The Religious History of American Women

REIMAGINING THE PAST

Edited by

Catherine A. Brekus

The University of
North Carolina Press

Chapel Hill

Manufactured in the United States of America

Designed by Jacquline Johnson
Set in Minion by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

This volume was published with the assistance of the University of Chicago Divinity School and of the Greensboro Women's Fund of the University of North Carolina Press. Founding Contributors of the fund: Linda Arnold Carlisle, Sally Schindel Cone, Anne Faircloth, Bonnie McElveen Hunter, Linda Bullard Jennings, Janice J. Kerley (in honor of Margaret Supplee Smith), Nancy Rouzer May, and Betty Hughes Nichols.

Portions of chapter 9 appeared previously in Ann Braude, "A Religious Feminist, Who Can Find Her?: Historiographical Challenges from the National Organization for Women," *Journal of Religion* 84, no. 4 (October 2004): 555–72, copyright 2004 by The University of Chicago Press; portions of chapter 12 appeared previously in Kristy Nabhan-Warren, *The Virgin of El Barrio: Marian Apparitions, Catholic Evangelizing, and Mexican American Activism* (New York: New York University Press, 2005).

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
The religious history of American women : reimagining the past / edited by Catherine A. Brekus.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN 978-0-8078-3102-1 (cloth: alk. paper)
ISBN 978-0-8078-5800-4 (pbk.: alk. paper)
1. Women and religion—United States—History. 2. United States—Religion. I. Brekus, Catherine A.
BL2525.R4698 2007
200.82′0973—dc22 2006102058

cloth 11 10 09 08 07 5 4 3 2 1
paper 11 10 09 08 07 5 4 3 2 1

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Sarah Osborn's Enlightenment

Reimagining Eighteenth-Century Intellectual History

Catherine A. Brekus

American religious historians have typically treated the Enlightenment as an elite movement that had little to do with women. When writing about intellectual or theological history, they have almost always assumed that the great intellectual movements of the past were shaped by men alone.

Did eighteenth-century women have an Enlightenment? The answer, according to Catherine Brekus, partially depends on how one defines the term. Drawing on recent scholarship connecting the birth of evangelicalism in the eighteenth century to enlightened thought, Brekus argues that women, like men, belong in narrative histories of the Enlightenment in America. Her case study of Sarah Osborn, an eighteenth-century teacher from Newport, Rhode Island, reveals that evangelical women were deeply attracted to the Enlightenment's emphasis on experience. Through their personal testimonies of faith, they helped to popularize this experiential language among other evangelical Christians.

In 1743, Sarah Osborn, a schoolteacher in Newport, Rhode Island, began writing a spiritual memoir. Influenced by the excitement of the Great Awakening, the religious revivals that brought thousands of converts into New England's churches, she decided to reflect on the spiritual meaning of her life. How had God ordered her experiences? What could her life story tell her about both herself and God? Filling more than 130 pages with her bittersweet memories of God's "dealings" with her, she wrote about her childhood sinfulness, her conversion, and her painful battles against despair—what we would call depression. The lesson she had learned along her religious pilgrimage could be summarized in just a few words. "Trust in the Lord," she advised, "and never dispair of his mercy."[1]

After finishing her memoir, Sarah Osborn continued to write, reflecting on her life in hundreds of letters to friends, a short theological tract that she published anonymously in 1755, and an astonishing number of diaries, more than fifty volumes in all. As she explained in 1754, writing helped her "get near or wrestle with God." "I seem to Lie u[nder] necessity to improve my

Pen if [I w]ill be at all Lively in religion," she wrote. According to Samuel Hopkins, her minister in Newport, she wrote 5,000 to 15,000 pages, more than 1,500 of which still survive.[2]

Osborn seems to have written for many reasons: to examine her heart for signs of corruption, to strengthen her relationship to God, and to help make sense of events that stretched the limits of her understanding, such as the death of loved ones. Most of all, she seems to have wanted to transform her life into a "text" that could be "read" during times of trouble or despair. Because her life was filled with poverty and illness, she sometimes found it difficult to keep her faith, but writing helped her to remember God's goodness. Obsessively recording her religious experiences in thousands of pages of entries, she repeatedly examined them for rational "evidence" of divine providence. As she wrote on the cover of her memoir twenty years after composing it, "this Book I Have reread again and again."[3]

Her rich devotional manuscripts offer a fascinating glimpse of popular Christianity in eighteenth-century America. They also offer a unique perspective on the intellectual movement that historians describe as the Enlightenment. Like John Locke, who claimed that "all our knowledge is founded" on "EXPERIENCE," Osborn believed that if she examined her life with scientific detachment, she could make discoveries about both herself and God. "*How do I know this God is mine; and that I myself am not deceived?*" she asked. "By the *Evidences* of a *Work of Grace* wrought in my Soul."[4] She believed that Christians could be virtually certain of their salvation if they objectively examined their lives for "evidence" of divine grace.

It may seem surprising to discuss Sarah Osborn, a little-known evangelical woman, in the same breath as John Locke, one of the most renowned philosophers in the modern world. But Sarah Osborn wrestled with many of the same questions that Enlightenment thinkers raised in their work—questions about original sin, the possibilities of human knowledge, and the nature of God—and her diaries are saturated with an "enlightened" language of evidence, experience, and certainty. Her writings raise two provocative questions for historians: First, did evangelicals—who are often portrayed as backward looking—embrace the Enlightenment? And second, did women play a role in constructing Enlightenment ideas? Or to state the question more baldly, did women have an Enlightenment?

The most common answer to both questions has been no. Although intellectual historians have increasingly recognized that the Enlightenment was not a monolith, most have tended to depict it as an elite, masculine movement that had little to do with women's lives. Indeed, when Adrienne Koch published *The American Enlightenment* in 1965, she included extracts from

the writings of just five male leaders: Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, and Alexander Hamilton.[5] Historians have also portrayed the Enlightenment as aggressively secular in its outlook. According to Peter Gay, for example, the Enlightenment involved a small number of French philosophers, all men, whose rallying cry was Voltaire's "ecrasez l'infame." Similarly, Henry May, whose 1976 book, *The Enlightenment in America*, remains the only one-volume survey of the movement in America, focuses almost entirely on learned men such as Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin who were hostile to organized religion. Although May recognizes that nineteenth-century Protestants embraced elements of Enlightenment thought (particularly Thomas Reid's Common Sense tradition), he suggests that eighteenth-century evangelicals were engaged in a battle against the "Age of Reason." Given May's interpretation, one would never imagine that an evangelical woman like Sarah Osborn might belong in a book about the Enlightenment in America.[6]

This chapter, in contrast, argues that Sarah Osborn's story—the story of an evangelical woman who had little in common with Franklin or Jefferson—should also be read as a story about the Enlightenment. More broadly, this chapter suggests that women's history forces us to rethink many of our assumptions about the Enlightenment in America. Contrary to what many historians have implied, the Enlightenment was not an elite, male movement but a broader transformation that affected the way ordinary converts, including women, made sense of their lives. Nor was the Enlightenment entirely a secularizing force. Building on the work of recent historians, especially David Bebbington, I will argue that evangelicalism, despite its hostility to the most skeptical strains of Enlightenment thought, should be understood as an Enlightenment form of Protestantism.[7] Finally, I will argue that even though Sarah Osborn and other evangelical women were troubled by many strands of the Enlightenment, they embraced the new emphasis on experience and certainty because it gave them greater religious authority.

Reimagining the Enlightenment

How should we define the Enlightenment? Writing in 1784, Immanuel Kant suggested that its "motto" was "dare to know!" Rather than offering blind obedience to the state or the church, "enlightened" men defended the "freedom to use reason publicly in all matters."[8] Echoing Kant's words, historians traditionally have portrayed the Enlightenment as a seventeenth- and eighteenth-century intellectual movement that enshrined reason and free inquiry as the ultimate human values. Paul Hazard explained that the En-

lightenment should be understood as a "revolution" against authority, dogma, and Christianity, and Lester G. Crocker described it as "a group of writers, working self-consciously for over a hundred years," who "sought to enlighten men, using critical reason to free minds from prejudices and unexamined authority, and—somewhat later within that period—using the same weapon to explore the ills of society and devise remedies."[9] Peter Gay, one of the most distinguished historians of the Enlightenment, underlined its commitment to *freedom*. "The men of the Enlightenment," he explained, "united on a vastly ambitious program, a program of secularism, humanity, cosmopolitanism, and freedom, above all, freedom in its many forms—freedom from arbitrary power, freedom of speech, freedom of trade, freedom to realize one's talents, freedom of aesthetic response, freedom, in a word, of moral man to make his own way in the world." Despite differing in the details of their interpretations, all these historians claimed that the Enlightenment had rejected the "mythical thinking" of Christianity in favor of "critical thinking" based on reason. They also portrayed the Enlightenment as a singular movement that had crossed international boundaries. As Gay argued, the "little flock of *philosophes*" often quarreled over how to understand human nature and society, but they remained unified by "their tension with Christianity, and their pursuit of modernity."[10]

Although this portrait of the Enlightenment continues to exert a powerful hold on the public imagination, recent historians have challenged it on several grounds. First, historians such as Roger Chartier, Robert Darnton, and Roy Porter have argued that the Enlightenment should be understood as a popular as well as an elite movement that involved "a vastly larger number of relatively obscure thinkers, writers, readers, and contact loops."[11] Because of the expansion of print culture and rising levels of literacy, many educated people participated in debates over "enlightened" ideas. Historians used to assume that the Enlightenment had not affected ordinary people's lives, but most now make the opposite claim. For example, John McManners has shown that the Enlightenment decisively reshaped attitudes toward death and dying in eighteenth-century France, and Norman Fiering has argued that most eighteenth-century Americans assumed that humans beings were instinctively compassionate—a startling reversal of the Puritan past that suggests the growing acceptance of humanitarian ideas.[12]

