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## Fueling and Fortifying the Foundational Machinery: Religious Necessity and Enlightened Republicanism in America's Founding

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FUELING AND FORTIFYING THE FOUNDATIONAL MACHINERY: RELIGIOUS  
NECESSITY AND ENLIGHTENED REPUBLICANISM IN AMERICA'S FOUNDING

by

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B.S. December 1997, Frostburg State University

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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
May 2002

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## ABSTRACT

### FUELING AND FORTIFYING THE FOUNDATIONAL MACHINERY: RELIGIOUS NECESSITY AND ENLIGHTENED REPUBLICANISM IN AMERICA'S FOUNDING

Jennifer L. Dyar  
Old Dominion University, 2002  
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The debate over the role of religion in the Revolution and Founding of America continues to rage despite years of fruitless wrangling. The obvious influence of Enlightenment thought on these events has led many historians to focus exclusively upon reason's authority, abandoning consideration of religion as a substantive force entirely and concluding it to be incompatible with Enlightenment ideology. Reason and religion, however, were neither incompatible nor mutually exclusive in the Founding. In both their revolutionary struggle for independence and their erection of a governmental framework, the Founders unquestionably utilized Enlightenment rhetoric and reason. This alone, though, was insufficient first to galvanize the American people into revolutionary action and then to secure their possession of freedom by controlling corruption. Religion was both the indispensable spark that lit the revolutionary fires, giving meaning to rational resistance theory, and the moral flame whose fervent heat the new government depended upon to fuel and control its enlightened engines.

To establish such a position for religion in America's Revolution and Founding, the words and writings of Americans and the Founders themselves must be carefully examined. Sermons, pamphlets, and letters reveal religion at the revolutionary core while the notes of the Constitutional debates of 1787 taken down by James Madison and others provide evidence of the same centrality in government. Equally important are texts like

the *Federalist Papers*, John Adams's *Defence of the Constitutions*, Thomas Jefferson's *Notes on Virginia*, James Madison's *Memorial and Remonstrance*, and commentaries on America by outsiders like Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*. To reveal the central position accorded religion, a wide array of letters and texts by many different Founders, including Jefferson, John Adams, Samuel Adams, Madison, Hamilton, Washington, James Wilson, John Witherspoon, Benjamin Rush, and Benjamin Franklin, have been scrutinized.

For Mom,  
All my love always,  
I'll see you in the Kingdom.

For your life is hid with Christ in God.  
When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also  
appear with him in glory.  
Colossians 3:3-4

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION: STRUGGLING FOR SUPREMACY

“With a firm reliance on the Protection of Divine Providence, we mutually pledge to each other our Lives, our Fortunes, and our sacred Honor”—thus did a group of America’s Founders close the Declaration of Independence in 1776 and inaugurate a new era of self-government.<sup>1</sup> The religious fervor resident in the statement resounds deafeningly, reverberating through the halls of history with enough force to shake the preconceived frameworks of historians and politicians today. But, for all its incontrovertible power, there is another voice, and, despite this voice’s controlled and soft pitch modulation, it is the Enlightened voice whose frequency is most receptive to many historians today. Quietly and logically, this voice queries again and again, “Is it supported by *reason*?”<sup>2</sup> Historians, for many years, have presumed that, to hear the history of America’s founding clearly, one must tune out one voice or the other completely, rarely pausing to consider the possibility of their blended complementarity or mixture. It requires a mental effort to transpose oneself into the Founders’ world and hear the voices with their ears, but, if done, one realizes that neither voice can be ignored for they are, on many points, in the same key, part of the same tune. Like melody and harmony, it is possible to separate religious ideas and Enlightenment philosophy from

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The format for this thesis follows current style requirements of *A Manual for Writers* by Kate Turabian.

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<sup>1</sup>Declaration of Independence. The appellation “Founders” has been applied to a broad selection of persons ranging from Revolutionary activists to Abraham Lincoln. Throughout the entirety of this thesis, the term “Founders” will refer only to those persons whose signatures appear at the bottom of either the Declaration of Independence or the Constitution of the United States.

<sup>2</sup>James Madison, Alexander Hamilton, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Isaac Kramnick (New York: Penguin Books, 1987), 346.

each other, but the song's beauty and ability to inspire, its functionality so to speak, is impaired in the process.<sup>3</sup> Even so, many historians would argue that the Enlightened machinery of American government is the melody, quite capable of playing on its own without religious harmony. However, for the Founders, quite the opposite was true. Religion provided the necessary spark and influence for both Revolution and Republic, the tune or key to which governmental institutions were bound to play, without which the machinery would not run properly. Accordingly, the Founders nurtured and protected religion, aimed to achieve in government the morality and forward-looking mindset it dictated, learned from it how to control corruption and self-interest, and relied heavily upon its precepts to hold the Enlightened machinery of their government firmly in check. Certainly dissonances occurred as both religion and reason stretched to reach other keys, but America's governmental Founders, particularly Federalists, believed it possible to structure an entire governmental system upon the harmonizing threshold of enlightened ideology reinforced by and reinforcing religion; this was the grand experiment they proposed and, in John Adams's opinion, performed to perfection.

## THE EVIDENCE

It is hard to deny religion's pervasive presence, particularly those Protestant strains of Christianity, in late eighteenth-century America. As historian Patricia Bonomi has realized, "the idiom of religion penetrated all discourse, underlay all thought, marked

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<sup>3</sup>The term "religion" will be used repeatedly throughout this thesis and, for this author's purposes, is narrowly defined as Protestant Christianity and its varied sects and offshoots unless otherwise noted. The rationale for this narrowing of terminology stems from the reality that Protestant Christianity in its varying forms was unquestionably the primary religious influence by far upon Americans.



all observances, gave meaning to every public and private crisis.”<sup>4</sup> Atheism in America was practically nonexistent, even among governmental authorities. The Continental Congress repeatedly mandated days of fasting and prayer, like July 20, 1775 and May 6, 1779, or thanksgiving to God, like November 28, 1782, “it being the indispensable duty of all nations, not only to offer up their supplications to Almighty God . . . but also in a solemn and public manner to give him praise for his goodness.”<sup>5</sup> George Washington exhorted his soldiers often to pray during the Revolutionary struggle and, in his first Inaugural Address, made a special point of including “in this first official act my fervent supplications to the Almighty Being who rules over the universe,” acknowledging God’s undeniable guidance and protection of America in her struggles heretofore.<sup>6</sup> Even Benjamin Franklin, a self-proclaimed Deist in his youth, was moved by the stalemated and unproductive wrangling of the delegates during the Constitutional Convention of 1787 to an effuse and often quoted profession of piety and plea for prayer:

In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? . . . I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – *that God governs in the affairs of men*. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that “except the Lord build the House they labour in vain

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<sup>4</sup>Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986; Oxford University Press, 1988), 3.

<sup>5</sup>*Journals of the Continental Congress, 1774-1789*, ed. Worthington C. Ford et al. (Washington, DC: 1904-37), 23: 647, 13: 343; Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), xiv; Perry Miller, “Religion as Revolutionary Ideology,” in *The Role of Ideology in the American Revolution*, ed. John R. Howe, Jr. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 34-5.

<sup>6</sup>George Washington, First Inaugural Address (New York: 30 April 1789), in *The World of the Founding Fathers*, ed. Saul K. Padover (New York: A. S. Barnes & Company, 1977), 462-63, and Michael Novak, “The Influence of Judaism and Christianity on the American Founding,” in *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America*, ed. James H. Hutson (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000), 162-63.

that build it.” I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel . . . . I therefore beg leave to move – that henceforth prayers imploring the assistance of Heaven, and its blessings on our deliberations, be held in this Assembly every morning before we proceed to business . . . .<sup>7</sup>

State constitutions like those of Pennsylvania and Maryland, both drafted and ratified in 1776, implicitly assumed the religious devotion of their constituents, explicitly promised protection to “all persons, professing the Christian religion,” and levied, as in the case of Maryland, taxes “for the support of the Christian religion.”<sup>8</sup> Nor did this noticeable religious presence dissipate as the wheels of time rolled the new century into the “affairs of men.” Alexis de Tocqueville, upon his nineteenth-century visit to America, marveled at the influence of Christianity whose “sway extends even over reason.”<sup>9</sup>

Reason’s representation in the thoughts of Americans is equally as discernable as religion’s. Historians have found numerous citations to a variety of Enlightenment works in the writings of Americans, and historian James Truslow Adams has traced the appearance on the American market of French books in particular. By 1763, works by Montesquieu, Voltaire, Rabelais, Racine, and Rousseau were all available to the American public with Montesquieu’s *Spirit of the Laws* being most popular. British philosophers like Locke and Blackstone, the Scottish David Hume, and Beccaria also

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<sup>7</sup>Max Farrand, ed., *The Records of the Federal Convention of 1787* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1911), 1: 450-52, and Benjamin Franklin, *Autobiography*, in *The Select Works of Benjamin Franklin*, ed. Epes Sargent (Boston: Phillips, Sampson and Company, 1853), 166-67.

<sup>8</sup>Constitution of Maryland (3 November 1776), arts. 33, 35-6; Constitution of Pennsylvania (16 August 1776), art. 2; Stephen Botein, “Religious Dimensions of the Early American State,” in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, eds. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 319.

<sup>9</sup>Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, ed. J. P. Mayer, trans. George Lawrence (New York: Harper & Row, 1966; Harper Perennial, 1969), 292, and Bonomi, 222.

headed the American booklist.<sup>10</sup> Edmund Randolph triumphantly pronounced “America the empire of reason,” and John Adams, after drafting the Massachusetts Constitution, self-satisfiedly declared it to be “Locke, Sidney, Rousseau, and de Mably reduced to practice.”<sup>11</sup> Practice is truly the key to understanding the American relationship to Enlightenment thought. Peter Gay, a historian of the Enlightenment, describes America as “a laboratory for Enlightenment ideas,” and Tocqueville also observed in the mid-nineteenth century that “there is no country in the world in which the boldest political theories of the eighteenth-century philosophers are put so effectively into practice as in America.”<sup>12</sup> So effective in application was the American endorsement of the Enlightenment that Enlightenment philosophers themselves heaped praise upon the country and touted America as the epitome of their ideals in their own fight against “the *ancien regime*” in Europe.<sup>13</sup>

## CONTENDING OVER THE FAITH

In spite of the obvious existence of both religion and Enlightenment thought in America, many historians seem to be unable to conceive of their compatibility and, in

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<sup>10</sup>Paul Merrill Spurlin, *Montesquieu in America, 1760-1801* (Louisiana: Louisiana State University Press, 1940), 35-6, 259-60; Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press, 1967), 26-7; Donald S. Lutz, “The Relative Influence of European Writers on Late Eighteenth-Century American Political Thought,” *The American Political Science Review* 78 (March 1984) : 193; Bernard Bailyn, “Political Experience and Enlightenment Ideas in Eighteenth-Century America,” *American Historical Review* 67 (1962) : 344.

<sup>11</sup>Gordon S. Wood, *The Creation of the American Republic, 1776-1787* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1969), 4, and R. R. Palmer, “The People as Constituent Power,” in *The Role of Ideology in the American Revolution*, ed. John R. Howe, Jr. (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1970), 77.

<sup>12</sup>Peter Gay, “Enlightenment Thought and the American Revolution,” in Howe, 49; Alexis de Tocqueville, *The Old Regime and the French Revolution*, trans. John Bonner (Garden City: Doubleday, 1955), 153; Padover, 28.

<sup>13</sup>Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 98, and Gay, “Enlightenment Thought,” 48.

fact, argue that they are completely oppositional, being “not merely different but *incompatible* systems of thought and behavior.”<sup>14</sup> Historians seeking to establish the validity of this theory invariably point to the atheism of the French Revolution and French philosophers as their proof. Historian James Byrne calls the Enlightenment movement “a volatile mixture of classicism, impiety, and science” and the philosophes themselves “modern pagans.”<sup>15</sup> Peter Gay also sees fit to subtitle his book on the Enlightenment *The Rise of Modern Paganism*. Eighteenth-century Americans like Noah Webster commented on French atheism, considering it a pendular reaction “starting from the extreme of superstition” and “vibrat[ing] to the extreme of skepticism.”<sup>16</sup> There is no doubt that philosophers like Voltaire and Diderot were not only atheists but fiercely anti-Christian, and, during the French Revolution, they “attacked the Church with a sort of studied ferocity; they declaimed against its clergy, its hierarchy, institutions, and dogmas, and, driving their attack home, sought to demolish the very foundations of Christian belief.”<sup>17</sup> Thomas Paine, in his infamous *Age of Reason*, even sought to rupture and invert Christianity’s nomenclature of atheism by designating Christianity itself as “a

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<sup>14</sup>Aram Vartanian, “Democracy, Religion, and the Enlightenment,” *The Humanist* 51, no. 6 (Nov./Dec. 1991) : 9, and May, 54.

<sup>15</sup>James M. Byrne, *Religion and the Enlightenment: From Descartes to Kant* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996), 7-8, and Edwin S. Gaustad, *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1996), 25.

<sup>16</sup>Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation, The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1967), 18, and Noah Webster, “The Revolution in France,” in *Political Sermons of the American Founding Era 1730-1805*, ed. Ellis Sandoz (Indianapolis: Liberty Press, 1991), 1251.

<sup>17</sup>Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, 6; Allan Arkush, “Voltaire on Judaism and Christianity,” *AJS Review* 18, no. 2 (1993) : 223, 225; Byrne, 2, 22; Ernest Cassara, *The Enlightenment in America* (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1975), 33; Arthur M. Melzer, “The Origin of the Counter-Enlightenment: Rousseau and the New Religion of Sincerity,” *American Political Science Review* 90, no. 2 (June 1996), 1, 17 [online]; available: Information Access Company (InfoTrac) File: Expanded Academic ASAP.

species of Atheism.”<sup>18</sup> Tocqueville, in his study of the French Revolution, *L’Ancien regime et la revolution*, noted that “among the many passions inflamed by it the first to be kindled and last to be extinguished was of an anti-religious nature.”<sup>19</sup> Historians have focused in their turn on many different aspects of the Enlightenment in the anti-religious context, including the philosophic denigration of man from godly creation to machine, as in Julien de la Mettrie’s *L’homme machine*, and the similar categorical declension from the study of “God and Man” and “God and Nature” to “Nature and Man” with the latter being placed at the center of the philosophic universe and God being relegated to the outer limits of abstraction. Another prominent focus is the Enlightenment’s deleterious effects upon Biblical authenticity and authority, a result of being lumped together with the mythological creation stories of “primitive people.”<sup>20</sup>

Taking the results of this French analysis, historians intent on conducting a similar eradication of religion from America’s founding history often infer them on American soil as well. The Revolution is considered the conclusory event in the “weakening of popular interest in theology and a decline in clerical leadership.”<sup>21</sup>

Edmund Morgan assumes that “in 1740 America’s leading intellectuals were clergymen and thought about theology; in 1790 they were statesmen and thought about politics.”<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup>Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, in *The Complete Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: The Citadel Press, 1945), 464-65, 486-87, 600.

<sup>19</sup>Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, 5, 155-56.

<sup>20</sup>Henry Steele Commager, *The Empire of Reason: How Europe Imagined and America Realized the Enlightenment* (Garden City: Anchor Press, 1977), 42-3, 71, 119; Leigh Eric Schmidt, *Hearing Things: Religion, Illusion, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000), 84; Gordon M. Sayre, *Les Sauvages Americains: Representations of Native Americans in French and English Colonial Literature* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1997), 200.

<sup>21</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, “The Revolutionary Era as an Age of Politics,” in Howe, 12, and Howe, 3.

<sup>22</sup>Morgan, “The Revolutionary Era,” 10.

Mark Noll chronicles the inability of the Great Awakening to invigorate or replace Puritanism and concludes, in affirmation of Morgan's analysis, that the revivalistic movement "was more successful at ending Puritanism than inaugurating evangelicalism."<sup>23</sup> John Wilson goes so far as to consider revolution itself as fundamentally discordant with religion, and Jon Butler refers to the American one as "a profoundly secular event" whose causes "placed religious concerns more at its margins than at its center."<sup>24</sup> Aram Vartanian, writing for *The Humanist*, asserts that democracy everywhere owes its success to the "ideas and legacy of the Enlightenment—not to those of any particular faith."<sup>25</sup>

More specifically, the Founders' governmental separation of church and state merely signifies to Peter Gay a "bolder play of the critical spirit" than could be unleashed prior to the Enlightenment's dawning while congressional proclamations of fasting and prayer days along with revolutionary sermons are "form[s] of deliberate propaganda by which revolutionary ideas were fobbed off on an unsuspecting populace" badly in need of some form of unification.<sup>26</sup> Franklin's moving and religious Convention speech is passed off as either pretentious and sanctimonious or simply as useless since the motion was tabled and never reintroduced. Building upon the very real contemporary consternation of Anti-Federalists pouring out of Massachusetts, New Hampshire, North Carolina, and

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<sup>23</sup>Mark A. Noll, "Evangelicals in the American Founding and Evangelical Political Mobilization Today," in Hutson, 147-48.

<sup>24</sup>John F. Wilson, "Religion and Revolution in American History," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 23, no. 3 (Winter 1993) : 598, and Jon Butler, *Awash in a Sea of Faith: Christianizing the American People* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 195.

<sup>25</sup>Vartanian, 11.

<sup>26</sup>Gay, "Enlightenment Thought," 44; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, vii; Miller, 35.

Maryland over the lack of Constitutional reference to God, some historians construe this as palpable proof of the Founders' abrogation of religious belief, and the references to God in the Declaration of Independence are belittled as allusions to an Enlightenment cosmic force as opposed to the vibrant Christian deity.<sup>27</sup> The faith of the Founders themselves is, of course, tediously examined, and Thomas Jefferson's and John Adams's vitriolic denunciations of John Calvin as "an atheist" and "his religion [as] daemonism" provide ample fodder for those of C. Bradley Thompson's persuasion interested in equating rejection of Calvinist theology with a whole-hearted endorsement of "modern philosophic rationalism" and all that that entails.<sup>28</sup> Silence reaps no reprieve either. The fact that James Madison is largely "silen[t] on spiritual matters" invites wide suppositional latitude from anti-religious historians eager to construe that silence as consent to their opinions.<sup>29</sup>

Struggling back against this secular reading of the American Founders are those determined to retain religion at the helm of the republic. Contrary to Edmund Morgan's belief that religion declined as the Revolution approached, to Patricia Bonomi this "same era presents itself as one of rising vitality in religious life, an era not of decline but the

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<sup>27</sup>Noll, 138, 147; Isaac Kramnick, "The 'Great National Discussion': The Discourse of Politics in 1787," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 45, no. 1 (Jan. 1988) : 10-11; Isaac Kramnick and R. Laurence Moore, *The Godless Constitution: The Case Against Religious Correctness* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 27, 32, 35-6; Botein, 325; Saul Cornell, *The Other Founders: Anti-Federalism and the Dissenting Tradition in America 1788-1828* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 57; Butler, *Awash*, 196.

<sup>28</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to John Adams, 11 April 1823, in *The Life and Selected Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Random House, 1993), 644; C. Bradley Thompson, "Young John Adams and the New Philosophic Rationalism," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 55, no. 2 (April 1998) : 262, 264, 267; Bonomi, 103.

<sup>29</sup>John G. West, Jr., *The Politics of Revelation and Reason: Religion and Civic Life in the New Nation* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1996), 67.

reverse – of proliferation and growth.”<sup>30</sup> Carl Bridenbaugh, in fact, calls religion the “fundamental cause of the American Revolution,” and new church attendance statistics are used to verify that, contrary to older estimates of 5 to 20 percent, at least 60 percent of white Americans during the 1700-1776 period regularly attended church.<sup>31</sup> Harry Stout also focuses on the broad and staunch religious base undergirding the Founders while Michael Novak turns his attention back to the Founders themselves and their governmental separation of church and state, denying that they intended by the division “to confine religion to the narrow sphere of private conscience, thus to set it on the path to extinction.”<sup>32</sup>

The Constitution is also reinvested with religious significance. Denying that it was the construction of “an irreligious cabal,” Stephen Botein postures the Constitution’s silence concerning God as an attempt “to forestall criticism from sectarians” terrified of being religiously oppressed.<sup>33</sup> John Patrick Diggins mines yet deeper into the Constitution’s significance, resurrecting Abraham Lincoln’s understanding of it as a mere outline of government’s mechanisms—“the picture of silver”—while the Declaration of Independence, with its overt references to God, embodies the true ideals and heart of the

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<sup>30</sup>Bonomi, 6.

<sup>31</sup>Carl Bridenbaugh, *Mitre and Sceptre: Transatlantic Faiths, Ideas, Personalities, and Politics, 1689-1775* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), xiii-xiv; Novak, 162; Bonomi, 220. Tocqueville’s observations strongly support Bridenbaugh’s assertion of religion as the cause of the Revolution. Tocqueville was adamant that religion had originally birthed the American colonies and that, because of that parenthood, “religion is mingled with all the national customs and all those feelings which the word fatherland evokes.” Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 432.

<sup>32</sup>Harry S. Stout, “Religion, Communications, and the Ideological Origins of the American Revolution,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Oct. 1977) : 520, and Novak, 163.

<sup>33</sup>Botein, 320-21.



nation and is “the apple of gold.”<sup>34</sup> Edwin Gaustad, also in an attempt to rescue the Constitution, unearths what he considers “the first real history of religion in the United States,” an 1844 book by Robert Baird entitled *Religion in America; or, An Account of the Origin, Relation to the State, and Present Condition of the Evangelical Churches in the United States*, in which Baird explains the Constitution’s silence as an understood religiousness. In his words, the Constitution was not written “for a people that had no religion” but instead “for a people already Christian.”<sup>35</sup> Perry Miller and James Byrne both conceive of the entire governmental system, with all of its “natural-rights philosophy” and “political rationalism,” as resting upon a religious frame—“indebted to a religious world-view.”<sup>36</sup>

Concerning the Founders’ personal religious lives, these historians give special notice to the evangelical John Witherspoon, the fervent “last of the Puritans” Samuel Adams, the faithful George Washington, the Baptist Robert Carter, and the Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson who wished the Great Seal to represent either the parting of the Red Sea or the pillar of smoke leading the children of Israel into the Promised Land.<sup>37</sup> Even John Adams, despite his vocal renunciation of Calvinism, never freed

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<sup>34</sup>John Patrick Diggins, *The Lost Soul of American Politics: Virtue, Self-Interest, and the Foundations of Liberalism* (New York: Basic Books, 1984), 7.

<sup>35</sup>Gaustad, 216-17.

<sup>36</sup>Miller, 42, and Byrne, 6-7.

<sup>37</sup>Bonomi, 100-01, 103-04; Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 530; David R. Williams, *Wilderness Lost: The Religious Origins of the American Mind* (Selinsgrove: Susquehanna University Press, 1987), 138. Thomas Jefferson apparently shared the exasperation of these historians with those people who assumed that his stand for religious liberty equated to religious absence. Frustrated, he wrote to John Adams to complain that “they wish it to be believed that he can have no religion who advocates its freedom.” Thomas Jefferson, to John Adams, 15 June 1813; quoted in Ellis Sandoz, *A Government of Laws: Political Theory, Religion, and the American Founding* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1990), 122.

himself of it entirely, and, as if in defiance of those who would conflate his castigation of Calvinism with Thomas Paine's vituperation of Christianity, he writes of Paine:

He understood neither government nor religion. From a malignant heart he wrote virulent declamations . . . . His billingsgate . . . will never discredit Christianity, which will hold its ground in some degree as long as human nature shall have anything moral or intellectual left in it. The Christian religion, as I understand it, is the brightness of the glory and the express portrait of the character of the eternal, self-existent, independent, benevolent, all powerful and all merciful creator, preserver, and father of the universe, the first good, first perfect, and first fair. It will last as long as the world. Neither savage nor civilized man, without a revelation, could ever have discovered or invented it.<sup>38</sup>

Such passionate statements would seem to stand on their own against the rising tide of skepticism and secularism. Alexis de Tocqueville's statements concerning Christianity in America also help to fend off those who would doubt its informal establishment.<sup>39</sup>

Historians desirous of maintaining a place for religion in the Founding also directly contradict those who tend toward "the Europeanizing of the American founding" and the insinuation that the Founders unreservedly absorbed all Enlightenment thought, known from the French example to be diametrically opposed to Christianity, by quickly pointing out those areas where the Founders markedly departed from the philosophies of the Enlightenment. Historian James Byrne draws connections between England and America in this regard, revealing that neither country succumbed to all of the radicalisms of the Enlightenment. For example, Louis Hartz argues that, while "the doctrine of the enlightened despot" was all the rage in lofty Voltairian circles in Europe, in America,

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<sup>38</sup>John Adams, Quincy, to Benjamin Rush, 21 January 1810, in *The Selected Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, ed. Adrienne Koch and William Peden (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1946), 156-57; Diggins, 71; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 130-31. In an even more pointed affirmation of faith in defiance of his detractors, Adams wrote his wife that, despite doubts concerning the future of America, "I must submit all my hopes and fears to an overruling Providence, in which, unfashionable as the faith may be, I firmly believe." John Adams, to Abigail Adams, 3 July 1776, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 59-60.

