed probably more influence than any other Clergyman in the province, during a period of thirty years.” See also, Perry Miller, “Solomon Stoddard” *Harvard Theological Review* vol. 34 (1941), 298.

³²⁵ David D. Hall, ed., *The Works of Jonathan Edwards.*, 22 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1957-2003), vol. 12, 42.

³²⁶ Thomas M. and Virginia L. Davis, eds., *The Unpublished Writings of Edward Taylor: Edward Taylor vs. Solomon Stoddard.*, 2 vols. (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1981), II, 17.

membership requirements, his success in introducing binding ministerial associations, and his popular support for increased clerical influence over the valley's congregations.

The extent to which Stoddard was successful in his efforts to achieve these goals has yet to be fully analyzed by modern historians. An episode from early in his ministry, however, demonstrates his influence over his clerical peers. At the famous "Reforming Synod" held in Boston in 1679, Stoddard candidly confessed his devotion to enlarged baptism and open communion and urged his colleagues to ease membership requirements and access to the Lord's Table. Although the synod had not specifically meet to discuss the qualifications for church admittance, Stoddard recalled in his 1709 work, *Appeal to the Learned*, that "some of the Elders in the synod had drawn up a Conclusion, That persons should make a Relation of the work of Gods Spirit upon their hearts, in order to coming into full Communion."³²⁷ This proposal, which conformed well to standard Congregational practice for New England, drew support from Increase Mather and virtually all of the other orthodox clergymen in attendance. After Stoddard raised objections about drawing up such a conclusion, he recalls that "It was agreed to have a dispute on that question."³²⁸ During this dispute the young charismatic minister from Northampton carefully asserted his positions on the matter and ultimately helped revise the final resolution.

While Increase Mather held that "Professors of religion...of good Conversation are not to be admitted to full Communion," Stoddard labored to insure that those of good conversation are to be admitted to the Lord's Table, "provided that they are able to

³²⁷ Solomon Stoddard, *An Appeal to the Learned* (Boston: 1709), 93-94.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

Examine themselves and discern the Lords body.”³²⁹ This disagreement, recorded by Peter Thacher, a representative from Old South Church in Boston, caused “much debate about persons being admitted to full Communion.”³³⁰ Although neither side wanted to give into the demands of the other, the resulting change of wording seemed vague enough to placate Stoddard, while upholding existing practices. The outcome of the synod, Stoddard records, “was that they blotted out that clause of Making a Relation of the work of gods Spirit, and put in the room of it, *The Making a Profession of their Faith and Repentance*.” Surmising that a mere profession of faith and repentance would keep few from the Lord’s Table, Stoddard considered this a victory and “voted with the rest” to accept its elastic requirements.³³¹

Although the synod’s vague language ultimately justified the continuation of limited church membership and communion practices, their failure to vote against Stoddard’s dissenting voice left his opponents vulnerable to future inroads by the Northampton minister. The synod’s failure to quash the issue, in favor of unanimity, not only demonstrated Stoddard’s persuasive powers in the matter, but it also opened the door for him to admit all but non-scandalous Christians to full communion, as long as they met the “just satisfaction of the Church.”³³² The doors of the church, which the Cambridge Platform mandated, should “not by Gods appointment stand so wide open,”

³²⁹ *Ibid.*

³³⁰ Thacher’s notes from the Synod are printed in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 417-419.

³³¹ Stoddard, *Appeal*, 93-94. Stoddard’s account is also corroborated by Thacher. See Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 419.

³³² *Ibid.*, 433.

could be more easily opened for candidates should ministers and members exert tolerance in their judgment of a person's profession of faith and repentance.³³³

Although few if any churches outside of Northampton practiced Stoddard's broad admission policies at the time the synod met, his success in keeping the "relation" as an optional requirement paved the way for future reforms in his own congregation and also in neighboring churches. In time, his unique practices and theology would become acceptable to many of western New England's clerical leaders and their congregations. Support for Stoddard's way, often referred to as "Stoddardeanism," would begin with his own Northampton Church, spreading to various churches throughout the valley by way of important family alliances and eventually to some neighboring churches that had no direct connection to the Stoddard family. By the end of his six-decade ministry Stoddardean principles would become widely practiced throughout the Connecticut Valley and his broader approach to church membership would find numerous supporters throughout New England as a whole, making Stoddard a much more significant figure of New England's ecclesiastical history than most historians have yet imagined.³³⁴

Before Stoddard could accomplish any of his Presbyterian-minded goals, such as easing church membership requirements and access to the Lords Table, however, he would have to overcome a significant amount of opposition from orthodox Congregationalists. In arguing that membership and the sacramental ordinances are "instituted for all adult members of the church who are not scandalous," Stoddard broke

³³³ See the text of the Cambridge Platform in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 21-22.

³³⁴ Paul R. Lucas, "An Appeal to the Learned," 257, 261. See also Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 183.

from New England's tradition of restricting membership and the sacraments to only the visibly elect, and established himself as an opponent of the New England Way.³³⁵ This doctrine, for which he became most well-known, seemed so dangerous to Congregational ministers and laymen alike, that most denounced his controversial innovations. Increase Mather, for example, condemned Stoddard publicly before the Massachusetts General Court.³³⁶ Others, such as neighboring minister, Edward Taylor, argued that the Northampton minister's views would do irreparable harm to New England's future. Proper administration of the Lord's Supper, Taylor maintained, served as one of the main reasons "Nonconformists have deserted Episcopal government, and suffered persecution, loss of the public ministry, poverty, imprisonment...and was that that brought this people from all things near and dear to them in their native country to encounter the sorrows and difficulties of the wilderness." Stoddard's advocacy against New England's long-held practice of limiting membership and access to the Lord's Table, Edwards believed, defeated the original settler's purpose for coming to the New World.³³⁷ With so many opponents and such a strong history of restricted membership, Stoddard certainly faced a major challenge. Given the obstacles against him, how did Stoddard find any success in spreading his Presbyterian-like polity to the valley's churches?

Stoddard began by creating significant alliances with the ministers and churchgoers of neighboring towns. Through careful placement of family members in

³³⁵ Solomon Stoddard, *The Doctrine of Instituted Churches* (Boston: 1700), 21.

³³⁶ Increase Mather, *A Call from Heaven to the Present and Succeeding Generations* (Boston: 1679), quoted in Williston Walker, *The Creeds and Platforms of Congregationalism* (Boston: The Pilgrim Press, 1960), 180n.

³³⁷ See Taylor's comments in Davis's, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 35.

positions of ecclesiastical and secular authority throughout the valley, Stoddard's general influence over the region gradually increased. "Like a feudal baron whose power depended on personal allegiances," George Marsden recently argued, Stoddard used "kinship ties to connect with other powerful clergy, merchants, and magistrates."³³⁸ Given that only two of his own sons survived to adulthood, Stoddard used his six daughters and one step-daughter to build his ecclesiastical presence throughout the valley. In one particularly amusing circumstance that illustrates Stoddard's overt attempt to marry his daughters to neighboring clergymen, Stephen Mix, the unmarried minister of Wethersfield, received an invitation to Stoddard's Northampton home. Mix's biographer records, that upon arrival at the Stoddard home, the young minister followed the venerable clergyman "to a room where he assembled his stock in hand" and allowed Mix to select any one of his daughters, "Mary, Esther, Christian, Sarah, Rebecca, [or] Hannah."³³⁹ After choosing Mary and abiding a short courtship with her, the couple married in December, 1696.³⁴⁰

Although little has been written about some of his sons-in-law, the scanty sources that are available indicate that most of them supported their father-in-law's views concerning open membership, open communion, clerical supremacy, and binding ministerial associations. Despite the assertions of various modern historians that "few if

³³⁸ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards, A Life* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 114.

³³⁹ Clifford K. Shipton, *Sibley's Biographical Sketches of Graduates of Harvard University, in Cambridge, Massachusetts*, 17 vols., (New York: Johnson Reprint Corp., 1967), IV, 70.

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

any of the clergy appropriated the concept of the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance," moreover, several of Stoddard's sons-in-law did, in fact, support this highly controversial doctrine, along with his other unique positions on ecclesiastical government.³⁴¹ Stephen Mix as well as Stoddard's other sons-in-law and his own sons supported most of his unique theological practices. Their support alone gave Stoddard's ideas a home in eight different churches of Western New England, allowing his influence to extend along the Connecticut River. "While it would be misleading to claim that all of Reverend Stoddard's 'sons' whole-heartedly shared every particular opinion of their 'father,'" Kevin Sweeney acknowledged in his dissertation on the religious history of the Connecticut Valley, "it is clear that most did and their commitment to his beliefs gave substance to the claims made for the influence of 'pope' Stoddard and his ideas."³⁴²

Labeled a Stoddard "disciple" by Paul Lucas, Mix remained a strong advocate of Stoddardean practices throughout his entire ministry. During his long tenure in Wethersfield, Mix supported Stoddard's views on open membership requirements and unrestricted access to the Lord's Table.³⁴³ Like Stoddard, Mix considered the sacrament of the Lord's Supper a necessary ordinance for the obtaining of saving grace. His belief that a person could be helped through the conversion process by partaking of the emblems of Christ's death made Mix one of Stoddard's greatest supporters in the Connecticut Valley. In a 1727 sermon, Mix demonstrated his allegiance to Stoddard by

³⁴¹ Hall, *Works*, vol. 12, 42.

³⁴² Kevin Michael Sweeney, "River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790" (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), 152-153.

³⁴³ Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 144.

arguing against the commonly-held Congregational view that saving grace be required in order to partake of the communion. Beyond simply supporting his father-in-law's views on admitting all but the non-scandalous to the Supper, Mix actually advocated Stoddard's very controversial position that the sacraments helped in obtaining grace. "Many reject the Lords Supper," he argued, "because they are destitute of saving grace." By rejecting this ordinance due to a lack of saving grace, Mix reasoned, parishioners actually damaged their chances of obtaining the grace they sought: "they are refusing the grace tendered, opposing the light of divine truths serving to prepare them for and work in them this grace."³⁴⁴ Mix not only tolerated the partaking of the Lords Supper by unregenerate Christians, but also encouraged it, noting that it "prepares them for," and works in them "this grace" they lack.