Second, many social and cultural historians have argued that the Enlightenment cannot be studied in isolation from larger seventeenth- and eighteenth-century transformations. Without claiming that the Enlightenment was nothing more than the by-product of material conditions, they argue that it must be placed in a larger context of political, economic, social,

and religious change. For example, British historians have connected the Enlightenment in England to the Glorious Revolution, the growth of religious toleration, the expansion of print culture, and the rise of capitalism.[13]

Third, historians have questioned older assumptions about the singularity of the Enlightenment, often preferring to discuss multiple "enlightenments" that differed according to national circumstance. The Enlightenment "occurred in too many forms to be comprised within a single definition and history," J. G. A. Pocock has written. Historians must imagine "a family of Enlightenments, displaying both family resemblances and family quarrels (some of them bitter and even bloody)."[14]

Fourth, historians have objected to simplistic definitions of the Enlightenment as the "Age of Reason." To be fair, earlier scholars such as Peter Gay also objected to such pat slogans, but because of their fascination with enlightened debates over human rationality, they paid less attention to other aspects of the Enlightenment, especially its privileging of experience. As a result, when other historians have tried to offer concise overviews of this research in textbooks or popular histories, they have often reduced the Enlightenment to a single-minded quest for rationality. But as Roy Porter has argued, enlightened thinkers were less focused on "*a priori* reason" as the key to knowledge than "experience and experiment." Instead of making judgments based on clerical authority or inherited tradition, they insisted on the value of "firsthand experience." Influenced by the scientific method, they insisted that every hypothesis about human nature and society had to be empirically tested.[15]

Fifth, historians have argued that the portrait of a rigorously rational Enlightenment doing battle with religious "superstition" is incomplete. On one hand, there is good reason to describe much of enlightened thought as hostile to religion. Many enlightened intellectuals condemned the "priestcraft" of Christianity and portrayed the church as an enemy of human progress. "All national institutions of churches—whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish—appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind and monopolize power and profit," wrote Thomas Paine in 1794.[16] But, on the other hand, historians have increasingly recognized that the Enlightenment was a diverse movement, not a singular one, and they have presented a far more complicated picture of the relationship between enlightened thought and Christianity. Some, for example, have wondered whether the Enlightenment may have grown out of the Protestant Reformation: for example, John Locke was raised in a Puritan family, and he may have been shaped by Reformed thought, despite rejecting it later.[17] Historians have also suggested that the Enlightenment contributed to the

growth of "more optimistic and tolerant types of Protestantism" such as Latitudinarianism, Deism, and in New England, "Catholick" Congregationalism.[18] In addition, American historians have shown that Protestant thinkers eventually assimilated aspects of enlightened thought in order to buttress their faith against skepticism. As Henry May argued in his 1976 survey, *The Enlightenment in America*, nineteenth-century Protestants defended their faith by appealing to Frances Hutcheson's Common Sense tradition and claiming that all humans have an innate moral sense given by God.[19]

Although all of these studies have found crucial links between enlightened thought and Protestantism, David Bebbington's analysis of eighteenth-century transatlantic evangelicalism offers the most intriguing analysis of the Enlightenment's profound influence on religion. According to Bebbington, the roots of modern evangelicalism can be traced back to the eighteenth century, when the older faith of the Puritans was replaced by a new kind of confident, optimistic Protestantism. Rejecting stereotypes of eighteenth-century evangelicals as reactionary, Bebbington has made the provocative claim that "the Evangelical version of Protestantism was created by the Enlightenment." Unlike earlier Protestants, evangelicals tended to be more optimistic, pragmatic, and humanitarian, and most important, they expressed much greater assurance about their salvation. Influenced by John Locke's emphasis on the authority of personal experience, they insisted that converts could "feel" and "know" whether they had been saved. Jonathan Edwards, for example, insisted that converts gained a "new sense" of grace that fundamentally changed their perception of reality. (Edwards was influenced by Anthony Ashley Cooper, earl of Shaftesbury, and Francis Hutcheson, who argued that all humans have an innate "moral sense" that helps them to distinguish good from evil. Although Edwards, unlike later Protestants, rejected this positive view of human nature, he still agreed that knowledge comes from sense perception.)[20] Rather than arguing that the Enlightenment was constructed against Protestantism, Bebbington has insisted that it also took place *within* Protestantism. What made evangelicals unique—what separated them from the seventeenth-century Puritans—was their embrace of the Enlightenment language of assurance, certainty, experience, and proof.[21]

To be clear, the rise of evangelicalism did not mark a complete break with the Protestant past, and the roots of evangelical experientialism can be traced back to seventeenth-century Puritanism. In both England and America, Puritan ministers urged Christians to examine their experiences in order to make judgments about their relationships to God. Yet Puritans also insisted that humans were too tainted by original sin to attain full knowledge of either the self or God, and they condemned assertions of religious certainty as

arrogance. In contrast, ministers in the early eighteenth century, eager to defend Christianity from rationalism, gradually began to expand their trust in firsthand experience. In his tract, *Reason Satisfied and Faith Established* (1712), Cotton Mather defended Christian orthodoxy against "rational" religion by emphasizing the genuine truth contained in personal religious experience, and in *A Treatise Concerning Conversion* (1719), Solomon Stoddard argued that people could know they had experienced conversion by listening to the voice of their consciences. Rejecting the earlier Puritan belief that the moment of conversion was often imperceptible and unknowable, he insisted, "Men may have the knowledge of their own conversion." During the revivals that took place in New England during the 1740s, this "experimental religion," as Cotton Mather called it, flowered into a distinctive kind of evangelical "enlightened" faith that particularly valued experience, sensation, and evidence.[22]

Influenced by David Bebbington's argument, historians have found surprising traces of Enlightenment thought throughout the new transatlantic evangelical movement. Mark Noll has argued that British, American, and Scottish evangelicals, like Locke, believed that "the self's personal experience was foundational for obtaining reliable knowledge," and both Frederick Dyer and David Hempton have noticed close parallels between Enlightenment ideas and Methodist religious practice. As Hempton explains, "The characteristic features of Methodist spirituality—its tendency to morbid introspection, its ruthless self-examination, and its compulsion to share and tell—are all products of its Lockean emphasis on sensible experience." (Describing the Methodists as "enlightened" would have surprised many eighteenth-century intellectuals, who criticized Methodists for their "enthusiasm.") In addition, Bruce Hindmarsh has suggested that Protestants not only absorbed the Enlightenment's empiricist strands, but its individualistic ones as well.[23]

Because of this wide-ranging new research, the term "Enlightenment" has become much more difficult to define and also much more sweeping. Roy Porter's book, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British Enlightenment*, which was published in 2000, not only discusses thinkers such as John Locke but also changes in everyday life. Although admitting that it would be silly to attribute all the changes that took place in the eighteenth century to enlightened ideas, Porter also insisted that "it would be equally silly to deny that notions of human nature and the ideas of the good life developed by the *philosophes* found wide expression in art and letters, in print culture, and in practical life."[24] When Alan Kors published his massive, four-volume *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* in 2003, he included almost 700 entries on topics as diverse as "reason," "hospitals," "law," "pov-

erty," "pornography," "sociability," and "sentimentalism." Reflecting the new interest in the relationship between the Enlightenment and religion, he also included several entries on religious topics, including a biographical sketch of the influential evangelical theologian, Jonathan Edwards.[25]

Besides debating over how to define the Enlightenment, historians have also argued, often heatedly, over its essential meaning. Because scholars tend to view the Enlightenment as a historical watershed—the moment when our "modern" values of individualism, capitalism, and liberalism took shape—they have been sharply divided over how to assess its legacy. Some echo Kant's rhetoric of progress and liberation; others have taken a darker view. As early as 1944, Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno argued in their influential book *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that the Enlightenment emphasis on reason had led to fascism, not liberation, and in recent years, it has become fashionable to criticize the "Enlightenment project" for laying the groundwork for Western totalitarianism, sexism, imperialism, and racism.[26] Michel Foucault's critical studies of the Enlightenment have been particularly influential. In several books published during the 1960s and 1970s, Foucault contended that the Enlightenment had not represented progress but rather new and more sinister forms of subjection. For example, in *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, he challenged the assumption that the decline of public torture in the eighteenth century had represented a humanitarian triumph. Instead, he argued that prison reformers had created a "disciplinary society" in which people were controlled through constant surveillance rather than brute force. Monarchs had demonstrated their power sporadically through the public spectacle of torture, but enlightened "reformers" aimed for nothing less than "total power"—most ominously, the internal regulation of the "soul."[27] Far from being a harbinger of freedom, the Enlightenment had led to new kinds of repression. In the acerbic words of Eric Hobsbawm, the Enlightenment now appears as nothing more than a "conspiracy of dead white men in periwigs to provide the intellectual foundation for Western imperialism."[28]

Feminist scholars have been particularly suspicious of the Enlightenment's legacy. Influenced by Foucault, they have condemned the Enlightenment for creating "a single truth and a single rationality" that legitimated women's political, economic, and religious subordination.[29] Rather than simply arguing that the Enlightenment was constructed without women, they have made the more radical claim that it was constructed *against* them. According to historian Joan B. Landes, for example, the Enlightenment led to the creation of a bourgeois public sphere that implicitly excluded women on the grounds of their irrationality and "effeminate" vice. Although a few female intellec-

tuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft participated in public debates, their writings echoed "masculinist values." Instead of overturning the social and political order, these women inadvertently reinforced its masculine bias by accepting "male" definitions of humanity. In another study of the gendering of the public sphere, the political theorist Carole Pateman has argued that liberal political theory, one of the greatest "accomplishments" of enlightened thought, is premised on men's sexual control over women.[30]