<sup>39</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 432. See note 31 above.

men like Jefferson bitterly opposed such a possibility.<sup>40</sup> Montesquieu, Paul Spurlin points out, was intensely criticized by the Federalists and Jefferson for his small republic theory, his belief that climate could determine the success or failure of a republic, and his “elaborate rationale for aristocratic power.”<sup>41</sup> David Hume also received his share of criticism from both Jefferson and John Adams. Jefferson libels him as a “degenerate son of science” and a “traitor to his fellow men,” lamenting the years it took for him “to eradicate the poison it [Hume’s *History of England*] had instilled into my mind.” Adams is “not often satisfied with the opinions of Hume,” especially concerning his aristocratic tendencies.<sup>42</sup> Rousseau is often not well received, and Adams blasts his ideas on savage morality as “mere chimeras.” Surprisingly perhaps, even Locke is not always in favor, with Adams condemning Locke’s Carolina Constitution as “a signal absurdity” and sarcastically querying, “Who did this legislator think would live under his government?”<sup>43</sup> Tocqueville supports this understanding of the Founders’ relationship

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<sup>40</sup>Louis Hartz, “John Locke and the Liberal Consensus,” in Howe, 54-5; Novak, 163; Byrne, 33-4; Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 342; Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 143.

<sup>41</sup>Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 21, 23, 239, 241; Charles-Louis de Secondat Montesquieu, *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. and ed. Anne M. Cohler, Basia Carolyn Miller, and Harold Samuel Stone (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 286; John Adams, Quincy, to James Madison, 22 April 1817, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 201; Thomas Jefferson, New York, to Thomas Mann Randolph, 30 May 1790, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 456; Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to Francois d’Ivernois, 6 February 1795, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 487; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 119-20; Diggins, 77; Joyce Appleby, “What Is Still American in the Political Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson?,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (April 1982) : 288.

<sup>42</sup>Douglas L. Wilson, “Jefferson vs. Hume,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (Jan. 1989) : 49, 62; John Adams, New York, to Samuel Adams, 18 October 1790, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 120; John Adams, *A Defence of the Constitutions of Government of the United States of America, Against the Attack of M. Turgot in his Letter to Dr. Price* (London: John Stockdale, Piccadilly, 1794), 1: 369-70.

<sup>43</sup>John Adams, Quincy, to Benjamin Waterhouse, 26 February 1817, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 199-200; Andrew C. McLaughlin, “Social Compact and Constitutional Construction,” *American Historical Review* 5, no. 3 (April 1900) : 470; Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 1: 365; Novak, 166; Russell Kirk, *Rights and Duties: Reflections on Our Conservative Constitution*, ed. Mitchell S. Muncy (Dallas: Spence Publishing Company, 1997), 111.

with Enlightenment philosophy as a cautious one, reminding his readers that “never has the whole American people shown such a passion for conceptions of this sort as did the French people in the eighteenth century, and they have never had such blind faith in the virtue and absolute truth of any theory.”<sup>44</sup>

Conservative historians also point out that, in addition to all of these Enlightenment ideas rejected by the Founders, many also explicitly rejected and strongly condemned the excesses and atheistic extremism they witnessed in the French Revolution, refusing to facilitate its occurrence on American soil.<sup>45</sup> John Adams and Alexander Hamilton were both outspoken in their opposition to French atheism. Adams, while cognizant of the great scientific and intellectual gifts capable of being bestowed on humanity by such men as “Voltaire, D’Alembert, Buffon, Diderot, Rousseau, La Lande, Frederic and Catherine,” lamented that their supreme lack of common sense negated much of that extractable virtue, for they had no conception of the folly of their philosophy of “atheism—pure, unadulterated atheism.” This atheism rendered “liberty . . . a word without a meaning. There was no liberty in the universe; liberty was a word void of sense . . . . Conscience [and] morality, were all nothing but fate. Why, then, should we abhor the word *God*, and fall in love with the word *fate*?” For Adams, such foolish philosophic games originated in nothing more than cowardice.<sup>46</sup> Alexander

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<sup>44</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 441.

<sup>45</sup>May, 65, and Bailyn, “Political Experience,” 343.

<sup>46</sup>John Adams, Quincy, to Thomas Jefferson, 2 March 1816, in Padover, 94-6, and Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Americans: The Colonial Experience* (New York: Random House, 1958), 153-54. Years earlier, John Adams, in a letter to Benjamin Waterhouse, had railed against the indiscretions and atheism encapsulated by the term Age of Reason and carefully separated these tares from the intellectual wheat by saying “I am willing you should call this the Age of Frivolity . . . and would not object if you had named it the Age of Folly, Vice, Frenzy, Fury, Brutality, Daemons, Buonaparte, Tom Paine, or the Age of the burning Brand from the bottomless Pit: or anything but the Age of Reason. . . . Call it then the Age of Paine. He deserves it much more than the courtesan who was consecrated to represent the goddess in the

Hamilton also denounced “the disgusting spectacle of the French revolution” with its blatant “plan to disorganize the human mind itself, as well as to undermine the venerable pillars that support the edifice of civilized society. The attempt by the rulers of a nation to destroy all religious opinion, and to pervert a whole nation to atheism, is a phenomenon of profligacy reserved to consummate the infamy of the unprincipled reformers of France.”<sup>47</sup> Louis Hartz describes this divergence as natural for Americans, for, in America unlike in Europe, religion had not been formed “into an explicit pillar of the *status quo*” which barred the way of a progressive new order.<sup>48</sup> Tocqueville, many years earlier, had made a similar assessment of the French versus American situation. The French were “obliged to declare war simultaneously on all established powers;” therefore, “it was far less as a religious faith than as a political institution that Christianity provoked these violent attacks.” In America, where there were no preexistent powers, political or religious, to clear away, the “anti-religious doctrines” of France “never made any headway.”<sup>49</sup>

## BRIDGING THE GAP

With one perspective based wholly upon Enlightenment absorption, including atheism, and the other settled upon the primacy of religion and both viewpoints

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temple at Paris. . . . The real intellectual faculty has nothing to do with the age, the strumpet, or Tom.” John Adams, Quincy, to Benjamin Waterhouse, 29 October 1805, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 148.

<sup>47</sup>Alexander Hamilton, *The Stand* (1798), in *The Works of Alexander Hamilton*, ed. John C. Hamilton (New York: Charles S. Francis & Company, 1851), 7: 650, and West, *Politics of Revelation*, 47.

<sup>48</sup>Hartz, 53.

<sup>49</sup>Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, 6-8, 153; *Ibid.*, 61; Bonomi, 220-21.

presenting evidence to support their positions, one certainly is compelled to ask if it is possible to locate the source of the Founding's ideology in either one or the other exclusively. Various historians have wrestled with this gap or paradox in different ways. Some, of course, have chosen to take evasive action and avoid the whole quandary by focusing more on the peripheries around it, writing as if this Gordian knot did not exist. For example, Bernard Bailyn takes a completely indifferent tact and centers the bulk of his research around the influence of "early eighteenth-century radical publicists and opposition politicians in England" on the Founders, discussing their integration of the "peculiar strain of anti-authoritarianism bred in the upheaval of the English Civil War" into their governmental philosophies.<sup>50</sup> Jon Butler also sidetracks by examining, not religion's role in the Revolution or Founding, but the effect of those occurrences on American religion. Others have become immersed in banal criticism, content to expound on the physical or intellectual lack of various Founders. Progressive historians like Charles Beard and Merrill Jenson have ignored the Enlightenment-religion controversy in the interest of presenting a picture of class struggle between "mercantile or aristocratic interest groups" and "agrarian or democratic groups."<sup>51</sup> While all are certainly valid

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<sup>50</sup>Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, viii; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 100; Ralph Lerner, "The Constitution of the Thinking Revolutionary," in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, eds. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 45.

<sup>51</sup>William E. Nelson, "Reason and Compromise in the Establishment of the Federal Constitution, 1787-1801," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 44, no. 3 (July 1987) : 458; Butler, *Awash*, 2, 223-24; Forrest McDonald, *E Pluribus Unum: The Formation of the American Republic 1776-1790* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 157. It is this Progressive position on class struggle and economics as the cause of the Revolution that "republican synthesis" historians like Bernard Bailyn, Gordon Wood, and J. G. A. Pocock primarily oppose, supplanting economic theories on the Revolution with ideological ones. Their investigation of the tradition of republicanism and Whig anti-authoritarianism in America, while important, skirts religion as a revolutionary factor and is therefore tangential to the scope of this thesis.

areas of exploration, they do not touch the heart of the debate over Enlightenment or religion.

Other historians, recognizing the apparent tension between and yet compelling arguments for the presence of both religion and Enlightenment philosophy, have sought to ameliorate the situation, making tentative coexistence a possibility. Donald Lutz, Isaac Kramnick, and Ellis Sandoz all warn against the “unfortunate tendency . . . to identify a single source as dominant.”<sup>52</sup> Lutz, by examining the textual records of the Founders and documenting their ideological references, has concluded that both religion and Enlightenment philosophy are represented in fairly equal proportions. However, Kramnick, while recognizing the coeval nature of the “languages of republicanism, of Lockean liberalism, of work-ethic Protestantism,” still seems to regard reason and religion as ultimately irreconcilable enemies necessarily kept carefully apart, thus his emphasis on a “godless Constitution” and denial of the Founders’ entreaty of “divine direction in reaching policy decisions” despite their religious beliefs.<sup>53</sup> Historians like John Howe, Daniel Boorstin, and, to some extent, Bernard Bailyn have managed to rectify the two by subtly, or perhaps not so subtly in the case of Boorstin, eliminating the prevalence of the Enlightenment. Boorstin argues that those ideas in America “which at first sight look like the conclusions of the European ‘Enlightenment’” are in reality the product of the progress of American institutions begun without enlightened help and necessitated by “the circumstances of life in a wilderness environment.”<sup>54</sup> In fact, the

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<sup>52</sup>Lutz, 190; Kramnick, “Great National,” 4; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 23.

<sup>53</sup>Kramnick, “Great National,” 4; Kramnick and Moore, 12; Lutz, 192.

<sup>54</sup>Boorstin, 158; Howe, 2; Bailyn, “Political Experience,” 345-46, 348-49.

circumspect occlusion of the influence of either the Enlightenment or religion is a common technique among those attempting to explain their simultaneous American presence. Henry May, for example, explains this binary existence in terms of upper class versus lower class penetration. While the Enlightenment suffused the upper classes, it was too weak to spread with authority to the “agrarian majority” who consequently retained their Protestant religiosity. Additionally, May and historian James Perkins argue that the most radical of the Enlightenment works, French ones, were slow in reaching America and were little regarded upon their eventual arrival.<sup>55</sup> Such theories allow for coexistence without religion being overwhelmed by the full force of reason’s onslaught; natural opposition is tempered by assorted mitigating factors.

Not content with such technical vacillations, some historians have firmly declared there to be no inherent contest between the reason of Enlightenment philosophy and religion. John Patrick Diggins blames the emergence of the conflict thesis on Progressivism’s concurrent equation of “liberalism” with “reason, freedom, and moral progress” and contention that “Calvinism” merely “sought to terrify man with irrationality, predestination, and human depravity.” For Diggins, “the distinction is less a difference of ideas than of images.”<sup>56</sup> Craig Hazen roots the idea of reason/religion conflict in an 1873 book by John W. Draper titled *The History of the Conflict between Religion and Science*, arguing that, before this publication, reason and religion were not viewed in terms of mutual exclusivity. To some extent, the appearance of conflict may

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<sup>55</sup>May, xviii, 41; Craig James Hazen, *The Village Enlightenment in America: Popular Religion and Science in the Nineteenth-Century* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2000), 6; Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 7.

<sup>56</sup>Diggins, 8.



also arise because definitions of the Enlightenment are far too narrow, thus forcing reason into a box with atheism. Even historians like Peter Gay and Henry May admit that “no definition of the Enlightenment fits all the men usually assumed to belong to it.”<sup>57</sup>

Regardless of the source though, these historians all agree that conflict between reason and religion is not necessarily existent and that the Founders employed them in a harmonious manner. Theodore Dwight Bozeman asserts that, in America, “science *and* religion . . . were harmonious enterprises cooperating toward the same ultimate ends,”

and Patricia Bonomi agrees that “evangelical Calvinism and religious rationalism did not carve separate channels but flowed as one stream toward the crisis of 1776.”<sup>58</sup> Other

historians like Louis Hartz and Saul Padover also oppose the opinion that religion and reason are “somehow antithetical,” inevitably following Alexis de Tocqueville’s lead.<sup>59</sup>

While many philosophes believed that religion would gradually die by the hand of reason spreading freedom in its wake, Tocqueville found it “tiresome that the facts do not fit this theory at all . . . . In France I had seen the spirits of religion and of freedom almost always marching in opposite directions. In America I found them intimately linked together in joint reign over the same land.”<sup>60</sup>

Despite all of this concurrence among some historians concerning the lack of conflict between religion and reason, there has been but meager coverage of the consensus that must implicitly fill the vacuum in the absence of conflict. None have

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<sup>57</sup>May, xiii; Hazen, 1; Gay, “Enlightenment Thought,” 45; Paul A. Rahe, “Thomas Jefferson’s Machiavellian Political Science,” *The Review of Politics* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1995): 451.

<sup>58</sup>Hazen, 2, and Bonomi, 188.

<sup>59</sup>Adrienne Koch, *Power, Morals, and the Founding Fathers: Essays in the Interpretation of the American Enlightenment* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1961), 5; Hartz, 56; Padover, 41-2.

<sup>60</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 295.

broached either a detailed explication of the areas of synchronization between religion and reason or an explanation of how the Founders employed this union of ideas in their structuring of a governmental system in America. The intention of this project is to open these largely unexplored areas to inquiry and to offer the conclusions of this author's research in partial repletion of the investigative void. While by no means intended as an exhaustive combing of ideological agreement, this study will begin by delving into the synchronic understanding of reason and religion among British Enlightenment philosophers and then trace the transportation of this understanding to America. Going beyond this simple synthesis of ideas, the centrality of religion's role in, first, the Revolution and, then, the Republic and its absolute necessity to the proper working of the Founders' Enlightened governmental machine will emerge as key to ultimately understanding the intricacies of American republicanism in both the eighteenth century and today.

## CHAPTER II

### SYNCHRONIZING RELIGION AND THE ENLIGHTENMENT

The possibility that most Americans followed Europe's example in supplanting religion, specifically Christianity, with the rational atheism of the Enlightenment has been a topic much investigated by historians. Unfortunately, their attempts to trace the influence of European ideas on the fledging New World colonies have largely remained scrupulously narrowed to the above dichotomy, rarely considering that the bulk of European influence may have consisted in harmonization rather than eradication. In fact, long before the wave of scientific phenomena discovered by Newton and enlightened governmental principles expounded by Locke and Montesquieu crashed full force on the American shore, European philosophers were working to harmonize these new radical ideas with the pre-existent religious ones. Perhaps as a result of this labor, when the enlightened wave did pour into America's harbors, it did not wash religion out to sea. Building upon the efforts of European philosophers, particularly those of the British triad of Newton, Locke, and Blackstone, many Americans quickly took up the task of assimilating enlightened and religious ideas. The American clergy in particular found this a worthwhile pursuit and their morphing theological constructs and religious movements like the Great Awakening exemplify the success of their endeavors. The fluidity between religion and reason bred even more than religious alterations though; it brought political ones in the form of Revolution as well. Enlightenment philosophy did not provoke the break with England alone, for religious ideology combined with it and, in fact, became the driving force, the fuel and fortification for the political push, without

which the effort would have collapsed. This combination of religion and reason, with the indispensability of religion being paramount, was repeated again in the Founders' efforts to erect a government for America. Like the Revolution, the Republic was a reasonable machine with religion at the heart, pumping the lifeblood.

## IN EUROPE

While scientific discovery and emphasis on the use of reason reached an intensity in the mid-eighteenth century, even Thomas Paine, often castigated as “a filthy little atheist,” hypothesized that this Age of Reason could never have been inaugurated had not religion in the form of the Reformation severed “the first link in [the] long chain of despotic ignorance” binding the European world.<sup>1</sup> The Reformation wind of religious freedom carried in its wake the liberty to explore scientific and philosophic spheres forbidden under the previous establishment. Indeed, by the mid-eighteenth century, Protestantism and enlightened philosophy had journeyed a long and hospitable road together. In 1688, they had colluded to erect a “great milestone” in the form of the Glorious Revolution and, consequently, had since appeared to the world as “two faces of the same happy history.”<sup>2</sup>

Reason's coming of age in the eighteenth century by no means marked the end of its congenial relationship with religion, particularly Protestantism, despite the anti-

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<sup>1</sup>Eric Foner, “Tom Paine's Republic: Radical Ideology and Social Change,” in *The American Revolution: Explorations in the History of American Radicalism*, ed. Alfred F. Young (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1976), 460, 462, and Paine, *Age of Reason*, 495.

<sup>2</sup>May, 3. The Glorious Revolution and the advent of William Prince of Orange and Mary Stuart to the throne of England inaugurated a new English world in which the Declaration of Rights (1689) set guidelines for a new, wholesome constitutional monarchy and the Toleration Act (1689) secured freedom for Protestants.

religious hue and cry wafting into the heavens from the general direction of France. The French may have been the “propagandists of the Enlightenment” movement, but they were not its backbone. According to Enlightenment historian Peter Gay, the British philosophers, namely Newton, Bacon, and Locke, were the “patron saints and pioneers” of the Enlightenment, the “colossi” whose gigantic shoulders formed the foundation upon which the Montesquieus, Voltaires, and Rousseaus built their philosophic castles.<sup>3</sup> While eighteenth-century Americans like James Madison typically demoted Bacon to the level of Montesquieu, they too exalted Newton and Locke as the progenitors of “immortal systems, the one in matter, the other in mind.”<sup>4</sup> These two enlightened giants, like many other philosophers perhaps too reticent to admit so boldly, “found much to cherish in the existing order,” including religion, and set about to preserve the precious.<sup>5</sup>

Isaac Newton, without doubt the greatest scientist of the late-seventeenth century, paved the way for the general application of reason to all situations in the eighteenth century through his use of it in discovering the universal laws of matter and mechanics of the universe. Though many later philosophes, intent on promoting Reason to a heavenly throne, used these laws to demonstrate that God was essentially unnecessary for the continued working of the universe and that belief in his providential intervention was incompatible with such a mechanistic view, Newton himself clung tenaciously to his faith in God, denying that any incompatibility existed between the rational laws of nature he had observed and his God. He maintained that only the God he believed in could have

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 5, and Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 11-12.

<sup>4</sup>James Madison, “Spirit of Governments,” in *James Madison: Writings*, ed. Jack N. Rakove (New York: The Library of America, 1999), 510, and Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 36, 241.

<sup>5</sup>Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 25.

created the wonderfully complex and yet highly organized and rational system that he had discovered in nature.<sup>6</sup> Far from detracting from his faith in God, Newton's discoveries through the application of reason served instead to further convince him of God's presence and the truth of the Scriptures. He spent the remainder of his life "unraveling Biblical prophecies" and validating the Bible as truth compatible with that discoverable through reason.<sup>7</sup>

John Locke, the second giant from whose theories of government and the human mind the Enlightenment also drew strength, was equally insistent upon the compatibility of the use of reason and faith in God and dedicated to the protection of the latter. In 1695, he even published a book entitled *The Reasonableness of Christianity* to defend Christianity and illustrate the blending of the two seemingly oppositional concepts.<sup>8</sup> However, Locke did not confine this view to just this one work. The belief that reason and revelation both had their source in God underpinned all his writings, even those primarily concerned with the human mind and politics. Locke explains throughout his writings that, while revelation is a direct word from the mouth of God, reason is a gift from God designed specifically to help men "make use of [the world] to the best advantage of life and convenience."<sup>9</sup> According to Locke, reason and revelation are really the same thing approached from different perspectives. Reason is merely "natural

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<sup>6</sup>John E. Van de Wetering, "God, Science, and the Puritan Dilemma," *The New England Quarterly* 38 (1965) : 496, and May, 5.

<sup>7</sup>Morgan, "Revolutionary Era," 13, and Byrne, 154-55.

<sup>8</sup>Kirk, 99-100; Joshua Mitchell, *Not by Reason Alone: Religion, History, and Identity in Early Modern Political Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 73; John Locke, *The Reasonableness of Christianity*, ed. I. T. Ramsey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 76-7; Morton White, *Philosophy, The Federalist, and the Constitution* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 215; Byrne, 105.

<sup>9</sup>John Locke, *The Second Treatise on Civil Government* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1986), 19.

revelation, whereby the eternal father of light, and fountain of all knowledge, communicates to mankind that portion of truth which he had laid within the reach of their natural faculties.”<sup>10</sup> If reason is “natural revelation,” revelation, in turn, is simply “natural reason enlarged by a new set of discoveries communicated by God immediately.”<sup>11</sup>

Whether approached directly through revelation or indirectly, yet more accessibly to men, through reason, there was only one law, “the law of God and Nature,” according to Locke. Essentially, it matters not whether one approaches truth through revelation or reason since the end result is the same.<sup>12</sup> As an example, Locke took the conclusion that the earth belongs to mankind. One could establish this truth through reason, “which tells us that men, being once born, have a right to their preservation, and consequently to meat and drink and such other things as Nature affords for their subsistence,” or through the revelation of the Bible, “which gives us an account of those grants God made of the world to Adam, and to Noah and his sons.”<sup>13</sup> Locke believed that, while true revelation and reason would always agree because God was the source of both, it was often difficult to tell whether something perceived as revelation truly was such. Because of this problem in establishing revelation’s validity, Locke considered reason, in its natural realm of discoverability, to be supreme; nothing believed to be revelation could “be

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<sup>10</sup>John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Chicago: Henry Regnery Company, 1956), 359.

<sup>11</sup>*Ibid.*, and Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 376-77.

<sup>12</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 75,79, and Locke, *Human Understanding*, 348-49.

<sup>13</sup>As another example, Locke explained that, not only did reason establish that “shaking off a power which force, and not right, hath set over any one” was acceptable, but Biblical example supported the position as well. For “notwithstanding whatever title the kings of Assyria had over Judah, by the sword, God assisted Hezekiah to throw off the dominion of that conquering empire.” Locke, *Second Treatise*, 19, 106-07.

admitted against the clear evidence of reason.”<sup>14</sup> This was why reason often seemed to be the central focus of mankind. However, reason was limited, and mankind must rely upon revelation alone in those areas “beyond the discovery of our natural faculties, and above reason” which are “purely matters of faith; with which reason has directly nothing to do.”<sup>15</sup>

Scientists and philosophers such as Isaac Newton and John Locke were not the only British purveyors of Enlightenment philosophy to insist upon religion and reason’s complicity and simultaneous efficacy. Great legal scholars, such as the highly influential William Blackstone, also conveyed this message. During the 1780’s in America, Montesquieu was the only Enlightenment figure or writer quoted more than Blackstone by the Founding Fathers. Blackstone himself based much of his legal analysis on Locke’s foundational writings, so, although the Founders certainly quoted Locke directly in any number of instances, Blackstone further extended “Locke’s visibility indirectly.”<sup>16</sup> In fact, Blackstone’s exposition on the laws of nature and revelation bears more than coincidental similarity to Locke’s analysis of the same subject. Blackstone too viewed the law of nature and the will of God as one and the same thing. He spoke of the law of nature as “being co-eval with mankind and dictated by God himself.”<sup>17</sup> As such, this law “is binding over all the globe, in all countries, and at all times: no human laws are of any validity, if contrary to this; and such of them as are valid derive all their force, and all

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<sup>14</sup>Locke, *Human Understanding*, 350.

<sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, 353.

<sup>16</sup>Lutz, 193.

<sup>17</sup>William Blackstone, *Of the Rights of Persons*, vol. 1, *Commentaries on the Laws of England* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1765; reprint, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 41.



their authority, mediately or immediately, from this original.”<sup>18</sup> Blackstone asserts reason as the means provided by God through which mankind discovers and understands the law of nature. Revelation is the “benign interposition of divine providence” in the form of the Bible serving to compensate for “the frailty, the imperfection, and the blindness of human reason.” Together they serve as the basis of “all human laws.”<sup>19</sup>

Other philosophers, even those who were not British, did not see a contradiction between the tenets of reason and religion. For them, as for the Americans influenced by them and discussed below, the two were not characterized as necessarily separate systems. Ideas flowed together easily and reinforced each other. For example, Rene Descartes’s rational system of doubt was not intended to destroy Christianity but as “a heuristic device” by which “the foundations which would overcome skepticism” could be laid. Descartes’s systematic application of reason led him to conclude that God did exist for there was no other way reasonably to explain the human inner knowledge of him. That knowledge was unmistakably “the mark of a craftsman stamped on the work” of his hands.<sup>20</sup> Even Voltaire, staunch proponent of deism and arch-rival to Christianity that he was, was not fool enough to deny the existence of God altogether. He too admitted that reason located its source in God who had given it to men much as he had “given feathers to birds and furs to bears.”<sup>21</sup> In his turn, David Hume limited reason to “the discovery of truth or falsehood” based upon observable facts. Whatever could not be scrutinized upon

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<sup>18</sup>Ibid., and Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 116.

<sup>19</sup>Blackstone, 41-2; R. A. Humphreys, “The Rule of Law and the American Revolution,” in Howe, 22; Novak, 168.

<sup>20</sup>Byrne, 57, 61-2.

<sup>21</sup>Commager, 40, and Arkush, 223, 227.

this basis was necessarily outside of the realm of reason and released from its sway.<sup>22</sup> Such admissions, even by men like Voltaire who totally rejected Christianity, coupled with those genuine efforts by British philosophers to fuse reason with traditional Christianity, set the stage for the marriage of reason and religion in America where the dominant religion was Protestant Christianity.

## IN AMERICA

Looking back on the eighteenth-century from the twenty-first, it is perhaps difficult for some to realize to what an extent “life was lived from cradle to grave” in the arms of religion. Religion seeped without check into every area of life, be that social, economic or political, public or private.<sup>23</sup> It was only natural that, in such a fluid environment and bolstered by the precedent already set by European philosophers, religion should flow smoothly into step with the Enlightenment. As historian Gordon Wood has noted, it was “a peculiar moment in history when all knowledge coincided, when classical antiquity, Christian theology, English empiricism, and European rationalism could all be linked . . . without any sense of incongruity.”<sup>24</sup>

Many Americans readily adopted the style of conjunction prevalent in the work of Blackstone and Locke. James Wilson, signer of the Declaration of Independence, member of the Constitutional Convention, and justice of the Supreme Court, echoed both Locke and Blackstone in his assertion that “law, natural or revealed, made for men or for

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<sup>22</sup>David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, ed. L. A. Selby-Bigge (London: White-Hart, 1739; reprint, Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1958), 458.

<sup>23</sup>Byrne, ix, and Bridenbaugh, 55-6.

<sup>24</sup>Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 7.

nations, flows from the same divine source: it is the law of God.”<sup>25</sup> Reason, one means of discovering that law, was a gift from God, an “oracle given . . . by heaven,” controlling within its limits.<sup>26</sup> John Adams unequivocally told Thomas Jefferson that “the human understanding is a revelation from its maker, which can never be disputed or doubted . . . . We can never be so certain of any prophecy, or the design of any miracle, as we are from the revelation of nature, that is, nature’s God, that two and two are equal to four.”<sup>27</sup> However, Americans concurred with their European counterparts that, while reason was undoubtedly a gift from God, it was also limited. Revelation must necessarily be taken up when reason reached its God-ordained boundaries. Almost as Locke’s mouthpiece, Benjamin Franklin, in a letter to a friend, explained that “our reasoning powers, when employed about what may have been before our existence here, or shall be after it, cannot go far, for want of history and facts. Revelation, only, can give us the necessary information.”<sup>28</sup> When revelation and reason did not appear to mesh together, Americans, like Locke, were more likely to assume that either one or the other was an invalid piece

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<sup>25</sup>West, *Politics of Revelation*, 41-3.

<sup>26</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Paris, to Peter Carr, 10 August 1787, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 400, and Novak, 172. Jefferson believed that the existence of God could be supported on the basis of reason alone, even without the added appeal of revelation, for reason also pointed back to its creator. Writing to John Adams, he stated, “I hold, (without appeal to revelation) that . . . it is impossible . . . for the human mind not to believe, that there is in all this, design, cause and effect, up to an ultimate cause, a Fabricator of all things from matter and motion . . . . So irresistible are these evidences of an intelligent and powerful Agent, that, of the infinite numbers of men who have existed through all time, they have believed, in the proposition of a million at least to unit, in the hypothesis of an eternal pre-existence of a Creator, rather than in that of a self-existent universe.” Jefferson, to John Adams, 11 April 1823, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 645.

<sup>27</sup>John Adams, Quincy, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, in Padover, 85.

<sup>28</sup>Benjamin Franklin, London, to Jane Mecom, 30 December 1770, in Sargent, 444-45; Morton White, *Science and Sentiment in America: Philosophical Thought from Jonathan Edwards to John Dewey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), 65; Cassara, 16; Locke, *Human Understanding*, 346; James Wilson, *The Works of the Honourable James Wilson*, in *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, ed. Page Smith (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 193, 199.

rather than to conclude that the two were incompatible. For, as the Rev. Samuel West explained to his congregation, “a revelation, pretending to be from God, that contradicts any part of natural law, ought immediately to be rejected as an imposture; for Deity cannot make a law contrary to the law of nature without acting contrary to himself.”<sup>29</sup> Reason and revelation must always agree.

For most Americans, reason and revelation were intimately connected and should not, even if possible, be separated. As the object of both was to discern the will of God, James Wilson explained, the information drawn from reason and revelation “ought not to run in unconnected and diminished channels: it should flow in one united stream, which, by its combined force and just direction, will impel us uniformly and effectually toward our greatest good.”<sup>30</sup> In truth, Americans could seldom think of one without the other. Their speech was full of such phrases as “the will of God and nature,” “principles of liberty and Christianity,” and “the law of God and nature.”<sup>31</sup> John Locke and the Bible often appeared as authorities on the same subject, and allusions to reason and religion were frequently used in concert. For example, Thomas Jefferson, in picturing the downtrodden state of the European populace, could not help but summon the image of Voltaire’s hammer and anvil alongside the “crowds of the damned” beneath the throne of God. When it came to the ultimate question of “whether authority is from nature and

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<sup>29</sup>Samuel West, sermon preached in Boston on 29 May 1776; quoted in Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 144; Hazen, 3; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 30.

<sup>30</sup>West, *Politics of Revelation*, 44; Wilson, *Honourable James Wilson*, in Smith, 193; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 8.

<sup>31</sup>Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, to Miss E. Hubbard, 23 February 1756, in Sargent, 418; Benjamin Rush, *To the Citizens of Philadelphia* (28 March 1787), in Padover, 439-40; James Otis, *The Rights of the British Colonies Asserted and Proved*, in *Colonies to Nation: 1763-1789*, ed. Jack P. Greene (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), 28; Commager, 72; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 39.

reason, or from miraculous revelation,” Americans resoundingly answered in the affirmative on both counts.<sup>32</sup>

The understanding of the linkage of reason and revelation, acquired in part through the philosophy of Locke and Blackstone, evolved in unique ways once it gained a firm foothold on American soil. Unlike in Europe, where it was primarily philosophers attempting to forge the links between reason and religion, in America, many of the Protestant clergy took an active role in merging the two together. After all, it was they who understood, perhaps better than any layperson, that it was the divorce of reason from religion that generated the lunacy of heresy and enthusiasm within religion. The hysterics and emotional upsurge of the Great Awakening of the 1740's presented a ready example for those stressing the imperative convergence of reason and religion.<sup>33</sup> It was through the infusion of reason into religion that some clergy hoped not only to heal breaches and correct errors but to discover advances in theology and new methods of applying that theology to the world in which they lived.<sup>34</sup> Accordingly, in sermon after sermon, especially in the post-Awakening years, the clergy integrated the key concept of reason. Whether it was Charles Chauncy conflating “the voice of reason” with the “voice of God,” George Whitefield expounding on Jesus Christ as “the Word, the Aoyos the

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<sup>32</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Paris, to Charles Bellini, 30 September 1785, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 355; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 134; John Adams, Philadelphia, to F. A. Vanderkemp, 13 July 1815, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 192.

<sup>33</sup>Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 325, and Richard L. Bushman, *From Puritan to Yankee: Character and the Social Order in Connecticut, 1690-1765* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1970), 200-01. The religious community's role in combining reason and revelation was still visible in 1812. The *Halcyon Luminary and Theological Repository*, a New York magazine, informed its readership that “natural and scientific proofs, so far from being incompatible with theology, are absolutely necessary to constitute a well-informed mind.” John Corrigan, “‘Habits from the Heart’: The American Enlightenment and Religious Ideas about Emotion and Habit,” *The Journal of Religion* 73, no. 2 (April 1993) : 190.

<sup>34</sup>Bridenbaugh, 16; Bushman, 181; Hazen, 8-9; Boorstin, 5; John Adams, *Dissertation on the Canon and the Feudal Law*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 16.

Reason,” or Samuel McClintock citing “the being and providence of GOD” as “conformable to the light of nature and reason,” the clergy, sermon by sermon, systematically eliminated any lingering doubts there might be in the heart of America about the inherent compatibility of reason and, in particular, the Christian religion.<sup>35</sup>

Newtonian science especially opened up a whole new world of theological potential for America’s clergy, particularly New England’s Congregationalists. Many were simply thrilled at the opportunity reason and science now afforded them for better understanding and observing first-hand the marvelous workings of God’s universe. Like the Quaker, John Bartram, who excitedly “exclaimed, ‘Through the telescope I see God in his glory,’” many clergyman were awed by the magnificence of God to which reason had opened their eyes.<sup>36</sup> Reason and science were providing proofs of God’s existence for the entire world to see, and men like the Rev. William Smith, the Provost of the College of Philadelphia, were anxious to support the effort to the utmost of their ability. Newton’s discoveries also promised the possibility of better comprehending Biblical miracles. Just as Newton eagerly applied himself to the task of explicating them, so too did the American ministry.<sup>37</sup> But, on a much deeper theological level, Newtonian science also presented the prospect of discovering a link “between natural and moral law,” proof that certain phenomena in nature were intended as messages concerning the moral

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<sup>35</sup>Charles Chauncy, “Civil Magistrates Must Be Just, Ruling in the Fear of God” (sermon preached in Boston in 1747), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 143; Cassara, 137; George Whitefield, “Britain’s Mercies, and Britain’s Duties” (sermon preached in Boston in 1746), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 134; Samuel McClintock, “A Sermon on Occasion of the Commencement of the New-Hampshire Constitution” (sermon preached in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1784), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 793.

<sup>36</sup>Cassara, 50, and Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 13.

<sup>37</sup>Van de Wetering, 496; McClintock, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 797; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 8; Gaustad, 36; Cassara 58-9; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 12-13; May 48.

behavior of mankind. Thus, rain could mean that God wished to bless his people while lightening and earthquakes could both illustrate and exercise the wrath of God against a disobedient people.<sup>38</sup>

Just as Newton's enlightened explorations of the natural world provided opportunities for theological innovations by the American clergy, so also did Locke's research into the recesses of the human mind. Jonathan Edwards (1703-58), a Congregational minister probably most well known for his role in the Great Awakening of the 1740's, was at the forefront of the clerical attempt to bring "the new science and the ancient regeneration together in a exhilarating union" and authored several books, *Original Sin*, *The Nature of True Virtue*, and *Freedom of the Will*, through which he explored their relationship.<sup>39</sup> Because of his irrevocable belief in the Puritan doctrines of predestination and irresistible grace, Enlightenment historians have often viewed Edwards as a potential innovator who was unfortunately "crippled by his Puritan heritage."<sup>40</sup> Such caricatures miss the essence of Edwards's intentions and conceal his synthesis of Locke's philosophy of human understanding with Puritan theology. Edwards was fascinated by Locke's explanation of the newborn human mind as a *tabula rasa*, or "white paper, void of all characters, without any ideas." According to Locke, this blank mind came to be "furnished" through contemplation of "external sensible objects" and internal reflection upon experiences and the workings of the mind itself.<sup>41</sup> Edwards seized upon this as an intersection with Calvinism's denial of a free will in

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<sup>38</sup>Van de Wetering, 498-99, and Schmidt, 123.

<sup>39</sup>Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 94, 99.

<sup>40</sup>*Ibid.*, 94.

<sup>41</sup>Locke, *Human Understanding*, 17-18, and White, *Science and Sentiment*, 11.

human beings, the doctrine of irresistible grace. Building on Locke's conception of human understanding, Edwards explained that, just as humans have no innate ideas of their own, so they have no free will of their own; both are controlled by external factors. The inclination towards God is the result of "a process of environmental conditioning which ultimately [is] controlled by God." Following Edwards's lead, other ministers, such as Ezra Stiles, quickly accepted Edwards's enlightened religious synthesis.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to providing vindication for doctrines such as irresistible grace, the Enlightenment also offered American ministers new ways of understanding and expressing other old theologies. For example, the Protestant doctrine of original sin soon found its counterpart in Thomas Hobbes's state of nature for men like John Witherspoon, a signer of the Declaration of Independence and the president of Princeton University, who used the two terms interchangeably in describing a position removed from God's favor. Although "original sin" and "state of nature" are not precisely analogous, both concepts represent initially wretched states from which man seeks relief and exit, from the first through entrance into the kingdom of God and from the later through entrance into society. The emphasis of both is upon the naturally reprobate and morally degenerate nature of human beings.<sup>43</sup> Just as life in a state of nature is full of "continuall feare, and danger of violent death . . . solitary, poore, nasty, brutish, and short" so too is life without the redemption of Christ's blood.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup>Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 99-100, and Bridenbaugh, 6.

<sup>43</sup>Novak, 169-70.

<sup>44</sup>Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, & Power of a Common-wealth Ecclesiasticall and Civill*, ed. C. B. MacPherson (London: Green Dragon in St. Paul's Church-yard, 1651; reprint, New York: Penguin Books, 1985), 186.



The Enlightenment also endowed American ministers, regardless of denomination, with a new framework for the delivery of their synthesized theology. Ministers like Jonathan Edwards began to employ a form of logical reasoning in the delivery of their Biblical texts. For his most famous sermon, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God,” Edwards chose Deuteronomy 32:35 as his text, explaining the phrase “*their Foot shall slide in due Time*” in logical, almost mechanical terms. He pictured the “slippery Places” where sinners walked as “declining Ground on the Edge of a Pit.” Sinners, foolishly venturing onto the precarious surface, would naturally be “left to fall as they are inclined by their own Weight.”<sup>45</sup> In some cases, ministers even used the logical construct of the Enlightenment in their sermons as a means through which to combat the excessive ungodly extremes of some philosophers. George Whitefield, preaching to a crowd in Boston, employed a logical progression to prove the irrationality of philosophers who disdained religion because of its mysteries by asking if it was “not the greatest mystery that men who pretend to reason, and call themselves philosophers, who search into the *arcana naturaen* and consequently find a mystery in every blade of grass, should yet be so irrational as to decry all mysteries in religion.”<sup>46</sup> By blending cool reason into their often fiery delivery of the Bible, ministers were able to meet both the intellectual and religious needs of their congregations. They recognized that reason provided a stable framework for organizing thought, but religious faith was ever the heart around which and for whose sake the logical frame was constructed.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup>Jonathan Edwards, “Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God” (sermon preached at Enfield on 8 July 1741. Boston: S. Kneeland and T. Green, 1741), 3-4; Deut. 32:35 KJV (King James Version); White, *Science and Sentiment*, 31.

<sup>46</sup>Whitefield, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 134.

<sup>47</sup>White, *Science and Sentiment*, 32.

Apart from the collective efforts of established denominational ministers, whether they were Congregational, Anglican, or Presbyterian, to incorporate reason and empiricism into their religion, evidenced in the fortification of old theology or the retooling of their hermeneutics, events like the revivals of the Great Awakening provided ever new situations in which to apply and combine religion and reason. The Great Awakening can accurately be described as an eruption of intensively sensory experience labeled, most often by opponents, as “enthusiasm.” Charles Chauncy described a revival in 1743 in cacophonous terms, mentioning “the Groaning, crying out, falling down and screaming”; the ‘terrible speaking’ of itinerants; the clapping and stomping, singing, roaring, and ‘hearty loud Laughter’.”<sup>48</sup> Both religious opponents and proponents of the Great Awakening soon discovered the versatile and chameleonic nature of Enlightenment ideology. As a basic structure of reasonable ideas, it could be shaped to serve many purposes and provided interested parties with the means to either condemn or justify the Great Awakening’s sensory activity.

Old Lights in New England quickly aligned themselves with Enlightenment scholars who supported their repugnance of emotional and sensory excitement. Puritans had always distrusted the senses and passions; they were like the chinks in the Christian armor, “the weak points, the permeable places of contact, danger, and profanation.”<sup>49</sup> The Scottish philosopher David Hume had warned against the dangerous human tendency to allow the passions to exert control over the reason, and the Old Lights and

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<sup>48</sup>Schmidt, 66.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., 17, 50, and May, 42.

other conservatives concurred.<sup>50</sup> Noah Webster, in fact, compared enthusiasm to superstition, maintaining that, even “if superstition and enthusiasm are not essentially the same thing, they at least produce effects, in many respects, exactly similar. They always lead men into error.”<sup>51</sup> John Locke had also briefly commented on enthusiasm, calling it a product “rising from the conceits of a warmed or overweening brain,” and denied that it had any foundation in either reason or revelation although it was dangerously powerful, exercising more control over “the persuasions and actions of men, than either of these two [reason or revelation], or both together.”<sup>52</sup> Thomas Paine succinctly, though certainly unintentionally, expressed the beliefs of the Old Lights toward enthusiasm when he voiced his own contention that “religion does not unite itself to show and noise. True religion is without either.”<sup>53</sup>

However, as strong a case as traditionalists could build against the Great Awakening’s course, supporters of the movement could also use the Enlightenment to justify its rampantly passionate nature. The cultivation of the senses did appear prominently in the writings of the Enlightenment “literati, from Shaftesbury and Voltaire to Hume and Reid.”<sup>54</sup> Locke himself had questioned whether reason, without passion or

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<sup>50</sup>Byrne, 52. Old Lights like Samuel Whittelsey often risked losing the dissenting members of their congregations who accused them of relying too heavily on rationalism and thereby lacking fervor when preaching. Bushman, 180-81, 200. However, many others besides Old Lights stressed the need to regulate the passions with reason. Abigail Adams compared “ungoverned passions” to “the boisterous ocean, which is known to produce the most terrible effects” and concluded that, while the “passions are the elements of life,” they are elements which must be controlled by reason. Abigail Adams, to John Quincy Adams, 20 March 1780, in Padover, 51-2.

<sup>51</sup>Webster, “Revolution,” in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 1254.

<sup>52</sup>Locke, *Human Understanding*, 360.

<sup>53</sup>Schmidt, 69.

<sup>54</sup>*Ibid.*, 3-5, 72.

emotion, could energize the body into action; reason informed the mind of “the possible physical consequences of actions, and the will provided volition, but it was emotion that provided the motive for action.”<sup>55</sup> If the emotions and senses were so necessary, advocates of their use in religion claimed that they could not be wrong. Various Americans writing after the zenith of the Awakening’s fervor had diminished somewhat tended to agree. Dr. Benjamin Rush, by 1789, had arrived at the conclusion that excitement of the body was necessary for the maintenance of health; thus, “one of the benefits of religion was that it excited the passions.” On the other hand, he warned that “atheism is the worst of sedatives to the understanding.”<sup>56</sup> Even John Adams acknowledged, in discussing his religious predecessors, that though they were “religious to some degree of enthusiasm . . . this can be no peculiar derogation from their character.” In fact, this enthusiasm, he goes on, “far from being a reproach to them, was greatly to their honor; for I believe it will be found universally true that no great enterprise for the honor or happiness of mankind was ever achieved without a large mixture of that noble infirmity.”<sup>57</sup>

The Great Awakening and traditional Christian theologies were not the only forums for the interaction of reason and religion afforded America. While, almost without exception, religious denominations in America integrated reason into their religious system in some form, the most extreme intermingling of reason and religion began to appear with heightened regularity in America in the late eighteenth century

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<sup>55</sup>Corrigan, 189, 199, and Diggins, 25.

<sup>56</sup>Corrigan, 185-86, and Benjamin Rush, *Three Lectures Upon Animal Life, Delivered in the University of Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: Budd and Bartram, for Thomas Dobson, 1799), 67.

<sup>57</sup>Adams, *Feudal Law*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 14-15.

despite the fierce agitation against it by hard-line Calvinists like Samuel Dunbar. This new merger, born out of a mixture of “New Testament moderation and enlightened rationalism,” became known as Deism, taking its name from the Latin *Deus* meaning simply “God.”<sup>58</sup> The term has endured flagrant stretching throughout the years in the vain attempt to compress “the myriad differences between” actual Deists “themselves, between them and certain forms of Christianity, and between them and some barely disguised forms of atheism” beneath it.<sup>59</sup>

Looking at this spectral collage, it is sometimes difficult to pinpoint, from today’s distance, what Deism was in America in the eighteenth century. It was not atheism—deists in fact considered atheism illogical—because it mandated a belief in God, yet it was not Christianity either, although many deists considered themselves as such, because it denied the existence of a Savior; it was an amalgamation of the Enlightenment and religion. In general, deists rejected as unreasonable the traditional Christian beliefs in miracles, a Savior, original sin, predestination, and present-day divine communication in favor of a belief in one God who had created the universe and who was knowable almost exclusively through that universe since he no longer communicated directly with mankind.<sup>60</sup> In a letter to Ezra Stiles in 1790, Benjamin Franklin provided an excellent description of the precepts of the reasonable religion as his statement of faith:

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<sup>58</sup>Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 13; Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 208; Bonomi, 98; Byrne, 100.

<sup>59</sup>Byrne, 100.

<sup>60</sup>Gaustad, 25, 37, 215; Bonomi, 100; Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, in Padover, 86; Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 373; Stout, 532. Many deists, especially European ones, were fiercely anti-Christian. Although some American ones like Ethan Allen and Elihu Palmer shared this hatred, such vitriol was not necessarily the rule. For example, Benjamin Franklin, a self-declared deist, not only did not harbor such resentment but professed a deferential respect for Christianity as both a religion and moral system and chose fervent Protestant ministers George Whitefield and Ezra Stiles as personal friends. Franklin, *Autobiography*, in Sargent, 203-04.

