Satan’s War against the Covenant
in Salem Village, 1692

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Christ having begun a new work [the new congregation in Salem village], it is the main drift of the Devil to pull it all down.
—Rev. Samuel Parris, sermon, Salem village, 3 January 1692

The Covenant People of God ... are the special objects of SATANS Rage and Fury.
—Rev. Deodat Lawson, sermon, Salem village, 24 March 1692

Satans design was to set up his own worship, abolish all the churches in the land, to fall next upon Salem.
—William Barker Sr., confession, Andover, 29 August 1692

THE 1692 witchcraft accusations in Salem village, it is well known, emerged in the midst of an intense village-wide conflict over the Reverend Samuel Parris, who had been

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appointed minister to the village’s only church in 1689. Strong objections had been lodged against Parris in early 1691, and by the end of that year, his opponents had stopped his salary and effectively blocked the growth of his newly covenanted church. In response, Parris harangued his congregation, repeatedly warning that the devil was bent on destroying their church.¹ In this highly charged atmosphere, leading members of Parris’s congregation began to attribute a sudden outbreak of violent “fits” among their children to acts of witchcraft. Indeed, the first to be afflicted were two members of Parris’s own household, his impressionable ten-year-old daughter, Betty, and his eleven-year-old niece, Abigail, whose sudden and uncontrolable bodily convulsions mirrored the demonic assault on the church covenant that Parris believed was taking place. When three weeks of public and private prayer, involving several local ministers, failed to cure the girls, a local doctor confirmed what Parris and the ministers had suspected: witchcraft was the cause. Soon the afflicted children, urged on by their parents, began to name names.

The conflict over Samuel Parris has been carefully studied.² But the connections among the controversy, the outbreak of the witchcraft accusations, and the unusual zeal of the accusers, ministers, and magistrates is still not well understood. As Richard Latner has recently shown, there was “an environment of divisive religious contention” in Salem village and neighboring Andover, which helped foment witchcraft accusations in both communities.³ The parallel between Salem village accusers and members of Parris’s newly established congregation

¹See The Sermon Notebook of Samuel Parris, 1698–1694, ed. James F. Cooper Jr. and Kenneth P. Minkema (Boston: Colonial Society of Massachusetts, 1993), p. 185. Subsequent quotations from Parris’s sermons are taken from this source and are referenced in the text.


has also been recognized. What has not been noticed, however, is that a large majority of those villagers who were accused of witchcraft did not belong to the covenant and had refrained from joining it, thus impeding the congregation’s growth. A chronological and geographical analysis of this pattern and its significance will, I believe, appreciably advance our understanding of the early phase of the nine-month witchcraft episode, the three and a half months from February 1692 through mid-May, when the accusations began to spread beyond Salem village to twenty-two other towns in the Bay Colony. Parris’s preaching, his conservative views concerning church membership, his connections to influential members of the community, and the opposition to his ministry are important factors to consider as we examine this crucial period.

The dispute over Samuel Parris’s ministry began almost immediately after the Salem village church was formally established in November 1689 and Parris was installed as its first ordained pastor. Salem village, generally referred to as “the Farms,” had originated as an inland settlement of the seaport town of Salem in 1639. In 1672, the town granted the farmers the right to build their own meetinghouse, to hire a minister, and to tax themselves to support him. Over the next seventeen years, the church grew, and three ministers before Parris, none of whom was ordained, served it in turn. The church Parris inherited consisted of twenty-five villagers who were members of the church in Salem town, as well as fourteen other people who were members of other neighboring churches but, having settled in the village, attended its church because it was nearby. At the time of Parris’s ordination, the twenty-five villagers who were members of the Salem church were formally dismissed from its covenant so that they might establish a new covenant in the village, “that they might be a Church of

4Apart from choosing a minister and raising taxes, Salem village could not otherwise govern itself. It remained a “parish” of Salem town and under its control until granted independence in 1752, when the villagers adopted the name “Danvers.”
themselves for themselves and their children” in Salem village. This was done “by consent with the Approbation of the Magistrates and neighbor churches.”

The establishment of the new church was driven by the group of twenty-five Salem villagers, who succeeded in persuading Salem town that, after seventeen years with no ordained minister to administer baptism or communion, it was time that the village be granted full-fledged covenant status. The Salem church appointed the town’s three leading magistrates—Batholomew Gedney, John Hathorne, and Jonathan Corwin—to represent the town’s civil authority at Parris’s ordination and to endorse the establishment of the covenant in the village. Hathorne and Gedney, also Assistants to the General Court in Boston, were influential members of the Bay Colony’s central government. Later, when the witchcraft accusations were initiated, Hathorne, Gedney, and Corwin would conduct the local grand jury hearings and serve as three of the nine magistrates on the special court of Oyer and Terminer that tried and convicted the accused in 1692.