Stephen Mix became instrumental in advocating Stoddard's view of ministerial associations with his support for the Saybrook Platform just a decade after his marriage to Stoddard's daughter. Serving as scribe at the Saybrook meetings, whose Platform Walker called "an interpretation not far removed from Presbyterianism," Mix became a driving force behind the approved proposals.³⁴⁵ He grew to be so determined that its Presbyterian-leaning provisions be implemented in Connecticut, in fact, that he also served as a representative and scribe on the 1709 council that successfully organized the

³⁴⁴ Stephen Mix, *Extraordinary Displays of the Divine Majesty and Power, Are to Try Men and Impress the Fear of God on their Hearts, that they Sin not* (London: T. Green, 1728), 29.

³⁴⁵ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 508-511.

Hartford County churches into two functioning Consociations, which also included his own Wethersfield Church.³⁴⁶

Stoddard's second daughter, Ester, like her sister Mary, also wed a young clergyman. Timothy Edwards, the minister of the East Windsor Connecticut Church, also helped Stoddard extend his influence into the lower Connecticut Valley. "Timothy's betrothal to a daughter of this leading clerical family," Kenneth Minkema explained, "was a major step for the Edwards family." Their 1694 marriage, Minkema furthermore argued, elevated Edwards and his descendants into "the highest ranking families of New England Society, with wealth and power at their disposal."³⁴⁷ This important alliance between Timothy Edwards and the Stoddard family prompted the young minister of East Windsor to emphasize several of Stoddard's unique doctrines. Like Mix, Edwards defended and supported the Saybrook Platform, which created binding consociations of ministers.³⁴⁸ Stoddard certainly smiled with approval as his two sons-in-law strongly promoted those efforts to set up a consociation of ministers that intended to have some regulatory and disciplinary powers above the churches themselves.

Edwards also followed Stoddard's Presbyterian view that ministers should exert more authority over local congregations than most New England Congregationalists allowed. Like his father-in-law, Edwards attempted to diminish the power of the laity

³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 508 and Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, IV, 72.

³⁴⁷ Kenneth Pieter Minkema, "The Edwardses: A Ministerial Family in Eighteenth-Century New England" (Ph.D. diss., University of Connecticut, 1988), 30.

³⁴⁸ Minkema, "The Edwardses," 46, Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, IV, 97, and Schafer, ed., *Works*, 26n.

while increasing his own.³⁴⁹ Although he advocated many of the same doctrines Stoddard practiced in his Northampton Church, Edwards never met with similar success. Unlike Stoddard, who gained influence over Northampton through his persuasive powers and charismatic personality, however, Edwards attempted to compel his parishioners to adhere to his views on church discipline through force. Because he ruled in what Shipton called a “dictatorial style,” Edwards failed to exert his supremacy over a church that “preferred to adhere to strict Congregationalism.”³⁵⁰ Most of the struggles with his parish, Shipton noted, were “due to the pastor’s insistence that questions of church discipline rested entirely with him.”³⁵¹

As with Mix and Edwards, Stoddard’s third son-in-law, Reverend William Williams of Hatfield, also strongly favored Stoddard’s unique ecclesiastical polity. Williams, who married Christian in 1699, became Stoddard’s most significant ally in all of the Connecticut Valley.³⁵² Even before solidifying his alliance to Stoddard through marriage, Williams advocated Stoddardean membership practices. One of Williams’s recently-discovered sermons from 1693, six years before his marriage to Christian, reveals the similarities between his views and those of his future father-in-law. The

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 26. Here, the author argues that during the Harvard years, “the Mathers were significant influences on Timothy’s views on church polity and piety.” Their influence notwithstanding, Timothy Edwards exhibited more Stoddard-like characteristics than those of the Mathers.

³⁵⁰ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, IV, 93-97.

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

³⁵² For a list of Stoddard’s children and their dates of marriage, see Sylvester Judd, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records, 1630-1820*, 6 vols. (Microfilm no. 086156, Genealogical Society of Utah), IV, 498-504.

sermon demonstrates, according to one historian, “Williams’s familiarity and sympathy with Stoddard’s opinion on the subject” of ecclesiastical administration.³⁵³ Echoing his future father-in-law’s reasoning, Williams argued that scripture shows “no precepts for, nor precedent of, insisting on... a profession of saving faith, as the condition of admission” to the Lord’s Table. Since only God could judge the sincerity of a candidate’s saving faith, he argued, men should not attempt to bar any person from partaking of all the ordinances instituted by Christ. In rejecting access to professing Christians, many of New England’s Congregationalists usurped God’s authority to judge, denying the applicant the opportunity to gain the grace all Christians sought.

Williams’s views became so similar to Stoddard’s, that he, like Mix, even espoused the Lord’s Supper as an effective converting ordinance. “The matter of the worship of God in his ordinances,” Williams explained, “is a step in the way that leads to repentance from sin, a step onward in the way to approach unto God... a step without the taking of which, a man can never worship God aright.” The Lord’s Supper, he summarized, could lead “unto the attainment of grace.”³⁵⁴

Like his brothers-in-law, Williams furthermore upheld Stoddard’s position that a higher authority over each congregation needed to be established in western Massachusetts. Fifteen years after his marriage to Stoddard’s third daughter, Williams followed in the footsteps of his Connecticut brothers-in-law by helping to form a ministerial association in Massachusetts. His name appears on the original proposal to

³⁵³ Philip F. Gura “Going Mr. Stoddard’s Way: William Williams on Church Privileges, 1693,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol., 45 (July, 1988), 491.

³⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 497.

the churches from the Hampshire Association in December 1714.³⁵⁵ This association, considered the churches of the county “subject” to it, just as “the primitive Churches were subject to the apostles.” The association was headed by none other than Solomon Stoddard himself.³⁵⁶ Williams’s participation in his father-in-law’s Presbyterian-like council demonstrated his support for Stoddard’s ecclesiastical polity not only through his words, but also through action.

Throughout his long life, William Williams advocated Stoddardean principles in Hatfield and throughout the Connecticut River Valley. At a 1729 ordination sermon in Sutton Massachusetts, almost thirty years after his marriage to Christian, and fifteen years after the Hampshire Association first formed, Williams continued to insist that churches needed to maintain their support of such councils. “For the regular upholding of ecclesiastical government, there ought to be the Communion or Consociation of Pastors and Churches, seeking and affording mutual assistance in all important matters.”³⁵⁷ His life-long advocacy on behalf of the Hampshire Association certainly must have drawn the admiration of his father-in-law, Solomon Stoddard.

Williams’s support for Stoddard’s ministerial council, open membership practices, and his most controversial doctrine, concerning the converting ability of the Lord’s Supper, provided the Northampton minister with an enormously strong ally during his lifetime and a devoted advocate on his behalf in the years after his death. Certainly

³⁵⁵ The proposals of the “Meeting of the ministers of Hampshire at Northampton,” are recorded in the *Northampton Church Records*, 21.

³⁵⁶ *Ibid*

³⁵⁷ William Williams, *A Sermon at the Ordination of Mr. David Hall in Sutton* (Boston, 1729), 18.

Philip Gura correctly suggested that William Williams's support of Stoddard "indicates both the power of Stoddard's mind over the valley and his neighbors' willingness to entertain—indeed, carefully to think through—propositions that gave a degree of truth to the Mathers' fears that the churches of the valley were ripe with apostasy."³⁵⁸

The youngest of Stoddard's daughters, Hannah, born in April 1688, also married a clergyman. Her husband, William Williams, first pastor of Weston, also exhibited many pro-Stoddard sentiments.³⁵⁹ Although relatively little has been written about Williams's life and his views on ecclesiastical government, the Weston church records and his own writings indicate that he favored open admissions to membership and communion.³⁶⁰ In 1728, eighteen years after his marriage to Hannah, Williams wrote in his *Divine Warnings*, that all those "laboring to grow in knowledge," may by "their well-ordered conversation...with open arms of love and charity...be received to the Table of the Lord." Like Stoddard, he furthermore argued that the Supper provided "a happy means to draw your hearts to Christ and fix them in his service."³⁶¹ Whether Williams's believed that communion drew hearts to Christ and thereby served as a converting ordinance, is not entirely clear from the vague sources yet extant. It is clear, however,

³⁵⁸ Gura, "Going Mr. Stoddard's Way," 498.

³⁵⁹ Judd, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records*, IV, 498-504.

³⁶⁰ *Weston First Parish Church Records, 1709-1858*, 84. The church records indicate that Williams's argues in favor of allowing all candidates to approach the Lord's Table, provided they make a profession of faith similar to the one he outlines in his book, *Divine Warnings*.

³⁶¹ William Williams, *Divine Warnings to be Received with Faith and Fear, Improved to Excite to all proper Methods for our own Safety and our Families* (Boston: Samuel Gerrish, 1728), vii.

that the Weston minister and his congregation seemed to lean toward Stoddardean membership practices.

His sponsorship of such doctrines ultimately resulted in the implementation of open membership polity in his Weston Church in 1741, thirty years after his marriage into the Stoddard family. The Church Records dated, June 29, 1741, indicate that in a “meeting of the Brethren of the Church, discourse was had about the manner of admission of persons into Communion.” Since many in his congregation opposed “making a relation of their experiences or convictions in order to their being received into Church fellowship,” the church determined that “it shall not be imposed upon them as a necessary term of communion, but if they are of orderly good lives and give satisfaction to the minister of their knowledge of the Christian religion,” then they may be admitted to the church and the Lord’s Table.³⁶² The records show furthermore that once the new admission policy met with the congregation’s approval, numerous churchgoers took advantage by becoming full members. The number of new members that came into full communion in 1741 alone, the year the church voted to cast off relations, more than doubled the entire previous decade.³⁶³ Although it should be acknowledged that dozens of churches experienced membership growth due to the “awakenings” of the thirties and forties, Williams’s link to Stoddard and his advocacy for tolerant admission requirements, however, must have provided the impetus that led to its implementation three decades into Williams’s Weston ministry. Stoddard’s influence over the valley,

³⁶² *Weston First Parish Church Records*, 83-84.

³⁶³ *Second Book of Records First Parish Weston, 1744-1815*, 1-4. The records indicate that between 1730 and 1740, 37 total candidates were admitted to full communion. In 1741 alone, 71 new members were admitted.

although difficult to measure, especially after his death, as the Weston case makes clear, eventually extended beyond his sons-in-law to even the most common churchgoers.³⁶⁴

Stoddard further exerted his powerful authority through his one step-daughter, Eunice, who married the Reverend John Williams of Deerfield, cousin of William Williams of Hatfield, who was also Stoddard's son-in-law.³⁶⁵ Like his brothers-in-law, Williams accepted Stoddard's liberal admission policies to church membership and the Lords Table. As Kevin Sweeney pointed out, Williams was "part of a clerical network" that included his cousin William Williams and his father-in-law, Solomon Stoddard, "united by kinship and shared religious sentiments." He played a central part in this "growing party of related and like-minded Connecticut Valley ministers" led by Stoddard, who "stood at the head."³⁶⁶ Whether Stoddard's influence over John Williams ultimately led the congregation to practice open membership, however, is difficult to determine since a fire destroyed the early church records. The scanty evidence available from outside sources, such as Williston Walker, who lists the Deerfield Church as "Stoddardean," suggests that loose requirements for membership and inclusion in the Lords Supper eventually became practiced in Deerfield, making Williams an effective tool in spreading Stoddardean practices to the ordinary churchgoers of the valley.³⁶⁷ In a

³⁶⁴ Like Weston, many congregations along the Connecticut would adopt Stoddardean practices within their own churches. The last half of this chapter will deal with this extremely important issue.