Like other feminist scholars, women's historians of religion have criticized the Enlightenment for its privileging of "masculine" norms of rationality. For example, Phyllis Mack suggests that the Enlightenment marked a decline in women's spiritual authority. Unlike seventeenth-century women, who had often used ecstatic language to describe their personal relationship to God, eighteenth-century women felt compelled "to cultivate the traits of restraint and rationality at the expense of the more 'feminine' qualities of enthusiasm and spiritual ardor." Rather than expanding women's opportunities for religious expression, the Enlightenment limited them. Similarly, Susan Juster has argued that one of the results of the Enlightenment commitment to rationality and middle-class respectability was the marginalization of female visionaries. Although infamous female prophets such as Jemima Wilkinson and Joanna Southcott certainly made their voices heard in the Anglo-American public sphere, they were ridiculed for eschewing the "enlightened" qualities of civility, gentility, and rationality. Their notorious reputations "exemplify the intractable hostility of Anglo-American men of letters toward women in public."[31]

Although these bleak interpretations of the Enlightenment's effect on women reveal that the Enlightenment cannot be understood in simplistic terms as "progress," they also obscure the many ways in which women were inspired by enlightened ideas. Indeed, many women's historians have objected to viewing female intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft or Mary Astell as "colluding with the oppressor" because of their defense of enlightened ideas.[32] British and French historians have studied women's participation in freemasonry, salons, and the public world of print, but American historians (who have generally written less about the Enlightenment) have also pointed to evidence of eighteenth-century women's growing activism in the public sphere. Rejecting the argument that the Enlightenment led to inherently "masculine" definitions of liberalism, Rosemarie Zagarri has argued that women's exclusion from American citizenship was "contingent, not essential."[33]

Yet despite these contentious debates over how to understand women's relationship to the Enlightenment, few historians have questioned the argu-

ment that the Enlightenment undercut women's religious authority. The reason for this is simple. Despite Susan Juster's warning that historians should not treat "the enlightenment and religious enthusiasm as distinct and antagonistic forces," most have echoed traditional interpretations of the Enlightenment as a profoundly skeptical movement that shook the foundations of traditional Christianity.[34] Pointing to the examples of thinkers such as John Locke, who insisted that Christianity must be "reasonable," and the radical David Hume, who insisted that miracles were impossible, they have assumed that most Christians, both male and female, were marginalized in an increasingly secular, rationalist world.[35]

Yet if women's historians take seriously the argument that one of the many "enlightenments" took place within Protestantism as well as against it, a more complicated picture emerges. Perhaps evangelical women such as Sarah Osborn were marginalized by enlightened thought, but perhaps they found ways to adopt it as their own.

Sarah Osborn's "Enlightenment"

If Sarah Osborn could speak to us across the generations, she would not choose to frame her remarkable story around the "Enlightenment," but around divine grace. She could not imagine any other way to explain how a "feeble worthless worm," as she called herself, had overcome poverty and tragedy to become one of the most respected female religious leaders of her time.[36] Her life story, as she confessed in her memoir, was as dramatic as a novel. Raised by parents whom she later described as "severe," she seems to have had a difficult childhood. As a teenager (the dates aren't clear, she was probably fourteen or fifteen) she struggled with temptations to commit suicide. The rest of her life was marked by recurring tragedy. She eloped at the age of seventeen with a sailor, Samuel Wheaten, who died two years later, leaving her with an infant son to support; remarried a successful tailor, Henry Osborn, a widower with three children, who suffered a breakdown that left him unable to work; and toiled long hours as a schoolteacher and a seamstress in order to pay her family's bills. Soon after her second marriage in 1742, she and her husband were forced to sell all their possessions in order to repay their creditors. Despite her constant battle to achieve economic security, she remained indigent throughout her life and her name never appeared on Newport's tax lists. Her beloved son, her only child, died at the age of eleven. Through everything, she suffered chronic bouts of illness. She spent the last twenty years of her life almost entirely confined to her house, unable to walk and almost entirely blind.[37]

Yet despite all these tragedies, Osborn was so charismatic that many people in Newport sought her spiritual counsel. Like the followers of medieval women saints, they seemed to interpret her afflictions as a mark of her sanctity, a symbol of her closeness to a suffering Christ. Reputed to be gifted in prayer, she became more popular than any of the ordained ministers in her town. During the winter of 1766–67, she emerged as the leader of a remarkable religious revival that brought as many as five hundred people—including more than one hundred slaves—to her house each week for prayer meetings. Although she remained poor, strangers from as far away as Canada and the West Indies sent money to help defray her expenses, eager to help a woman who had become virtually a Protestant saint. After her death in 1796, the Reverend Samuel Hopkins heightened her fame by publishing extracts from her writings in two books, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn* and *Familiar Letters, Written by Mrs. Sarah Osborn and Miss Susanna Anthony, Late of Newport, Rhode Island.*[38]

Osborn seems to have been especially admired by religious conservatives who were ambivalent about the dramatic economic, social, and religious changes that were reshaping their world. As Timothy Breen and Timothy Hall have argued, nothing seemed certain in mid-eighteenth-century America: the expansion of the market, the breakdown of social hierarchy, and increasing religious pluralism meant that individuals were able to exercise greater personal choice than ever before.[39] In Newport, a thriving seaport that was the fourth-largest city in colonial America, people could buy a stunning variety of goods, whether books, furniture, or clothing. "Just imported," announced an ad in the *Newport Mercury* in 1759. "A Variety of European and India Goods, at the most reasonable Rate, for Cash or short credit."[40] People in Newport could also choose among a bewildering plurality of religious traditions. Sarah was a Congregationalist, but Newport was also home to Roman Catholics, Quakers, Anglicans, Moravians, Baptists, and even a small group of Jews.[41] (Touro Synagogue, the oldest synagogue in the United States, was built in Newport in 1762.) Many people must have been intoxicated by this new religious and economic freedom, but others seem to have found it overwhelming. With so many choices, how could one be sure of making the right decision? After Osborn had a conversation with "some serious good sort of people" who were Seventh-Day Baptists, she wrote a letter to a trusted minister asking him to help her defend the custom of keeping Sunday as the Sabbath. "I seem much more confused than usual," she admitted.[42]

Eighteenth-century Protestantism was not only transformed by capitalism and growing religious pluralism, but also by new currents of ideas. Although

few American ministers were as radical as England's Samuel Clarke, who challenged the doctrine of eternal punishment, or Daniel Whitby, who complained that the entire idea of original sin was "exceeding cruel, and plainly inconsistent with the Justice, Wisdom, and goodness of our gracious God," growing numbers of clergy began to challenge traditional Calvinist doctrines during the 1740s and 1750s.[43] Indeed, the change may have come even earlier. Reflecting on religion in New England, for example, Jonathan Edwards claimed that "the great noise that was in this part of the country, about Arminianism" began in 1734.[44] (The term "Arminianism" refers to the belief that humans could earn God's favor through good works. In contrast, Calvinists like Sarah Osborn insisted that humans were utterly sinful and could be saved only be divine grace, not by good behavior.) Edwards may have been exaggerating, but it is clear that by the 1740s and 1750s, many ministers had begun to challenge traditional Calvinist beliefs. For example, in 1757, Samuel Webster published a tract condemning the doctrine of original sin as cruel, especially because it logically led to the conclusion that infants as well as adults could be damned. He found it difficult to reconcile a belief in infant damnation with "the *goodness*, *holiness* or *justice* of God."[45] According to the Reverend Samuel Niles, the doctrine of original sin was the "most eagerly struck at, and virulently opposed by many, in the present age."[46]

Evidence suggests that these theological controversies were not only the product of disputes among learned clergy but also of popular discontent. In other words, changes in religious life happened from the top down and from the bottom up. For example, at the same time as Webster condemned the doctrine of infant damnation as cruel, ordinary Christians began drifting away from older ideas of innate depravity. As Jonathan Edwards complained, many of his congregants mistakenly described their children as "innocent." By the early nineteenth century, Protestantism had been subtly transformed by a growing faith in human goodness and compassion.[47]

Because Sarah Osborn lived in one of the most religiously diverse and tolerant cities in America, she was no stranger to theological controversy, and she seems to have feared that her Calvinist faith was under attack. In the 1740s and 1750s, the ministers whom she most admired—men like Gilbert Tennent, Jonathan Edwards, and Samuel Buell—all offered stern warnings about the insidious "spread of Arminianism, Socinianism, Arianism, and Deism," and when Samuel Hopkins became her minister in 1770, taking tea at her house every Saturday afternoon, she joined him in condemning the alarming spread of infidelity.[48] As a member of the First Congregational Church in Newport, a church that had a reputation for theological rigor, she was especially critical of the more liberal Congregationalists who worshipped

nearby in Newport's Second Congregational Church. In 1755, the members of that church happily appointed Ezra Stiles as their pastor even though, as historian Edmund Morgan wryly notes, he had "preached to them on 'the Excellency of the Christian Religion' without once mentioning Christ."[49] Although Stiles became more conservative during his time in Newport, Osborn still found him far too optimistic about human nature for her taste. After hearing him preach on a reassuring text from Psalms, "the Lord is good to all," she asked God to "rouse this servant, alarm Him with a sence of the awful danger there is of His rocking His People more and more to sleep in the cradle of security instead of Exciting them to fly from the wrath to come." Despite admiring his "Lovely Engaging benevolent temper," she thought he focused too much on good works rather than grace, failing "to make clear distinctions between the secure sinner, the Hypocrite, and the real Christian."[50]

Despite her poverty and her lack of formal schooling (she attended a girls' academy for only a few months as a child), Sarah Osborn was well educated for her time. Her parents struggled throughout their lives to make ends meet, but they seem to have emphasized the importance of education. Her family, in some ways, was a distinguished one in Protestant circles: her maternal uncle, John Guyse, was a British minister who published several theological treatises. (Perhaps his most lasting claim to fame is that he, along with Isaac Watts, wrote the preface to the first edition of Jonathan Edwards's *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God*, the book that helped inspire the revivals of the Great Awakening.) Although it would be a mistake to identify Osborn as an intellectual, she was a voracious reader who was deeply interested in Protestant theology.[51]

