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The Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse: The New American Israel and the French Antithesis

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THE CHRISTIAN REPUBLICANISM
OF TIMOTHY DWIGHT AND JEDIDIAH MORSE:
THE NEW AMERICAN ISRAEL AND THE FRENCH ANTITHESIS

by
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B. A. May, 1973, Purdue University

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ABSTRACT

THE CHRISTIAN REPUBLICANISM
OF TIMOTHY DWIGHT AND JEDIDIAH MORSE:
THE NEW AMERICAN ISRAEL AND THE FRENCH ANTITHESIS

Kim Alan Snyder
Old Dominion University, 1981
Director: Dr. John W. Kuehl

Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse were New England Congregational clergymen during America's early national period. Due to their criticisms of the French Revolution and their belief in a fictional plot by the Bavarian Illuminati to destroy religion and civil government both men have been judged by historians as backward-looking, unenlightened reactionaries. The evidence, however, reveals that Dwight and Morse were well educated, devoted to the advancement of learning, and filled with great visions of America as God's New Israel, destined to lead the rest of the world into religious and civil liberty. They espoused the ideology of Christian Republicanism and, in the 1790's, waged a battle against what they believed to be the anarchic principles of the French Revolution. They fought license in order to preserve liberty.
Intellectual history is a broad field, incorporating not just the history of ideas, but every trace of ideological influence upon an entire culture. In short, intellectual history is nothing less than a study of world views, entailing the meaning and purpose of life as well as the mechanics of conducting life according to an ideology. Ideas and their results are a fascinating study.

This examination of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse has been a labor of affection. Although I cannot agree with everything these two men believed, I am thrilled by the type of faith and optimism they often generated, even in a misguided cause. I especially enjoy showing that ideas do inspire; that man is more than an economic unit or a spoke in the wheel of society.

Since Dwight and Morse were real men, and not impersonal cogs in a great machine, it was very important in this study to let them speak for themselves at every opportunity. Each quotation, whether from a sermon, a book, or a letter has been copied without making any improvements on their spelling, punctuation, or abbreviations. It is my belief that the personalities of these men are more fully
revealed without modern attempts to "dress up" their original thoughts.

Ours is a different age from that of Dwight and Morse. Our contemporaries struggle to understand how an earlier time could have been so devoted to religious and political beliefs. Cynicism and skepticism are more the rule now than in the early national period. Perhaps the Christian Republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse can provide a partial cure for these modern afflictions.
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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study is to examine previous conclusions about the beliefs and characters of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse, and to provide a framework for further study of their thoughts and activities during the 1790's. Dwight and Morse were two leading Congregational clergymen in the early national period of American history. Both have been alluded to in many works, but very little scholarship exists which deals exclusively with either one. The only biography of Dwight was written by Charles Cumingham in 1942. Since then, Kenneth Silverman has written a critique of Dwight's literary efforts, and Stephen Berk has focused on Dwight's role as a precursor of American evangelicalism of the nineteenth century. The major biography of Morse was composed by William B. Sprague in 1874. A shorter and more selective account of his life was published in 1939 by James K. Morse. The comparative scarcity of works on these two important men seems to invite a fresh examination. By viewing the events of America's first decade through their eyes, not only will one develop a comprehension of their characters, beliefs, and motivations, but also an understanding of the political-religious connections during the period.
America in the 1790's was a center of political controversy, and both Dwight and Morse were actively involved in the controversies which arose. Dwight was the Federalist President of Yale and Morse was the champion of Congregational and Federalist orthodoxy in the Boston area. Dwight's influence in Connecticut led his enemies to give him the title of "Pope Dwight."\(^1\) Morse, during most of his ministry, was the unofficial spokesmen for the forces opposing religious liberalism in Massachusetts. A thorough analysis of their thoughts during the crises of the 1790's should provide enlightenment about the relationship between politics and religion.

Historians investigating the battle between the Federalists and the Republicans in the 1790's have divided into different schools of interpretation in regard to the two parties. The Progressive school of interpretation, which held sway through much of the first half of the twentieth century, pronounced the Republicans the true heirs of 1776, and the Federalists aristocratic reactionaries, unsympathetic to the people, and more concerned for their own propertied interests than for the good of the country. According to Charles Beard, the main support for the Constitution came from a propertied class which subsequently became the bulwark of Federalism.\(^2\)

\(^1\)Aurora and General Advertiser, March 31, 1800.

of Federalists as aristocrats was championed by such writers as Claude Bowers and Vernon Parrington. ³ Parrington contended that the aristocratic prejudices of Federalists were made militant by a propaganda campaign against democracy. "Democracy was pictured as no other than mob rule, and its ultimate purpose the denial of all property rights."⁴ In Parrington's opinion, the Federalists, through their attacks upon the democratic societies and other Republican efforts, turned "the country into a bedlam."⁵

This same view of Federalism has been espoused in a more recent work by Richard Buel. Portraying them as an aristocratic elite, Buel perpetuates the idea that the Federalists had no regard for the people.⁶ The Federalist fear, Buel maintains, was that the public would become aroused and use its vote against Federalism. Therefore, their continued management of public affairs "depended on an acquiescent, indifferent populace."⁷

Only in the last fifteen to twenty years has this thesis been adequately challenged. Modern scholarship now

⁵ Ibid., p. 323.
⁷ Ibid., p. 185.
strongly suggests that Federalists simply promoted a different concept of republicanism. This school of interpretation, which might be termed Republican Ideologue, has a growing list of adherents, and has become the prevalent view of current scholarly studies.\(^8\)

The Republican Ideologues have traced the roots of American Republicanism to the English libertarians, the Radical Whigs. The Commonwealth of Oceana, written by James Harrington in 1656, urged the creation of a "mixed English republic, a system based on the balancing of different political interests." The concept of a mixed and balanced government, with the people enjoying a larger share of power than was previously allowed, and encouraged by many writers such as John Locke, Algernon Sidney, and Henry Neville, soon became a common English belief. As

Whig theory developed, a more radical strain emerged in the eighteenth century. *Cato's Letters*, written by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, first appeared in the *London Journal* from 1720 to 1723. The *Letters* emphasized two points: the contrast between English freedom and happiness and the state of the rest of the world, and a great fear for the survival of that freedom. Trenchard and Gordon found a much more receptive audience in America than in England. America's distance from the main seat of the government had helped foster a greater sensitivity for liberty and a fear of swollen executive power.\(^9\)

The colonists' distinction between free and arbitrary government led to the break with England.

The only distinction between freedom and slavery [Alexander Hamilton contended] consists in this: In the former state, a man is governed by the laws to which he has given his consent, either in person, or by his representative: In the latter, he is governed by the will of another. In the one case his life and property are his own, in the other, they depend upon the pleasure of his master.\(^{10}\)

The move for independence and the consequent study of the first principles of government transformed the advocates of free government into republicans. Republican thought became the dominant expression of American political theory.

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\(^9\)Banning, pp. 33-73; Bailyn, pp. 32-34; Wood, pp. 10-17; Shalhope, pp. 57-62.

\(^{10}\)Stourzh, pp. 41-42, quoting Hamilton's Papers, vol. 1, p. 51; also see Wood, pp. 18-25, 36-43.
James Banner has concluded that Federalists were as republican as the Republicans.

[Federalists] shared a commitment to republican ideology altogether as deep and encompassing as their Republican opponents. ...the republican ideology had by the 1790's become a secular faith for all Americans,... Federalists and Republicans embraced its tenets with equal fervor, and each outdid the other in professions of their faith.11

The Federalists, then, according to this view, responded to the Republicans out of "republican" concerns, not aristocratic privilege. As Linda Kerber states, "It begins to seem possible, at least, that intelligent men of good will might have found Jeffersonian politics distasteful." Their attitude toward Jefferson may have originated "out of a genuine fear for the security and stability of the republic under his administration."12

The link between Federalism and aristocracy, in Banner's view, is partially due to the fact that the Federalists generally had more respect for the past, admired tradition, and were slower to countenance change.13 They did exhibit a semblance of elitism, but it did not destroy their basic republican precepts. It is true that they were

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11 Banner, p. 24; also see Wood, pp. 518, 547, 614-15; Shalhope, pp. 72-74, 80.
12 Kerber, pp. viii, x.
13 Banner, p. 72. Kerber comments concerning Federalist attitudes toward change, p. 22, "All the famous Jeffersonian rhetoric about man's capacity to construct a better world from new blueprints was so much high-flown nonsense. It was given to man only to remodel his world, not to remake it, and then only with the greatest caution."
fiercely independent of public opinion, but this they deemed a republican virtue because they perceived that often a crowd would simply support whatever ideas were currently in vogue, regardless of the principles involved.\textsuperscript{14} Most Federalist officeholders were public-spirited and guided by a set of values which they refused to compromise.\textsuperscript{15} Many of them were in the vanguard for independence and, when contrasted with European leaders, seem very liberal. It is when they are compared with Republicans that they appear staid. The differing republican concepts were not as noticeable in 1789, and only as policies were formed by the Washington administration in response to domestic and foreign events did the diversity of viewpoints become more obvious.

Dwight and Morse were both solidly in the Federalist camp. Therefore, they have normally been identified with all the traditional Federalist faults. Yet, if the Republican Ideologue school is correct, they need to be examined again in a new light. This has not been done. Although revisions of Federalism as a whole have been published, and certain individuals have been reinvestigated, the old attitudes are still reflected toward Dwight and Morse. The questions

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., pp. 72-73

\textsuperscript{15} David H. Fischer, The Revolution of American Conservatism (New York: Harper and Row, 1965). One of Fischer's recurring themes is that the Old Federalists' unwillingness to compromise their views led to their downfall. Fischer then proceeds to show how Young Federalists (1800-1815) rejected their elders' view as suicidal to political success.
which need to be answered are, "Are the Progressive views of Federalism an accurate description of Dwight and Morse, or are there alternatives? What light can the Republican Ideologue school shed on these two men? Does this newer school of interpretation provide a valid basis upon which they can be judged, or is another perspective needed?"

Morse has been described by one writer as a man who craved fame but could never achieve it. Instead, Samuel F. B. Morse gained the recognition his father had sought for so long.16 Richard Buel, by the tenor of his writing, has intimated that Morse was a calculating plotter who devised half-truths for the purpose of political advantage.17

More has been written about Dwight than Morse. The critiques range from mild censure about his nativism and his undemocratic spirit to outright attacks on his mental stability.18,19 Kenneth Silverman has portrayed Dwight as a man who was continually torn between acting as the champion

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17 Buel, p. 171.

18 Douglas L. Good, "The Christian Nation in the Mind of Timothy Dwight," *Fides et Historia* 7:1 (1974), p. 9, remarks, "Dwight was more blameworthy on the question of ethnocentrism than on elitism, for he was a harsh nativist."

19 Robert Edson Lee, "Timothy Dwight and the Boston Palladium," *New England Quarterly* 35:2 (June, 1962), p. 238, concludes, "The result of his influence was backward-looking and undemocratic.... Dwight personifies the conservative revolt from the revolutions, American and French."
of progress and as the scourge of man's sinful nature.  

His final conclusion is that Dwight was a pendulum-rider, or a Manichean: "...he lived only on birthday or doomsday." After reading Silverman's analysis of Dwight's character and his literary works, one is tempted to believe that Dwight was a man of incredibly low intellect and imagination.

Perhaps the best-known, most-enduring, and least-flattering image of Dwight was given by Vernon L. Parrington.

Easy-going and lovable are certainly the last adjectives one would think of applying to the massive character of Timothy Dwight.

He was a walking repository of the status quo. His commanding presence and authoritative manner, his sonorous eloquence, his forwardness in defense of what few doubted, his vehement threshing of straw long since reduced to chaff, his prodigious labors, his abundant printing, seemed to his open-mouthed contemporaries the authentic seal of greatness... He was certainly not so great as they esteemed him. He was very much smaller indeed, almost amusingly so. ...it appears that Timothy Dwight was not a real prophet, not an authentic voice at all, but only a sonorous echo.... There was no sap of originality in him, no creative energy, but instead the sound of voices long silent, the chatter of a theology long since disintegrating, the authority of a hierarchy already falling into decay, the tongue in short of a dead past....

The intellectual inquisitiveness that gave birth to disintegrating tendencies in the mind of his grandfather, Jonathan Edwards, and that made him such a revolutionary force in his time, was wholly lacking in the grandson. Timothy Dwight refused to follow the questioning intellect into unsurveyed fields. He would

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21 Ibid., p. 152.
not meddle with change. His mind was closed as tight as his study windows in January.\textsuperscript{22}

Parrington's sarcasm runs rampant throughout his description of Dwight. Poignant phrases such as "walking repository of the status quo," and "forwardness in defense of what few doubted" paint a picture of a blustering establishment reactionary. The "open-mouthed contemporaries" are designed to show the backward state of society at that time, obviously the only type of society which could have regarded him as a prominent man. But of course Parrington's greatness linguistic achievement was his comparison of Dwight's mind with the closed study windows in January. If Parrington's opinion of Dwight is accepted at face value, then no further research is necessary. All of Dwight's actions can be seen as unthinking reactions to a world that passed him by while he remained entrenched in his narrowness. But to adopt uncritically such a view or to assume it is true from a cursory examination of the evidence is to overlook Dwight's basic republican perspective.

The biographies of both Dwight and Morse, while not adopting the tone of the Progressive historians, do not provide a Republican Ideologue evaluation. Charles Cunningham offers details on Dwight's life and his

accomplishments which are not found in other publications, but he almost totally avoids political issues. 23

Stephen Berk does a better job of uniting Dwight's theological and political views, but his emphasis is theological. 24 William B. Sprague's account of Morse is also rich in detail, but his uncritical approach translates all of the actions of Morse into a positive vein. 25 James K. Morse, in a shorter publication, concentrates primarily on Morse's theological controversies after 1800. 26 The aim of this study, therefore, is to reassess the perception of Dwight and Morse in light of the viewpoint provided by Republican Ideologues. The thesis attempts to determine the commitment of Dwight and Morse to republicanism, especially during the turbulent years of the Washington and Adams administrations.


CHAPTER 1

AMERICAN POLITICAL RELIGION IN THE 1790's

In spite of the usual picture of warnings and pessimism that surrounds Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse, historical evidence suggests that they possessed a vibrant optimism which sprang from their personal faith. God's providence and the future of America were key elements in their writings. An optimistic outlook on the future of American undertakings has also been recognized as a cornerstone of the republican thought of that era. Dwight and Morse were part of a tradition of the merger of political and religious concerns which began with the Plymouth settlers and provided a vision for the future; religious considerations weighed heavily on the minds of political leaders as well as the clergy. For Dwight and Morse, any attempt to disassociate religion from the civil sphere was to advocate the dissolution of government and society. America's founding and its fight for independence were viewed as God-ordained, and the prevalence of providential thought in civil affairs can be seen in the writings of men from all parts of the country, not just in Congregationalist-dominated New England, where Dwight and Morse thrived. The well-known Southern historian of the American
Revolution, David Ramsay, wrote of the colonists,

They could not easily be persuaded, that their grants of land, or their civil rights, flowed from the munificence of Princes.... They looked up to Heaven, as the source of their rights, and claimed, not from the promises of kings, but from the parent of the universe.¹

Also, as Glenn Miller has pointed out,

The observation that millennialism was common in the Middle Atlantic region should caution us against an overly hasty identification of theological movements with the culture of New England.... A Philadelphia Presbyterian, a New York (Dutch) Reformed, and a Massachusetts Congregationalist lived in similar spiritual worlds and were subject to similar intellectual influences.²

American providential thought has begun to attract new attention in the last few years. Two recent publications, Nathan O. Hatch's The Secret Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England and John F. Berens' Providence and Patriotism in Early America, 1640-1815, are prime examples of this renewed interest.³ Berens has listed the providential thought concepts which he regards as most important for a fuller understanding of colonial and early national history.


These concepts are America as God's New Israel, the jeremiad tradition, the deification of America's founders, the blending of national and millennial expectations, and providential history and historiography. A separate analysis of each of these points provides a basis for understanding how Dwight and Morse thought, and how their thought related to republicanism.

The Old Testament portrays God raising up the nation Israel to be His example to the world of proper spiritual values. Old Testament prophecy, as confirmed by the New Testament writers, revealed how God was to use that nation as His channel of salvation and blessing for the world. The fulfillment of the prophecies occurred in the atonement of Christ and the establishment of the Christian church. After nearly three centuries of relative purity, the church slipped into a degraded condition. The dominance of Catholicism was seen by providential thinkers as the darkest hour of Christianity. Then came the Reformation and the beginning of the restoration of pure Christian faith and practice. Catholicism became the symbol of tyranny and the Reformation the champion of liberty of conscience. God then sifted through the peoples of Europe to find His choicest servants, whom He subsequently planted in the New World. Berens summarizes America's mission in the world.

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4 Berens, p. 2.
The New World was to be a great empire for liberty, an asylum for the oppressed of the globe, and a model for the political emulation of other nations. All three of these components found expression after 1789, but by far the greatest emphasis was awarded the last. Shared by Federalists and Republicans, northerners and southerners, clerics and laymen, the conviction that Divine Providence had raised up republican America to serve as the political model for the modern world, as Israel had served as the religious model for the ancient world, dominated the early national era.

America was a chosen nation, and as such, she had both privileges and responsibilities. Because of her chosenness, she could expect Divine assistance, and both spiritual and material blessings. One of Dwight's sermons, while he was a chaplain in the Revolutionary Army, reveals both the identification of America with Israel and the hope of God's assistance. In his sermon, preached shortly after the American victory at Saratoga, Dwight used the biblical account of a foiled Assyrian attack on Judah, and the shattered pride of the Assyrian commander, as a prototype of the unsuccessful British attempt to cut the colonies in two. "Gentleman Johnny" Burgoyne, like the Assyrian commander, had been humiliated; because of his abominable pride, God had judged him. Dwight's later publication, The Conquest of Cannan, was an obvious allegory, comparing Joshua and

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5 Ibid., p. 120; also see Hatch, pp. 146-56.
6 Timothy Dwight, A Sermon Preached at Stamford, December 18, 1777 (Hartford, 1778).
the Israelites to Washington and America. The view of America as the New Israel destined by God to bless the world was a widespread belief. According to Glenn Miller, the attempt to institutionalize this hope of America as a redeemer nation can provide a solid foundation for writing much of United States history.

