

“Something to please everyone.” Selling Religion in Eighteenth-Century America

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Presented to the Georgia Workshop in Early American History and Culture  
University of Georgia, Athens  
February 24, 2006

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## ABSTRACT OF THE PAPER

This paper is part of a larger project that I am working on that examines the role of periodical print upon religious culture in eighteenth-century America. I have focused upon several themes for this paper. First, I want to provide a context for eighteenth-century American periodicals by discussing people's attitudes towards them. Next, I explore the commercial impact that periodicals had upon American religion by creating a marketplace for religious material. Finally, I examine several religious topics (providential thought, impact of the Enlightenment, the Great Awakening) found in periodicals that generated great interest among their readers. In the long run, public discussions of these topics contributed to a dilution of traditional clerical authority and fostered a greater inclusion of the American public in religious affairs.

In 1758, Benjamin Franklin, Deputy Postmaster General of the British colonies in North America, issued an order to all post-masters throughout the colonies, instructing them on how to handle a growing problem: the dramatic increase in the circulation of newspapers across their postal routes. Franklin's purpose was not to question the value of newspapers, since he personally believed that newspapers had "on many Occasions" been so "usefull to Government, and advantageous to Commerce, and to the Public." He himself, in fact, was the editor of a Philadelphia newspaper, the *Pennsylvania Gazette*. Rather, Franklin was more concerned by what he considered to be a massive proliferation of their numbers, because the growing volume of newspapers had "become extremely burthensome" to the riders on his postal routes. The fact that they had been delivered free of charge contributed significantly to this delivery nightmare. Newspapers also traveled beyond local routes, and a growing number of them crossed colonial boundaries. In order to rectify the situation, Franklin announced that newspapers would no longer be delivered free of charge. Instead, subscribers would pay a flat rate of nine pence per every 50 miles for newspapers carried via the postal routes.<sup>1</sup>

Franklin recognized in 1758 that the increased volume of newspapers and other periodicals reflected their integral role within colonial society. What had started as a casual trade had blossomed into a thriving business that taxed the resources of the postal system. By the end of the eighteenth century, the flourishing periodical trade transcended colonial boundaries, connecting the colonies together along an "informational highway." Indeed, periodicals had become one of the principal means whereby individuals could convey their thoughts on a variety of different subjects throughout the Atlantic community. Franklin was not exaggerating when he asserted that his postal riders were becoming overwhelmed by the increased volume of periodicals being delivered. The rise in the overall numbers of periodicals throughout the eighteenth century attests to their rise in popularity. Tables 1.1 and 1.2 (found at the end of this paper) illustrate the growth of periodicals during this era. In the year 1700, not a single

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<sup>1</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 27 April 1758.

newspaper or magazine had been published in North America. By the end of the century, that changed dramatically, with over 200 periodicals circulating throughout the various states.<sup>2</sup> This rapidly growing industry was responding to a surge in reader demand. According to one estimate, approximately 15% of all adult white males subscribed to some form of periodical by the end of the century, creating a higher per capita readership of periodicals than anywhere else in the Atlantic world.<sup>3</sup>

Many in the eighteenth century had come to view periodicals as one of the best ways of imparting knowledge to the general populace. One writer in *The Independent Gazetteer* affirmed the significance of periodicals when he discussed the resounding success enjoyed by newspapers in recent times: “If the merit of a publication is to be judged by the rapid and general sale it has with the public,” he declared, then “a newspaper may be ranked amongst the very first productions of the age.” The reason for this, he opined, was the fact that just about everyone had access to its pages. “It is read with avidity by men of all descriptions,” he asserted, “from Majesty itself down to the ale-house politician.” The diversity of material found in newspapers guaranteed that anyone, even those with peculiar tastes, could find something of interest to read. “In short,” he concluded, “a newspaper is the world in miniature, and an epitome of life.”<sup>4</sup>

An essayist from *The Universal Magazine* echoed these sentiments in his article entitled “On the Advantages of Periodical Publications.” According to this author, one of the most compelling reasons for the “general diffusion of knowledge in the present age” was closely connected to the rise of periodical literature: “nothing seems to have been of more importance than the circulation of so many different periodical papers.” This author even suggested that putting a “well conducted periodical pamphlet in the way of ingenious youth” would likely contribute to their “great and rapid improvements in the science of life and manners.” He believed that periodicals also had the ability to educate the masses: “In the

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<sup>2</sup> This number includes both newspapers and magazines.

<sup>3</sup> Thomas Purvis, *Revolutionary America 1763-1800* (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 277.

<sup>4</sup> *The Independent Gazetteer*, 24 January 1784.

country particularly, how many thousands receive what they read in a periodical publication as oracular decisions, and to whom knowledge of social or moral duty could not otherwise be communicated, as they too often neglect other means of instruction.” Thus, the main object of these periodicals was to “illuminate and reform,” and he concluded that they had been quite successful in this endeavor:

They commonly tend to convey instruction, and to generalize knowledge. By giving intelligence from every quarter of the globe they excite enquiries; by displaying good and bad qualities of other nations, they remove ill founded prejudices . . . They communicate beneficial discoveries which would otherwise be lost; they record transactions which engage admiration, or rivet disgust; they warn by example, and instruct by censure. They diffuse taste; they correct prevailing absurdities.<sup>5</sup>

For this author, periodicals had become one means of achieving the ideals of the new republic, by reaching and transforming thousands of Americans into better citizens. The Querist of *The Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum* declared much of the same in the August of 1775: “Very few of us are possessed of libraries – and if we were, we could not spare time to search the voluminous works of the learned . . . We shall, therefore, consider your Magazine as our oracle, and apply to it, as occasion may offer, for instruction and information.”<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps what attracted readers most to periodicals was their diversity of information. One could find just about anything in periodicals if they looked hard enough. As the essayist Fenelon concluded in one Boston periodical: “every publication . . . ought, in my opinion, to consist of as much variety as possible, in order, that there may be something to please everyone.” It was up to the reader to “pick out such dishes as please their palate, and make a hearty meal of them.”<sup>7</sup> By the end of the eighteenth century, periodicals managed to do just that: cater to the consumer taste of a reading public. The key player in this process lay in the hands of the printers. Because they ultimately decided upon what was

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<sup>5</sup> *The Universal Magazine*, 2 January 1797, 9-10. Benjamin Mecom, printer of *The New-England Magazine*, tried to attract a younger audience, when he advertised that his magazine was “a very suitable present for instruction of youth.” See the August 1758 edition, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *The Pennsylvania Magazine, or American Monthly Museum*, August 1775, 353.

published, most printers attempted to carefully navigate the diverse needs of their readership. They recognized that alienated readers usually cancelled subscriptions. As a result, printers published most of the material sent their way, regardless of their own personal beliefs or that of their readers.<sup>8</sup> Timothy Whitmarsh, the editor of the *South Carolina Gazette*, defended the differing viewpoints found in his newspaper. He quoted scripture, suggesting that with “so many men, so many minds,” he was bound periodically to offend some of his readers. Whitmarsh asserted that this could not be helped since it was the nature of the newspaper business. The goal of a printer, he contended, was to have an “unconcernedness as to the right or wrong Opinions contained in what they print.”<sup>9</sup> Even with the politicization of newspapers along party lines by the end of the eighteenth century, most printers still published an eclectic blend of content in order to attract a broad readership.<sup>10</sup>

My current research focuses in part on the growing commercial influences of periodicals upon religious culture in eighteenth-century America. Based upon an examination of early American periodicals from the major regional publishing centers of Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston, I conclude that newspapers and magazines reflected a developing “marketplace mentality” in American society and played an important role in redefining popular understandings of American religion. Printers worked hard to turn the periodical industry into a lucrative pursuit, and catering to religious needs proved to be a financially lucrative way to conduct business. Periodicals contributed to the growing trend towards consumerism in the eighteenth century by providing advertisers with an opportunity to sell religious wares to interested buyers. From the marketing of books to public announcements, advertisers covered the

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<sup>7</sup> *The Independent Chronicle and Universal Advertiser*, 15 September 1796; *The Boston Magazine*, January 1784, 98-99.