To grasp the internal dynamics of the Salem village controversy, it is useful to envision the geographical distribution of residents in reference to their church status. As can be seen on map 1, the households of members of the newly formed village covenant were evenly distributed across the village landscape, from the beginning of Parris’s ministry in November 1689 through to its conclusion in 1695. Although the locations of a few households cannot be determined, the map plots the residences of the twenty-five original members, the twenty-nine people who joined during the period January 1690–July 1691, and the five who joined between 1693 and 1695. Seven of these new members were spouses of and shared the same households as founding members. Parris identified fourteen additional

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7Parris recorded the names of those who joined the village church and the dates of their admission in the minister’s record book, published as “Records of the
individuals who attended his church as “church members” even though they formally belonged to other, nearby churches.\(^8\)

\(^8\)In 1695, Parris identified an additional fourteen persons as “church members” in the list of signatures attached to two petitions relating to the continuation of his ministry (Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem-Village Witchcraft*, pp. 261–63). Apparently, this group of residents had not formally requested that they be admitted to the village congregation by transfer from their original parishes, and Parris did not list them in his record book as “admitted,” although they may have been regular communicants in the village church. It would appear that Parris regarded these individuals as closely allied to his congregation because, when identifying church members among the names on the two opposing petitions concerning his continued ministry, he made no distinction between them and formally admitted members.
From the outset, the Salem village church was decidedly conservative. Unlike the large majority of Puritan churches in the Bay Colony, Parris and his congregation chose not to institute the Halfway Covenant, which permitted the children of all baptized adults, even those who had not embraced the covenant, to be baptized.\footnote{See Christine Alice Young, \textit{From “Good Order” to Glorious Revolution: Salem Massachusetts, 1628–1689} (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Research Press, 1980), pp. 126, 172.} For some years, the Halfway Covenant had been in force in the Salem church, and it had been adopted by neighboring congregations in the towns of Beverly, Lynn, Marblehead, and Rowley as well. Only Topsfield, Salem village’s northern neighbor, retained the old practice.\footnote{Robert G. Pope, \textit{The Half-Way Covenant} (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 140–45, 193.} By adhering to the less inclusive old covenant, Parris and his followers ensured that the important sacrament of baptism—necessary for a family’s much desired continuity in the covenant—would be restricted to children of “one of [whose] parents is in full communion,”\footnote{Boyer and Nissenbaum, \textit{Salem-Village Witchcraft}, p. 371.} which excluded the vast majority of families in the village. Access to the sacrament of holy communion was similarly restricted to covenant members.

Church records do not reveal why Parris and his congregation decided to organize under the old covenant, but as Larry Gragg has indicated, the practice is consistent with Parris’s statements that a “pure church” consisted solely of God’s elect, gathered under the minister’s leadership. “I have chosen you out of the World,” Parris declared, emphasizing his central role. “I have separated you from the World.... Why it is by Preaching of the word, that a church is born & propagated.”\footnote{Gragg, \textit{Life of Samuel Parris}, p. 68; see Parris, \textit{Sermon Notebook}, p. 182.} Latner has suggested the plausible view that in insisting on the old covenant, Parris was motivated by an “evangelical piety” to renew and purify religion in Salem village.\footnote{Latner, “Witchcraft and Religious Discord,” p. 97.} In any case, led by its conservative founders and its conservative minister, the village church fashioned itself into the mirror opposite of the
Salem town church, which had grown progressively more liberal. It has been estimated that by 1692, well over four hundred villagers were neither members of nor had been baptized in the village church. Clearly this state of affairs presented a fertile prospect for the spiritually enthusiastic Parris. Because the church had not been formally established between 1672 and 1689 and its ministers had not been ordained, an entire generation of Salem village churchgoers had been denied the benefits of baptism and communion. In his ordination sermon, Parris reproached the villagers for this lamentable situation, which he was eager to correct. But whereas the village church had lacked a covenant for seventeen years, it had also avoided the consequent divisions between members and nonmembers. Now that the choice was available, it could serve as a mark of distinction. In his sermons, Parris quickly began to exploit the difference between the “precious” and the “vile,” the “chosen” and the “wicked & unconverted” in an effort to prod and encourage the nonelect to embrace the covenant.

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14 Young, “Good Order” to Revolution, chaps. 9 and 10.

15 Gragg, Life of Parris, p. 90. Gragg’s estimate of “well over 400” villagers who were neither baptized nor church members may be somewhat high. Since there was no full census of the village, it is difficult to determine its total population in 1692. We also do not know, without detailed research in local church records, how many residents of Salem village took their children to the mother church in Salem for baptism or to neighboring churches to which some belonged. We do know that by 1691, there were 59 adult church members admitted to the new congregation in the village. Using current sources, I estimate the total number of adult villagers to be about 230, which would mean that there were perhaps over 150 adults who were not church members and perhaps 200 children who were not baptized. I derive this number from the list of names of householders on the village tax rate list of 1689–90, from the list of village households on Upham’s map of Salem village in 1692 (Salem Witchcraft), from the somewhat incomplete village census compiled by Boyer and Nissenbaum in Salem-Village Witchcraft, pp. 384–93, and from Richard B. Trask’s informative estimates in “Demographics of 1692 Salem Village,” in “The Devil hath been raised” (Danvers, Mass.: Danvers Historical Society, 1992), pp. 121–23. The number of church members, baptisms, births, and deaths in the village during Parris’s time can be estimated fairly accurately from his “Records of the Salem-Village Church from November 1689 to October 1696,” transcribed in Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem-Village Witchcraft; from Henry Wheatland, “Baptisms at Church in Salem Village, Now North Parish, Danvers,” Essex Institute Historical Collections 16 (1879): 235–40, 302–11; and from Marilynne Roach’s recent review of these records: “Records of the Rev. Samuel Parris, Salem Village, Massachusetts, 1688–1696,” New England Historical and Genealogical Register 157 (January 2003): 6–30.
Reverting to old practice, Parris set the terms that would govern the church’s composition. To gain full membership in the congregation, which included the right to have one’s children baptized, to receive communion, and to vote on church policy, individuals had to make public confessions of “faith and repentance wrought in their souls.” Men were required to deliver theirs “before and in the presence of, the whole congregation” and “with their own tongues and mouths”; women were permitted to write out their professions of faith and to consult privately with the minister. In addition, no one was to be admitted “without some testimony from the Brethren.”