Being a chosen nation, however, was not all bliss. The responsibilities were awesome. The guilt of backsliding was much greater precisely because God had blessed the people to such an extent. They had to be properly humbled to receive the blessings. Humility was fostered through the use of the jeremiad.

Begun by the seventeenth-century Puritans, the jeremiad was almost an institution by the early national period. The name was appropriated from Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, whose mission in life was to warn Judah of its sins and the certainty of future calamity if repentance was not deep and swift. America was supposed to learn from the eclipse of Judah that God's blessings were not to be taken without gratitude. For America to escape the same fate, individual and societal piety would have to reign over man's ever-present selfishness.

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7 Silverman, pp. 30-32.
8 Miller, p. 240.
Although the jeremiad spoke in terms of sin, pride, selfishness, and repentance, and could easily be judged as oppressive and heavy-handed rhetoric, it must be remembered that the purpose was positive. The goal was to purge the people of all hindrances to their reception of God's blessings. In order to achieve a blessed state, it was first necessary to be proven in the fire.

The jeremiad was an effective force in American society; days of national fasting and humiliation during crises were founded on the jeremiad tradition. An additional factor which made the jeremiad much more potent in America than in any other country was that its themes of corruption and potential destruction were in agreement with the ideas of virtue and corruption in republican ideology, an ideology already thoroughly assimilated by the public.\(^{10}\) In essence, what the clergy offered was a "Puritanized version of Whig political science," with its abhorrence of luxury and selfishness, and its exaltation of public virtue.\(^{11}\)

The memory of America's founders was often appealed to whenever it was believed that piety was waning. The example of the brave, liberty-loving men who had risked so much to clear a wilderness was regularly invoked to stir the present generation on to similar achievements. In one of Dwight's poems, the concept of providentially-directed

\(^{10}\)Banner, p. 33.

\(^{11}\)Stourzh, p. 55.
founders was given expression. Dwight spoke of Columbus being taught by heaven, and of Raleigh being used by God to arouse colonization interest. When he wrote of New England, Dwight exclaimed,

To these far-distant climes our fathers came,
Where blest New England boasts a parent's name.
With Freedom's fire their gen'rous bosoms glow'd,
Warm for the truth, and zealous for their God;...12

His praise was not limited to New England. Included in his gallery of heroes were representatives from both the middle and southern colonies: "Penn led a peaceful train to that kind clime,..."; "Brave Oglethorpe in Georgia fixed his seat,..."13

Admiration for the early settlers began to spread to Revolutionary heroes, particularly George Washington. Dwight, while writing The Conquest of Canaan, received Washington's permission to have the work dedicated to him. Kenneth Silverman comments, "Dwight took great pride in this endorsement, since Washington would be enthroned beside Calvin in the Federalist-Congregationalist pantheon."14

The tone of Silverman's work indicates that he intends this remark as sarcasm, but Dwight probably would not have been offended by it. Most certainly, he had placed the first President on a pedestal to be venerated by all of mankind.

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13 Ibid., p. 5.
14 Silverman, p. 25.
In his eulogy of Washington, Dwight reminded his audience, "When oppression was to be resisted, government to be reformed, or the moral state of mankind to be renewed, the Ruler of the Universe has always supplied the means, and the agents." That George Washington was one of those agents, and that the early settlers were God's hand-picked representatives, neither Timothy Dwight nor most of his contemporaries doubted.

The fourth concept of providential thought was the blending of national and millennial expectations. Millennialism, the prospect of the thousand-year reign of Christ on earth, has always held a prominent place in Reformation theology. Puritans, both in England and America, had imbibed deeply of millennialist visions during Cromwell's Commonwealth, only to see the dreams dashed by the Restoration. But millennialism did not succumb to that temporary disappointment. The fires of millennialism were again stoked by the prospects of the New World. In the American colonies, millennialism embraced civil liberty, a religious-political merger that would have a pervasive influence on American society through the Civil War.

Living in the expectation that destroying the shackles of Britain and establishing a new republican government would usher in the millennium, American clergymen dreamed great dreams about America's future. Millennial

speculation, combined with Revolutionary self-confidence, provided a source of vitality for the task of nation-building after the war.\textsuperscript{16} If America, under God, could defeat the mightiest nation on earth, then where were the limits of its future progress? A growing belief, even in Calvinist circles, that man's actions could help bring to pass a more glorious future inspired individuals to live in a way that would guarantee that vision of America's future.

People, whose lives had been transformed, could see themselves as transformers of history, the masters of time, people whose actions had cosmic significance.\textsuperscript{17}

The union of republican and millennial hopes thus became a powerful motivating factor for the success of the new government.

The final concept mentioned by Berens was a providential view of history and historiography. This idea was already alluded to in the discussion of God's assistance to the New Israel. A providential view of history sees God's active involvement in the affairs of men; providential historiography is the ability to explain events from that perspective.

As Americans in the 1790's reflected on the circumstances surrounding the settlement of the New World and the gaining of independence, they believed that on many occasions the hand of God could be seen plainly. The

\textsuperscript{16}Miller, p. 240.

\textsuperscript{17}Ibid., p. 259.
interception of the Jamestown evacuees by the new governor, the plague that wiped out a hostile Indian tribe and provided a place for the Pilgrims to land peacefully, the heavy fog that blanketed the American army's escape from the British in Brooklyn, the discovery of Benedict Arnold's treachery, were just a few of the incidents that convinced many Americans that God was guiding the destiny of the new nation.  

Even crises and possible disasters did not shake this confidence. Troubles were merely testing times, and God often used difficult circumstances to achieve His long-range goals. Excerpts from two of Morse's sermons illustrate this thinking:

By these awful events...God is doubtless accomplishing his promises, and fulfilling the prophecies. This wrath and violence of men against all government and religion, shall be made ultimately, in some way or other, to praise God....

A state of things like the present has long been expected by many pious, reflecting, and enlightened Christians. The Wise and Mighty God is accomplishing his grand designs; and the winding up of the awful and tremendous scene now acting in our world, will doubtless be glorious to himself.

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18 Excellent summaries of this position can be found in a sermon by the Rev. Samuel W. Foljambe, *The Hand of God in American History* (Boston, 1876) and in the book by Peter J. Marshall, Jr. and David B. Manuel, *The Light and the Glory* (Old Tappan, New Jersey: Revell, 1977).

Even the French Revolution itself, in the minds of the clergy the most despicable event of the decade, possibly of the century, was a confirmation of the acceleration of God's providential plan. After all, just as Morse noted in the above passage, some darkness was to be expected before the final glorious triumph.²⁰

All five providential concepts exuded optimism about a sure future, in direct contradiction to the actual events of the last decade of the eighteenth century. Both Hatch and Berens suggest that this optimistic providential rhetoric was pressed into the forefront by the need for security, to act as an anchor of hope in a darkening storm. Surely it would be foolish to deny the presence of that motivation; many times it is true that people will be more adamant in their vocal support of a belief when it is threatened. But to place every providential spokesman in that category would be an unjustifiable generalization. For every person who believed out of fear, another could probably be found who believed out of conviction, in both good and bad situations. The belief in divine providence helped to give a purpose and a future to the new nation.

CHAPTER 2
THE VISION OF AMERICA

As preservers and perpetuators of American providential thought, Dwight and Morse often expressed their faith in America's purpose and future. Although circumstances could at times blunt their optimism, or seemingly efface it completely, they appear to have maintained hope in America's providential usefulness throughout their lives.

Morse early displayed pride in America when he published a broadside to appeal for material in the compilation of his American Geography.

*Geographers of foreign countries, [Morse wrote] not being possessed of the proper materials, and not equally interested in this part of their subject, have filled their accounts of these states with numerous inaccuracies. It is time these inaccuracies were corrected. We are independant of Great Britain, and are no longer to look up to her for a description of our own country.*

The common Republican complaint that Federalists were too bound to Britain is not evident in Morse's statement. He seemed quite insistent that America was to stand on her own feet intellectually, and to develop her own scholarly pursuits. By 1794, in a letter to the German geographer

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1 Morse, Broadside, "To the Friends of Science" (Philadelphia, August 7, 1787).
Prof. C. D. Ebeling, Morse saw America as "rising into importance with unexampled rapidity."²

The following year, Morse delivered and published a sermon which provides more insight into his confidence in America. The purpose of the sermon was to show how blessed America was in comparison to the rest of the world. Morse's first evidence of God's blessing was that America had not become involved in a foreign war; his second evidence was that internal tranquillity had been preserved in spite of a "daring insurrection," a reference to the Whiskey Rebellion. He expressed gratitude for the response of the citizenry in backing President Washington. He was also convinced that the American governmental system was best for the rights of individuals.

In no nation on earth do the citizens enjoy protection and safety in their rights, at the expense of so small a portion of their natural liberty - Each individual is secured in the possession of his own rights, but in no instance suffered to encroach upon the rights of others.³

One of America's missions, in Morse's view, was to be a refuge for the oppressed of the world.

The United States offer, if not the only, probably the best asylum for the oppressed and persecuted by civil and ecclesiastical tyranny - Hither thousands of useful artizans and others, have already taken refuge from

² Morse to Prof. C. D. Ebeling, May 27, 1794, Morse Family Papers, Yale University Library.
³ Morse, The Present Situation of the Other Nations (Boston: Hall, 1795), p. 33.
the calamities which afflicted their own country.\footnote{Ibid., p. 35.}

The Federalists have become known for their wariness in accepting foreigners into the country. In early 1795, Morse showed no signs of this fear. America was to open wide her arms to the people fleeing European despotism. Morse continued his discourse by stating that God had made all men brothers, and that Americans were responsible to break out of the narrow confines of purely local interests "and unite in one sincere and fervent petition to the Great Ruler of Nations, 'That we would impart all the blessings we possess, or ask for ourselves, to the whole family of mankind.'"\footnote{Ibid., p. 36.}

Morse possessed a global vision for America. In terms very unusual for a Calvinist, his sermon concluded,

With such a Country - such a Government - such a Religion - if we are but wise to improve the advantage they furnish, and God vouchsafes to us his blessing - what that is great and ennobling to human nature, may we not expect?\footnote{Ibid., p. 37.}

He seemed to be expressing confidence in man's continual upward progress, albeit only with God's superintendence, and man's use of what He has provided.

The question may be posed, however, whether Morse remained as optimistic after 1795. Certainly the crises of the last half of that decade made him a more critical
observer of events, but his faith in the eventual triumph of the American mission seems to have survived. In the midst of what he considered to be the gravest situation America had experienced, in 1798, Morse was still able to praise the American system and its potential.

With the advantage of the theories and experience of all past ages, a selection, by our free choice, of our wisest men, have formed for us, and we have deliberately and peaceably adopted, a Constitution, which is deservedly the admiration of the most enlightened part of mankind. Never, probably, was a government framed by men, better adapted to the situation, opinions, and habits of a nation, or more perfect in theory, more excellent in practice; whose powers were better defined, and balanced; which guarded more effectually against the encroachment of despotism on the one hand, and of anarchy on the other,...

Near the end of his life, Morse was still actively promoting the American cause. His History of the American Revolution, published in 1824, continued to espouse the idea of God's providential guidance in America's emergence as a nation. Morse also undertook a mission as an agent of the United States government to observe the condition of the Indians, and to seek ways to raise their state of civilization.

Dwight was a more prolific writer than Morse, especially in his younger years. He wrote a number of poems

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7 Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon with Appendix (Boston: Hall, 1798), p. 10. Morse made these comments during the Bavarian Illuminati controversy. (See chapter 7.)

8 Sprague, p. 226.

9 Ibid., p. 174.
and delivered several sermons in which a recurring theme was the glorious future of America. In an address at Yale in 1776, Dwight practically overflowed with idealistic enthusiasm.

...it is evident that the Empire of North America will be the last on earth;...it will be the most glorious. Here the progress of temporal things towards perfection will undoubtedly be finished. Here human greatness will find a period. ...we have the best foundation to believe that this continent will be the principal of that new, that peculiar kingdom, which shall be given to the Saints of the Most High.10

Dwight's terminology indicates that at this point in his life, millennial expectations were dominant in his mind. America was to be the headquarters of Christ's earthly reign. This unbounded optimism was also reflected in one of his poems, written four years later.

O land supremely blest! to thee tis given To taste the choicest joys of bounteous heaven; Thy rising Glory shall expand its rays, And lands and times unknown rehearse thine endless praise....

Hail land of light and joy! thy power shall grow Far as the seas, which round thy regions flow; Through earth's wide realms thy glory shall extend, And savage nations at thy scepter bend. Around the frozen shores thy sons shall sail, Or stretch their canvas to the Asian gale,...11

As in his address at Yale, Dwight concluded in this poem

10 Dwight, A Valedictory Address to the Young Gentlemen, who Commenced Bachelors of Arts, at Yale College, July 25, 1776, pp. 13-14.

11 Dwight, America, pp. 9, 11.
that American dominion in the world would eventually usher in the reign of Christ on earth.\textsuperscript{12}

When Dwight compared Europe and America, the former seemed to him to be corrupt. His concern was that European corruption would be contagious, and America would be ruined as well. When he examined his countrymen, he felt that there was too much dependence on Europe, and he feared that America would become "slavishly subservient" to European ways.\textsuperscript{13} Dwight believed he could help break the bands of European cultural dominance by creating a unique American way of expression. His literary efforts were all designed to serve that purpose. One of his better works, \textit{Greenfield Hill}, was written to honor the Connecticut style of life and to be an example of what America could be.\textsuperscript{14} Dwight did not take it for granted that America would automatically fulfill God's purposes; he believed that proper instruction was necessary in order to follow the right paths. In his introduction to the poem, Dwight expressed confidence that solid foundations had been laid "for the future greatness and prosperity" of America, and that Providence had given advantages to this nation far greater than "the world has hitherto seen."\textsuperscript{15} Throughout the poem, Dwight continually

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{12} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 12.
\item \textsuperscript{13} Silverman, p. 49.
\item \textsuperscript{14} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 52.
\item \textsuperscript{15} Dwight, \textit{Greenfield Hill} (New York: Childs and Swaine, 1794), pp. 6-7.
\end{itemize}
draws attention to the belief that God established America for the benefit of mankind; that America was destined to stretch across the entire continent, and then introduce liberty to the rest of the world.

All hail, thou western world! by heaven design'd
Th'example bright, to renovate mankind.
Soon shall thy sons across the mainland roam;
And claim, on far Pacific shores, their home;
Their rule, religion, manners, arts, convey,
And spread their freedom to the Asian sea....

From yon blue wave, to that far distant shore,
Where suns decline, and evening oceans roar,
Their eyes shall view one free elective sway;
One blood, one kindred, reach from sea to sea;
One language spread; one tide of manners run;
One scheme of science, and of morals one;
And God's own Word the structure, and the base,
One faith extend, one worship, and one praise.16

The repeated use of the word "one" reveals an aspect of Dwight's character which became a liability. His concept of America required that the particular religious-political-social milieu with which he was so familiar become accepted in every corner of the continent. He so admired the New England Way that he literally hoped for a type of Connecticut stretching from Atlantic to Pacific. For Dwight, New England, and Connecticut especially, was the model for an America which would, in turn, be the model for the world. He was to extol the virtues of New England in nearly all his writings. Connecticut's elected officials, according to Dwight, were exemplary in their virtue; the example Connecticut offered of liberty, order, peace, learning, and

16 Ibid., pp. 52, 168.
piety was rarely to be equalled in the world; righteousness, wisdom, and integrity were the routine practices of Connecticut's government. 17

Of the Piety of the New England people their accusers have furnished abundant evidence. Change the words Superstition, Fanaticism, Enthusiasm, and Bigotry, into Piety;...and you will from their enemies themselves have ample testimony, that the objects of their calumny were distinguished for this superior kind of excellence. 18

At the same time that he was praising New England and foreseeing a vast American empire, Dwight was also writing a work entitled The Triumph of Infidelity (1788). Dwight's concern for doctrinal purity was bound with his belief in America's future. If America were to succumb to impious ideas, all the glorious visions would avail nothing. Based largely upon this one publication, Silverman concludes that Dwight began to turn sour on America. His optimism, says Silverman, faltered under "the moral failures of the newborn republic." 19

To be sure, Dwight never again gave such powerful testimonies of unbridled confidence in America's future state. He also, upon realizing that the rest of America was not going to be an exact copy of Connecticut, withdrew more into a New England frame of reference when speaking of

19 Silverman, pp. 47, 49.
the country's hopes. But most of this withdrawal occurred after the battles of the 1790's, which culminated in Jefferson's election in 1800. To Dwight, the election of Jefferson was a repudiation of the American vision.

In 1803, Dwight set himself against the importation of a large number of foreigners. His reason was that the influence of the majority of newcomers had been detrimental to the nation; America seemed to be importing only the most "worthless characters" of other countries. Looking back on an earlier poetic production, which had encouraged immigration, Dwight charged it to "enthusiasm," another way of saying that he had been carried away by his emotions.21

For anyone seeking to prove Dwight's total disillusionment with America, one letter, written in 1805, would seem to provide adequate proof.

