

Issue 50 • Reprint

CHRISTIAN HISTORY

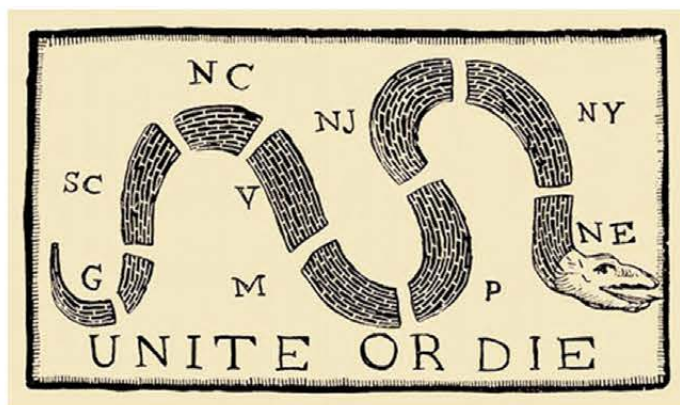


The American Revolution

Christianity's overlooked role
in the bold venture to gain independence

Little-Known or Remarkable Facts about Christianity and the American Revolution

CASSANDRA
NIEMCZYK



Revolutionary rattlesnake. This 1770s cartoon (based on a design by Benjamin Franklin) pleads for colonial unity with almost apocalyptic drama.

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Events moved quickly in the years before independence. As late as 1761, during the French and Indian War, Congregational ministers in Connecticut pledged absolute fidelity and submission to the king of England.

By the mid 1760s, after Britain had begun taxing the colonies, many of these same clergy were denouncing the king and justifying non-submission.

During the Revolutionary era, the pulpit played a key role in encouraging dissent. The political activism of these black-robed ministers earned them the name “the black regiment.”

In July 1775, as tensions with the British rose, the Continental Congress called for a day of prayer and fasting. Most ministers used the occasion to preach for the colonial cause, but Anglican clergyman Jonathan Boucher spoke instead on the need to obey constituted authority. Concerned about his safety in proclaiming such an unpopular view, he carried into his pulpit not only his sermon manuscript but also a loaded pistol.

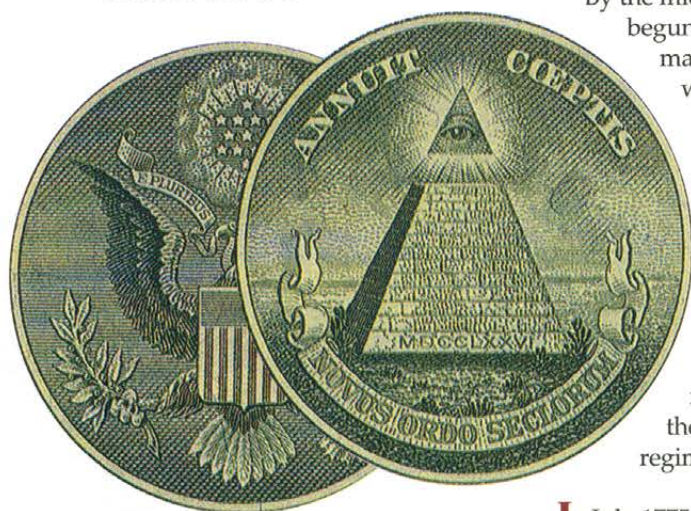
At the bottom of the original Declaration of Independence, the Continental Congress ordered copies of the

Declaration first be sent not to town clerks or newspapers but to parish ministers, who were “required to read the same to their respective congregations, as soon as divine service is ended, in the afternoon, on the first Lord’s day after they have received it.”

During the war, more than a hundred colonial ministers served as chaplains in the Continental Army, and a lesser number of Anglican clergy, sympathetic to the loyalist cause, joined British regiments. As a result, many congregations found themselves with empty pulpits during the war.

Most colonial legislatures exempted pacifists, such as Quakers and Mennonites, from military duty, though fines to underwrite the expenses of war were often still levied. Quakers, however, objected to paying tax for war and disciplined 450 of their members for paying it.

The war was supported by most Baptist men and at least one Baptist woman! In 1782 Massachusetts Baptist Deborah Sampson donned a soldier’s uniform and successfully enlisted in the Continental Army as Private Robert Shurtliff. Assigned to the infantry, she was wounded twice. Her sexual identity went undetected for over a year. After the war, Deborah married a farmer and bore three



Religious history for a dollar. The back of the great seal of the United States (right) recalls the religious mood of the Revolutionary era. The Egyptian pyramid symbolises strength, and the Roman numerals represent 1776. *Novus ordo seclorum* translates, “A new age now begins.” The eye in the radiant triangle is all-seeing Providence, and *annuit coeptis* means, “He has favored our undertakings.”



Igniting resentment. Paul Revere's idealistic rendition of the "Boston Massacre," May 5, 1770. His mere handful of innocent bystanders was, in fact, an unruly mob of 200 to 300 Bostonians resentful of British occupation. They cornered 10 British soldiers and taunted them until the British fired, killing five. Colonists cried, "Murder!" and their leaders exploited the incident to crystallize anti-British sentiment.

children. She eventually received full payment, a pension, and public praise for her military service. Her church, however, excommunicated her for impersonating a man.

English Bibles were not printed in America until a year after the Declaration of Independence, when an edition of a King James Version New Testament was published. The complete Bible appeared five years later. Until then, all colonial Bibles were imported from England because only the king's commissioned printers were allowed to issue them.

Though Americans fought for religious liberty in 1776 and passed a Constitutional amendment in 1791 to protect religious freedom, Connecticut did not disestablish its state-sponsored Congregational church until 1818, and Massachusetts not until 1833.

At the end of the war, after Cornwallis surrendered at Yorktown, George Washington "suggested" his troops thank God: "The General congratulates the army upon the glorious event of yesterday. . . . Divine service is to be performed tomorrow in the several brigades and divisions. The

commander in chief recommends that the troops not on duty should universally attend with that seriousness of deportment and gratitude of heart which the recognition of such reiterated and astonishing interpositions of Providence demand of us."

The 1783 Treaty of Paris, which concluded the peace between Britain and the United States, begins "In the name of the most Holy and undivided Trinity." CH

CASSANDRA NIEMCZYK is a freelance writer from Wheaton, Illinois, and a regular contributor to CHRISTIAN HISTORY.

DVDS ON RELIGIOUS LIBERTY AND THE FOUNDING OF AMERICA



The Intersection of Church and State

In the United States, the intersection of church and state is a busy juncture with a long and fascinating history. Debates about the proper relationship between church and state date back to the time of the founding fathers, and the arguments continue to dominate the news today. This engaging, information-packed documentary assists viewers in understanding the multi-layered and sometimes contentious arguments that surround this issue. 55 minutes with PDF discussion guide.

