Revivals and Revolution: Historiographic Turns since Alan Heimert’s Religion and the American Mind

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Thirty years ago Alan Heimert published his monumental study of religion's relationship to the American Revolution. Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution contradicted the conventional wisdom rooted in Vernon Parrington's 1927 Main Currents of American Thought and implicitly challenged the more recent interpretation put forward by Heimert's own mentor, Perry Miller. Critics responded vigorously, but their reproofs did not foretell the future of Heimert's argument. Indeed, in the past twenty years a cadre of young scholars assumed either his thesis or method and moved the debate toward the personalities and movements Heimert underscored. Some of today's leading scholars who study connections between the revivals and the Revolution pay homage to Heimert's thought in footnotes if not in the texts themselves. Two social/intellectual movements seemingly at cross-purposes, namely Protestant evangelicalism and the new cultural history, rescued Heimert's work from scathing yet well-placed criticisms to establish its assertions as a leading model for understanding religion's role in the American Revolution.¹

The story of this rehabilitation demonstrates the shifting ground under historians' feet as the profession continues both to shape and to be shaped by larger social and cultural forces. Even further, it uncovers today's strange bedfellows, evangelicals and postmodernists, who together have launched a forceful objection to long-standing historical

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assumptions and paradigms. Because the very academic categories and methods that underlay the violent reactions to Heimert's book in the 1960s mirrored the societal battles taking place then, this essay begins with a review of the book's scholarly setting, its purpose, and the volatile responses it engendered. Next, I hope to show that changing social and intellectual currents in the late 1970s and the 1980s created an academic atmosphere that encouraged a new generation of scholars to recover much of Heimert's argument and approach. That trend did not discourage recent detractors from leveling some of the broadest and deepest attacks yet against the book. Indeed, the echoes of the initial storm can still be heard in contemporary debates. Clearly, though, the scholarly shoreline has been reshaped to the map Heimert drew three decades ago, thanks in large part to both Protestant evangelical and new cultural historians. 2

I. THE 1960S: DIVIDING THE PROPHET'S MANTLE

The specter of Perry Miller hovers over Heimert's book and responses to it. Dedicated to Miller, the work dealt with many of his themes and the intellectual battles he fought for decades. Miller and his students faced an uphill battle, as the dominant paradigm remained firmly entrenched in academic culture. Vernon Parrington had contended that liberal, enlightened thought won the eighteenth-century struggle with Calvinist Christianity and became the basis for the American Revolution. In a chapter titled "The Anachronism of Jonathan Edwards," Parrington stated, "Before an adequate democratic philosophy could arise in this world of pragmatic individualism, the traditional system of New England theology must be put away, and a new conception of man and of his duty and destiny in the world must take its place." Progressive historians in the first half of this century fully assumed that ideal—the mind released from the bondage

2. Two excellent historiographic essays from the 1993 Wingspread Conference recently appeared in print, both dealing with religion's relationship to the American Revolution. While Alan Heimert's work plays a significant role in each, their interests differ substantially from this essay. Allen Guelzo thoroughly lays out the "considerable amount of interpretive territory" between Heimert and Jon Butler in order to indicate how the Great Awakening straddles intellectual history and religious history and to put forth a new language for writing about it. Gordon Wood reviews much of the same literature, but with an eye to the long Revolutionary period—which begins in the early eighteenth century and ends in the early nineteenth century—to argue for the primacy of migratory, economic, and social changes that manifested themselves in political and religious rebellion. See Allen C. Guelzo, "God's Designs: The Literature of the Colonial Revivals of Religion, 1735-1760"; and Gordon S. Wood, "Religion and the American Revolution," in New Directions in American Religious History, ed. Harry S. Stout and D. G. Hart (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997).
of irrational religious experience to rational thought—which dominated their interpretation of America’s founding and the establishment of the nation.3

Miller’s desire to find an intellectual mooring for a “spirit of the age” ironically was not that different from Parrington’s goal. Miller however challenged the assumption that behavior must be studied solely from functional or environmental perspectives. By taking the “life of ideas into their own consciousness,” intellectual historians could move deeper into understanding the influence of thought upon human action. More specifically, Miller objected to the accepted interpretation of religion’s role in colonial American life. He argued that New England’s religious ideas created the social atmosphere and inspired the behavior of Puritans, not vice versa. By the eighteenth century two movements, Pietism and the Enlightenment, divided

3. Parrington, Main Currents, 148. See also the interpretation of one church historian whose conclusions paralleled those of Parrington, in Henry K. Rowe, History of Religion in the United States (New York: Macmillan, 1928). Most historians ignored the revivals in relating religion’s role in the Revolution; see especially G. A. Koch, “Republican Religion: The American Revolution and the Cult of Reason” (Ph.D. dissertation, Columbia University, 1933); Alice Baldwin, The New England Clergy and the American Revolution (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1928) analyzes the Great Awakening’s debates along Enlightenment lines, focusing on who used John Locke’s thought most often and most effectively, centering on debates over natural and constitutional rights. C. H. Van Tyne, The Causes of the War of Independence (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1922), approached the topic similarly by reasoning that Puritan politics were democratic in nature, linking Congregational and Presbyterian ministers to Locke and John Milton. See also John C. Miller, Origins of the American Revolution (Boston: Little, Brown, 1943). William Warren Sweet, the foremost religious historian of the day and a devotee of Frederick Jackson Turner, placed emphasis on Calvinism’s frontier transformation from communitarian societies to individualistic faith, and in doing so made possible an organic connection to the revolutionary spirit: “The emphasis everywhere was upon man’s personal needs; every man was expected to find his own way to God. In a pioneer society this emphasis was both natural and inevitable, for a pioneer society is a self-reliant individualistic society. . . . The emphasis upon the individual therefore meant variability; implied in it the right to be different. And is this not basic in democracy; the right to live his own life; his right to life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness?” (See Sweet, Revivalism in America: Its Origin, Growth, and Decline [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1944], 40–41) Likewise, “For the first time the American people found, in the revival, a common intellectual and emotional interest; for the first time intercolonial leaders emerged, which broke over political as well as sectarian lines. . . . In these respects the Great Awakening may be considered one of the important contributing factors in preparing the way for the Revolution” (idem, The Story of Religion in America [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1930], 250–51). Nonetheless, Sweet never exhibited the link between the two events more precisely than such rare allusions. In fact, he usually kept the two events in separate divisions of his books, or even in separate books altogether; see above and Religion in Colonial America (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1942), and Religion in the Development of American Culture, 1765–1840 (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1952). This tendency is especially revealed in Religion in Colonial America, where his chapter titled “The By-Products of the Great Awakening” does not mention politics or the American Revolution. Sweet’s main interest in linking the revivals to the Revolution usually lay in showing cooperation and unity behind once competing faiths.
Puritanism's once coherent aspects into rival philosophical and social movements—evangelicalism and rationalism. Jonathan Edwards and Benjamin Franklin personified the two sides. Even then, the dichotomy was more apparent than real, for Miller understood—in a nearly Weberian sense—Franklin's character as a secularized form of religious thought based on the same Puritan underpinnings that created Edwards. The American mind, even in its most worldly sense, thus found its core in religion. Miller's untimely death in 1963 left a significant hole among American historians still hoping to discover a distinctive character to the American mind—the window to past Americans' behavior.4