My former letter holds out to you a melancholy picture of this country. I see little in the present state of things which can render it brighter. We hear much in the President's late speech...concerning the general prosperity of the last four years. All that he may perhaps genuinely believe. If he does, he is more ignorant than he ought to be in such a station. I know almost everything, contained in the speech to be grossly erroneous.... The moral and political world is violently agitated; and no termination can, hitherto,

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20 Berk, pp. 134-35, comments, "His faith in world renewal remained undiminished, but the growth of democracy in America had caused him to view the millennium more as a New England Zionist than and American Nationalist."

be perceived, of this agitation. A general unhinging of the minds of men has taken place; and there is no appren method of settling them again in the former, nor in any new, state. A standard of opinion, and of fashion, seems to be wanting; and fluctuation seems to be the only condition, to which man appears to choose to retreat. To what he will finally rest, it is difficult to conjecture.22

Dwight was undeniably distressed over the direction the nation had taken under Jefferson, but it is one thing to give vent to distress, and quite another to abandon hope completely. Beneath all his fulminations against the Republicans, Dwight always maintained some type of vision for America, sometimes in a modified form, at other times all-encompassing, depending upon the political realities of the day.

If anyone had a good reason to dispense with Revolutionary optimism, Dwight did, even before the Revolutionary War ended. His father, as a matter of conscience, had not been able to support wholeheartedly the move for independence. Because he had held these views, he was the subject of mistreatment in his town of Northampton, Massachusetts. Feeling obliged to seek a new residence, Dwight's father bought some land on the Mississippi River and went to prepare a home for his family. While on this journey he died, and the young Dwight was forced to leave his duties as an army chaplain and assume responsibility for

22 Dwight to the Rev. Doctor Pryland, March 16, 1805, Dwight Family Papers, Yale University Library.
his mother and ten other children who were still living at home. The stigma of Toryism had settled on the family. The townspeople burned his fields on one occasion and drove the oxen away on another. One of Dwight's brothers eventually went insane because of hostile actions against the family. Yet Dwight labored without rest, establishing his reputation and, most noteworthy of all, giving no evidence of bitterness.\textsuperscript{23} The optimistic phrases of \textit{America} and \textit{Greenfield Hill} were penned after these unsettling incidents.

One of the keys to understanding Dwight is the recognition that he could hold two contrary views at the same time. This is not to be attributed to mental instability or to a character that swings from birthday to doomsday. It is, rather, a common attribute of men. Inconsistency might be the word for it, but it does not always deserve that negative connotation. Dwight's "inconsistencies," and his own brand of optimism, can be explained more clearly by looking at his reactions to both a good and a bad circumstance.

In November, 1781, Dwight preached a sermon in Northampton, celebrating the surrender of Cornwallis at Yorktown only one month before. It was a time of victory, of success, of dreams realized, of the beginning of the millennium. Yet Dwight's response was contrary to what might be expected. He spent a significant portion of his address warning that America could lose God's favor. He

\textsuperscript{23}Cunningham, pp. 86-92.
cited Britain as an example of a nation that had been blessed and then had become "a peculiar object of the Divine indignation" because she had abused her privileges.24 He emphasized that it was God who had given the victory at Yorktown; man could not take any credit.

...let us be cautioned not to attribute these effusions of the Divine goodness to any excellence of ours. Our national character, in the strongest manner, proves the folly and wickedness of such vain-glorious sentiments.25

Warning of impending disaster in the midst of undeniable triumph is a traditional ministerial activity. Since man is so easily misled, and since, in Calvinist thought, pride is the greatest deceiver, the time of victory could be the beginning of a state of spiritual apathy. It was, therefore, part of Dwight's makeup to mix warnings with blessings.

On the other hand, a bad circumstance, such as Jefferson's election, called forth efforts to ensure the progress of society. During Jefferson's administration, Dwight's actions belied his dire pronouncements of doom. In his desire to live in a redeemed society, he was one of the leaders of the new reform movements. Missionary societies, Bible societies, Sunday Schools, efforts to reform the habits of drinking, swearing, and dueling, and promotion of aid for prison reform, the poor, the handicapped, and the


slaves consumed much of his time and financial resources. In direct contradiction to his gloomy national forecasts, Dwight's activities give the impression that America was on the verge of attaining the highest state of civilization the world had ever known. The challenge seemed to draw the best out of him; after all, as previously noted, the dark clouds were often understood to be the forerunners of the greatest glory. Even Silverman, who believes that Dwight was a Manichean, admits that at the end of his life he again dreamed of a Christian America; the vision became all-encompassing again.

From all existing evidence, it appears safe to conclude that both Dwight and Morse maintained a foundation of hope for America, even in the disturbing 1790's. Dwight, to be sure, was more prone to pessimism, but not matter how low in spirit either one became, there was never a complete rejection of the visions that grew out of the American Revolution. The republican spirit that had been fanned to a passion during Revolutionary times sustained them through darker days which followed.

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26 Cuningham, pp. 335-36; Silverman, p. 113.
CHAPTER 3

DWIGHT, MORSE, AND AN AMERICAN ENLIGHTENMENT

The European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century is commonly described as the discarding of superstition and revealed religion, the rejection of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny, and the exaltation of man's reason, the scientific method, and a more humane, tolerant government. The debate has not ended on the extensiveness of this thought in America. America was not totally cut off from European influence, but neither was she in a European situation. Her status as a wilderness nation with a strong Puritan tradition, especially in New England, molded her character in a way that was different from Europe. Similar ideas might receive different interpretations and applications in America. The New World was not a mere copy of the old, in spite of the continuance of many forms of English political and social life. This study is not intended to explore this issue in great detail; to do so would require an entire study in itself. John F. Berens' claim that the American Enlightenment "was more unlike than like the European Enlightenment" seems substantiated by convincing evidence that no comprehensive, secular view displaced the providential world view that America had received at its
beginning. Although this world view was the object of modification over the years, "the basic world view of the seventeenth century was not discarded. On the contrary, it continued to serve Americans through and beyond the early national period."¹

Rather than discarding revealed religion, Americans wedded the traditional Christian beliefs with rationality. Even the millennialists believed that the Revolution, and the hopes of future glory, were thoroughly rational in concept. They argued that they had not acted merely from enthusiasm, but had decided on independence after carefully considering all the arguments on both sides of the issue. They maintained that "the rationality of the American Revolution set it apart from the rebellions of the past."² Both Morse and Dwight shared the ideas about the union of religion and rationality.

Both were involved in education: Dwight, obviously, as the President of Yale, devoted his life to educational improvement, but Morse was also active. Before he was ordained, Morse earned his living as teacher of a girls' school. It was while he was teaching there that he was inspired to compile a geography for his students' use. His Geography Made Easy, published in 1784, was the first one written in America. His constant revisions, and the enlarged editions which appeared in later years, earned him

¹Berens, p. 2.
²Miller, "Fashionable to Prophesy," p. 243.
the title, "The Father of American Geography." His work also opened doors for him to the best educated circles of both America and Europe. Morse considered the world to be in an age of unparalleled achievement, as he explained to one of his correspondents, Prof. Ebeling of Germany:

To undertake a description of an unexplored, or but partially explored Country,...

Morse's reputation earned him the Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Edinburgh, and his position as a pastor in the Boston area made him a member of the Harvard Board of Overseers. He was one of the better educated men of his day, and his resourcefulness and initiative in compiling massive geographical volumes attest to his desire to further man's educational progress.

Like Dwight, Morse was also involved in many societies. He was an officer of the Society for Propagating the Gospel, was instrumental in establishing numerous local Bible societies, and was a delegate at the convention that formed the American Bible Society. Furthering the cause

3James K. Morse, p. 45; Sprague, p. 192.
4Ibid., p. 26; Ibid., pp. 203-205.
5Morse to Ebeling, May 27, 1794, Morse Family Papers.
6Sprague, p. 17.
7Ibid., pp. 128-29, 157-60.
of the Gospel, Morse and Dwight believed, was a means of accelerating the progress of mankind. Morse was also the Corresponding Secretary of the short-lived Massachusetts Emigrant Society, which was designed to help integrate immigrants into New England society. Morse's *American Geography* served to promote emigration from Europe by increasing interest in the new nation. Morse wrote the society's Prospectus, which stated:

The inhabitants of New England, satisfied with the natural increase of their population, have, hitherto, rather discouraged than countenanced foreigners from settling among them. Hence few Europeans have come to us since 1640. The great body of the present inhabitants are the offspring of about twenty-one thousand persons, who came over previous to that period, driven from their native land by persecution and oppression. This wise policy has preserved a homogeneity of habits, manners, language, government, and religion. But, owing to the present disturbed state of Europe, causing large emigrations and jeopardizing our commerce with that quarter of the globe, it becomes a question now whether a change of policy on our part is not required alike by humanity and self-interest.  

New England was making an effort to break out of its narrowness, to be more hospitable to others who were different; Morse was in the forefront of this effort. The society, which began in 1793, died in the late 1790's because most immigrants chose to settle other areas further to the south. The decision of many immigrants to settle outside New England may have been due to the increasing Federalist

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8Ibid., pp. 137-38.
phobia about foreigners. But to place Morse in this pattern of thought seems unjust. Very little evidence can be found to indicate that he developed an intense dislike of immigrants, at least during the 1790's. He certainly preferred the homogeneity New England had enjoyed, but he seems to have been able to distinguish between the people of other countries and their principles, detesting the latter, but loving the former out of Christian charity.

Another concern for Morse was the welfare of the blacks, not just on a faraway plantation, but within his own city of Charlestown. His Christian conscience overcame his natural prejudices to a degree remarkable for the early national period.

If a valuable negro die, it calls forth the remark that some old worn-out slave could have been better spared. Can this be right? Are not the slaves immortal beings? Should they not have the opportunity of rising in the scale of humanity as the whites have?9

Putting his words into action, Morse was instrumental in providing both a school and a church for local blacks. His own concern for their spiritual state often found him preaching in their pulpit.

Upon request from black leaders, Morse took an active role in the experiment of African colonization. These efforts were one link to the formation of the American Colonization Society. When two of Morse's sons returned home from Yale for vacation, they once found their yard

9Ibid., p. 141.
filled with blacks from the Boston vicinity who had come "to ask the advice of their friend Dr. Morse on some matter regarding their welfare."\(^\text{10}\)

No doubt Morse's approach was paternalistic in light of subsequent measures applied to the racial problem. Yet he struggled in uncharted waters. More important for this study than his success in dealing with race relations is the realization that his concern for blacks was genuine. He did what he could to create a more tolerant, humane world.

It has been previously noted that Morse considered the Constitution to be the admiration of the most enlightened part of mankind, and that the government of the United States best preserved the rights of men and was most effectual for guarding against despotism and anarchy. The words, "enlightened," "rights," and "despotism" were Morse's own. His vocabulary was replete with typical Enlightened terminology. His love for liberty and progress, as evidenced by his philanthropic work and his optimistic outlook on civil government, is incongruous with the description of a typical reactionary. The stereotyped reactionary would not have supported a revolution, befriended societal outcasts, and looked forward to a millennium created from governmental progress. Neither would a reactionary have listened to opposite views, except for the purpose of strengthening his

\(^{10}\text{Ibid.}, \text{pp. 142-48.}\)
own arguments. Yet, even in the heat of controversy, Morse's goal was to be able to understand both sides. He recognized that

...it is hard for us to divest our minds of partialities and prejudices - and to place ourselves in their circumstances - which ought as far as possible to be done, in order to avoid the charge of partiality and unfairness.11

Morse's comments reveal a sensitivity to, and an understanding of, objectivity and perspective. That he was unable to achieve consistently his goal in the midst of passionate politics is understandable. But Morse's thoughts and his various activities do show his desire to be part of man's ascent to higher planes of knowledge. He was not a recalcitrant opponent of change.

Neither is it appropriate to stereotype Dwight. Beginning once again with his 1776 address at Yale, it is clear that Dwight saw himself as a friend of learning and human advancement.

Never were the rights of men so generally, so thoroughly understood, or more bravely defended. No country ever saw learning so largely diffused throu' every class of people, or could boast of so sensible, so discerning a Commonalty.12

Dwight, like Morse, used Enlightenment terminology when he spoke of the rights of men. America, in Dwight's mind, had reached an apex of understanding these rights. The cause

11Morse, Present Situation, p. 10.

for this was the diffusion of learning, a true Enlightenment ideal. In another passage, Dwight espoused another Enlightenment concept, the breaking away from tyranny. In language that few have believed Dwight capable of uttering, he proclaimed,

Mankind have in a great degree learned to despise the shackles of custom, and the chains of authority, and claim the privilege of thinking for themselves. Every science is handled with a candor, fairness and manliness of reasoning, of which no other age could ever boast,...from these advantages what improvements may not be expected?\textsuperscript{13}

Dwight, at this stage of life, was the opposite of Parrington's description of him as a "walking repository of the status quo." Even in his Northampton sermon, five years later, his zeal was unabated as he exulted in freedom of inquiry and independence of decision. He stated, "May we not, in a word expect, from this disposition, a depth of research, a candour of debate, and a friendliness to truth, which shall exhibit a contrast to former prejudices,..."\textsuperscript{14}

Dwight's The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy, published in the late 1790's, has often been cited as an example of his hostility toward philosophy. Yet, within that book, Dwight clearly made a division between good and bad philosophy.

You will observe that it is a particular kind of Philosophy against which all my arguments

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 12.

\textsuperscript{14}Dwight, A Sermon at Northampton, p. 34.
are directed. Philosophy at large, or the Use and the Attainments of our Reason, in the candid and careful examination of every question,...so far as it springs from a real desire of investigating truth, and proceeds on satisfactory evidence, is not only undeserving of censure, but deserving of the highest praise.\textsuperscript{15}

Dwight went on to assert his confidence that whenever a question is thoroughly explored by reasoning, truth is in no danger. At all times, truth has a decided advantage over falsehood.\textsuperscript{16} This belief is the reason Dwight could state in the preface of one of his most widely-read sermons that he believed if men would simply exercise "their own right and duty of judging for themselves," they would be brought over to his understanding of the nature of America's crisis.\textsuperscript{17} His unflinching conviction that reason was on the side of revealed religion led him to insist that the Yale library obtain copies of contemporary French infidel literature. One modern writer notes this fact, while still maintaining the accuracy of Parrington's analysis of Dwight.\textsuperscript{18}

Dwight entered the realms of science without any doubt that God approved the study of His creation, and he

\textsuperscript{15}Dwight, The Nature and Danger of Infidel Philosophy (New Haven, Connecticut: Bunce, 1798), p. 11.

\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., p. 49.

\textsuperscript{17}Dwight, The Duty of Americans (New Haven, Connecticut: Greens, 1798), preface.

\textsuperscript{18}Ravitz, p. 519.
also never doubted that scientific research would only confirm the written revelation.\(^{19}\)

Full-rising Science casts unclouded light,  
Up wisdom's heights the soul shall wing her way,  
And climb thro' realms of still improving day.

For soon, no more to philosophic whims,  
To cloud-built theories, and lunar dreams,  
But to firm facts, shall human faith be given,\(^{20}\)  
The proofs of Reason, and the voice of Heaven.

Science, Reason, and the voice of Heaven all became one in Dwight's view of truth.

Since he was involved with the task of education all of his adult life, even while pastoring, Dwight had ample opportunity to put flesh on his theories. While a tutor at Yale, he took the initiative, with John Trumbull and Joseph Howe, to introduce the first literature course into the curriculum. When he began a grammar school at Northampton, he rather shocked the community by teaching boys and girls at the same time, in the same room. He refused to accept the common notion that girls were intellectually incapable of higher learning and gave them the same curriculum the boys received. He disdained "fashionable education," designed only to train children to move at ease in elegant society, and he modified the use of corporal


\(^{20}\)Dwight, Greenfield Hill, pp. 159, 164.
punishment, believing persuasion to be more effective than coercion. 21

Dwight accepted the appointment as President of Yale in 1795 and, until his death in 1817, he worked vigorously to upgrade existing curriculum and to establish new avenues of learning. He founded the chair of Law, and the Professorships of Languages and Ecclesiastical History, and Chemistry; he established also a Medical School, and set in motion the plans for a Divinity School, which opened a few years after his death. In addition, he rid the college of the disadvantageous system of temporary tutors, realizing that few teachers could have equal mastery over all branches of knowledge, and moved toward specialization in teaching. 22

This overview of Dwight's administrative accomplishments runs counter to charges of elitism and unwillingness to initiate change. Perhaps Dwight's attitude toward progress and innovation can best be summarized by his statement that:

Ingenious men have lately made, and are still making, many improvements in science and in arts. Unhappy would it be, if, after all the advances of preceding ages, the present should be unable to advance at all; if no additional truth should be discovered, and no erroneous opinion detected. But what, let me ask, would have been our situation, had these and many other able men, of past ages,

21 Cuningham, pp. 36, 94-96, 148, 158.

22 Ibid., pp. 169-233.
never lived? How much of all, which we know, is contained in their works, and derived solely from their talents and labours? Can it be just, can it be decent, to forget the hand that feeds us, and to treat with contempt those, without whose assistance we should have been savages and blockheads?  

Dwight was apparently attempting to unite the old and the new, and to strike a balance between respect for tradition and innovation. In the controversy over the Ancients and the Moderns, he planted one foot firmly in each camp.

Through all his life, Dwight was one of the staunchest backers of state support for the Congregational Church, a stand which became one of the main tenets for critics of his progressiveness. But in theological matters also, he was willing to accept change. Harsh Calvinism was being challenged, and Dwight was one of the challengers. The complete inability of man to respond to God was a doctrine that he could not accept.  

According to Berk, Dwight humanized Calvinism with his beliefs in a general atonement, man's ability to choose, God's character of benevolence, and the conviction that education is able to develop good habits in children, in spite of their sinfulness. The atmosphere of inquiry at Yale was open enough to lead one of his most beloved students, Nathaniel Taylor, to develop the New Haven Theology, which, although it still claimed

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24 Dwight to the Rev. Dr. Pryland, March 16, 1805, Dwight Family Papers.