<sup>8</sup> See the work of Stephen Botein, "Meer Mechanics' and an Open Press: The Business and Political Strategies of Colonial American Printers" *Perspectives in American History*, IX (1975), and Rosalind Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital: Philadelphia Book Publishers in the New Republic* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1996), for a discussion of the business practices of eighteenth-century printers.

<sup>9</sup> *The South Carolina Gazette*, 14 October 1732. Whitmarsh wryly noted that “if all Printers were determined not to print any thing till they were sure it would offend no Body, there would be very little printed.”

<sup>10</sup> Remer, *Printers and Men of Capital*, chapter 3.

gamut of religious possibilities. Bibles, testaments, common prayer books, psalters, devotional literature, and denominational primers are just a few examples of the variety of printed material available for public consumption. Hundreds of advertisements beckoned consumers to sample the rich variety of religious merchandise found on the pages of periodicals.<sup>11</sup> Newspapers and magazines also offered the public controversy by allowing different visions of religious “truth” to compete with one another, and this controversy proved particularly profitable during the time of the Great Awakening. Over time, advertising became one of the fundamental tools for marketing religious sentiments to the public beyond the institutional church, and periodicals must be recognized for their contributions to the emergence of a religious marketplace in America.

Frank Lambert has shown in his recent work on the Great Awakening how evangelicals like George Whitefield successfully utilized various forms of print, including periodicals, to expand the cause of evangelicalism throughout the Atlantic world.<sup>12</sup> Applying relatively modern marketing techniques, revivalists manipulated the press to ensure that his revivals would receive appropriate publicity. In fact, print brought religion from the confines of the church into an emerging religious public sphere, where individuals became the arbiter of various religious messages. By their use of the press, Whitefield and other evangelicals had successfully taken spiritual authority out of the hands of the clergy and placed it into the hands of the laity.<sup>13</sup> My research seeks to compliment Lambert’s work by focusing upon the vast majority of periodicals published in America that were not controlled by evangelical printers and that

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<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 1 for a listing of books for sale by William Bradford in December of 1742 in the *Pennsylvania Journal*. His advertisement was typical of the diverse religious titles offered for sale. In this particular case, out of 135 book titles for sale, 73 (54%) are clearly related to religious topics.

<sup>12</sup> See Frank Lambert’s two books that deal extensively with this issue: *George Whitefield and the Transatlantic Revivals, 1737-1770* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), and *Inventing the “Great Awakening”* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).

<sup>13</sup> David Hall also discusses the important role laity had in spiritual discernment, although his study concentrates upon seventeenth-century New England. See Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment*.

offered an alternative direction to American religion based upon the principles of the Enlightenment, not evangelicalism.<sup>14</sup>

Lambert also contends that religion was transformed into a commodity for sale. By appropriating the commercial language of the day, Whitefield was able to both create and sell evangelicalism as a consumer product to the public.<sup>15</sup> Lambert's assertions about the commercial influences upon religion are critical in understanding the changing religious culture of the eighteenth century and how print played a key role in this transformation. Advances in technology and marketing allowed most people to own a copy of the Bible or other religious printed material such as books, sermons, and pamphlets, which meant that the Word of God was available for personal consumption. Print also generated religious competition; as Lambert has shown, the revivalists and anti-revivalists vied with one another for the public's support in their attempts to define the nature of the "Great Awakening."<sup>16</sup> But religious consumerism went beyond the evangelical movement. Annette Laing has argued that churchgoers had a "marketplace mentality" and would shop around until they found a church that suited their needs. Many were uncommitted to church orthodoxy and held beliefs that were quite eclectic, much to the dismay of clerics.<sup>17</sup> Advertisers

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<sup>14</sup> Please see "a note on the sources" at the end of this paper for an outline of the sources used in this paper.

<sup>15</sup> See also Harry Stout, *The Divine Dramatist: George Whitefield and the Rise of Modern Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William Eerdman's Publishing Company, 1991), whose work provides a good compliment to Lambert by focusing upon Whitefield's personal characteristics that made his evangelical approach so successful. For other assessments of the Great Awakening, see Stout, *The New England Soul*; C.C. Goen, *Revivalism and Separatism in New England* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962); Edwin Gaustad, *Great Awakening in New England* (New York: Harper, 1957); and Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Lambert, *Inventing the Great Awakening*, 3-13. For a discussion of the relationship between printing and religion, see David D. Hall, *Worlds of Wonder, Days of Judgment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 23-31. See also Hall, *Cultures of Print*, and Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986). David Paul Nord discusses the religious roots of printing in the seventeenth and the beginning of the eighteenth centuries in his article "Teleology and News: The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730," *The Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990), 9-38.

<sup>17</sup> Annette Laing, "'All Things to All Men': Popular Religious Culture and the Anglican Mission in Colonial America, 1701-1750" (Ph.D. diss., University of California, Riverside, 1995), page 40 for quote.

recognized this growing trend and tried to tap into the market of finicky shoppers by turning to printed matter to get their message out to the public.

Advertisements became an integral part of a periodical's survival, particularly newspapers. Although most newspapers carried only a sprinkling of advertisements in the early part of the eighteenth century, their columns were crammed full of these money-makers by the end of the century (so much so that some advertisements were literally packed into the margins of the newspapers).<sup>18</sup> Printers like Charles Crouch of *The South-Carolina Gazette and Country Journal* enticed advertisers with the pecuniary benefits of advertising, letting them know that “a very extensive Circulation” would increase revenue for both the printer and the advertiser. The printers of *The South Carolina Weekly Museum* announced to their readers the “extensive and still increasing circulation of the Museum (both in town and country) rendering it a very advantageous vehicle for Weekly Advertisements” in the hopes of luring advertisers to their magazine.<sup>19</sup> Recognizing the impact that advertisements had made upon his paper, Richard Carpenter announced to the readers of *The Massachusetts Daily Advertiser* that his newspaper would employ the “strictest impartiality” when accepting advertisements from interested parties. Carpenter was quite open in explaining his rationale:

With respect to Advertisements, he begs leave to observe that they are intended to be read by the Public at large; interest itself, in this instance, dictates the suspension of party-spirit between the Vender and Purchaser – it is well known the Federalist does not often sanction a Democratic print, perhaps seldom reads it, and so vice versa, they consequently are read by a part only – but a paper Strictly Impartial conveys not only News, but

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<sup>18</sup> The cost of advertising varied between newspapers. *The State Gazette of South Carolina*, for example, charged three shillings for a twelve line ad for the first week, and two shillings for the same ad in subsequent editions. *The State Gazette of South Carolina*, 17 December 1787. In Pennsylvania, several newspapers would periodically run advertisements in German to try and capture a larger clientele. For example, see *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 July 1762.