The mother church in Salem had substituted an easier procedure: a baptized candidate was to be observed for a month and after having been certified as a person of good character, he or she made a private affirmation (or “owning”) of the covenant to the minister. Public testimony of regenerate faith was eliminated.

While the vast majority of New England churches loosened their regulations with the goal of expanding their religious communities, the Salem village church, with a stern enthusiast in the pulpit, pursued the same goal by returning to restrictive practices.

At first Parris’s strategy seemed to work. Between January 1690 and January 1691, twenty-seven people joined the village church. With this influx, the covenant membership more than doubled, and Parris began baptizing new members’ children. In the seven months after January 1691, however, only seven villagers joined the church. After August 1691, no one was enrolled for nearly two years, and baptisms fell off dramatically.

In October 1691, the village meeting voted a new five-man governing committee into office: Joseph Porter, Joseph Hutchinson, Joseph Putnam, Daniel Andrew, and Francis Nurse. Unlike the previous two committees, which consisted mostly of church founders, none of the newly elected members belonged to the village covenant. At the same time the

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16 Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem-Village Witchcraft, p. 270.
18 Wheatland, “Baptisms at Church in Salem Village.”
committee was elected, the village meeting questioned Parris’s compensation. Although he had driven a hard bargain, Parris’s salary was not significantly larger than that of previous ministers. His demand for outright possession of the minister’s house and its accompanying land, however, was unprecedented. The village meeting was evidently having second thoughts about the agreement they had struck with their minister. In the end, the meeting declined to authorize its elected committee to set a tax rate for the year, thus preventing the collection of the ministry tax that supported Parris’s salary. Clearly a majority of voting village members were eager to drive Parris from his post.

In November 1691, Parris’s congregation of fifty-nine adult members and seventy-four newly baptized children abruptly stopped growing. To be sure, during this period in the life of the Bay Colony, only a minority of people within any given Puritan community joined the church covenant; as Gragg points out, however, the two-year stagnation at the Salem village church indicates that public opinion had turned against Parris. As early as the summer of 1691, a frustrated Parris, still bent on his evangelical mission, was railing against village holdouts: “If you are ashamed to own Christ now, to profess him before the World ... hereafter Christ will be shamed of you” (p. 148).

On 26 December 1692 Parris’s supporters wrote out a petition to the county court to enforce the collection of the ministry tax for Parris’s salary. In their petition, they described the situation that had developed in 1691. The manuscript mentions the growing influence of “a few,” who had “drawn away others” and persuaded even those sympathetic to Parris to “absent themselves” from village meetings or refrain from casting their votes. Indeed, hardly any meetings were held in the village during 1691, and so the issue of Parris’s unpaid salary remained

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19 According to Robert Calef, Parris’s attempt to gain ownership of the village parsonage was the key issue in the dispute (More Wonders of the Invisible World [London, 1700]; abridged in Narratives of the Witchcraft Cases, 1648–1706, ed. George Lincoln Burr [New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1914], p. 341).

20 Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem-Village Witchcraft, p. 356.
unaddressed.\textsuperscript{21} The meetinghouse was falling into disrepair, and, as Parris’s record book documents, some people were failing to attend church services or meet with him, a clear sign of waning enthusiasm, which Parris felt as a “slight and neglect” that “did not a little trouble me.”\textsuperscript{22}

During this period, over seventy Salem village households claimed no church members; fifty-nine of them can be located on Charles Upham’s 1867 map of the 1692 village, and, as my map 2 shows, they were spread across its environs. Nonelect


\textsuperscript{22}Boyer and Nissenbaum, \textit{Salem-Village Witchcraft}, p. 277.
villagers numbered over one hundred fifty adults, about 70 percent of the adult population. Most of these individuals would not have been well disposed toward Parris, who had associated himself with over a dozen influential Putnam men and their wives, all of whom were covenant members. The Putnams had been involved in the village leadership and the affairs of the ministry for decades, and they had weathered previous conflicts. Never before, however, had the minister been so intransigent nor the village so unwilling to support him. As Boyer and Nissenbaum characterize it in *Salem Possessed*, “By late 1691 . . . the village had reached the point of total institutional polarization: the church speaking for one group, the village Committee for the other.”

Parris fought back in his sermons. Although allusions to Satan were common in Puritan preaching (and Parris took his sermon topics from a standard preaching guide), the devil’s work in the village became an increasingly significant issue for him. As the editors of Parris’s sermons point out, “the Satanic theme dominates his sermons during the four months immediately preceding the witchcraft accusations.” The evangelist had translated opposition to his ministry into a demonic attack on the new covenant.