I believe in one God, Creator of the Universe. That he governs it by his Providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable Service we render to him is doing good to his other Children. That the soul of Man is immortal, and will be treated with Justice in another Life respecting its Conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental Principles of all sound Religion . . . .<sup>61</sup>

John Adams, in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, placed less stress on the duties of Deism than on its purported avenue to God. He writes that “the love of God and his creation – delight, joy, triumph, exultation in my own existence – though but an atom, a *molecule organique* in the universe – are my religion.”<sup>62</sup> Of course, not every deist’s belief system adhered strictly to the general principles described above; there were any number of varieties. For example, historian Edwin Gaustad has suggested that Thomas Jefferson would be best described as a “‘warm deist,’ or perhaps a Newtonian deist” since he rejected the idea that God had merely created the universe and now allowed it to continue to spin of its own volition without interfering. Jefferson instead believed that God maintained an active “moment by moment” role in sustaining his creation.<sup>63</sup>

Other religious systems besides Deism also developed as integrations of reason and religion. Striking a midway point between Christianity and Deism proper were the Unitarians and Universalists. Like the deists, they also typically rejected the doctrines of original sin, the Trinity, and salvation through the blood of Christ, believing instead that a loving and reasonable Father God would not be so harsh as to condemn any part of mankind to an eternity of fire and hell. However, they continued to believe in the

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<sup>61</sup>Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, to Ezra Stiles, 9 March 1790, in Padover, 144. Franklin’s *Autobiography* leaves no doubt as to his devotion to Deism. He mentions that, as a young man, he chanced to read some books declaiming deism but that “they wrought an effect on me quite contrary to what was intended by them. For the arguments of the Deists, which were quoted to be refuted, appeared to me much stronger than the refutations; in short, I soon became a thorough Deist.” Franklin, *Autobiography*, in Sargent, 166-67.

<sup>62</sup>Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 14 September 1813, in Padover, 86.

<sup>63</sup>Gaustad, 36, 143.

possibility of miracles and “maintained their faith in the Scriptures as a vehicle of revelation, insisting, however, that they could be understood correctly only if reason is applied to them.”<sup>64</sup> Unitarianism and Universalism, like Deism, appealed chiefly to a small, elite, intellectual audience who preferred a religious rationalism to the rational religiosity advocated among mainstream Christian denominations.<sup>65</sup> Whatever the mixture though, both forms represent subscription to the belief that not only could religion and reason flow together but it was unthinkable that they should not.

By the 1760s, the harmonization of religion and reason within the religious framework had reached such an extent that the merger was, for the most part, taken for granted. It was then that both began to apply a joint influence upon the American political situation. Locke’s revolutionary assertion, now enshrined in the words of the Declaration of Independence, that the security of natural rights is the purpose of all governments and that “whenever any Form of Government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the Right of the People to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new Government” became key to separation from England.<sup>66</sup> However, it was religious fervor that set the Revolutionary gears to spinning and powered the American military machine into action.

Most historians have little trouble in distinguishing the connections between the Enlightenment and the Revolution, but historian Patricia Bonomi insists that, additionally, “the connections between religion and politics are everywhere

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<sup>64</sup>Cassara, 16-17, 140-41, and Butler, *Awash*, 220.

<sup>65</sup>Butler, *Awash*, 221.

<sup>66</sup>Declaration of Independence.

discernible.”<sup>67</sup> Other onlookers, from a closer vantage point than Bonomi, also observed this trend. One British officer, after a visit to Connecticut, declared that “they are all Politicians, and they are all Scripture learnt,” while Alexis de Tocqueville, the famous eighteenth and nineteenth century political analyst, had the following comment to make:

For the Americans the ideas of Christianity and liberty are so completely mingled that it is almost impossible to get them to conceive of the one without the other . . . . In the United States, patriotism continually adds fuel to the fires of religious zeal . . . . If you talk to . . . missionaries of Christian civilization you will be surprised to hear them so often speaking of the goods of this world and to meet a politician where you expected to find a priest.<sup>68</sup>

For the colonists, the potentiality of a bishop’s establishment in America became equally as onerous as unjust taxation, for, as one minister noted in 1773, “religious liberty is so blended with civil that if one falls it is not to be expected that the other will continue.”<sup>69</sup> John Witherspoon prayed similarly that “true religion and civil liberty may be inseparable, and that the unjust attempts to destroy the one, may in the issue tend to the support and establishment of both.”<sup>70</sup> Reason and religion were constantly exhorted as the twin pillars upon which the colonial effort was supported. In 1768, another patriot asserted that “the Road of *Justice* is the Road of God; / Fear not the Issue of illicit Might, / Heaven pleads the Cause of Liberty and Right” while “*Reason* point[s] out with *Judgment* fraught, / What you *ought not to do*, and what you *ought*.”<sup>71</sup> Even Thomas Paine, a European philosopher anxious to join the fray, fused the two into one thought as

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<sup>67</sup>Bonomi, 9.

<sup>68</sup>Bridenbaugh, 189, and Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 293.

<sup>69</sup>Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 266; Butler, *Awash*, 198; Bonomi, 8-9, 208; Bridenbaugh, 257.

<sup>70</sup>John Witherspoon, “The Dominion of Providence over the Passions of Men” (sermon preached at Princeton in 1776), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 549, 558.

<sup>71</sup>Rusticus, “Liberty” (1768), in Greene, 150, 153.



he pleaded the American cause on the world stage. In response to a hypothetical questioning of the American right to what the Enlightenment termed “natural rights,” he answered that only “*the fool hath said in his heart there is no God.*”<sup>72</sup>

Much as Tocqueville’s comment above suggests, many of the American clergy threw their whole weight into the fight for liberty, basing their arguments for that cause on both religious and reasonable grounds. Enlightened secular and religious propaganda began to sound remarkably alike. Even as exhortations to join the patriotic fight, arguments of resistance against oppressive governments as commanded by Locke, and other various “political Whiggism[s]” flowed from the American pulpits accompanied by censures of corruption and warnings against moral decay in the tried and true sermon form known as the jeremiad, secular pamphlets and appeals began to adopt a similar oral and evangelical style.<sup>73</sup> Jonathan Sewall, a Tory, had noticed it. Writing to General Frederick Haldimand in 1775 he commented on the “Enthusiasm in politics, like that which religious Notions inspire.”<sup>74</sup> Speeches like that given by Samuel Adams in 1776, along with the standard and enlightened resistance theory, invariably contained an “appeal to heaven” as well.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Thomas Paine, *The American Crisis*, in Foner, *Writings of Thomas Paine*, 78.

<sup>73</sup>Miller, 37-41; Diggins, 8; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 12; Butler, *Awash*, 200; Stout, 523. The typical style of the jeremiad is apparent in Samuel Sherwood’s 1774 sermon in New Haven. He forthrightly tells his congregation that “God is testifying against these kinds of sin in particular, and threatening us on account of them. Shame and sorrow, humiliation and abasement become us for these things. We ought, each one, to examine his own heart and life, and enquire what has been done by, or among us, to provoke the Lord to such an awful controversy; and speedily to return, by gospel-repentance, to his love and service.” Samuel Sherwood, “Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers” (sermon preached at New-Haven in 1774), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 403.

<sup>74</sup>Jonathan Sewall, to General Frederick Haldimand, 30 May 1775, in Greene, 267; Stout, 534; Charles Royster, *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 145.

<sup>75</sup>Bonomi, 216, and Samuel Adams, Speech given in the State House at Philadelphia on 1 August 1776, in Padover, 111.

Apart from style and mode of delivery, religion and Enlightenment philosophy also concurred on the argument at the heart of the Revolution—the belief that governmental authority ultimately rested on the will and consent of the people for the good of the people. Locke had made this assertion in his *Second Treatise on Civil Government*, and patriots like James Otis were certainly following his example by claiming that the “supreme absolute power is *originally* and *ultimately* in the people.”<sup>76</sup> However, this argument also resembled “the theories of certain Puritan writers” who had chosen to govern themselves in the seventeenth century upon such principles before Locke had expounded them. At the time of the Revolution, ministers were still basing arguments for popular sovereignty and resistance to government on Biblical principle. Samuel West, preaching in Boston in 1776, drew upon I Peter 11:13, 14 to argue that the purpose of government was “for the punishment of evil-doers, and for the praise of them that do well.”<sup>77</sup> If government began to “punish the virtuous,” it must immediately “forfeit [its] authority to govern the people,” and power would revert to the hands of those people.<sup>78</sup> Another minister, Moses Mather, explained to his audience in 1775 that the source of all authority was God and only flowed to the ruler “through the voice and consent of the people.”<sup>79</sup> When revolutionaries like James Otis or John Adams claimed

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<sup>76</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 54-5, 67, 71-3, and Otis, 28.

<sup>77</sup>Kirk, 99, and Samuel West, Sermon preached before the Honorable Council in Boston in 1776, in Smith, 181-82.

<sup>78</sup>West, Sermon preached before the Honorable Council, in Smith, 181-82, and Alice M. Baldwin, *The New England Clergy and the American Revolution* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Company, 1958), 22-3.

<sup>79</sup>Moses Mather, “America’s Appeal to the Impartial World” (sermon preached in Hartford in 1775), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 444-45; Elisha Williams, “The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants” (sermon preached in Boston in 1744), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 59; Baldwin, 31.

the people as the true possessors of governmental authority, they were drawing from a well of religious and enlightened ideological agreement.<sup>80</sup>

However, as much as religious and enlightened principles agreed on the essentiality of resistance, it is doubtful whether full-scale resistance would have broken out as quickly as it did had not religion's fire lit the first spark.<sup>81</sup> It was indeed, in the words of Thomas Paine, "repugnant to reason, to the universal order of things, to all examples from former ages, to suppose that this continent can long remain subject to any external power," and enlightened philosophy had discoursed at length upon a system, also advocated by religion, by which oppressive external powers could be removed.<sup>82</sup> However, reason had no power to animate on its own. In fact, the enlightened philosophers themselves, including Locke, waffled back and forth, at first advocating resistance then quickly advising restraint and couching their approval of resistance in terms of "last resort."<sup>83</sup>

Religious activism and concerns were the spark needed to push the colonial cause into the "last resort" bracket, motivating Americans to act upon the heretofore static enlightenment principles of resistance. Edmund Burke, watching America from across the sea, knew it to be so and warned Parliament that

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<sup>80</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 325.

<sup>81</sup>Bridenbaugh, xiii-xiv, and William G. McLoughlin, "The American Revolution as a Religious Revival: 'The Millennium in One Country,'" *The New England Quarterly* 40, no. 1 (March 1967) : 100.

<sup>82</sup>Thomas Paine, *Common Sense* (1776), in Foner, *Writings of Thomas Paine*, 23, and Cassara, 21.

<sup>83</sup>Ronald Hamowy, "Jefferson and the Scottish Enlightenment: A Critique of Garry Wills's *Inventing America: Jefferson's Declaration of Independence*," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 36, no. 4 (October 1979) : 510; Bonomi, 198-99; Edmund S. Morgan, *Inventing the People: The Rise of Popular Sovereignty in England and America* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 256.

religion, always a principle of energy, in this new people is no way worn out or impaired . . . . The people are Protestants; and of that kind which is most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion. . . . [Religion in] our Northern Colonies is a refinement on the principle of resistance.<sup>84</sup>

Many clergymen, particularly dissenters, actively promoted and preached the principles of Revolution from their pulpits. In fact, because of their active role, they quickly went to the top of the loyalist lists of most despised persons. Peter Oliver, chief justice of the Superior Court of Massachusetts and an ardent Tory, contemptuously dubbed clerical participants in the Revolution the “black Regiment.” If their effectiveness can be established on the strength of his vitriolic denunciations of them, they must indeed have played a pivotal part. Others loyalists, like prisoner of war Anthony Allaire, also commented contemptuously on the propensity of Presbyterian clergymen to “stuff” sermons “as full of Republicanism as their [the Continental Army’s] camp is of horse thieves.”<sup>85</sup> When rumors and fears that England planned to place a bishop in America and curtail her enjoyment of religious liberty gained widespread circulation, Americans roused under the battle cry “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God” and galvanized a will to resist.<sup>86</sup>

Colonial attitudes toward service in the Continental Army also reflected the centrality of religious fervor in the ostensibly political fight. Believing that God had

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<sup>84</sup>Bonomi, 162, 187, 198-99, 216.

<sup>85</sup>Peter Oliver, *Origin & Progress of the American Rebellion*, ed. Douglass Adair and John A. Schutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967), 41, 91, 104-05, and Royster, 167.

<sup>86</sup>[Samuel Adams], *A State of the Rights of the Colonists, in Tracts of the American Revolution, 1763-1776*, ed. Merrill Jensen, The American Heritage Series, ed. Leonard W. Levy and Alfred Young (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967), 250. John Adams, in particular, was adamantly of the opinion that it was the prospect of an American bishop that most pushed the people, common and elite alike, to the point of war. John Adams, to Jedediah Morse, 2 December 1815; quoted in Bridenbaugh, 135-36, 231, 233. The motto “Rebellion to tyrants is obedience to God” was initially suggested by Benjamin Franklin as a possible motto for the seal of the United States. Novak, 168; Baldwin, 45; Gaustad, 71.

uniquely chosen America to represent the ideal of self-government to the world, soldiers, like the one quoted by the *New Jersey Journal*, embraced the fight as a Christian duty and “rejoice[d] that the ALMIGHTY Governor of the universe hath given us a station so honourable, and planted us the guardians of liberty.” Desertion of the Army became a religious as well as a social and military transgression, for “to shun the dangers of the field is to desert the banner of Christ.”<sup>87</sup> Leaders like George Washington had little else to depend upon to brace men to face the conflict, for enforcement of military service was unfeasible due to manpower shortages and reasonable, enlightened ideals alone were simply not worth dying to obtain. It was religious fervor and obedience to God that fueled the fight, gave it vigorous meaning, and held the ranks together in the face of the enemy.<sup>88</sup> The government to be created following the Revolution would require the same stabilizer and glue to cement the enlightened, republican government together in the face of the world.

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<sup>87</sup>Royster, 5-6, 16.

<sup>88</sup>Ibid., 12-13.

## CHAPTER III

## A GOVERNMENT HANGING IN THE BALANCE

It was from the environment of intricately intertwined religion and Enlightenment described in the previous chapter that the authors of the Constitution were born, and they did not emerge into positions of political prominence untouched by that atmosphere. Even the common people, encouraged by the clergy and in support of the Revolutionary effort, had participated in the furtherance of the synthesis of religion and reason by beginning to “discuss, debate, create, synthesize, modify, demonize, or embrace religious, scientific, and philosophical ideas.”<sup>1</sup> Americans in general evinced both a remarkable eclecticism and pragmatism concerning the general ordering of their lives and society and a dependence upon experience rather than abstract philosophy. It was this inherited attitude which allowed the Founders to continually conceive of the tightly twisted strands of religion and reason as one rope, as two areas which must be balanced to create a unified whole. The Founders referred to both sources with little sense of disjunction throughout the course of the Constitutional debates and drew from both religious and enlightenment ideology to validate their rejection of monarchical governments in favor of republicanism, their emphasis on natural rights and equality, their censure of slavery, their approbation of the primacy of the people’s will, their adherence to social contract philosophy, and their method of controlling majority factions. The unification and balance of religion and reason’s presence and persuasion was the first necessary step in the Founders’ governmental building project. The final

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<sup>1</sup>Hazen, 3, and McLaughlin, 468.

step would be the placement of religion at the core where it could determine governmental boundaries and influence the enlightened machinery's operation.

#### CRYSTAL CLARITY IN A BLURRED REALITY

As mentioned earlier, historians of today tend to dichotomize religion and reason into two separate spheres. Using such terminology makes the world of the Founding Fathers explicable only through the conceptualization of it as a "blurring of worlds," a blurring which happens to result in focal clarity.<sup>2</sup> However, for the Founding Fathers, no such dualism of worlds existed. Instead, it was the reverse of this image. The concepts of religion and reason existed in one world, the peripheries of which, at times, tended to diverge like the fraying ends of a rope. Apparent paradoxes from today's vantage point were from their perspective seemingly non-existent.

Repeatedly, scholars have noted and made comment on the seeming eclecticism, at least from a twentieth-century point of view, in the purely secular pursuits of the Founding Fathers. Historians observe with wonder that these men "read Thucydides, Virgil, and Cato in Greek and Latin, and Coke and Blackstone, Montesquieu and Harrington, Locke and Hume in English; and not only could cite this incongruous conglomerate of authorities to justify any action, [but] they believed them all as well."<sup>3</sup> Persons of any number of religious, political, and ideological persuasions could summon philosophers like Montesquieu to the bar in support of their disparate positions. In his discussion of the *Federalist Papers* as a defense of the Constitution, historian Morton

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<sup>2</sup>Hazen, 149.

<sup>3</sup>McDonald, 72.

White particularly stresses the authors' willingness "to pick up whatever philosophical muskets they could respectably shoot at those who attacked the Constitution."<sup>4</sup> Founding Fathers like Thomas Jefferson did not contain their studies to one particular field or limit their appreciation of philosophical perspectives by nationality.<sup>5</sup> They freely indulged their minds in all edificatory musings, whether expressed by thinkers of the present or past. Adding religious ideology to this already contorted secular milieu has only compounded the confusion for historians searching for a simple answer to the question of what the Founders believed.

With respect to both their eclectic philosophical leanings and their uninhibited perusal and combination of religion and reason, the Founders were repairing to what historians have described as a distinctly American emphasis on the practical and the experiential—the Common Sense approach. Historian Peter Gay, coining a new term, calls this American mental attitude "pragmatic rationalism." Americans of the eighteenth-century liked to think of themselves as practical people, as "a common-sense country opposed to useless speculation."<sup>6</sup> In this sense, they did not differ remarkably from their Puritan forbearers who had always been "more interested in institutions that functioned than in generalities that glittered." Theirs had been an "experiment in applied theology;" the Founding Fathers were embarking on a governmental experiment bounded within the same mental framework of applicability and functionality.<sup>7</sup> Throughout the Constitutional debates and in their private writings and discussions, the Founding Fathers

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<sup>4</sup>White, *Philosophy*, 22; Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 259-60; Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 39.

<sup>5</sup>Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 47.

<sup>6</sup>May, 9; Hartz, 56; Gay, *Enlightenment Thought*, 49.

<sup>7</sup>Boorstin, 5, 16.



continually eschewed “the essentially theoretical and abstract side of human knowledge” and insisted that, until those avenues of thought were “further pursued, let us adopt such as have already been found practicable and useful.”<sup>8</sup> Men like Charles Pinkney in the Constitutional debates went to great length to emphasize the specific functions of the government, warning the delegates against “mistak[ing] the object of our government” and diverting their attention away from daydreams of conquest and world recognition and onto the precise task of forming a practical system “capable of extending to its citizens all the blessings of civil & religious liberty.”<sup>9</sup>

In addition to practicality, appreciation of experience was a considerably important component of the Founders’ pragmatic mindset. Experience was so imperative that, to a great extent, the decrees of the Enlightenment were acceptable only as they reinforced, affirmed, and supported premises already proved or indicated by experience.<sup>10</sup> During the Constitutional debates, John Dickinson brought this hierarchical ranking of discovery methods to the fore by reminding the delegates of the following verity:

Experience must be our only guide. Reason may mislead us. It was not Reason that discovered the singular & admirable mechanism of the English Constitution. It was not Reason that discovered or ever could have discovered the odd & in the eye of those who are governed by reason, the absurd mode of trial by Jury. Accidents probably produced these discoveries, and experience has given a sanction to them.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 460, and Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 434-35.

<sup>9</sup>Farrand, 1: 402.

<sup>10</sup>Boorstin, 158; Kirk, 107-08; Bailyn, “Political Experience,” 345-47; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 18; David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (LaSalle: The Open Court Publishing Company, 1938), 28-9, 31, 37.

<sup>11</sup>Farrand, 2: 278, and Commager, 216-17.

James Madison, in the *Federalist Papers*, also confirmed the ascendancy of experience, making its witness a necessary coupling to all truths arrived at through the medium of reason. If something was “suggested by reason,” it unavoidably followed that it be “illustrated by examples, and enforced by our own experience.”<sup>12</sup> Obviously, the result of this emphasis upon experience was a refusal on the part of the Founders to accept at face value the whole of the teachings of the Enlightenment or of any system without close evaluation. Thomas Jefferson was adamant in his adherence to this policy as is evident in his explanation to Francis Hopkinson in 1789 that he was “not a federalist, because I never submitted the whole system of my opinions to the creed of any party of men whatsoever, in religion, in philosophy, in politics or in anything else, where I was capable of thinking for myself. If I could not go to heaven but with a party, I would not go there at all.”<sup>13</sup> With respect specifically to Enlightenment philosophy and scientific advancement, Jefferson was as equally obdurate against the wholesale adoption of all included tenets without recourse to experiential observation of their effects. Writing to John Adams, he comments that, for all their enlightened scientific achievements, England and France remain in a state of complete degradation and in fact have sunk to the level of common thievery and piracy. He concludes from this experiential observation that, “if science produces no better fruits than tyranny, murder, rapine and destitution of national morality, I would rather wish our country to be ignorant, honest, and estimable, as our neighboring savages are.”<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 373-74, and Sewall, 267.

<sup>13</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Paris, to Francis Hopkinson, 13 March 1789, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 424.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to John Adams, 21 January 1812, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 565, and Gaustad, 158.

In their refusal to blindly accept all of the new and modern teachings of the Enlightenment, the Founders were manifesting their intention to hold tightly to those traditions and ideologies of the past to which they ascribed much value. Indeed, as historians like Gordon Wood and Stanley Katz have pointed out, much of the Revolutionary conflict turned upon the colonial presumption that they were not demanding new concessions but simply insisting upon and defending “the traditional rights and principles of all Englishmen, sanctioned by what they thought had always been.”<sup>15</sup> James Madison exulted in the American ability to retain the good of the past even as progress and new ideas were embraced. Rhetorically, he asks his international audience:

Is it not the glory of the people of America that, whilst they have paid a decent regard to the opinions of former times and other nations, they have not suffered a blind veneration for antiquity, for custom, or for names, to overrule the suggestions of their own good sense, the knowledge of their own situation, and the lessons of their own experience?<sup>16</sup>

In their desire to embrace both the old and the new, pursue present progress but not at the expense of past progressions, Americans were not so unlike the British stock from which the majority of them had sprung. However, the more vocal expression and active implementation of this object in America has drawn the greater attention from historians, many of whom are baffled at this ability “to combine rock-ribbed traditionalism with high inventiveness, ancestor worship with ardent optimism,” and Enlightenment philosophy with religious fervor.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup>Stanley N. Katz, “The American Constitution: A Revolutionary Interpretation,” in *Beyond Confederation: Origins of the Constitution and American National Identity*, eds. Richard Beeman, Stephen Botein, and Edward C. Carter II (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987), 28.

<sup>16</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 144.

<sup>17</sup>Hartz, 56, and Byrne, 33-4, 45.

Without doubt, religious belief was one of the things of the past that the Founders wished to retain even as they embraced new yet religiously compatible and supportable ideas from the Enlightenment. Benjamin Rush, in designing a seal for a college, demonstrated the primacy of religion by choosing the Bible as one of the seal's three symbols yet found no disagreement between that and the seal's second symbol, a telescope representing reason and science. Both symbols converged as one in the pursuit of the third symbol—"a cap of liberty."<sup>18</sup> Americans could easily have identified with Edmund Burke's assessment of England's position in the wake of the French atheistic rantings, for, like Englishmen, Americans could say, "We are not the converts of Rousseau; we are not the disciples of Voltaire; Helvetius has made no progress among us. Atheists are not our preachers; madmen are not our lawgivers."<sup>19</sup> Protestantism in particular ran deep in the veins of America with a legacy that stretched back for several hundred years. The fruit of this bequest was still plainly visible in the lives of Americans in general and the Founding Fathers as well by the late 1700s. Most Founders accepted without question the rightness of Puritanical moral demands, the Calvinistic "conviction of human depravity," the God-ordained structuring of society on the basis of compact, and the necessity of relying upon His Providence for guidance.<sup>20</sup>

Even those Founding Fathers who did not in any sense openly ascribe to the doctrines of John Calvin or attend church in a Protestant denomination could not wholly escape its influence, for, even yet, "a residue of iron Calvinism remained in their souls,

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<sup>18</sup>Foner, "Tom Paine's Republic," 206.