25 Berk, chapter 5.
to be Calvinistic, totally repudiated the idea of inherited sin.

Although Dwight was appalled at the possibility of a pluralistic society, his theology helped pave the way for an adjustment to a more democratic tone. 26 Ultimately, as he saw disestablishment to be inevitable, he was able to make his peace with it. One reason may have been because he saw Congregationalism still flourishing even as state support weakened. 27

Morse was also considered a theological moderate who, until the Unitarian controversy came to a head in 1804, was able to work alongside both liberals and Hopkinsian conservatives. 28 He attempted to unite all persuasions of Trinitarians against the Unitarian threat. The founding of Andover Theological Seminary was chiefly the result of his mediation between moderate and hardline Calvinists, as he sought to check the influence of Unitarian Harvard. Morse concerned himself with theological dogma only when doctrines went too far afield, as he believed they did in Unitarianism. 29

Much evidence has been presented in these chapters to suggest that Dwight and Morse could exhibit great

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26 Ibid., pp. 5-6.
27 Silverman, p. 149.
28 James K. Morse, p. 40. The Hopkinsians were a group that called for a return to a very strict Calvinism.
29 Ibid., pp. 114-15, 120.
optimism. Their efforts for advancement of education, their desires for a government that promoted liberty, their work in social reform, and their theological flexibility all seem to indicate an infusion of Enlightenment thought, and seem in complete accord with republican concepts. Why, then, has history normally judged them as defenders of the status quo, and as unenlightened, closed-minded bigots? The political controversies of the 1790's, and the influence of the French Revolution in particular, provide the answers.
CHAPTER 4
AMERICA AND THE FRENCH REVOLUTION

For all their progressive thought, there was a limit beyond which Dwight and Morse would not go. The proper functioning of society, in their understanding, was impossible without a firm Christian base. Infidelity in religion was the source of societal disintegration; if infidelity was seen as the parent of such dissolution, then the French Revolution was its child in the flesh. Dwight and Morse reacted vigorously to the Revolution once they more fully comprehended its nature. But they were not alone: all America took sides in the French struggle, and most of the political-religious controversies of America's first decade can in some way be traced to the upheaval in France. An examination of the French Revolution, and America's response as a whole, is essential before narrowing the scope to the specific reactions of Dwight and Morse.¹

¹No attempt will be made in this study to outline all the possible interpretations of the Revolution. Basically, the accepted interpretation upon which this work is based is the view that there was a difference between the American and French revolutions; that no matter how well-intentioned the French may have been at the beginning, the lack of a balanced understanding of liberty led the Revolution into a maelstrom of terror and despotism far beyond any experience of the Americans. That the Old Regime was corrupt and inefficient is not debated, nor the need for a
The English contemporary, Edmund Burke, was one of the first to speak his mind on the subject in a publication entitled *Reflections on the Revolution in France*. Burke's impression was that the real French constitution was founded on anarchy, that its preachers were atheists, and its lawgivers were madmen. He was only willing to allow that "among an infinite number of acts of violence and folly, some good may have been done," but that was merely because "they who make everything new have a chance that they may establish something beneficial." In this not-too-flattering change in the government of the country; but the old system was inadvertently replaced by a tyrannical government.


Crane Brinton, *The Jacobins: An Essay in the New History* (1930; reprinted New York: Russell and Russell, 1961) details the inner workings of the Jacobin party that ruled France during the Terror. A. Aulard, *Christianity and the French Revolution* (Benn, 1927; reprinted Fertig, 1966) and John McManners, *The French Revolution and the Church* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969) are largely relied upon for the effects of the Revolution on the Christian religion, although the assertions in these books are generally supported and confirmed by the other works listed.
analysis, he concluded, "The improvements of the National Assembly are superficial, their errors fundamental." ²

Another contemporary, the German diplomat Friedrich Gentz, also took a dim view of the Revolution, but it developed over a few years. Gentz, by comparison to many continental political leaders, was a liberal, and at first he applauded the French efforts. But as events progressed, and as he reflected on the philosophy behind the Revolution, he became steadfastly opposed to it. He could find no legality for the suspension of the constitution, the dethronement of the king, the calling of a national convention, and the creation of the republic. The French accomplished these momentous feats, according to Gentz, "with fewer formalities, than a man would use to change his dress." His conclusion was that the Revolution began by a violation of rights, every step of its progress was a violation of rights, and it ended by establishing wrong as its rule of action. ³

By way of contrast, to indicate that Gentz was not simply an Old World reactionary, he praised the American Revolution. In his mind, the Americans conducted a defensive war which ended the moment Britain ceased her oppression. The French Revolution, however, "true to the character of a most violent offensive revolution, could not but proceed

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³ Gentz, p. 52.
so long as there remained objects for it to attack,..."^{4}

If, in America, the heavy hand of war had proven unjust to certain individuals, "never at least, as in France, were confiscations, banishments, imprisonments, and death, decreed in a mass."^{5}

Gentz' views were closely allied with American Federalists, who saw a basic contrast between the two revolutions which superficial appearances of similarity could not obliterate. John Quincy Adams took the lead in translating Gentz' work and having it published in the United States as a tool for educating the public in regard to these differences.^{6}

The scholarship of later years has taken widely differing views of the origins and effects of the Revolution. Georges Lefebvre's classic semi-Marxist interpretation sees the Revolution as a series of class revolts. His view is contested by writers such as Elizabeth Eisenstein, who argues that leadership came from like-minded individuals from all the estates who formed a loose coalition.^{7}

Concerning the effects of the Revolution, James Thompson concludes that there was nothing unusual about the

^{4} Ibid., p. 67.

^{5} Ibid., p. 92

^{6} Ibid., introduction, p. ix.

^{7} Georges Lefebvre, The Coming of the French Revolution and Elizabeth L. Eisenstein, "Was the 'Bourgeois Revolt' Bourgeois?" published in Kafker and Laux.
Terror; that it was less severe than actions taken during World War I, and was just another instance of a national outlook or temper. Even though many of the French leaders have been shown to be rational, Thompson's conclusions have been seriously called into question. There was an impulse and severity to some aspects of the French Revolution which cannot be explained away as simply a national temper. According to Robert R. Palmer, by October, 1789, many of the patriots who had signed the Oath of the Tennis Court were becoming alarmed at the descent of the Revolution into mob rule. Disillusioned revolutionaries were also distressed at the attempts to practice leveling concepts. The height of this practice began in February, 1794, when new laws prescribed that the poor should be "indemnified" from the property of suspects, not merely those who had been duly convicted of a crime.

The French historian, Pierre Gaxotte, spares no words in his critique of the Terror. He finds it inexcusable to label the actions of Robespierre's faction as "regrettable excesses" of "legitimate reprisals." He contends that the Terror was the "essence" of the Revolution because the revolutionaries were not just changing a system of government,

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9 Palmer, p. 67.
10 Ibid., p. 117.
but the entire social fabric of the nation.\textsuperscript{11} How deeply
the social change was effected may be debated, but there
was obviously an attempt not just to rearrange a political
system, but also to restructure society. The leaders of
the restructuring process were the Jacobins, or at least
the radical element which eventually dominated that party.
One must understand the Jacobins in order to understand the
Revolution.

Crane Brinton's excellent investigation of the
Jacobins reveals that they were not failures before 1789,
nor frustrated, maladjusted individuals seeking vengeance
on society. Neither were they a lower class rising up
against the privileged class, held together by their shared
economic station. "They were in the main ordinary, quite
prosperous middle-class people." The problem, then, is to
understand why they produced the Terror, which Brinton says
"was marked by cruelties and absurdities which the greatest
of misanthropes will hardly maintain are characteristic of
ordinary human beings."\textsuperscript{12} The answer lies in the beliefs
of the Jacobins.

In Brinton's research, he discovered that intellec-
tual ideas provided the motivating force behind the Jacobins.
But they were intellectual ideas with a theological base.
The Jacobins were held together by theological concepts.

\textsuperscript{11}Pierre Gaxotte, "The Desire to Communise," pub-
lished in Kafker and Laux, p. 263.

\textsuperscript{12}Brinton, p. 232.
They considered themselves as a small band of the elect, and even used terms such as grace, sin, heresy, repentance, and regeneration. Paris was the new Jerusalem, or holy city, and the elect were determined to rule on earth. A true Jacobin, says Brinton, was a religious fanatic. He was a man inspired and possessed, who sought to change earth into his type of heaven overnight. The Jacobin was a revolutionary in that he attempted to realize his heaven here on earth. Since disagreement is impossible in heaven, he found himself in the position of removing those who refused to be converted to the true faith. That was the Reign of Terror.

Ideas, in themselves, are powerful. Contrary to certain schools of modern thought, economic and political considerations may at times be overruled by beliefs. Ideology has moved men in all ages. Jacobinism was an ideology; it was a faith. The conclusion at which Brinton arrives is that the Jacobins believed for no greater reason than that they wanted to believe. Ideas, concepts, beliefs -- these were more influential in their actions than economic and material motives. In their emphasis on ideology, the Jacobins were similar to Dwight and Morse; the ideas themselves, though, were in direct conflict with all that the two New England ministers held as sacred. One faith was pitted against another. Ideas and beliefs were all-important.

13 Ibid., see chapter on Faith, pp. 203-22.
14 Ibid., p. 239.
As Brinton argues, "Surely there is nothing surprising if a study of the Jacobins forces us to the conclusion that man cannot live by bread alone?"\textsuperscript{15}

The Jacobin faith, which influenced the Revolution from the beginning, could not really countenance a rival. Therefore, the power of the Catholic Church had to be compromised and made subservient to the new order. The steps were taken gradually and, at first, there was no hint of any attempt to destroy the church. The declared intention of the Assembly to found the new order upon religion was probably sincere. The Church was to be a buttress of the new France, as it had been of the old regime.\textsuperscript{16} Due to unforeseen difficulties, the Church did not fulfill its purpose, and it was then that the dechristianization process began.

The Revolution was undertaken with the support of the Catholic clergy, especially the inferior clergy who had little to lose economically or socially. It was the clergy that finally decided to join with the third estate against the nobles, thereby advancing the revolutionary cause.\textsuperscript{17} They could have hardly realized that they had helped to hasten their own downfall.

The era of religious warfare was opened by the

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., pp. 341-42.
\textsuperscript{16} McManners, p. 24.
\textsuperscript{17} Aulard, p. 47.
decree of November 2, 1789, which declared all Church property to be at the disposal of the State.\textsuperscript{18} The rationale behind this action was to avert an overwhelming financial crisis. The need for the Church's wealth, and the continuing support of the poorer clergy, drowned the outraged cries of the higher clergy from whose hands the property was taken.

The second act of the Assembly against the Church was the decree of February 13, 1790, which withdrew official recognition of all existing vows and opened the monasteries for those who chose to leave. Contemplative and mendicant orders were suppressed, and in the future all religious vows were forbidden. As John McManners puts it, "This was ideological legislation with a vengeance, the high tide of utilitarianism and Voltairean prejudice." This action, however, brought few protests because the monastic orders had made such a travesty of their original purposes that they had earned the contempt of most of the nation.\textsuperscript{19}

The high point of ecclesiastical legislation was the Civil Constitution of the Clergy. This act made the Church an arm of the State. The clergy were to be paid directly by the State, and all Frenchmen, Catholic or not, could vote for priests and bishops. Church and State became bound more closely together than at any time under the old regime. The relationship was clearly not one of equality;

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., p. 52.

\textsuperscript{19} McManners, p. 31.
the Church was subordinate to the State in nearly all matters.\textsuperscript{20} On November 27, 1790, an oath was imposed on the clergy which was meant to draw Church and State together into a unity which would never be severed. But the imposition of this oath was where the Revolution went wrong in its relations with the Church. This oath marked the end of national unity and the beginning of national strife.\textsuperscript{21}

Roughly one-half of the clergy refused to take the oath, believing that their first loyalty was to the Pope. These "non-jurors," as they were called, were thus separated from the Constitutional Church. The unity which the Assembly had sought was nothing more than a puff of smoke. The Constitutional Church, in this weakened condition, was not a useful instrument for the support of the State. With the coming of war, the non-jurors found themselves in a precarious position. They had refused to join the Constitutional Church and now they found that what they had done was interpreted as treason against the nation. On May 26, 1792, the Assembly passed a decree which brought the penalty of deportation for every refractory priest denounced by 20 active citizens. The king vetoed the measure, delaying it for a while. But with the end of the monarchy, the deportation decree became effective immediately. Later, it was made more stringent, requiring only six citizens. In a

\textsuperscript{20}Aulard, pp. 63-64.

\textsuperscript{21}McManners, p. 38.
nation where a quorum could be assembled to denounce anything, this was no different from universal proscription.\(^{22}\)

Since the Constitutional Church was insufficient for State purposes, and since it was obvious that the alliance was collapsing, a new revolutionary religion was needed to replace the old one. New religious leadership appeared which was almost totally deistic.\(^{23}\) Reason became the French god; Temples of Reason were established and festivals were held. Later, Robespierre, wanting to disassociate the Revolution from charges of atheism, converted this religion into the Worship of the Supreme Being. But whether the French national religion was called Reason or the Supreme Being, it was obvious that Catholicism was being discarded. Dechristianization had begun.

The Vendee uprising accelerated dechristianization. It was easy to confirm that many of the rebels against the recruiting policy for the war were religiously inspired. And the non-juring clergy were at hand to feed the counter-revolutionists' desire for inspiration. Naturally, to patriotic Frenchmen this meant that those clergymen were aiding the foreign enemy as well as the counterrevolution movement. On March 13, 1793, the Convention imposed the death penalty on priests who had taken part in the disturbances excited

\(^{22}\)Ibid., pp. 64-65.

\(^{23}\)Ibid., pp. 76-77.
by the recruiting.\textsuperscript{24} As the usefulness of the Constitutional Church waned, not only refractory priests, but also those who had taken the oath, along with all the practicing faithful, became targets of the dechristianizers.\textsuperscript{25}

Of course, official government policy was one of toleration of religious belief, but any such pronouncement was a sham, as officials gave tacit approval to the dismantling of Catholicism. The Paris Committee of Public Safety hoped that Christianity might disappear gradually as enlightenment gained ground.\textsuperscript{26} But although it did not openly advocate persecution, neither did it try very hard to stop it. Actually, the real start of dechristianization was in the provinces, where at Nevers, on October 10, 1793, a decree stated that the French people recognized no religion but that of morality, no dogma but that of its own sovereignty.\textsuperscript{27}

Because of the extreme minority position of Protestants in France during that period, there is no way of knowing for sure if the antichristian movement would have been as strong in a more religiously balanced country. But from the evidence that does exist, it appears that very little distinction was made between Protestants and Catholics. Aulard says that the two French Protestant churches, the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{24} Aulard, p. 98.
\item \textsuperscript{25} Lefebvre, "A Synthesis," published in Kafker and Laux, p. 271.
\item \textsuperscript{26} Aulard, p. 113.
\item \textsuperscript{27} McManners, pp. 87-88.
\end{itemize}
Lutherans and the Calvinists, were just as affected by the dechristianization process as the Catholic Church. In his opinion, the movement was a reaction against all Christianity. If he is correct, then American clergymen like Dwight and Morse had more of a basis for concern than they have often been given credit for.

Another piece of evidence to support the view that French policy was totally antichristian was the nature of deism. Revealed religion, whether Protestant or Catholic, was considered superstition. And the response of the public to this change shows how enthusiastically the Christian ways were discarded. Even after the Worship of the Supreme Being replaced Reason, dechristianization continued strong. The new title, which gave the appearance of a less antichristian outlook, did not alter actual events. The period of the Worship of the Supreme Being was the height of the antichristian movement when the largest number of churches was closed.

During the dechristianization of the Terror, priests were persecuted and pressured to resign their positions. A priest could be punished for trying to hedge his resignation.

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28 Aulard, p. 14. Brinton, p. 153, offers the alternative view: "...the bulk of the evidence is overwhelming. Orthodox Jacobinism, even in the provinces was at open war with the Catholic Church, both Roman and Constitutional. With Protestantism it seems to have had little quarrel."

29 Ibid., p. 108.

by withdrawing from his duties instead of his office. The State demanded thorough renunciation of the priesthood. The best figures for this period show that between 2,000 and 5,000 clergymen were executed, while even more languished in prison.\(^{31}\) The total number of abdications was about 20,000. Despite these inroads, by 1795-96 the government came to the conclusion that it was impossible to eradicate totally Christianity by force, so the official program was to destroy it by means of education, the diffusion of knowledge, and by patriotism itself.\(^{32}\) The Terror had ended, but the dechristianization spirit remained, only under a different form, and employed in a new manner. Although by the time Dwight and Morse began to publicly repudiate the Revolution the outward dechristianization had halted, they were still correct in assuming that the sentiment had not altered.

New procedures for destroying Christianity proved no more effective than the old method. Eventually, the Catholic Church was reinstated under Napoleon, though in a less authoritative position. All the wranglings over the fate of Christianity ended in a formula which had already been adopted in America, without all the destruction and terror which had been so abundant in France.

Americans were already well-versed in the concepts

\(^{31}\)McManners, p. 106.

\(^{32}\)Aulard, p. 137.
of liberty and the rights of man, but Jacobinism, dechristianization, and a reign of terror were experiences foreign to the Revolution they had undertaken. It took some time before American republicans could sort all of their feelings and thoughts concerning the new Revolution. The United States barely had time to get its new government in operation before the Revolution in France was underway. America's own revolution had not yet been fully settled when it had to deal with the new one. In the flush of excitement over the prospect of another republican nation, Americans were almost universally enthusiastic over events in France. They believed the French Revolution had been inspired by their example, and they saw the dawning of the promise of liberty, republicanism, and written constitutions for all mankind. Only in widely isolated cases could a voice of distrust or criticism be heard.