Just two months after he was ordained, Parris’s preaching began to reflect this strain. In January 1690, he chose as his text “Cursed be he who doeth the work of the Lord deceitfully” (p. 66). The next month, he spoke, apparently from personal experience, about not trusting the “pretended” friendship

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23 Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Possessed*, p. 68. The split resembles one that had taken place over a decade earlier in Salem town. The board of selectmen had passed into the hands of nonmembers. In response, the Salem church, under the leadership of Rev. John Higginson, progressively liberalized its rules of membership over two decades, but eventually the town severed its relationship with the church. Thereafter, church membership in Salem gradually declined while the population continued to grow. See Young, *Good Order* to Revolution, pp. 136–37.

24 Cooper and Minkema, eds., *Parris, Sermon Notebook*, p. 20; see also Gragg, *Life of Parris*, pp. 98–100.
of “rotten-hearted” people in the village (p. 76). Later, Parris referred to his sense of betrayal more explicitly. “Oh, that we would have a care of false words,” he entreated. And he warned, “I am afraid there is great guiltings upon this account in this poor little village” (p. 84). Entire families were being drawn into the conflict, he noted, and “great hatred ariseth even from nearest Relations” (p. 184).

In February, when some villagers began to refuse to pay taxes for his salary, Parris preached a sermon containing thinly veiled references to himself as Christ and his opponents as Judas. “Wicked men,” he declared, “will give 30 pieces of silver to be rid of Christ: they would not give half so much for his gracious presence & holy sermons . . . for the maintenance of the pure Religion” (p. 126). In the summer of 1691, as the anti-Parris contingent grew in number, the minister’s sermons took on an increasingly militant tone. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil,” Parris instructed. “Christ furnisheth the believer with skill, strength, Courage, Weapons, & all military accomplishments for Victory” (pp. 147–48). Thus did Parris convert opposition to his ministry into a grand cosmic struggle between the forces of good and evil, between God and Satan.

The next year, in early January 1692, Parris declared most explicitly that “Christ having begun a new work, it is the main drift of the Devil to pull it all down” (p. 184). By the middle of February, the children in the Parris household were beginning to act strangely and witchcraft was suspected. Parris spoke boldly to his congregation, warning them that “for our slighting of Christ Jesus God is angry and sending for destroyers” (p. 188). He encouraged his listeners not “to be offended at the present low condition of the Church in the midst of its enemies” (p. 191).

Given Parris’s position at the center of the struggle, it is not surprising that the children of his household would be the first to be affected by it. According to the Reverend John Hale, the minister in nearby Beverly who wrote an eyewitness account, Parris initially called in “some Worthy Gentlemen from Salem,” most likely the magistrates (Hawthorne, Gedney, and
Corwin) who had attended his installation in the village, as well as “Neighbour Ministers” to observe the two afflicted girls in his home. The magistrates and ministers, Hale recorded, “had enquired diligently into the Sufferings of the Afflicted, concluded they were preternatural, and feared the hand of Satan was in them.” But first they advised Parris that “he should sit still and wait upon the Providence of God to see what time might discover.” Several weeks later, in mid-February, Dr. Griggs, a village physician, church member, and friend of Thomas and Edward Putnam, diagnosed the children in Parris’s home to be afflicted by “the evil hand.” By this point, Thomas Putnam’s twelve-year-old daughter, Ann, and Dr. Griggs’s seventeen-year-old niece, Elizabeth Hubbard, had also been stricken. According to Hale, “the Neighbours quickly took up [Griggs’s diagnosis] and concluded they [the girls] were bewitched.”

In his sermon of 14 February, just two weeks before his afflicted daughter and niece voiced their first accusations, Parris had already reported to his congregation that “assistants of Satan” were at work in Salem village (p. 185). This is virtually a charge of witchcraft, although no formal charges had yet been lodged.

Witchcraft having been officially proposed by Dr. Griggs, a church member and close neighbor of Parris’s, Mary Sibley, secretly arranged with John Indian, Parris’s Indian slave, for a “witch cake” to be made from the children’s urine. The purpose of this folk magic was to enable the children to identify the witches who were causing their distress. By Parris’s own admission, the witch cake procedure not only confirmed that witches were at work in the village but prompted the first accusations of 29 February. Nevertheless, in order to distance himself and his family from the crisis, he rebuked Mary Sibley before the congregation for using “Diabolical means” (the witch cake) by which “the Devil hath been raised amongst us.”

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Although Parris attempted to dissociate himself from the witchcraft accusations that had originated in his own family, his sermons during the previous months had aroused villagers’ fears of demonic activity and created the climate in which accusations might flourish. Parris also made a public spectacle of the girls’ disturbing and by now widely performed “afflictions.” To quote Hale again, “there were two or three private Fasts at the Ministers House, one of which was kept by sundry Neighbour Ministers, and after this, another in Publick at the Village, and several days afterwards of publick Humiliation, during these molestations, not only there, but in other Congregations for them. And one General Fast by Order of the General Court, observed throughout the Colony to seek the Lord that he would rebuke Satan, and be a light unto his people in this day of darkness.”

And Sunday after Sunday, Parris framed the escalating struggle over his ministry as a demonic attack on his church. It is understandable, then, that some in Parris’s congregation would attribute their children’s fits to the presence of devil’s agents—witches—in the village.