In Religion and the American Mind Alan Heimert argued that those very Calvinists whom Parrington dismissed had, in fact, stimulated the democratic movement that resulted in the Revolution. Following Miller, he claimed that despite the multiplicity of sects in colonial America there were essentially two religious parties, Liberals and Calvinists, but for Heimert these divisions became most apparent in the years after the religious revivals of the 1740s. Documenting his assertions with thousands of citations he turned upside down the notion that Calvinism's death brought life to colonial and Revolutionary politics. "For it has long been received historical doctrine that 'Liberal' religion—the rationalism espoused by critics of the Awakening enthusiasm and further developed as a counterthrust to eighteenth-century Calvinism—was comparatively humane and progressive in outlook and import, that, indeed, Liberal religion prepared the way for a Revolution of which its spokesmen were the heralds," he wrote, reminding his readers of the conventional wisdom. "It is my conclusion, however, that Liberalism was profoundly conservative, politically as well as socially, and that its leaders, insofar as they did in fact embrace the Revolution, were the most reluctant of rebels. Conversely, 'evangelical' religion, which had as its most notable formal expression the 'Calvinism' of Jonathan Edwards, was not the retrograde philosophy that many historians rejoice to see confounded in America's Age of Reason. Rather Calvinism, and Edwards, provided pre-Revolutionary

ary America with a radical, even democratic, social and political ideology, and evangelical religion embodied, and inspired, a thrust toward American nationalism. 5

Heimert sought not only to challenge Parrington’s model but also to proceed beyond Miller’s assertions. This move ultimately brought down upon his head the fire of reviewers who considered Heimert the natural heir to Miller, having worked closely with his mentor studying the revivals and having been hired at Harvard. Miller’s second volume of The New England Mind, which concludes in 1730, had implied that Puritanism’s decline into separate competing movements created both halves of the American mind. But Heimert hoped to elevate Edwards’s evangelicals as the true American progenitors, the authentic genesis of the push for independence and nationalism. Status quo-seeking rationalists proved to be latecomers to the revolutionary spirit, if they showed up at all. While he remained true to Miller’s contention that two “isms” existed in the early eighteenth century, Heimert asserted that evangelicalism proved more significantly “American.” Colonial Calvinism—in all its intellectual and emotional power—lay at the basis of the distinctly American Great Awakening. And it, in turn, lay at the basis of the American Revolution. 6

Heimert’s thesis was not the only aspect of his book standing against the whirlwind of historical scholarship. Clearly, he understood his work to challenge conventional methods of studying and writing about the past. “The interpretations that follow,” he admitted to his readers, “often derive from a view of doctrinal positions and developments that does not, confessedly, adhere to the standard rubrics for a history of religious dogma.” The book proved as much interpretation as narrative of ideas, for it sought to go beyond what was written to what was meant, through “a continuing act of literary interpretation, for the language with which an idea is presented, and the imaginative universe by which it is surrounded, often tells us more of an author’s meaning and intention than his declarative propositions.” Ideas, after all, do not exist in isolation. Their significance demands the historian’s awareness of the “context of institutions and events out of which thought emerged, and with which it strove to come to terms.” For Heimert, then, full apprehension of an idea’s significance “depends finally on reading, not between the lines but, as it were, through and beyond them.” Calvinists and Liberals inhabited separate intellectual universes. The same word often held disparate connotations and signified different meanings. Reading the context and character into

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6. Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, 16.
each statement revealed that "Liberalism was a profoundly elitist and conservative ideology, while evangelical religion embodied a radical and even democratic challenge to the standing order of colonial America." 7

Critics attacked Heimert’s work on numerous levels. The two most powerful attacks came from Edmund Morgan and Sidney Mead. Morgan, also a student of Miller, appreciated Heimert’s focus on religious ideas, calling the work “one of the most ambitious efforts in intellectual history to appear in the past decade.” But he took exception to Heimert’s method of reading “through and beyond the lines.” Noting that Heimert chose conspicuous cases that identified Edwardsians as aggressive patriots, Morgan claimed that “it becomes apparent that the secret of this technique of literary interpretation is to ask of every passage: who wrote it?” Heimert cast liberal authors from Jonathan Mayhew and Charles Chauncy to John Adams as reactionaries hoping to justify the status quo. Naturally, Morgan—long convinced that a secular form of Puritanism that underscored a personal work ethic, frugality, and public virtue fired the Revolutionary’s imaginations—took exception to any approach that required such an interpretation. This was unsurprising, as months before Morgan’s influential essay, “The Puritan Ethic and the American Revolution,” appeared in the William and Mary Quarterly, arguing that a secularized, moralized form of Puritan virtue animated the Revolutionary generation. If Heimert were correct, then it was a distinctly warm, revivalist Calvinism that lay at the heart of Revolutionary ideology rather than the residual, secularized religion Morgan found. The final paragraph of Morgan’s 1967 review of Heimert, the most pointed, deserves full attention.

The book is well-written. It rests on enormous erudition. And it is possible that some of the attributes the author ascribes to his contending forces are placed where they belong. There indisputably was a division among American clergymen in the eighteenth century, and some of the improbable things Professor Heimert says about that division may be correct. Things are indeed not always what they seem. But sometimes they are. How are we to know when they are not? Professor Heimert does not assist us with empirical evidence. He tells us very little about the “context of institutions and events out of which thought emerged.” The world he offers us has been constructed by reading beyond the lines of what men said; and what he finds beyond the lines is so far beyond, so wrenched from the context, and so at odds with empirical evidence, that his world, to this reviewer at least, partakes more of fantasy than of history.