³⁶⁵ Judd, ed., *Northampton Genealogies and Church Records*, IV, 366-368.

³⁶⁶ Sweeney, "River Gods," 152-153.

revealing sermon, the Deerfield pastor exhorted his listeners to “let such as have hitherto neglected the Lords Supper be persuaded to come to this ordinance. Too many among us take license to neglect this.” The process did not need to be as difficult as some made it. “Let a man examine himself,” he argued, “and so let him eat of that Bread, and drink of that Cup. You are Solemnly invited.”³⁶⁸ His failure to mention the need for a relation and his specific mandate that a man only needs to “examine himself,” suggests, at the very least, his fear that many would hold back due to religious scruples and his hope that the Supper would be better utilized in Deerfield. It seems likely, too, that Williams wanted to go even beyond their vision of the supper, by allowing all but non-scandalous Deerfield inhabitants to become full members and participate at the Lord’s Table.

John Williams also supported Stoddard’s notions on the need for binding consociations. He joined the Hampshire Association in 1714 as one of its original members.³⁶⁹ As an important member of the Hampshire Association, Williams, like the others, advocated that each church represented by the association was bound to the

³⁶⁷ There is no intimation in any records about an ecclesiastical controversy over the admission requirements in Deerfield. Bradley indicates in *Recollections of Deerfield*, that John Williams was immensely loved by his parishioners who “greatly...lamented” his death, as he was considered “a great blessing” to the church. His successor to the pulpit in 1732, who was “strongly orthodox in his sentiments,” did however, side with “Mr. Stoddard in his controversy...over baptism.” That major fighting was avoided in Deerfield during Williams’s ministry and that his successor quickly accepted liberal requirements for membership, despite his “strongly orthodox sentiments,” indicates that the congregation most likely favored Williams’s views. See M. Bradley, *Recollections of Deerfield* (Genealogical Society of Utah, film no. 0954368), 24, 66 and Pliny Arms, *Deerfield History* (Deerfield, MA: Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association, 1820), 28. See also Williston Walker, *Creeeds and Platforms*, 282n.

³⁶⁸ John Williams, *A Serious Word to the Posterity of Holy Men to Exalt their Father’s God* (Boston: B. Green, nd.), 46.

³⁶⁹ *Northampton Church Records*, 21.

council's recommendations, insisting that it must be their "duty to be subject to a Council of the churches of the county, until there is some superior Council set up in the Province unto which we may appeal."³⁷⁰ Although the association did not have as much binding power as the Saybrook Platform granted, Williams continually admonished his own church to heed the council's advice as if it were binding. The Deerfield minister warned his parishioners, in a passionate sermon, not to "forsake the communion of these Churches, upon frivolous pretences, or for by-ends, as the manner of some is."³⁷¹ Although it is not known whether or not his church agreed with his arguments for a binding ministerial council, his support for Stoddard's Presbyterian-like council certainly earned him the respect of his father-in-law and helped to further solidified the Northampton minister's influence and authority among western New England's clergymen.

Stoddard's two sons and one step-son also helped their father extend his clout throughout the region. His son Colonel John, as discussed in the previous chapter, provided Stoddard with an effective secular deputy in Northampton. As the county's wealthiest man and most important secular ruler, John gave his father a significant secular presence outside of Northampton as well. Sharing "his father's idea" that one should not be too strict in "extending baptism and church membership to those who were a little unorthodox but sincere in their beliefs," John Stoddard proved an important voice of support for his father throughout Western New England.³⁷² John's step-brother,

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁷¹ Williams, *A Serious Word*, 48.

Warham Mather, who, like John, never became a full-time minister, seemed to also endorse his step-father's views on admissions to the Lords Table. In one of the rare discourses he gave, Warham Mather argued that the Lords Supper, among other useful ordinances and practices, has "a direct and natural tendency to further and help us in well-doing."³⁷³ Whether he advocated the use of the Supper as a means of obtaining grace or not, is not entirely clear from the scanty sources available. His influence as a Justice of the Peace in New Haven, however, regardless of his ecclesiastical views, gave his step-father another strong ally in the valley.

Anthony, Solomon Stoddard's only son to enter the ministry, further extended his father's influence in Connecticut. After graduating from Harvard, he accepted a position as pastor of the church in Woodbury, Connecticut in 1700. Like his brothers-in-law, Stephen Mix and Timothy Edwards, Anthony Stoddard favored the Presbyterian-leaning Saybrook Platform. His name, in fact, appears on the "Fairfield Interpretation," which affirmed that he was "compliant with ye conclusions of ye sd Councill at Saybrook."³⁷⁴

Although it is difficult to determine the exact polity of the Woodbury Church from the scanty sources still available, it seems clear from what information does exist, that Anthony Stoddard sought to open membership to all of Woodbury's inhabitants and that his church even practiced such doctrines. Historian James Walsh acknowledged in his local study of Woodbury, that "although there is no direct evidence that Woodbury

³⁷² Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, V, 108. See also the previous chapter for a more in-dept look at John Stoddard's influence in Northampton and the surrounding areas.

³⁷³ Warham Mather, *A Short Discourse Showing that our Salvation is of Mere Grace* (New London: 1716), 18.

³⁷⁴ See the *Fairfield Interpretation* in Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 509.

was Stoddardean, Stoddard's son, Anthony, was pastor there from 1702-1760," adding that "when a new pastor was ordained to succeed him, a new covenant was adopted which implicitly criticized the traditional practice of allowing persons to become communicants without subscribing to the covenant of grace." Additionally, the Bethlehem First Church, an offshoot of the Woodbury Church, which likely inherited its practices, similarly rejected unregenerate communion in 1750 after having practiced it for ten years.³⁷⁵ True to the family name, Anthony Stoddard did much to extend Stoddardean principles in Woodbury and the surrounding areas and provided his father with an important ecclesiastical ally.

With the support of his Northampton congregation and a developing network of influential relatives, Stoddard's influence over Western New England seemed to be on the rise. With his sons-in-law and own sons providing him with a base of power, Sweeney argues, Stoddard "stood at the head of a small, but growing party of like-minded Connecticut Valley ministers."³⁷⁶ His ultimate influence over the region, however, would come into full bloom only after clergymen with no familial ties embraced and practiced Stoddard's unique doctrines within their own churches. Although not every clergyman and congregation in the valley readily accepted Stoddard's Presbyterian-leaning ideas, a substantial number of them eventually did accept some or all of Stoddard's practices.

³⁷⁵ James Walsh, "The Great Awakening in the First Congregational Church of Woodbury, Connecticut" *William and Mary Quarterly*, vol. 28 (Oct, 1971), 545.

³⁷⁶Sweeney, *River Gods*, 153.

This acceptance of Stoddardeanism among those not directly related to the Northampton pastor came, in part, as a result of Stoddard's immense fame as a successful evangelist. His five distinct Northampton "harvests," or episodes in which numerous churchgoers converted simultaneously, made him a minister whose guidance was extremely valuable to clergymen throughout the valley. They certainly understood that evangelical success equated to increased deference from parishioners. Stoddard himself acknowledged in his famous publication, *Guide to Christ*, that effectual teaching not only reached the unconverted, but that it also raised the importance of the clergy.³⁷⁷ Bringing Christians to salvation seemed like one of the few ways New England's clergymen could combat the rising power of the fraternity and the declining authority of the ministry.

In his examination of Western New England's ecclesiastical history, Paul Lucas affirmed that during the second and third generations, ministers along the Connecticut "fell from power" and that "little remained to control or channel popular energies," arguing furthermore that as the valley's churches began to give more power to the fraternity, this "limited or nullified the independence of the minister." Despite this general trend, however, he acknowledged that "Stoddard's advice was sought eagerly...and his stock among the brethren of the valley remained high, a rarity in a time of anticlericalism."³⁷⁸

³⁷⁷ Solomon Stoddard, *A Guide to Christ: Or, the Way of Directing Souls That Are Under the Works of Conversion Compiled for the Help of Young Ministers* (Boston, 1714). In this work, Stoddard attempts to help young ministers guide souls to conversion through preparation and effective preaching. One of the obvious consequences of successful guidance through conversion would be increased respect from the laity and enhanced clerical authority.

³⁷⁸ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 86, 126, 148.

Stoddard's overall goal as a minister, who regularly preached at different churches and events throughout New England, had been to create an awakening or revival of religion among Christians outside of Northampton. Like Paul the itinerate preacher, Lucas argued, Stoddard and his fellow ministers in the Hampshire Association often exchanged pulpits in an effort to bring conversion to the numerous lost souls throughout Hampshire County. Their labors, Lucas believed, led to frequent revivals and outpourings of the spirit during the 1720s. This very ploy, in fact, was mimicked by George Whitefield and others, according to Lucas, during the Great Awakening.³⁷⁹ Even the extremely popular and seemingly innovative idea of itinerate preaching during the Great Awakening, then, had met with previous success by Stoddard and his peers in the Hampshire Association.

Given Stoddard's unique position as a preacher who maintained the deference of his parishioners, it comes as no surprise that envious ministers throughout the valley began to read his books on conversion and preaching. These works touched the lives of many with whom Stoddard did not even come in personal contact. Thomas Clap, for example, who later became the President of Yale University, emerged as one of the many who would read and be influenced by Stoddard's powerful words on conversion. "When I was about seventeen years old," he recalled, "I read a Treatise concerning conversion by Mr. Stoddard of Northampton, upon which I thought I had never been really converted." After some amount of "concern and distress" for the welfare of his soul, "some short time

³⁷⁹ Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 200-202.

after this I joined the Church in Cambridge.”³⁸⁰ Even Stoddard’s printed words, as this particular case makes clear, had a tremendous impact on his readers. Stoddard’s enormous success as an author and an evangelist, Lucas insisted, caused many neighboring clerics, seeking to increase their own influence, to “flock to his new plan.”³⁸¹

This evangelical success made Stoddard famous among both the laity and clergy of the valley. Their respect for him as a skillful preacher certainly must have enhanced his reputation in other ecclesiastical matters as well. It comes as no surprise, then, that ministers along the Connecticut and especially those in Hampshire County not only read his books on preaching and mimicked his evangelical style, but also implemented and practiced his more controversial innovations. The churches and ministers of the Stoddard-led “Hampshire Association,” in fact, eventually became some of his most ardent supporters.