It was Parris’s Indian slave Tituba, one of the first three village residents to be accused, who initially revealed the existence of organized witches’ meetings in Salem village. In contrast to the two other accused women, Sarah Good and Sarah Osborne, who asserted their innocence before the magistrates, Tituba responded to judges John Hathorne and Jonathan Corwin’s aggressive interrogation and to an alleged beating by Parris by confessing her involvement with witchcraft and by testifying against the two other accused women. She had spectrally seen Good and Osborne with five other witches from Boston standing inside Parris’s house, where “they all meet together,” she reported, and Good and Osborne had “hurt” the children

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28 See Calef, More Wonders of the Invisible World, p. 343. “The account she [Tituba] since gives of it is, that her Master did beat her and otherways abuse her, to make her confess and accuse (such as he call’d) her Sister-Witches, and that whatsoever she said by way of confessing or accusing others, was the effect of such usage.” Hale reported independently that Tituba was found to “have upon her body marks of the Devils wounding her” (Modest Inquiry, p. 415).
there. During her second interrogation the next day, 2 March, Tituba stated that the leader of the witches had shown her the devil's book of covenant in which she had seen the signature marks, in blood, of both Good and Osborne as well as the marks of seven other unnamed witches.\footnote{Paul Boyer and Stephen Nissenbaum, eds., \textit{The Salem Witchcraft Papers}, 3 vols. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1977), 1:747–55.} Thus did Tituba divert attention from herself by testifying against Good and Osborne and by introducing the notion of a satanic conspiracy aimed at the minister's household. More important, she introduced the sensational idea that outsiders were leading that conspiracy. Tituba's testimony, then, set the stage for a witch-hunt of potentially wide-ranging social and geographic scope.

The revelation of outside leadership was new to the authorities, and its effect was momentous. Whether reacting to Parris's supposed beating or not, Tituba had aligned her testimony with Parris's cosmic vision of a struggle between God and Satan. Hereafter, reports of "signing" the devil's book and attempts to make others do the same would recur in the most serious accusations, as would vivid reports of satanic meetings, held next to Parris's house. As Hale later observed, "the success of Tituba's confession encouraged those in Authority to examine others that were suspected,"\footnote{Hale, \textit{Modest Inquiry}, p. 415.} which led to more confessions and to multiple testimonies of a satanic attack on the church.

On 19 March 1692, less than three weeks after the first accusations, Samuel Parris and the Salem magistrates invited the village's former minister, the Reverend Deodat Lawson, to preach to the congregation. Upon learning that the "the first Person Afflicted was in the minister's Family," Lawson reported that he was seriously concerned because his own wife and daughter, who had died three years before while he had served the village, were now said in court testimony to have been killed by "the Malicious Operations of the Infernal Powers." Upon his arrival, Mary Walcott and Abigail Williams, both
children of church member families, confronted Lawson with their “grievous fits” and demonstrated their afflictions. Walcott screamed in pain that she was being bitten on the wrist, and Williams almost burned herself while uncontrollably “flying” into Parris’s fireplace and calling out against Rebecca Nurse.31

The next day, Lawson opened the Sunday worship service with a prayer. As if to demonstrate that the devil’s aggression was directed against the church’s ministry, the afflicted girls and a village matron quickly interrupted the prayer with their “sore fits.” Two of the girls, Abigail Williams and Ann Putnam Jr., became possessed and attacked Lawson’s ministerial authority. Speaking in bold voices, which were understood to be inspired by the devil, they proceeded to reprimand an astonished Lawson in a spectacular display of gender misconduct and satanic assault on the clergy. “After Psalm was sung,” Lawson reported, “Abigail Williams said to me, ‘Now stand up and Name your Text’: and after it was read, she said, ‘it is a long text.’” As he began to preach, the respected, middle-aged Bathshua Pope, entranced by the devil, disrupted Lawson’s sermon, saying “Now there is enough of that.” At the afternoon service, Abigail Williams, again possessed, once more questioned the textual authority of Lawson’s sermon: “I know no Doctrine you had, If you did name one, I have forgot it.” Ann Putnam chimed in and accused Lawson of having a “Yellowbird,” a witch-familiar spirit, perched on his hat, thus implying that he was an agent of the devil.32 Clearly more was at stake than a few troubled females. The ministry was being attacked, and godly women and children of the congregation were being transformed into agents of Satan. Indeed, this is how Lawson understood the disruption, and he made it the subject of his Thursday sermon.

On 24 March, Lawson told the congregation that God had specially targeted them as the “Covenant People of God” and had loosed Satan, in all his “Rage and Fury,” upon them. “The

32 Lawson, A Brief and True Narrative p. 154.
Lord,” he said, had sent “this Fire of his Holy displeasure” to
douse the “Fires of Contention” in the village, almost certainly
a reference to the village conflict over Parris. Lawson urged the
congregation to humble themselves before God and to “PRAY,
PRAY, PRAY” for deliverance from Satan’s attacks. Near the
end of his sermon, Lawson also addressed “Our HONOURED
MAGISTRATES, here present.” John Hathorne and Jonathan
Corwin had examined Rebecca Nurse that morning and had
sent her to jail. In the preceding three weeks, the two had in-
dicted and jailed two other village witches: Tituba, Sarah Good,
Sarah Osborne, and Martha Cory. From the pulpit Lawson ex-
horted the magistrates to continue to “Do all that in you Lyes,
to Check and Rebuke Satan” and “to discover the Instruments
in these Horrid operations.” As the civil authorities respon-
sible for defending the church, “Being ordained of God to such
a station (Rom. 13:1), we entreat you,” Lawson went on, “to
bear not the sword in vain, as Ver. 4. But approve yourselves a
Terror of and Punishment to, evil-doers.”33