Having also written earlier in the decade a remarkable essay introducing the newly published papers of John Adams, whom Morgan understood as paradigmatic of secularized Puritanism, he no doubt felt the sting of Heimert's attack against the "Unitarian historiography" based on "John Adams's memory" that had created "one of the more sophisticated myths concerning the American past." Morgan's review simply answered Heimert in kind.8

Meanwhile, Sidney Mead's lengthy review focused on three additional problems that hurt what he considered an otherwise helpful corrective to the traditional interpretation. First, he took great exception to Heimert's suggestive yoking of Calvinism to nineteenth-century Jeffersonian-Jacksonian democracy. Heimert's claim that "the architecture of the Republicans' heavenly cities was not all that different from what had been envisioned in the philosophy of Edwards" concerned Mead deeply. Actually that section of Heimert's book is a conjectural essay included at the end of the final chapter and goes beyond the book's stated limits. But while that might explain its speculative nature, that did not excuse it. Mead employed its more dubious implications and apparent self-contradictions as his major substantial critique. The second problem proved more methodological and linguistic in nature. "Obviously Heimert does not use the words 'Calvinism' and 'Calvinist' with their commonly accepted denotation and connotations," he complained. "To me it suggests a doctrine of transmigration adapted to the writing of intellectual history whereby the soul of a theological system reappears in successive epochs in quite different bodies." Heimert argued that while the Stamp Act crisis of 1765 marked the death of Edwards's theological Calvinism, its spirit was resurrected in an American aspiration whose rhetoric merged political opponents with the enemies of God. Such was the root, according to Heimert, of nineteenth-century democracy. Mead demurred. To his mind, Heimert's creative reading of authors' motivations in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century sources proved more interesting than serious. "Heimert's genealogy of Jacksonian democracy is about as plausible as the 'begat' passages in the gospels of Matthew and Luke and apparently has about the same relationship to historical evidence."9

Mead’s final attack was especially surprising for its *ad hominem* nature and self-disclosure. Like Morgan, he was bothered by Heimert’s willingness to “read beyond the lines” and not accept many characters’ words at face value. Unhappy that Heimert had dismissed the liberal Jonathan Mayhew’s arguments as the result of a temperament shaped by too quick success in the big city, Mead turned the tables and posed the question about Heimert himself: Does his background explain this unusual book? He pointed to the author’s tenure as a Korean War officer in the army’s Far East Psychological Warfare Section. Heimert himself had claimed that his wartime experience helped him read the Awakening’s pamphlet wars with a greater sense of “the relationship of ideology and political commitment to modes of persuasion” in shaping propaganda. But Mead, writing in the midst of public debate about Vietnam, found such an admission alarming, for it pointed to a “habit of mind” in presenting material using—in Paul Linebarger’s words—argument, suggestion, enlightenment, and obfuscation. Heimert’s employment of character assassination in the case of Liberals “gives the work the odor of Calvinist propaganda—a psychological blitz designed to induce the ‘will to surrender’ in the erstwhile defenders and present dupes of the ‘Liberals’ who ‘identify the Revolution as the cause of Charles Chauncy alone’ and have ‘effaced’ its ‘evangelical sources.’”

But why such a vitriolic attack—something between an application of Heimert’s own method and an *ad hominem* argument? After all, if interpretation is the pursuit of all historians, why did “reading between the lines” bother Mead, and presumably Morgan, to this degree? Mead quoted Marshall McLuhan to reveal his deep-seated anxiety that Heimert’s book reflected the “literate, fragmented Western man encountering the electric implosion within his own culture.” Moving from the content of messages to their effect beguiles people into believing they have discovered the hidden meaning. “In this one could readily see a description of Heimert’s methodology,” lamented Mead, “and a plausible explanation of why it so irritates us older historians with our ‘phonetic literacy’ . . . and alphabetic and lineal approach to knowledge, and our great concern for the precise meaning of the lines we find in our documents.” Indeed, Mead frankly admitted that Heimert’s answer to his criticisms points up Mead’s own continuing insecurities. In a poignant conclusion, he disclosed that if the

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Interestingly, Mead misquoted Heimert’s words, mistaking Heimert’s “Republican heavenly cities” for Carl Becker’s “heavenly City,” a reference to Enlightenment religion (277).

profession was becoming concerned more with effect than meaning, "then we old-line historians who criticize the work must realize that, in Lewis Carroll's lines,

We are but older children, dear,
Who fret to find our bedtime near."11

William McLoughlin gave Religion and the American Mind its most positive major review. Certain that Heimert had "opened up a new era in the study of the American Revolution," McLoughlin claimed that a pantheon of such scholars as Parrington, Baldwin, Thornton, Weber, Tawney, Beard, Miller, Adams, Hofstadter, Sweet, Boorstin, Haroutunian, Foster, Walker, Trinterud, Goen, Tracy, and Gaustad must be put aside. Certainly, McLoughlin had difficulties with the book; he particularly complained about its failure to distinguish clearly among such sharply different groups as religious Liberals and secular Liberals, and among the many types of Calvinists. He thought the work would have been stronger had Heimert spent more time with church records, diaries, association minutes, and letters. Still, he wrote, "If Heimert's reading of the eighteenth-century religious mind is correct, and I think it is, then we must reject the old liberal-oriented interpretations." But McLoughlin, also a former Miller student, took Heimert's assessments a level deeper, asking how evangelical creativity during the Awakening differed from any other episode of religious development in the face of philosophical difference. Heimert's narrative only communicates the eighteenth-century chapter of a longer story of pietists' constant struggle for "inner felicity" against a backdrop of moral declension and social disunity. While McLoughlin was convinced that Heimert's interpretation revealed how historians had misread much of the religious literature of the era, his was—in the words of John Murrin—an "ironic appreciation."12

In all, the dominant paradigm remained a tough nut to crack. Heimert's massive book, however, seemed all too easy to pick apart. In 1970 Bernard Bailyn's essay "Religion and Revolution: Three Biographical--


cal Studies" directly attacked *Religion and the American Mind* with three case studies that contradicted Heimert's thesis. Picking up the banner of Miller's rationalist-minded Americans, Bailyn's argument reinforced his *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, which had appeared within months of Heimert's book: Religion served to spread Whig ideology. Bailyn's primary player, by employing moral arguments that defended the political tenets of revolutionaries. Though not a return to Parrington, Bailyn's work underscored the importance of secular ideas in the Revolution. Religion was present, but "it is a gross simplification to believe that religion as such, or any of its doctrinal elements, had a unique political role in the Revolutionary movement."13