<sup>19</sup> *The South Carolina Gazette and Country Journal*, 15 December 1767; *The South Carolina Museum*, 25 February 1797.

Advertisements to the eye of all.<sup>20</sup>

Carpenter's financial acumen recognized that party politics was a bad policy not only for his newspaper, but for seller and buyer alike. By emphasizing how his advertisements would reach a large segment of Boston's population (and thus bring financial gain to those who advertised), Carpenter promoted ways to augment his own cash flow beyond a reliance upon subscriptions.<sup>21</sup>

By providing a marketplace where religious wares were sold to the public, newspapers had contributed significantly towards the commercialization of religion in American society.<sup>22</sup> Even those who frowned upon the commercialism of religion joined the fray in fear of being left behind.<sup>23</sup> There was a growing recognition that newspapers offered new possibilities that had never been available before. Readers understood that printers were willing to open up their newspapers to advertisements and other types of religious endorsements. Sensing opportunity, many individuals recognized that newspapers had the potential to reach a broad audience, and thus sought to take full advantage of that potential by

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<sup>20</sup> The advertisement for Carpenter's newspaper comes from the *Boston Gazette and Republican Journal*, 7 May 1798.

<sup>21</sup> Joseph Crellius promoted the following in his *Weekly German Newspaper* in an attempt to encourage advertising for his ethnic newspaper: "All Merchants and others therefore, who are desirous to have their Advertisements more effectively communicated to the Germans, that are unacquainted with the English tongue, if they will be pleased to send their Advertisements to me . . . care will be taken that they be carefully translated and inserted in the said Paper, without any Charge for translating." Thus, advertising transcended ethnic boundaries in the pursuit of financial stability.

<sup>22</sup> For authors addressing the transformative powers of newspapers in early American society, see Charles Clark, *The Public Prints: the Newspaper in Anglo-American Culture, 1665-1740* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994); David Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers* (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1997); Charles Clark, and Charles Wetherell. "The Measure of Maturity: The Pennsylvania Gazette, 1728-1765," *William and Mary Quarterly* 46 (1989); Bernard Bailyn and John Hench, eds., *The Press and the American Revolution* (Worcester: American Antiquarian Society, 1980); Arthur Schlesinger, *Prelude to Independence: The Newspaper War on Britain, 1764-1776* (New York: Knopf, 1958); David Paul Nord, "Teleology and News: The Religious Roots of American Journalism, 1630-1730," *The Journal of American History* 77 (June 1990), 9-38; David Hall, *Cultures of Print* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1996); Richard Brown, *Knowledge is Power* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

<sup>23</sup> See Annette Laing, "All Things to All Men: Popular Religious Culture and the Anglican Mission in Colonial America, 1701-1750," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of California, Riverside, 1995) for a case study on this process. For further reading on the consumption patterns of early America, see Cary Carson, Ronald Hoffman, and Peter J. Albert eds., *Of Consuming Interests: The Style of Life in the Eighteenth Century*, (Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1994). See also Richard Bushman, *The Refinement of America* (New York: Vintage Books, 1993).

advertising. Over time, advertising became one of the fundamental tools in marketing religious sentiments to the public. Advertisers paid advertising costs because they realized that the hundreds of readers became potential consumers of their wares. Consumers also benefited because they now had a wide array of products to choose from by simply picking up the paper. An examination of newspaper advertisements shows that religion had become commercialized in a variety of different ways.

In order to test the waters of consumer interest, printers would advertise their intention to publish a particular work before its actual printing took place. If a certain number of individuals subscribed to the project, then printing would commence. The number of subscribers necessary to make the project viable varied from printer to printer, but several hundred seemed to be the average goal. In *The Pennsylvania Journal*, William Bradford offered to publish Robert Flemming's *The Fullfilling of the Scriptures Held Forth*, a work that purported to examine the fruition of God's promises that, according to Flemming, had recently been fulfilled in Scotland. For five shillings six pence (with two shillings six pence of this to be paid at the time of subscription), the subscriber was guaranteed a work that promised to confirm one's belief in Christianity. Even a hardened atheist would be moved by the evidence, the advertisement proclaimed. Bradford employed "agents" to assist him with the subscription process. These agents, including Rev. Mr. Gilbert Tennent of New Brunswick, Rev. Mr. Treat of Abington, Rev. Mr. John Rowland of Chester County, and Rev. Mr. Charles Tennent of White-Clay Creek, lived outside of Philadelphia and thus tapped into a broad population from the surrounding region. Through this network, Bradford hoped that the desired numbers of subscriptions could be achieved.<sup>24</sup>

The ministry proved particularly adept at utilizing the marketing potential of newspapers. While the pulpit provided their main forum to reach the public, they quickly realized the possibilities offered by the weekly prints to disseminate their ideas beyond Sunday services. No greater opportunity presented

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<sup>24</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 3 March 1743. For another example from the same newspaper, see *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 4 April 1745, where subscriptions were being taken for the publication of *Six Discourses on Various Subjects*. The book was offered at a discount of 3 shillings for those who subscribed early, with the threat of a price increase for those who waited until the printing was completed.

itself to the clergy than that of publishing their sermons.<sup>25</sup> Recognizing an interest in sermonic material outside of the church, ministers worked with printers to publish sermons whenever the chance presented itself. Based upon an examination of colonial newspapers, printers catered to sermonic interests on several different levels. William Bradford, printer of *The Pennsylvania Journal*, recognized the selling potential of ministerial literature and sought to meet consumer expectations. Sermons that engaged in controversial and sensational material proved extremely popular if their frequency in Bradford's advertisements serves as a guide. One such topic that piqued the curiosity of many was the presence and activities of Satan in society. In 1743, the Reverend Samuel Finley published a sermon entitled *Satan strip'd of his angelick Robe* in which he described how so many people had become deluded by the machinations of Satan, including many who believed themselves to be good Christians.<sup>26</sup> For those interested in Armageddon and the end of the world, the reverend Richard Clarke preached a chilling outlook of the future in his book *The Prophetic Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated*. The advertisement for his book teased readers with excerpts of the impending millennium: a "great man" would arrive in 1760; Asia, Africa, and America "will Tremble" in 1761; "a great Earthquake" will occur throughout the world in 1763; and the ultimate conclusion, when the second coming will manifest itself on earth. However, readers would have to purchase the book in order to find out exactly when this meeting with God would occur. The price to discover one's fate was six pence, payable upon purchase of the text.<sup>27</sup>

Other popular sermons included those preached by well-known ministers, particularly those involved in the controversies surrounding the Great Awakening. As one might expect, the sermons by George Whitefield generated significant interest. The prolific Whitefield published on just about every topic imaginable. William Bradford found it lucrative to keep a supply of Whitefield sermons on hand in his shop. In Bradford's 1743 advertisement, one could find nine Whitefield sermons for sale, ranging

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<sup>25</sup> For a comprehensive treatment on the nature of these sermons, see Harry Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

<sup>26</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 14 April 1743.

from *The Seed of the Woman and the Seed of the Serpant* to *Abraham offering up his Son Isaac*.<sup>28</sup> The sermons of Gilbert Tennent, another well-known evangelical preacher, also appeared to be in great demand by the reading public. Printers published dozens of advertisements announcing the sale of Tennent's sermons, hoping to cash in on this controversial figure's popularity.