Seven days later, on 31 March, Salem village and Salem town
observed a public fast and offered prayers for the afflicted. On
the same day, Lawson announced that Abigail Williams had
witnessed a gathering of witches near Parris’s house, where
they celebrated the devil’s sacrament with “Red Bread and
Red Drink.” Thus Williams confirmed the congregation’s worst
fears: a demonic conspiracy was operating in the village and
attacking the village church, as initially reported by Tituba
on 2 March. The next day Mercy Lewis said that she had
witnessed the same satanic mass near the parsonage. While in
a trance-like state, she related how the devil had enticed her to
take his sacrament, which she refused, saying, “I will not Eat,
I will not Drink, it is Blood . . . . Christ gives the Bread of Life,
I will have none of it!” She proceeded to describe her vision of
a “Glorious Place,” where a heavenly choir sang Psalm 110.34

33Deodat Lawson, “Christ’s Fidelity, the Only Shield Against Satan’s Malignity,”
reprinted in Richard B. Trask, “The Devil hath been raised,” revised ed. (Danvers,
34Lawson, A Brief and True Narrative, pp. 160–61. I wish to thank Marilyne
Roach for calling my attention to the fact that Psalm 110 was used in Parris’s sermon on
Parris had taken this psalm, which refers to the risen Christ conquering his enemies and using them as his footstool, as opening text for four communion Sunday sermons he preached between late November 1691 and mid-February 1692. Mercy’s reputed temptation thus reflected Parris’s warnings that Salem village was being torn asunder by the competing forces of Christ and Satan.

Based on the girls’ reports, Lawson estimated at the end of March that there were twenty-three to twenty-four witches regularly meeting in the village, where they “keep dayes of Fast and dayes of Thanksgiving, and Sacraments.” Lawson not only affirmed Tituba’s and the girls’ reports about the scope of witchcraft activity; he also identified it as a full-scale assault on the Church. “Satan endeavours to Transforme himself to an Angel of Light, and to make his Kingdom and Administrations to resemble those of our Lord Jesus Christ,” he noted. In order to account for the awkward fact that at this time two covenanted women, Martha Corey and Rebecca Nurse, had been accused of witchcraft, Lawson stated that Satan “makes use (at least in appearance) of some of them [members of the congregation] to Afflict others; that Christ’s Kingdom may be divided against it self, and so be weakened.” After barely four weeks, there were nearly two dozen complainants and accusers in the village—men and women, young and middle aged—and they were all from covenant families. Two ministers and three local magistrates were also fully engaged in endorsing accusations against five village people, and the records show that they were swayed by reports of regular satanic meetings taking place in the village. They were also convinced that the satanic attack on the church was mounting, involving at least two dozen, yet-to-be-named suspects. A turning point had been


35Lawson, A Brief and True Narrative p. 163; see also Parris’s sermon of 27 March 1692, “There are Devils as well as Saints in the Church of Christ” (p. 195).
reached: more accusations were expected, and they were sure
to reach beyond the village.\footnote{Lawson was not alone in envisioning the large scope of the witchcraft threat, nor
did he alone convince the authorities of it, as Richard Francis suggests. In the minds
of the accusers and the local authorities, the witchcraft menace had already grown
well beyond the usual village-contained limits of previous episodes. But it was Lawson
who heightened the sense of danger to the church, already signaled by Parris, and
confirmed that “Apocalypse was in the air,” to use Francis’ apt expression (Richard
Francis, \textit{Judge Sewall’s Apology} [New York: HarperCollins, 2005], pp. 93ff.).}

Less than a month later, in mid-April, Abigail Hobbs, Ann
Putnam Jr., and Mercy Lewis brought an accusation against
the former village minister, the Reverend George Burroughs.
Burroughs was then serving as the minister in Wells, Maine.
Because of discontent over his ministry and amidst rumors of
wife abuse, he had left Salem village in 1683, with his pay in ar-
rears. The discovery that a Puritan clergyman was in league with
Satan had a spectacular impact. “[I]t was a dreadful thing,” said
Ann Putnam Jr., who first reported seeing Burroughs frightful
apparition, “that he which was a Minister that should teach
children to fear God should come to persuade poor creatures
to give their souls to the devil.”\footnote{Boyer and Nissenbaum, \textit{Salem Witchcraft Papers}, 1:164.}
The news gave rise to the
shocking notion that the devil was not only attacking the vil-
lage church but employing a minister to undermine the entire
Puritan enterprise.