DVD - #501641D, ~~\$19.99~~ **SALE! \$14.99**

People of Faith

Survey the history of Christianity in the United States from before the Pilgrims to the present in this six-episode DVD series. You'll gain valuable perspective on the people and ideas that shaped America and see how it came to be the first nation in history based upon the ideal of religious liberty. You'll meet the spiritual visionaries, leaders, and entrepreneurs who shaped Christianity across the centuries, including Jonathan Edwards, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Martin Luther King Jr. and Billy Graham, among many others. 3 hours.

DVD - #501437D, ~~\$29.99~~ **SALE! \$23.99**

We the People

Travel back in time through the eyes of America's unsung patriots to experience the trials and victories that have formed our nation's destiny and secured the blessings of liberty for future generations. In this six-episode series you'll meet a diverse cross-section of people who have all played a role in our nation's history. Each episode presents a phrase from the Preamble with examples of people whose lives embodied that ideal. 3 hours.

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Gospel of Liberty

Produced by Colonial Williamsburg, this program re-creates the fire of George Whitefield, the zeal of the Reverend Samuel Davies, and their pursuit of the right to worship according to one's convictions. Thomas Jefferson guides viewers to understand how the axiom that government ought not to legislate belief became a fundamental pillar of American democracy. 37 minutes.

DVD - #500839D, ~~\$19.99~~ **SALE! \$14.99**

Saints & Strangers

From the earliest settlers in Jamestown to the eventual formation of the original colonies into the United States of America, this award-winning documentary examines the religious and spiritual roots of the men and women who founded our country and who were crucial influences during the colonial period—the Church of England, the Puritans, Baptist, Quakers, and others. 59 minutes.

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Edwin S. Gaustad



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Discovering the Unexpected— Again

Once more I find myself surprised by history. I've been amazed at the amount and depth of Christian influence during the American Revolution. All my historical training took place in secular schools, and my professors simply ignored the religious dimension of the Revolutionary era (which in this issue we're stretching from the 1760s, the beginning of British taxation, to the 1790s, the beginning of Constitutional government). Yet as Harry Stout points out in the lead article, it was Protestant clergy who propelled colonists toward independence and who theologically justified war with Britain. Furthermore, as the article "Holy Passion for Liberty" shows, Americans were quick to discern the hand of God in the tumultuous events of the times.

On the other hand, I'm perplexed at the increasingly small role Christian faith played as the era moved forward. Church attendance declined during the war, and though God is mentioned four times in the Declaration of Independence, he does not make an appearance in the Constitution. The founding fathers were deeply religious men, and they believed religion necessary for the survival of the country. But sometimes they mocked orthodox Christianity or, at best, remained cool towards it. And one of the most challenging mission fields of the day was the Continental Army!

Another surprise still: many devout believers were opposed to the war, and not necessarily on pacifist grounds.

And on it goes. The more I explored, the more surprises I found. And we simply didn't have room to include how the era played out with Catholics, Christian women, and free blacks, among others.

So I've discovered once again that history is not what I expect it to be. It's always much more interesting than that.

Editor's choice

I highly recommend *Mary Silliman's War*, a dramatic video of one Puritan family's Revolutionary War ordeal. It is based on a true story and shows, with realism and sympathy, how Christian faith inspired patriotic sacrifice, troubled consciences, and comforted hearts. Contact Heritage Films (1-800-400-3302) for more information.

—Mark Galli



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Reactions to Everyday Faith in the Middle Ages

AOL: Very interesting! As a student of medieval history, I think you did a very credible job with a very touchy subject. I'll bet you get a lot of letters about your "revisionist" history; the Reformation myths about medieval Europe are some of the most enduring and stubbornly held historical errors. Keep up the good work!

Cunneen@aol.com

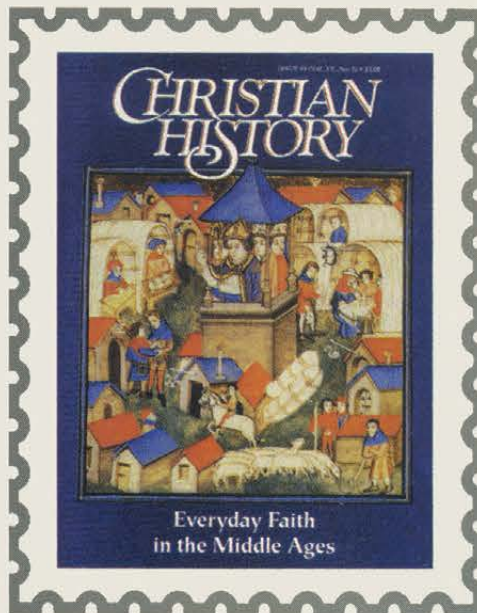
AOL: In "From the Editor," you allege that the High Middle Ages—"from roughly A.D. 1000 to 1500"—was "a time in history when Christianity was one."

For roughly 54 years only [before the Great Schism of 1054] was Christianity one, and that in the midst of longstanding differences between Western and Eastern Christians. Furthermore, according to most historical timelines with which I am familiar, the High Middle Ages lasted from roughly 1000 to 1350. Even the Western Church was divided for a period after 1378 [by the Great Papal Schism].

Quinn Fox
Boulder, Colorado

Quinn: I'm afraid you caught me committing hyperbole—though I think the exaggeration was justified. Even during major schisms, all parties shared unified religious conventions and a common worldview—hardly true before or since. And though most historians say the "High" Middle Ages ends around 1350, recent studies convince me there wasn't significant decline afterward—thus my willingness to stretch high.—mg

LETTER: I have enjoyed *Christian History* for many years and appreciate the much-needed insight regarding our wonderful Christian heritage. Yet, as I read "Everyday Faith . . ." I



was very disappointed. Where previous issues appeared to expose and even criticize the heresies of the Roman Catholic Church, this issue not only lacked such conviction but seemed to condone or, even worse, agree with blatant heterodoxy. I do not expect your periodical to be iconoclastic or antagonistic, yet "peace if possible, but truth at any rate" was Luther's aphorism and would seem to be an excellent goal for us all.

Rick Allen
Leakey, Texas

FAX: I must say I have not seen such a piece of revisionist historical writing for quite some time.

First, Roman Catholicism is not "Christian." Certainly you understand the doctrine of justification by

faith! Such Reformation slogans as *sola fide* and *sola gratia* dramatically contrast that which you so glibly call "Christian."

Second, much of the so-called unity you write about was fostered by popes and councils through various forms of coercion: if pleading did not work, then perhaps confiscations, tortures, murders, and interdict! You really glossed over the dark side of Catholicism.