This association, formed in 1714 by Stoddard and five other ministers, including his two sons-in-law, William and John Williams, proved to be a central means by which Stoddard would extend his influence outside of his family to much of Hampshire County and western New England. The new association allowed the outspoken Northampton clergyman a forum through which he propagated his Presbyterian views to fellow ministers and eventually to the churches themselves. Rather than extending his influence through mere reputation or through print, the Hampshire Association allowed Stoddard to come into direct contact with ministers and laymen throughout the valley, permitting him the opportunity to use his charismatic preaching style and well-honed powers of

³⁸⁰ This account is recorded by Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, VII, 343-344.

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 200.

persuasion in a uniquely personal way. Citing Warham Williams's journal, Paul Lucas suggests in his ecclesiastical history of the Connecticut Valley that during the early years of the Hampshire Association many of the clergymen in Stoddard's council exchanged pulpits on a regular basis.³⁸² James Goulding and George Marsden further argue that beginning in 1712, Stoddard and William Williams "cultivated revivals throughout the valley."³⁸³ These assertions seem to be further verified by the Evans Manuscript Collection of early American sermons. Of the numerous sermons preached by Stoddard in the vast collection, more than half were given outside of Northampton. A large percentage of the sermons preached by other members of the association also came from outside of their respective churches, with many being preached in other Hampshire Association churches.³⁸⁴ Stoddard's uniquely effective preaching style, which produced at least five different "harvests" in Northampton, could then be enjoyed by other congregations and his Presbyterian views on church membership and polity could also be circulated within the churches themselves.

³⁸² Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 200-202.

³⁸³ See Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 117 and Goulding, "Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers," 354-357.

³⁸⁴ Some of the sermons preached by Hampshire Association members can be found in the Evans Manuscript collection. See, for example, William Williams's 1716 sermon to the congregation of Springfield entitled "A Painful Ministry of the Particular Gift of the Lord of the Harvest to be Sought by Prayer," (Boston, 1717), Isaac Chauncey's "Blessed Manumission," preached at Deerfield, Solomon Stoddard's "The Duty of Gospel Ministers Set Forth in a sermon preached at Brookfield," in 1717, or his sermon entitled "The Presence of Christ with the Ministers of the Gospel in a sermon preached at Swampfield, January 1, 1718." Swampfield, which would change its name to Sunderland, joined the Hampshire Association after becoming an officially gathered church.

The ministers of the various churches in the Hampshire Association, furthermore, became important advocates on his behalf in their respective congregations. These ministers, after all, believed much like Stoddard himself, that binding ministerial associations needed to be utilized in New England. Although a true national church would be too difficult to put into practice in the strict Congregational society of New England, Stoddard and his fellow minister's attempts to create a binding association, according to George Marsden, "was the best they could do."³⁸⁵ The council's proposals, signed by all six original founders, acknowledged "a power in ecclesiastical Councils" because it found "the constitution of a superior power over particular congregations in the Old Testament."³⁸⁶ Their proposals also argued that "we find that the primitive churches were subject to the Apostles, and therefore had no absolute power in themselves." Being convinced by Stoddard that the county needed "an effectual means for redressing grievances," he and the five other members of the council acknowledged that "under these considerations we judge it our duty to be subject to a Council of the Churches of the County, until there be some superior Council set up in the Province unto which we may appeal."³⁸⁷

Although the Hampshire Association never achieved the power to bind each member church to its decisions, the ministerial support for this overtly Presbyterian association demonstrated Stoddard's influence over the nearby clergymen. These very ministers and their congregations, with the possible exception of the Enfield Church,

³⁸⁵ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 116.

³⁸⁶ *Northampton Church Records*, 21.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

became Stoddard's strongest allies in Hampshire County as most debated his views on membership qualifications and eventually accepted these practices within their own churches. Stoddard's influence over this ministerial association, then, ultimately became a way for him to spread his ideas to a greater number of the valley's lay and clerical leaders.

Despite assertions by historians like Harry S. Stout, who argues that "Stoddard's views were not accepted even by many of his fellow ministers in the Connecticut River Valley, and within the churches lay people generally resisted his 'Presbyterian' sentiments," a closer look at the individual clergymen who participated in the Hampshire Association and their respective churches reveals a different perspective of Stoddardeanism in Western New England. Jonathan Edwards himself, surprisingly enough, even recognized that at the time he changed from Stoddardean to anti-Stoddardean admission policies in 1744, just fifteen years after Stoddard's death, the popularity open communion received. The general population, he explained, assumed that "the contrary opinion to mine had not only long been established in Northampton, without so much as one opposer to it, but it had also been fully and quietly established for a long time in all the neighboring churches and congregations and in all the country round, even to a great distance."³⁸⁸ Stoddard's open way received such widespread support, Edwards admitted, that most people thought "all the world almost was against me" and they therefore "represented me as all alone in my opinion." Even his "opposers" at "a great distance," he further acknowledged, became intensely involved in the

³⁸⁸ Claghorn, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XVI, 385.

controversy, suggesting the widespread support of Stoddard's open admission practices outside of Northampton.³⁸⁹

Almost the entire Northampton congregation, Edwards recognized, agreed that Stoddardean admission practices extended to most if not "all" of the valley's clergymen and congregations. Numerous clergymen who shared no family connections to Stoddard would, over time, come to endorse Stoddard's views in their published sermons, in their various ecclesiastical writings, and through their efforts to establish binding consociations of ministers in both Massachusetts and Connecticut. More than simply professing their belief in Stoddard's doctrines, several of the valley's clergymen would also find success in implementing and practicing his ecclesiastical polity in their various congregations. Even Westfield would eventually implement Stoddard's admission policies very soon after the ministry of Stoddard's ecclesiastical opponent, Edward Taylor, ended. Stoddard's most divisive and controversial doctrine--that the Lord's Supper served as a means of obtaining grace--would even find some adherents in the valley.

Hadley, the closest town geographically to Northampton and an original member of the Hampshire Association, gradually fell under the powerful influence of Solomon Stoddard. Settled in 1659, just five years after its neighbor to the west, Hadley gathered its church in 1661, a year before the Northampton Church was officially gathered.³⁹⁰

Unlike Northampton, Hadley was settled by strict Congregationalists who had split from

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁹⁰ Sylvester Judd, *History of Hadley, Including the early History of Hatfield, South Hadley, and Granby Massachusetts* (Northampton: Metcalf and Co., 1863), 13, 47.

their Hartford Church because they refused to accept the pastor's effort to extend baptism to the children of unbaptized adults. Because the Hartford minister "bordered more on Presbyterianism and less on independence," the minority who opposed his views departed from town and settled Hadley, Massachusetts.³⁹¹ Despite this initially strict adherence to Congregational government, Hadley's clerical leaders gradually began to support Stoddardean polity. Their support for Stoddard's open membership practices became first evident in the events surrounding the gathering of the Westfield Church in 1678, just six years after Stoddard's Northampton ministry began.

In the years immediately prior to Westfield's gathering, Stoddard and the Westfield minister, Edward Taylor, exchanged numerous letters with each other. During their correspondence, Taylor became aware of Stoddard's views on open membership and strongly disagreed with his new neighbor. At the gathering of his Westfield Church, which Stoddard attended, Taylor sought to emphasize his differences with the Northampton minister by reading his regenerative experience in its entirety before the church and requesting that each of the six founding "pillars" do the same. By so doing, Taylor hoped to focus the services on the importance of public conversion testimonials. "But," the Westfield church records indicate, "the Elders and Messenger of Northampton and Hadley Churches drove to the contrary." In a show of solidarity, the Hadley delegation backed their Northampton neighbors against Taylor's subtle jab at Stoddard's polity. This early example of Hadley's support for Stoddardean practices proved to be only the first of many such displays during and after Stoddard's long Northampton ministry.

³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 5.

Hadley's second minister, Isaac Chauncy, who began preaching there in 1695, eventually became a trusted friend and a powerful ally of Solomon Stoddard. Over time, Chauncy would strongly advocate many of Stoddard's positions on ecclesiastical polity. One of the first ways he demonstrated his support for Stoddard came through his endorsement of the Hampshire Association. The appearance of his name on the original Hampshire Association records, symbolizes Chauncy's early devotion to his friend, Solomon Stoddard. As one of six original members of the consociation of ministers in the county, Chauncy, like the others, affirmed that "because churches may neglect to hear advice" from ineffectual councils, the Hampshire Association did "acknowledge a power in ecclesiastical Councils."³⁹² The Hadley minister's participation furthermore allowed Stoddard additional opportunities to persuade Chauncy and his congregation to accept his views on church membership and the Lord's Supper.

Beyond his support for Stoddard's ministerial association, Chauncy became an advocate of Stoddard's other controversial practices. Concerning membership and the sacraments, for example, Chauncy argued before a crowd of clergymen and lay members alike in a 1724 ordination sermon at Sunderland, Massachusetts, that "if persons are acquainted with the Principles of religion, entertain the Doctrines of the Gospel as Articles of their creed and Live Moral and Religious Lives, they are Visible Saints and therefore not to be debar'd of those Privileges." Echoing his neighbor, he continued his sermon by suggesting that "the tares and the wheat must grow together till the harvest." Giving credit where credit was due, however, Chauncy acknowledged that "I need not multiply words, for the Reverend Mr. Stoddard by his excellent and elaborate Discourses

³⁹² *A Meeting of the Ministers of Hampshire in the Northampton Church Records*, 21.

hath brought this truth to noonday light, and the world is greatly indebted to him for it.”³⁹³ In accepting Stoddard’s “excellent” truths, Chauncy recognized his friend’s significant role in the Connecticut Valley and advocated on his behalf before a group containing both apologists and opponents of Stoddard’s polity. More than an innovative minister with obscure doctrines, Stoddard, in Chauncy’s eyes, had become an ecclesiastical leader whose important beliefs needed to be brought to light. As a friend and disciple of Stoddard, Chauncy spent his ministry helping the Northampton minister spread the “truth” within Hadley and throughout the entire valley.³⁹⁴

Although Hadley had initially opposed liberal baptismal requirements and especially open communion, Stoddard’s influence over Chauncy as a close neighbor and as an important participant in the Hampshire Association, eventually resulted in Hadley’s practice of Stoddardean polity.³⁹⁵ Walker’s listing of Hadley as a “Stoddardean” church in 1750, demonstrates that at least by the middle of the eighteenth century, Hadley had come around to Stoddard’s practices, but the transition clearly began decades before.³⁹⁶

³⁹³ Isaac Chauncy, *Sermon Preached at the Ordination of Mr. William Rand at Sunderland* (Boston: Green for Henchman, 1725), 28-29.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.* Chauncy’s *Sermon Preached*, which recognizes Stoddard’s role in bringing the truth concerning membership requirements to light, was delivered before the Sunderland Church. More than simply advocating Stoddard’s views to his own church, Chauncy also is willing to propagate those views to neighboring churches.