The day after he learned of his daughter Ann’s spectral vision,
Thomas Putnam wrote a personal note to Salem magistrates
Hathorne and Corwin to draw attention to the importance of
her finding. He wished “to inform your Honors of what we
conceive you have not heard, which are high and dreadful: of
a wheel within a wheel, at which our ears do tingle.”\footnote{Boyer and Nissenbaum, \textit{Salem Witchcraft Papers}, 1:165–66.}
Seeking
to validate and privilege Ann’s otherwise outrageous charge
against the Reverend Burroughs, Putnam called her vision
a work of “divine providence,” as mysterious as the prophet
Ezekiel’s visionary wheel, whereby God makes himself known
to his people. Things are not as they seem, Putnam implies. God
has communicated with a twelve year-old girl and revealed to
her that a Puritan minister is Satan’s high priest.
If Burroughs was indeed the devil’s high priest, then the witchcraft activity in Salem village was not local or isolated but the leading edge of a full-fledged satanic assault. In recounting their visions of Burroughs presiding over satanic masses in Salem village, his accusers described how he set out to recruit new witches, baptize them, sign them into a covenant, and administer the sacrament to them. Deodat Lawson’s diagnosis was thus upheld: the devil was trying to establish his church in Salem village and in other towns of Essex County. With this threat now widely known, broadcast as it was through many well-attended grand jury hearings, new witchcraft accusations began to proliferate, as did more accounts of Burroughs presiding over the devil’s sacrament in Salem village. In late July, Mary Lacey called Burroughs the “King of Hell” and Martha Carrier of Andover his Queen. She also named Cory and Nurse as Satan’s two deacons. By mid-April, then, the accusations against Burroughs and the presumption that Satan was establishing a foothold in Salem village were spreading the range and extending the duration of the witch-hunt beyond anything hitherto experienced in the New World.

From mid-April forward, accusers and confessors reported seeing hundreds of witches under Burroughs’s command gathering in Salem village and nearby Andover. It may have been Burroughs’s relationship with the Maine frontier, where Indians attacked colonial settlements, that gave new impetus to the accusers’ fears, as Mary Beth Norton has recently argued. Burroughs, though, was an easy target. Although a minister, his lapses in receiving communion were notable, and he had failed to baptize all but one of his children. Just as Burroughs sightings multiplied, so did the number of accusations, which spread beyond the immediate environs of Salem village to twenty-two other towns and villages. This phase of the witch-hunt is intensely complex, involving an ever-widening and more diverse field of sociopolitical and religious factors, as Norton has shown.39

By late August 1692, reports of witches’ meetings in Salem village were so rampant that William Barker Sr., one of the fifty-odd persons who confessed to witchcraft in the neighboring town of Andover, boldly told the court that he had joined a meeting of about a hundred witches, armed with swords and rapiers, “upon a green peece of ground neare the ministers house” and that there were now over three hundred witches in the country. “Our design,” he said, “was to destroy Salem village and to begin at the minister’s House” and “to destroy that place [Salem village] by reason of the peoples being divided & theire differing with their ministers—Satan’s design was to set up his own worship, abolish all the churches in the land, to fall next on Salem and soe go through the countrey.” Once again, here was evidence that Parris’s dark warnings about the devil opposing his ministry had now escalated into a satanic conspiracy involving all the churches in Massachusetts Bay. As Parris put it in a sermon delivered on 11 September 1692, “The Devil, & his Instruments, will be making War, as long as they can, with the Lamb & his Followers” (p. 204).

Given Parris’s ongoing and consistently strident sermons about “assistants of Satan” being at work in Salem village, it is not surprising that 65 percent of the village accusers (41 out of 63) belonged to households of one or more covenanted church members or of Parris supporters (see map 3). More telling is the fact that 76 percent of the village men (13 out of 17) who signed the original village covenant either initiated witchcraft complaints, the sine qua non of the legal process, or gave evidence against at least one person. Equally significant is the fact that 76 percent (13 out of 17) of the most active village accusers (those who accused more than three people) belonged to church member families. Indeed, Thomas Putnam, father

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40Boyer and Nissenbaum, *Salem Witchcraft Papers*, 2:65–66. Corey had joined the village church in 1690, and Nurse was a long-standing member of the church in Salem and regularly attended the village services.

of Burroughs’s first accuser and a prominent founding member of the Salem village church, wrote out over one hundred complaints and depositions, mainly on behalf of the afflicted girls, against local residents and others of nearby towns.42

Court records show that village accusers testified mainly about witchcraft attacks against other covenant members, which corroborates Lawson’s initial observation that “Satan Rages Principally amongst the Visible Subjects of Christ’s Kingdom,”

42The finding about Putnam is based on recent handwriting analysis of the court documents. This number surpasses by far any other complainant and is a clear indication of Putnam’s aggressive role throughout the proceedings. See Peter Grund, Merja Kyoto, and Matti Rissanen, “Editing the Salem Witchcraft Records: An Exploration of a Linguistic Treasury,” American Speech 79 (2004): 158.
that is, among the elect of the Salem village congregation. Lawson’s finding held true for the duration of the episode, even though the geographic range of the accusations moved far beyond the local village community. Members of village covenant families continued to feel besieged, and they raised their voices in accusation, no matter how distant and unfamiliar their targets might be.

The witchcraft accusations in Salem village, it is apparent, sprang from the heart of an embattled congregation, and members initially directed their fears against those who were not members—the many “outsiders” living among them—a classic opposition between “us” and “them” within a bounded community. A large proportion of those accused in the village, 89 percent (twenty-four out of twenty-seven), did not profess the covenant. If we consider only individuals who resided within the boundaries of Salem village, 81 percent of those accused (13 out of 16) were not church members (see map 4).