I wonder, if they could come back, what all the martyred Huguenots, English, Waldensians, and Germans would say to you about the "loving kindness" of the church of Rome?

Rev. Paul K. Christianson
Clarkston, Washington

Rick and Paul: Thought-provoking letters! Still, just to review some fundamentals of CH: (1) we're committed evangelicals who happen to think even the medieval church, for all its tragic flaws, has something to teach us; and (2) though we do not condone everything we cover, we do seek to understand sympathetically all church eras.—mg

AOL: Your articles on the medieval church are enlightening. I sometimes wish our U. S. "civil religion" could return to the "good old days" (when there was no dichotomy between culture and religion), but your articles give me both perspective and pause for my wish. Thank you.

Rev. Ken McCaw
Kalamazoo, Michigan

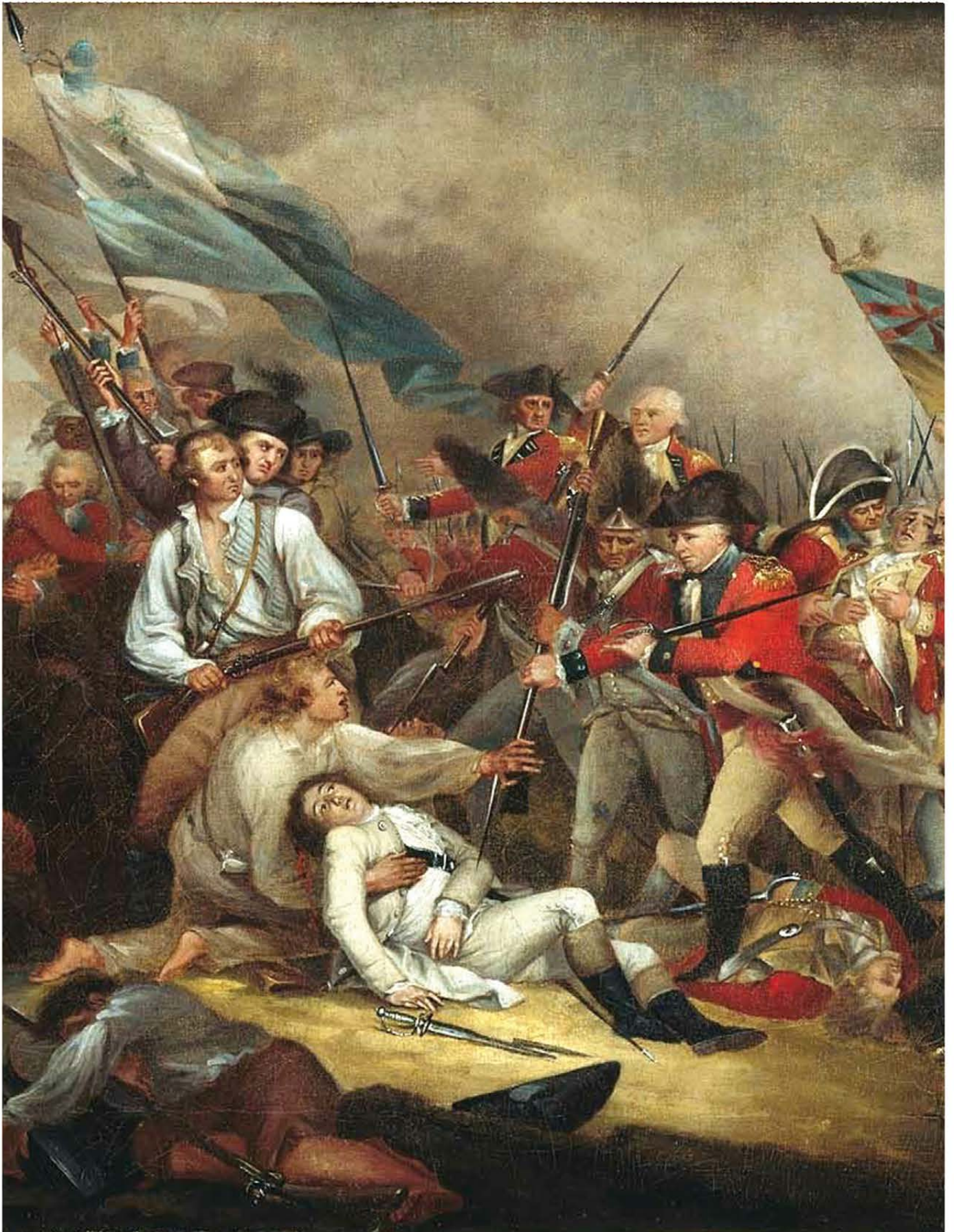
Radicals in CH

AOL: I'm a pastor leading a church and constantly gain courage from the saints who have gone before. When I say something difficult, I usually tell my folks I'm not radical; compared to the people featured in CH, I'm a wuss.

Phil Mathis
Waco, Texas

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Preaching the Insurrection

Angry colonists were rallied to declare independence and take up arms because of what they heard from the pulpit.

HARRY S. STOUT

No turning back.

At the Battle of Bunker Hill (June 17, 1775) Americans suffered 441 casualties and the British 1,150. Though a strategic victory for the British, English nerve was shaken, the colonists were emboldened, and any hope for peaceful reconciliation was lost.

It's 1775. The year 1787, with its novel constitution and separation of church and state is a long 12 years away. At the moment, you and your friends are just a bunch of outlaws.

You've heard the debates in Parliament over taxation and representation; you've seen British troops enforce royal supremacy at the point of a bayonet. Your king, George III, and Parliament have issued a declaration asserting their sovereignty in "all cases whatsoever" in the colonies. You are, at least in New England, a people under siege with British troops quartered in Boston. You've dumped tea into Boston's harbor in a fit of rage and had your port closed.

Who will you turn to now for direction? There are no presidents or vice-presidents, no supreme court justices or public defenders to call

on. There are a handful of young, radical lawyers, like the Adams cousins, John and Samuel, but they're largely concentrated in cities, while you and most of your friends live in the country. In many colonies, including Massachusetts, there are not even elected governors or councilors—they have all been appointed by the British crown and are answerable to it.

Where you turn is where you have habitually turned for over a century: to the prophets of your society, your ministers.

The American Revolutionary era is known as the "Golden Age of Oratory." What school child has not heard or read Patrick Henry's immortal words, "Give me liberty or give me death"? Who has not seen reenactments or heard summaries of Ben Franklin's heroic appearance before a hostile British Parliament?



Electric preaching. In the 1760s and 1770s in worship and town meetings, preachers so dramatically championed the colonial cause that Thomas Jefferson said the call for liberty ran through some areas "like a shock of electricity."