³⁹⁵ For an excellent overview of Hadley’s early history, see Judd, *History of Hadley*.

³⁹⁶ Walker, *Creeks and Platforms*, 282n. Walker’s list of Stoddardean and anti-Stoddardean Churches is derived from the 1750 council of ministers that met to arbitrate the dispute between Edwards and the Northampton Church. Although the nine ministers that convened in Northampton on this occasion should have come from the twenty-five member Hampshire Association, two of the nine were from outside Hampshire County. Given that Edwards was allowed to choose five of the members that would form the core

Despite their certain knowledge, through word and print, that Chauncy advocated the practice of unrestricted baptism and access to the Lord's Table as early as 1724, Judd argues that the Hadley minister "led a peaceable and quiet life with the people of Hadley," stating furthermore, that "there is no intimation that there was ever any difficulty or misunderstanding between them."³⁹⁷ The absence of resistance to Chauncy's Presbyterian doctrines and practices indicates, at the very least, that most tolerated what they once disdained. It seems very likely that Stoddard's significant presence in nearby Northampton, coupled with Chauncy's strong defense of his doctrines compelled the Hadley brethren to accept and practice Stoddardean policy in their church long before Walker acknowledged it in 1750.

Chauncy became such a strong supporter of Stoddard that he even advocated Stoddard's highly-controversial doctrine concerning the converting power of the Lord's Supper. In a published sermon, the Hadley minister taught the importance of Christ's ordinances, arguing that like prayer and preaching, the sacraments "are adapted to

of the ecclesiastical council, historian W.L. Kingsley argued that two sympathetic outsiders were needed since "there were not more than three in the county, with the exception of his young brother-in-law, Moses Tuttle, that were decidedly anti-Stoddardean." The other twenty-two members of the Hampshire Association, Kingsley and Walker argue, were Stoddardean in their admission policies. Their findings in the matter seem to be confirmed by the still extant records of the council that does include representatives from Sutton and Reading, both from outside the Hampshire Association. The council's records also, not surprisingly, record a mixed vote between the representatives over the requirements for full communion. Concerning the qualifications for membership the council declared; "We don't all of us agree with Mr. Edwards in our sentiments upon the point." See *Result of the Council of Nine Churches Met at Northampton, June 22, 1750* (Boston, 1750) 1-5. See also W.L. Kingsley "Stoddardeanism," *The New Englander*, vol. IV (July, 1846), 350-356.

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 327. It is clear that Hadley's residents knew of Chauncy's Presbyterian-leaning polity. Their minister advocated enlarged baptism and access to the Lords Table in word and in print and was one of the original members of the Hampshire Association when it formed in 1714.

establish the faith of Christians and build them up unto Eternal Life.”³⁹⁸ His endorsement of such an innovative doctrine aligned him squarely with his influential neighbor, making him one of Stoddard’s strongest supporters in all of New England.

Isaac Chauncy’s espousal of Stoddard’s unique doctrines and his defense of his neighbor’s even most controversial practices seem enormously significant. Before Chauncy accepted Stoddard’s views, his devotees could only be found among ministers with family connections and by Presbyterian-leaning congregations in the lower Connecticut region. Chauncy not only accepted Stoddard’s doctrines, but he also publicly acknowledged Stoddard’s role in advocating open communion. As the closest neighbor, furthermore, Chauncy’s acceptance of Stoddard’s views ultimately demonstrated the Northampton minister’s persuasiveness over fellow clergymen. Although his church only implemented Stoddardean practices decades after its break from the Hartford Church, moreover, their acceptance of a doctrine so contrary to the founder’s original polity showed Stoddard’s true influence over even the common churchgoers of the valley.

Chauncy, in fact, was not the only ally from outside Stoddard’s family circle. Numerous other non-related ministers and laymen also began to support Stoddardean practices within their own churches. A contemporary of Chauncy and Stoddard, Daniel Brewer, the minister of nearby Springfield, also became a friend to Stoddard and an advocate of his practices. Brewer grew to be so supportive that, like Chauncy, he also supported Stoddard’s ecclesiastical polity as one of the original members of the Stoddard-led Hampshire Association, affixing his name to the Presbyterian-leaning proposals of the

³⁹⁸ Chauncy, *Sermon Preached*, 2.

council.³⁹⁹ Although the early Springfield records are no longer extant and the later records remain silent about his participation in the association and his views on membership, it seems likely that Brewer favored Stoddardean admission policies given his friendship with Stoddard and his lifelong support of the Hampshire Association. His advocacy on behalf of Stoddard's ecclesiastical polity eventually resulted in its implementation within his Springfield Church. Their 1736 vote to "not look upon the making a relation to be a necessary term of communion," coupled with Walker's listing of Springfield as "Stoddardean" at the time of Edward's dismissal from Northampton, demonstrated both the minister's commitment to Stoddardean practices as well as the commitment of the entire church.⁴⁰⁰ Despite his open support of Stoddard, through his participation in the Hampshire Association, Brewer's church never became divided over his eventual introduction of open membership requirements or his participation in the Hampshire Association, which they seemed to accept as binding.⁴⁰¹ His parishioners, in

³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁰ *Springfield Church Records*, under the heading "1736." See also Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

⁴⁰¹ Although most historians point out the weaknesses of the Hampshire Association by showing its failure to resolve a controversy in Enfield, most churches probably accepted the association's advice. When the Enfield situation escalated to such a degree that many parishioners began partaking of the communion at Springfield, members of the Springfield Church actually requested the advice of the Hampshire Association concerning the matter. The association's determination that Springfield should not allow the Enfield brethren to encroach on their communion was probably obeyed. (Although the Springfield records contain no information as to whether the congregation accepted the council's advice, the lack of any kind of reprimand from the Hampshire Association indicates that the Springfield Church most likely accepted the council's advice.) See the exchange of letters during this controversy in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Gratz Collection, case 8, box 25, and Goulding's account of the dispute in "Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers," 731-744.

fact, granted him a raise in salary for his excellent work among them.⁴⁰² The support Daniel Brewer and his Springfield Church offered Solomon Stoddard seemed to be a microcosm of the larger influence Stoddard began to receive throughout western New England.

Other ministers and congregations also became strong supporters of the Northampton clergyman's Presbyterian principles. Deerfield's Jonathan Ashley, for example, who emerged as the heir to John Williams's pulpit in 1729, "sided with Mr. Stoddard," according to the town historian, "in his controversy with Mr. Edwards over baptism."⁴⁰³ The Westfield Church, which had endured the long pastorate of one of Stoddard's foremost opponents, Edward Taylor, also began to use Stoddardean membership practices sometime between the last part of Taylor's ministry in 1728 and the commencement of Edwards's Northampton controversy at mid-century, when Walker listed Westfield as "Stoddardean." Whatever the case, however, it is clear that by 1728, a year before Taylor and Stoddard's deaths, many of Westfield's parishioners opposed at least the public expression of faith that had been required during Taylor's long ministry. "In a church meeting holden in Westfield Feb. 25th, 1728," the records indicate, it was "voted that those who enter full communion, may have liberty to give an account of a work of saving conversion or not. It shall be regarded by the church as a matter of

⁴⁰² See Henry M. Burt, *First Century of the History of Springfield: The official Records from 1636-1736 with a Historical Review and Biographical Mention of the Founders* (Springfield, MA: H.M.B, 1899) and *Springfield Church Records* (Springfield, MA), under the heading "1736."

⁴⁰³ Arms, *Deerfield History*, 28.

indifference.”⁴⁰⁴ Two of Taylor’s modern biographers, Thomas and Virginia Davis, in fact implied that the congregation’s push to forgo an account of saving conversion was indicative of a larger movement toward completely open communion.⁴⁰⁵ Westfield’s movement from the strict admission policies Taylor maintained during his ministry to the more open membership qualifications that would eventually be practiced in Westfield, must have been due, at least in part, to the life-long advocacy of such principles by their influential neighbor, Solomon Stoddard.

Like Brewer, Chauncy, Jonathan Ashley and others, the minister of New London, Connecticut, Gurdon Saltonstall--who would also eventually become governor of that colony--became an adherent of Stoddardean practices, further augmenting Stoddard’s influence in western New England. Although he lived in southern Connecticut, a considerable distance from Northampton, and therefore was not a member of the Hampshire Association, Saltonstall, surprisingly enough, became a strong advocate on Stoddard’s behalf during his ministry and throughout his governorship. By the early eighteenth century, Lucas argued, Saltonstall could be firmly “connected to Stoddard.”⁴⁰⁶ Being what Lucas termed a “disciple” of Stoddard, Saltonstall even embraced the

⁴⁰⁴ Walker, *Creeks and Platforms*, 282n.

⁴⁰⁵ Davis’, *Edward Taylor versus Solomon Stoddard*, 47. Although the Davis’s do not specifically say that the Westfield Church began to practice open membership and communion at this time, they do allude to such circumstances by arguing that Westfield’s change in polity “would seem to be the end of the matter, were it not, of course, for Jonathan Edwards.” Edwards, it must be remembered, brought the matter back into public scrutiny years later when he began to fight against Stoddard’s practices of allowing all non-scandalous Christians to enjoy full church membership and all of its prerogatives.

⁴⁰⁶ Paul R. Lucas, “An Appeal to the Learned,” 274n.

Northampton minister's divisive doctrine on the converting power of the sacraments.⁴⁰⁷

Lucas furthermore argues that as a Presbyterian and advocate of the broad way, Saltonstall, like Stoddard, opposed church covenants and favored binding ministerial associations.