After its initial press, *Religion and the American Mind* received little attention for nearly a decade. At least four reasons explain this silence. First, the volume itself is so massive and its arguments so complex—at times seemingly contradictory—that it said *too much* about religion's relationship to the Revolution. It proved difficult to nail down exactly what Heimert's contribution was, the fault of Heimert and not his readers. Meanwhile, most of those involved in the debate seemed satisfied to let sleeping dogs lie. The discussion about which Miller student—Heimert, McLoughlin, Morgan, or Bailyn—most deserved to wear the prophet's mantle appeared useless and too personal to continue arguing in public. Simultaneously, the rise of the new social history turned scholars' attention to the past's inarticulate masses, many of whom would not have recognized the elite-based "American mind" those like Heimert and others in the developing American Studies school touted. Finally, related to the rise of social history, Richard Bushman's *From Puritan to Yankee*, published in 1967, met the need for many who wanted to place the Great Awakening as a central event without ascribing to it all the significance Heimert attempted. A Bailyn student at Harvard, Bushman pushed his mentor's notion to the limit without crossing the line: Economic ambitions and a resultant yet residual Puritan guilt led to the revivals as a means to alleviate the Yankee conscience, thus giving religious justification for an increased sense of individualism and political freedom. Certainly Bushman gave the Awakening a more notable role, but it remained secondary to other forces. One reviewer recognized this distinction. "His book might well

be complemented," wrote Richard Birdsall, "by a reading of Perry Miller or Alan Heimert for a treatment of religious ideas."\(^{14}\)

II. MAKING ROOM FOR NEW VOICES: CONSERVATIVE POLITICS AND LINGUISTIC ANALYSIS

While the early 1970s saw relatively few works that sought to reevaluate either religion's relationship to the Revolution or Heimert's thesis, the bicentennial celebration brought several such studies. For instance, the *Journal of Presbyterian History* dedicated an issue to the topic of "Presbyterians and the American Revolution: An Interpretive Account." Articles on Presbyterian immigrants, John Witherspoon, John Zubly, William Livingston, church-state questions in Virginia, slavery, state constitutions, Dutch Reformed, and millennialism were included. While *Religion and the American Mind* was cited in three of those essays, only one of them appropriated its thesis. *Church History* followed with seven articles devoted to religion and the Revolution. Here the generation gap that separates the original reactions to Heimert's book from today's assumption of its method and many of its ideas began to appear, as the three articles that spoke approvingly of Heimert's work, even to the point of assuming his argument, were authored by an assistant professor, a recent doctoral program graduate, and a graduate student.\(^{15}\)

In fact 1976, the bicentennial of the Revolution and tenth anniversary of *Religion and the American Mind*, saw the beginning of the rehabilitation of Heimert's work. Two young scholars made their marks that year by picking up different aspects of the book as the basis for their acute and aggressive work over the next two decades. Mark

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Noll and Harry Stout did more to resurrect Heimert’s book than any other historians. Significantly, these authors represent two movements that came to the fore in the 1980s that permitted, even encouraged, a transformation in the debate: Protestant evangelicalism and the new cultural history. Heimert’s work attracted Noll, a young evangelical scholar, by its thesis highlighting Edwardsean revivalists’ role in provoking the Revolution; Stout found Heimert’s method suggestive for understanding the transformation of culture by looking for clues in shifting language codes and popular symbols.

Mark Noll’s work appeared in both the *Journal of Presbyterian History* and *Church History* in 1976. Each article examined specific ministers whom he felt represented a middle ground in the debate. His *Church History* article, “Ebenezer Devotion: Religion and Society in Revolutionary Connecticut,” dealt directly with the two models scholars were left with at the end of the previous decade. Heimert had focused on the legacy of the Great Awakening and the principles that were “translated” into political weapons—namely, “‘benevolent union,’ socially indiscriminate predestination, and millennialism.” On the other hand, Bailyn had denied that “religious expression can be associated systematically with political and social behavior in eighteenth-century New England.” Noll’s conclusion about the Connecticut minister leaned toward what he called “a more organic relationship” among “religious allegiances, social commitments, and political ideas.” Noll hoped to fashion a synthesis, but one that apparently favored Heimert. “Both have accurately portrayed certain aspects of the relationship between religion and society in revolutionary America: libertarian categories did dominate the political thought of the day, even for religiously minded individuals; but, in contradiction to Bailyn’s conclusion, there was also a close, even determinative, connection between religious and political ideas and actions during the period.” He ended the study by asserting that although Whig ideology defined theoretical and practical political action, “[t]he career of Ebenezer Devotion provides support for Heimert’s contention that the long-term effects of the Great Awakening were of vital importance for the shaping of responses to the crisis of revolution.” Noll likewise concluded that Jacob Green’s case, the subject of his *Journal of Presbyterian History* piece, “militates against Bailyn’s conclusions concerning the source of moral reform in Revolutionary America.” The religious principles of the Great Awakening led this minister to criticize colonial society and support the Revolution.16

Noll's discomfort in fitting together Heimert's Calvinist ideas and Bailyn's Whig principles also appeared in his *Christians in the American Revolution*. Obviously uneasy minimizing either component, both of which he thought were present, he made his sharpest dissent from Heimert's work by showing Old Lights just as excited about the patriot cause as Edwardsians. Noll completed his synthesis of the competing paradigms in "The Reformed Politics of the American Revolution," published in 1988. This, his fullest and most concise explication to that point, traced republicanism's history—finding its sources in the English Puritan Revolution—and then sought to show how American Christianity paralleled republican principles. Both products of seventeenth-century English dissent, he argued that they shared several formal similarities, including pessimistic views of human nature, virtue as a negative quality (lack of sin or political corruption), notions of freedom (whether from sin or political tyranny), and ideas of a good society. Apparently the Christianization that took place during the revivals reawakened these components in many Americans' minds. Both worldviews were brought closer together during the Seven Years' War, later to merge during the British imperial crisis.17

In all, Noll's work on the Revolution is best viewed as a struggle to bring *Religion and the American Mind* into line with scholarship emphasizing the Republican, Whig intellectual sources of the American Revolution. Because of that, Noll ran into many of the same difficulties that Heimert faced, namely, how to fit numerous contrary examples into the picture—a task at which Noll enjoyed more success—and how to move beyond New England. Even more important however was the political climate that proved conducive to his efforts. An evangelical Christian teaching at Wheaton College, home to the Billy Graham Center and the Institute for the Study of American Evangelicals, and host to Republican presidents, Noll's scholarship rode the religious right wave that brought evangelical scholars back to the academic arena. Upon the heels of born-again Jimmy Carter's election and openness about his faith, journalists and historians hurried to understand evangelicalism's history and role in American politics. The political culture, especially since the religious right's marriage to the Republican Party in 1980, has given Noll the opportunity to remind us of evangelicalism's historical importance. Movements that had been marginalized for their religious commitments in the early twentieth

century found comfort and cultural meaning in Noll’s contention that evangelicals had played a significant part in the creation of the country.18