Yet often lost in this celebration of patriotic oratory is the key role preaching played in the Revolutionary movement.

TV, Internet and more

A few broad statistics can help us appreciate more fully the unique power the sermon wielded in Revolutionary America.

Over the span of the colonial era, American ministers delivered approximately 8 million sermons, each

lasting one to one-and-a-half hours. The average 70-year-old colonial churchgoer would have listened to some 7,000 sermons in his or her lifetime, totaling nearly 10,000 hours of concentrated listening. This is the number of classroom hours it would take to receive ten separate undergraduate degrees in a modern university, without ever repeating the same course!

The pulpits were Congregational and Baptist in New England; Presby-

terian, Lutheran, and German Reformed in Pennsylvania and New Jersey; and Anglican and Methodist in the South. But no matter the denomination, colonial congregations heard sermons more than any other form of oratory. The colonial sermon was prophet, newspaper, video, Internet, community college, and social therapist all wrapped in one. Such was the range of its influence on all aspects of life that even contemporary television and personal computers pale in comparison.

Eighteenth-century America was a deeply religious culture that lived self-consciously "under the cope of heaven." In Sunday worship, and weekday (or "occasional") sermons, ministers drew the populace into a rhetorical world that was more compelling and immediate than the physical settlements surrounding them. Sermons taught not only the way to personal salvation in Christ but also the way to temporal and national prosperity for God's chosen people.

Events were perceived not from the mundane, human vantage point but from God's. The vast majority of colonists were Reformed or Calvinist, to whom things were not as they might appear at ground level: all events, no matter how mundane or seemingly random, were parts of a larger pattern of meaning, part of God's providential design. The outlines of this pattern were contained in Scripture and interpreted by discerning pastors. Colonial congregations saw themselves as the "New Israel," endowed with a sacred mission that destined them as lead actors in the last triumphant chapter in redemption history.

Thus colonial audiences learned to perceive themselves not as a rag-tag settlement of religious exiles and eccentrics but as God's special people, planted in the American wilderness to bring light to the Old World left behind. Europeans might ignore or revile them as "fanatics," but through the sermon, they knew better. Better to absorb the barbs of English ridicule than to forget their glorious commission.

For over a century, colonial congregations had turned to England for protection and culture. Despite religious differences separating many colonists from the Church of England, they shared a common identity as Englishmen, an identity that stood firm against all foes. But almost overnight, these loyalties were challenged by a series of British imperial laws. Beginning with the Stamp Act of 1765 and running through the "Boston Massacre" of 1770, the Tea Act of 1773, and finally, martial law in Massachusetts, patriotic Americans perceived a British plot to deprive them of their fundamental English rights and their God-ordained liberties.

In the twentieth-century, taxation and representation are political and constitutional issues, having nothing to do with religion. But to eighteenth-century ears, attuned to lifetimes of preaching, the issues were inevitably religious as well, so colonists naturally turned to their ministers to learn God's will about these troubling matters.

Tyranny is "idolatry"

When understood in its own times, the American Revolution was first and foremost a religious event. This is especially true in New England, where the first blood was shed.

By 1775 the ranks of Harvard- and Yale-educated clergymen swelled to over 600 ministers, distributed throughout every town and village in New England. Clergymen surveyed the events swirling around them; by 1775 liberals and evangelicals, Congregationalists and Presbyterians, men and women—all saw in British actions grounds for armed resistance.

In fact, not only was it right for colonists to resist British "tyranny," it would actually be sinful not to pick up guns.

How did they come to this conclusion? They fastened on two arguments.

First, they focused on Parliament's 1766 Declaratory Act, which stated that Parliament had sovereignty over the colonies "in all cases

★ FIGHTING WORDS ★

Peter Muhlenberg gave perhaps the most dramatic sermon of the Revolutionary era.

Though Peter Muhlenberg had preached regularly for the cause of the American colonists, he decided that, in his last sermon, he would have to do something unusual to drive home his point.



THE REVEREND JOHN PETER GABRIEL MUHLENBERG: a doer of the Revolutionary word.

Muhlenberg (1746–1807) was familiar with the unusual. He was born in Pennsylvania to Lutheran missionaries (his father, Henry, was the founder of the Lutheran Church in America). His father sent him back to Germany for schooling, but his German teachers felt he wasn't good educational material, so they apprenticed him to a grocer for six years. Muhlenberg had other ideas and escaped to join the army before returning to Philadelphia in 1767 to study for the ministry under his father.

In 1771, the Lutheran-trained Peter went to Virginia to work with a settlement of German Lutherans; at the same time, he was ordained in the

Anglican Church (so he could perform marriages, baptisms, and collect tithes in Anglican Virginia). Muhlenberg was beloved by his congregation and quickly became a leader in the community.

He was elected to the Virginia Legislature in 1774 and became an outspoken advocate for colonial rights. Though an Anglican minister, he never confused the "invoking of divine blessing on the king with wearing a parliamentary yoke."

He was present at St. John's Church in Richmond when Patrick Henry gave his immortal cry, "Give me liberty or give me death!" Peter was so moved, he enlisted under George Washington and returned to his congregation to give his final sermon.

After reading from Ecclesiastes 3:1, he said, "There is a time to preach and a time to pray, but there is also a time to fight, and that time has now come." Muhlenberg threw off his robes to reveal the uniform of a militia colonel.

He then recruited the men of his congregation, who became known as the "German Regiment," which Muhlenberg commanded throughout the war. He eventually rose to the rank of major general, and after the war, returned to Philadelphia a hero. He spent the remainder of his life in local and national politics.

—Mark Couvillon

whatsoever." For clergymen this phrase took on the air of blasphemy. These were fighting words not only because they violated principles of representative government but even more because they violated the logic of *sola Scriptura* ("Scripture alone") and God's exclusive claim to sovereignty "in all cases whatsoever."

From the first colonial settlements, Americans—especially New England Americans—were accustomed to constraining all power and granting absolute authority to no mere human being.

For Reformed colonists, these ideas were tied up with their historic, covenant theology. At stake was the preservation of their identity as a covenant people. Not only did Parliament's claims represent tyranny, they also represented idolatry. For colonists to honor those claims would be tantamount to forsaking God and abdicating their national covenant pledge to "have no other gods" before them.

In a classic sermon on the subject of resistance entitled *A Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission*, Boston's Jonathan Mayhew, a liberal (he favored Unitarianism), took as his text Romans 13:1–6, in which Paul enjoins Christians to "be subject unto the higher powers." The day he picked for this sermon was portentous—it came on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I, when Anglican ministers routinely abhorred the Puritan revolution, and Puritans routinely kept silent. Mayhew would not keep silent.