The polemics offered up in their sermons generated interest among consumers. Gilbert Tennent was soundly thrashed in the book *The Examiner, or Against Gilbert Tennent*, advertised in the 6 January 1742 edition of *The Pennsylvania Gazette*. In order to entice potential buyers, this advertisement offered readers a brief overview of the entire book, outlining the critique over the controversial preaching of Tennent.<sup>29</sup> Not to be outdone, the printers of *The Pennsylvania Journal* published a rebuttal entitled *The Examiner Examined, or Gilbert Tennent Harmonious*, whose pages promised to "vindicate the late Glorious Work of God's Power and Grace in these Lands" and refuted the "unjust Reflections" of the *Examiner*.<sup>30</sup> Both parties of the Great Awakening thus recognized the potential of newspapers as an opportunity to influence religious dialogue outside of the pulpit and polemical literature.

Attacks against the Catholic Church generated additional interest among consumers. In 1747, *The Pennsylvania Gazette* announced the publication of *A Protest Against Popery*. Readers could now obtain an easy-to-read account that explained why the Church of England was "pure" and the Catholic Church was so corrupt. For those desiring a little more spicy reading, the tenth edition of *The French Convert* was available in 1749. This sensational book related the story of a French lady who had recently converted from Catholicism to Protestantism and promised to unveil her "great and unparalleled Sufferings on the Account of her said Conversion; and also her wonderful Deliverance from two assassines, hired by a popish priest to murder her; and of her miraculous preservation in a wood for two

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<sup>27</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 19 April 1759.

<sup>28</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 21 July 1743.

<sup>29</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 6 January 1742.

<sup>30</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 6 January 1742; *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 28 July 1743. For other examples, see *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 4 August 1743, 28 June 1744, 12 September 1754.

years . . .”<sup>31</sup> Such sensationalism certainly generated tremendous interest, and newspaper advertisements like these offered opportunities to dramatically increase the amount of dramatic material sold to the public.

Some creative entrepreneurs found particularly unique ways to commercialize religion in newspapers. In one case, the tavern at the Sign of the Buck used religious interest to entice patrons inside. They did so by displaying a miniature model of the city of Jerusalem. For the charge of one shilling (such beauty did not come cheaply), patrons could gaze upon this display between the hours of 8 o’clock in the morning until 9 o’clock in the evening. The innkeeper touted the realism of the model in his advertisement:

It represents Jerusalem, the temple of Solomon, his royal throne, the noted houses, towers, and halls; likewise the sufferings of our Saviour from the garden of Gethsemane to the cross on the hill of Golgotha; an artful piece of statuary, in which every thing is exhibited in the most natural manner, and worthy to be seen by the curious.<sup>32</sup>

In this particular case, the innkeeper recognized the potential of newspapers and advertised in the hopes of expanding his clientele beyond its usual numbers. From the public’s point of view, newspapers provided a valuable service by informing them about the variety of religious experiences available to them beyond the doors of the church. In this unique case, it meant having the opportunity to consume a pint of ale while contemplating the sublime nature of Jerusalem in miniature.

The power of the press exerted influence over Christian denominations as well. Various groups realized the growing influence of newspapers upon the public, and they turned to them as a means of soliciting greater support from the population. In fact, advertising offered additional ways to raise revenues for their coffers. For example, churches sponsored lotteries with the goal of generating a large sum of cash for a particular project. The Anglican parish of St. James Church in Lancaster appealed to Christians throughout Pennsylvania to participate in their lottery, as they hoped to raise over one thousand

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<sup>31</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 11 May 1749. See also *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 24 April 1746, and 22 March 1748.

<sup>32</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 8 January 1767.

dollars to defray the cost of constructing a new church. The prize money from the lottery totaled over seven thousand dollars, promising a rewarding experience for the lucky winners. The advertisers reassured participants that their actions were the pious act of “friends of Virtue and Christianity” rather than the degenerate behavior of a gambler.<sup>33</sup> A church might also choose to rent out dormant land as a means of raising cash for its coffers. In *The State Gazette of South Carolina*, Christ Church proposed to lease church property for up to a three year period, including the parsonage house if necessary. An advertisement in *The South Carolina and American General Gazette* informed readers that the Fellowship Society, an Anglican support group, was sponsoring a “charity sermon” preached by the reverend Robert Cooper. They hoped to raise enough money by the event to begin construction on a new hospital in the city of Charleston.<sup>34</sup> Religious organizations thus creatively pursued public advertising as a means of generating additional operating funds.

Even the Bible became a commercial venture. In 1770, the Society of Clergymen advertised their own edition of the Christian Bible as a more scholarly and informative version than any previous Bible. To further entice consumers, the printers promised a Bible that would be printed on the finest quality paper and bound with the sturdiest covering possible. For those still hesitant, the printers appealed to the holiness of the Bible itself, for only here could one learn lessons of salvation, and by purchasing their Bible, readers would have access to the true “Knowledge and Love of God, and of his son Jesus Christ.” If the spiritual imperative argument did not work, then perhaps belittling did. The advertisement suggested to would-be buyers that because their edition of Bible was so cheap, “nothing but mere necessity can be an excuse for neglecting the purchase of it.” Thus, from their perspective, only the

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<sup>33</sup> *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 5 March 1761. See also *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 14 January 1762. For a critique on the use of lotteries as an instrument that led to the “corruption of youth and the Ruin and Impoverishment of many poor families,” as well as causing “Vice, Idleness and Immorality,” see *The Pennsylvania Gazette*, 4 March 1762.

<sup>34</sup> *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 1 April 1771.

poverty-ridden could not afford to purchase this Bible. At a cost of thirty shillings, one might find their notion of affordability subject to debate by many within the community.<sup>35</sup>

Beyond advertising, one of the selling points of periodicals was its value for entertainment. Readers turned to newspapers and magazines not only for news, but for pieces that piqued their curiosity or tickled their fancy. This interest in entertainment could also serve a duo function: keep the interest of readers while serving to illuminate their minds at the same time. In a letter to the editor of *The Dessert to the True American*, “Philoctetes” argued that since an increasing number of people were turning to periodical print for “entertainment and amusement,” it was imperative to meet the virtuous needs of the nation by publishing articles based upon “religion and sound morals.” By inculcating virtue in the reading public, the United States could avert the moral disaster witnessed in Europe, where print was incorrectly used to advance “scepticism, infidelity, and irreligion.”<sup>36</sup> Stories abounded in periodicals that would not only entertain, but would also serve as a didactic piece and provide readers with a contour of proper religious behavior and attitudes.

Several examples illustrate the religious utility of an American newspaper. In an anonymous letter published in *The Pennsylvania Gazette* in 1732, one writer was so troubled by a difficult “case of conscience,” that he turned to the *Gazette* for guidance. He discovered recently that his neighbor had “corrupted his Wife and injur’d his Bed.” Feeling betrayed, he queried the newspaper if he would be justified in fornicating with his neighbor’s wife in retaliation. “Casuist,” the “Dear Abby” of the *Pennsylvania Gazette*, advised the troubled soul that a good Christian would follow the “positive Laws of Religion, *Thou shalt not commit Adultery; Return not Evil for Evil, but repay Evil with Good.*”<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>35</sup>*The State Gazette of South Carolina*, 18 June 1787. *The South Carolina and American General Gazette* advertised a newly printed Bible that took salesmanship one step further. Trying to obtain a total of 300 subscribers, the printers resorted to financial incentives: “In order to encourage Booksellers, Country Traders, &c. To promote Subscriptions for this grand and useful Work, the Publisher will give two Copies gratis to such as shall collect One Dozen of Subscribers.” *The South Carolina and American General Gazette*, 5 February 1771.