From 1789 to 1792, although the sympathy of Americans for the Revolution was undoubted, there were no noteworthy public manifestations of it. But with the overthrow of the monarchy and the proclamation of the Republic late in 1792, there was a shift toward public displays of pro-French sentiment. City-wide celebrations in Baltimore, Boston, and New York City began in December; the arrival of the French minister, Edmund Charles Genet, early in 1793, touched off a new round of celebrations in every city he entered on his

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33Banning, p. 156.
way to Philadelphia; July 14, the anniversary of the overthrow of the Bastille, became an American holiday.\textsuperscript{34,35}

Soon, every French holiday would find its counterpart in America. Americans also adopted French modes of thought and phrases, French songs, dances, cockades, and clubs. A renewed indignation toward monarchy swelled in the country. The Americans imitated everything French, even the most trivial details.\textsuperscript{36}

But unanimity of praise for the Revolution was shaken by the execution of Louis XVI in early 1793. This execution, plus the war which had broken out between France and other European countries, cooled the ardor of many Americans, and raised to respectability those few distant voices that had sounded early warnings. Beginning in 1793, the Federalists and Republicans started to develop patterns of thought and action which led to a massive split in the ranks of American political leaders. Although they did not form parties in the modern sense, two groups of men did begin to cluster together out of common beliefs.

\textsuperscript{34}John Bach McMaster, A History of the People of the United States, vol. 2 (New York: Appleton, 1891), pp.89-95, provides a description of these festivities.

\textsuperscript{35}Ibid., p. 100; Charles D. Hazen, Contemporary American Opinion of the French Revolution (Johns HopKIns Press 1897; reprinted Gloucester, Massachusetts: Peter Smith, 1964), pp. 173, 182. Bernard Fay, in The Revolutionary Spirit in France and America (Harcourt, Brace and World, 1927; reprinted New York: Cooper Square, 1966), p. 324, comments on Genet's reception, "The wild joy with which he was welcomed... completely persuaded him that nothing could halt the American people on the path of war and Democracy."

\textsuperscript{36}Hazen, p. 217.
The Federalists were generally more critical of the Revolution. Their concerns over the excesses of democracy and the leveling spirit of a part of the American people had preceded those tendencies in France. The latest events of the Revolution added fuel to their fears, and they increasingly found themselves at odds with further French developments. The Republicans, meanwhile, were beginning to suspect that monarchical plots were underway in Federalist ranks. True to their radical Whig nature, they saw liberty in jeopardy from their own governmental officials. The Revolution in France seemed to breathe new hope into them and inspired them to guard their own Revolution from a lapse back into tyranny. Fears on both sides led to distortions of the other group's views. Both groups also received a distorted picture of the happenings in France. As one historian has put it, "Republicans were blind for years to the reality of the French drive for universal empire and to the subversion of liberty in the Republic overseas."37

Thomas Jefferson, for example, was deceived by the Revolution. The Prussian-Austrian coalition against France worried him. He believed that if the coalition were victorious, the very security of the American republican experiment would also be jeopardized.38 With this fear as his guide,

37 Banning, p. 211.
Jefferson no longer criticized France. Rather than admitting that France had committed errors, Jefferson chose instead to believe that a Federalist conspiracy devised by Hamilton and the British was the culprit behind all the problems. The height of conspiracy speculation can be found in the comments of James Monroe, when as ambassador to France he surmised that the Reign of Terror had been the work of British agents. "In short, the Jacobin Club of Paris was a British Front." Intelligent men actually considered that possibility!

During the 1790's, many of Jefferson's views about France were mirrored in the democratic-republican societies. The constitutions of these voluntary societies indicate that their purposes were threefold: 1) the maintenance of vigilance concerning the actions of governmental officers; 2) self-improvement through political education; and 3) correspondence among themselves to ensure a unified front. In addition, the societies were ardently pro-French; the quality of one's republicanism was tested by one's attitude


40 Kaplan, p. 77.

41 Smelser, p. 258.
toward the Revolution. Victory for the armies of France was considered essential for the ultimate victory of republicanism in America and elsewhere. 42

Forty-two of these societies can be documented, 35 of which were inaugurated in 1793-94. A large number of the members tried to follow the philosophies of Rousseau, whose thought infuriated the Federalists. 43 The American radicals' optimism concerning human nature and their anticlericalism led to charges of atheism, especially by the Federalist clergy. 44 Their forthright attacks on all titles, even such commonplace ones as "sir," "Mr.," and "Rev.," provided sufficient proof to Federalists that their ultimate goal was a complete leveling of American society. 45 Politically, their criticisms of the Washington administration touched almost

42 Eugene Perry Link, Democratic-Republican Societies, 1790-1800 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1942), pp. 8, 43, 125-29. Hazen, pp. 195-96, remarks, "The society at Charleston even went so far as to petition the Jacobin Club in Paris for the honor of adoption. ...the petition was granted."

43 Ibid., pp. 13-15, 104.

44 Ibid., pp. 114-21.

45 Hazen, pp. 213-17. Hazen reports, "The New York Democratic Society provided by its constitution that the term citizen should be prefixed to the designation of all its officers;... This society toasted the President...as 'Citizen George Washington' without any indication of his position in the country or any allusion to his public services." One sarcastic Federalist commentator suggested the prefix "biped" as the least offensive and most accurate term by which men could address each other.
every policy decision. Most of the clubs died out in the mid 1790's, aided by Washington's public disapproval, but their members and many of their ideas became embodied in the Republican party.

But before the lines were so sharply drawn between Federalists and Republicans, most American governmental leaders, even those who staunchly opposed the Revolution later, were not quick to attack it in its early phase; for the first few years, they adopted a cautious wait-and-see attitude, and many actively supported it. At first, Washington regarded the Revolution as promising, but even so, he expressed a fear that the easy solutions the French envisioned would not be forthcoming. Hamilton was very wary from the start, but the one American who spoke out against the Revolution at an early date was John Adams.

I know not what to make of a republic of thirty million atheists.... Too many Frenchmen,...pant for equality of persons and property. The impracticability of this God Almighty has decreed, and the advocates for liberty who attempt it will surely suffer for it.

46 McMaster, p. 110, comments, "They denounced the excise, they condemned neutrality, they praised Genet, they used language toward the Government for which, in any other country, every Democrat among them would have been laid by the heels and soundly punished."

47 Link, p. 206; Palmer, p. 223.

To say that France was a country of 30 million atheists was a tremendous exaggeration, but it reveals how strongly Adams viewed the revolutionary activities in that country. In his "Discourse on Davila," published in Fenno's Gazette of the United States in 1790, one of the main tenets that Adams discussed would later be used often against the Revolution.

It is a sacred truth, and as demonstrable as any proposition whatever, that a sovereignty in a single Assembly must necessarily, and will certainly be exercised by a majority as tyrannically as any sovereignty was ever exercised by kings or nobles.49

Federalists like Adams saw the Revolution as a tyranny of the majority. They delighted in quoting James Madison's argument in the tenth Federalist against majority tyranny and democracy, especially now that Madison was Jefferson's lieutenant. In that essay Madison had said,

The majority...must be rendered...unable to concert and carry into effect schemes of oppression...a pure democracy can admit of no cure for the mischiefs of faction. ...there is nothing to check the inducements to sacrifice the weaker party or an obnoxious individual. ...democracies have ever been found incompatible with personal security or the rights of property; and have in general been as short in their lives as they have been violent in their deaths.50

An accurate description of France, the Federalists claimed, and to prevent this scenario from spreading throughout the United States became their mission. Discrediting the

49 Ibid., vol. 6, p. 252.

French Revolution became a political necessity. For this reason they drew upon the statements of European statesmen like Burke and Gentz in order to bolster their arguments. They pointed to the inexcusable excesses, the way in which the French were forcing their Revolution on other nations, and the character of a government which was extinguishing Christianity within its borders and which, they charged, desired to do the same in America. 51

Dwight, Morse, and the other clergy, with their theological training and in spite of some misconceptions, were able to perceive that which Brinton concluded over a century later, namely that Jacobinism was more than just a new political system. Their sensitivity to religious concepts most probably alerted them to the fact that Jacobinism was an entirely different outlook on life, an outlook that attacked everything that they believed to be proper and true. Their own view of republican government was threatened and they rallied to its aid.

Two different concepts of republicanism had sprouted. The battle for the future of America had begun. Rhetoric and tempers flared. Accusations were hurled vehemently from both sides. Men who had been united in independence now called each other traitors. As one scholar of early American affairs has noted,

By the middle of the decade, American political life had reached the point where no genuine debate, no real dialogue was possible for there no longer existed the toleration of differences which debate requires. Instead there had developed an emotional and psychological climate in which stereotypes stood in the place of reality.52

Each side believed in the rightness of its cause, and each felt that it was the true defender of liberty and republican government. It was this tension-packed, conspiracy-conscious atmosphere that Dwight and Morse encountered as they entered the political fray.

CHAPTER 5

FOUNDATIONS OF LIBERTY AND ORDER:

THE DREAM OF A CHRISTIAN REPUBLIC

Jedidiah Morse stood in his Charlestown pulpit, April 25th 1799, and, among other exhortations, delivered this analysis of American government:

Our dangers are of two kinds, those which affect our religion, and those which affect our government. They are, however, so closely allied that they cannot, with propriety, be separated. The foundations which support Christianity, are also necessary to support a free and equal government like our own.... Whenever the pillars of Christianity shall be overthrown, our present republican forms of government, and all the blessings which flow from them, must fall with them.1

Morse could see no distinction between a free and equal republican government and Christianity. In his mind, they were so intertwined that an attack on one was also an attack on the other. This chapter will attempt to shed light on how Dwight and Morse understood liberty, what they considered to be the proper government to support liberty, the part which religion was to play in government, and the role of the clergy in politics.

As children of the American Revolution, one concept

1Morse, A Sermon, Exhibiting the Present Dangers, pp. 10-11.
which neither Dwight nor Morse could tolerate was aristocracy by birth. Any accusation that they would have accepted a man as a ruler merely because he was born into a certain family cannot be supported by the evidence. Political office was a gift bestowed on a person by the community; no man could claim the right through inheritance. Dwight used his poetry to establish his position on the matter.

Beholding no superior, but the laws,
And such as virtue, knowledge, useful life,
And zeal, exerted for the public good,
Have raised above the throng. For her, in truth,
Not in pretence, men is esteem'd as man.
Not here how rich, of what peculiar blood,
Or offices high; but of what genuine worth,
What talents bright and useful, what good deeds,
What piety to God, what love to man,
The question is.

No person could consider himself superior to another because the laws were superior to all men. Only through the quality of a person's life could superiority be acknowledged, and the quality was based upon a person's character, knowledge, and skill, not his riches or ancestry. The genuine worth of an individual was centered in his piety, love, and talents.

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2Notes taken from observations made by Dwight in the Seniors' recitation room, Yale, 1806-1807, p. 19, Dwight Family Papers.

3Dwight, Greenfield Hill, p. 12.

4In these views Dwight was unknowingly in total agreement with Jefferson, who acknowledged to John Adams, October 28, 1813, "For I agree with you that there is a natural aristocracy among men. The grounds of this are virtue and talents.... The natural aristocracy I consider as the most precious gift of nature, for the instruction, the trusts, and government of society." Thomas Jefferson, Writings, vol. 6, p. 223.
If a man were to prove himself and show his worth, then obviously he would need the liberty to do so. Arbitrary government which suppressed the people would be contrary to liberty and, therefore, to the dignity of the individual. Dwight opposed arbitrary government and spoke often of a free government and a free people. In Greenfield Hill, he wrote,

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\text{Warm'd by that living fire, which Heaven bestows;}
\text{Which Freedom lights, and Independence blows;}
\text{By that bright pomp, which moral scenes display,}
\text{The unrivall'd grandeur of elective sway;...}^5
\]

Freedom and independence were seen as intimately bound to the gifts bestowed by heaven. The right of the people to mold their government by election was considered the height of grandeur. Throughout his sermon, Public Happiness, Dwight reminded his audience that freedom was an essential part of true happiness.

A free government has been always, and justly, supposed to be a primary source of national happiness....

The primary means of originating and establishing happiness, in free communities, is, I imagine, the formation of a good personal character in their citizens....

Government is rendered effectual by two great engines - force and persuasion. Force is the instrument of despotism, and persuasion of free and rational government.\(^6\)

Dwight was repelled by the use of force to operate government

\(^5\)Dwight, Greenfield Hill, p. 159.

because force was the tool of despots. Despotism was the very evil he had sought to purge from America through his support of independence. He wanted the new nation to be different from the examples which were so evident in history.

As Dwight reflected on governments of the past, he concluded that most of them had for their purpose the establishment of the status quo. He was distressed that history revealed so little desire on the part of governments to better the situation of the people they ruled. All the efforts of government seemed disposed to secure an absolute submission of the people to their authorities. As a result, "Policy became an art; and government a trick." The consequence of rulers plotting against their subjects was one of two possibilities: the subjects either sank quietly into "torpid insensibility" or "awakened by oppression extended beyond every bound, rose to insurrection and madness."  

Dwight knew that men must have liberty to form and direct their own governments, because tyranny would foster either stupidity or licentiousness.

Morse also rejected tyranny, both civil and ecclesiastical. His belief that America offered the best asylum from tyranny has already been mentioned.  

In a reflection of his Lockean basis of thought, he exulted in how little

7 Ibid., pp. 9-10.
8 See chapter two of this study, p. 24.
natural liberty had to be forfeited in order to maintain each person's rights under the American system. Liberty was the cornerstone of Morse's political philosophy. For many years he supported the French Revolution because he was convinced that the goal of the revolutionists was liberty. In fact, his love for the cause of liberty, for a time, made him as forgiving of the atrocities of the Revolution as any Republican. In a 1794 letter to his father, Morse was buoyant over the news from France.

We have fresh good news from France. The French carry all before them, it is said. Great events are before us. The time will I hope soon arrive when wars shall cease forever. I have great hope that I shall live to see that happy time.

That "happy time" was certainly to be the millennium. Morse's expectations were at a high point. The French, he believed, were fighting for liberty, and if liberty were to carry the day then another step would be taken toward Christ's earthly return.

That liberty was foremost in his mind, and that he perceived France to be in the vanguard of liberty was forcefully expressed in two of Morse's sermons from the mid 1790's. Speaking of the French Revolution, he stated,

Liberty is the birth-right of all mankind;... Where that genuine liberty, which is the right of every man, has been their object, and the

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9 Ibid.
10 Morse to his father, January 15, 1794, Morse Family Papers.
measures pursued to attain it have been commendable, and such as heaven approves, as lovers of mankind, we cannot but rejoice most sincerely, in their success....

This mighty nation has burst the chains of civil and ecclesiastical tyranny. They have arisen from the darkness of slavery to the light of freedom. With a boldness and energy which astonishes and interests the world, they have espoused the cause of LIBERTY, which is the birth-right of mankind.\footnote{Morse, sermon of November 20, 1794, quoted in \textit{Present Situation}, note, p. 15; \textit{Present Situation}, p. 10.}

He obviously received great delight from seeing a nation "burst the chains" of tyranny. Slavery was described as darkness and freedom as light. Liberty was not just a grant from any church or government, but was each man's birth-right, a gift from the Creator. Morse naturally thought in terms of liberty and tyranny, freedom and slavery because he was a son of the American Revolution and its principles. His overriding concern for liberty even allowed him to see an optimistic side to the dechristianization process in France.

\begin{quote}
The rejection of the Christian Religion in France is less to be wondered at, when we consider, in how unamiable and disgusting a point of view it has been there exhibited, under the hierarchy of Rome. When peace and free government shall be established, and the people have liberty and leisure to examine for themselves, we anticipate, by means of the effusions of the Holy Spirit, a glorious revival and prevalence of pure, unadulterated Christianity.\footnote{Morse, \textit{Present Situation}, note, p. 14.}
\end{quote}

Even when Morse finally turned against the Revolution,
he did so because he felt it was offensive to liberty. He acknowledged that he had rejoiced over the events in France, but mainly because of the prospect of seeing that country "enjoying the sweets of freedom, and the blessings of an equal government." But he had to conclude later that he could no longer believe "that the liberty and happiness of Frenchmen,...were the real objects of a majority of the authors and promoters of her revolution." The French Revolution had betrayed liberty. All of Morse's activities which were thereafter directed against the Revolution were viewed by him and those who were in agreement with him as efforts to secure liberty.

Another indication that Morse fought the Revolution in behalf of liberty was his concern over French influence in the United States. He was bothered by what he felt was an attempt to tamper with a freely-elected government. The French agents in America were carrying out "a deep-laid plan,...in vilifying the men we have, by our free suffrages, elected to administer our Constitution." Morse was protective of America's system of popular participation in government. He was fond of reminding his audiences that the government about which men were complaining was of their

13 Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon, pp. 31-32.

14 Rev. John French to Morse, February 13, 1799, Morse Family Papers, "I thank you for your sermon; & for your great exertions in supporting the labouring cause of religion & liberties of our country."

15 Morse, Fast Day Sermon, p. 13.
own forming, that the rulers were of their own choosing, and that the laws had been debated and passed by legislatures composed of their own elected representatives. With all these advantages, the very ends which the American Revolution had sought to attain, Morse could not conceive of a plausible reason for disrespect and disobedience.16

His deep concern over disrespect and disobedience was prompted by his fear that the new government would not be given the opportunity to operate. Echoing Dwight's concerns over the possible ends of society, Morse pleaded:

I would to God, the people of the United States could all be impressed with the high importance of the experiment we are now making for the world, and would unite in a resolution, to reform their vices, to stifle and bury their animosities, to conciliate their differences, and learn to reverence and obey the Constitution, the Rulers, and the Laws of their own creation. Unless something like this shall soon take place, one or other of these consequences may be easily foreseen, either a voluntary increase of the powers of Government, sufficient to preserve order and respect for the Laws, or revolution, anarchy, and military despotism.17

These words of Morse could be used to show that he was primarily a friend of order in society, regardless of how liberty was affected. But to judge Morse in that way is to forget all the earnest statements he made regarding the importance of liberty. It is not probable that his views changed that much in so short a time. A more perceptive

16Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon, p. 14.
17Ibid., p. 15.
interpretation of these words looks beneath the surface and understands his desire that liberty be given the opportunity to function within the governmental system. The "experiment" the United States was conducting was republicanism, a government founded on liberty. Morse called for obedience to the Constitution and the rulers not because he did not want to see the status quo upset, but because he knew that liberty could only operate under certain conditions. If chaos were the rule, then there would be no protection of the rights of individuals, a protection that was supposed to be guaranteed by the Constitution and the elected officials. There would be no liberty if everyone were "free" to trample on the rights of others. Only the rule of law could guarantee liberty. Order was not an end in Morse's mind, but a means to an end. The end was the establishment of a government that could safeguard liberty. Disrespect for law would bring either an increase in government or a dissolution of it, both of which would lead to a complete tyranny. Morse did not relish either alternative.