<sup>19</sup>Byrne, 45.

<sup>20</sup>Morgan, "Revolutionary Era," 17, and Novak, 161.

nourishing their stubborn sense of personal independence and giving moral support to their systematic refusal to accept authority without questioning it.”<sup>21</sup> This “iron Calvinism” is easily discernable in John Adams’s life, although he specifically rejected its doctrines, whether revealing itself in his “full pursuit of the Protestant Ethic,” his adoption of rigid moral standards, his Puritanical use of a diary as simultaneous confessional for sin and weapon against recurrences of the same, or his impulsive habit of peppering his speech with Biblical and religious analogies.<sup>22</sup> Adams’s tendency to evoke religious imagery could manifest itself in any situation, from describing his feeling of inadequacy to his wife Abigail by saying, “Is it not a saying of Moses, who am I, that I should go in and out before this great People?,” to, in old age, depicting his grandchildren as “multiplying like the seed of Abraham.” He also characterized the American “Union” as “the rock of our salvation” and recast the pursuit of liberty in these parabolic terms: “Strait is the gate and narrow is the way that leads to liberty, and few nations, if any, have found it.”<sup>23</sup>

Other prominent American religions, such as Quakerism, also remained steadfastly present in the face of the Enlightenment in the lives of those who did not

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<sup>21</sup>A statement made by John Adams concerning his cousin Samuel’s heritage could easily be applied to many more Americans and Founders, including John himself. When asked about Samuel’s character, John Adams felt it sufficient to say that he had been raised a Calvinist and “so had been all his Ancestors for two hundred years.” The influence of this heritage was unquestionable in John Adams’s mind. Padover, 41-2.

<sup>22</sup>Edmund S. Morgan, “John Adams and the Puritan Tradition,” *The New England Quarterly* 34, no. 4 (Dec. 1961) : 523-24; Bernard Bailyn, “Butterfield’s Adams: Notes for a Sketch,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 19, no. 2 (April 1962) : 244; Thompson, “Young John Adams,” 259-62, 264, 267.

<sup>23</sup>Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 135, 144; Adams, to F. A. Vanderkemp, 192; John Adams, Quincy, to Josiah Quincy, 9 February 1811, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 157; John Adams, Quincy, to Richard Rush, 14 May 1821, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 212; Novanglus, Tract published in February 1775, in Jensen, 317; Ps. 89:26 KJV; Matt. 7:14 KJV.

subscribe to their specific doctrines. For example, historian Harry Stout sees Quakerism's distinctive influence in Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* pamphlet. Like Adams, Paine too laced his writings with religious references, the most prominent examples being in his *Common Sense*.<sup>24</sup> Religion also infused both social and political institutions "in spirit if not in language." Even when overtly religious institutions and ideas were discarded, they were often replaced with "secular equivalents" and analogously used to legitimize the new secular institution's establishment.<sup>25</sup> So effectively was religion retained in America as Americans welcomed the Enlightenment that Alexis de Tocqueville, writing of America in the middle of the nineteenth century, could state even then that "it is not only mores that are controlled by religion, but its sway extends even over reason."<sup>26</sup>

#### "LET US TRY THE EXPERIMENT"

The experiment in government building upon which the Founders embarked was a massive and multifaceted one. Firstly, it would attempt to prove that, just as there were planetary laws governing the mechanism of the physical universe, so too were there reflections of those laws in man himself and the institutions that governed him—governmental laws which, if found and instituted, would guarantee equality and liberty to

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<sup>24</sup>Stout, 536-37; Foner, "Tom Paine's Republic," 206; Paine, *Common Sense*, 10-12, 14, 25, 45; Paine, *American Crisis*, 59, 106.

<sup>25</sup>Diggins, 8-9; Richard Striner, "Political Newtonianism: The Cosmic Model of Politics in Europe and America," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 52, no. 4 (Oct. 1995) : 585; Morgan, "John Adams," 526.

<sup>26</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292.

men for all time.<sup>27</sup> This in itself was a lofty experiment and not one that all men believed could be completed satisfactorily. However, in the true spirit of the Enlightenment and the Puritan forefathers who had ventured to the “American Strand” on an earlier impossible errand, men like John Adams and George Washington were dedicated to the attempt, whatever the outcome.<sup>28</sup> Writing to Count Sarsfield in 1786 on the eve of the Constitutional debates, John Adams told him,

It has ever been my hobby-horse to see rising in America an empire of liberty, and a prospect of two or three hundred millions of freemen, without one noble or one king among them. You say it is impossible. If I should agree with you in this, I would still say, let us try the experiment, and preserve our equality as long as we can.<sup>29</sup>

Secondly, the experiment would entail the use of experimental materials—a balance of religion and Enlightenment ideology—in the construction of this colossal government. Thirdly, as will become clear in the final chapter, the experiment would involve an untried arrangement or situation of these two elements in which religion would comprise the core or foundation while Enlightenment ideology provided the peripheral structure.

The concept of balance, along with order and harmony, is perhaps the cornerstone of Enlightenment thought, first dominating the writings and discussions of the European philosophes and then occupying a prominent position in American politics. Its presence is centripetal to the conception of the Newtonian universe in which planets and solar

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<sup>27</sup>Cassara, 69, and Drew R. McCoy, “Benjamin Franklin’s Vision of a Republican Political Economy for America,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 35, no. 4 (Oct. 1978) : 605.

<sup>28</sup>Boorstin, 3, and Thomas Jefferson, to Dr. Walter Jones, 2 January 1814, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 165. Tocqueville considered that Americans might be among “the boldest innovators and the most implacable logicians in the world.” Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 292.

<sup>29</sup>John Adams, London, to Count Sarsfield, 3 February 1786, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 75, and Gay, “Enlightenment Thought,” 50.

systems are held in place by “a balance of forces.”<sup>30</sup> However, balance also claims hegemony over the social and political life of mankind, for this too is governed by “the theory of counterpoise.”<sup>31</sup> Not only did the Founders concede this extension of universal Newtonian law into the political sphere, but they also directly invoked it in their debate over the relationship between state and federal government. According to Madison’s notes, John Dickinson “compared the proposed National System to the Solar System, in which the States were the planets, and ought to be left to move freely in their proper orbits.”<sup>32</sup> Madison himself later picked up the illustrative strand to comment that, like the sun, “the General Govt. is the great pervading principle that must controul [*sic*] the centrifugal tendency of the States; which, without it, will continually fly out of their proper orbits and destroy the order & harmony of the political system.”<sup>33</sup> Balance between the forces, whether they be planets and the sun or federal and state governments, is compulsory for the successful ordering of systems. The Founders, recognizing the systemic nature of balance, were repetitious in their political application of it. In addition to balancing the power between the states and the federal government, the Founders constructed a complex system of “checks and balances” to regulate the internal compartments, legislative, executive, and judicial, of the federal government. Even the Constitutional form of government is balanced, as Madison points out, being “neither wholly national nor wholly federal,” resting entirely on neither the individual votes of the

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<sup>30</sup>Striner, 586, and Corrigan, 183.

<sup>31</sup>Striner, 583, 586, and Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 192.

<sup>32</sup>Farrand, 1: 153-54.

<sup>33</sup>*Ibid.*, 1: 165.



people or the conglomerate votes of the states.<sup>34</sup> Samuel Cooper's comment upon the Massachusetts Constitution could easily have been spoken in reference to the later national document, for it also "nicely" "poize[d] the powers of government, in order to render them as far as human foresight can, . . . powers only to do good."<sup>35</sup>

In such a world of "balanced" thought, what could be more natural than an assumption that reason and religion could be appreciated in a similar posture? This did not mean, of course, that the Founders viewed them as diametrically opposed to each other, although they could be, for, as historian John West recognizes, "the Founders never claimed that autonomous reason and divine revelation could agree on everything."<sup>36</sup> They understood well enough that the ends of their rope frayed out in different directions, but they also apprehended that about the core of liberty the strands were wound tight holding it secure. Separating the strands and hanging their experimental government on either one or the other would be pointless and foolish given the augmented weakness of either separated strand and the danger of losing liberty in the process of extricating a preferred one. How much more prudent it must have seemed to them to use the strength of the unified rope. Looking back in 1825 at the Declaration of Independence that he had labored to deliver in 1776, Thomas Jefferson evinces this intention. He clearly stipulates in his letter to Henry Lee that the document "neither aim[ed] at originality of principle or sentiment, nor yet copied from any particular and previous writing" but "was intended to be an expression of the American mind;" all of

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<sup>34</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 259, and Gay, "Enlightenment Thought," 50.

<sup>35</sup>Samuel Cooper, "A Sermon on the Day of the Commencement of the Constitution" (preached in Boston in 1780), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 644, and Miller, 43.

<sup>36</sup>West, *Politics of Revelation*, 76-7.

the document's "authority rests then on the harmonizing sentiments of the day."<sup>37</sup>

George Washington, in a letter of 1783, had already clearly identified those sentiments as both religion and Enlightenment's reason when he informed Governor Livingston that the "foundation of our Empire" will depend upon "the Treasures of knowledge acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislators" and even more upon "the pure and benign light of Revelation."<sup>38</sup>

Throughout the Constitutional Convention, as the delegates worked on the specifics of their republican government, the mutual appeal to reason and religion is evident, though the interconnections are often more difficult to perceive since the Bible and religion have very little to directly state concerning the intricate workings of particular governmental institutions. It is in the Convention debates that David Hume's assessment of "politics" as "reduc[ible] to a science" gains its fullest expression.<sup>39</sup> Even so, James Madison instinctively describes the process in religious terms, as does Benjamin Franklin in his famous Convention speech of June 28, being unable to separate the political reasoning from religious expression. While marveling in the *Federalist Papers* that, at the Convention, "so many difficulties should have been surmounted and surmounted with a unanimity almost as unprecedented as it must have been unexpected," Madison clearly intimates religious involvement in the reasoned debate, it being

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<sup>37</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to Henry Lee, 8 May 1825, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 656-57; Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 31-2; Novak, 168.

<sup>38</sup>George Washington, to Governor William Livingston, 12 June 1783, in Padover, 453-54.

<sup>39</sup>Douglass Adair, "'That Politics May Be Reduced to a Science': David Hume, James Madison, and the Tenth *Federalist*," *Huntington Library Quarterly* 20, no. 4 (1957) :346, and Lutz, 194. Hamilton describes the following American governmental innovations as part of this scientific politics: the "distribution of power into distinct departments; the introduction of legislative balances and checks; the institution of courts composed of judges holding their offices during good behavior; the representation of the people in the legislature by deputies of their own election." Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 119.

“impossible for the man of pious reflection not to perceive in it a finger of that Almighty hand which has been so frequently and signally extended to our relief in the critical stages of the revolution.”<sup>40</sup> In later years, the religious and reasoned cords are still wrapped tightly together for Madison, and he describes the delegates’ goal to fathom the depths of their governmental institutions by comparing it to God’s innate knowledge of his own system. For, as “in religion itself there is nothing mysterious to its author; . . . so in the institutions of man let there be no mystery.”<sup>41</sup> And so, even amidst the highly technical and scientific discussions over legislative eligibility for executive offices, judiciary power and control through appointment, and executive term of office, discernible religious principle filtered through. It is inherently reflected in the very orderly and “reasoned character of the debate” which summons to the mind of the Scripturally astute, as many Founders were, God’s invitation to man in Isaiah 1:18 to “come now, and let us reason together.”<sup>42</sup> The delegates at the Constitutional Convention, as if in tacit response to the heavenly command, proceeded to do just that.

The conjunctive possibilities of reason and religion were even more vividly expressed throughout the Convention by way of analogies and examples. Short Biblical quotations, such as Gouverneur Morris’s suggestion that “loaves & fishes,” in reference to Jesus’s feeding of the multitude, might be employed to “bribe the Demagogues” to accept positions in the federal rather than state legislatures, subtly crept into the speech of

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<sup>40</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 246, and Farrand, 1: 450-51.

<sup>41</sup>James Madison, “Who are the Best Keepers of the People’s Liberties?” (printed in the *National Gazette* on 20 December 1792), in Padover, 324.

<sup>42</sup>Nelson, 468, 472-73.

delegates much as they did into John Adams's.<sup>43</sup> Sometimes religious references were provided as a foil to the desired action in government. For example, George Read, protesting various restrictions on the legislature, maintained that such measures would have the undesirable effect of making "the Constitution like Religious Creeds" which, as affecting the legislature, would "be too much shackled."<sup>44</sup> At other times, direct comparisons were in order. Benjamin Franklin, during the discussion of salaries for judges, advocated the practice of the Quakers who, "supported by a sense of duty, and the respect paid to usefulness," undertook judicial responsibilities without remuneration of any kind. Franklin heartily seconded this religious group's awareness that "the less the profit the greater the honor" in public service offices.<sup>45</sup> Again, Gouverneur Morris, instead of employing a classical, economic, or even colloquial metaphor while arguing that the Senate must be an independent body, chose to use a religious attitude, albeit an undesirable one, to highlight, paradoxically, desirable political activity. His argument was that, while "in Religion the Creature is apt to forget its Creator," this is apparently not so in politics as "the late debates here are an unhappy proof" of, for too many delegates want the Senate "to revert to a dependence on the democratic choice" that created it.<sup>46</sup>

As palpable as the balance between religion and reason is in the speech patterns and analogies found in the text of the Constitutional debates, it is even more strongly discernable in the governmental decisions made both before and during those debates.

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<sup>43</sup>Farrand, 1: 513-14.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., 1: 582.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., 1: 84.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 1: 512.

Initially, the combined guidance of reason and religion led the Founders to reject monarchical or despotic forms of government in favor of republicanism. In spite of the support given to “the doctrine of the enlightened despot” by Voltaire and other enlightenment luminaries as well as the older Hobbesian theory recommending an authoritarian Leviathan as the only effective restraint of innate human corruption, the Founders and “the people of this country in general” were bitterly opposed to this governmental form, considering “the very thought alone” to be “treason against mankind in general.”<sup>47</sup> Even before the Revolution, men like James Otis had begun to deny the existence of the divine right of kings to autocratic power. Later, as the country moved toward the framing of the Constitution, Thomas Jefferson’s concern was that, should the country acquiesce to despotism now, the result would be to curtail the freedom of all mankind, “riveting forever the chains which bow down their necks, by giving to their oppressors a proof, which they would have trumpeted through the universe, of the imbecility of republican government.”<sup>48</sup> In answer to Hobbes’s contention of despotism as a remedy for human evilness, Jefferson rhetorically asks, “Have we found angels in the forms of kings to govern him [man]? Let history answer this question.”<sup>49</sup> Americans decidedly viewed despotism as alien to the precepts engendered by the collective force of reason and religion and enthusiastically concurred with Thomas Paine’s contention in *Common Sense* that, just “as the exalting one man so greatly above the rest cannot be

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<sup>47</sup>Hartz, 54; Padover, 35; Diggins, 34; Thomas Jefferson, *Notes on the State of Virginia* (1784), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 228-29.

<sup>48</sup>Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 228-29; Otis, 28; Rahe, 465.

<sup>49</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Inauguration Address (4 March 1801), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 299.

justified on the equal rights of nature, so neither can it be defended on the authority of scripture.”<sup>50</sup> Paine then proceeded to detail the development of monarchy as a heathen institution that the Israelites, over the disapproval of Samuel, a prophet of God, adopted as their own. Having done this thing, the Israelites “greatly feared the Lord and Samuel” and pleaded with Samuel to “pray for thy servants unto the Lord thy God that we die not, for WE HAVE ADDED UNTO OUR SINS THIS EVIL, TO ASK A KING.”<sup>51</sup>

Benjamin Rush also concluded the divine right of kings to be in opposition to “the original and natural equality of all mankind” as supported by “the Old Testament,” and John Adams saw the American “aversion to lordships temporal and spiritual” as rooted in their Puritan “ancestors [flight] to this wilderness to avoid them.”<sup>52</sup>

The value of natural right to the Founders was important in determining their choice of republicanism over monarchism and they drew upon religion and reason to substantiate their claims of natural right’s foundational significance. Thomas Jefferson, in 1776, presumed the existence of these rights “to be self-evident,” for people were ubiquitously “endowed, by their Creator, with certain unalienable rights” including those famous ones of “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.”<sup>53</sup> These natural rights found their source in “the laws of nature and of nature’s God.” Religion certainly embodied

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<sup>50</sup>Paine, *Common Sense*, 10, and Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 199.

<sup>51</sup>Paine also attempted to strike down hereditary succession on Biblical as well as reasonable grounds. His Biblical argument involves positioning hereditary succession on a parallel with original sin, which is to be eradicated in time by the coming of the Millennium. Paine compared them by noticing that, “in the one all mankind were subjected to Satan, and in the other to sovereignty; as our innocence was lost in the first, and our authority in the last, and . . . both disable us from reassuming some former state.” Since they are parallels, Paine viewed hereditary succession as inevitably meant to be as destroyed like original sin. Paine, *Common Sense*, 9-10, 12, 14.

<sup>52</sup>Novak, 169, and Diggins, 34.

<sup>53</sup>Declaration of Independence, and Gaustad, 48.

these innate laws for they were, after all, “dictated by God himself” and “superior in obligation to any other.” The law of nature was synonymous with the “will of [man’s] maker.”<sup>54</sup> The rights deriving from this law were therefore, from a religious point of view, “to be found closely written and promulgated in the New Testament,” discernible by “any coppersmith or carpenter who reads his Bible closely.”<sup>55</sup> In fact, long before Jefferson used the natural rights argument to justify independence and the inauguration of a new republican government, the New England Congregationalists, led by the Reverend John Wise in 1717, had utilized it to combat a hierarchical attempt to consolidate authority over individual churches into overseeing “associations.”<sup>56</sup> Reason also confirmed the existence of the law of nature and the rights emanating from it. As one historian notes, “one does not need Locke to come to natural rights;” however, “Locke rendered valuable service in bringing arguments from reason to this same conclusion.”<sup>57</sup> Thomas Hobbes understood the law of nature to be “a Precept, or generall [*sic*] Rule, found out by Reason,” and Thomas Paine argued for its constancy, logically asserting that “just as nature is unchanging and unchangeable, so are the natural rights of man.”<sup>58</sup> The Founders, by assuming that the overt role of government was “to secure these rights,” implicitly accepted their reality, bolstered as they were by both religious and reasonable definition.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup>Declaration of Independence; Blackstone, 39, 41; Kirk, 130.

<sup>55</sup>[Adams], *State of the Rights*, in Jensen, 238, and Novak, 169.

<sup>56</sup>Cassara, 69-70.

<sup>57</sup>Novak, 165, 169; Kirk, 127; Humphreys, 22.

<sup>58</sup>Hobbes, 189, and Cassara, 78.

<sup>59</sup>Declaration of Independence.

Among those natural rights that the new government pledged itself to secure was liberty. Liberty, as protected by this government, was not “full liberty to do as [one] listed.” According to James Wilson, one of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention, such a state would make liberty a synonym for lawlessness. Pursuit of lawlessness, not being “agreeable to our nature,” would, consequently, leave “many of our talents and powers hanging upon us like useless incumbrances. Why should we be illuminated by reason, were we only made to obey the impulse of irrational instinct?”<sup>60</sup> Both Thomas Jefferson and George Washington agreed that liberty must be restrained lest it become lawlessness and impinge upon or deprive others of their liberties. Jefferson defined the ideal as “temperate liberty.”<sup>61</sup> Clearly, reason helped dictate this interpretation of liberty by the Constitutional Convention. It was an echo of Enlightenment philosophy. Similar word choice evokes Locke’s contention that freedom is not “a liberty for every one to do what he lists;” it is instead “to have a standing rule to live by, common to every one of that society.” Montesquieu also refutes the common assumption that liberty “consists in doing what one wants,” agreeing with Locke that “liberty is the right to do everything the laws permit.”<sup>62</sup> But, religion also played a part in influencing this definition of liberty. American ministers had long propounded on the nature of liberty as law-bound. Elisha Williams, in a sermon in 1744, insisted that liberty did not permit a person “to do what he pleases without any regard to any law; for a rational creature cannot but be made under a law from its Maker.” The Bible, in fact,

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<sup>60</sup>Wilson, *Honourable James Wilson*, in Smith, 192.

<sup>61</sup>Thomas Jefferson, *Autobiography*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 26-7; Jefferson, to Dr. Walter Jones, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 165; Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 204.

<sup>62</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 17, and Montesquieu, 155.



referred plainly to “the law of liberty.”<sup>63</sup> Isaac Backus, in a sermon of 1773, again made reference to the lawful perimeters of liberty. Other ministers stepped beyond the mere assertion of liberty as law-bound to explain the necessity of such restriction. For example, Moses Mather, in 1775, explained the restraint in terms similar to those of James Wilson above as a crucial precaution against “licentiousness” or “acting under the influence of sensual passions” and against the interests of others.<sup>64</sup> Such explanations drew directly upon Calvinist fears that men tended to “abuse God’s good gifts to their own lust” with “no regard for weaker brethren” and Biblical injunctions against the use of “liberty for a cloke of maliciousness” and as “a stumblingblock to them that are weak.”<sup>65</sup> Obviously, the arguments of both reason and religion resonated in the Founders’ definition of liberty.

The Founders’ concern that liberty not become lawlessness, thus depriving some persons of their liberty, points invariably to their special endeavor to preserve the right to equality in government and law. Madison is clear that, in the election of representatives to serve in the government, “no qualification of wealth, of birth, of religious faith, or of civil profession is permitted to fetter the judgment or disappoint the inclination of the people.”<sup>66</sup> Alexander Hamilton is also adamant that “the door ought to be equally open

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<sup>63</sup>Williams, “The Essential Rights,” 56, and Ja. 1:25, 2:12 KJV.

<sup>64</sup>Mather, 486; Isaac Backus, “An Appeal to the Public for Religious Liberty” (sermon preached in Boston in 1773), in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 334; Williams, “The Essential Rights,” 55.

<sup>65</sup>John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, in *Religious Origins of the American Revolution*, ed. Page Smith (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1976), 17; I Peter 2:16; I Cor. 8:9.

<sup>66</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 343-44. Their focus on preserving equality did not blind the Founders to the fact that perfect equality was unachievable, especially since liberty was also to be maintained and would sometimes counteract equalization. Hamilton clearly voiced this inevitability to the Convention delegates in June of 1787, admitting that “inequality would exist as long as liberty existed, and that it would unavoidably result from that very liberty itself.” Farrand, 1: 424. This inverse relationship

to all” since “all men are created equal.”<sup>67</sup> Once again, both Enlightenment and religious thought propelled the Founders toward the institution of such an ideal. Enlightenment scholars insisted that republican governments were only legitimate if all the society’s members shared its “benefits and opportunities” or what Montesquieu called “the privileges of sovereignty.” In fact, Montesquieu considered the “love of the republic” and the “love of democracy” as indistinguishable from the “love of equality” and deemed the republic or democracy ruptured “when the spirit of equality is lost.”<sup>68</sup> Thomas Hobbes championed the natural equality of men at birth as the work of Nature who performed her job so well that “the difference between man, and man, is not so considerable, as that one man can thereupon claim to himselfe [*sic*] any benefit, to which another may not pretend, as well as he.” Reason was the teacher at whose feet men learned of their equality “in respect of jurisdiction or dominion one over another.”<sup>69</sup>

Religion also had input in the dialogue on equality. After all, every Christian knew that all were equal in the sight of God, he being “no respecter of persons.” It was this religious spirit of “animating egalitarianism” which had infused the Great Awakening revivals with such potency and caused the “common men, ‘the rabble’” to flock to hear the words of itinerants like George Whitefield. It was also in this spirit that Solomon Stoddard, during the 1680s, repudiated the “half-way covenant” theology of corrupted Puritanism and opened his church doors to all believers regardless of parental

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between equality and liberty did not necessarily bode ill for the republic though, as a “spirit of extreme equality” was as equally to be guarded against as the lack of equality. Montesquieu, 112.

