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Deserted: A Letter, 1743.; 15. James Davenport, Confession and Retractions, 1744; Opposition to Itineracy; 16. The Subversion of Church Order: Theophilus Pickering, Letters, 1742; 17. Connecticut Inhibits Itinerants: The Public Records of Connecticut; Whitefield Returns; 18. Close the Pulpits: A Letter ... to the Associated Ministers of Boston and Charlestown, 1745; 19. George Whitefield, Journals, 1744; Chapter III. THE NEW BIRTH; 20. A Conversion: The Spiritual Travels of Nathan Cole, 1741; 21. A Revival: Samuel Blair, A Short and Faithful Narrative, 1744.; 22. The Theology of New Birth: Jonathan Dickinson, True Scripture-Doctrine, 1741; Chapter IV. TROUBLE IN THE CHURCHES; A Qualified Ministry; 23. Gilbert Tennent, The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry, 1740; 24. A Plea for Moderation: Solomon Williams, A Letter, 1744; Separations; 25. The Synod of Philadelphia Divides: Records of the Presbyterian Church, 1741; 26. The Separates in Norwich, Connecticut, 1745-1752; 27. The Failings of the Churches: Ebenezer Frothingham, The Articles of Faith and Practice, 1750; Chapter V. ASSESSMENTS; 28. The Priests Are Blind: Samuel Finley, Letter, 1741.; 29. Overheated Passions: Charles Chauncy, A Letter ... to Mr. George Wishart, 1742; 30. A Work of God: Jonathan Edwards, The Distinguishing Marks, 1741; 31. Errors and Disorders: The Testimony of the Pastors of the Churches, 1743; 32. An Effusion of the Holy Spirit: The Testimony and Advice of an Assembly, 1743; Chapter VI. NEW DIRECTIONS; Moralism and Piety; 33. The Injustice of Primitive Calvinism: Experience Mayhew, Grace Defended, 1744; 34. The Selfless Love of God: Joseph Bellamy, True Religion Delineated, 1750.

Sommario/riassunto

Most twentieth-century Americans fail to appreciate the power of Christian conversion that characterized the eighteenth-century revivals, especially the Great Awakening of the 1740's. The common disdain in this secular age for impassioned religious emotion and language is merely symptomatic of the shift in values that has shunted revivals to the sidelines. The very magnitude of the previous revivals is one indication of their importance. Between 1740 and 1745 literally thousands were converted. From New England to the southern colonies, people of all ages and all ranks of society underwent the New Birth. Virtually every New England congregation was touched. It is safe to say that most of the colonists in the 1740's, if not converted themselves, knew someone who was, or at least heard revival preaching. The Awakening was a critical event in the intellectual and ecclesiastical life of the colonies. The colonists' view of the world placed much importance on conversion. Particularly, Calvinist theology viewed the bestowal of divine grace as the most crucial occurrence in human life. Besides assuring admission to God's presence in the hereafter, divine grace prepared a person for a fullness of life on earth. In the 1740's the colonists, in overwhelming numbers, laid claim to the divine power which their theology offered them. Many experienced the moral transformation as promised. In the Awakening the clergy's pleas of half a century came to dramatic fulfillment. Not everyone agreed that God was working in the Awakening. Many believed preachers to be demagogues, stirring up animal spirits. The revival was looked on as an emotional orgy that needlessly disturbed the churches and frustrated the true work of God. But from 1740 to 1745 no other subject received more attention in books and pamphlets. Through the stirring rhetoric of the sermons, theological treatises, and correspondence presented in this collection, readers can vicariously participate in the ecstasy as well as in the rage generated by America's first national revival.