Harry Stout, meanwhile, avoided many of the blows Noll took in appropriating Religion and the American Mind. Again, 1976 was the decisive year. Stout’s “Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution” appeared in the William and Mary Quarterly, questioning the previous decade’s interpretation of Heimert’s work. After reviewing Morgan’s and Mead’s “impressive assault,” he pointedly stated that “we must ask whether in fact Heimert wrote the book the critics reviewed.” Their critiques assumed the work was an extension of Perry Miller; if that were so, said Stout, then their attacks were justified, for “there is no clear and consistent link between revivalism and republicanism at the level of ideas.” But it had never been Heimert’s sole purpose to attenuate his mentor’s program. The problem, claimed Stout, appeared in critics’ failure to recognize the book’s value “in suggesting a method of historical analysis that focuses on the context of communication.”19

Stout’s point of departure from Noll in reviving Heimert’s work is apparent. His interest lay in Heimert’s method, underscoring those “rhetorical strategies” the revivals produced. “Approaching the problem of popular receptivity and concentrating on the verbal forms through which ideas were presented,” he pointed out, “Heimert locates the sources of this animating egalitarianism in the Great Awakening but concludes it can be understood only by reading beyond the religious content of evangelical ideas to the new forms of public address established in the revivals.” The important transformation in popular consciousness occurred thus in the form, rather than the content, of communication. Therefore, while Mead aimed his guns in the right direction—the waning significance of apparent content, or better, explicit meaning—he missed the target, namely, the cultural meaning behind changing forms of communication. The religious revivals bestowed on the mid-eighteenth century a new rhetoric, a “mode of persuasion that would redefine the norms of social order.” Before beginning his own study of popular rhetoric, Stout drove home to Heimert’s critics that the true meaning of Religion and the American Mind had been sitting under their noses for years. He used the author’s own words of introduction: “[T]he contrasts between Liberal

and Calvinist social thought were possibly of less ultimate significance than the remarkable differences between their oratorical strategies and rhetorical practices."  

Just as Noll went on to work out the implications of his 1976 essays, so Stout—to use a Puritan term—"improved" his argument with a massive study of New England sermons. The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England emerged in 1986 to critical acclaim. After examining over two thousand unpublished sermons, an ignored source in the preceding debates, Stout did not find the secularization and nationalization of Puritan tenets touted by Perry Miller and two of his intellectual heirs, Bernard Bailyn and Edmund Morgan. Instead he found that the evangelical message of New England piety remained persistent throughout the eighteenth century in the form of covenant theology. The Great Awakening divided the ministry into two wings as revivals gave birth to a lay piety that democratized the region's religion. Even this division, however, proved temporary as both sides continued to emphasize sola scriptura and quickly moved to biblical metaphors for French Catholics during the 1750s. Stout's belief that the imperial crisis forced the two sides together seems at first to contradict Heimert's thesis. In truth, it rested on the methodological foundation of Religion and the American Mind in that Stout interpreted ministers' language and rhetorical contexts as democratic restatements of covenant theology, the bedrock of evangelical piety throughout New England's history before the Revolution.  

Stout's method of reading sermons as much for their form—and how form often connotes symbolic meanings—as for their content reflected a new approach that gained popularity in America during the 1980s. Cultural historians began to look at linguistic and material representations of society as suggestive of the larger culture that existed, ultimately, in people's minds. Though such representations were constructed, they served to shape succeeding generations. Stout claimed that New England culture remained true to a covenant theology that molded the worldview of each generation to understand their lives according to specific, shared terms imparted as much through the structure as the content of sermons. Riding the wave of  

20. Stout, "Religion, Communications," 525. Heimert, Religion and the American Mind, 18. Henry May at the same time also noted this importance in Heimert's work: "As Heimert points out in his most penetrating passages, the most important and enduring difference between Old Light and New Lights was one of style" (see Henry May, The Enlightenment in America [New York: Oxford University Press, 1976], 93).  

new cultural history as it washed up on this side of the Atlantic, Stout pushed colonial historians to go beyond conventional intellectual and social history methods to discover the mentalité of historical New England.22

III. FIGHTING OVER THE WHEEL IN THE LINGUISTIC TURN

Given the emerging postmodern and multicultural environment in American academics during the 1980s, it proves unsurprising that a book called Religion and the American Mind would find a new audience among scholars. Increased attention was paid to created mental worlds and their languages and symbols, particularly how ideology and behavior was maintained through constructed codes. In this context, Stout's book was accompanied by several excellent works that assumed much of Heimert's argument initially assailed in print. Patricia Bonomi's Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America argued a powerful connection between the Great Awakening and the Revolution in New England. Following the path of Stout's 1976 essay, she steered clear of doctrinal debates since the intellectual ties between the two events remained tenuous at best. Her work emphasized the New Lights' language and actions that inspired a popular challenge to institutional authority, a new ability to decide significant issues for oneself. Compact and lucidly written, Bonomi's sections about New England synthesized Heimert's reading of sources with Carl Bridenbaugh's concern for Anglican authority in Mitre and Sceptre and Richard Hofstadter's final thoughts on religion's role in shaping eighteenth-century politics.23

22. For a direct discussion of this approach in distinction to earlier historical approaches, see Joyce Appleby, Lynn Hunt, and Margaret Jacobs, Telling the Truth about History (New York: W.W. Norton, 1994), chapter 6. See also Peter Novick, That Noble Dream: The "Objectivity Question" and the American Historical Profession (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988), part 4; and Lynn Hunt, ed., The New Cultural History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989). I do not mean to categorize Stout as a "new cultural historian" so much as to indicate his role in encouraging colonial religious scholars to approach material in a manner that cultural historians during this period used. Since 1986 many cultural historians have taken the approach further than Stout seems interested in going. Stout's approach straddled the structuralist interest in mapping mental realities and an emerging post-structuralist concern for speech as a polyglot of codes. His argument, however, leaned toward structuralism in its regard for New England society's consistency and the historian's ability to decipher various speech codes. For a contemporaneous example of this transition in nonreligious history, see J. G. A. Pocock, "Between Gog and Magog: The Republican Thesis and the Ideologia Americana," Journal of the History of Ideas 48 (1987): 325–46.