For Dwight, Morse, and all Federalists, a clear distinction was made between liberty and license. Liberty implied responsibility, whereas license meant a total lack of restraint. "Rational liberty" included respect for established authority. If that respect disappeared, liberty would vanish also. Only through a stable government could liberty be known in its fullness. Dwight saw no

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18 Berk, p. 36.
contradiction in terminology when he said, "The liberty order,...of our State have scarcely known an example."\textsuperscript{19} Liberty and order were two sides of the same coin. Of New England he declared,

Their Love of Liberty will not be questioned. It ought to be observed that they are the only people on this continent, who originally understood, and have ever since maintained, the inseparable connection between Liberty and good order; or who practically knew, that genuine freedom is found only beneath the undisturbed dominion of equitable laws.\textsuperscript{20}

Dwight was not a promoter of order at the expense of liberty, but an advocate of a liberty that would not exceed responsible bounds. He desired equitable laws which would apply to everyone so that each person's liberty might be secured.

To form a free government was not difficult, but to render it durable and able to withstand all attacks was, according to Dwight, a much greater problem. "Yet in its durability plainly consists almost all the value of such a government."\textsuperscript{21} The answer, for Dwight, was in the proper extent of suffrage, the dissemination of piety and knowledge, and the requirements for rulers.

In Connecticut, the right to vote was treated very seriously; it was a gift which was not bestowed lightly,

\textsuperscript{19}Dwight, Virtuous Rulers (Hartford, Connecticut: Hudson and Goodwin, 1791), pp. 28-29.

\textsuperscript{20}Dwight, Travels, vol. 1, p. 171.

\textsuperscript{21}Dwight, Public Happiness, p. 5.
and which could be withdrawn upon scandalous behavior. Universal suffrage was considered detrimental to good government because it allowed unproven people to help make decisions. A property qualification was imposed so that the lazy and wasteful citizens would be weeded out of the electorate. "The Federalist view of republican government was compatible with a broadly based electorate, as long as the electorate was composed of solid citizens..." A "solid" citizen was one who had used his liberty in the right manner; one who had shown enough industry and frugality to achieve property ownership. The flaw in the argument, of course, was that a person might obtain property through dishonesty or inheritance as well as through good character traits. Yet, for Dwight this reasoning, despite any inconsistencies, provided a way of drawing a line between voters and non-voters. If some good citizens were left out, at least most of the unworthy were omitted also. The purpose was the promotion of good government.

Dwight's concern with the quality of the voters is a reflection of the importance he placed upon the character of the citizenry as a whole. He did not conceive of making a separation between private and public morality; the former determined the latter.


\[23\] Ibid.
If each man conducts himself aright, the community cannot be conducted wrong. If the private life be unblamable, the public state must be commendable and happy.

Individuals are often apt to consider their own private conduct as of small importance to the public welfare. This opinion is wholly erroneous and highly mischievous.24

The idea that virtue was essential for republican government was commonplace, but Dwight saw virtue in a somewhat different way than most republican thinkers. For many republicans, the best examples of virtue were Greece and Rome, but Dwight rejected those examples. He argued that both nations maintained a deficient working definition of virtue. Their own moral problems led to their demise, and they never even comprehended the problems. "Indeed, one of the first political errors of later ages appears to be too high a respect for the state of society in Greece and Rome."25

Dwight's definition of virtue was the love of doing good: when exercised toward God, it was called piety; toward others, goodwill or benevolence; toward self, temperance or self-government. This kind of virtue, with piety as the

24Dwight, The Duty of Americans, p. 16. Hatch says, p. 111, "Individual piety was certainly serious enough, but... corporate assumptions made any disease contagious to the whole. There was no such thing as private sin."

25Dwight, Public Happiness, pp. 11-12; also see Hatch, p. 106.
highest manifestation, was a cornerstone of a stable society; without it, the edifice would crumble.  

Dwight named the diffusion of knowledge as the other cornerstone, complementary to virtue. His love of knowledge and his career as an educator have already been discussed, but it is important to add one other point. Dwight never assumed that the acquisition of knowledge by itself would ensure good government. Knowledge was a two-edged sword, used for both good and ill purposes. In one of his lectures at Yale, he commented on the use of knowledge, and used Napoleon as his example.

After all, knowledge is no more than power. It may be made subservient to both good and evil. Had Bonaparte been an ignorant man, the state of Europe would have been very different from what it is now. If we do educate men then, we must educate them in such a manner as will make them better and lead them to embrace virtue.... Wherever learning has been given without any reference to religion, it has been of very little advantage to mankind.

Virtue and knowledge were necessary for each other. Virtue would be inefficient without knowledge, and knowledge would be heartless without virtue. The two, properly joined, promoted public happiness.

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26 Ibid., pp. 14-16. Hatch says, p. 112, "Rejecting outright the notion that tyranny would vanish when government came to rest on the consent of the people, clergymen wrestled with the herculean task of eradicating selfishness."

27 Ibid., p. 25.

28 Notes in Seniors' room, p. 7, Dwight Family Papers.
If the electorate were to be so qualified, how much more the elected officials? Dwight devoted one of his printed sermons exclusively to the requirements of public leaders. In accord with his emphasis on Christian virtue, he maintained that love for God and man was the only sufficient motivation for a ruler. That love should also be manifested in a good family life. As stated previously, there could be no dichotomy between a ruler's personal morality and his public service; only internal piety could create an excellent public servant.29

A ruler's personal character also determined the power of his influence, and his influence, in turn, determined his usefulness. Whenever Dwight wanted to underscore his comments on the importance of character, he would refer to Washington. He was the prime example of a leader whose influence gave outlet to his usefulness.30 To Dwight's way of thinking, leaders who had built a relationship of confidence with their electorate were one of the greatest safeguards of republicanism.31

Responsibility for free government rested with both electorate and elected, but Dwight, and Morse likewise, laid more emphasis on the abilities of the elected than the electorate. They found it much easier to trust one virtuous man than a crowd which could be emotionally swayed. The

29 Dwight, Virtuous Rulers, pp. 15-19.
word democracy raised spectres of "mobocracy," a situation they resisted with their own concept of republicanism. They believed that the people were definitely the base of a free government, that power rested ultimately with them through their suffrage, but they also believed that excesses and threats to liberty were more likely to occur among the people than among the rulers, a tenet in direct contradiction to the main fear of the Republicans. In the heat of the Jay Treaty controversy, Morse wrote his father that the opponents of the treaty were conducting themselves in a "violent fashion," and that "the more thinking part begin to be ashamed of their conduct." He judged the leaders of the opposition to be dishonest, and concluded, "In seaports there always will be a mob at the command of any artful Demagogue."32

In this fear of unlimited democracy, a social element was introduced. It seemed to be the less educated, less well-to-do who were so easily led by demagogues. Conversely, the better rulers habitually came from the most successful and best educated families. Douglas Good comments that Dwight placed his trust in the socially elevated not because he was an aristocrat, but because he believed they were generally more righteous. Since they had been trained in responsibility, "such positive qualities as constancy and wisdom" were more often demonstrated in their

32Morse to his father, August 12, 1795, Morse Family Papers.
lives than in the lower classes. According to Berk, Dwight saw all rulers and clergymen in a paternal pattern: the Connecticut citizenry were the children into whom the fathers sought to instill virtue and an appreciation for liberty. It would, then, naturally be in society's best interest to keep proven men in office until their successors' qualifications could be assured. Regardless of the deficiencies of the paternalistic spirit, no base motive can be detected in Dwight; he sincerely believed that men needed to be educated in the appreciation for and practice of liberty. He was proud of Connecticut's public service record.

The great officers of this State are few; and their continuance in office is usually long. Hence they are customarily regarded by their fellow citizens with no small degree of respect, and personal attachments.

In his estimation, this was true republicanism: a government close to the people, based upon personal friendship, and subject to change only if the people felt it to be necessary.

Dwight thought so highly of elected officials that he remarked in one of his lectures,

The Constitution of the United States it is true, permits the President to be impeached. But this article is in my opinion intended, merely to satisfy the populace. The President never will be impeached, and if he is, our constitution will be destroyed. Society will

33 Good, p. 8.
34 Berk, pp. 37, 98.
never quietly suffer an officer of such importance...to be brought as a criminal before any court whatsoever.36

Dwight feared the consequences of the election of a President of "inferior talents." The possibilities of national disruption loomed before him in such a case.37 Yet he was the active opponent of discouragement and sloth: "When man has prepared the ground, and sown the seed, Heaven will refuse neither the rain, nor the sunshine."38

Civil government without the moorings of religion was unthinkable, not only to Dwight and Morse, but to most Americans, especially those of Federalist persuasion. Even Washington, in his Farewell Address, spoke of religion and morality as "indispensable supports" for political prosperity. He further cautioned the nation against the idea that morality could exist without religion.39 Dwight agreed.

All the duties which we owe to mankind, are, without the consideration of Piety, viewed as merely due to men;...in the eyes of Piety all these duties are enhanced, beyond measure, by the consideration, that they are enjoined by God, and that, of course, every fulfillment of moral obligation to our neighbor is the performance of a duty to our Maker.40

36 Notes in Seniors' room, p. 15, Dwight Family Papers.
37 Good, p. 12.
38 Dwight, Public Happiness, p. 31.
As Hatch explains, "It was asserted that nothing less than a belief in God's moral government and the approaching state of reward and punishment would effectively check the unruly passion of men."\textsuperscript{41} The proper formula for government was that religion made good citizens who, in turn, created a government amenable to liberty. To try to reverse the procedure was unworkable, so it was evident that religion should be thought of as the most important element.\textsuperscript{42}

Any attempt to remove religion from political considerations was an invitation to national disaster; liberty would be the victim. The only freedom that would remain would be that of "savages, bears, and wolves."\textsuperscript{43} Dwight contended that no free government had ever existed without religion, and he used France as his example. He added that religion has everything to do with politics, since it regulates all the concerns of men. "If religion has nothing to do with politics, a tyrant, because he is a tyrant cannot be a bad man."\textsuperscript{44} In other words, who is to say what constitutes tyranny without a God-ordained definition of good or evil? Religion, therefore, was essential to the maintenance of liberty.

\textsuperscript{41} Hatch, p. 110.
\textsuperscript{42} Good, pp. 6-7.
\textsuperscript{43} Dwight, \textit{The Duty of Americans}, p. 18.
\textsuperscript{44} Notes in Seniors' room, pp. 33-34, Dwight Family Papers.
When Morse spoke to his congregation on the national Fast Day in 1798, he was greatly disturbed over those who criticized the government's proclamation of a fast. In the spirit of the jeremiad, he roundly attacked what he considered to be an awful change in the American character.

Whether our troubles and dangers arise from our own errors, or from the unjustifiable conduct of foreign nations, it becomes us,... to humble ourselves before God, and to implore his forgiveness, direction and benediction. But that we should have men among us, so lost to every principle of religion, morality, and even common decency, as to reprobate the measure; as to contemn the authority who recommend it, and to denounce it as hypocritical, and designed to effect sinister purposes, is indeed alarming.... That such vile sentiments should find their way into a newspaper, and be read and tolerated by a people who profess Christianity, indicates a degree of corruption and depravity, in the public mind, more truly threatening to our dearest rights and interests, than the hostile attitudes and movements of foreign nations.45

Threats against long-standing traditions which Dwight and Morse believed to be beneficial to the country led them to cling even more earnestly to that mutual support of church and state which historians have labeled the Standing Order. When Dwight and Morse spoke of the Standing Order, they were not envisioning the European system which "so unhappily blended civil and spiritual objects" so as to prescribe faith and bind the conscience. They meant, rather, that the first duty of a ruler was the support of religious belief in order to maintain public order and morality.

45 Morse, Fast Day Sermon, p. 12.
This he was to do, not in the mistaken European way, but by "steadfastly opposing immorality, by employing and honouring the just, by contemning the vicious, by enlarging the motives to righteousness, by removing the temptations to sin." The contemporary state of affairs distressed Morse. The rulers were not enforcing the laws against immorality. "Many of our laws, indeed,...particularly those against profane swearing, debauchery, gaming, and sabbath-breaking, are but a dead letter." Such laws, which may seem more acclimated to the seventeenth century than the eighteenth, were for Morse entirely consistent with republicanism. They were not seen as oppressive, but as essential for the maintenance of public virtue, which was one of the foundations of liberty. The Standing Order, in the eyes of Dwight and Morse, was not a ruling class or a special interest group, but the "guardian of freedom." To encourage disestablishment was to give license to heresy, irreligion, and infidelity.

One of the biggest problems for Dwight and Morse, and one which they never seemed to comprehend fully, was their equation of Congregationalism with true religion. This equation engendered bitterness in dissenters who considered themselves just as Christian as any Congregationalist.

46 Dwight, Virtuous Rulers, pp. 18-19.

47 Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon, p. 12.

48 Berk, pp. 42, 77.
Because religion was the life of government, clergymen saw nothing wrong in their participation in political affairs. But out of their participation developed an opposition which viewed them as mere tools of the Federalist politicians. One of their most vocal detractors, a Connecticut Republican named Abraham Bishop, declared, "Their depravity is total, their influence is wholly undesirable.... The political clergy are the worst enemies of the church. The Federalist leaders are the worst enemies of our Revolution, and both are enemies to the common people." 49

The Federalist clergy did not allow such attacks to escape rebuttal. Dwight used his full powers of persuasion to convince the public that clergymen had every right to be involved politically. In an anonymous series of newspaper articles shortly after Jefferson's inauguration, Dwight examined the critics' complaints and offered his own apology. To the charge that the clergy were cunning men, Dwight showed that this was antithetical to another charge that the clergy were weak and ignorant, and destitute of talents. He responded:

But, my countrymen, can the man who is without talents, who is ignorant, who is weak, be also cunning; and that to such a degree as to be dangerous to a community, of which the great body are neither ignorant, nor weak, and of which multitudes are learned and wise? 50


Dwight strongly resented the charge of meddling; for him, it was a sacred duty for clergymen to lend their voices to political affairs. Politics was public morals in operation, and the clergy were responsible for guiding public morals as well as private. And what of a clergyman's citizenship? Was he supposed to renounce it because he was a man who earned his living by religion? A clergyman's personal liberty, his rights, his family, and his property were as dependent on good government as any other citizen's.\(^5\)

Morse, in like manner, made himself clear on this matter. He took issue with the impropriety of political preaching and invoked history as his witness.

\[A\] malignant spirit is visibly at work to destroy the Clergy in these United States. And what have they done to provoke this hostility? Why they have "preached politics." This, so far as I know, is the principal, if not the only, charge alleged against them. But is this any new crime? No, it is as old as Christianity; nay it is as old as the priesthood itself. The priests and prophets under the Old Testament dispensation; Christ and his Apostles under the New; the faithful Christian clergy in every age and every country, have preached politics;...for doing what only twenty years ago they were called upon to perform as a duty, they are now censured and abused, and represented as an expensive, useless, nay even, noxious body of men.\(^5\)

\(^5\)Ibid., May 26, 1801.

\(^5\)Morse, Present Dangers, pp. 18-19. The Rev. Jeremy Belknap, in an address before a convention of Massachusetts clergymen, in 1796 (at which Morse was probably in attendance), reacted spiritedly against the opposition to the clergy: "There is a monopolizing spirit in some politicians, which would exclude clergymen from all attention to matters of state and government; which would prohibit us from bringing political subjects into the pulpit, and even
To Dwight and Morse, the attack on the clergy was an attack on precepts of republicanism: the rights of man, citizenship, and participation in the political process. They were not about to back away from their dream of an American Christian Republic.

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threaten us with the loss of our livings if we move at all in the political Sphere. But, my brethren, I consider politics as intimately connected with morality, and both with religion.... How liberal are some tongues, some pens, and some presses, with their abuse when we appear warm and zealous in the cause of our country! When we speak or write in support of its liberties, its constitution, its peace and its honor, we are stigmatized as busy-bodies, as tools of a party, as meddling with what does not belong to us,..." Quoted in Vernon L. Stauffer, New England and the Bavarian Illuminati (New York: Russell and Russell, 1918; reprinted 1967), pp. 94-95.
CHAPTER 6
THE CHRISTIAN REPUBLIC UNDER ATTACK

It is said that it is impossible to exclude Infidels from office; it is impossible to prevent stealing, yet there ought to be laws against stealing.... It has been said, that infidels may be good men, but no man is better than his principles, or even as good. No infidel has good principles.¹

Perhaps no man in America was a more ardent foe of what he considered to be infidelity than Timothy Dwight. As he surveyed the state of the world, and of America in particular, from the 1780's until his death, he became convinced that the forces of irreligion were working in concert for the destruction of all societal institutions.² And it was through the French Revolution that all of these forces were attempting to dismantle his personal American dream.

Dwight believed that infidelity gained a foothold in America through the introduction of foreign troops, the British in the French and Indian War, and the French in the American Revolution.³ These troops, claimed Dwight,

¹Notes in Seniors' room, p. 19, Dwight Family Papers.
²Stauffer, p. 246.
³Silverman, p. 82.
corrupted the American soldiers with the new philosophies of men like Voltaire, Hume, and Rousseau. The American soldiers then returned to their hometowns and spread the poison there. Dwight was correct in thinking that the Puritanized Americans were not as steeped in the new philosophies as their European counterparts, and that European soldiers influenced the Americans, but he was guilty of reductionism, a common fault for him, by making a single factor the entire reason for a later development. For instance, he could not conceive that the soldier's willingness to listen to ideas contrary to those they had always imbibed might be, in part, the fault of Calvinist theology or the social habits of Americans. The belief that America could be totally isolated from European thoughts was a bit naive. But Dwight was quite eager to do whatever he could to check the growth of a dangerous philosophy.