<sup>67</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 235-36, and Declaration of Independence.

<sup>68</sup>Byrne, 24, and Montesquieu, 43, 112, 143.

<sup>69</sup>Hobbes, 183, and Williams, “The Essential Rights,” 56.

membership.<sup>70</sup> Religious sects like the Quakers all but made equality a doctrinal tenet, and Founders like John Witherspoon readily recognized the inherently egalitarian nature of religion. As Witherspoon comments, in the worldly arena “the road to heroism is not open to every man,” but in religion “that magnanimity . . . may be attained by persons of mean talents and narrow possessions, and in the very lowest stations of human life.”<sup>71</sup> Even Enlightenment figures like Paine and Locke recognized religion’s intrinsic equality, with Paine tracing the roots of equality back to God’s creation of mankind and Locke noting the accessibility of the Bible to all since God had given “such a gospel as the poor could understand, plain and intelligible” rather than one “filled with speculations and niceties, obscure terms, and abstract notions” such as only “the learned scribe, the disputer or wise of this world” could fathom.<sup>72</sup> Using the centrality of equality to both religion and the Enlightenment as a guide, the Founders incorporated that focus into their government.

In proportion as equality was appreciated and supported by the government, detractions from it, such as slavery, were denigrated. Madison derogated the institution as “the great evil under which the nation labors,” and John Adams, railing against slavery, considered that “the turpitude, the inhumanity, the cruelty, and the infamy of the African commerce in slaves” had already been so emphatically expressed to the public “that nothing that I can say would increase the just odium in which it is and ought to be

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<sup>70</sup>Acts 10:34 KJV; Byrne, 24; Novak, 169; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 33; Stout, 525, 527; Baldwin, 57; Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 86.

<sup>71</sup>West, *Politics of Revelation*, 32-3, and Boorstin, 33.

<sup>72</sup>Thomas Paine, *The Rights of Man*, in Foner, *Writings of Thomas Paine*, 274, and Locke, *Reasonableness*, 76-7.

held.”<sup>73</sup> Jefferson too, although a slave owner himself, viewed “the whole commerce between master and slave [as] a perpetual exercise of the most boisterous passions, the most unremitting despotism on the one part, and degrading submissions on the other.”<sup>74</sup> In spite of John Rutledge’s protestation at the Constitutional Convention that “religion & humanity had nothing to do with this question” of slavery, they did have a great deal of influence upon the thoughts of the Founders as to slavery’s continued presence in the new republic.<sup>75</sup>

Beyond their disapproval of slavery as an abrogation of equality, reason and religion both resisted it as a causative of moral degeneracy. As Jefferson had observed, owning slaves tended to render a man captive to his passions, unable to act reasonably. Enlightenment thought assumed that reasonable men would be moral men. Thus, slavery inevitable led “to failing in all the moral virtues, because he [the owner] grows proud, curt, harsh, angry, voluptuous, and cruel.” Jean Jacques Rousseau flatly denounced slavery as a “null and void” institution, not only because it is “illegitimate, but also because it is absurd and meaningless.”<sup>76</sup> From a religious standpoint, slavery could not only lead to immorality but was an immoral act in and of itself. Owning slaves and thereby perpetuating slavery constituted “a sacrilegious breach of trust, as offensive in the sight of God as it is derogatory from our own honor.”<sup>77</sup> Benjamin Rush, after

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<sup>73</sup>James Madison, Montpelier, to Robert J. Evans, 15 June 1819, in Rakove, 733, and John Adams, Quincy, to Robert J. Evans, 8 June 1819, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 209.

<sup>74</sup>Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 257.

<sup>75</sup>Farrand, 2: 364.

<sup>76</sup>Montesquieu, 246, and Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract and Discourses*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, 1950), 12.

<sup>77</sup>Adams, *Feudal Law*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 22.

enumerating a whole list of vices prohibited and virtues promoted by Christ, warned that slavery instilled “all the former Vices” while automatically “exclud[ing] the practice of all the latter Virtues, both from the Master and the Slave.” As Jefferson warned, should the slaves of America revolt, “the Almighty has no attribute which can take side with us in such a contest.”<sup>78</sup> Spurred by the warnings of both religion and reason and cognizant that such an inconsistency with equality in the structure of their government could crack the framework, the Convention delegates debated the question heatedly. Those true adherents to the dictates of religion and reason were disappointed however, being forced to delay both stoppage of importation and total emancipation in order to obtain ratification for the Constitution in the southern states.<sup>79</sup> Despite the path promoted by reason and religion, the Founders failed to act accordingly. Those who observed the dislocation in ideals caused by the persistence of slavery, like Jefferson, feared the result but hoped to approach the subject again after ratification. They never succeeded, and the result, as history can well attest, was nearly disastrous for the republic with the Civil War costing thousands of lives and nearly splitting the carefully crafted nation in half. If the Founders could have looked into the future, they surely would have chosen the course dictated by both reason and religious belief.

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<sup>78</sup>[Benjamin Rush], *An Address to the Inhabitants of the British Settlements in America, upon Slave-Keeping* (Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1773), 14, and Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 258. Benjamin Rush concurred with Jefferson’s assessment of God’s position on the question of slavery and told those who would seek to “vindicate the traffic of buying and selling Souls” to “seek some modern System of Religion to support it, and not presume to sanctify their crimes by attempting to reconcile it to the sublime and perfect Religion of the Great Author of Christianity.” There were indeed religious arguments being made by slave owners in support of the institution, and it is in direct opposition to these that Rush wrote. Rush, *Slave-Keeping*, 14.

<sup>79</sup>Farrand, 2: 370, and Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 275.

In addition to promoting liberty and equality in government, the Founders also intended that their government should rest entirely upon the will or consent of the individual people receiving those blessings. Revolutionary leaders like James Otis had advocated this course, and the Founders put this desire into practice. With emphasis, Hamilton promulgated that “the fabric of American empire ought to rest on the solid basis of THE CONSENT OF THE PEOPLE,” and John Adams advocated “the people in their assemblies [as] the best keepers of their liberty.”<sup>80</sup> State constitutions, such as that of Maryland in 1776, smoothed the way for the total seating of a federal government on the people themselves.<sup>81</sup> Such individual participation in government was historically unprecedented, but the Founders were not without the support of the Enlightenment and religious example and leaned heavily on both to support their radical governmental step. Enlightenment advocates like Thomas Paine and John Locke traced the individualistic nature of man to his emergence from the state of nature, “each in his own personal and sovereign right.” Legitimate government was of necessity birthed from individualistic participation because persons not immediately under some form of government were presumed to be in a state of nature and in possession of all their individual and natural rights.<sup>82</sup>

Without denying in any form Enlightenment’s justification of governmental reliance upon individuals, religion provided the practical proof of the possibility. With the coming of the Reformation came the disruption of the medieval categorization of

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<sup>80</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 184; Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 325, 328; Otis, 28.

<sup>81</sup>Constitution of Maryland, arts. 1, 2.

<sup>82</sup>Paine, *Rights of Man*, 278, and Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 283.

people into classes and estates and the definition of them in conglomerate terms alone as “Luther and Calvin, by postulating a single ‘individual’ soul responsible for itself, plucked a new human type out of this traditional ‘order’.”<sup>83</sup> Their emphasis upon the individual’s direct and personal relationship with God initiated the rise of what one historian has termed “the primacy of the individual conscience.” While this new posturing of the human soul did undergo brief suppression in the hierarchical structuring of Puritanical New England, it reemerged, thoroughly refined, in the revivalistic fires of the Great Awakening as, once again, “each individual” undertook the odyssey “to face God in the wilderness alone.”<sup>84</sup> Supported by the Enlightenment’s assurance that it was natural and right for governments to rest upon individual consent and well aware that religion, by shifting accountability for personal salvation to the individual, had already anticipatorily positioned the majority of their populace to accept such a responsibility, the Founders chose to formulate a government on the consent of individual people.<sup>85</sup>

Building a government upon the consent of the people was effected by those persons’ documented entrance into a social contract. In their adoption of this method and their understanding of the Constitution as a type of social contract, the Founders relied again on both popular Enlightenment contract theory and the religious covenant tradition. Enlightenment contract theory stipulated that each individual, in full possession of his natural rights, agree to enter society, relinquishing his “right to all things and [being] contented with so much liberty against other men, as he would allow other men against

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<sup>83</sup>Smith, 2.

<sup>84</sup>Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 206; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 303; Butler, *Awash*, 213-14, 257; Baldwin, 49; Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 92; Bonomi, 132-33.

<sup>85</sup>Bonomi, 188; Smith, 2-3; Kramnick, “Great National,” 18-19.

himselfe [*sic*].”<sup>86</sup> The contract was intended to arise from the agreement of equal individuals; it was not an agreement between “magistrates and people, rulers and ruled” although, either after or within the compact among themselves, the people extended authority to government, expecting it to honor the terms of their social contract.<sup>87</sup> By entering the contract or compact, a man placed “himself under an obligation to every one of that society to submit to the determination of the majority, and to be concluded by it.”<sup>88</sup> If those in governmental authority contravened the will of the majority and the original intent of the contract, they could be removed for all original authority rested in the majority.<sup>89</sup>

That the Founders understood and closely adhered to this reasonable theory of social contracting is clear from published pamphlets and discussions during the Constitutional Convention. In a pamphlet of 1783, Pelatiah Webster demonstrated his knowledge of contract theory by mentioning in his discussion on the possibility of political union in America that just as “every member of civil society parts with many of his natural rights, that he may enjoy the rest in greater security under the protection of society” so too would the American states need to “part with and transfer over . . . so

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<sup>86</sup>Hobbes, 190-93; Rousseau, 14; McLaughlin, 472, 482.

<sup>87</sup>Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 283; Paine, *Rights of Man*, 278; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 12; Locke, *Second Treatise*, 114.

<sup>88</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 55, and Rousseau, 15. Thomas Hobbes carefully defines the terms “contract” and “covenant” or “compact,” making a slight distinction between the former and the latter two. He defines contract as “the mutuall transferring of Right.” Covenant and compact are deeper terms defining the type of contract. As Hobbes explains, after a contract has been made, “one of the Contractors, may deliver the Thing contracted for on his part, and leave the other to perform his part at some determinate time after, and in the mean time be trusted; and then the Contract on his part, is called PACT, or COVENANT.” Hobbes, 190-93.

<sup>89</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 115, 131-32.



much of their own sovereignty, as is necessary to render the ends of the union effectual.”<sup>90</sup> George Washington expressed this same sentiment during the course of the ratification debates. The rights of the majority in a compact were also apparent to the Founders. During the Convention debates, Madison brilliantly used contract theory to refute William Paterson’s contention that the Articles of Confederation represented a contract that could, having been formed by unanimous consent, only be dissolved by the same. By claiming the Articles as such a contract, Patterson hoped to curtail further discussion of a new Constitution, but Madison pointed out his mistaken perception of contract theory. The Articles could not be “analogous to the social compact of individuals: for, if it were so, a Majority would have a right to bind the rest, and even to form a new Constitution for the whole, which the Gentn: from N. Jersey would be among the last to admit” being, as they were, in the minority.<sup>91</sup> The understood delegation of ultimate authority to the majority and binding of governmental bodies to its will expressed by Madison here also informed Samuel Adams’s firm persuasion that the body of the people, not rulers or an aristocracy, “have a right to demand and insist upon the performance of” their “equitable *original compact*.”<sup>92</sup> The Founders’ intention to create such a compact after the fashion of Enlightenment theory and designation of the Constitution as such is best expressed in Madison’s description of Gouverneur Morris’s resolute stance on the Convention floor; he, in no uncertainty, had come “here to form a

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<sup>90</sup>[Pelatiah Webster], *A Dissertation on the Political Union and Constitution of the Thirteen United States of North-America* (Philadelphia: T. Bradford, 1783), 3-4, and McLaughlin, 472.

<sup>91</sup>Farrand, 1: 314-15, 485, and McLaughlin, 475.

<sup>92</sup>[Adams], *A State of the Rights*, in Jensen, 235.

compact for the good of America. He was ready to do so with all the States: He hoped & believed that all would enter into such a Compact.”<sup>93</sup>

However, in choosing to view the Constitution as a social compact, the Founders were also relying upon decades of religious tradition. The idea of social compacting was, in America, an inevitable outgrowth of Calvinist and Puritanical covenant theology. Beginning from the premise that God had, in the Garden of Eden, established a covenant relationship with Adam guaranteeing eternal life in exchange for obedience, Calvinists traced God’s covenantal dispensations throughout the Old and New Testaments. The culminating covenant, called the “Covenant of Grace,” was the offering of salvation through the blood of Christ on the basis of individual belief in God’s grace. Puritans expanded the concept of a pact or covenant between the individual and God to include similar relationships between individual persons. As such, the covenant became the basis of societal cohesion for the good of the whole within Puritan communities, and their governmental structures grew out of and remained dependent upon the societal covenant. The similarity between the covenant and the contract are obvious.<sup>94</sup> Having been appropriated from a religious context and applied to a societal and governmental context, the covenant gained widespread colonial usage beginning with the Mayflower Compact of 1620 which purposed to “solemnly and mutually, in the Presence of God and one another, covenant and combine ourselves together into a civil Body Politick, for our

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<sup>93</sup>Farrand, 1: 593.

<sup>94</sup>May, 45; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 11-12; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 32; Humphreys, 22; Smith, 3.

better Ordering and Preservation.”<sup>95</sup> Following the Mayflower Compact, state constitutions, such as the Fundamental Orders of Connecticut and the Constitution of Massachusetts, also drafted the essence of the covenant into their text. In fact, by 1780 when the Massachusetts Constitution was under construction, covenant theology and contract theory were recognizably compatible, and their terminology was used interchangeably. In the Massachusetts Constitution, John Adams, its drafter, considered the “body politic” as “a *social compact*, by which the whole people *covenants* with each citizen, and each citizen with the whole people.”<sup>96</sup> In constructing the Constitution, Founders like John Adams followed the same course of indiscriminate borrowing from religious and Enlightenment contexts.

By forming a society and government on the basis of social compact/covenant theory, the Founders recognized the necessity for control by the majority. However, majorities could be dangerous. They could develop into majority “factions,” exercising an authoritarian will and inflicting great harm upon a minority. Madison, in his exposition on the control of majority factions, appealed to both Enlightenment rhetoric and a religious model, although he explicitly rejected reliance on either “moral” or “religious motives . . . as an adequate control” of majority factions.<sup>97</sup> As in many areas, there was little consensus among Enlightenment figures concerning the control of majority factions. While Montesquieu specifically warned that “it is in the nature of a

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<sup>95</sup>Mayflower Compact, 11 November 1620; Richard L. Perry, ed., *Sources of Our Liberties: Documentary Origins of Individual Liberties in the United States Constitution and Bill of Rights* (Buffalo: William S. Hein & Company, 1991), 57; Smith, 3; Commager, 179.

<sup>96</sup>Emphasis added. Constitution of Massachusetts (25 October 1780), preamble; Fundamental Orders of Connecticut (14 January 1639), preamble; Koch, *Power, Morals*, 87.

<sup>97</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 126, 321.

republic to have only a small territory; otherwise, it can scarcely continue to exist,” others, like the Scottish David Hume, advocated factional competition spread out over a large republic as the key to majority control.<sup>98</sup> It was Hume’s analysis of factionalism that Madison adopted and acknowledged:

Extend the sphere and you take in a greater variety of parties and interests; you make it less probable that a majority of the whole will have a common motive to invade the rights of other citizens; or, if such a common motive exists, it will be more difficult for all who feel it to discover their own strength and to act in unison with each other.<sup>99</sup>

Like Hume, Madison also viewed “competing factions” as an integral part of society, as necessary for the social good. The greater the diversity within a society, the more secure was the republic’s existence and the rights of its citizens while, on the contrary, “an extinction of parties necessarily implies either a universal alarm for the public safety, or an absolute extinction of liberty.”<sup>100</sup>

Along with his digestion of Enlightenment philosophy on majority faction control, Madison also learned from the excellent illustration provided by religious denominationalism in America of that control in action. It was undeniable that America had proved fertile ground for innumerable sects and Christian denominations. While Alexis de Tocqueville and Thomas Jefferson were both to comment on the “innumerable multitude of sects in the United States” in the years following the ratification of the Constitution, this proliferation of diverse religiosity existed well before that event as

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<sup>98</sup>Montesquieu, 124, and Roy Branson, “James Madison and the Scottish Enlightenment,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 40, no. 2 (1979) : 240.

<sup>99</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 127, and White, *Philosophy*, 200.

<sup>100</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 123, 318; Branson, 237, 247, 249; Diggins, 67-8; Adair, 356.

well.<sup>101</sup> Ministers such as Elisha Williams in 1744 had commented favorably on the diversity, considering that “difference of sentiments in some things in religion, seems natural and unavoidable.”<sup>102</sup> In fact, one minister’s insightful remarks regarding sectarianism somewhat trump Madison’s later discovery of the same phenomenon. For this minister, the multiplicity of denominations became “a mutual balance upon one another. Their temporary collisions, like the action of acids and alcalies [*sic*] after a short ebullition, will subside in harmony and union, not by the destruction of either, but in the friendly cohabitation of all.”<sup>103</sup> This was exactly the result Madison envisioned for political factions, and he did not shrink from appreciating the similarity. In revealing the necessity of having a large republic to control majority factions, Madison referred to the religious example, explaining that though “a religion sect may degenerate into a political faction in a part of the Confederacy; . . . the variety of sects dispersed over the entire face of it must secure . . . against any danger from that source.”<sup>104</sup> Inferring from the positive results of religious factionalism, Madison assumed the same to be true of political factionalism. The latter protected civil rights. The former protected religious rights, security “consist[ing] in the one case in the multiplicity of interests, and in the other in the multiplicity of sects.”<sup>105</sup>

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<sup>101</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 290, 432; Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to M. de Meusnier, 29 April 1795, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 488; Bonomi, 39, 81; Hartz, 53; Commager, 210-11.

<sup>102</sup>Williams, “Essential Rights,” 92-3.

<sup>103</sup>Ezra Stiles, *Discourse on the Christian Union* (sermon originally delivered in Bristol, RI on 23 April 1760 and then printed in pamphlet form in Brookfield, MA: 1799), 123, and Bridenbaugh, 10-11.

<sup>104</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 128.

<sup>105</sup>*Ibid.*, 321; Diggins, 78; Paine, *Common Sense*, 37; Paul Merrill Spurlin, *The French Enlightenment in America: Essays on the Times of the Founding Fathers* (Athens: The University of Georgia Press, 1984), 104.

Because of both their eclecticism and reliance upon experience, including religious experience, the Founders pragmatically allowed both religious beliefs and reasonable ideas to mingle freely in their minds and in their discussion of such topics as natural rights, equality and slavery, social contracts, and majority factions. Often the voices of religion and reason spoke unanimously with piercing perspicuity regarding a particular issue, and the Founders sought, just as those clergymen and revolutionaries before them had, to incorporate both streams of thought, belief, and strength into their arguments. However, incorporation and balance of such ideas in equal parts alone could not ensure the smooth operation of the government the Founders sought to create. Just as the Revolution relied on a religious center to catalyze its occurrence, so too would the Founders' government require religious principles as the stanchion of the Enlightenment's specificity concerning institutional construction. At the heart of the governmental machine, religious belief and virtue would fuel and regulate the enlightened engines seeking to control corruption and regulate the state using systematic checks and balances.

## CHAPTER IV

### AT THE HEART OF THE ENLIGHTENED MATTER

Though both religious faith and reason advocated the protection of liberty, one of the dangers to that liberty could arise simply by failing to prioritize or arrange them properly within the government. The relationship between reason and religion as necessary forces in a cohesive system is complex and, like the universe, can be understood on two levels. First, just as planets in the solar system were held in orbit close to the sun by the attraction of gravity, so were reason and religion held together by their attraction to and concurrence on particular issues like those discussed in the preceding chapter. Second, the balancing of forces inevitably implies at least the possibility of some measure of opposition or deviation and the necessity of proper arrangement of the forces for deviation to be avoided. In Newtonian terms, the planets, through the action of centrifugal tendencies, would whip away into space if it were not for the strong gravitational pull emanating from the sun. Similarly, the Founders feared that the enlightened and mechanistic aspect of their constructed government, through an assumption of its own self-sufficiency, would fly out of proper orbit if released from religion, its gravitational center or sun. Their assumption of religious principles as the bedrock of government is readily apparent in their acknowledgement of the inherently sinful nature of man and their subsequent relentless attempts to construct a government which would control, nullify, and exploit the corruption and evil emanating from that nature since it could not prevent it entirely. Consequently, the safety, maintenance, and influence of religion became vital. For, though insufficient at present to control

corruption without the regulatory help of enlightened government, that religious force alone promised to produce a better world in which the morality it engendered would work to eliminate corruption and create virtue.

## CURBING CORRUPTION

Corruption and its control within government was without doubt an overriding concern for the Founding Fathers, for they had begun to detect the presence of its harbinger—luxurious excess—in America and recognized its potential to wreak republican righteousness. In 1776, John Adams was lamenting that “even the farmers and tradesmen are addicted to commerce; and it is too true that property is generally the standard of respect.”<sup>1</sup> By 1787, the evils of luxury were weighing heavily on the minds of the Convention delegates. John Dickinson hesitantly “doubted the policy of interweaving into a Republican constitution a veneration for wealth” having “always understood that a veneration for poverty & virtue, were the objects of republican encouragement.”<sup>2</sup> Gouverneur Morris forthrightly labeled wealth as a corrupter of the mind, an opinion in which Hamilton and Madison both concurred, and George Mason tried repeatedly to introduce serious discussion of “sumptuary regulations.” Franklin’s observation on the base nature of wealth pointed directly to one of the sources influencing the Founders’ concern with wealth. He was concerned lest “a great partiality to the rich” on the part of the new government should “hurt us in the esteem of the most

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<sup>1</sup>John Adams, to Mercy Warren, 16 April 1776, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 58, and Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 334, 338.

<sup>2</sup>Farrand, 2: 123.



liberal and enlightened men” in Europe.<sup>3</sup> Those “enlightened men” had for some time been demonizing the aristocratic hoarders of wealth in Europe who would “monopolize power and profit” at the expense of the unfortunate lower classes. When the French Revolution broke out in 1789 in partial response to wealth inequalities, Thomas Paine would quickly produce a pamphlet, *The Rights of Man*, to justify that revolution.<sup>4</sup> But the Founders’ uneasiness with “a morass of materialism” derived from religious influence as well. Like Enlightenment philosophers, Protestants, especially Puritans, shuddered at the increase in luxurious consumption, and ministers responded vehemently in sermon form, condemning the excess and exhorting Americans to repentance.<sup>5</sup>

As the anxiety of the Founders regarding luxury mounted, Enlightenment ideology and religion provided some answers. They advocated industry, coupled with frugality, as an impediment to the corrupting idleness spawned by excessive wealth. Locke, with his emphasis on labor as conferring the only legitimate title to property, and Montesquieu, with his contention that “love of democracy is also love of frugality,” both laud those qualities as potentially redemptive, allowing for the possibility of men with wealth whose “mores are not corrupted.”<sup>6</sup> Protestantism also promoted industry and frugality as the two-pronged solution, most readily recognizable by the term “work-ethic Protestantism.” Ministers like Charles Chauncy actively encouraged “industry, frugality, temperance, chastity, and the like moral virtues.” Other sermons, in a more Lockean

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 2: 52, 249, 606; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 106; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 72.

<sup>4</sup>Paine, *Age of Reason*, 464; Montesquieu, 48; Paine, *Rights of Man*, 266-67.

<sup>5</sup>Diggins, 7; Morgan, “John Adams,” 527; Appleby, 292; Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 203.