For centuries, rulers had used this text to discourage resistance and riot. But circumstances had changed, and in the chilling climate of impending Anglo-American conflict, Mayhew asked if there were any limits to this law? He concluded that the law is binding only insofar as government honors its "moral and religious" obligations. When government fails to honor that obligation, or contract, then the duty of submission

A LIST of the Names of the PROVINCIALS who were Killed and Wounded in the late Engagement with His Majesty's Troops at Concord, &c.

KILLED.

Of Lexington.
 * Mr. Robert Munroe,
 * Mr. Jonas Parker,
 * Mr. Samuel Hadley,
 * Mr. Jona^r Harrington,
 * Mr. Caleb Harrington,
 * Mr. Isaac Muzzy,
 * Mr. John Brown,
 Mr. John Raymond,
 Mr. Nathaniel Wyman,
 Mr. Jedediah Munroe.

Of Menotomy.
 Mr. Jafon Ruffel,
 Mr. Jabez Wyman,
 Mr. Jafon Winship,

Of Sudbury.
 Deacon Haynes,
 Mr. ——— Reed.

Of Concord.
 Capt. James Miles.

Of Bedford.
 Capt. Jonathan Willfon.

Of Alton.
 Capt. Davis,
 Mr. ——— Hofmer,
 Mr. James Howard.

Of Woburn.
 * Mr. Azael Porter,
 Mr. Daniel Thompson.

Of Charlestown.
 Mr. James Miller,
 Capt. William Barber's Son.

Of Brookline.
 Isaac Gardner, Esq.

Of Cambridge.
 Mr. John Hicks,
 Mr. Moses Richardson,
 Mr. William Maffey.

Of Medford.
 Mr. Henry Putnam.

Of Lynn.
 Mr. Abednego Ramsdell,
 Mr. Daniel Townsend,
 Mr. William Flint,
 Mr. Thomas Hadley.

Of Danvers.
 Mr. Henry Jacobs,
 Mr. Samuel Cook,
 Mr. Ebenezer Goldthwaite,
 Mr. George Southwick,
 Mr. Benjamin Daland, jun.
 Mr. Jotham Webb,
 Mr. Perley Putnam.

Of Salem.
 Mr. Benjamin Peirce.

WOUNDED.

Of Lexington.
 Mr. John Robbins,
 Mr. John Tidd,
 Mr. Solomon Peirce,
 Mr. Thomas Winship,
 Mr. Nathaniel Farmer,
 Mr. Joseph Comee,
 Mr. Ebenezer Munroe,
 Mr. Francis Brown,
 Prince Easterbrooks,
 (A Negro Man.

Of Framingham.
 Mr. ——— Hemenway.

Of Bedford.
 Mr. John Lane.

Of Woburn.
 Mr. George Reed,
 Mr. Jacob Bacon.

Of Medford.
 Mr. William Polly.

Of Lynn.
 Jothus Feit,
 Mr. Timothy Munroe.

Of Danvers.
 Mr. Nathan Putnam,
 Mr. Dennis Wallis.

Of Beverly.
 Mr. Nathaniel Cleaves.

MISSING.

Of Menotomy.
 Mr. Samuel Froot,
 Mr. Seth Ruffell.

Those distinguished with this Mark (*) were killed by the first fire of the Regulars.

Sold in Queen Street.

BY J. D. DRAKE 12 BRONFIELD STREET BOSTON. RELIOTYPE.

Costly ideas. With the Battles of Lexington and Concord, April 19, 1775, fiery revolutionary rhetoric turned into armed rebellion—and grief for not a few families.

is likewise nullified. Submission, in other words, is *not* unlimited.

Rulers, he said, "have no authority from God to do mischief. . . . It is blasphemy to call tyrants and oppressors God's ministers." Far from being sinful, resistance to corrupt ministers and tyrannical rulers is a

divine imperative. The greater sin lies in passively sacrificing the covenant for tyranny, that is, in failing to resist.

Who determines whether government is "moral and religious"? In the Revolutionary era, the answer was simple: the individual. There were no established institutions that would support violent revolution. Ultimate justification resided in the will of a people acting self-consciously as united individuals joined in a common cause. Where a government was found to be deficient in moral and spiritual terms, the individual conscience was freed to resist.

America: a new heaven

Clergy in the Revolutionary era reminded people not only what they were fighting against, namely tyranny and idolatry, but also what they were fighting for: a new heaven and a new earth.

Many early American settlers arrived believing they were part of the New Israel, that they would be instruments for Christ's triumphant return to earth. Interpretations varied on whether the last days would be marked by progressive revelations and triumphs (the "postmillennial" view), or whether they would be marked by sudden judgments and calamities (the "premillennial" view), or some combination thereof. But all agreed the present was portentous, and American colonists were going to play a direct role in the great things looming.

Wars, first with France and later with England, accelerated these millennial speculations. In fighting against England and George III, people felt they were at once fighting against the Antichrist in a climactic battle between good and evil, tyranny and freedom.

Freedom and liberty (like *individual*) were both political and religious terms. They helped not only preserve fundamental human rights but also sustain loyalty to Christ and to *sola Scriptura*. So closely intertwined

were the political and religious connotations, it was virtually impossible for colonists to separate them.

In his 1776 sermon on *The Church's Flight into the Wilderness*, Samuel Sherwood examined the prophecies in the Book of Revelation and concluded that American Christians were the "church in the wilderness," nurtured in a faraway hiding place and raised to battle and defeat Antichrist. He argued that the powers of Antichrist were "not confined to the boundaries of the Roman empire, nor strictly to the territory of the pope's usurped authority." Rather, they extended to all enemies of Christ's church and people. He concluded that England's monarchy "appears to have many of the features and much of the temper and character of the image of the beast."

In only slightly more secular terms, the greatest pamphlet of the Revolutionary era invoked this millennial imagery. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* was the runaway best-seller of the American Revolution. In time Paine would be unveiled as a wild-eyed deist, and worse, an atheist. But you couldn't guess that from *Common Sense*. It read like a sermon. Paine knew his audience well, and he knew what biblical allusions would bring them to arms.

His sermonic pamphlet begins by berating George III as the "royal brute" of England, noting that monarchy, like aristocracy, had its origins among ruffians who enforced their "superiority" at the point of a sword. Then they masked this brute coercion with the trappings of refined culture and regal bearing. Nevertheless, "How impious is the title of sacred majesty applied to a worm, who in the midst of his splendor is crumbling into dust!" He then identifies the monarchy with tyranny, and tyranny with idolatry and blasphemy. Paine traces in elaborate detail Israel's "national delusion" in requesting a king as did other nations, and God's subsequent displeasure at a "form of government which so impiously invades the prerogative of heaven."