Some of the books that she read heightened her fears of the "awful danger" of straying from Calvinism. On at least one occasion, she seems to have unwittingly chosen a book to share with her female prayer group that was critical of Calvinist teachings. Osborn believed that only a small number of "elect" had been chosen for salvation, and since God had chosen who would be saved and who would be damned even before birth, humans could not earn salvation by performing good works. But when she and her friends read this book together (unfortunately, she did not record its title), they were troubled by its challenge to their belief in predestination. "Defeat satan in his attempt to break us," she implored God, "and prevent His taking advantage and discouraging any by what was read on predestination and reprobation. Lord, thou art infinitely Just in choosing whom thou wilt, and infinitely Just in withholding that Grace thou art no ways bound to Give."[52] More commonly, she learned about liberal or Deist tracts secondhand. For example, she admired David Hamilton's book, *The Private Christian's Witness for*

Christianity, which condemned "the notional and erroneous apprehensions of the Arminian, Socinian, and Deist of the Age."[53]

Osborn responded to the theological controversies of her day by strongly affirming her own orthodoxy. Unlike ministers who questioned the doctrine of original sin, she insisted that humans were essentially corrupt. Reflecting on her childhood, she did not remember herself as an innocent child of nature, but as "a monster in sin," a "lyar," and "the most ignorant and vile of all creatures." Her "bace ingratitude," her "deep-rooted enmity" against God, her "angry ungratefull temper," and her dreadful "corruptions" made her entirely unworthy of God's love.[54] As she confessed over and over again in her diaries, she was "guilty," "peevish," "wretched," "filthy and Poluted," "churlish," and "worthless."[55] (Although judgments about style are hard to quantify, she sounds more harsh than either seventeenth-century Puritans or later generations of evangelicals. As we have seen in our own day, people tend to express their beliefs in especially extreme terms when they feel threatened.) In her opinion, her childhood proved the dark wisdom of the Psalms: "The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they are born, speaking lies."[56]

Given Sarah Osborn's pessimism about human nature, it is not surprising that she also objected to enlightened thinkers' positive view of self-interest. Newport's wealthy merchants seem to have eagerly embraced Adam Smith's capitalist ethic, but she refused to believe that selfishness could have a silver lining. In contrast to Benjamin Franklin, who assured his readers that self-interest could foster the virtues of hard work and thrift, Osborn insisted that true Christians had to crucify the self. "Strip me intirely of self," she begged God in 1757. "Wean me wholly from the world and all things therein." Four years later, after reading a sermon, "The Evil of Self Seeking," published by her uncle, the Reverend John Guyse, she "bitterly bemoan'd" her selfishness. "The soul that is full of self in any consideration of it, hath no room for CHRIST," Guyse warned. "It is self-sufficient, and becomes a GOD to itself." Nothing but evil could come from the unbridled pursuit of individual desire.[57]

Finally, Osborn also rejected the strain of Enlightenment thought that historians have described as "humanitarianism." As Protestants began to rethink their assumptions about human nature, they also began to shift their understanding of God. Unlike earlier Christians, who had described God as both loving and angry, merciful and vengeful, liberals insisted that God was too compassionate to ever deliberately inflict suffering on his creation. As the Reverend Jonathan Mayhew protested, "If I were to form my conception of God's moral character, by such discourses as I have sometimes heard and

read, and such as were, by many, thought to be truly evangelical; instead of thinking Him . . . essentially good, and infinitely the best of Beings, I could not but conclude Him to be infinitely more unjust and cruel, than any other being in the universe!" First and foremost, God was *benevolent*, and he had created the world to make humans happy.[58]

Although Osborn portrayed God as a "tender, indulgent father" and Jesus as a "sympathizing savior" who was "sensibly touched" by her sufferings, she was too much of a Calvinist to question the reality of divine punishment.[59] Because of her faith that God had created the universe to demonstrate his glory, not to promote human happiness, she insisted that suffering and evil were ultimately part of his plan. Consider, for example, one of the most horrifying passages in her memoir, in which she claimed that when she was nine years old God had brutally punished her for the crime of playing on the Sabbath. As she and her mother sailed across the Atlantic to join her father in New England, she became so sinful that God sentenced her to an excruciating ordeal: "On board the ship I Lost my good impressions and grew vile so that I could play upon the sabath then. But I was convinced of that sin by an accident that befel me, or rather what was orderd by infinite wisdom to that end. For as I was busey a boyling some thing for my babee [a doll], I fell into the fire with my right hand and burnt it all over, which I presently thought was just upon me for playing [on] a sabath day. And I was ashaimd and sorry I had done so." Even though she had been only a child, Osborn believed she had been so "vile" that God had chastised her for her sins, intentionally sending her into the flames.[60] Her God was not serenely "benevolent," but sovereign, majestic, uncontrollable, and sometimes violent. (Given how many eighteenth-century ministers imagined God as benevolent, it is significant that she never seems to have used this word to describe God in a single one of her diaries.)

As these examples illustrate, Sarah Osborn had little in common with enlightened thinkers who wanted to create a more liberal view of humanity and God. Given her hostility to new ideas about the goodness of humanity, the benefits of self-love, and the benevolence of God, it would be easy to portray her as a reactionary who wanted to defend Calvinism against the acids of modernity. According to Charles Hambrick-Stowe, for example, Osborn was a Puritan at heart: she shared more in common with Thomas Shepard, the famous Puritan minister, than with eighteenth-century provincials who prided themselves on their refinement and cosmopolitanism.[61]

Yet despite Osborn's theological conservatism, she looked forward as well as backward, and she was not a Puritan but an evangelical. (She described herself simply as a "Protestant," but she seemed to realize that she stood on

the brink of something new, and like many other converts, she settled on the word "evangelical" to describe it. For example, after a night of prayer, she wrote about her experience of "true evangelical repentance.")[62] Inspired by the revivals of the "Great Awakening," she helped to construct a new kind of individualistic faith that drew much of its inspiration from the Lockean emphasis on experiential knowledge. In 1755, for example, she published an anonymous tract with a title that sounded curiously "enlightened": *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity*. Originally written as a letter to a female friend who was anxious about the state of her soul, the tract explained that conversion could be objectively verified by "*Evidences* of a *Work of Grace*." As Osborn admitted, her "Evidences" were sometimes "clouded" by anxiety or despair, but in times of doubt, she reflected on her past experiences. "Having treasur'd up the Experiences of many Years," she wrote, "I repair to them in a dark and cloudy Day. . . . this as an Anchor holds me sure." At a time when liberal Christians demanded that faith be more rational, Osborn responded by appropriating the Lockean language of experience. "Religion is no imaginary Thing," she testified, "but a substantial Reality."[63] She insisted that true Christian faith was "experimental": it was not only based on received wisdom but also on firsthand experience of divine grace.[64]

It is likely that Sarah Osborn absorbed this experiential language from listening to her ministers, talking with like-minded Christians, and reading religious books. Although there is no evidence that she ever read Locke, she did read the works of Cotton Mather, Jonathan Edwards, and many other ministers who advocated an "experimental" religion. For example, in 1767, when she read Samuel Buell's narrative of the revivals in his congregation, she not only learned that converts were "taught" their faith through "Experience," but that they "exhibit Evidence" of "a change of Nature."[65] Since her church required converts to share their stories of conversion before being admitted to full membership, she also heard many lay Christians describing their religious "experiences."

Today the word "experience" has become such a common part of our language that we may find it difficult to hear its revolutionary cadences. We tend to use the word "experience" as a synonym for individual subjectivity, and we describe our experiences in the same way as our "feelings"—as interior and private. Indeed, modern-day scholars of religion have criticized an emphasis on "the experiential dimension of religion" because personal experience is "inaccessible to strictly objective modes of inquiry."[66] But in the eighteenth century, the word "experience" had a much more scientific connotation, and philosophers as diverse as Adam Smith, John Locke, and

Frances Hutcheson argued that it was the foundation of true knowledge. Rejecting the view of Descartes, who had claimed that ideas were innate, they insisted that all knowledge is the product of sense impressions. This idea may sound like common sense to us today, but it had radical implications in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Intoxicated by scientific and technological advances, Enlightenment thinkers insisted that ideas had to be subjected to the test of experiment and observation. Empiricism would liberate people from blind devotion to the past.