<sup>36</sup>*The Dessert to the True American*, 6 April 1799.

<sup>37</sup>*Pennsylvania Gazette*, July 3, 1732.

The *Pennsylvania Gazette* also treated its readers to the sensational story of one Thomas Woolston who was put on trial in London during the spring of 1730. The court accused Woolston of publishing scandalous and blasphemous materials in his controversial book, *The Six Discourses on the Miracles of our Saviour*. According to the prosecuting attorney, Woolston's book represented Jesus Christ as a false prophet and impostor and asserted that his miracles were the result of magic rather than divine powers. He was also charged with denying the truth and authority of the Bible, and of dispersing "Diabolical Opinions among his Majesty's Subjects." The prosecuting attorney then presented several examples to the jury supporting their case, including Woolston's claim that the turning of water into wine at the wedding of Cana showed Jesus as a wine imbibor, perhaps becoming a bit too drunk at the occasion. The prosecution summed up its case with a blistering attack on Woolston's interpretations:

The Laws of God . . . are a part, and a Chief Part of the Laws of this Kingdom; and if a Man who should write against our stated Laws, or but to turn them into Burlesque and Ridicule, cannot escape impunity, what can he expect, who shall strike at the Root of Christianity, and bring into Contempt the Author and Finisher of our Faith? . . . These, and such like Indignities, offer'd to the Holy Jesus, Our Blessed Saviour, the Author and Foundation of Our Hope, it's hop'd will stirup all who profess Christ, and hope to be sav'd by His Death and Suffering of our Sins to a lively Zeal for his Cause, and a Detestation of those who would bring him into Contempt His Holy Gospel.<sup>38</sup>

The counsel for Woolston claimed that his client's intent was not blasphemy, but rather that the miracles should be taken metaphorically rather than literally. Woolston believed that literal interpretations would lead to absurdities and improbabilities in the Bible. Unfortunately for Woolston, he was found guilty on all accounts. The trial of Woolston certainly provided entertainment for newspapers readers. Yet it also

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<sup>38</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 26 March 1730 and 2 April 1730.

served notice that religious debate could only be tolerated to a certain extent, and Woolston's guilty verdict indicated he had surpassed acceptable bounds of debate.<sup>39</sup>

People today often criticize the media for their heavy emphasis on negative news to keep the attention and viewers, but this is nothing new. Eighteenth-century periodicals found that stories of human malfeasance proved particularly effective in keeping reader attention. Stories of human degeneracy provided colorful reading while at the same time instructing readers about the proper boundaries of social expectations, particularly when it came to religion. For those not taking to heart the warnings about moral and virtuous behavior, the consequences could be severe. In 1734, the *Boston Gazette* printed the story of William List, a drunkard whose irreligious behavior destined him to an untimely demise:

Yesterday during the Forenoon Service at the Rev. Mr. McLead's Meetinghouse, William List, a Porter of this town, came into the Meetinghouse somewhat disguised in liquor, and behaved so indecently that he was ordered out; and in going to his lodgings got a Fall [fell], which together with the Frame he was in, killed him. He died about 12 o'clock noon.<sup>40</sup>

Mr. List's intoxication symbolized the sinner's lack of respect towards God, and his death indicated divine displeasure at such behavior. Most telling were the execution speeches given by condemned criminals moments before they tied the knot. In one case, Terence Rogers, condemned for murder, hoped that his last speech would serve as a warning for others, particularly those who were young and still impressionable. Leading an immoral life of "drinking, whoring, and swearing," Rogers eventually sunk to such depths that he believed the devil himself caused him to murder. He had realized the errors of his

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<sup>39</sup> The case of Peter Zenger illustrates the struggle over the freedom of the press from a political standpoint. Zenger, the printer of the New York newspaper *The New York Journal*, was arrested in 1734 for publishing scathing political commentaries about the colonial governor, William Cosby, and his circle of political friends. David Copeland argues that "the foundation of a free press was spawned in that trial." See Copeland, *Colonial American Newspapers*, 12. See also Livingston Rutherford, *John Peter Zenger, His Press, His Trial*, (New York: Chelsea House, 1981), and Vincent Buranelli, *The Trial of Peter Zenger*, (New York: New York University Press, 1957), for additional accounts of the Zenger trial. While the Woolston trial suggests that free speech could only go so far, the Zenger trial suggests that newspapers were considered an appropriate place for dissent. For the records used in this work, I could find no court cases where an individual was tried for the religious sentiments expressed in American newspapers.

way, albeit too late. He asked that all Christians pray for him, “a poor miserable Sinner, and take warning by my unhappy end, which is come to me by not regarding the Advice of Parents and Friends.”<sup>41</sup> By presenting accounts of immoral behavior and the consequences associated with them, newspapers reinforced the idea that Christian virtue should be the guide of all human activity.

An examination of eighteenth-century periodicals reveals that newspapers proved particularly adept at taking advantage of controversial issues in an attempt to gain readers. Debates over theology proved particularly fruitful in generating copious amounts of press, as readers disputed visions of Christian orthodoxy. These articles ranged in topic from the frailty of human nature to various interpretations of the Bible. One such subject that generated much discussion in eighteenth-century newspapers dealt with providential ideology and just how much God affected the natural events in the world. Traditional providential philosophy declared that most events could be explained as the result of God’s design and that such events carried a message, usually relating to the moral integrity of those concerned. In certain cases, however, the providential argument came under fire in newspaper editorials. The small-pox epidemic that hit South Carolina in 1738 generated serious debate over God’s hand in the epidemic. Disagreement over whether to inoculate the citizens of Charleston provoked considerable controversy among the public. One position taken in the newspapers argued against inoculation. “Philirenus” asserted that the practice of inoculating was immoral. It was the duty of a religious people, he argued, to trust in the providence of God. Only God would decide who should live and who should die, and His providence would protect those he had destined to live. By not submitting to God’s will and judgment through the practice of inoculation, the people risked divine punishment worse than the disease.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> *Boston Gazette*, 8 July 1734.

<sup>41</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 28 March 1734. See also *The American Weekly Mercury*, 6 March 1733, for the story of “fourteen malefactors” executed on October 9, 1732.

<sup>42</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, 3 August 1738.