From scriptural precedent, Paine,



Born-again? King George III's disastrous colonial policies earned American scorn and sparked revolution, but in his personal life, he was a devout Christian. He was sympathetic to evangelicals (most Anglicans ridiculed them) and said he put his ultimate "faith and trust in the merits of the Redeemer."

the revivalist of revolt, concludes, "These portions of Scripture are direct and positive. They admit of no equivocal construction. That the Almighty hath here entered his protest against monarchical government is true, or the Scripture is false."

Paine then went on to echo ministerial visions of a new millennial age. With unmitigated confidence, Paine

reiterated John Winthrop's 17th-century Puritan vision of America as a "city upon a hill." But unlike Winthrop, Paine's millennial city was modeled on republican principles (rather than hierarchical) and religious toleration (rather than state-enforced conformity). With words certain to thrill, he likened the colonists to a young tree on which small characters were carved,



Suspicious-looking bishop sent packing. In the 1760s, some officials suggested America should have its own Anglican bishop. Colonists smelled religious oppression and reacted bitterly, as this satirical engraving suggests.

characters of liberty and freedom. In time this tree would grow huge, and with it, the characters boldly would proclaim the birth of a new adventure in freedom that would be seen throughout the world.

Many colonists were fearful that, if they failed, their leaders would be hung as traitors and the people enslaved in tyranny. But Paine exulted, "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation

similar to the present hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom. . . . How trifling, how ridiculous do the little paltry cavillings of a few weak or interested men appear when weighed against the business of a world."

With rhetoric like this, Paine

fused the liberal Mayhew's defense of resistance with an evangelical-like appeal to passion. It is not surprising that liberals and evangelicals united in "the business of a world."

Voice of hope and courage

No minister studied the rapidly unfolding events against scriptural teachings more closely than did Concord's 32-year-old minister, William Emerson (grandfather of Ralph Waldo Emerson). For a long time, his world had been dominated by local concerns and salvation preaching. But all of this changed in March and April 1775, when all the members of his congregation were propelled into what he termed "the greatest events taking place in the present age."

By March, Emerson and other Concord patriots knew that British spies had infiltrated their town and informed General Thomas Gage of a hidden armory and munitions supplies stocked by the local "Sons of Liberty" (a secret society of radicals). Many believed Gage was planning a preemptive strike on these supplies, and they feared for their lives. At a muster of the Concord militia on March 13, Emerson preached a sermon on 2 Chronicles 13:12: "And behold, God himself is with us for our captain . . . O children of Israel, fight ye not against the Lord God of your fathers, for ye shall not prosper" (KJV).

Never would he deliver a more momentous sermon. He had it within his means to promote or discourage an almost certainly violent call to arms. What was he to say? What was God's will for his American people?

With obvious agitation, Emerson began his sermon with the somber note that recent intelligence warned of "an approaching storm of war and bloodshed." Many in attendance would soon be called upon for "real service." Were they ready? Real readiness, Emerson explained, depended not only on martial skill and weaponry but also on moral and spiritual resolve. To be successful, soldiers must believe in what they were fighting for, and they must



Wordsworth Thompson: Old Braxton Church, Virginia—Athenaeum

Suspicious institutions. *In the 1770s, three out of four colonists were connected with Reformed denominations (mostly Congregational and Presbyterian). Their theology—and the experience of Presbyterians in Scotland and Huguenots in France, where monarchs persecuted Calvinists—made them naturally suspicious of monarchies and more willing to defy them when necessary.*

trust in God's power to uphold them. Otherwise they would scatter in fear before the superior British redcoats.

What were the men of Concord fighting for? In strident political terms that coupled the roles of prophet and statesman, Emerson argued for colonial resistance. For standing by their liberties and trusting only in God, the American people were "cruelly charged with rebellion and sedition." That charge, Emerson cried, was a lie put forward by plotters against American liberty. With all of the integrity of his sacred office behind him, Emerson took his stand before the Concord militia:

"For my own part, the more I reflect upon the movements of the British nation . . . the more satisfied I am that our military preparation here for our own defense is . . . justified in the eyes of the impartial world. Nay, for should we neglect to defend ourselves by military preparation, we never could answer it to God and to our own consciences of the rising [generations]."

The road ahead would be difficult, Emerson cautioned, but the out-

come was one preordained from the beginning of time. Accordingly, the soldiers could go forth to war assured that "the Lord will cover your head in the day of battle and carry you on from victory to victory." In the end, he concluded, the whole world would know "that there is a God" in America.

On April 19, the mounting apprehensions became fact as 800 British troops marched on Lexington and Concord to destroy the patriot munitions. At Lexington, Gage's troops were met by a small "army of observation," who were fired upon and sustained 17 casualties. From there the British troops marched to Concord. Before their arrival, the alarm had been sounded by patriot silversmith Paul Revere, and militiamen rushed to the common. William Emerson arrived first, and he was soon joined by "minutemen" from nearby towns. Again a shot was fired—the famed "shot heard 'round the world"—and in the ensuing exchange, three Americans and twelve British soldiers were killed or wounded. America's colonial war for

independence had begun.

Words like Emerson's continued to sound for the next eight years, goading, consoling, and impelling colonists forward in the cause of independence. The pulpit served as the single most powerful voice to inspire the colonists.

For most American ministers and many in their congregations, the religious dimension of the war was precisely the point of revolution. Revolution and a new republican government would enable Americans to continue to realize their destiny as a "redeemer nation." If time would prove that self-defined mission tragically arrogant, it was not apparent to the participants themselves. With backs against the wall, and precious little to take confidence in, words like those of Mayhew's, Emerson's, and Paine's were their only hope.

CH

HARRY STOUT is Jonathan Edwards Professor of American Christianity at Yale University. He is author of *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford).



New York Public Library

Fiesty for freedom. During the Stamp Act crisis (1765), Patrick Henry stood before the Virginia House of Burgesses and condemned British tax policy. When delegates shouted, "Treason!" he retorted, "If this be treason, make the most of it!"

Christians in the Cause

Five devout champions of liberty and revolution.

* MARK COUVILLON *

PATRICK HENRY (1736–1799)

Eloquent thunderer

Inspired by his religious faith and passion for liberty, Patrick Henry not only fought against British tyranny but also the U. S. Constitution!

Born to a plain but respectable family in rural Virginia, Henry started his career at the age of 16 as a struggling storekeeper, and later as a farmer, before becoming a successful,

self-taught lawyer in 1760. Educated by his father, Henry's modest background won him the title of "man of the people."

Henry first won fame as a young lawyer in 1763 by attacking the established Anglican clergy as "rapacious harpies" for demanding more money from their parishes. In 1765 he was elected to the Virginia legislature. Ten days after taking his seat, he started the sparks of revolution by calling the king and Parliament

"tyrants" for taxing the people without their consent.