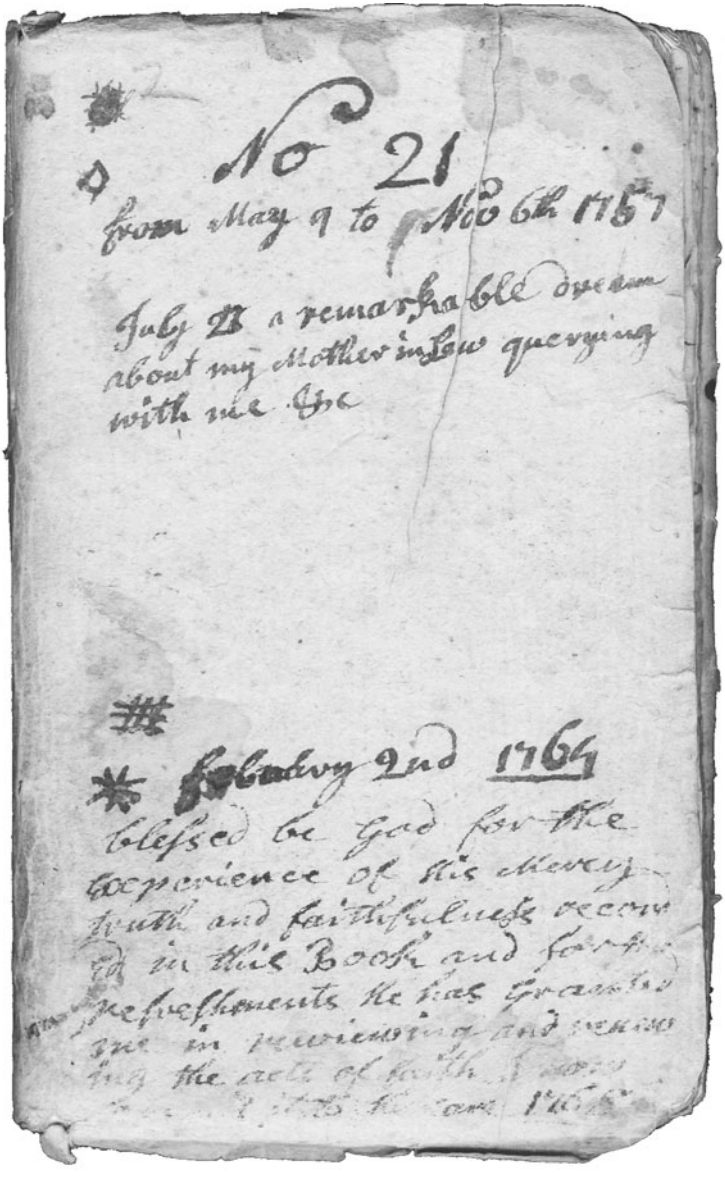
Osborn did not want to be "liberated" from tradition, particularly not Christian tradition, but she, too, believed that firsthand experience could offer rational evidence about the universe. On one hand, she was suspicious of the "enlightened" exaltation of reason. In 1757, for example, when she was vexed with financial problems and found it difficult to place her complete trust in God, she equated "carnal reason" with satanic temptation: "O, what a confederacy do Satan, unbelief, and carnal reason, keep, to drive me out of my strong tower, my hiding place, my rest in God."[67] Yet even though she denied her ability to understand God through "shallow" reason alone, she still described her religious views as "rational," and she viewed her personal experiences of divine grace as rational proof of God's existence.[68] Out of all the books that she read, one of her favorites was John Johnson's *A Mathematical Question, Propounded by the Viceregent of the World; Answered by the King of Glory*, a book that argued that true Christians were the only ones capable of solving the greatest "mathematical" problems in the universe. Johnson, a British Baptist, crafted an elaborate allegory featuring a "grand Geometrician" (God) whose secrets were ultimately too mysterious for mere humans to understand. But those who became part of his "country" (the saved) were able to gain a partial understanding of the universe with the help of the "king's secretary" (the Holy Spirit), who "opens, interprets, and guides our understandings into these mysteries." They became "true mathematicians" whose "solutions" to problems were "grounded upon facts." In contrast, all others who claimed the mantle of learning were simply "parrots" or "monkeys" who tried to "mimick the king's subjects," but whose knowledge amounted to nothing more than "chaff or dung." Eagerly copying long passages of this book into her diary (her extracts stretched to twelve pages), Osborn described it as "one of the Grandest Pieces I think yt I Ever met with and yet as clear as Grand."[69] This book confirmed one of her strongest beliefs: reason without revelation was virtually worthless, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, Christians could draw "factual" and rational conclusions about the universe.

Searching for "evidences of grace," Osborn combined rapturous descrip-

tions of her religious "affections" with an almost clinical scrutiny of her everyday life. Like a scientist making notations in a lab notebook, she carefully recorded her experiences in order to make discoveries about God. (In yet another echo of the scientific, empirical language of the Enlightenment, she particularly liked the word "discovery." "Let me have some more discoveries of Eternal things Lord," she wrote in 1753.)[70] At a time when British Deists depicted God as a clock maker who stood apart from his creation, Osborn took special care to record instances when he had directly answered her prayers. In 1757, when food supplies were low because of the French and Indian War, she rejoiced that "Our God sent us dainties from day to day, squab, pigeon, sparrograss [asparagus]—pudding, gingerbread—tarts."[71] (Presumably her friends and neighbors had delivered the food, but Osborn did not mention them by name. She knew that they were simply doing God's will.) In 1759, after rereading a desperate prayer for food that she had written a year earlier, she once again thanked God for not allowing her family to go hungry. All her fears had been for naught.[72]

Osborn's diaries are filled with accounts of her experiences. "Blessed be God for the experience of His Mercy truth and faithfulness recorded in this Book," she wrote on the cover of her 1757 diary. As she struggled to understand God's will, she not only examined scripture but also the record of her own life. How did she feel about God? Did she passionately long for his presence? Did she feel as if she stood at a distance from him? More important, how did God seem to feel about her? How had he intervened to direct her life? Nothing escaped her providential imagination. For example, after awaking one morning to "the most terrible wind that i ever knew" and praying "earnest[ly] with god to abate the violence of the storm and to have compation on the poor souls in distress," she marveled that the storm ceased almost immediately. Although others complained that "it was a peice of pride and presumption" for her to conclude that God had answered her prayer, she disagreed. If she had used academic, theological language, she would have responded that God could work through "second causes": in other words, she was not claiming that God had performed a miracle for her, but only that he had answered her prayer through ordinary natural laws that could be rationally apprehended. "This i know," she testified. "God is both the hearer and answerer of prayer for jesus sake."[73]

Whenever Osborn wrestled with doubts—whenever she feared that her troubles meant that God had abandoned her—she comforted herself by reading her experiences. Sometimes, as she admitted to her friend, the Reverend Joseph Fish, she felt overwhelmed by her responsibilities. In 1759, exhausted by the pressures of teaching school, caring for the boarding students who



Cover of Sarah Osborn's diary, where she wrote: "February 2nd 1764 blessed be God for the Experience of His Mercy truth and faithfulness recorded in this Book and for the refreshments He has Granted me in reviewing and remembering the acts of faith." (Courtesy of Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University)

lived with her, and managing her family's finances, she plaintively described herself as "a poor over-Loaded weak animal crouching under its burden."[74] But rereading her diaries always brought her consolation. "I have been reviewing former writings," she wrote, "and find, notwithstanding many, many deficiencies in every thing, yet God has kept me reaching after greater degrees of grace, and *heart* holiness."[75] In a revealing moment, she described her writings as a "witness" for God and for herself "to the confusion of hell." "These Experiences are Mine," she wrote after rereading one of her diaries. "Let Satan say what He will. Thus God Has begun to deliver and He will Go on to deliver. God has deliverd me out of the Paw of the Lion and the bear."[76] Because she believed that a sovereign, majestic God controlled every detail of her life, she never used the phrase "religious experience," but only "experience." *All* experience was inherently religious.

Although seventeenth-century Puritans had also kept diaries as a means of self-examination, they had hesitated to make definitive judgments about their experiences because of their deep sense of sinfulness.[77] What if they were deceived? In contrast, even though Osborn admitted that God sometimes "hid his face," she was much more confident about her ability to determine his will. Although she was deeply aware of her own spiritual corruption, she also believed, like Jonathan Edwards, that converts gained a new spiritual "sense" during conversion that enabled them to gain a clearer view of reality. Even more than Edwards, she seems to have trusted her "sensations" as tangible evidence of her encounters with God. Echoing Locke's belief that knowledge came through sense impressions, she insisted that God had given her a "sense" of his "excellence, glory and truth."[78] On one occasion, she rejoiced that she had felt "sencible communion" with him, while on another, she marveled that "Grace was for a few minutes drawn forth into sensible, lively exercise." "Grant I may indeed sensibly grow in grace," she prayed.[79]

Osborn was especially attracted to the Enlightenment language of certainty. In 1742, during the height of the New England revivals, when ministers argued over how sure converts could be of their salvation, she seems to have expressed herself with so much confidence that she caused offense. Seventeenth-century Puritans had tended to see declarations of certainty as evidence of pride, and Osborn may have sounded dangerously radical to those who criticized the revivals' "enthusiasm." In an angry moment, she admitted that she "was accountd a bold pretender for saying i was sure of heaven as if i was there." In response, she quoted Romans 8: "Whom he did predestinate, them he also called, and whom he called, them he also justified, and whom he justified, them he also glorified." Scripture, like personal expe-

rience, offered concrete proof of her faith. "*I was enabled here to prove my calling*," she affirmed.[80]

By the 1750s, as moderate evangelical ministers like Jonathan Edwards discouraged this kind of "enthusiastic," radical language, Osborn seems to have grown more cautious in her public speech. She probably wanted to distinguish herself from the Strict Congregationalists, or "Separates," as they were more popularly known, who were the most radical wing of the American evangelical movement. They were infamous for claiming, in Ebenezer Frothingham's words, that "doubting is sinful." "True Evangelical Humility is forever accompanied with Faith and love," Frothingham wrote, "and doubting is as contrary to Faith, as Water is to Fire."[81] In *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity*, Osborn explicitly set herself apart from the Separates by denying any desire to "establish Assurance as the Essence of saving Faith."[82] Yet in her private writings, she still sounded remarkably confident about God's love for her. In a particularly poignant diary entry that she wrote at a time when she had little money or food, she reminded herself that her past experiences offered convincing proof of God's goodness. Addressing God directly, she wrote: "My own experience has ever Provd to me, that thou art the God that has fed me all my Life Long—the God that didst never Leave me upon the mount of difficulty, but always appeard and wrought deliverance."[83] Based on her past experiences, she could be certain that God would not allow her to sink into utter poverty.

Like other evangelicals, Osborn seems to have been attracted to the Enlightenment language of experience, evidence, and proof for several reasons. First, it offered her a sense of security at a time when the old world seemed to be disappearing and a new world—one marked by scientific discovery, political controversy, transatlantic commerce, and upward mobility—had begun to take shape. Second, evangelicals embraced the scientific language of the Enlightenment because it helped them to defend Christianity against attack. Ironically, they fought against the skeptical strains of the Enlightenment with the weapons of the Enlightenment. At the same time as wealthy, liberal merchants in Newport argued that Christian doctrines should be supported by rational evidence, Osborn claimed that her faith was based on both the living voice of scripture and sensory experience.