<sup>6</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 19-31; Kramnick, “Great National,” 18; Montesquieu, 43, 48; Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 225.

tone, urged man to employ “*the labour of his body and the work of his hands.*”<sup>7</sup> For Protestants, work was simultaneously the earmark of a virtuous person, the means of averting the twin corruptions of idleness and wealth, and the redemptive antidote for those persons already waylaid by vice.<sup>8</sup>

The Founders’ assumption of industry as a potential remedy for the illness of idleness and excess is easily discernable. Jefferson earnestly sought to “increase the number of freeholders,” believing the work required by agriculture yielded model citizens. John Witherspoon condemned idleness as “the mother or nurse of almost every vice” and lauded industry as “a moral duty of the greatest moment, absolutely necessary to national prosperity, and the sure way of obtaining the blessing of God.”<sup>9</sup> Benjamin Franklin also echoed the directive to “industry and frugality” as the means of effectuating freedom from vice. Franklin, in fact, always preferring “the *doers* of the word to the mere *hearers*,” became probably the most ardent promoter of industry, filling the pages of his famous *Poor Richard’s Almanac* with such sayings as “God helps them that help themselves,” “Sloth makes all things difficult, but industry all easy,” and “Diligence is the mother of good luck, and God gives all things to industry.”<sup>10</sup> Yet, even as industry was used to clear corruption from the paths of men, it ever invited that evil to come still closer to their hearts and minds, for where did industry lead but to greater wealth and

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<sup>7</sup>Kramnick, “Great National,” 17; Chauncy, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 163; Williams, “Essential Rights,” 57; Diggins, 147.

<sup>8</sup>Kramnick, “Great National,” 18; Diggins, 7; Smith, 4.

<sup>9</sup>Appleby, 294-95, and Witherspoon, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 556.

<sup>10</sup>Franklin, *Autobiography*, in Sargent, 193; Diggins, 8; Benjamin Franklin, Philadelphia, to George Whitefield, 6 June 1753, in Sargent, 413; Benjamin Franklin, *Poor Richards Almanac*, in Sargent, 354-56; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 17.

temptation to idleness and corruption? Franklin recognized this vicious cycle and frankly admitted, in spite of his emphasis on industry, that “I have not, indeed, yet thought of a remedy for luxury.”<sup>11</sup>

The seemingly inevitable presence of corruption was one of the great puzzles with which the Founders came to wrestle. Protestantism, the dominant religion in America, explicitly taught that man’s natural state was one of unregenerate sinfulness and corruption. The Founders, accepting this religious pronouncement as truth, recognized corruption’s existence as unquestionable. John Adams, in his *Defence of the Constitutions*, matter-of-factly stated that “there is no reason to believe the one [man] much honest or wiser than the other; they are all of the same clay, their minds and bodies are alike.” Search where one may throughout the pages of history, the story is the same—“self-interest, private avidity, ambition, and avarice, will exist in every state of society, and under every form of government.”<sup>12</sup> George Washington resignedly concluded that “disinterested” or uncorrupted persons amounted to “no more than a drop in the Ocean,” and Hamilton agreed that “the history of human conduct [did] not warrant” an “exalted opinion of human virtue.”<sup>13</sup> In justifying their decision to break with the Old European world and form their own nation, the Founders emphasized the extremely depraved nature of that world. Like their Puritan ancestors who, “flying from the deprivations of Europe,” landed upon the “American Strand,” the Founding generation were also fleeing “from the political Sodom,” determined not to “look back,

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<sup>11</sup>Benjamin Franklin, Passy, to B. Vaughan, 26 July 1784, in Sargent, 471, and Diggins, 7.

<sup>12</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 118, 215, 283.

<sup>13</sup>Gordon S. Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992; Vintage Books, 1993), 252-53; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 425-26; Adams, to Samuel Adams, 18 October 1790, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 120; Diggins, 12.

lest we perish and become a monument of infamy and derision to the world.”<sup>14</sup> In a very real sense, the Founders embraced a “Hebraic kind of separatism”—new innocent world versus old corrupt world—as defense against the contamination of Europe.<sup>15</sup> In this example, the complexity of the Founding Fathers’ thought system is again evident, for, while they separated from Europe’s corruption, they held fast to the value perceptible in its enlightened thought.

The Constitutional Convention fairly hummed with references to corruption and suggestions for its management. Gunning Bedford felt its existence to be too much in evidence in the voting chamber and appealed to the delegates who scoffed at the notion to reexamine the voting rolls and then deny that “the large States” were not “seeking to aggrandize themselves at the expense of the small.”<sup>16</sup> Discussion of salaries and offices inevitably involved careful analysis for the purpose of removing as much temptation as possible from the purview of elected officials. For example, Madison felt increases in salary for officials holding dual offices to be an unnecessary risk; Hamilton felt it to be a necessary one, although admittedly hazardous, to be taken in the interest of providing public service. Franklin, even more extremely, was against salaries altogether, seeing no benefit to “making our posts of honor, places of profit.”<sup>17</sup> The assigning of numbers to various governmental bodies and the disbursement of power all revolved around the eternal corruption question. Elbridge Gerry was ever in favor of increasing the numbers because “the larger the number the less the danger of their being corrupted,” and George

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<sup>14</sup>Boorstin, 3, and Adams, Speech given in the State House, in Padover, 110.

<sup>15</sup>Hartz, 52; May, 46; McCoy, 607; Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 200; Cassara, 21.

<sup>16</sup>Farrand, 1: 491.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., 1: 82-3, 376, 386, and Smith, 205.

Mason cautioned against placing too much power in any one body's hands for "we know they will always when they can . . . increase it."<sup>18</sup> Following Bedford's lead, many delegates did not even trust themselves. When discussing the question of "their own compensation," Madison respectfully submitted to the Convention members that "it wd. be indecent to put their hands into the public purse for the sake of their own pockets."<sup>19</sup> According to Hamilton, even those who obviously spread the truth were not always "influenced by purer principles than their antagonists," for corruption could be deceptively invisible at times. It is no wonder that, at times, John Adams doubted "whether there is public virtue enough to support a republic."<sup>20</sup>

Corruption and evil's existence was clearly visible and problematic to both the American clerics who denounced it from their pulpits and the American Founders who sought to control it through their government. At the core, although the idea is repugnant to some historians, in their fundamental understanding of corruption as an irremovable and unchangeable part of human nature, the Founders were drawing upon the Calvinist belief in original sin, the human depravity to which every person born since the fall of Adam is heir.<sup>21</sup> This Puritanical sense of the innate depravity of man surfaces time after time in the writings of the Founders. Both John Adams and Alexander Hamilton urged their fellow Founders to the awareness "that although reason ought always to govern

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<sup>18</sup>Farrand, 1: 569, 578.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., 1: 373-74, and Bailyn, "Butterfield's," 250.

<sup>20</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 88, and John Adams, Braintree, to Mercy Warren, 8 January 1776, in Padover, 79. John Adams thought that the avaricious drive to vice was so strong and subtle in humans that many would mistake its promptings "for the dictates of our consciences" and yield to its course, not realizing that they had succumbed until already well started down the path of destruction. John Adams, "On Self-Delusion," *Boston Gazette*, 29 August 1763; quoted in Striner, 599, and John Adams, to Thomas Jefferson, 2 February 1816; quoted in Striner, 599.

<sup>21</sup>Noll, 147; Diggins, 7-8; Morgan, "Revolutionary Era," 17, 19.

individuals, it certainly never did since the Fall, and never will till the Millennium; and human nature must be taken as it is, as it has been, and will be."<sup>22</sup> An even more overt contextualization of political corruption in Puritanical terms is this statement by Adams in his *Defence of the Constitutions*:

To expect self-denial from men, when they have a majority in their favour, and consequently power to gratify themselves, is to disbelieve all history and universal experience; it is to disbelieve Revelation and the Word of God, which informs us, the heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.<sup>23</sup>

James Madison, agreeing with this basic assessment of human nature, made his position explicit in the *Federalist Papers* by recognizing divisiveness and greed as “sown in the nature of man.” Even the Founders’ fear of undetectable or hidden corruption discloses religious influence, summoning to the mind “imagery of drowsy hearts” awakened by the spirit of the Lord to the knowledge of sin’s hitherto concealed and deadly work within.<sup>24</sup>

Enlightenment philosophers shared this sense of corruption’s concealed control, having a particular penchant for discovering the hidden workings of the universe in general, as well as an acknowledgment of corruption’s pervasiveness. David Hume was fascinated by the “secret nature” and “secret powers” of the universe, pondering how the “effects and influence” of various objects and ideas “may change, without any change in their sensible qualities.”<sup>25</sup> There is a disparity between the messages of reason and religion at this point that reveals the Founders’ placement of religious understanding at the core of their ideological system. They accepted political corruption as the progeny of

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<sup>22</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 363; Smith, 205; Koch, *Power, Morals*, 99.

<sup>23</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 289.

<sup>24</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 124, and Striner, 598.

<sup>25</sup>Hume, *Human Understanding*, 31-2, 36-7, 90, and Striner, 598.

original sin and thereby decidedly rejected the Enlightenment holding, declaimed particularly earnestly by Rousseau and Paine, that “man is a being that is naturally good.” Paine felt that man, “were he not corrupted by governments, is naturally the friend of man, and . . . human nature is not of itself vicious.”<sup>26</sup> However, Enlightenment philosophers still accepted corruption’s influence as universally pervasive, although largely believing it to be caused by government failure and poor societal interaction, and they entertained no illusions of present-day virtue for mankind. Scottish philosophers like David Hume and Adam Ferguson, in their search for “the constant and universal principles of human nature,” found, in contrast to Paine, truly ubiquitous ones in self-interest and corruption. Hume confidently asserts that “nothing is more certain than that men are, in a great measure, govern’d by interest, and that even when they extend their concern beyond themselves, ‘tis not to any great distance.”<sup>27</sup> Going as far back as Machiavelli, philosophers had “presuppose[d] that all men are wicked.” Locke had considered the possibility that man is “one of the lowest of all intellectual beings,” and Montesquieu had fleshed out that pondering by detailing exactly how man’s avaricious nature could spell destruction for a republican system.<sup>28</sup> Along with detailing how man’s corruption could destroy a republic, Enlightenment philosophers also advanced suggestions on how it could be controlled. It was by building this Enlightenment

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<sup>26</sup>Arthur M. Melzer, *The Natural Goodness of Man: On the System of Rousseau's Thought* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), 15, 17; Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 226; Melzer, “The Origin,” 5.

<sup>27</sup>Adair, 345-46; Branson, 248; C. Bradley Thompson, “John Adams’s Machiavellian Moment,” *The Review of Politics* 57, no. 3 (Summer 1995) : 402; Commager, 73; Diggins, 77; Hume, *Human Nature*, 499-500, 534.

<sup>28</sup>Rahe, 452; Locke, *Human Understanding*, 260; Montesquieu, 23.

structure around the core religious concept of original sin that the Founders embarked on the creation of a “politics of distrust” government.<sup>29</sup>

The government that the Founders set about to erect was never intended to make men virtuous; it was calculated instead to control corruption and transmute self-interest into a mechanistic agent in the enforcement of its own restraint or, in Madison’s words, “enable the government to control the governed; and in the next place oblige it to control itself.”<sup>30</sup> Although religion was the core of their system, the Founders recognized that, in the present age, the virtue and morality it engendered were yet insufficient to control corruption. For government to rely on them now would “be to calculate on the weaker springs of the human character.” While religion and its resultant virtue could not “be too much beloved, practiced, or rewarded; . . . to place liberty on that foundation only would not be safe.”<sup>31</sup> Accordingly, the Founders disdained to turn “earth into heaven” and settled for developing the governmental regulatory scheme known as separation of powers and checks and balances, drawing heavily upon the central Enlightenment concept of balance and Montesquieu’s theory of three separate governmental branches.<sup>32</sup> The first step was to separate and balance the branches in such a way that “should abuses

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<sup>29</sup>Rahe, 455.

<sup>30</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 319-20; Diggins, 52, 59, 67-8, 71, 164; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 19. As John Adams noted, the basic reason for having a government at all was to control the corruption of the people. He maintained that “all magistrates, and all civil officers, and all civil government, are founded and maintained by the sins of the people. All armies would be needless if men were universally virtuous.” John Adams, *Diary* (entry for 18 December 1760), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 9.

<sup>31</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 228-29; James Madison, to Thomas Jefferson, 24 October 1787, in Padover, 330-31; White, *Philosophy*, 111, 133-34; Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 490; Appleby, 289; Farrand, 1: 254.

<sup>32</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 434-35; Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 8-9, 11, 17; Kirk, 120; Montesquieu, 157, 164; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 120; Farrand, 2: 34.



creep into one part, they are reformed by those that remain sound.” The second step was to activate self-interest in the pursuit of its own restraint within this system of separated branches and make “ambition . . . counteract ambition.”<sup>33</sup>

Self-interest and ambition were substantially significant in the mechanistic operation of the Founders’ new government. Self-interest could motivate men to enter governmental office and serve their country. While Washington admitted that patriotism could help to move men in that direction, he also knew that patriotism “will not endure unassisted by Interest.” Hamilton blatantly suggested that the government should deliberately pique the baser interests of man, “his pride and vanity,” in order to entice him into government service.<sup>34</sup> In commerce, such unabashed carrot-dangling and multiplication of “the means of gratification, by promoting the introduction and circulation of the precious metals, those darling objects of human avarice and enterprise,” were already being employed and yielding dividends by serving to “vivify and invigorate all the channels of industry and to make them flow with greater activity and copiousness.”<sup>35</sup> However, after being attracted to government by his ambition, a man’s ambition, within the framework of separated powers, would be counteracted and neutralized by that of other men. Concerning the possibility of deliberate executive perversion of Senatorial instructions, Hamilton had no fears, knowing that the wrath of the Senate would undoubtedly fall upon the executive, for “we may thus far count upon their pride, if not upon their virtue.” Similarly there is no danger that judges will attempt

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<sup>33</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 121, 303, 319-20, and Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 239, 283.

<sup>34</sup>Diggins, 23, 27, 71; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 344; Farrand, 1: 284-86; McDonald, 194.

<sup>35</sup>Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 134.

“deliberate usurpations of the authority of the legislature” because that body is “possessed of the means of punishing their presumption” and has a “personal interest” in so doing.<sup>36</sup> John Adams also considered “the desire of dominion,” when leashed by the balance of government, to be “a very useful and noble movement in the human mind,” and Franklin found self-interest to be an excellent “prod” towards virtue, providing one could present virtue in appealing guise.<sup>37</sup>

The idea of building a government fueled by self-interest to control corruption did not materialize in the Founders’ minds out of nothingness. Enlightenment figures such as Locke and Hume theorized that action could only occur if the emotions or interests were aroused; the will was incapable without these catalysts. Society is, according to Locke, only entered upon the basis of self-interest, “the great and chief end” being “the preservation of . . . property.” Hume suggested that, in order to get men to obey laws, a government must “render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest, and their violation our most remote.”<sup>38</sup> Only by appealing to interest, could a government survive. However, the Enlightenment philosophers were not alone in their espousal of self-interested government. Although self-interest may seem supremely antithetical to religion, nevertheless clerics recognized its usefulness and unhesitatingly appealed to it, although there is certainly a fundamental difference between the greed and power lust symbolized by the word self-interest in government and the fear and desire for safety evoked by the religious use of the word. Revivalists often preached hellfire and

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., 388-89, 453; Farrand, 1: 512; White, *Philosophy*, 111.

<sup>37</sup>Adams, *Feudal Law*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 12, and West, *Politics of Revelation*, 25.

<sup>38</sup>Locke, *Second Treatise*, 70; Hume, *Human Nature*, 537; Diggins, 25.

damnation in an attempt to draw self-interested souls to a state of saved and comfortable preservation. George Whitefield candidly asked his audience, “And would not self-interest, if there was no other motive, excite us to *observe GOD’s Statutes, and keep his laws?*”<sup>39</sup> Yet another minister, Charles Chauncy, styled the fear of God as a check upon lust and corruption in self-interested souls and compared its efficacy to the checks employed by government and society. Just as in the government created by the Founders, this fear of reprisal controls “the out-breaking of their pride, and envy, and avarice, and self-love, and other lusts.” However, unlike the government where corruption can only be controlled through self-interested mechanisms yet never eradicated, the religious fear of God “will weaken, and gradually destroy, the very inward propensities themselves to the various acts of vice” until self-interest is itself consumed.<sup>40</sup> In religion, self-interest compelled one to God and dissipated in his radiance; the enlightened mechanisms of government could only check and redirect the unwavering striving to sin. This religious concept of self-interest’s eventual eradication was of paramount importance to the Founders, for an enlightened government alone could not accomplish such a feat. Only a religious spark could potentially effectuate such a perfection of virtue.

#### SAFE SEPARATION FROM THE STATE

Whether separating from Europe, separating the powers of government, or separating church and state, separation, to the Founders, was ever in furtherance of corruption’s alienation. Purity of religious fervor must be maintained if their

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<sup>39</sup>Whitefield, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 134, and Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 86-7.

<sup>40</sup>Chauncy, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 167.

governmental structure was to survive and operate properly. Just as the Founders sought to distance themselves from corruption by separating from England, so did they also attempt to preserve the Church's purity by dividing it from a government that utilized mankind's self-interested striving to maximize lusts. For, as Jefferson elucidates in Virginia's 1786 Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, in societies which combine church and state, the state "tends also to corrupt the principles of that very religion it is meant to encourage, by bribing, with a monopoly of worldly honors and emoluments, those who will externally profess and conform to it."<sup>41</sup> Madison also feared that, if church and state were not separated, a "Civil Magistrate" could "employ Religion as an engine of Civil policy" thus corrupting religion and rendering in its place "an unhallowed perversion of the means of salvation." For Madison, the issue was beyond question: "Religion flourishes in greater purity, without than with the aid of Govt."<sup>42</sup> Church and state were not separated to protect the state from religious influence altogether but to protect all churches "against the usurpations of government" establishment and to shield them from possible contaminates leaking from a government necessarily closely connected, in the interest of controlling, to the more sordid sides of human nature.<sup>43</sup> Although the Anti-Federalists generally opposed the separation of church and state, the Federalists, whose will by virtue of being the majority was controlling, firmly insisted upon it. Madison, writing in 1785, argued the debate in terms of natural right by declaring that "the Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and

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<sup>41</sup>Virginia, *An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*, passed on 16 January 1786.

<sup>42</sup>James Madison, *Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 1785*, in Padover, 312-13, and James Madison, Montpelier, to Edward Livingston, 10 July 1822, in Rakove, 789.

<sup>43</sup>Commager, 204, and Byrne, 51.

conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate. This right is in its nature an unalienable right.”<sup>44</sup>

Contrary to the Anti-Federalists, the Federalist Founders in fact hoped and believed that separation of church and state would facilitate the much-needed growth of the church’s influence. Madison objected to collusion between church and state precisely because it “is adverse to the diffusion of the light of Christianity” and

is a contradiction to the Christian Religion itself; for every page of it disavows a dependence on the powers of this world: it is a contradiction to fact; for it is known that this Religion both existed and flourished, not only without the support of human laws, but in spite of every opposition from them: and not only during the period of miraculous aid, but long after it had been left to its own evidence, and the ordinary care of Providence . . . .<sup>45</sup>

Jefferson also felt that “it is error alone which needs the support of government. Truth can stand by itself.” Coercion to one particular religion is “a departure from the plan of the Holy Author of our religion, who being Lord both of body and mind, yet chose not to propagate it by coercions on either, as was in his Almighty power to do.” Instead he chose to “[create] the mind free,” and this was the optimum condition for religion’s proliferation.<sup>46</sup> By 1819, Madison was gratified to see that the separation plan had succeeded, for “the number, the industry, and the morality of the Priesthood, & the devotion of the people have been manifestly increased by the total separation of the Church from the State.”<sup>47</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, on his visit to America, also noted with

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<sup>44</sup>Madison, *Memorial*, in Padover, 310-11; Cornell, 109; Noll, 150; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 70; Thomas Jefferson, Second Inaugural Address (4 March 1805), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 315; Koch, *Power, Morals*, 119.

<sup>45</sup>Madison, *Memorial*, in Padover, 313, 315, and Novak, 173.

<sup>46</sup>Jefferson, *Notes on the State*, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 255, and *An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom*.

<sup>47</sup>James Madison, Montpelier, to Robert Walsh, 2 March 1819, in Rakove, 727. Jon Butler, having examined the population and congregational statistics for the period following the separation of

wonder that Christianity possessed the authority of “a religion believed in without discussion.” His desire for an explanation drove him to question both clergymen and laypersons. Amazingly, he “found that they all agreed with each other . . . that the main reason for the quiet sway of religion over their country was the complete separation of church and state.”<sup>48</sup> Additional to the benefits which separation brought to religion were the governmental benefits, for it was religion operating free of the state that was best able to lend to “the support of the Civil Government” as Madison thoroughly expected it would do. In the words of Presbyterian minister Jonathan Parsons, church and state “were designed to be mutual benefits” to each other and “mutual helps in this province.”<sup>49</sup>

In much of their understanding of and desire for the separation of church and state, the Founders were mirroring religious sentiments of the past and present. Roger Williams, the founder of Rhode Island, was a firm believer in such separation, believing that “the state cannot touch a religious practice without corrupting it.” He propounded his separationist views at length in his 1644 text, *The Bloody Tenant of Persecution*.<sup>50</sup> Places like Rhode Island and William Penn’s Pennsylvania had, since their founding,

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church and state, concludes that Madison was correct in his assessment. In fact, he has calculated that, in the period between 1780 and 1860, Protestant congregations increased numerically faster than the entire national population. By way of illustrating this growth, Butler states that “Baptists counted about 400 congregations in 1780, 2,700 in 1820, and 12,150 in 1860; Lutherans, 225 in 1780, 800 in 1820, and 2,100 in 1860; Presbyterians, nearly 500 in 1780, 1,700 in 1820, and 6,400 in 1860; Methodists, perhaps 50 in 1783, 2,700 in 1820, and nearly 20,000 in 1860.” Butler, *Awash*, 268-70.

<sup>48</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 295, 432, 448.

<sup>49</sup>Madison, *Memorial*, in Padover, 313-14, and Jonathan Parsons, “Freedom from Civil and Ecclesiastical Slavery, the Purchase of Christ” (sermon preached at Newbury, MA in 1774), in Greene, 388-89. John Witherspoon went so far as to aver, “Whoever is an avowed enemy to God, I scruple not to call him an enemy to his country.” However, Witherspoon did not wish to be misunderstood as advocating one sect over another. He makes clear that “I do not wish you to oppose any body’s religion, but every body’s wickedness.” Witherspoon, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 553-54.

<sup>50</sup>Kramnick and Moore, 48, 57, 60, and Bonomi, 35.

been havens of religious freedom. Even in Massachusetts Bay, despite the “coercive measures” used by Puritans to force the conversion of those living within their communities, some measure of church-state separation was employed as ministers were not permitted to hold any political offices. The entire purpose of the Massachusetts Bay colony’s founding was, in fact, to escape the religious establishment of England.<sup>51</sup> More recently, ministers like Elisha Williams in 1744 were declaring “that every Christian has *a right of judging for himself* what he is to believe and practice in religion.”<sup>52</sup> Ezra Stiles thanked God for the lack of religious establishment with its “subscriptions and oaths to uninspired rules for defining truth,” and the Biblical phrases “Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s” and “my kingdom is not of this world” were very much in religious vogue.<sup>53</sup>

Dissenting groups were particularly adamant about the separation of church and state. Baptists and Methodists in Virginia, as well as Presbyterians, Quakers, and Lutherans, strongly supported the efforts of Jefferson and Madison to establish religious freedom and separate church and state. In fact, it was in a letter to a Baptist congregation, assuring them of his efforts to secure separation, that Jefferson first used his famous “wall of separation between church and state” phrase.<sup>54</sup> George Washington also wrote later to a Hebrew congregation to assure them that the government’s position

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<sup>51</sup>Cassara, 123; Backus, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 344; Kramnick and Moore, 49; Morgan, “Revolutionary Era,” 16-7.

<sup>52</sup>Williams, “Essential Rights,” 55, 61, 64, 82-3.

<sup>53</sup>Stiles, 37; Bridenbaugh, 3; Matt. 22:21 KJV; John 18:36 KJV; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 123; Gaustad, 121.