During the next ten years, Henry became the leader of the revolutionary movement in Virginia: "a Son of Thunder—Boanerges," as one contemporary called him (see Mark 3:17). In his most famous speech, Henry drew from the Book of Jeremiah to attack those who still hoped for reconciliation with England. "Gentlemen may cry, 'Peace, peace,'" he shouted, "but there is no peace.

The war is actually begun!... Give me liberty or give me death!"

After Virginia declared independence, Henry helped set up the new state government, of which he became the first governor. Though he helped to promote the "free exercise of religion" in Virginia's Declaration of Rights, he did not want complete separation of church and state. Believing that a republic could not survive without "virtue, morality, and religion," he wanted to see the state support all Christian denominations.

Although an Anglican, his exposure to Presbyterian Calvinism during the Great Awakening fueled his attack on the U. S. Constitution. Concerned that the new government relied too much on the virtue of office holders and not enough on checks and balances, he tried to defeat the proposed constitution in the Virginia Ratifying Convention of 1788. Though he failed, he was a key figure in getting the Bill of Rights added in 1791.

During the last years of his life, he became increasingly alarmed with the spread of deism and atheism coming from France's "godless revolution." Henry came out of retirement in 1799 to run for public office in Virginia. As a contemporary put it, he warned against the doctrines of the French philosophers who were at war with "the majesty of Heaven and the welfare of earth, and which were poisoning the minds and morals of the most talented youths of Virginia." He won the election but died of an intestinal blockage before taking office. In his will, he reminded Americans that "Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation." The real "father of our country," Patrick Henry had 17 children by his two marriages and 77 grandchildren!

PHILLIS WHEATLEY (1753–1784)

Shocking poet

Though practically unknown today, Phillis Wheatley's patriotic po-



etry was widely read in America and Britain during the Revolutionary years, and many scholars consider her the best poet of the times.

Wheatley was born in Africa, captured at age 7, and sold into slavery in Boston. Though no doubt a tragedy to her, later she thanked God for freeing her from her "heathen" home and placing her in the hands of a good Christian family. Within 16 months of arriving in America, Wheatley learned to read English. By age 14, she began writing poetry, and at 17, in 1770, her first poem was published: "An Elegiac Poem, on the Death of the Celebrated Divine . . . George Whitefield."

Six years later, while visiting England with her master, her book *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* was published and made her an immediate sensation in Britain and America.

The idea that not only a woman but a black slave could express such beauty astounded the intellectual community. While some like Franklin and Washington praised her abilities, many, like Thomas Jefferson, dismissed her works as being from another's hand.

It was Phillis's love of freedom as a slave and a Christian that made her take up her pen for American liberty. She wrote one poem to commemorate George Washington's appointment as commander in chief of the Continental Army:

Thee, first in place and honors—we

demand

The grace and glory of thy martial band.

Fam'd for thy valor, for thy virtues more,

Here every tongue thy guardian aid implore.

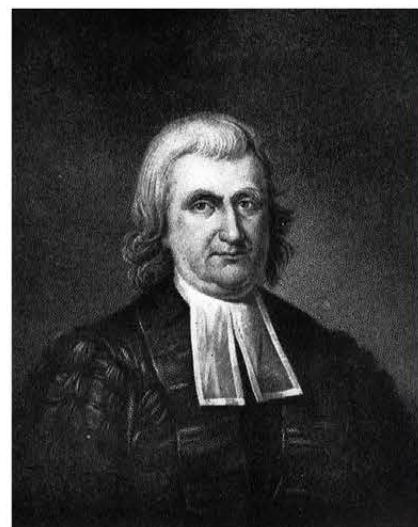
Her comparison of American oppression by England to that of black bondage gave fire to the American cause:

Such, such my case. And can I then but pray

Others may never feel the tyrannic sway?

Her poetry was so well-respected, she was held up as an example in anti-slavery tracts to show that blacks were not inferior.

The Wheatleys eventually gave Phillis the freedom she wrote so much about. In 1778 she married John Peters, a black legal advocate, but the marriage was not a happy one. She bore three children, all of whom died young. She and her husband separated, and she died in poverty at age 31.



JOHN WITHERSPOON (1723–1794)

"Preacher of sedition"

The Reverend John Witherspoon, champion of both Calvinism and common sense, left his mark on the Presbyterian church, the American

Revolution, and the U. S. Constitution. Of the 56 signers of the Declaration of Independence, Witherspoon was the only clergyman.

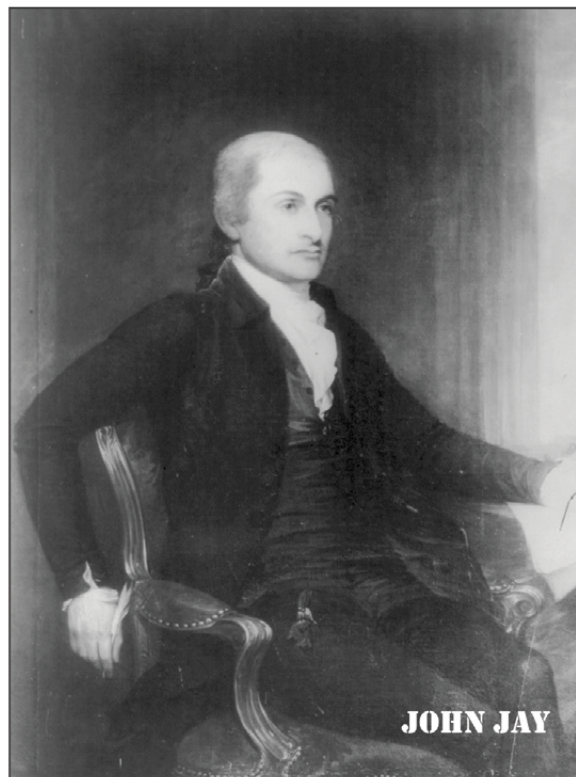
He was born in Scotland, the son of a Scottish minister, and he received his license to preach from the University of Edinburgh in 1743. He soon was at the center of a deep rift in the Scottish church, a champion of the conservative faction. He preached a strict Calvinism and despised ministers who took a more humanist approach.

In 1768 Witherspoon left Scotland to become president of the College of New Jersey (later Princeton University). He showed a knack for organization, and he reunited the liberal and conservative factions of the American Presbyterian church (divided by the Great Awakening); consequently, the denomination went through a growth spurt.

In intellectual circles, he made Scottish common-sense realism more popular. Against the skepticism of David Hume and the idealism of George Berkeley, this philosophy argued that ordinary people can gain accurate knowledge of the world through responsible use of their senses. This common-sense approach to philosophy had a profound impact on early American history.