Finally, evangelical women seem to have been particularly drawn to Enlightenment language because of the growing restrictions on their participation in public life. Unfortunately, Enlightenment philosophers were rarely "enlightened" when it came to the subject of women, and instead of trying to dismantle sexual inequality, they sought to strengthen it. According to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, for example, women belonged at home, where they should

devote themselves to pleasing their husbands and raising their children. As he explained in *Émile* (1768), "To oblige us, to do us service, to gain our love and esteem . . . these are the duties of the sex at all times, and what they ought to learn from their infancy."[84] In contrast, evangelical women claimed to have "evidence" and "proof" of their calls to religious service.

Given the long history of Christian women who justified their religious authority on the grounds of divine inspiration, this strategy hardly seems new. Although Osborn probably knew little about the female religious leaders who had fought the same battles before her, she stood in a long line of remarkable women who claimed to have been transformed by their personal experience of God's grace. Hildegard of Bingen, a medieval visionary; Anne Hutchinson, the "American Jezebel" who claimed to have received revelations from God; Sarah Osborn—all of them insisted that they knew, without a doubt, that God had chosen them.

Yet despite these continuities with the past, the eighteenth century seems to have marked a watershed in understandings of "experience." Because Enlightenment philosophers elevated firsthand experience as the only reliable source of knowledge, even more reliable than the Bible, empirical language sounded particularly potent. Experience was no longer imagined as an alternative to formal knowledge, but as the very foundation of it.

Osborn's life bears witness to the extraordinary power of this language when put into practice. In 1764, at the age of fifty, she began holding religious meetings in her home for Newport's large population of slaves. (Newport was an important slave-trading port, and almost 30 percent of families there owned slaves.)[85] Although it is not clear exactly how or why the meetings began, they probably grew out of her long friendship with a slave woman named Phyllis, who had been a member of her women's prayer group for many years. By 1766, her meetings had generated so much excitement that other people began flocking to her house as well—hundreds of them. Although she hosted different groups each evening (Africans on Sundays, white girls on Mondays, white boys on Tuesdays, white women on Thursdays, and white men on Saturdays), her small house could barely hold the throngs. "We were so crouded there was scarce room to stir Hand or foot," she marveled in 1767.[86] If her numbers can be trusted—and they were echoed by Newport's ministers—at the height of the revivals as many as 525 people came to her meetings each week, including more than 100 slaves. (This means that about one out of every ten members of Newport's black population passed through her doors every Sunday evening.)[87]

Osborn's meetings were controversial. Not only did some of Newport's leading matrons accuse her of "keeping a Negro House," but her minister, the

Reverend William Vinal, who had once been a close friend, turned against her. (Vinal was suffering from alcoholism at the time, which was probably part of the reason that so many of his congregation sought Osborn's spiritual guidance.)[88] Even one of her warmest supporters, the Reverend Joseph Fish, questioned whether she had "moved beyond her line." Yet Osborn insisted that she had undeniable evidence of her special call to leadership. Besides describing her strong inward sense of calling, she pointed to the positive effects of the revival. In her diary, which she wrote in nearly every day, she took detailed notes about how many people had attended her meetings, how they had behaved, and how many had been "born again." According to her careful accounting, all the evidence pointed in her favor. "Tho I was born as the wild asses Colt and fit for nothing till brot too by soverign grace," she wrote, "yet He can Serve Himself of me and Glorifie Himself in me and in His own way too, However Misterious to me and all around me—he Has chosen the weak things of this world."[89]

Osborn was unusually well educated and articulate, but scores of other evangelical women also borrowed the Enlightenment language of experience, evidence, and certainty. Some, like Sarah, claimed that their personal conversion experiences gave them the authority to exhort others to repent; more radical women insisted that their "experiences" included revelations from God. According to Hannah Heaton, who belonged to a Separate church in Connecticut, she was so swallowed up by God's love during her conversion that she seemed to actually see Christ. "Me thot i see jesus with the eyes of my soul stand up in heaven," she wrote. "A lovely god man with his arms open ready to receive me his face was full of smiles he lookt white and ruddy and was just such a saviour as my soul wanted."[90] Empowered by her belief that she had directly experienced God's presence, she became a crusader for the Separates' cause.

By the nineteenth century, the evangelical absorption of the Enlightenment was complete.[91] Words such as experience, experimental, certainty, proof, and evidence were a common part of the evangelical vocabulary: Methodists held "experience" meetings, Baptists preached "experimental" religion, and clergy from many denominations confidently proclaimed that true Christians could be virtually sure of their salvation. (Given the Protestant belief in original sin, few were willing to say that assurance could ever be absolute.) Given the widespread popularity of this language among men as well as women, it would be an exaggeration to suggest that it was gendered, but it strongly appealed to those who were excluded from formal positions of power, whether white women, lower-class men, or male and female slaves.

Osborn's story raises crucial questions about the effects of the Enlighten-

ment on women. On the one hand, it is clear that Enlightenment philosophers failed to challenge negative stereotypes of women's frailty and passivity, and even the most radical found it difficult to imagine a world where men and women would be completely equal. Significantly, Osborn repeatedly described herself in her diaries and letters as a "weak" woman, and even though she probably knew more about Reformed Protestant theology than most of the men in her church, she never defended herself on the grounds of her intelligence, but only of her experience.

Yet, on the other hand, Osborn's story suggests that historians may have exaggerated the conservatism of enlightened thought. By claiming that women's voices were silenced by the new emphasis on rationality, they have underestimated the equally powerful language of experience and certainty. Most important, they have underestimated women's ability to devise new theological strategies to overcome the limitations placed upon them. As Judith Butler has explained, gender is an unstable category, and it has to be continually reproduced through both speech and practice. Because of Osborn's desire to be a good Christian, she reminded herself, again and again, that she was not supposed to step beyond her "line." Yet the very fact that she had to repeatedly subject herself to this discipline suggests that the gendered discourse of the Enlightenment was never a completely hegemonic one.[92] (She would not have felt the need to reiterate this language if not for her difficulty in maintaining a subordinate posture.) Each time that evangelical women reminded themselves of their feminine weakness, they left open a space for the possibility that they were not actually weak at all. Although they often echoed Enlightenment thinkers by portraying the female sex as inferior, they also claimed to have been transformed by their experience of God's grace. They were *certain* of it.

This chapter has used Sarah Osborn's story to argue that women helped to construct a new religious movement, evangelicalism, that drew much of its inspiration from the Enlightenment. To be sure, most intellectual historians would express surprise at the claim that an eighteenth-century woman's devotional writings can tell us something new about the Enlightenment. But scholars who have defined the Enlightenment narrowly around a small group of elite male thinkers have obscured the dramatic religious transformation that took place in eighteenth-century America. Not only did the Enlightenment have a much stronger impact on Protestantism than we have realized, but it gave women a powerful vocabulary to justify their leadership.

Like many other conservative Protestants of her time, Sarah Osborn was deeply ambivalent about Enlightenment "progress." Yet at the same time as

she rejected its theological liberalism, she echoed its faith in experiential knowledge. When she died in 1796 at the age of eighty-two, frail and nearly blind, she left few possessions: a gold locket, a silver spoon inscribed with her husband's initials, a cloak.[93] But more valuable, in her opinion, were the thousands of pages of devotional writings she had sewn together into neat booklets, each marked with a number and date. For more than thirty years, until her eyesight failed, she had carefully written down her experiences, reading them over and over again as a defense against despair. Inspired by her evangelical faith, a faith that had grown in the soil of the Enlightenment, she had searched every page of her life for "evidence" of God. What she found, despite her many sorrows, was the unmistakable gift of grace. "*Surely*," as she testified in her diaries, "I have had experience of the goodness of the Lord, all my life long."[94]

Notes

1. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut (hereafter Beinecke Library).
2. Sarah Osborn, Diary #15 (1754), undated entry at end of diary, 129, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Conn. According to Hopkins, Osborn wrote more than fifty volumes of diaries, "the least containing near 100 pages, the bigger part above 200, and a number 300, and more, besides letters to her friends, and other occasional writing." See Samuel Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn* (Worcester, Mass.: Leonard Worcester, 1799), 358. Although the majority of Sarah's diaries and letters have been lost, more than 1,500 pages have been preserved in the following collections: Sarah Osborn, Diaries, 1753–1772, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; Sarah Osborn, Diaries and Memoir, 1757–1769, Beinecke Library; Sarah Osborn, Letters, 1743–1770, 1779, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.; Sarah Osborn, Diaries, 1754, 1760–1761, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Conn.; Sarah Osborn, Letter to Samuel Hopkins, August 26, 1769, Simon Gratz Manuscript Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia; and Sarah Osborn, Five Letters, 1769–1770, Simon Gratz Manuscript Collection, Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia. See also Sarah Osborn, *The Nature, Certainty, and Evidence of True Christianity* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1755); and Samuel Hopkins, ed., *Familiar Letters, Written by Mrs. Sarah Osborn and Miss Susanna Anthony, Late of Newport, Rhode Island* (Newport, R.I.: Newport Mercury, 1807). Several of Hopkins's letters to Osborn are preserved in the Samuel Hopkins Papers, Andover Library, Andover Newton Theological School, Newton, Mass. Since Osborn did not include punctuation in any of her manuscripts, I have added it when needed for clarity.
3. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library.