Advocates of the opposite position argued that God approved of inoculations since individuals had a natural and moral duty to do good, and saving lives was considered to be a reasonable, moral action. The “inoculationists” questioned why cures like bleeding, vomiting, and purging were allowed, but not inoculation? Taken to the logical extreme, were not all physicians competing against God?<sup>43</sup> Providential belief required that Christians see all events as expressions of God’s will. Newspaper accounts show, however, that the nature of God’s will was something open to intense debate. One writer illustrated how moral failure could even mean doom for an entire community. The *General Magazine* outlined exactly how God’s wrath could manifest itself. In November 1740, the city of Charleston, South Carolina, experienced a devastating fire that destroyed most of the southeast section of the city. According to the author, the fire represented God’s judgment against a sinful city. The essayist hoped that “this fiery Dispensation may lead us to Repentance and truly humble us before God” and that “the Fury of his Anger may be turned away from us.” The letter thus served as a jeremiad that warned readers of the dire consequences resulting from immoral lives. After all, a rational God was also the great dispenser of justice.<sup>44</sup>

One of the livelier debates taking place in eighteenth-century newspapers examined what effect “enlightenment” thinking had upon religion. With reason, human choice, and science as its trademarks, the effects of the Enlightenment proved particularly divisive among the populace.<sup>45</sup> This point was furthered by a Mr. Barbeyrac in 1750. He contended that Christianity had evolved from superstitious beliefs to a superior version that incorporated the “real Sciences.” All persons, including the ecclesiastics,

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<sup>43</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, 6 July 1738. See also *South Carolina Gazette*, 17 August 1738, 24 August 1738, 31 August 1738, and 14 September 1738 for additional discussion over the smallpox inoculation in South Carolina. By the second half of the eighteenth century, inoculation for smallpox had generally become an accepted practice and greater acceptance of inoculation offered greater possibilities to enterprising individuals. In one case, Dr. Thomas Ruston published a book on the subject, *An Essay on Inoculation for the Smallpox*, that was advertised for sale in *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 27 August 1767. According to the advertisement, the book would provide solutions to the smallpox epidemic based upon tried and true methods.

<sup>44</sup> *The General Magazine*, March 1741, 203.

<sup>45</sup> See Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford, 1976), for a summary of Enlightenment thought in eighteenth-century America.

were “o’bliged to science” because its tangible benefits were undeniable.<sup>46</sup> A humorous satire in the *Boston Evening-Post* called for the destruction of reason. The benefits, the author argued tongue-in-cheek, would be many. For example, lack of reason would mean individuals would no longer have to decide between right and wrong, and even better, would not have to personally judge any matters concerning religion. He concluded that if his plan worked, reason would all but disappear!<sup>47</sup> An excerpt from Dr. Samuel Clark’s sermon, “Mark and Criterion of True Religion and Superstition” appeared on the front page of the 13 December 1735 edition of the *South Carolina Gazette*. Clark argued that religion and superstition were diametrically opposed. Whereas religion was “founded in truth” and “made men Lovers of Reason, meek, gentle, and patient,” superstition had the opposite effect, making people “blind and passionate, Despisers of Reason, careless in inquiring after the Truth, hasty, Censorious, Contentious, and Impatient of Instruction.”<sup>48</sup>

In another critique on superstition, an author from the *American Magazine and Historical Chronicle* argued that scientific explanation was necessary to fend off religious error. Too many people, he claimed, used the supernatural to explain events that seemed mysterious: “In Fevers, and malignant Distempers, People see Visions and Apparitions of Angels, Devils, dead Men, or whatever else their Imaginations render most agreeable or terrible to them.” Thus, it was necessary for people to become educated so that misunderstandings resulting from ignorance could be reduced.<sup>49</sup> Writers also used science to debunk existing religious myths and legends that had no scientific basis. “Hampton” decried the foolishness of astrology, calling it a “mock science” and denigrating its practitioners. According to Hampton, “astrology hath no foundation; and that it cannot be proved by any reason that any such powers are in the stars, as the astrologers ascribe to them.” Only “vanity of men’s minds” could explain the

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<sup>46</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, 26 February 1750.

<sup>47</sup> *Boston Evening-Post*, 7 June 1742.

<sup>48</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, 13 December 1735.

<sup>49</sup> *American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, May 1744, 372-375.

popularity of using the stars to predict behavior and events. Hampton charged astrologers with infringing upon the true science of the stars, astronomy.<sup>50</sup>

*The American Apollo* treated readers to a story about a “miracle” that mocked those who lacked an enlightened understanding of the universe. Two men digging a grave in a church cemetery noticed a skull moving in the graveyard, and they rushed to the curate of the church to inform him of their discovery. Upon his arrival at the scene, he also noticed movement of the skull, and immediately declared:

“A miracle!” And, in order to shew the utmost respect to so precious a relic, he ordered the Cross, Holy Water, his Surplice, and Square Cap, to be brought; he caused the bells to ring, and called together the parishioners; he then gave directions for a dish to be brought, in which he put this skull, covered it with a napkin, and carried it in procession to the Church, during which time there were warm debates amongst the people, each claiming kindred to the skull. As soon as they came to the Church, and had placed it upon the high altar, the curate began to sing “Te Deum,” in the midst of it, a mole was observed to run out of the skull, which had been the cause of its motion; whereupon the Curate desisted, and the people retired, and the skull was buried again.<sup>51</sup>

Such an account certainly provided readers with an entertaining story. But on a deeper level, accounts like this suggested to the reader that human action must be predicated upon the use of one’s rational capacity.

Others viewed the Enlightenment less sympathetically. They believed an increased reliance on reason subverted God’s authority and power over people and would ultimately lead to skepticism and even the eventual abandonment of religion itself. Clearly, any intellectual trend that did not place God at its center was entirely deficient. “Philoclerus” disparaged “Freethinkers” who mocked and held in contempt those who still believed in God’s unlimited power. He also took offense at the notion that with the use of reason, individuals could decide for themselves their own religion and correct doctrine. As his

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<sup>50</sup> *The Columbian Magazine*, March 1788, 125-126.

name implies, Philoclerus believed that the clergy held a special status in society since they were trained teachers in religion, in addition to being the models of virtue and morality.<sup>52</sup> Because of the centrality of God in clerical lives, they, not the laity, should be primarily responsible for religious formation. Another essay disputed the triumph of human reason. This writer contended that reason alone was not enough, that “reveal’d Religion” was indispensable for understanding religion. He accused “enlightened” thinkers of being completely ignorant “of the very Foundation on which all Religion” rests. The author offered several proofs for the existence of God to silence any tendency towards atheism. The only way to explain the miracles of the Old and New Testaments was through the power of God (since most miracles were contrary to the laws of nature and could not be explained through reason). He further posited that since all societies throughout history had believed in a supreme power, this demonstrated conclusively the existence of God.<sup>53</sup>

The most vitriolic of all religious debates dealt with the religious revivals relating to the Great Awakening of the late 1730s and early 1740s. No event elicited more controversy in colonial periodicals than the evangelical tide that swept across British America. “New Light” ministers were concerned with what they perceived as a general decline in the religiosity and morality of the people, particularly among various members of the clergy themselves. Each believer had to experience a “new birth” in their faith in order to obtain God’s saving grace. George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent, and James Davenport embodied this new evangelical style, eliciting a tremendous amount of criticism from those referred to as the “Old Lights.” This latter group of ministers resented the revivalist attack upon their methods and believed that the “enthusiasm” of New Light preachers created false doctrines and caused dissension. Eventually, the controversy crossed over into the secular world, and elites beyond the ministry found themselves a part of this religious imbroglio. The controversies that erupted challenged the Old Light’s traditional authority in

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<sup>51</sup> *American Apollo*, vol. 1, part II, no. 16, 1792, 228. For a similar anecdote, see the “miracle” of the wooden sword in *The Philadelphia Minerva*, 28 October 1797; *Boston Magazine*, April 1784, 224-226.

<sup>52</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 7 May 1730.