Donald Weber’s controversial *Rhetoric and History in Revolutionary New England* clearly followed Stout’s advice for reading Heimert’s work, to the point that content lost virtually all significance. Similar to Bailyn’s work in structure only, Weber analyzed five New England ministers to find the “connections among religious rhetoric, political discourse, and narrative form in the revolutionary pulpit.” Leaning heavily on critical theory and cultural anthropology, he argued that the 1740s and 1770s shared transitions in context, referents, and style. Sounding precisely like Heimert two decades earlier, Weber claimed that “the much debated links between Revival and Revolution may reside in neither the realm of abstract theology . . . nor in the opposing political stances that determined religious allegiance after Edwards’s death in 1758,” but “finally exist, most suggestively and provocatively, on the level of rhetoric itself.” Weber’s dissection is exhausting. He found that the fragmentary style, syntax, “vertical catalogs,” and “incantatory phrases” that characterized evangelicals’ rhetoric in the 1740s came to dominate sermons that included Whig libertarian speech during the 1770s.  

Ruth Bloch’s *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756–1800*, which appeared in 1985, also exemplifies how Heimert’s work drew attention during the early days of cultural history in America. Bloch’s topic and period would not seemingly necessitate association with *Religion and the American Mind*; nevertheless, Philip Gura—a former student of Heimert at Harvard—reviewed Bonomi’s, Weber’s, and Bloch’s books in 1988 as proof of a larger rehabilitation of Heimert’s work. In this insightful essay Gura holds that a close reading finds that Bloch used the Great Awakening as the crucial event that shaped perceptions of society—particularly notions of luxury and virtue—that created a millennialist mindset. The cultural patterns of such a worldview, passed on through shared symbols, lent an imaginative meaning to the Revolution.  

There are many angles from which one may assess the criticisms and adoptions of Alan Heimert’s *Religion and the American Mind*. The millennialist track, which Bloch exemplified, was not necessarily the

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about religion’s primary role in shaping colonial religious culture, see Bonomi’s introduction. For a good review of Bonomi that examines her similarities to and differences from Heimert and Stout, see Philip F. Gura, “The Role of the ‘Black Regiment’: Religion and the American Revolution,” *New England Quarterly* 61 (1988): 439–54.


primary contribution of Heimert's work. Truth be told, his use of Edwards's positive vision of America that inspired New Lights to social action leans heavily on Clarence Goen's pathbreaking studies of Edwards's postmillennialism. Still, many whose careers have included studies in millennialism's relationship to the Revolution assumed Heimert's work either explicitly or implicitly. William G. McLoughlin's positive review in 1967 was followed ten years later by a study titled "Enthusiasm for Liberty': The Great Awakening as the Key to the Revolution' in which he explicitly stated his affinity for Heimert's thought. Charles Royster claimed revolutionaries saw political rebellion as the opportunity to work out in the political realm their private redemption, a notion drawn largely from the revivals. Others who have interacted with Heimert's work, using his assessments to their advantage in otherwise revisionary pieces, include Catherine L. Albanese, who introduced a new discourse of civil religion; and Mark Valeri, who interpreted Edwardseans' actions as based on concern for the moral law.

To be sure, some found Heimert's work no more convincing in the 1980s than others had in the 1960s and 1970s, whether their concerns were the revivals or millennialism. Nathan Hatch has consistently offered a countervailing opinion since his seminal Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England appeared in 1977. Convinced that Edwards's followers were unable to sustain the optimism surrounding the Awakening, he argued that religion's role in the Revolution centered on the marriage of Real Whig ideology to millennial language that resulted from the French and Indian War. In Bailyn-like fashion, Hatch—who trained under J. G. A. Pocock—held political ideas as primary; religion lent itself to the cause in a secondary sense, able to raise the stakes with powerful images. Hatch's work continues to influence even scholars who assume much of Heimert's argument, including Noll, Bloch, and Bonomi. One could even argue that Stout's New England Soul steps back a bit from his 1976 essay by integrating Hatch's work into the final chapters. J. William T. Young's work on Stephen Williams, a New

Divinity revolutionary, nuanced the issue by showing how religious and secular ideologies that sparked revolutionary behavior could exist on separate planes within a single individual—thus simultaneously challenging and integrating Hatch’s work. At first glance Robert Wilson’s study of Ebenezer Gay, Massachusetts’ South Shore leader of religious liberalism who remained a lonely loyalist, appears to maintain Heimert’s thesis that Arminians remained social conservatives; but in fact he calls into question Heimert’s assertion that Arminians failed to live by their convictions and supported the rebellion, showing in the case of Gay one who stood courageously against the will of the people. Wilson’s assessment challenges the basic argument of Religion and the American Mind by falling into step with Bailyn and Hatch, arguing that a secular Whig ideology proved the primary motive behind liberal revolutionary clergy.27

Others have censured Heimert’s book more generally. Bruce Tucker and John Wilson re-envisioned the revolutionary period to extend throughout the eighteenth century: Tucker in order to argue the 1690s as the moment of origin for New England’s sense of identity that was augmented in the 1740s and betrayed by England in the 1760s; Wilson as a theoretical exercise to understand various roles religion played in the larger “Revolutionary era.” In both cases, Heimert was singled out for criticism. Bailyn’s ideas, while updated, continue to find voice in perhaps his finest student, Gordon Wood, who recently identified Heimert’s book as “much too personal, much too much of a cri de coeur against bourgeois conservatism and stuffiness, to be entirely convincing.” Echoing Morgan and Mead, Wood found Religion and the American Mind “so imaginatively separated from the reality of the eighteenth century as to be scarcely history; his argument cannot be verified in any conventional manner.” Likewise, Heimert’s Manichean dichotomy between Liberal and Calvinist traditions proved “too simple, too rarified, too detached from the concrete and complicated world of real people.” But sitting on this side of nearly three decades of scholarship that had sprung from Heimert’s work, Wood admitted that the connections Heimert fastened between religion and the Revolution were “too important and too intriguing to be ignored.” Ulti-

mately. Wood placed both religion and politics in the same supporting role, "consequences of more deeply rooted determinants, as manifest responses to massive demographic and economic changes taking place in society." Although he placed politics no higher than religion, he stayed true to Bailyn's contention that religion's role in the Revolution was indirect and secondary.28