<sup>54</sup>Kramnick and Moore, 110-11, 118-19; Parsons, 390; James Madison, Orange City, to William Bradford, 1 April 1774, in Rakove, 8; Gaustad, 52-3, 71; Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, 257-58; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 70.

concerning their religion went beyond mere toleration to complete freedom and separation. The Continental Congress enshrined this concept of religious freedom and disestablishment in their Northwest Ordinance of 1787 by guaranteeing that “no person, demeaning himself in a peaceable and orderly manner, shall ever be molested on account of his mode of worship or religious sentiments in the said territory.”<sup>55</sup> The belief that religion could and would prosper without governmental support was widely adhered to by dissenters and evangelicals. One group in Cumberland County appealed to history for proof that Christianity had already survived “for several hundred years without the aid of civil power” and stressed that “religious establishment has never been a means of prospering the Gospel.”<sup>56</sup>

Despite such evidence of religious activism in American, the Founders’ decision to separate church and state is often coveted by historians as a successful Enlightenment innovation. Indeed, Enlightenment philosophy did propound religious freedom as one of the basic natural rights of mankind. Montesquieu praised the religious “spirit of toleration and kindness” that had infused society in the ancient days of Rome, and Rousseau proposed that, instead of “an exclusive national religion, tolerance should be given to all religions that tolerate others, so long as their dogmas contain nothing contrary to the duties of citizenship.”<sup>57</sup> Simple toleration was not sufficient for Thomas Paine, and, in concert with Voltaire and Diderot, he spoke out in favor of full “liberty of conscience” and total disestablishment, or separation. Paine considered toleration to be

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<sup>55</sup>George Washington, to the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, August 1790, in Padover, 460, and *An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States, North-west of the River Ohio* (passed 13 July 1787), in *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 32 :340.

<sup>56</sup>Butler, *Awash*, 263.

<sup>57</sup>Gay, *Enlightenment: An Interpretation*, 169; Cassara, 116; Rousseau, 140.



merely “the *counterfeit*” of intoleration, for “the one assumes to itself the right of withholding liberty of conscience, the other of granting it.”<sup>58</sup> In fact, so impressed were Enlightenment philosophers by the American application of the religious freedom precept that the Virginia act guaranteeing religious freedom was “inserted in the new ‘Encyclopedie,’ and is appearing in most of the publications respecting America.”<sup>59</sup> However, though the Founder’s decision to separate church and state was supported by Enlightenment thought, it required religious motivation to become reality. Perhaps Jefferson’s earnest statement concerning his willingness to fight for religious freedom and separation best illustrates the presence of the religious spark. In 1800, writing to Benjamin Rush, Jefferson declares: “I have sworn upon the altar of God, eternal hostility against every form of tyranny over the mind of man.”<sup>60</sup> The altar of God is the motivation for this stance, not the Encyclopedia, and it is belief in the coming of the kingdom of God and the perfection of virtue through religion that enables the Founders to envision their governmental machine as possessing potential longevity and stability.

## MOVING TOWARD THE MILLENNIUM

Even as the Founders sought to combat corruption and human depravity by separating their governmental powers from the church, specifically making control rather than impossible eradication of vice their aim, they were also inclined toward a belief that progress and a betterment of the innate human condition was possible. The idea of

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<sup>58</sup>Gaustad, 71; Bridenbaugh, 152; Paine, *Rights of Man*, 291.

<sup>59</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Paris, to James Madison, 16 December 1786, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 378.

<sup>60</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 23 September 1800, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 511.

progress, indeed of the “perfectibility of Man” and society, was part of Enlightenment theory as it imagined the possible grounds to be gained in every conceivable area from government to science to morality. Enlightenment thinkers like Voltaire and Paine and Condorcet “forecast a future” in which progress would continue to crest new mountains and overcome yet unseen obstacles. Paine excitedly considered the current enlightened age as “hav[ing] it in our power to begin the world over again.”<sup>61</sup>

Once again, though Enlightenment philosophy considered progressive possibilities, religious expectations for the Millennium and the second coming of Christ to earth provided the dynamic energy necessary to maintain a forward-looking government. Protestant doctrine must “be counted as having been more often an ally of the future than of the past.”<sup>62</sup> For David Tappan, a Congregationalist minister, the Revolution was “a chain which is gradually drawing after it the most glorious consequences to mankind” which would culminate in the Millennium reign of Christ.<sup>63</sup> One historian considers that “Christian millennialism played a significant role in rationalizing popular secular optimism,” making that “vision of optimistic progress . . . more understandable by Christian teleology.”<sup>64</sup> Christianity fortified and fueled governmental enthusiasm in every facet of its framework, instilling a sense of mission for the current age. While Paine exhorted Americans from a reasoned perspective, telling them that “the cause of America is in a great measure the cause of all mankind,” a cause

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<sup>61</sup>Commager, xi-xii, 41; Gay, “Enlightenment Thought,” 45; McCoy, 609; Paine, *Common Sense*, 45.

<sup>62</sup>Bonomi, 221; May, 46; Bridenbaugh, 16-7.

<sup>63</sup>Gaustad, 109.

<sup>64</sup>Butler, *Awash*, 217, and Foner, “Tom Paine’s Republic,” 205-06.

by which posterity would be “affected even to the end of time,” ministers like Jonathan Edwards added potency to the charge by conflated America with the new Jerusalem and proclaimed America as the inaugural country of the Millennium, sounding vaguely like resurrected John Winthrops exhorting a crowded deck of Puritans in 1630 to be “as a Citty upon a Hill” with “the eies of all people . . . uppon us.”<sup>65</sup>

This millennial expectation is evidenced in the Founders’ vision of a kind of “civic millenarianism” in which governmental and societal progress are effected with the aid of “the hand of Heaven.”<sup>66</sup> References to the idea of progress toward greater perfection are plentiful. John Adams found it “folly to say that no further improvements can be discovered,” and Jefferson acknowledged a belief that “we shall continue to grow, to multiply and prosper until we exhibit an association, powerful, wise and happy, beyond what has yet been seen by men.”<sup>67</sup> James Wilson deemed it “the glorious destiny of man to be always progressive” and combined this enlightened assessment with the supportive religious injunction to “forget those things that are behind” in order “to press on towards those that are before.”<sup>68</sup> The sense of American mission was as palpable for the Founders as it was for the Puritans gathered around Winthrop on the *Arbella*’s deck. According to John Adams, the American people had at this historic point “the best opportunity, and the greatest trust, in their hands, that Providence ever committed to so

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<sup>65</sup>Paine, *Common Sense*, 3, 17; Williams, *Wilderness Lost*, 111, 115; Wilson, “Religion and Revolution,” 609; McLoughlin, 107; Boorstin, 3.

<sup>66</sup>Wilson, “Religion and Revolution,” 611; Appleby, 292; Adams, speech given in the State House, in Padover, 110.

<sup>67</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 3: 434-35; Jefferson, to John Adams, 21 January 1812, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 565; John Adams, Quincy, to H. Niles, 13 February 1818, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 204; Joseph Charles, “Adams and Jefferson: The Origins of the American Party System,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 12, no. 3 (July 1955) : 432.

<sup>68</sup>Wilson, *Honourable James Wilson*, in Smith, 201, and Phil. 3:13-4 KJV.

small a number since the transgression of the first pair: if they betray their trust, their guilt will merit even greater punishment than other nations have suffered, and the indignation of heaven.”<sup>69</sup> Not only would the entire current body of humanity be affected by America’s decision but so also would the “millions yet unborn.” The Founders knew that America, having accomplished a revolution without historical parallel or precedent, was now truly the city on the hill with the eyes of the world upon it to see whether it could “rear the fabrics of governments which have no model on the face of the globe.”<sup>70</sup> So, even as the Founders fashioned a government to control and check the corruption produced by humanity’s original sin, they dreamed, with the aid religious stimulants, of a day when religious, millenarian progress would herald an increase in morality to render such mechanisms mere precautions and no longer the first-line defense against corruptive vice.

#### THE CENTRALITY OF MORALITY

Controlling corruption was all well and good and necessary in a republic, but, with prevention always being preferable to reaction, morality and virtue were the mortar that would render the republican fort impenetrable if only they could be established. The Founders implicitly understood the current lack of and absolute necessity of morality to republicanism. John Adams frankly acknowledged in his *Defence of the Constitutions* that “very few, in any nation, are enlightened by philosophy or religion enough to be at all times convinced that it is a duty to prefer the public to a private interest, and fewer

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<sup>69</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, xiii.

<sup>70</sup>Samuel Adams, *On Resistance to Tyranny* (1771), in Padover, 104; Farrand, 1: 529; Madison, Hamilton, and Jay, 144-45.

still are moral, honourable, or religious enough to practice such self-denial.” However, as he told Mercy Warren in 1776, “virtue and simplicity of manners are indispensably necessary in a republic.”<sup>71</sup> The essentialness of morality was also a topic of much discussion during the ratification of the Constitution. Charles Turner, a member of the Massachusetts legislature, insisted that “pious and moral principles” were “the support, the life and soul, of republican government and liberty, of which a free constitution is the body; for, as the body, without the spirit, is dead, so a free form of government, without the animating principles of piety and virtue, is dead also, being alone.”<sup>72</sup> In the Virginia legislature, Madison argued similarly that “to suppose that any form of government will secure liberty or happiness without any virtue in the people, is a chimerical idea.” Franklin also recognized morality’s importance and advocated the use of both religious and reasonable means to achieve it.<sup>73</sup> In the years following the Constitution’s ratification, the Founders continually returned to the theme of morality, reaffirming their identification of it as vital. Washington spoke of it in his presidential Farewell Address, and Jefferson reaffirmed the “intimate connection” between liberty and morality in 1813. The collapse of the French Revolution into degeneracy merely confirmed what the Founders already understood as essential, for, while the French strove for liberty, equality and fraternity, they did so without morality, and their failure was absolute.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 494; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 75-6; Adams, to Mercy Warren, 8 January 1776, in Padover, 79; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 85; McCoy, 605; Novak, 177; Diggins, 70.

<sup>72</sup>Jonathan Elliot, ed., *The Debates in the Several State Conventions, On the Adoption of the Federal Constitution, As Recommended by the General Convention at Philadelphia, in 1787* (Washington: 1836), 2: 171-72, and Kramnick, “Great National,” 11.

<sup>73</sup>Elliot, 3: 537; Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 261-62; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 21, 25.

<sup>74</sup>George Washington, Farewell Address (19 September 1796), in Padover, 475; Gaustad, 158; Novak, 176. Looking back at the French Revolution from 1821, John Adams lamented the excess that,

Obviously morality was central to religious thought, being a direct and outward sign of commitment to God. Ministers ever condemned immorality, and transgression of the moral code inflicted a penetrating guilt alleviated only through repentance. Additionally, religion, particularly the Protestantism of America, promoted the concepts of self-sacrifice and relinquishment of one's desires in the interest of others even as Jesus had done. One minister, Samuel McClintock, expressed the religious system of morality as "friendly to civil government; as it contains a system of the most pure and sublime morality, and enjoins on its professors in the most express manner, and by the most powerful sanctions, subjection to the powers that are ordained of God."<sup>75</sup> Of course, enlightened thought also acknowledged the necessity of morality and virtue to the continuation of a republic but was largely helpless to inculcate or facilitate its occurrence. Montesquieu labeled virtue "the living principle of a republic" and "the spring that makes republican government move, as honor is the spring that makes monarchy move."<sup>76</sup> Denying that the virtue to which he referred was "a Christian virtue," he provided no equally inspired alternative source for its obtainment. His description of "political virtue" as "a renunciation of oneself, which is always a very painful thing . . . requiring a continuous preference of the public interest over one's own," is similar in result to

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without morality's tempering influence, corrupted the ideals of the French nation. With a touch of sarcasm, he observes, "Helvetius and Rousseau preached to the French nation *liberty*, till they made them the most mechanical slaves; *equality* till they destroyed all equity; *humanity* till they became weasels, and African panthers; and *fraternity* till they cut one another's throats like Roman gladiators." John Adams, Montizello, to Benjamin Waterhouse, 21 May 1821, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 212-13.

<sup>75</sup>McClintock, in Sandoz, *Political Sermons*, 806-07; Diggins, 17; Novanglus, in Jensen, 329; Wood, *Creation of the American Republic*, 59-61, 118; John 15:13 KJV; II Cor. 8:9 KJV; I Cor. 10:24 KJV; Phil. 2:4 KJV.

<sup>76</sup>Montesquieu, xli, and Spurlin, *Montesquieu*, 250-51.

Christian virtue but lacking a God to inspire men to seek it.<sup>77</sup> Similarly, other Enlightenment figures such as Voltaire and Paine and Rousseau also expounded upon the necessity of morality and advanced only tedious pursuit of reason as the means of securing it. Rousseau considered that the state should issue a statement of moral requirements or “social sentiments without which a man cannot be a good citizen or a faithful subject,” and Paine, apparently at a loss as to how to cause morality to exist in men, ignominiously hedged by claiming morality to be automatically existent in “every man’s conscience.”<sup>78</sup> Religious fervor, as the Founders understood, was the only truly effective catalyst to the necessary morality.

Having already determined that the church should be separated from the state, the state could not of course legislate religious adherence in order to foster morality, but, despite the separation, the Founders were not at all opposed to religious influence on the state. Although the Founders decidedly considered religion alone to be an insufficient basis upon which to rest the republic, it was equally undeniable that the republic could not exist without it. Public virtue must draw its life from private virtue, whether that virtue derive somehow from reason or, more probably in America, religion. As the revivalistic surge of the Great Awakening encouraged more and more people to “wrestle with their souls in public” and Enlightenment spokesmen like Thomas Paine urged people to refrain from “mental lying” and profess in the public sphere what they truly believed in private, the Founders garnered support for their assertion that “public virtue cannot exist in a nation without private, and public virtue is the only foundation of

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<sup>77</sup>Montesquieu, xli, 35-6, and Appleby, 289.

<sup>78</sup>Rousseau, 139; Arkush, 228; Paine, *Age of Reason*, 599, 601-02.

republics.”<sup>79</sup> Private religious belief must without doubt impinge on public policy if the republic were to function correctly. Washington, in his Inaugural Address, reiterated this same sentiment, laying “the foundation of our national policy” squarely on “the pure and immutable principles of private morality.”<sup>80</sup> This was indeed a bold experiment: to form a republican government, necessarily dependent on public virtue, which in turn is dependant upon private virtue arising from a religion which the state had bound itself not to governmentally sponsor. The republican government would be dependent upon a religious environment it could not create for survival.

That religion was perceived by the Founders to be the backbone of private virtue in America and was absolutely essential to the republic’s survival is obvious from their writings and speeches. The Continental Congress acknowledged in Article Three of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787 that “religion, morality and knowledge” were “necessary to good government,” and several state constitutions, including those of Massachusetts in 1780 and New Hampshire in 1784, did likewise.<sup>81</sup> Benjamin Rush found religion to be “the only foundation for a useful education in a republic” in need of virtue to acquire liberty, and John Adams, responding to his sentiments, agreed “that religion and virtue are the only foundations, not only of republicanism and of all free governments, but of social felicity under all governments and in all the combinations of human society.”<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>79</sup>Cassara, 136; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 28; Byrne, 118; Adams, to Mercy Warren, 16 April 1776, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 57; Corrigan, 197; McCoy, 618; Appleby, 293; Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 300.

<sup>80</sup>Washington, First Inaugural Address, in Padover, 463.

<sup>81</sup>*An Ordinance for the Government*, in *Journals of the Continental Congress*, 32: 340; Constitution of Massachusetts, arts. 2, 3; Constitution of New Hampshire (2 June 1784), arts. 5, 6.

<sup>82</sup>Novak, 168, 177, and John Adams, Quincy, to Benjamin Rush, 28 August 1811, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 161.



George Washington in the Farewell Address of his presidency reiterated the same theme, only this time tinged with warning:

A volume could not trace all their [religion and morality] connections with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths which are the instruments of investigation in courts of justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education or minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.<sup>83</sup>

Even Benjamin Franklin earnestly contended against attempts to undermine the position of religion in the hearts of people, viewing it as essential to the maintenance of their morality. After reading Thomas Paine's invective *Age of Reason*, Franklin wrote him a scathing letter, rebuking him for "striking at the foundations of all religion." Franklin reminded Paine that, while he personally "may find it easy to live a virtuous life without the assistance afforded by religion," most people could not and to undermine that influence in their lives would be to deal a blow to morality. Besides, Franklin reminded Paine, he himself was likely indebted to the instruction of religion in his youth which made such an attack in poor taste, for, as Franklin sardonically noted, "among us it is not necessary, as among the Hottentots, *that a youth, to be raised into the company of men, should prove his manhood by beating his mother.*"<sup>84</sup> Alexander Hamilton, upon observing the depredations of the French Revolution against Christianity, condemned it as an evil "conspiracy to establish atheism on the ruins of Christianity" thus "depriv[ing] mankind of its best consolations and most animating hopes, and [making] a gloomy

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<sup>83</sup>Washington, Farewell Address, in Padover, 474; Novak, 176-77; Sandoz, *Government of Laws*, 121.

<sup>84</sup>Benjamin Franklin, to Thomas Paine, in Sargent, 488-89.

desert of the universe;” he knew that with religion “morality [is] overthrown (and morality *must* fall with religion).”<sup>85</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville also commented on this American understanding of religion. While demurring from rendering opinion on how many Americans truly believed in their religion, for who could “read the secrets of the heart,” he was unequivocal in his determination that they saw “in religion the surest guarantee of the stability of the State and the safety of individuals” and stated this point several times throughout his writings.<sup>86</sup>

Although the Founders did recognize the ability of other religions to foster morality, there does seem to have been an assumption that the dominant strain would be Protestant Christianity, including of course all of its various denominations and offshoots. Though Jefferson declared that while he believed in one God he accorded other men the right to believe in three and found that “both religions . . . make honest men, and that is the only point society has any right to look to,” he nevertheless considered Christianity to possess “the most sublime and benevolent code of morals which has ever been offered to man” and avowed so repeatedly.<sup>87</sup> He even told Charles Clay in 1814 that the continuous staying power of Christianity’s moral system throughout history was evidence enough for him of “the sanction of divine authority stamped upon it” and, in 1801, proclaimed Christianity to be the religion most agreeable to liberty and scientific progress.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup>Hamilton, *The Stand*, 651-52, and West, *Politics of Revelation*, 46.

<sup>86</sup>Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 290, 293-94, and Tocqueville, *Old Regime*, 153.

<sup>87</sup>Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to James Smith, 8 December 1822, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 642-43; Jefferson, Inauguration Address (4 March 1801), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 299; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 39, 51; Jon Butler, “Why Revolutionary America Wasn’t a ‘Christian Nation’,” in Hutson, 197; Thomas Jefferson, Monticello, to John Adams, 13 October 1813, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 578; Thomas Jefferson, Washington, to Dr. Benjamin Rush, 21 April 1803, in Koch and Peden, *Writings of Thomas Jefferson*, 522; Bonomi, 100.

<sup>88</sup>Gaustad, 120, 211, and Novak, 159.

Benjamin Franklin also considered Christianity as a religion and moral system to be “the best the World ever saw or is likely to see” as did John Adams who echoed Jefferson and Franklin’s sentiments and fantasized about the possibilities of a Christian Utopia in which every person would order his life by the Bible.<sup>89</sup> John Witherspoon and Benjamin Rush were both outspoken in their advocacy of Christianity. Benjamin Rush particularly stressed the importance of Christianity in the republican education of children, for, in his words, “a Christian cannot fail of being a republican.” For Rush, “it is only necessary for Republicanism to ally itself to the Christian Religion, to overturn all the corrupted political and religious institutions in the world.”<sup>90</sup> In his *Defence of the Constitutions*, John Adams gave Christianity a central position and concluded his analysis of the experiment he had boldly intimated in a letter to Count Sarsfield in 1786 that he was eager to try. He concluded that “the experiment is made, and has completely succeeded: it can no longer be called in question, whether authority in magistrates, and obedience of citizens, can be grounded on reason, morality, and the Christian religion, without the monkery of priests, or the knavery of politicians.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup>Franklin, to Ezra Stiles, in Padover, 144-45; Novak, 170; Adams, *Diary* (entry for 22 February 1756), in Koch and Peden, *Writings of John and John Quincy Adams*, 5; West, *Politics of Revelation*, 51; Thompson, “Young John Adams,” 280.

<sup>90</sup>Benjamin Rush, *Of the Mode of Education Proper in a Republic*, in *The Selected Writings of Benjamin Rush*, ed. Dagobert D. Runes (New York: Philosophical Library, 1947), 88-9; Rush, *To the Citizens*, in Padover, 441; Novak, 169-70; Gaustad, 120.

<sup>91</sup>Adams, *Defence of the Constitutions*, 1: xix.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Historians have battled through the pages of books and journals for years over the influence that the Enlightenment and religion, specifically Protestant Christianity, exerted in shaping the occurrence and course of the Revolution and the republican government that followed the American victory in that conflict. Many have chosen to favor one of these sources of influence over the other, usually discounting the discarded one almost entirely. However, privileging a preferred source over the other when evidence suggests that both presided over the course of history is not the answer.

Despite the anti-religious course of the Enlightenment in France and its ignominious finale in the French Revolution, Americans were not bound to the fate of the French Jacobins and chose instead to borrow from the British approach advanced by such men as Isaac Newton, John Locke, and William Blackstone. These philosophers chose to hold on to their religion while coupling its practice and precepts to the scientific and reasonable pursuit of knowledge. When this philosophical approach crossed the Atlantic, it was quickly seized upon by, surprisingly, clergymen who capitalized on the opportune juxtaposition of reason and religion to flesh out their theology, denounce deep-rooted errors, and discover new depths of God's creative presence and power. As reason and religion fluidly melded together, new sects such as Deism and Unitarianism came into vogue, and heated religious happenings like the Great Awakening doubled as anvils on which religion and reason hammered out their forged friendship. The process changed the religious community of America forever, but it was not the only arena to receive such alteration. Religion and reason began to shape affairs in the political realm as well. The

role of Enlightenment philosophy in the American Revolution is well documented and certainly important. However, what is often forgotten is the religious pressure that snapped the chains and imbued pedagogic, reasonable arguments for revolution with the momentum and energy necessary to bring liberty into being and sustain its fight for life. The revolutionary mechanism may have been enlightened, but its heart was religion.

Following the Revolution, Americans concurred in a decision to set sail on the political sea in a republican ship of state. Once again, the Founders commissioned to craft the vessel acquired materials from both religion and reason. Both were present and influenced the Constitutional debates, guiding the Founders in their decisions to chose a republic over a monarchy and to herald natural rights and equality as preeminent values and the people's will through the social contract as the paramount authority. The Founders constructed an elaborate and enlightened governmental framework in which corruption could be controlled through a system of checks, balances, and separations. The world had never witnessed such a feat, and European philosophes applauded the American accomplishment. At the oft-forgotten core of the elaborate edifice though, was reverence to religious principle inspired by the knowledge that, without the fervent combustion of religion, the lights of the nation sitting on the hill in the eyes of the world would go out. Religious teaching had opened the eyes of the Founders to the necessity of controlling the corruption that spewed naturally from the sinful nature of mankind, and religious belief provided the only possibility of a perfect solution. As Founders like George Washington, Alexander Hamilton, and John Adams made clear, "reason and experience both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."<sup>1</sup> Although the Founders knew that religious belief was not yet

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<sup>1</sup>Washington, Farewell Address, in Padover, 474.

sufficient to hold back the squalid tide of corruption on its own, thus the need for an enlightened government, neither could that government hope to achieve longevity and maintain liberty without religious fortification. Only the coming of the millennial reign of Christ and the growth of the morality and virtue which religious belief quickened could combat and curb corruption's course. The Founders implicitly understood the symbiotic possibilities of reason and religion in their government. Even more importantly, they comprehended and heeded the imperative to place religion at the heart of the enlightened matter where it would stimulate and support the entire structure with its life, energy, and hope.

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