Saltonstall's advocacy of Stoddard's system of hierarchical church government, moreover, became even more important in Connecticut after 1707 when he became its new governor. Although the Saybrook Platform "met with plentiful opposition," Williston Walker explained, Governor Saltonstall, became "instrumental in securing the Saybrook system." "His election to the governorship," Walker further maintained, pushed "the movement...more rapidly forward."⁴⁰⁸

Stoddard's influence over Connecticut's governor and many of its influential ministers at the time of the Saybrook meetings is extremely significant. The Platform, after all, according to Marsden, was a "version of the Westminster Confession of Faith," a confession that endorsed a very Presbyterian system of church government for England.⁴⁰⁹ Connecticut's platform, modeled on the English version, also set up a very Presbyterian-like association of churches in southwestern New England similar to what Stoddard advocated in his *Instituted Churches*. "The Saybrook Platform," Miller asserted, "institutionalized the ecclesiastical theories of Solomon Stoddard."⁴¹⁰ Although

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 144. In an unpublished albeit very "pro-Stoddard" sermon from 1703, as Lucas described it, Saltonstall openly endorsed Stoddard's arguments concerning the converting ability of the Lord's Supper. See also, Lucas, *Valley of Discord*, 129-130.

⁴⁰⁸ Walker, *Creeks and Platforms*, 493, 499, 600.

⁴⁰⁹ Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards*, 116.

few if any modern historians have analyzed Stoddard's influence over this very important ecclesiastical development, his influence over several Connecticut ministers, including his son Anthony, and sons-in-laws, Stephen Mix and Timothy Edwards as well as Governor Saltonstall provides an insight into his larger influence over the valley's religious practices.

Despite his modern reputation as an ineffective voice of opposition to the New England Way, Stoddard exerted a tremendous amount of influence over the ministers and laymen of Hampshire County and the Connecticut Valley, affecting many changes in its ecclesiastical polity. His influence over Governor Saltonstall and three leading members of the Saybrook meetings certainly contributed to the adoption of New England's most Presbyterian form of ecclesiastical government. By the time of his death in 1729, moreover, his sons-in-law including all three Williams', Stephen Mix, and Timothy Edwards as well as his own sons John and Anthony Stoddard, at least three non-related ministers, Isaac Chauncy, Daniel Brewer, and Jonathan Ashley, and Connecticut's governor, Gurdon Saltonstall all adhered to Stoddard's Presbyterian-leaning polity. The churches of Wethersfield, East Windsor, Hatfield, Weston, Deerfield, Woodbury, New London, Hadley, and Springfield increasingly leaned toward Stoddard's views on open membership. Every incorporated town in Hampshire County, including Edward Taylor's once strict Westfield Church, eventually joined Stoddard's Hampshire Association and remained true to Stoddardeanism.⁴¹¹ Even his most controversial doctrine concerning the

⁴¹⁰Miller, *From Colony to Province*, 264-266.

⁴¹¹Cotton Mather's 1696 map of New England shows thirteen towns along the Connecticut River. Six of those towns are located in present-day Connecticut while seven are in Massachusetts. Five of the seven Massachusetts towns—Hatfield, Northampton, Springfield, Deerfield, and Hadley—as well as one Connecticut town—

converting power of the Lord's Supper, for which Lucas and Hall both found no evidence outside of Northampton, attained adherents in Stephen Mix, William Williams, Isaac Chauncy, and Gurdon Saltonstall.⁴¹² Other ministers and churches not directly correlated with Hampshire County or Solomon Stoddard may well have similarly fallen under his immense influence. Although complete correlations between Stoddard and the churches throughout New England that practiced open membership policies during his lifetime are difficult to make considering the lack of sources directly linking Stoddard to a particular church's polity, his advocacy for such innovations possibly played a role in their various practices. After listing what he considered a large number of "Stoddardean" churches and ministers, in fact, Williston Walker quickly added that "these of course represent but a few of the real number of adherents."⁴¹³ Whatever the case, however, it seems clear that Stoddard's influence over the county and much of the valley exceeded what most modern historians now acknowledge.

Although at least ten ministers, one governor, and almost a dozen churches clearly practiced "Stoddardeanism" during his lifetime, far more practiced his polity following

Enfield—joined the original Hampshire Association. The other two towns--Swampfield, which later became Sunderland, and Squakheag, which eventually changed its name to Northfield—joined the Hampshire Association after each became an officially incorporated town. All but Enfield, furthermore, were listed by Walker as "Stoddardean" in practice at the time of Edward's 1750 dismissal from the Northampton pulpit, suggesting that opposition to Stoddard's polity was waning at least in Hampshire County. See Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n and chapter VI of this dissertation.

⁴¹² Hall, *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, vol. 12, 42 and Lucas, "Appeal to the Learned," 276n. Lucas argues that "few if any of the clergy ever appropriated the concept of the Lord's Supper as a converting ordinance." Lucas also mentions that "I have scanned the Church records...for attempts to link open communion and converting ordinances. I have found no such evidence except in Stoddard's own church."

⁴¹³ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

his death in 1729. Furthermore, his influence as an evangelist, who was responsible for numerous “harvests” or “awakenings” in Northampton, continued to grow after his death as ministers mimicked his teaching style in the Great Awakening. The final factor in understanding Solomon Stoddard’s true influence over the valley, then, will require an in-depth look at his significant legacy in Hampshire County and the Connecticut Valley after his death.

Chapter VII

Solomon Stoddard's Legacy in Northampton and the Connecticut Valley

During his sixty-year Northampton ministry, Solomon Stoddard became a significantly influential figure within his own church and in many of the surrounding churches of the Connecticut Valley. Numerous ministers joined his Hampshire Association and several congregations throughout the region practiced his open admission policies as a direct result of his teachings. After his death in 1729, moreover, his influence remained strong among future generations. The New England-wide trend toward more open forms of communion that occurred in the decades after his death, in fact, was greatly influenced by Stoddard's Presbyterian legacy. His charismatic preaching style and emphasis on conversion also carried over to future generations of ministers especially during the revivals of the Great Awakening. Stoddard's ultimate legacy, then, can be measured not only by what he accomplished during his lifetime, but also by the influence he exerted even after his death.

In order to accurately evaluate Stoddard's contribution to New England's later church polity, a consideration of larger New England-wide trends must be made. Although historians acknowledge Stoddard as a voice of opposition to the New England Way, most assume that New England's admission and communion policies fluctuated not as a result of one particular minister's influence, but as a result of various trends in both

old and New England during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. One such historian, Edmund S. Morgan, argues that even before the Puritan migration to New England in the 1620s and 1630s, most English Puritans advocated open communion.⁴¹⁴ Although the movement to limit communion to only regenerate saints later became a hallmark of New England's churches, England itself remained largely open in its polity. Morgan maintains that after a few decades of practicing limited membership in New England many of the colony's congregations began to move back toward the more tolerant requirements most English congregations continued to practice. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, Morgan further argues, many congregations and ministers "came out flatly for open communion and denied that there was any scriptural foundation for the testing of saving faith by relations of religious experience."⁴¹⁵ Given New England's larger trend toward open communion in locations like Boston, Stoddard's posthumous influence over the valley's ecclesiastical polity becomes difficult to gauge. That his lifelong advocacy for open communion did have some impact on the larger trend favoring such practices, however, seems certain when the records are consulted. His direct links to various ministers and congregations that practiced his polity shows that his lifelong advocacy for expanded membership requirements actually helped to drive this larger trend forward after his death.

In the geographical area immediately surrounding Northampton, numerous churches practiced, in one form or another, Stoddard's system of open communion in the

⁴¹⁴Edmund S. Morgan, *Visible Saints* (New York: New York University Press, 1963), 57-76. Here, Morgan mentions that Samuel Willard's Boston Third Church adopted tolerant admission requirements.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150.

decades following his death. The nineteenth-century historian, Williston Walker, in fact, listed twenty-two of the twenty-five Connecticut Valley churches that participated in the Hampshire Association as “Stoddardean” in practice by the time of Jonathan Edwards’s dismissal from Northampton in 1750.⁴¹⁶ Many lay and clerical leaders undoubtedly recognized the widespread appeal of Stoddard’s practices. The Northampton brethren, for example, strongly believed, according to Edwards, that Stoddard’s tolerant church membership practices “had...been fully and quietly established for a long time in all the neighboring churches and congregations, and in all the country round, even to a great distance.”⁴¹⁷ Besides the familiar churches, which had long been associated with Stoddard and the early Hampshire Association, Walker’s extensive list of churches favoring Stoddard’s polity by the mid-eighteenth century also included such churches as Amherst, Brimfield, East Granville, Great Barrington, Greenwich, New Marlborough, Northfield, Sheffield, Shutesbury, Southampton, Sunderland, Wilbraham, Somers, and Suffield.

Although these various churches participated in the Hampshire Association and were considered “Stoddardean” by Walker, the exact polity of each church is difficult to substantiate with the limited sources yet available. Suffield, as one example, can only be confirmed as “Stoddardean” by limited outside sources. Their pastor, Ebenezer Gay, one town historian acknowledged, “was disposed to think candidly and hope charitably of all who appeared to possess the Christian temper.” Certainly his church must have felt much

⁴¹⁶ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

⁴¹⁷ Claghorn, ed., *Works of Jonathan Edwards*, XVI, 385.

the same way as “peace attended his steps through the whole course of his ministry.”⁴¹⁸ The exact polity of the church, despite circumstantial evidence linking it to Stoddard’s open way, however, is difficult to determine. Although not every church listed by Walker as “Stoddardean” can be easily verified, more than half of the twenty-two listed can be corroborated by sources other than Walker, suggesting the accuracy of his detailed record.⁴¹⁹

Many churches not even listed on Walker’s extensive register also practiced Stoddardean polity as a direct result of Stoddard’s influence. The Williams family, for example, related to Stoddard through the marriage of three daughters, played a major role

⁴¹⁸ Hezekiah S. Sheldon, *A Documentary History of Suffield, Massachusetts, 1660-1749* (Springfield, MA, 1879), 90.