Jon Butler leveled the most fundamental attack in his 1982 essay "Enthusiasm Described and Decried: The Great Awakening as Interpretive Fiction." Butler clearly preferred the approach of such millennial scholars as Nathan Hatch and Whig proponents in the train of Bailyn over students of the revivals, particularly Heimert, Stout, and McLoughlin. Indeed, Butler's powerful article went for the jugular: There was no Great Awakening. Revivals were local and sporadic. "What, then," he concluded, "ought we to say about the revivals of religion in prerevolutionary America? The important suggestion is the most drastic. Historians should abandon the term 'the Great Awakening' because it distorts the character of eighteenth-century American religious life and misinterprets its relationship to prerevolutionary American society and politics."29

Butler's assault was so thorough, covering virtually every assertion from ideological connections to Republicanism, from transformations in language to church growth, that fifteen years later authors writing about the revivals sense the need to defend themselves against his work. Even Mark Noll, after reviewing what can be said about the revivals after Butler's essay, wrote in 1993, "Put this way, the political importance of the Awakening was not direct, as Heimert thought, but everywhere indirect." Interestingly, Noll went on to develop a theory that the revivals "opened up possibilities for the migration of political language into religious speech, most obviously in New England." But this was no shift to Stout's position; continuing to look at content rather than the form of rhetoric, Noll clearly felt more comfortable


with Hatch’s thesis that the French and Indian War caused ministers to use Real Whig language.30

IV. IDEOLOGY AND METHOD IN THE NEXT GENERATION

Nevertheless, Alan Heimert’s Religion and the American Mind: From the Great Awakening to the Revolution continues to draw a strong following. A 1992 article by James F. Cooper Jr. in The New England Quarterly speaks to the work’s robust status. The picture Cooper draws differs dramatically from that of the late 1960s: “Although there are dissenters among them,” he wrote, “historians have traditionally regarded the Great Awakening in New England not simply as a watershed in the religious history of the region but as a turning point in popular conceptions of authority, which eventually paved the way for a more democratic culture and the American Revolution.” Which historians were cited? McLoughlin, Stout, Bonomi, and of course, Heimert. Jon Butler, meanwhile, according to Cooper, “dissents from the traditional view.” Who could have guessed thirty years ago that Heimert’s work would be understood as the traditional interpretation?31

Numerous scholars new to the topic assume either Heimert’s approach, via Harry Stout, or Heimert’s thesis outright as Noll once did. Frank Lambert’s nuanced study of George Whitefield as a cultural representation of liberty for later revolutionaries reads precisely like Heimert’s argument for the great evangelist’s symbolism. Nancy Ruttenburg claims that Whitefield, as the charismatic model of the converted “new man,” broke through traditional constraints to offer listeners the “voice of self-enlargement.” The revivals therefore fashioned a democratic personality for converts, who challenged longstanding institutions of authority. Beyond the rhetorical interest in Heimert is Gerald McDermott’s One Holy and Happy Society, which appears more aligned with Noll’s pre-1993 assessment. Also an evangelical, he argues that Jonathan Edwards’s social theory, which McDermott calls “public theology,” proved more egalitarian than rationalist Charles Chauncy’s and “may have helped pave the way for popular accep-


tance of both classical republicanism and radical egalitarian republicanism." At its most basic level this book continues Noll's early argument but replaces Bailyn's work with that of J. G. A. Pocock in seeking a synthesis. Evangelical Keith Griffin meanwhile moves south to the middle colonies in hopes of finding religious ideology behind revolutionary principles. He claims that Reformed clergy inherited classical principles from Edwards, namely those of just war and the natural law of self-defense, which had become part of "Reformed political ideology." Reminiscent of Noll's early marriage, Griffin blurs the lines between the two sides in order to solve the problem—a more convenient synthesis since New School Presbyterians of the middle colonies were influenced by the Reformed politics of Scotland. One even hears echoes of Religion and the American Mind now in such established scholars as J. C. D. Clark, who is new to this particular debate, in his Language of Liberty, 1660–1832: Political Discourse and Social Dynamics in the Anglo-American World, which finds denominational differences behind various reactions to the imperial crisis and political factionalism in late-eighteenth century America. Some of the criticisms of that work even sound familiar.32

Despite severe and often well-targeted reproaches by Morgan and Mead in the 1960s, Bailyn and Hatch in the 1970s, and Butler in the 1980s, Religion and the American Mind continues to stand. As the venerable Henry May put it, "Heimert's book, partly because of a few unfortunate statements, called forth an extraordinary barrage of heavy artillery. And yet I don't think that Heimert was blown clear out of the water."33

That is the opinion of most scholars who have carried the Heimert torch the past twenty years. Those employing his ideas or methods tend to overlook or ignore initial vitriol as failure to understand the nature of the book. Moving quickly beyond Morgan's and Mead's criticisms, they dismiss Religion and the American Mind's most attacked


sections simply as—in the words of Gura—"hyperbole of the sort that detracted from Heimert's arguments." As Weber put it, "most critics have missed Heimert's major point: that the affective preaching modes of Edwardsean clergy were instrumental in the coming of the Revolution." But this only makes room for those who follow Stout's reading of Heimert—sensitive to the agenda of literary criticism and cultural studies. Outside McDermott, those who sought a Perry Miller-like connection of the revival to the Revolution on the ideological level have retreated from the ground Noll occupied—owing largely to Butler's criticisms. Heimert's work, then, appears most safely positioned in the hands of those interested in cultural forms, who recognize that the professor's office was neither in the divinity school, nor the department of history, but in the department of English. After all, Heimert warned readers thirty years ago, "I am convinced that it is only by way of 'literary' analysis that the full meaning and import of discourse can be ascertained. More particularly, it is necessary to discern the rhetorical stances and strategies of the spokesmen of the various colonial persuasions."³⁴

Jon Pahl stands as perhaps the only person still willing in Heimert-esque fashion to marry the substantial argument Noll initially attempted to the approach Stout extolled. As such, Pahl's Paradox Lost is perhaps the most likely heir to Religion and the American Mind. A complex work that traces the theological (rather than religious) debate about free will from 1630 to 1760, the volume rarely addresses Heimert's work head-on and even agrees with Bailyn's contention that millennialism cannot effectively link the revivals to the Revolution. Yet Pahl asserts that debates over free will both substantially and rhetorically corresponded to definitions of liberty, which, consonant with McDermott, he calls "public theology." Like Noll's take on Heimert, Pahl claims that ideas mattered since eternal life or damnation depended on holding the right beliefs. Those ideas about free will—running the gamut from necessity, which connoted tyranny; to chance, which implied anarchy—naturally harmonized with political realities. On the other hand, like Stout's interpretation of Heimert, Pahl maintains that words mattered since the symbolic language of various groups reveals the shifts and development of a public theology equating private free will with public choice. Sounding more conciliatory than his argument truly is, Pahl concludes, "The American republic may have had theological roots." Yet one must not be fooled by such language: This is no wholesale return to Heimert's thesis. Ultimately