<sup>53</sup> *Boston Gazette*, 9 January 1738, and 16 January 1738.

religious affairs, and created a crisis of authority. Both parties recognized the power of American newspapers and used them to further their war on each other.<sup>54</sup>

The greatest debate took place over the character of George Whitefield, the center of the evangelical movement. Advocates of Whitefield were quick to defend his character and message. The *Pennsylvania Gazette* ran a front page article entitled “The Conduct and Doctrine of the Rev. Mr. Whitefield vindicated from the aspersions and malicious invectives of his Enemies” in December 1739. The author of this article claimed that Whitefield was superior in all areas to other ministers, and his success lay in his zeal for the glory of God and the utmost concern for all men’s souls. What made him so successful was his teaching of “pure Christianity” and his desire to “awaken the Consciences of the Guilty, and rouze the Dead in Trespasses and Sins, from the Death of Sin, to a Life of Righteousness.” Through his preaching and writings, Whitefield provided comfort, instruction, and direction to those in need of it. The article concluded that other ministers rejected Whitefield simply because of petty jealousies.<sup>55</sup> In *The Pennsylvania Journal*, Dr. Watt referred to Whitefield simply as a great man who awakened “A stupid and ungodly World to a Sense of the important Affairs of Religion and Eternity.”<sup>56</sup> One reader in the *Philadelphia Gazette* was so taken by Whitefield that he felt compelled to write a poem in his honor:

Whitefield! that great, that pleasing Name  
Has all my Soul possest:  
For sure some Seraph from above  
Inspires his Godlike Breast.  
He comes commisson’d from on High,  
The Gospel to proclaim;  
And thro’ the wide extended World,

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<sup>54</sup> See Appendix 2 from Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill, 1999), which offers the reader a good historiographical overview of the Great Awakening. See also Richard Bushman’s *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980), which examines this religious controversy and how it spilled over into political and social affairs in Connecticut.

<sup>55</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 13 December 1739.

<sup>56</sup> *The Pennsylvania Journal*, 8 March 1743. See *The South Carolina Gazette*, 12 January 1740, and *The Boston Gazette*, 23 September 1746,

To spread the Saviour's Name.<sup>57</sup>

For some, newspapers offered an opportunity to expand the cause of revivalism and promote the reputations of those involved in the movement.

Whitefield was not without his detractors, however, as others used newspapers to attack him and the evangelical movement. One anonymous writer condemned Whitefield as evil and mischievous. He charged that "Whitefieldism" had "raged and rioted" in the various colonies, causing division, strife, and hatred within communities. He condemned Whitefield as doctrinally unsound, since his extreme positions of Calvinism damned just about everyone to everlasting hell. The author was also concerned that the tumultuous meetings associated with Whitefield's preaching caused "Frenzies, Convulsions, and Madnesses" and were thus a danger to civil government. In the *Boston-Evening Post*, "A.B." challenged Whitefield's integrity on several points. He accused him of calling the clergy in Boston "vicious and unsanctified" in his sermons. He also disparaged Whitefield's appeal to emotion, arguing that his messages "deprecat[ed]" human reasoning and learning. Finally, he questioned Whitefield's true motives, claiming his goals were more inclined towards collecting money for himself rather than for the salvation of souls.<sup>58</sup>

Debates like the one over the Great Awakening illustrate the growing power of periodicals throughout the course of the eighteenth century and contributed significantly to the emergence of a religious marketplace in America. The greater dissemination of religious material through newspapers and magazines meant that people had greater options in choosing their own beliefs. As a marketplace for Christianity, periodicals thus provided a growing number of readers with religious ideas, opinions, and controversies on an unprecedented scale. The printers of *The Pennsylvania Packet* published a poem that praised the contributions made by newspapers and congratulated them for their diverse contributions to society:

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<sup>57</sup> *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 29 November 1739. For Whitfield's own defense see *Pennsylvania Gazette*, 10 April 1740, and 24 April 1740.

<sup>58</sup> *South Carolina Gazette*, August 30, 1742 and *Boston Evening-Post*, 10 November 1740.

We say (with def'rence to the college)  
News papers are the spring of knowledge;  
The gen'ral source throughout the nation,  
Of every modern conversation.  
What would this mighty people do.  
If there, alas! Was nothing new?  
We tell you Patrons, what relates,  
To make us formidable States . . .

Our services you can't express,  
The good we do hardly guess.  
There's scarce a want of human kind,  
But we a remedy can find . . .

An advertisement does the thing,  
And quickly will the party bring . . .

A News Paper is like a feast,  
Some dish there is for every guest.  
Some large, some small, some strong, some tender,  
For every stomach, stout or slender.<sup>59</sup>

The printers clearly believed that his newspaper made significant contributions to society by providing important information on a weekly basis, and one of the most important dishes that he and other printers served was that of religion.

In January 1798, an essayist in *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine* tried to put into perspective the importance of American periodicals to the nation. "Man is the only animal we know, that possesses the power of aggregate existence," he began. Human beings had progressed over past centuries because of the accumulation of knowledge over time: "the individual who died a thousand years ago may become the instructor of those who are born in the present time." If the accumulation of knowledge was the key to human existence, the author surmised, then "whatever tends to facilitate the communication of ideas between man and man must have a direct tendency to exalt the human species to a higher degree of eminence than it could otherwise have attained." In the contemporary times of the eighteenth century, he declared, society was fortunate to have a medium that achieved this goal: "among all the modes [of communication] that have been devised for that purpose, no one has been so effectual as that of periodical

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<sup>59</sup> *The Pennsylvania Packet*, 22 September 1784.

performances.” Although ephemeral print appeared to be “a humble kind of writing” when compared to the great books of the past, in reality they “effect the most proper means that ever yet have been contrived for raising human nature to its highest degree of exaltation.” In fact, he concluded, the success of a nation is in large part tied to its development of the periodical press: “we shall in general find, that the progress of nations in knowledge . . . will keep pace with the number of periodical publications allowed to circulate.”<sup>60</sup>

Circulation did indeed occur, with the number of periodicals increasing dramatically over the course of the eighteenth century. Printers worked hard to turn the periodical industry into a lucrative pursuit, and that meant catering to the needs of a finicky public. The rapid demise of most periodicals suggests that it was a hard course to navigate, but overall, a growing number of printers entered into the business as the century progressed. Newspapers and magazines informed their readers on a multitude of different subjects including a large amount of information dealing with politics, warfare, and commercial endeavors. In spite of this focus, religious material also generated a significant amount of interest and was published on a fairly regular basis. Periodicals also reflected the growing trend towards consumerism in the eighteenth century by providing advertisers with an opportunity to sell religious wares to interested buyers, whether that be a Bible, sermon, lottery, or even a pew at a church. These visions of religious truths frequently competed with one another, and one of the greatest contributions of periodicals lay in the fact they became centers of discussion over the key issues of the time. Denominations contested with one another over correct doctrine and writers sparred over the intellectual trends of the day. This competition of ideas diluted the possibility of agreeing upon a single standard of orthodoxy for most American communities. The debates also blurred the lines of authority and implicitly questioned those who had previously been considered religious authorities. This opportunity to join in debate allowed a greater number of individuals to participate in the religious direction of America like never before. Thus,

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<sup>60</sup> *The Philadelphia Monthly Magazine*, January 1798, 21-23, and February 1798, 71-74.

the role of periodicals in the eighteenth century contributed to a greater inclusion of the American public in religious affairs. From the printers' perspective, life was indeed good, because they had not only done their civic duty by contributing to the religious enlightenment of America, but also procured a decent living by doing so.

## TABLES

**Table 1.1**  
**Growth of the newspaper industry over the eighteenth century**

Year	Number of newspapers in existence
1700	0
1725	4
1750	12
1775	48
1800	197

Source: Thomas Purvis, *Colonial America to 1763*, (New York: Facts on File, 1999), 258-259, and his subsequent volume, *Revolutionary America 1763-1800*, (New York: Facts on File, 1995), 277.