His The Triumph of Infidelity, written in 1788, was an allegory which traced the rise of infidelity and its transfer to America. Appropriately, the volume was dedicated to Voltaire. Included in the dedication was Dwight's uncompromising conviction that reason was on the side of Christianity. Referring to Voltaire, he said,

Your Creator endued you with shining talents. ...you devoted them to a single purpose, the elevation of your character above his.
...you opposed truth, religion, and their authors,...and taught...that the chief end of man was, to slander his God, and abuse

4Ibid., pp. 82-83.
him forever... Reasoning is an unhappy
gine to be employed against Christianity;
as, like elephants in ancient was, it usually,
...turns upon those who employ it. Ridicule
is a more convenient weapon, as you have
successfully evinced;...

Voltaire, according to Dwight, misused the talents
God had given him. He turned philosophy into the opposite
of what God had intended. The reason Voltaire wrote in a
sarcasm vein, said Dwight, was because that was the best
avenue for one to take when reason contradicted one's
arguments. Dwight maintained that ridicule could never be
the test of truth.  

Kenneth Silverman's analysis of Dwight and
The Triumph of Infidelity provides an opinion which can
and should be challenged.

The discourse moves from sweetly logical,
formal refutations of infidel philosophy to
eruptions of acid invective that reveal
Dwight's authoritarian temper. Here his
enemy...was the intoxicated clamor for Liberty
ending in the tumbrils and guilotine of the
French Revolution.... Dwight's hated white
whale is clearly no single doctrine but all
abstract thought, all philosophy, all intel-

In the first place, Silverman's terminology, "eruptions of
acid invective," is highly subjective and places an unfair
onus on Dwight's work. Secondly, while it is true that
Dwight was authoritarian, there is no indication that his

5Dwight, The Triumph of Infidelity (1788), p. iii.
6Ibid, note, p. 11.
7Silverman, pp. 97-98.
authoritarianism was as oppressive as intimated in this analysis. He detested absolute submission to authority and declared time and again his commitment to open debate and the right of the individual to judge for himself. In the third place, Silverman's reference to the French Revolution is inappropriate. When Dwight wrote this work, the Revolution was still in the future and could not have been an influence on his views. Lastly, quotations already attributed to Dwight in this study have shown that he was not opposed to all philosophy, as Silverman contends, and that he deplored governments that would not improve, but would rest with the status quo. Further, Dwight's book ended optimistically; he maintained that Americans had resisted the more virulent strains of infidelity. Even Silverman admits this.

Dwight believed in progress, but he could not tolerate the idea that progress was the unique possession of the infidel philosophers. Morse, also, spoke out against the idea that the philosophers had plumbed depths hitherto unknown because superstition had earlier prevailed.

Let us not then become enamoured of this vain and impious philosophy, nor imagine that infidelity is any mark of profound thinking,

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8Dwight, Sermon at Northampton, pp. 33-34; Public Happiness, pp. 9-10; Infidel Philosophy, pp. 11, 43, 49; The Duty of Americans, preface.

9Silverman, p. 90.

10See chapter three of this study.

11Dwight, Infidel Philosophy, p. 57.
or of acute penetration. "A little philosophy (said Lord Bacon) inclineth men's minds to atheism; but depth in philosophy bringeth men's minds about to religion.\textsuperscript{12}

As Dwight studied the European philosophies, he believed that he detected a major difference between the English and French schools. The English school was rational, straightforward, and could be refuted in a logical manner; the French school, however, was "a system of abstract declarations, which violated common sense." He was frustrated trying to refute it because of its approach.

He, who cannot convince, may perplex. He, who cannot inform, may beguile. He, who cannot guide, may entice. He, who cannot explain, may overbear. He, who can do all these, may, and often will, persuade.\textsuperscript{13}

Although Dwight began battling infidelity in the 1780's, it was not until the mid 1790's that the American situation called for a major defense of orthodoxy. American deists were a small group and were not actively involved in anticlerical activities at first. Then, a few of their number, like Elihu Palmer and Thomas Paine, began more vigorously to promote their views.\textsuperscript{14} Paine's \textit{Age of Reason}, which first appeared in America in 1794, touched off a theological furor. The book was published in France and

\textsuperscript{12}Morse, \textit{Present Dangers}, p. 32.

\textsuperscript{13}Dwight, \textit{Travels}, vol. 4, pp. 374–75.

\textsuperscript{14}Nash, p. 401.
and sent to America to be sold for a very low sum, thereby increasing its sales and influence. It became a catechism for many democratic-republican societies. The prospects frightened the clergy; a philosophy that had once been merely the philosophical toy of some of the well educated was now being diffused through all of society. Before long, infidelity and the French Revolution became inseparable in the minds of the clergy.  

At the beginning of the Revolution, the clergy shared in the general atmosphere of approval. "There was that in the...struggles of the French people to tear the yoke of despotism from their necks which appealed mightily to the sympathies of the clerical heart."

Through most of 1794, the clergy maintained a hope that the Revolution would yet lead to a stable, well-governed state. "What is surprising, and little recognized, is that the clergy's Francophilia persisted through its most violent and most anticlerical phase." The main reason for their acceptance seems to be that the church being attacked was the Roman Catholic. Papal tyranny was being uprooted and no full-blooded Calvinist could possibly be opposed to that. As Richard Purcell writes,

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15 Ibid., pp. 402-404; Banner, p. 190.
16 Stauffer, p. 87.
17 Nash, p. 394.
The attack on the church was applauded in a shortsighted, if not bigoted, manner, as the fulfillment of their long-predicted overthrow of Anti-Christ, of Babylon. ...it would have been well if the Congregational ministers had realized that Jacobinism was essentially an attack on Christianity.18

During the first years of the Revolution, the New England clergy were almost indistinguishable from Jefferson in their attitudes. Dwight, from a perspective of years later, recalled how America was the victim of some kind of "enchantment." A "veil" was spread over the "enormities" of the Revolution, and it carried such an influence on the minds of men that "for a season no efforts" could "resist." He continued, "Actions which a few years before would have mocked all utterance, now passed over the tongue with moderate censure, and reluctant severity."19

When Paine's Age of Reason appeared, and "offered to the public an engaging defense of the French Revolution as an antireligious exercise," the clergy were jolted out of their willingness to accept the events in France.20 The startling spectacle of millions of Frenchmen prostrate before a god of Reason awakened them to the fact that the

18 Richard J. Purcell, Connecticut in Transition, 1775-1818 (Oxford University Press, 1918), p. 16; also see Nash, p. 395-96. Dwight later commented, "The reason that Voltaire and others were so successful in destroying religion in France is, that the priests and Bishops of the Roman Catholic religion were in general dreadfully corrupt, and held their offices merely for the riches and power with which they were joined." Notes in Seniors' room, p. 16, Dwight Family Papers.

19 Dwight, Travels, vol. 4, pp. 373, 378.

20 Banner, p. 19.
direction of the Revolution was unlikely to turn into an advantage for Protestantism. For Dwight, to worship abstract terms like Reason "seemed to him idolatry as meaningless as that of the heathen who bowed down before a sacred cow or stone."\(^{21}\) For the first time, the clergy began to see what effect French principles would have on American society. Instead of being a revolution on the other side of the ocean, the French Way was being transmitted to America. No longer could they sit at a safe distance and nod approvingly at the assertions of the rights of man; now, they had to deal with the French version in their own backyards. As Gary Nash perceptibly explains:

The timing of the clergy's change in its views of the French Revolution makes it clear that the change was the product not so much of the drift of events in France as of movements - ideological, political, and social - at home. Of chief importance were the rise of militant deism, the threat of social disorder, and the growing intensity of national political issues. It was perhaps the first of these, the threat to religious orthodoxy, that figured most prominently.\(^{22}\)

Morse's Present Situation sermon, in 1795, was to be his last official defense of the Revolution. Apart from a short comment to his father in April, 1795, he remained virtually silent on the subject for the next three years, at least in his remaining letters and printed sermons. But a transformation was effected in his mind during that

\(^{21}\) Cuningham, p. 298.

\(^{22}\) Nash, p. 399.
period of silence which stripped away every defense of French actions. America had experienced a great division over France; the climax came with the XYZ Affair. In his 1798 Thanksgiving sermon, Morse confessed to his congregation that his previous support of France had been wrong, the offspring of ignorance of French motives and designs. He declared that "the real nature and object of her revolution, has produced an intire change in my own feelings and opinions." In the preface to a 1799 sermon, Morse again apologized for his former beliefs.

Those who were in situations most favourable for early discovering the atrocity of the French rulers, perhaps once looked on him [Morse] with the same mixture of wonder and compassion, with which he now regards those of his Christian friends, whose prejudices and want of information, even now inflame them with honest, misguided zeal in the cause of the French Revolutionists. Morse now regarded the French Revolution as only the opening stages of an attempt to overthrow all ordered government and Christian principles. This belief began to spread throughout the clergy of New England; soon nearly all of them were resolutely backing Federalism. "France was identified as the source of American infidelity, and the pro-French faction in the United States - the Jeffersonians - were charged with atheistic sympathies."

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23 Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon, pp. 31-32.
24 Morse, Present Dangers, preface.
25 Nash, p. 405.
The stereotypes had been set up: Republicans were Jacobins and atheists; Federalists were aristocrats and monarchists.\textsuperscript{26}

Europe was at war, American society was in a state of flux, faction controlled politics, and irreligion was on the rise. The French fostered license instead of liberty; anarchy and blasphemy were rampant. And Americans, misled by Republicans and religious liberals, were followers of French principles.\textsuperscript{27} It is no wonder that Federalist clergy-men were fearful. Dwight and Morse saw their dream of a Christian Republic crumbling. Something had to be done to halt the destruction of liberty, to convince Americans to divorce themselves from all French concepts. It was at this juncture that an explanation of the Revolution was offered which they rushed to embrace. They believed they had discovered a conspiracy to which all of the problems could be traced. Unfortunately for them, and for their dream, they jumped too soon.

\textsuperscript{26}Kerber comments, p. 196, "Federalists saw clearly that reasonable debate could not begin until the opposition ceased to equate Federalism with monarchy. They failed to realize that they would have to offer an equivalent concession; at the very least they would have to cease equating Republicans with Jacobins (as serious an error of definition as the one of which they so loudly complained)."

\textsuperscript{27}Nash, p. 410.
CHAPTER 7
THE SPECTRE OF CONSPIRACY

Our country is assailed both by internal and external enemies, who form and carry on their wicked machinations in the dark, and by the most subtle and insinuating artifice and intrigue. In such a state of things our bosoms should glow with the love of our country, and burn with such ardency as to kindle the same spirit in the bosoms of all those with whom we associate.1

So spoke Jedidiah Morse one month after he unveiled for America the plan of a conspiracy which he declared was committed to the abolition of Christianity and the destruction of all civil government.2 What was the source of this plan? How had he come to the knowledge of it? How credible were his claims?

The strange story that developed into a controversy throughout the Western world began in Bavaria. A professor at the University of Ingolstadt, Adam Weishaupt, had nurtured a lifelong enmity toward all who advocated religious superstition and rejected the authority of man's reason. He decided to establish a secret association to outwit the enemies of reason; so, on May 1, 1776, the Order of the

1Morse, A Sermon Delivered before the Grand Lodge (Leominster, Massachusetts: Prentiss, 1798), p. 12.
2Morse, Fast Day Sermon, p. 21.
Illuminati was founded. The purposes of the Order, as Weishaupt envisioned it, were twofold: to educate socially and to rid the locality of clerical authority. He wanted to place members in the seats of civil authority in order to advance enlightened thought. But he made use of practices contrary to the spirit of enlightenment. First of all, the veil of secrecy lent itself to the feeling that the order had something to hide. Secondly, Weishaupt's insistence on blind obedience was the very evil he was supposedly fighting. After four precarious years, the Illuminati society was on the verge of extinction, virtually ripped apart by infighting among the leaders. Its existence would have only occupied a footnote in history had not Baron Adolf Franz Friederich Knigge been initiated into the order. Knigge set about reorganizing the society. He greatly strengthened it and widened its scope into a worldwide battle for tolerance and enlightenment. The aim was to diffuse knowledge so widely that civil government would no longer be necessary. The order was patient, however, and set its sights on attaining this goal gradually over a few thousand years.

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3Stauffer, pp. 146-57.


5Stauffer, pp. 161-70; Mounier, pp. 175-76.

After 1780, the Illuminati became affiliated with some Masonic lodges.\(^7\) It appears, though, that Illuminees considered themselves to be superior to Masons, and they merely adopted some of the outward forms of the continental lodges. The general attitude of the order toward Masonry was one of contempt.\(^8\) But due to its reorganization and its affiliations, by 1784, Illuminati membership was estimated to be between two and three thousand.\(^9\)

The order that was designed to spread tolerance throughout the world, however, could not achieve that goal within its own ranks. A continual dispute between Weishaupt and Knigge resulted in Knigge leaving the order in 1784. That was only the opening act in the dissolution of the Illuminati. The next year the Bavarian sovereign began an open persecution of the Illuminati because he saw in its existence a threat to his power. The crushing blow was the discovery of the papers of Weishaupt and other leaders.\(^10\) Some of the leaders were less than discreet in their writings: their moral blemishes were evident, and others boasted of an influence far beyond the order's capabilities. As Vernon Stauffer writes,

> By the admission of its leaders, the system of the Illuminati had the appearance of an

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\(^7\) Stauffer, p. 170.  
\(^8\) Mounier, p. 218.  
\(^9\) Stauffer, p. 172.  
\(^10\) Ibid., pp. 174-81.
organization devoted to the overthrow of religion and the state, a band of poisoners and forgers, an association of men of disgusting morals and depraved tastes.\textsuperscript{11} By the end of 1786, the Illuminati was no more. Weishaupt, who had fled Bavaria, was broken in spirit and lived until 1830 in virtual obscurity.\textsuperscript{12}

Some people, though, feared that the Illuminati had not really been destroyed, but had merely devised a more secret organization. The letters of some of the leaders had addressed the question of what to do in case the order were suppressed; the fear grew that the Illuminati was yet going to wring victory out of apparent defeat.\textsuperscript{13}

Then came the French Revolution. The world had never seen anything quite like it. All of Europe was aroused against its extremes. The question arose whether there was a link between the Illuminati and the principles of the Revolution. They both seemed to promote the disruption of government and both appeared opposed to the Christian faith. John Robison's \textit{Proofs of a Conspiracy}, published in 1797, purported to show that a definite link \textit{did} exist.

Robison, a reputable Scottish mathematician at the University of Edinburgh, was an associate of James Watt and other prominent British intellectuals, a savant and a Free-mason whose position in the academic world earned him a

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 182.

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., pp. 184-85.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., p. 187.
hearing for his statements.\textsuperscript{14} Robison not only linked the Illuminati and the French Revolution, but he indicted the continental Masonic lodges in the conspiracy. Moreover, he mentioned that the Illuminati had also spread their doctrines to America, and that several such societies had been in operation since before 1786.\textsuperscript{15}

Federalist clergymen needed no further goading to publicize what they had believed in their hearts all along: a gigantic conspiracy was underway, even in America, to destroy society and the Christian beliefs that undergirded it. "Henceforth their arsenal would be enlarged to include a new weapon."\textsuperscript{16}

It was Morse who first took command of the situation. He had read Robison's book in April, 1798. Then, on May 9, the day of the National Fast, he delivered a sermon exposing the supposed conspiracy.\textsuperscript{17} He expressed his belief that the Illuminati was the source of the "torrent of irreligion" which "threatens to overwhelm the world." Then he cited a long list of what he considered to be the beliefs of the order: atheism, the justification of suicide, Epicurean pleasure-seeking, the disdain of patriotism, disregard for private property, the abolition of marriage, and the

\textsuperscript{14}Berk, pp. 125-26; Stauffer, p. 201.

\textsuperscript{15}Dwight, \textit{The Duty of Americans}, p. 14.

\textsuperscript{16}Stauffer, p. 239.

\textsuperscript{17}James K. Morse, p. 55.
promotion of promiscuity. Above all, the society advocated the concept of the end justifying the means. From this catalog of alleged beliefs, Morse turned to the Illuminati's influence in the world: the French Revolution "was kindled by the Illuminati," Paine's Age of Reason "proceeded from the fountain head of Illumination," and the American Jacobin Societies (Morse's term for the democratic-republican societies) "were instituted to propagate here the principles of the illuminated mother club in France."\(^{18}\)

On July 4, Dwight joined in support of Morse's warnings in a sermon entitled The Duty of Americans. Dwight described the Illuminati as "a higher order of Masons" whose aims were to destroy religion and government, private property, and marriage. The Masonic Societies of France and Germany, said Dwight, were "hot beds" in which were sown "the seeds of that astonishing Revolution, and all its dreadful appendages, which now spreads dismay and horror throughout half the globe." He claimed that "multitudes" of the Germans had been converted to Illuminism, and that in France, "those men, who have had...the chief direction of the public affairs of that country, have been members of this society."\(^{19}\)

Dwight's endorsement of the conspiracy carried significant weight in the country because of his leadership role at Yale and his influence in Connecticut in general. "The undoubted

\(^{18}\)Morse, Fast Day Sermon, pp. 20-24.