⁴¹⁹ See chapter V and pages 5-11 of chapter VI of this dissertation for a careful examination of the ministers and churches in Hampshire County that practiced open communion. More than half of Walker’s register of churches are shown in these chapters to have practiced Stoddardean polity, suggesting the accuracy of Walker’s list. See also, Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n. Walker’s list of Stoddardean and anti-Stoddardean Churches is derived from the 1750 council of ministers that met to arbitrate the dispute between Edwards and the Northampton Church. Although the nine ministers that convened in Northampton on this occasion should have come from the twenty-five member Hampshire Association, two of the nine were from outside Hampshire County. Given that Edwards was allowed to choose five of the members that would form the core of the ecclesiastical council, historian W.L. Kingsley argued that two sympathetic outsiders were needed since “there were not more than three in the county, with the exception of his young brother-in-law, Moses Tuttle, that were decidedly anti-Stoddardean.” The other twenty-two members of the Hampshire Association, Kingsley and Walker argue, were Stoddardean in their admission policies. Their findings in the matter seem to be confirmed by the still extant records of the council that does include representatives from Sutton and Reading, both from outside the Hampshire Association. The council’s records also, not surprisingly, record a mixed vote between the representatives over the requirements for full communion. Concerning the qualifications for membership the council declared; “We don’t all of us agree with Mr. Edwards in our sentiments upon the point.” See *Result of the Council of Nine Churches Met at Northampton, June 22, 1750* (Boston, 1750) 1-5. See also W.L. Kingsley “Stoddardeanism,” *The New Englander*, vol. IV (July, 1846), 350-356.

in extending Stoddardeanism to future generations of New Englanders both inside and outside of Hampshire County, thereby helping to drive forward the general movement toward more relaxed admission policies. The “Williams ministers,” according to Kevin Sweeney, became the “followers and intellectual heirs of Reverend Solomon Stoddard.”⁴²⁰ By 1723, in fact, just six years before Stoddard’s death, nine Williams’ occupied pulpits in New England.⁴²¹

Stoddard’s grandson, Solomon Williams, son of William Williams of Hatfield, for example, strongly supported his grandfather’s views on ecclesiastical government and admission to the Lord’s Table. Williams, in fact, defended his grandfather’s position against Jonathan Edwards when the latter changed his stance on the qualifications for admission to full membership and rightful participation in the Lord’s Supper. More than twenty years after Stoddard’s death, Williams pleaded with his cousin, Jonathan Edwards, in his book, *The True State of the Question Concerning the Qualifications Necessary to Lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments*, not to forsake Stoddard’s longstanding practice of allowing all moral Christians to partake of the Lord’s Supper. Like his grandfather, Williams argued that “I know of no members of the church, unless persons under censure, or scandalously ignorant, or immoral, but what the Church ought to admit to Communion and Privileges of members in complete standing.”⁴²² Citing

⁴²⁰ Kevin Michael Sweeney, “River Gods and Related Minor Deities: The Williams Family and the Connecticut River Valley, 1637-1790,” (Ph.D. diss., Yale University, 1986), abstract.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, 174.

⁴²² Solomon Williams, *The True State of the question Concerning the Qualifications Necessary to Lawful Communion in the Christian Sacraments* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1751), 3.

Solomon Stoddard's work, *Appeal to the Learned*, Williams further reminded his cousin of their grandfather's belief that "sanctifying grace is not necessary to the lawful attending of the Lords Supper."⁴²³ In opposing the truths practiced by Solomon Stoddard and his Northampton congregation, his cousin seemed to be making an error that would lead to his removal from the pulpit. Williams's purpose in writing the pro-Stoddard treatise, therefore, simply served as a "means of giving him a conviction of his mistake and reuniting him and the people of Northampton."⁴²⁴ Although unsuccessful in helping his cousin reconcile with the people of Northampton, Williams's arguments in favor of his grandfather's polity demonstrated Stoddard's power over the Williams family in the decades after his death. Solomon Williams's continued advocacy on behalf of Stoddard's polity, however, is just one example of a disciple who continued to promote what he called "the doctrine Mr. Stoddard maintained with respect to the Qualifications necessary to the lawful attending the Lord's Supper" in the decades after Stoddard's passing.⁴²⁵

Certainly Solomon Williams, who studied under Stoddard's own tutelage and who wrote an important book defending his grandfather's polity, proved to be a major influence over his church. His Lebanon, Connecticut Church, Williams's biographer tells us, "received all to communion who offered themselves without a relation of their experience."⁴²⁶ Although other factors may have influenced his congregation to reduce requirements on communion, Solomon Williams's direct link to and strong advocacy for

⁴²³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, 143.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, i-ii.

⁴²⁶ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, VI, 357.

Stoddardean practices provides an excellent example of how Stoddard's views continued to hold sway over the clergy and churches of the valley even after his death.

Like his brother Solomon, Elisha Williams also became a devoted advocate of Stoddardeanism. As the third child of William Williams, who became Stoddard's most eminent supporter in the Connecticut Valley, Elisha devoted much of his time after his graduation from Harvard to direct theological study under the watchful eye of his father in Hatfield.⁴²⁷ If the young man had not already become a disciple of Stoddard before studying under his father, then his time as a junior pastor with his father in Hatfield certainly influenced him to become a true devotee of Stoddardean principles. Elisha, like his father and grandfather, had a "doctrinal difference" with Edwards over the qualifications for communion, according to his biographer.⁴²⁸ As a dedicated disciple of Stoddard, in fact, Elisha coauthored his brother, Solomon's, famous treatise defending their grandfather's open admission standards against the strict polity of their cousin, Jonathan Edwards.⁴²⁹ Their book not only echoed Stoddard's teachings, but it also cited him on several occasions.⁴³⁰ The preface furthermore acknowledged that after studying the controversy between Solomon Stoddard and Dr. Increase Mather, the authors came to

⁴²⁷ Sweeney, "River Gods," 174.

⁴²⁸ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, VI, 593

⁴²⁹ Solomon Williams's book, *The True State of the Question*, was written in part by Elisha. The two defended their grandfather's views against their cousin, Jonathan Edwards.

⁴³⁰ See for example Williams, *The True State of the Question*, 2. Here the Williams's brothers quote directly from Solomon Stoddard's book, *Appeal to the Learned*.

support fully “the doctrine Mr. Stoddard maintained.”⁴³¹ Although not in the ministry, Elisha’s influence as a long-time Rector of Yale College and outspoken advocate of open admission requirements, gave Stoddard’s theology a strong presence among college students and other residents of Central Connecticut.⁴³²

Elisha and Solomon Williams’s cousin, Stephen Williams, son of John Williams of Deerfield, likewise supported his grandfather’s views of church polity. Stoddard, who fifteen years before his death had actually ordained Stephen Williams as minister of Longmeadow in 1714, served as his grandson’s mentor in doctrinal issues. The Northampton clergyman became so influential to the young man that in a sermon preached almost fifty years after his grandfather’s death, Williams exhorted his listeners to refrain from neglecting the “sacrament under a notion that they are not fit to come to it,” arguing that such neglect of the Lord’s Table created a “stumbling block” that must be “taken out of the way.”⁴³³ His words, Walker claims, did not fall on deaf ears, as his church accepted and implemented those doctrines into practice.⁴³⁴ Kevin Sweeney further verified Walker’s assertion, maintaining that Williams’s Longmeadow Church allowed all non-scandalous Christians to participate in the ordinance of Lord’s Supper.⁴³⁵ Williams, in fact, supported even Stoddard’s most controversial doctrine concerning the

⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, i-ii.

⁴³² Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, V, 473.

⁴³³ Stephen Williams, *Drawing Near to God in his Instituted Worship, the Means of Enjoying his Gracious Presence* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1772), 19-27.

⁴³⁴ Walker, *Creeks and Platforms*, 282n. Longmeadow is one of the churches Walker lists as “Stoddardean” in 1750.

⁴³⁵ Sweeney, “River Gods,” 181.

converting power of the sacraments. He argued in a 1772 sermon, that “God has appointed the special ordinances of baptism and the Lords Supper as a means of obtaining his gracious presence” and “will be a blessed means to enable us to observe all the commandments of God better.”⁴³⁶ This advocacy on behalf of Stoddard’s most divisive doctrine made Stephen Williams, like the rest of the Williams family, a strong ally indeed.

His brother, Warham Williams, the minister of Waltham, Massachusetts, also studied Stoddardean theology and became advocates of his doctrines. After commencing his career at Harvard, in fact, Warham moved to Northampton where he studied under Stoddard himself.⁴³⁷ Like his grandfather, Warham also advocated toleration and openness in his Waltham Church and what Shipton called “a catholic spirit.”⁴³⁸ This important minister undoubtedly provided Stoddard with an effective ally both during and after his lifetime.

In addition to the Williams clan, other ministers in New England also advocated Stoddard’s doctrines in their own churches. Many of these clergymen, who either came in contact with the Williams family or with Stoddard’s writings, practiced Stoddardean polity in their later churches, often giving the venerable clergyman credit for their tolerant practices. Stoddard’s influence over the valley, then, became almost as significant to subsequent generations of ministers and churchgoers as it had been with his own. Like Stoddard, these ministers sought to open requirements for membership and

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴³⁷ See Sweeney, “River Gods,” 175 and Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, VI, 363.

⁴³⁸ Sibley, *Harvard Graduates*, VI, 363.

communion and some even upheld his views on the converting power of the Lord's Supper. Moses Mather, for example, in his 1759 work, *The Visible Church in Covenant with God*, argued that when churchgoers failed to come to the Lords Table, they, in essence, turned their backs on God.⁴³⁹ In this work subtitled, *The Admission of Adults to Complete Standing in the Visible Church—Though Destitute of Saving Faith, Shown to be Agreeable to the Revealed Word of God*, Mather further admonished all Christians to partake of the Supper, arguing that even unregenerate saints could be “capable subjects,” entitled to inclusion in the external covenant, “thereby becoming real members of the visible church of Christ.”⁴⁴⁰

Similarly, Moses Hemmenway of Wells Maine, who Walker said “defended” Stoddard's views “at various times in print,” explained in a sermon “that a credible profession of Christianity constitutes a visible saint.” These visible saints, he furthermore argued, had the right to full communion in the church.⁴⁴¹ Using some of Stoddard's well-known arguments, in fact, Hemmenway surmised that since mere mortals could not determine the sincerity of a professing saint, all outwardly sincere Christians desiring admittance to the church and the sacraments must be accepted. “All the congregation of Israel were admitted or recognized as members of the visible church by god himself at mount Sinai,” Hemmenway declared, “yet who can say one in ten of them were saints in

⁴³⁹ Moses Mather, *The Visible Church in Covenant with God* (New York: Gaine, 1759), 59.

⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 14.

⁴⁴¹ Moses Hemmingway, *A Discourse Concerning the Church* (Boston: Thomas and Andrews, 1792), 52, 72.

heart?”⁴⁴² The inherent inability of the minister or the congregation to determine an applicant’s fitness, Hemmenway suggested, compelled the examiners to be charitable in their judgment of visible sainthood.