As court records demonstrate, the accusations taken most seriously reflected fears that Satan was conspiring against the village covenant. All seventeen of those from the village and from the neighboring towns of Salem, Salem Farms, Topsfield, Andover, and Marblehead whom villagers accused of covenanting with the devil by “signing” his book were executed for witchcraft, and these charges were specified at their trials. Equally important, these individuals were said to have attempted to force church members to do the same, tormenting them if they did not, thus seeking to undermine the church by converting its members to apostasy.

Although the conflict between Samuel Parris and the village-wide opposition movement apparently precipitated fears of witchcraft, it does not seem to have been the sole motivating

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43 Each of these documents is marked “Jurat in Curia,” indicating that it was selected and used at the trial of the accused. (See the court records in Boyer and Nissenbaum, Salem Witchcraft Papers.)

44 The records show that all but two of those convicted and executed in the entire episode were thus accused, a charge that characterized nearly half of all the Salem cases. It is necessary to speak in approximations, because the records are not complete. They show that 67 out of 153 for whom records exist were accused of signing the devil’s book and of attempting, implicitly or explicitly, to force others to do so.
force for the accusations. Not being a member of the congregation was not sufficient grounds for accusation. Nor were the leaders of the Parris opposition specifically targeted, for only two out of the five opposition leaders were ever touched by the accusations. Whatever their specific grudges against certain neighbors may have been, however, accusers were far more likely to finger individuals who were not members of the congregation. Parris, whose sermons divided the village into two groups—the “precious,” on the one hand, and the “wicked and unchurched,” on the other—offered a model for this process as his church stagnated. Thus, more than any other single factor, geographic or economic, one’s status within or without the
village congregation became the distinguishing characteristic of the accusers and the accused within the village community.

Although no one in Salem village is recorded as having noticed the correlation between church membership status and witchcraft accusations, Cotton Mather believed that the outbreak was directly related to the community’s large number of nonelect and unbaptised residents, a woeful condition that Mather attributed to old covenant restrictions. In mid-December 1692, Mather wrote to John Richards, a leading member of his congregation who was strongly opposed to Mather’s wish to establish the Halfway Covenant in his own church. In his letter, Mather sought to persuade Richards, who had served as a magistrate at the court of Oyer and Terminer, with what he assumed would be a telling argument: “I have seen that the Divels have been Baptising so many of our miserable Neighbours, in that horrible Witchcraft. . . . I cannot be well at Ease, until the Nursery of Initiated Beleevers . . . be duly Watered, with Baptism. . . . I would mark [with baptism] as many as I should, that the Destroying Angels may have less claim to them.”

Mather had read the court testimonies, and he knew that the accused were said to have done the very thing that he feared the unbaptized might do in his own parish: they had “signed” the “Devil’s book” and thus joined the devil’s covenant.

After the witch trials concluded in May 1693, Parris continued to equate his enemies with the forces of Satan. In a sermon he preached in October 1693, he proclaimed, “When Sin & conscience, men & Devils accuse us, why then let the death of Christ appease our bleeding, wounded & disquieted Souls” (p. 275). Stagnation continued: new baptisms and memberships were rare. In May 1695, competing petitions were presented to the leading Boston clergy on the issue of retaining Parris as the village minister. After transcribing the petitions into his record book, Parris aligned the signers’ names in two separate columns: “Church-Members”; and “Householders,” that

is, noncovenant residents of the village.\textsuperscript{46} The majority (105), including all but one of the original church members, were in favor of keeping Parris on. His opponents (84) were sufficiently numerous, however, that Parris eventually realized that reconciliation was impossible and decided he should depart. Of those opponents, fifty adults were not members of the village church. Another group consisted of sixteen young men, all sons of covenant members in the village or in Salem town but who were not themselves fully members. Seven of them were also sons of accused villagers. It was these young men, together with the nonelect adults, the majority of whom were men, who tipped the scale against Parris.\textsuperscript{47}

Once he was installed, Joseph Green, Parris’s carefully selected successor, immediately instituted the Halfway Covenant (a move probably arranged in advance), and in the first year of his ministry he proceeded to welcome a flock of new members and to baptize many children. For the first time in its history, Salem village warmly embraced its minister. A more liberal church had been established, and the ministry finally became the unifying force it was intended to be.\textsuperscript{48}

Cotton Mather’s justification of the witch trials in his \textit{Wonders of the Invisible World}, written in October 1692, soon after the closing of the special court of Oyer and Terminer, makes reference to the many testimonies about witches’ meetings in Salem village. Their purpose, he asserted, echoing both Parris’s and Lawson’s sermons, was the “Rooting out the Christian Religion from this Country.”\textsuperscript{49} Given the inflammatory content of


\textsuperscript{48}See Latner’s excellent account of Green’s early ministry in “Witchcraft and Religious Discord,” pp. 118–21.

Parris’s sermons and the pattern of early witchcraft accusations in Salem village, it seems apparent that the belief that Satan had targeted village church members and that he had planned a wider assault on the churches of the colony produced an unprecedented number of witchcraft accusations and executions. To be sure, a great many of the court testimonies tell of the usual neighborly jealousies, personal disputes, and old suspicions typical of other small-scale and well-contained New England witchcraft episodes. As other scholars have noted, such petty accusations were prompted by the sensational Salem affair, an episode of such satanic proportions that it drew all other witchcraft suspicions, near and far, into its powerful vortex.

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