4. John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), reprinted in *The Portable Enlightenment Reader*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin, 1995), 186; Osborn, *Nature, Certainty, and Evidence*, 3.
5. Adrienne Koch, *The American Enlightenment: The Shaping of the American Experiment and a Free Society* (New York: G. Braziller, 1965).
6. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 2 vols. (New York: Knopf, 1966, 1969); Henry Farnham May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976). For other studies of the Enlightenment in America, see Norman Fiering, *Moral Philosophy at Seventeenth-Century Harvard: A Discipline in Transition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981); John Corrigan, *The Prism of Piety: Catholick Congregational Clergy at the Beginning of the Enlightenment* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991); Donald H. Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1976); Christopher Grasso, *A Speaking Aristocracy: Transforming Public Discourse in Eighteenth-Century Connecticut* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999); and Ned C. Landsman, *From Colonials to Provincials: American Thought and Culture, 1680–1760* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1997).
7. See D. W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 1–74.
8. Immanuel Kant, "What Is Enlightenment," in Kramnick, *Portable Enlightenment Reader*, 1–6.
9. Paul Hazard, *The European Mind, the Critical Years, 1680–1715* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953); Lester G. Crocker, *The Age of Enlightenment* (New York: Walker, 1969), 1. See also Robert A. Ferguson, *The American Enlightenment, 1750–1820* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 22.
10. Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, vol. 1 (New York: Knopf, 1966), 3, 423, 8. On the unity of the Enlightenment, see also Ernst Cassirer, *The Philosophy of the Enlightenment* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1951). On the "secularization of European thought," see Roy Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 2nd ed. (New York: Palgrave, 2001), 66. See also Jonathan Irvine Israel, *Radical Enlightenment: Philosophy and the Making of Modernity, 1650–1750* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).
11. Roger Chartier, *The Cultural Origins of the French Revolution*, Bicentennial Reflections on the French Revolution (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991); Robert Darnton, *The Forbidden Bestsellers of Pre-Revolutionary France* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1995). The quote is from Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 40.
12. John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christians and Unbelievers in Eighteenth-Century France* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981). Norman Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37 (April–June 1976): 195–218.
13. Roy Porter, *The Creation of the Modern World: The Untold Story of the British*

Enlightenment, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Norton, 2000); Margaret C. Jacob, *The Newtonians and the English Revolution, 1689–1720* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1976).

14. Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich, *The Enlightenment in National Context* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981); J. G. A. Pocock, *The Enlightenments of Edward Gibbon, 1737–1764*, vol. 1 of *Barbarism and Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 19991), 9. For another discussion of the difficulty of defining the Enlightenment, see James Schmidt, "The Legacy of the Enlightenment," *Philosophy and Literature* 26 (2002): 432–42.
15. Porter, *The Enlightenment*, 2, 15.
16. Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1794), in Kramnick, *Portable Enlightenment Reader*, 175.
17. On the relationship between Calvinism and the Enlightenment, see Helena Rosenblatt, "Calvinism," in *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Alan Charles Kors (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), accessed at the University of Chicago, September 7, 2006, <http://www.oxfordreference.com>.
18. The quote comes from ibid. "Latitudinarians" were British Anglicans who prized tolerance and rationality. See John Gascoigne, "Latitudinarianism," in ibid. Deists were skeptics who rejected traditional Christian doctrine, including the divinity of Christ, but who still believed in a God who created a mechanistic universe. See Kerry S. Walters, *The American Deists: Voices of Reason and Dissent in the Early Republic* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1992); Kerry S. Walters, *Rational Infidels: The American Deists* (Durango, Colo.: Longwood Academic, 1992); and Peter Byrne, *Natural Religion and the Nature of Religion: The Legacy of Deism* (New York: Routledge, 1989). "Catholicks" were New England Congregationalists who incorporated enlightened ideas about the "rational order of the universe, and human capability to detect that order," in the early eighteenth century. See Corrigan, *The Prism of Piety*, vii.
19. May, *Enlightenment in America*. See also Mark A. Noll, "The Rise and Long Life of the Protestant Enlightenment in America," in *Knowledge and Belief in America: Enlightenment Traditions and Modern Religious Thought*, ed. William M. Shea and Peter A. Huff (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 88–124; and E. Brooks Holifield, *Theology in America: Christian Thought from the Age of the Puritans to the Civil War* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003).
20. Jonathan Edwards, "A Treatise Concerning Religious Affections," in *Religious Affections*, vol. 2 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. John E. Smith (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), 93–461.
21. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 74.
22. Cotton Mather, *Reason Satisfied and Faith Established* (Boston: J. Allen, 1712); Solomon Stoddard, *A Treatise Concerning Conversion* (Boston: Franklin, 1719), cited in James Spencer Lamborn, "Blessed Assurance? Depraved Saints, Philosophers, and the Problem of Knowledge for Self and State in New England, 1630–1820" (Ph.D. diss., Miami University, 2002), 212. I am indebted to this disserta-

tion for its clear explanation of changing attitudes toward religious knowledge in New England. On Mather's "experimental religion," see Robert Middlekauff, *The Mathers: Three Generations of Puritan Intellectuals, 1596–1728* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1971), 305–19.

23. See Mark A. Noll, *The Rise of Evangelicalism: The Age of Edwards, Whitefield and the Wesleys* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity, 2004), 140; David Hempton, *Methodism: Empire of the Spirit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005), 52; Frederick A. Dreyer, *The Genesis of Methodism* (Bethlehem, Pa.: Lehigh University Press, 1999); Bruce Hindmarsh, "Reshaping Individualism: The Private Christian, Eighteenth-Century Religion, and the Enlightenment," in *The Rise of the Laity in Evangelical Protestantism* (New York: Routledge, 2002), chap. 5; and D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005). See also Brian Stanley, "Christian Missions and the Enlightenment: A Reevaluation," in *Christian Missions and the Enlightenment*, ed. Brian Stanley (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2001). Gertrude Himmelfarb has argued that the Methodists should also be included in histories of the Enlightenment because of their "democratic" faith in free will and universal salvation. Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (New York: Knopf, 2004), 129.
24. Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 59.
25. Allen C. Guelzo, "Edwards, Jonathan," in Kors, *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment.*
26. Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1993). Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanss Reill criticize a postmodernist, caricatured view of the Enlightenment that makes it responsible for "rationalism, instrumentalism, scientism, logocentrism, universalism, abstract rights, eurocentrism, individualism, humanism, masculinism, etc." See Keith Michael Baker and Peter Hanns Reill, *What's Left of Enlightenment? A Postmodern Question* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2001), 1.
27. Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, 1st U.S. ed. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1977), 209, 16, 129.
28. Eric Hobsbawm, *On History* (1997; London: Abacus Books, 1998), 336, quoted in *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, ed. Sarah Knott and Barbara Taylor (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), xvi.
29. The quote is from Caroline Belsey, "Afterword: A Future for Materialist-Feminist Criticism," in *The Matter of Difference: Materialist-Feminist Criticism of Shakespeare*, ed. Valerie Wayne (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1991), 262, quoted in Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 338.
30. Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1988), 135; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1988).
31. Phyllis Mack, "Women and the Enlightenment: An Introduction," in Hunt et al., *Women and the Enlightenment*, 9–10; Susan Juster, "Mystical Pregnancy and

Holy Bleeding: Visionary Experience in Early Modern Britain and America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 57, no. 2 (April 2000): 249–88; Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 218. For another perspective, see Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "Women and the Enlightenment," in *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Claudia Koontz, and Susan Stuard, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

32. See the introduction to Knott and Taylor, *Women, Gender, and Enlightenment*, xvi. For historians who have argued that "enlightened" thought had sexually egalitarian possibilities, see Margaret C. Jacob, "Freemasonry, Women, and the Paradox of the Enlightenment," in *Women and the Enlightenment*, ed. Margaret Hunt, Margaret Jacob, Phyllis Mack, and Ruth Perry (New York: Haworth Press, 1984); Margaret Jacob, *The Enlightenment: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2001); Porter, *Creation of the Modern World*, 320–38; and Israel, *Radical Enlightenment*, 82–96.
33. On freemasonry, see Janet M. Burke and Margaret C. Jacob, "French Freemasonry, Women, and Feminist Scholarship," *Journal of Modern History* 68, no. 3 (September 1996): 513–49. On women authors, see Carla Hesse, *The Other Enlightenment: How French Women Became Modern* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Rosemary Zagarri, "The Rights of Man and Woman in Post-Revolutionary America," *William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (1998): 229.
34. Juster, *Doomsayers*, viii.
35. For one example, see Paula McDowell, "Enlightenment Enthusiasms and the Spectacular Failure of the Philadelphia Society," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 35, no. 4 (2002): 515–33. McDowell not only argues that "enthusiasm" was discredited in the eighteenth century but also that modern literary studies continue to disdain "enthusiastic" forms of speech and writing.
36. Sarah Osborn, Letter to Joseph Fish, May 29, 1753, Folder 2, in Sarah Osborn, Letters, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
37. On Osborn's early life, see her Memoir, Beinecke Library. Scholarship on Osborn includes Charles E. Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn (1714–1796)," *Church History* 61, no. 4 (December 1992): 408–21; Sheryl Anne Kujawa, " 'A Precious Season at the Throne of Grace': Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn, 1714–1796" (Ph.D. diss., Boston College, 1993); Sheryl Anne Kujawa, "Religion, Education, and Gender in Eighteenth Century Rhode Island: Sarah Haggar Wheaten Osborn, 1714–1796" (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University Teacher's College, 1993); and Mary Beth Norton, ed., " 'My Resting Reaping Times': Sarah Osborn's Defense of Her 'Unfeminine Activities,' " *Signs* 2 (1976): 515–29.
38. Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*; and Hopkins, *Familiar Letters.*
39. T. H. Breen and Timothy Hall, "Structuring Provincial Imagination: The Rhetoric and Experience of Social Change in Eighteenth-Century New England," *American Historical Review* 103, no. 5 (December 1998): 1411–39.
40. *Newport Mercury* (Newport, R.I.), August 14, 1759.