George Beckwith and Charles Chauncy, who Walker also says “defended” Stoddard’s views, advocated open admissions policies and complete access to the Lord’s Table. In a published sermon, in fact, Beckwith argued that even members who came into the church through the Halfway Covenant, had a right to the Lords Supper.⁴⁴³ Citing Stoddard’s son-in-law, William Williams of Hatfield, who, according to Kevin Sweeney, “established himself as the... heir apparent to Solomon Stoddard’s version of an orthodox, evangelical, and more Presbyterian Congregationalism,” Beckwith suggested that “in receiving the Lords Supper, a man does not seal that he has fulfilled the covenant,” just that he has an “engagement” to do so.⁴⁴⁴ In a like manner, Chauncy argued, a person could be “spiritually benefited” by partaking of the symbols of Christ’s body and blood and that saving faith should not be required for participation in the ordinance.⁴⁴⁵

Given that numerous ministers throughout New England, such as Charles Chauncy of far-away Boston and George Beckwith of Lyme, Connecticut supported and “defended... in print” Stoddard’s practices, it comes as no surprise that almost every church and minister in Hampshire County supported his doctrines. Twenty-two of twenty-five Hampshire County churches, after all, opposed Edwards’s anti-Stoddardean

⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, 49.

⁴⁴³ George Beckwith, *Visible Saints* (New London: 1769), 38.

⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 27, 30.

⁴⁴⁵ Charles Chauncy, *Breaking of the Bread* (Boston: Kneeland for Leverett, 1772), 100-102.

communion policies at the time of his dismissal from the Northampton pulpit more than twenty years after Stoddard's death.⁴⁴⁶ The controversy, moreover, was not considered by its participants as a simple nameless, faceless trend toward open communion as some modern scholars assume. Most contemporaries regarded it instead as a movement largely driven by individuals like Solomon Stoddard. Mid-eighteenth-century observers considered it a showdown between Solomon Stoddard and Jonathan Edwards that Stoddard ultimately won. Ministers in Western New England did not label themselves as being for or against open communion, but rather for or against Stoddard or Edwards. Even outsiders who did not become directly involved in the argument often aligned themselves with one of the ministers on each side of the controversy. Jonathan Ashley, for example, the minister of Deerfield and long-time member of the Hampshire Association, "sided with Mr. Stoddard," according to the town historian, "in his controversy with Mr. Edwards over baptism."⁴⁴⁷ Southborough's minister, Nathan Stone, also "was a strong supporter of the liberal church membership policy of Solomon Stoddard."⁴⁴⁸ Rather than mentioning Elisha Williams's belief in open communion and open membership, his biographer instead simply relates that he had a "doctrinal difference with Edwards...on the qualifications for communion," whereas William Hobby of Reading, not even a part of the Hampshire Association, "stood with Jonathan Edwards on the question of narrowing the communion."⁴⁴⁹ Even Edwards, using a few of

⁴⁴⁶ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

⁴⁴⁷ Arms, *Deerfield History*, 28.

⁴⁴⁸ Shipton, *Harvard Graduates*, VIII, 100.

⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, V, 593 and VII, 535.

Stoddard's remarks to justify his own practices, argued that "I conceive there is no inconsistency between this and Mr. Stoddard's doctrine." One of his opponents, Solomon Williams, however, argued conversely that Edwards's justifications were "not a fair treatment of Mr. Stoddard."⁴⁵⁰ Solomon Stoddard's role in the larger movement toward open communion throughout New England, therefore, cannot be considered inconsequential, especially in Hampshire County--given the widespread recognition most if not all eighteenth-century ministers attributed to him. Perhaps their acknowledgement of Stoddard's authority over the ecclesiastical practices of the county led Williston Walker to list the churches as "Stoddardean," rather than "open" or "tolerant" in their membership and communion requirements.⁴⁵¹ His influence certainly remained strong in Hampshire County and the entire valley long after his passing.

Despite the recognition many eighteenth-century ministers gave to Stoddard for his significant role in helping to drive New England's general movement toward easing membership requirements, most modern historians have neglected to acknowledge what contemporaries seemed to have embraced: Stoddard's continued influence over the valley. Because numerous pro-Stoddard clergymen and congregations became so geographically dispersed, making it more difficult to directly link Stoddard to the larger movement for open communion, many subsequent historians, it seems, have simply credited each minister and church's polity's to a larger trend rather than to Stoddard himself. Historian, Williston Walker, however, suggested that there could have been

⁴⁵⁰Williams, *True State of the Question*, 2, 14.

⁴⁵¹ Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

even more adherents to Stoddard's practices than those he acknowledged in his long list. "These views of Stoddard spread widely and were adopted by many good men. The majority of the churches in Western Massachusetts accepted them, they were largely entertained in Connecticut, and the region about Boston was not without their representatives." The numbers of churches and ministers who could be directly linked to Stoddard through the few remaining sources, he suggested furthermore, represented "but a few of the real number"⁴⁵² of his adherents.

Stoddard's posthumous influence over Hampshire County and the valley, as Walker suggested, probably extended further and had a greater impact on the ecclesiastical polity of Western New England than most recent scholars have recognized. Hence, the mid-eighteenth century movement back to the open communion practices of seventeenth century England that Morgan and other historians have acknowledged, cannot be considered a simple backlash to New England's century-long policy of limited membership and communion. It must be considered, instead, as a movement largely propelled by ministers and congregations, who like Stoddard and his adherents, sought to change a practice they believed to be unscriptural. Perhaps this is why nine prominent clergymen writing against Stoddard's "unhappy novelties," in the early eighteenth century, accused the unorthodox minister of "assaulting the state of our churches," or why Increase Mather believed that Stoddard threatened to usher in the decline of the New England Way, and why neighboring minister and ecclesiastical opponent, Edward Taylor also accused Stoddard of causing "the beginning of New England's apostasy."⁴⁵³

⁴⁵² Walker, *Creeds and Platforms*, 282n.

Stoddard's significant role in easing membership requirements, which was widely acknowledged by contemporary friends and enemies, then, must now also be acknowledged by modern scholars.

Despite the hesitancy recent historians have shown in linking Stoddard's ecclesiastical polity to New England's movement toward more open forms of communion, most modern scholars have at least acknowledged his influence over the evangelical movement that followed his death. His charismatic preaching style, many now observe, was mimicked by those who knew him and his books on effective preaching became widely read by eager clergymen. Stoddard's *Guide to Christ*, for example, was read throughout New England during his lifetime and even more popular in the 1735 and 1742 revivals, according to Jonathan Edwards's biographer, Patricia Tracy.⁴⁵⁴ Another book, *Safety of Appearing*, however, became his most famous work. The treatise, Miller explained, became "one of the most widely read books in all New England for sixty years."⁴⁵⁵ Historian, Thomas A. Shafer, furthermore maintained that although Stoddard's innovations "caused much more stir in his own day," it would be

⁴⁵³ The letter from nine judges is quoted in James A. Goulding, "The Controversy Between Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers: Western versus Eastern Massachusetts Congregationalism" (Ph.D. diss., Claremont University, 1971), 505. For Mather's remarks, see Increase Mather, *Order of the Gospel Professed and Practiced by the Churches of Christ in New England* (Boston, 1700), 5-9 and Paul Lucas, *Valley of Discord: Church and Society Along the Connecticut River, 1636-1725* (Hanover, N.H., 1976), 172-176. See also Norman S. Grabo, "Edward Taylor on the Lords Supper" *Boston Public Library Quarterly*, vol. 12 (January 1960), 24-26 and Goulding, "Solomon Stoddard and the Mathers," 412 for Taylor's comments on Stoddard.

⁴⁵⁴ Tracy, *Jonathan Edwards*, 33.

⁴⁵⁵ Perry Miller, "Solomon Stoddard, 1643-1729," *Harvard Theological Review*, vol. 34 (1941), 284.

“his books on conversion, his evangelistic sermons, and his example as a soul-winner that were in the long run most powerfully to influence American religion.”⁴⁵⁶

Other historians of the Great Awakening have also acknowledged Stoddard’s monumental influence on the events that took place in the decades after his 1729 death. Stephen J. Stein, a modern scholar of eighteenth-century religious history, argued that Stoddard “helped begin an evangelical revival tradition which produced the Great Awakening.” He considered the Northampton minister “ahead of his time.”⁴⁵⁷ His more famous successor and grandson, Jonathan Edwards, even attempted to elevate his influence over the Northampton brethren by using Stoddard’s tactics, and by citing the venerable pastor as often as occasion would permit. John E. Smith, an editor of the multi-volume series on Edwards’s life, acknowledged that Stoddard wielded the most powerful influence over Edwards’s career, showing up more often in his notes and being quoted more frequently than any other source. “When he finds something in Stoddard to support him, he uses it.”⁴⁵⁸ Jonathan Edwards’s reputation as one of New England’s greatest evangelists during the revivals of the Great Awakening, historians now recognize, owed an enormous amount to Solomon Stoddard.

⁴⁵⁶ Thomas A. Shafer, “Solomon Stoddard and the Theology of Revival,” In *A Miscellany of American Christianity, Essays in Honor of H. Shelton Smith*, ed. Stewart C. Henry (Durham: Duke University Press, 1963), 33.

⁴⁵⁷ Stephen J. Stein, *Jonathan Edwards’s Writings* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 71, 80.

⁴⁵⁸ Smith, ed., *Works*, II, 22, 58-60.

Solomon Stoddard's evangelical spirit survived him. Like Edwards, numerous clergymen imitated his charisma and preaching style. Their efforts to do so helped produce an awakening not only in Hampshire County, but in all of New England. Despite not being directly responsible for that awakening, Stoddard's books on conversion, his influence over Jonathan Edwards, and his successes as a soul-winner in Northampton certainly played a great part in the revivals that took place in the decades after his death. Although Stoddard's ultimate significance to most modern scholars stems only from his connection to Jonathan Edwards and the evangelism of the Great Awakening, he stood nevertheless as an extremely successful, albeit controversial figure of Presbyterianism in a strict Congregational society. Unlike Presbyterians before him, he earned the widespread support of his own church and even the backing of numerous nearby ministers and their congregations. His views on open communion, moreover, were seriously considered and often endorsed and practiced by countless ministers and churches during and after his lifetime. Although he never overturned the New England Way, he held such sway over his congregation and the valley, that even his Hampshire Association, which many considered a failure because of its lack of binding authority, functioned for generations as an effective ecclesiastical council in Hampshire County. Despite never becoming the dictator that many historians and even some contemporaries considered him, Stoddard's title of "Pope" is probably an accurate reflection of his enormous influence over Northampton and the Connecticut River Valley in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.

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