**Table 1.2**  
**Growth of the magazine industry over the eighteenth century**

Year	Number of magazines in existence (Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston)
1700-1740	0
1741-1760	7
1761-1780	6
1781-1799	27

Source: Jean Hoornstra, ed., *An index to the microfilm collections—American periodicals 18<sup>th</sup> century, American periodicals, 1800-1850, American periodicals, 1850-1900, Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Ann Arbor : University Microfilms International, 1979), reel 1. They are based upon the three publishing cities researched for this paper: Boston, Philadelphia, Charleston. The numbers for 1761-1780 are less than prior years because more periodical emphasis was placed upon newspapers during these years, given the focus on the political controversies of the 1760s and early 1770s, along with the war years of the American Revolution.

## APPENDIX 1

William Bradford was a prolific seller of printed material during the mid-eighteenth century. As publisher of the *Pennsylvania Journal* in Philadelphia, Bradford often ran full-page advertisements of printed material for sale at his store *The Sign of the Bible*. The following is a listing of those items advertised for sale (in order of their appearance) in his 2 December 1742 edition of the *Pennsylvania Journal*. Out of the 135 titles listed for sale, 73 (54%) are discernable for their religious content.

Quarto Bibles,	Runyan's Pilgrim's Progress,
Ocatvo Bibles with Can's	---- Holy War,
Notes	Brooks Mute Christian,
Can's Bibles,	Confession of Faith,
Small Pocket Bibles	Fox on Time,
Common Prayer-Books,	Doelittle on the Lords Sup.
Testaments, Psalters,	Vincent on Judgment,
Flavel's Works,	---- Catechism,
W. Penn's Works	Heavens Glory,
Wislon's Christian Dictio	Flavel on the Heart
G. Pox's Doctrinals	---- Token for Mourners
Life of Bishop Tillotson,	---- Divine Conduct,
Pamela, or Virtue reward.	Allens Catechism,
Beveridge's privat. thoughts	Divine Breathing,
Thomas a Kempis,	Dyers Mount Sion,
Drinlincourt on Death,	Believers Golden Chain,
Nellson's Fasts and Feasts,	Durham on Death
Companion to the Lords Table,	Craighead on the Sacrament
Horneck's crucified Jesus,	Life of God in the Soul of
Baxter's Call to the	Man,
unconverted	Scotch Psalm Books
Alleins Allarm,	Erskine's Rainbow of the
Russel's seven Sermons,	Covenant surrounding the
Pierce on Death,	Throne of Grace,
Shower on Eternity,	---- Gospel Sonnets,
Fowler's Design of Christian	Watts Hymns,
Shephard's Sincere Convert,	---- Lyrick Poems,
----- Sound Believer,	Weddeburn on the Coven.
Meads almost Christian,	Willison's Sacramental Ca-
Bunyans Grace abounding,	techism,
----- come and welcome to	Bruce's History
Jesus Christ,	Moses unveil'd,
----- Sighs from Hell,	Dead Faith Anatomiz'd,
Guthery's Trial of a Saving	Self Justiciary convicted

Interest,  
 Henry on the Sacrament,  
 Mr. Whitefields Sermon on  
     the Prodigal Son,  
 ----- on the Conversion of  
     Paul  
 ----- Marriage of Cana,  
 Love and Religion Demonstrated  
     in the Martyrdom of  
     Theodora and Dydimus  
 Laws Christian Perfection  
 ----- Serious Call to a Holy  
     Life,  
 Devout Souls Exercise,  
 Mrs. Rowe's Devotion,  
 Kenn's retired Christian,  
 Chancey's Doctrine of  
     Godliness,  
 Clark on the Promises,  
 Baxters Poor Man's Family  
     Book  
 Life of Halyburton  
 Halyburton against the  
     Deists,  
 Gilpin on Temptations,  
 Owen on the Person of  
     Christ,  
 Dowfall of Arminianism,  
 Dodderidges Sermons to  
     young People,  
 Youths Monitor by Dr.  
     Guyse,  
 Select Contemplations by  
     a Lady  
 British Empire  
 History of Virginia  
 History of Roxana  
 Journey thro' Holland,  
 History of Mosel St. Phale,  
 Mrs. Bhens Novels,  
 Betah's Voyages,  
 Cocker's Arithmetick  
 Wingates Ditto,  
 Echards Gazetteer,  
 Latin Bible,  
 Latin Testaments,  
 Greek Ditto,  
 Lilly's Grammars,  
 Justin, Eutropii,  
 Ruddemons Rudiments,

and condemned  
 Ashwood's Discourses,  
 Dutton on the New Birth,  
 ----- Justification  
 ----- on walking with God,  
 ----- Letters on Spiritual  
     Subjects  
 ----- Thoughts on Faith  
 ----- Letter to all Saints,  
 ----- Letter to Mr. Wesley,  
 New-England judged in the  
     Spirit of the Lord.  
 Sufferings of the People  
     called Quakers,  
 Barclays Apol. in French,  
 Switch for the Snake in  
 the Grass,  
 Young Man's Compani.  
 Dyches Spelling Book,  
 Cole's English Dictionary,  
 English & Latin Dicto.  
 Bailey's Ditto,  
 Littleton's Ditto,  
     Oldenbury's Exchange,  
 Webster's Book-keeping,  
 Patoon's Navigation,  
     History of the Turks  
     4 vol. 8 vo.  
 History of Jamaica,  
 History of the Baptists,  
 History of Peter the Great,  
     History of Kouli Khan,  
 Life of Oliver Cromwel,  
     Life of Prince Eugene  
 Cockburn on Fluxes,  
 Robison on the Gravel and  
     Stone  
 Physical Essays on Human  
     Bodies  
 Secretaries Guide,  
     Downnon's Concordance,

Baylies Exercises,  
Erasmus, Corderius,  
Nomenclatura's, &c. &c.  
Hays Interest at one View

### A NOTE ON THE SOURCES

The explosion of periodical publications during the eighteenth century made it necessary to limit the scope of this research. Newspapers and magazines for Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston are the focus of this study, from 1704 (when the first successful newspaper in Boston was founded, *The Boston Newsletter*), to the end of the century, 1799. Each of these cities represented the regional publishing capitals of New England, the Mid-Atlantic, and the South respectively, and each produced the greatest volume of printed matter from their particular region.<sup>61</sup> Over 11,000 newspaper issues were examined for the project, with the focus primarily on those newspapers with a publication life of over ten years in the hopes of assessing any change in content over time (although newspapers before 1750 were examined regardless of their publication life given their paucity). Since magazines had a shorter publishing life than newspapers, every issue of each magazine published in Boston, Philadelphia, and Charleston was examined (totaling approximately 800 issues).

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<sup>61</sup> One can easily get a sense of how significant each of these cities were for publishing in their particular regions by consulting secondary sources. For newspapers, see Edward Lathem, ed., *Chronological Tables of American Newspapers* (Barre, Massachusetts: American Antiquarian Society & Barre Publishers, 1972), 1-43; for magazines, see Jean Hoornstra, ed., *An index to the microfilm collections-- American periodicals 18th century, American periodicals, 1800-1850, American periodicals, 1850-1900, Civil War and Reconstruction*, (Ann Arbor : University Microfilms International, 1979), reel 1.