41. For statistics on church membership in Newport, see Elaine Forman Crane, "Uneasy Coexistence: Religious Tensions in Eighteenth-Century Newport," *Newport History* 53, no. 5 (Summer 1980): 101–11.
42. Sarah Osborn, Letter to Joseph Fish, September 17, 1750, in Sarah Osborn, Letters, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
43. Samuel Clarke, *Discourse Concerning the Unchangeable Obligations of Natural Religion* (London: W. Botham, 1706); Daniel Whitby, *A Discourse* (London: John Wyat, 1710), quoted in H. Shelton Smith, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin: A Study in American Theology since 1750* (New York: Charles Scribner's, 1955), 12–13.
44. Jonathan Edwards, *A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God* (London: John Oswald, 1737), cited in Holifield, *Theology in America*, 83. Holifield offers a helpful overview of theological controversies over rationalism, nature, and the supernatural, pp. 56–101.
45. Samuel Webster, *A Winter Evening's Conversation upon the Doctrine of Original Sin* (New Haven: James Parker, 1757), 5.
46. Samuel Niles, *The True Scripture-Doctrine of Original Sin Stated and Defended* (Boston: S. Kneeland, 1757), 40.
47. Jonathan Edwards, "Some Thoughts Concerning the Present Revival" (1742), in *The Great Awakening*, vol. 4 of *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, ed. C. C. Goen (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 394. On changing attitudes toward original sin, see Merle Curti, *Human Nature in American Thought: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1980); Conrad Wright, *The Beginnings of Unitarianism in America* (Starr King Press, 1955), 59–90; Clyde A. Holbrook, "Original Sin and the Enlightenment," in *The Heritage of Christian Thought: Essays in Honor of Robert Lowry Calhoun*, ed. Robert E. Cushman and Egil Grislis (New York: Harper and Row, 1965); and Smith, *Changing Conceptions of Original Sin.*
48. The quote is from Gilbert Tennent, *The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*, cited in Holifield, *Theology in America*, 95. Samuel Buell expressed his fear of "a Decay of the Life and Power of Godliness among us, and the Prevalency of Arminian Principles in some Places," in Samuel Buell, *The Excellence and Importance of the Saving Knowledge of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Gospel Preacher* (New York: James Parker, 1761), ii.
49. Edmund Sears Morgan, *The Gentle Puritan: A Life of Ezra Stiles, 1727–1795* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962), 111–12.
50. Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, March 1759–April 1760), entry for November 25, 1759, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. Osborn doesn't explicitly identify this minister as Stiles, but it is clear from the context that she was describing his preaching. See also Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, February 19, 1758–April 2, 1758), entry for March 12, 1758, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; and Sarah Osborn, Diary #27 (June 22, 1760–January 18, 1761), entry for November 21, 1760, Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Conn.

51. On Guyse, see "Guyse, John," in *The Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1964), 8:837.
52. Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, 1767), entry for March 28, 1767, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
53. David Hamilton, *The Private Christian's Witness for Christianity* (London: Thomas Cockerill, 1697). Osborn recorded reading this book in Diary #30 (February 21, 1762–April 29, 1762), entry for March 17, 1762, Beinecke Library.
54. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library, 1–3.
55. Sarah Osborn, Diary #14 (July 8, 1753–March 1, 1754), entries for the following dates: July 9, 1753, September 8, 1753, September 19, 1753, October 30, 1753, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
56. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library, 17. She was quoting from Psalm 58:3.
57. Sarah Osborn, Diary #20 (January 1, 1757–May 7, 1757), entry for January 16, 1757, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. John Guyse, *A Collection of Seventeen Practical Sermons on Various and Important Subjects* (London: Edward Dilley, 1761), 19. Osborn records reading this sermon in Sarah Osborn, Diary #29 (April 28, 1761–February 18, 1762), entry for November 8, 1761, Beinecke Library. On the new positive idea of selfhood, see Daniel Walker Howe, *Making the American Self: Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997).
58. Jonathan Mayhew, *Two Sermons on the Nature, Extent and Perfection of the Divine Benevolence* (Boston: Kneeland, 1763), quoted in Ava Chamberlain, "The Theology of Cruelty: A New Look at the Rise of Arminianism in Eighteenth-Century New England," *Harvard Theological Review* 85, no. 3 (1992): 348. Elizabeth Clark has argued that Protestants "shifted their focus from the drama of God, the sovereign judge, sentencing the depraved human to an afterlife of unremitting suffering, to that of God, the benevolent father, working for his children's physical and spiritual well-being. The purpose of worship shifted from the glorification of God to the salvation and celebration of man." See Elizabeth B. Clark, "The Sacred Rights of the Weak: Pain, Sympathy, and the Culture of Individual Rights in Antebellum America," *Journal of American History* 82, no. 2 (September 1995): 471.
59. Sarah Osborn, Diary #20, September 1, 1757, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 70.
60. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library, 6–7.
61. Hambrick-Stowe, "The Spiritual Pilgrimage of Sarah Osborn."
62. Sarah Osborn, Diary #21 (May 9, 1757–November 6, 1757), entry for July 20, 1757, Beinecke Library.
63. Osborn, *Nature, Certainty, and Evidence*, 3, 8, 10.
64. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library.
65. Osborn recorded reading this narrative in Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number, 1767), entry for March 17, 1767, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. See

Samuel Buell, *A Faithful Narrative of the Remarkable Revival of Religion* (New York: Samuel Brown, 1766), 34, 40.

66. Robert H. Sharf, "Experience," in *Critical Terms for Religious Studies*, ed. Mark C. Taylor (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 95; Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). For an overview of historical controversies over "religious experience" in America, see Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999).
67. Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 215. She also linked "the devil and carnal reasoning" in her memoir. See ibid., 42.
68. For Osborn's descriptions of her faith as "rational," see Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, March 1759–April 1760), entry for April 24, 1760 ("my views were rational and solid"), Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I., and Diary #27, entry for November 11, 1760 ("I would only act the rational Part and Leave all my cares with thee. Leave thee to work in thy own way"), Connecticut Historical Society, Hartford, Conn. For her use of the phrase "shallow reason," see Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 215.
69. John Johnson, *A Mathematical Question, Propounded by the Viceregent of the World; Answered by the King of Glory*, 3rd ed. (Boston: Green and Russell, 1762), 2, 43, 45–47. Osborn referred to reading this in Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, March 1759–April 1760), entry for March 17, 1760, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. For more information on Johnson, see S. L. Copson, "Johnson, John (1705/6–1791)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 (<http://www.oxforddnb.com>, accessed June 4, 2006).
70. Sarah Osborn, Diary #14, December 16, 1753, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. See also Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 130. This language was common. For example, David Hamilton claimed that "observing Christians" could "discover God." See Hamilton, *The Private Christian's Witness for Christianity*, 138, 142.
71. Sarah Osborn, Diary #20, March 5, 1757, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
72. Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, February 19, 1758–2 April 1758), entry for March 6, 1758, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. For another example, see the entry for March 28, 1760, when Osborn recorded that God had answered her prayer for firewood. Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, March 1759–April 1760), Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
73. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library. See Holifield, *Theology in America*, 37.
74. Sarah Osborn, Letter to Joseph Fish, May 3, 1759, Folder 4, in Sarah Osborn, Letters, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
75. Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 185.
76. See Sarah Osborn, Diary #20, cover, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; and Sarah Osborn, Diary #21, February 2, 1764, Beinecke Library.

77. On Puritan diaries, see David S. Shiels, "The Journal of Spiritual Self-Examination: A History of Personal Diary Writing in New England, 1620–1745" (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1982); Michael McGiffert, ed., *God's Plot: The Paradoxes of Puritan Piety Being the Autobiography and Journal of Thomas Shepard* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1972); and Daniel B. Shea Jr., *Spiritual Autobiography in Early America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968).
78. Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 26.
79. Sarah Osborn, Diary #14, July 8, 1753, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.; Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 144, 112. For another example, see Diary #15, January 6, 1754, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I. David Bebbington's careful explanation of the difference between Puritan and evangelical understandings of assurance is worth quoting at length: "There was as much desire for confident knowledge of one's own salvation in the seventeenth century as in the eighteenth. But if there was a common preoccupation with assurance, the content of the doctrine was transformed. Whereas the Puritans had held that assurance is rare, late and the fruit of struggle in the experience of believers, the Evangelicals believed it to be general, normally given at conversion and the result of simple acceptance of the gift of God. The consequence of the altered form of the doctrine was a metamorphosis in the nature of popular Protestantism." See Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain*, 43.
80. Sarah Osborn, Memoir, Beinecke Library, 117.
81. Ebenezer Frothingham, *The Articles of Faith and Practice, with the Covenant, That Is Confessed by the Separate Churches of Christ* (Newport: J. Franklin, 1750), 114.
82. Osborn, *Nature, Certainty, and Evidence*, 13.
83. Sarah Osborn, Diary #14, July 29, 1753, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
84. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Emilius, Or a Treatise of Education* (Edinburgh: A. Donaldson, 1768), 3:74–75, quoted in Linda Kerber, "The Republican Mother: Women and the Enlightenment—An American Perspective," *American Quarterly* 28, no. 2 (Summer 1976): 194.
85. In 1755, there were 1,234 African Americans in Newport, and they made up 18.27 percent of the total population. In 1774, there were 1,246 African Americans, and they made up 13.5 percent of the population. See Elaine Forman Crane, *A Dependent People: Newport, Rhode Island, in the Revolutionary Era* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1985), 52, 76.
86. Sarah Osborn, Diary (no number on cover, 1767), April 7, 1767, Newport Historical Society, Newport, R.I.
87. Ibid., January 27, 1767.
88. Letter from Sarah Osborn to Joseph Fish, August 9, 1766, Folder 6, in Sarah Osborn, Letters, American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Mass.
89. Norton, "My Resting Reaping Times," 527.
90. *The World of Hannah Heaton: The Diary of an Eighteenth-Century New England Farm Woman*, ed. Barbara E. Lacey (Dekalb: Northern Illinois Press, 2003), 9.
91. On the influence of the Scottish Common Sense tradition on Protestantism, see

Holifield, *Theology in America*; and Mark A. Noll, *America's God: From Jonathan Edwards to Abraham Lincoln* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

92. Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits Of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
93. Sarah Osborn, Will, October 5, 1794, Probate Book, no. 3:11, Newport City Hall, Newport, R.I.
94. Hopkins, *Memoirs of the Life of Mrs. Sarah Osborn*, 101; emphasis mine.