Calvinists, representing a corresponding aristocratic public theology, and Arminians with their democratic understanding of liberty, ran headlong into Heimert's fundamental argument that Edwardsean Calvinists proved more revolutionary than theological liberals.35

V. MEETING AGAIN AT THE DISINTEGRATING CENTER

Daniel Rodgers recently argued in a brilliant essay that a historical paradigm draws power "less from its logic than from the mesh of its premises with the shifting canons of common sense." He presented Republicanism, the dominant secular model inspired by Bailyn's work for understanding the Revolution, as "a measure, should historians need yet another one, of how deeply responsive the interpretive disciplines are, not to evidence (though evidence plays at its allotted moment a critical part) but to their interpretive problematics." Heimert's Religion and the American Mind bears out that point. Disdained and then ignored for over a decade, the work gained a new following not because of later changes in its argument or approach but due to transformations in American culture and their effects on the historical profession.36

One need look no further than recent culture wars for proof. After thirty years Heimert's general ideas appear wrenched once more in yet another direction by a group not wholly unrelated to Noll's popular readership: conservative Christians seeking cultural legitimacy in the nation's past. Some evangelicals have adopted the notion that conservative Christians led the American Revolution and founded the new republic. This goes beyond merely looking back to the "black regimen" Peter Oliver decried soon after the war. Such books as Timothy LaHaye's Faith of Our Founding Fathers peddle to believers an eighteenth-century theism as twentieth-century evangelicalism. Grasping at every mention of God or a deity, they interpret the founders as disciples of an amorphous "Judeo-Christian ethic" (read proto-evangelicalism) that has been diluted by today's secularism. Scholars may scoff at such unhistorical writings but we must remember that these books teach a brand of history to the masses prone to disbelieve the efficacy of anything denominated as "liberal," whether in politics or religion.37

That popular evangelical conception underscores just how complicated the situation truly is. Heimert’s and later Noll’s point was never that the national founders were evangelicals, but that the revivals provided a popular ideology that stimulated Americans’ move toward independence. In fact, those who argue that the Constitution exhibited Christian, particularly evangelical, principles stand on shaky ground, according to Noll. Still, his presuppositions remained explicitly evangelical, committed like George Marsden—the intellectual leader in issues of evangelical scholarship—to the standard that since all knowledge is God’s knowledge then evangelical scholarship must be particularly rigorous, having nothing to fear in it. Ironically, this necessitates their “secular” historical method, which requires empirical study over providential argument, something many evangelical readers cannot accept.

The irony goes deeper still. Both Stout and Hatch, neither of whom agreed with Noll’s search for an ideological connection between the revivals and the Revolution, are also evangelicals. The fact that their interpretations vary widely indicates just how committed these evangelical scholars are to empirical study and professional argument rather than a sectarian reading of history. But their basic assumptions differ from Morgan, Mead, and Bailyn. Stout, Hatch, and Noll find a common background in the Dutch Reformed tradition, especially in the thought of Abraham Kuyper—turn-of-the-century educator and prime minister of the Netherlands—who claimed that all scholarship stems from one of two presuppositions, naturalistic or religious. In other words, there is no such thing as value-free scholarship. Cornelius Van Til, longtime professor at Westminster Seminary in Philadelphia, popularized that notion in the United States among evangelical intellectuals, including George Marsden. Marsden remembers Van Til’s critique of modern culture’s Baconian postulates as close to present-day postmodernism. Certainly, Marsden’s assertion that “the Enlightenment is over” sounds such a note. “With the demise of Enlightenment ideals about universal science and objectivity, the intellectual reasons for such dogmatic attitudes have collapsed,” he wrote. “Those who wish to relate their theological beliefs to the rest of their intellectual life have nothing to apologize for intellectually.” Stout recognized this shifting ground recently when he wrote about questions of personal religious commitment and the writing of history for the tradition-

38. For a discussion of Noll’s disagreement with Francis Schaeffer, a leading evangelical thinker during the 1970s and 1980s, about America’s alleged Christian foundation, see Maxie B. Burch, The Evangelical Historians: The Historiography of George Marsden, Nathan Hatch, and Mark Noll (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996), 56–70.
ally secular academy. “Just as one would not discuss one’s sex life or marriage as ‘context’ for one’s history writing, neither did one discuss one’s religious commitment,” explained Stout. “Now, under the force of debates surrounding multiculturalism, the canon, and semiotics, both of these prohibitions are being lifted.”

This rejection of the traditional Enlightenment presupposition, the postulation that research and interpretation can remain “value free,” tethers Marsden, Noll, Hatch, Stout, and many evangelical scholars to cultural historians. At first glance this paradoxical coupling makes no sense. After all, new cultural historians’ roots lie deeply embedded in deconstructionist soil, which evangelicals tend to reject as strict relativism. But their common enemies—including the belief that everything can be explained in economic and social terms, and that empirical study is untainted with bias—fasten them together practically even if not philosophically. Allen Guelzo’s recent prediction that studies of the Great Awakening, which is usually interpreted from either the vantage point of intellectual history or religious history, will eventually produce a narrative “of surprising convergences” seems true enough, but for different reasons from the one he foresaw. For it is the post-Enlightenment assumptions underlying cultural history (which has breathed new life into intellectual history) and evangelical scholarship that has made the eighteenth-century revivals such a dynamic place to reside in late-twentieth-century scholarship.

In retrospect, while it seems strange that two 1980s movements that appear at cross-currents rehabilitated Heimert’s work, perhaps that is just the point behind it all. If Heimert’s thesis proves as pervasive as it currently seems, then a revolution of sorts has occurred. Whether religion in the form of modern evangelicalism, or secular ideology cast as postmodernism’s cultural history, was the primary force in back of it proves a familiar debate worth waging. The more fruitful understanding, however, rests in the ambiguous and usually unspoken alliance that has formed between evangelical and postmodern critiques of scholarly assumptions that dominated American historical scholarship until recently. The various languages, arguments, and methods in *Religion and the American Mind* proved so broad in 1967 to warrant attack by traditional interpreters, but just sweeping enough to attract

evangelicals and postmodernists today. Although they fall out on opposite sides of the ideological bed, both share the same pillow as they read Heimert's book by their individual lights. Ironically, the very method and arguments that nearly caused the work to be buried thirty years ago resurrected it in two communities interested in confronting the liberal Western Enlightenment's claim to sole historical truth.