\(^{19}\)Dwight, The Duty of Americans, pp. 11-13.
effect was to give more solid standing to the sensational charge that Jedidiah Morse had made." 20

Bolstered by Dwight's support, Morse kept pressing his case. In his 1798 Thanksgiving sermon, he added an appendix with various comments intended to give credence to his thesis. In one of the appendix notes, Morse focused on the democratic societies. He accused them of being the leading disseminators of Illuminati principles in America and pointed to their part in circulating the Age of Reason as proof. Since they had been frowned upon by the government, they had ceased to act openly, but "now hypocritically mask themselves under the name of The American Society of United Irishmen." 21

Morse received encouragement from many quarters. Massachusetts Congressman Dwight Foster commented on his Thanksgiving sermon and appendix with high approbation. 22 The one response that Morse probably treasured most came

20 Stauffer, p. 252.

21 Morse, Thanksgiving Sermon, note F.

22 Dwight Foster to Morse, February 6, 26, 1799, Morse Family Papers. "The valuable information it contains will be of great service in the present situation of the affairs of the U.S. A number of gentlemen are very anxious to have the discourse more generally circulated. Some of the members of Congress from the Southward, have repeatedly mentioned to me since the first copies were received in this place their hopes to have it in their power to procure a number to send to their friends for circulation... These publications have a good tendency. - I humbly hope, with the other exertions which we made, that they save our country from the horrible effects of French philosophy and Illumination."
from Mt. Vernon. Washington, now in retirement, seemed very pleased with his exposure of the conspiracy.  

On April 25, 1799, Morse opened fire once again on the Illuminati in another printed sermon. This time he indicated a Masonic lodge in Portsmouth, Virginia as an Illumined society, and he claimed that the mother lodge was in New York City. He included a list of all the names of the members of the Portsmouth lodge, most of whom were of French origin. This sermon, however, was to be Morse's last public attempt to forward his cause. Before 1799 concluded, most of the spark of the Illuminati scare was extinguished, the victim of too much contention and too little proof.

Dissent from Morse's view was not long in coming. A great portion of it centered around the character of Robison and the authenticity of his facts. Morse proved to be an able defender of Robison's character. Totally

23 Sprague, p. 232, Washington to Morse, February 28, 1799. "The letter with which you were pleased to favour me, dated the 1st instant, accompanying your Thanksgiving Sermon, came duly to hand. For the latter I pray you to accept my thanks. I have read it and the Appendix with pleasure, and wish...[it] could meet a more general circulation..."

24 Morse, Present Dangers.

25 Dwight was referring to Robison when he said, "The doctrine of any man ought always to be regarded as open to disbelief, and free discussion; but the general character of this man ought not to be treated with contempt by persons, who do not in some good measure approximate to the same talents, learning, and respectability." The Duty of Americans, note p. 32.
unfounded rumors concerning Robison were circulated: that he had fled Britain and had lived in exile in Germany because of crimes he had committed; that he was allowed to return only on condition that he write something of the nature of Proofs of a Conspiracy; that he was insane and held his professorship only as a gift.  

Robison called Morse "my worthy advocate" and sent him a résumé of his life so Morse would have all the facts at hand to answer false charges.

However, whenever Morse was challenged to prove details of his accusations, he would come up short, and revert back to a defense of Robison's character -- perhaps the best argument he really had. The one solid proof which he thought he had established, the Illumined lodge in Portsmouth, also turned to dust. When Morse wrote to Virginia Congressman Josiah Parker for confirmation, Parker instead asserted that it was a reputable, regular Masonic lodge. Most of the members had French backgrounds because they were immigrants from Santo Domingo, an island that had undergone a slave insurrection. As Robert Palmer acknowledges, "Most of these French refugees were not very well disposed toward the Revolution." The American hot bed of Illuminism would have to be found elsewhere.

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26 Rev. Walter King to Morse, August 22, 1799; Morse to King, August 28, 1799, Morse Family Papers.

27 Robison to Dr. Erskine (Edinburgh), July 19, 1800; Robison to Morse, September 23, 1800, Morse Family Papers.

28 Palmer, p. 220.
Two other sources of confirmation also fell flat. Both Dwight and Morse were telling the country that the soon-to-be-released *Memoris of Jacobinism*, by the French emigrant Abbe Barruel, would provide all the corroborating evidence anyone could want. Barruel's thesis was simply that the philosophers, the Masons, and the Illuminati, deliberately working together, had produced the Jacobins, who in turn, produced the Revolution.29 Although his arguments were readily accepted by proponents such as Dwight and Morse, he mentioned nothing about America. The publication of his book in this country, therefore, did nothing to bolster the belief that the conspiracy had any foothold in the New World. Consequently, Barruel's impact was slight.30

One other hope was Morse's German correspondent, Prof. Ebeling. He was, however, a disappointment to both Dwight and Morse because he was far too sympathetic to the Revolution and personally disliked both Robison and Barruel. Morse commented that Ebeling "detects several errors in Robison, but in my opinion none whh invalidate the most material and important parts of his work." Morse concluded, "His opinions as well as those of Robison and Barruel, are to be received with some allowances for prejudices."31 It is important to note that even when backed into a corner, Morse

29Stauffer, p. 218.
30Ibid., pp. 311-12.
31Morse to Rev. Walter King, August 16, 1799, Morse Family Papers.
did not denounce Ebeling as an enemy or a conspirator. He continued to regard him highly and even acknowledged that allowances had to be made for some of the comments in the works of Robison and Barruel. 32

Morse's personal trial was increased later that year when two Republican newspapers, the Bee and the Aurora, published a letter which they purported to be from Ebeling to Morse. This letter denounced Robison's book as ridiculous and asserted that it was composed in the interests of party. 33 Morse steadfastly denied that the printed letter was a communication from Ebeling to him. He refused to publish the letter which he had received from Ebeling because he said it was private, but he claimed that he was ready to furnish affidavits from two Harvard professors in support of his testimony. This response made him appear evasive and damaged his reputation. Only after the damage was done was he vindicated. 34

32 Morse even admonished Dwight to be more moderate in his views: "Dr. Eliot thinks that in some part of your note you are too severe against Prof. Ebeling. He believes him to be an honest man. He (Prof. Ebeling) declares that he is no Jacobin nor Illuminee - but it is evident enough that he thinks much too favorably of both. He is probably a modern Socinian and friendly to the principles (though he does not approve of all the disastrous effects) of the revolutions in Europe." Morse to Dwight, April 17, 1801, Morse Family Papers.

33 Stauffer, p. 316.

34 Ibid., p. 317. The letter was from Ebeling to William Bentley, a man who had a personal grudge against Morse.
From the perspective of the modern scholar, the evidence overwhelmingly indicates that Dwight and Morse supported the wrong cause in their attempt to stay the dismemberment of society. They were too quick to believe "proofs" that had not been adequately proven; they saw conspiracy where only differences existed.

Their contemporary, the Frenchman Jean-Joseph Mounier, who had taken part in the early stages of the Revolution, only to fall into disfavor when it took a more radical turn, discounted a conspiracy from the start. Wrote Mounier:

> How absurd it is to suppose that the Revolution of France is the result of a conspiracy! ...nobody in France thought, in 1787, of the means of changing the government. They censured, they ridiculed the errors of administration, but they took no means to prevent them.35

Mounier's own comparative study of Jacobinism and Illuminism revealed many opposite viewpoints between the two parties.36

35 Mounier, pp. 23-24.
36 Ibid., pp. 210-11. Mounier saw the following discrepancies:
1) the Jacobins desired to overturn government to establish unlimited democracy now, whereas the Illuminati wanted to direct governments to the point where they would one day be useless, perhaps in a few thousand years;
2) the Jacobins proscribed princes, priests, and nobles, whereas the Illuminati received them;
3) the Jacobins excited open revolt, whereas the Illuminati detested tumults and violence;
4) the Jacobins trusted in perfection through political constitutions, whereas the Illuminati felt it would be achieved merely through instruction;
5) the Jacobins believed liberty is submission to the majority, whereas the Illuminati saw liberty in the reestablishment
But Dwight and Morse, like so many Americans of that decade, had reached the point where their minds were already made up, regardless of further evidence. The conspiracy theory was only one part of a religious-political drama that saw the rise of Jeffersonianism and the supposed dissolution of American Christian institutions.

It has been argued that the reaction of Morse and Dwight to the Revolution was a retreat from their desire to promote liberty. However, the distinction which was made in their minds between American liberty and French anarchy enabled them to see themselves as the true friends of freedom. They rejected the French brand of independence, but they insisted that they had not abandoned their love of liberty. As Hatch explains.

Congregationalists argued that theirs was a pure strain of Christian republicanism, well-reasoned, self-consistent. ...the historian must be impressed with those contours of New England thought that did remain stable over time. Even when Yankee clergymen seemed to have broken completely with past reality, concocting the Bavarian Illuminati scare, their reasoning comes as no surprise.

To the Federalist mind the plot by the Bavarian Illuminati was generated by the same two-pronged attack against liberty - civil and religious - which had been responsible for the simultaneous schemes of the Quebec Act and the tax on tea.37

of a patriarchal system. Mounier also thought it strange that no Illuminees crowded Paris to share the fruits of their victory, if they were truly the source of the Revolution. pp. 216-17.

37 Hatch, pp. 130-31.
Dwight and Morse were simply refighting the cause of the American Revolution. Liberty and free government were being threatened by a tyrannical revolution inspired by the enemies of Christian principles. Unhappily, though, they grafted their concern for America's liberty on to the sickly tree of a conspiratorial plot devoid of proof. Consequently, their names have remained connected to a reactionary mode of thought which bears little resemblance to their real beliefs.
CHAPTER 8
THE REVOLUTIONARY TRADITION:
THE CHRISTIAN-REPUBLICAN SYNTHESIS

Dwight and Morse were idealistic. Their idealism was grounded on a faith -- a faith in a God who was providing mankind with all the essential materials to construct a more perfect world. Divine Providence was the central factor in human progress. They fused together their religious and political beliefs and ideals so that America was cast in the role of the New Israel, destined to spread liberty, both civil and ecclesiastical, throughout the world. A new order was approaching. Man, with God's supervision, was going to make such outstanding theological, intellectual, and scientific advances that the millennium would be the culmination of all these achievements.

Expecting this scene to be largely played out in their lifetimes, they developed an understanding of liberty which was best embodied in the Constitution of the United States. They stressed the need for republican government in order for liberty to have full sway, but they also made it abundantly clear that a change in an outward system was not to be relied upon totally. Only a Christian understanding of virtu, with its highest level being piety toward God
was sufficient to provide the necessary moral stamina to maintain republican institutions. Knowledge, and its diffusion, also had to be placed in a Christian context so that it would not be employed for despotic purposes. One of the duties of the clergy, they felt, was to oversee the progression of American morality in order to warn against violations of virtue and to encourage piety toward God, benevolence toward man, and self-government of oneself. This duty carried them into the nation's political life and brought pronouncements from their opponents concerning the danger of mixing religion and politics. But they believed that as representatives of God and as citizens of a government which promoted the rights of man, they had an obligation to defend the freedom that had been won in America's War for Independence. Having been sensitive to tyranny from above during the Revolutionary years, Dwight and Morse, by the 1790's, had also developed an understanding that tyranny could be imposed from below as well. The French Revolution confirmed the latter thought.

Although initially applauded by the New England clergy, the Revolution in France soon personified the complete antithesis of liberty and true religion. The violence of its politics and the methodical dechristianization, in both its open and discreet forms, began to have an impact on American society. Dwight and Morse saw the spread of deism in America and were horrified. They saw the rise of an opposition party and were certain that they perceived
French philosophy throughout Republican ranks. With their vision of an American Christian Republic threatened, Dwight and Morse went on the offensive, determined to stop the growth of what they viewed as an irreligious, anarchic spirit. The fear of a conspiracy by the Bavarian Illuminati, which was devoted to the disintegration of all societal institutions, became their focal point. Subsequent developments revealed this plot to be without solid foundation.

Perhaps nothing could, on first appearance, be more damaging to the thesis that Dwight and Morse were republican in concept than their actions during the Illuminati phase of their careers. The accusations of reactionism find their greatest force in an examination of this period. Certainly they reacted, but Republicans also reacted to their own fears; a conspiracy theory was adopted, but in the same way that many Republicans gave credence to a monarchical Federalist plot. Whether the charge by Dwight and Morse that the Illuminati planned the French Revolution was more absurd than James Monroe's belief that British agents were responsible for the Reign of Terror may be unresolvable, but both assertions are equally indefensible. Yet Dwight and Morse fell under a stigma, while Monroe went on to be President. Belief in a conspiracy alone must not be the criteria for judging one as antirepublican.

A republican country was an experiment in the 1790's. It had never been attempted on such a broad scale as in America. As previously noted, the common belief was that a
republic was an extremely frail and impermanent structure; therefore, every decision had to be correct or the entire edifice might fall. This consciousness led to the fear that even one wrong action or policy would spell disaster for the whole enterprise. It was the supposed precariousness of the situation that prompted Americans to react so strongly to one another. The two ministers shared this concern. As Sprague says of Morse,

As he regarded these questions as having a vital bearing upon the religious interests of the country, he could not conscientiously remain passive in respect to them. Accordingly, he did not hesitate to avow his opinions openly and boldly, though at the expense of incurring no small degree of party odium.1

Dwight and Morse did not allow the unpopularity of their views in certain circles to dissuade them from proclaiming the conspiracy theory openly. It must be admitted that a certain boldness of character led them to risk ruined reputations for the sake of their country's future. Yet the other side of boldness is often recklessness. They were too quick to believe the interpretation offered by Robison.

How could two intelligent men so readily accept the conspiracy theory on such scanty evidence? Stephen Berk theorizes that the reason is because "they glibly connected biblical prophecy with the fate of contemporary nations."2 Perhaps only a person who has himself lived through a time

1 Sprague, p. 229.
2 Berk, p. 126.
of complete fascination with biblical prophecy can fully appreciate the weight of this argument. A man in such an intellectual and emotional state sees deep historic meaning in every passing event which can be fit into a prophetic scheme. An added importance becomes attached to anything even remotely similar to some biblical depiction of future events. As a result, since the Bible has already provided the absolute proof of truth, other evidence does not need to be as thorough as an "unbeliever" might desire. Dwight and Morse were satisfied with fewer proofs than were the skeptics, and were, therefore, more easily convinced than others.

The charge that Dwight and Morse turned away from liberty and devoted themselves to order ignores their own statements to the contrary and fails to see the connection between the principles they espoused in the American Revolution and those they defended during the 1790's. The New England clergy were some of the most vocal supporters of America's separation from Britain. Congregationalists could not take seriously the accusations of elitism leveled at them; they had the history of patriotic clergy, and could see themselves as Whigs. The clergy were attacked by the Republican press, both Dwight and Morse responded sharply, reminding critics of the days of the American Revolution. Morse asked,

What have the clergy done to provoke this treatment? Can it be said, with truth, that they are unfriendly to the rights and interests of the people? On what side were they in the year 1775, and during the revolution? Indeed, Morse's concern for the rights of man kept him on favorable terms with the French Revolution after many other ministers had already turned against it. Dwight also answered the critics.

There was a time, my countrymen, when the clergy of this country were not considered as enemies to liberty,... They were then opposed to the unreasonable measures of the government, as they are now to the unreasonable measures of the modern democracy.

Dwight continued to defend the American Revolution and the rights of man throughout his life.

They (the colonies) were not subject to the British parliament. This was always understood by both parties.... It was not one of the powers of parliament to tax the colonies. This intrusion of the parliament was unlawful.... This reduced us to the state of absolute slaves. The Parliament attempted to bring us to obedience by force. We did not resist by force until our lives were in danger. We have certain rights given to us by God. We ourselves may part with these rights so far as our own convenience is concerned; but we cannot give away the rights of our descendants.

Consistently, then, from the time of the American Revolution to the end of their lives, Dwight and Morse penned

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Morse, Fast Day Sermon, p. 19.

Dwight, "To the Farmers," Palladium, May-June, 1801.

Notes in Seniors' room, pp. 29-30, Dwight Family Papers.
the virtues of liberty and republicanism. Their 1790's emphasis on stability must be traced to the differences they perceived in the two revolutions. The French attack upon the church, the confiscation of church property, and the drive for complete secularization "was not what their own Revolution had been all about. How could such madness have any relationship to the American model?" Nathan Hatch expresses the historiographical problem best:

> Attributing the near-paranoid cries for order and stability arising from Federalist clergy-men to an abandonment of libertarian principles, scholars have rarely taken seriously the arguments of ministers in the 1790's, much less considered it necessary to relate this reactionary climate of opinion to its Revolutionary counterpart two decades earlier.

Yet the clergy's defense of liberty against Britain in the 1770's was the same argument consistently reiterated in the 1790's. This defense had been misjudged because it was aimed at a country which was supposedly fighting for the same cause for which Americans had fought twenty years before. Their love of liberty made them abhor what they judged to be anarchy in France; if French principles were allowed, they feared that the hardfought liberty which they had so recently won would soon be forfeited.

The republicanism of Timothy Dwight and Jedidiah Morse was a synthesis of Christian and Whig doctrines. It

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8Hatch, p. 13.
was grounded in a paradox of human progress and human depravity. It believed in liberty, but also recognized that man would undermine his own liberty if he were not carefully watched. Virtue and absolute truth were the foundations of this republicanism; a Christian sense of morality was essential to its vitality. When they looked at the French Revolution, they saw virtue, truth, and morality being stripped away and discarded as useless relics of a superstitious age. Naturally, they reacted; their entire code of values was being held in contempt, and they saw signs of a similar growth of French thought in America. Rational liberty had to be reinforced; license had to be stopped short. As William Gribbin explains,

Liberty, it seems, could be maintained only through the restriction of liberty.... What has heretofore passed as republican religion, exalting the individual's autonomy while rejecting the restraints of traditional mores and church organizations, was in fact anti-republican. It defied precisely those social conventions and ethical patterns which most Americans assumed were essential to the continuance of liberty.  

Viewed in this way, Dwight and Morse were not manipulators for political advantage, nor a part of a conservative revolt from the American Revolution, nor walking repositories of the status quo, unless one understands the status quo to be freedom. Within the Congregationalist-Federalist framework of the early national period, they were champions of liberty.

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9 Gribbin, pp. 73-74.
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