Witherspoon's common-sense views and his concern for the church led him to argue that the colonies ought to sever ties with England. "There is not a single instance in history," he stated, "in which civil liberty was lost and religious liberty preserved." Starting in May 1776, he began arguing for independence from the pulpit, earning him the Tory title, "Doctor Silverspoon, Preacher of Sedition in America."

He was appointed to the Second Continental Congress in 1776. As the delegates wavered about declaring



independence, he told them, "America is not only ripe for the measure but in danger of rotting for the want of it!"

Between 1776 and 1782, he served on more than a hundred committees. He was not present during the writing of the U. S. Constitution in 1787, but his presence was felt through his Princeton student, James Madison. In Madison's system of checks and balances, with its separation of powers, one can discern the influence of Witherspoon's Calvinist lectures on the depravity of humankind.

Witherspoon retired from Congress in 1782 and spent the rest of his years trying to rebuild Princeton, which had been devastated by war and neglect. Upon his death in 1794, it was said, "A great man has fallen in Israel."

JOHN JAY (1745–1829)

Reluctant revolutionary

Though considered by some to be one of the nation's founding fathers,

John Jay was at first opposed to American independence.

Socially secure, a member of a wealthy New York Huguenot mercantile family, John Jay entered the law profession in 1768 after receiving his M. A. from King's College (now Columbia University). His successful practice, however, was cut short by escalating troubles with England.

In 1774 Jay was elected to the First Continental Congress. Conservative in thought, due to his family's wealth and Tory connections, Jay opposed the use of strong measures against England. A firm believer in rights, however, he authored the *Address to the People of Great Britain*, in which he charged Parliament with "establishing a system of slavery" by denying

Americans the same rights as Englishmen.

During the Second Continental Congress, Jay opposed all talk of independence. Reflecting the interests of the gentry class, he feared that mob rule would shortly follow. Still hoping for reconciliation with England after fighting began, Jay successfully moved that one last conciliatory attempt be sent to the king. He was conveniently absent during the signing of the Declaration of Independence, but once independence was declared, Jay became a warm advocate of the cause. He served as president of Congress in 1778.

At the end of the war, Jay was appointed to write a peace treaty with England. This role he assumed again in 1794 (resulting in the famous "Jay's Treaty") and helped prevent another war with England.

Jay always wished for a stronger central government, and he aided the passage of the U. S. Constitution by writing (with James Madison and Alexander Hamilton) essays that came to be known as *The Federalist*

Papers. Jay became the first chief justice of the United States and remained in politics until 1801. Throughout his long political career his motto was "Nothing is useful except what is honorable."

ISAAC BACKUS (1724–1806)

Baptist freedom fighter

Isaac Backus was born into an elite Puritan family in Connecticut, into a culture that believed the state, for the peace and harmony of society, should enforce Calvinist religion. Backus would spend his life, however, helping to put asunder this marriage of church and state.

His disaffection with Puritanism began when the Great Awakening swept through New England. He had a conversion experience at age 17 and plunged into itinerant preaching. He soon left the Standing (Puritan) Church and joined the Separate



Baptists who, in contrast, were against open communion. In 1747 he was formally ordained at the Separate Church in Middleborough, Massachusetts, where he had been pastoring.

Slowly, after agonizing prayer and Bible study, he came to even more pronounced Baptist beliefs: he had himself rebaptized, by immersion, no less. This act divided his church, forcing Backus, his family,

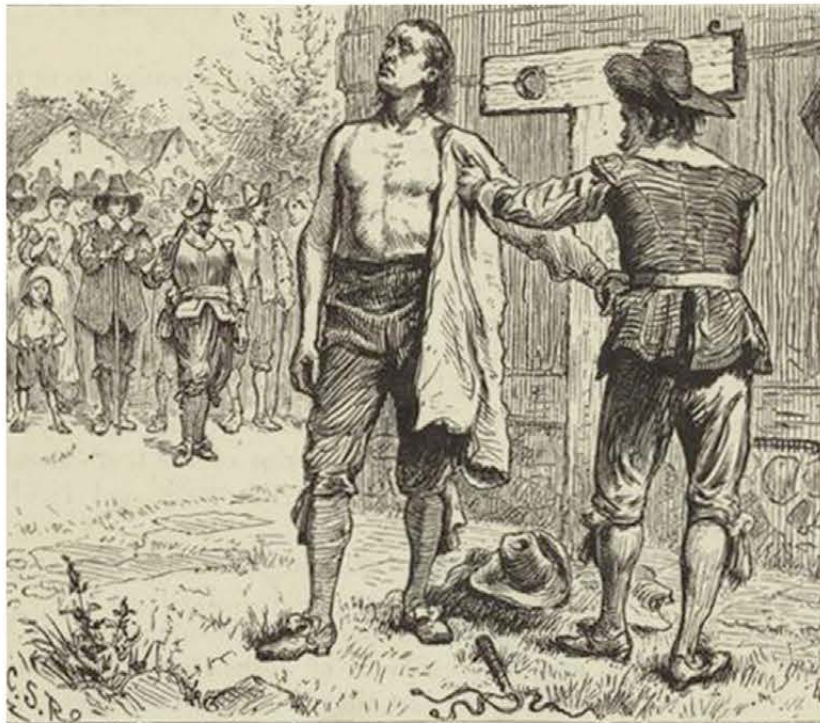
and some followers to found the First Baptist Church in the same town.

Because his church was not recognized as legitimate, Backus and his followers were forced to pay taxes to the Standing Church. This struck Backus as unjust, and he set out to do something about it. He wrote tracts, drew up petitions, and carried on constant warfare for religious liberty. In 1774 Backus was sent to the First Continental Congress as a lobbyist for the Baptist Warren Association; Baptists wanted to insure that while delegates talked about freedom they not neglect religious liberty.

Upon receiving news of bloodshed at Lexington, Backus found himself in a bind. He was opposed to his colony's interference in religion, and he had been ready to appeal to King George III for help. At the same time, Backus believed that if America lost the war, Anglicanism would be firmly established in New England, allowing for even less religious freedom. So Backus took to his pulpit to justify both independence and war.

In 1780 Backus tried unsuccessfully to lobby for separation of church and state in Massachusetts. But eight years later, as a delegate to the Massachusetts Ratifying Convention, he achieved a partial victory when he helped secure the passage of the U. S. Constitution.

Unlike most of his fellow Baptists, who didn't believe the Constitution guaranteed religious freedom, Backus believed that "the exclusion of any hereditary, lordly power, and of any religious tests" for holding office promoted separation of church and state and would eventually push New England to disestablish its churches. He was right; 27 years after his death, in 1833, the last state church (in Massachusetts) was finally disestablished. **CH**

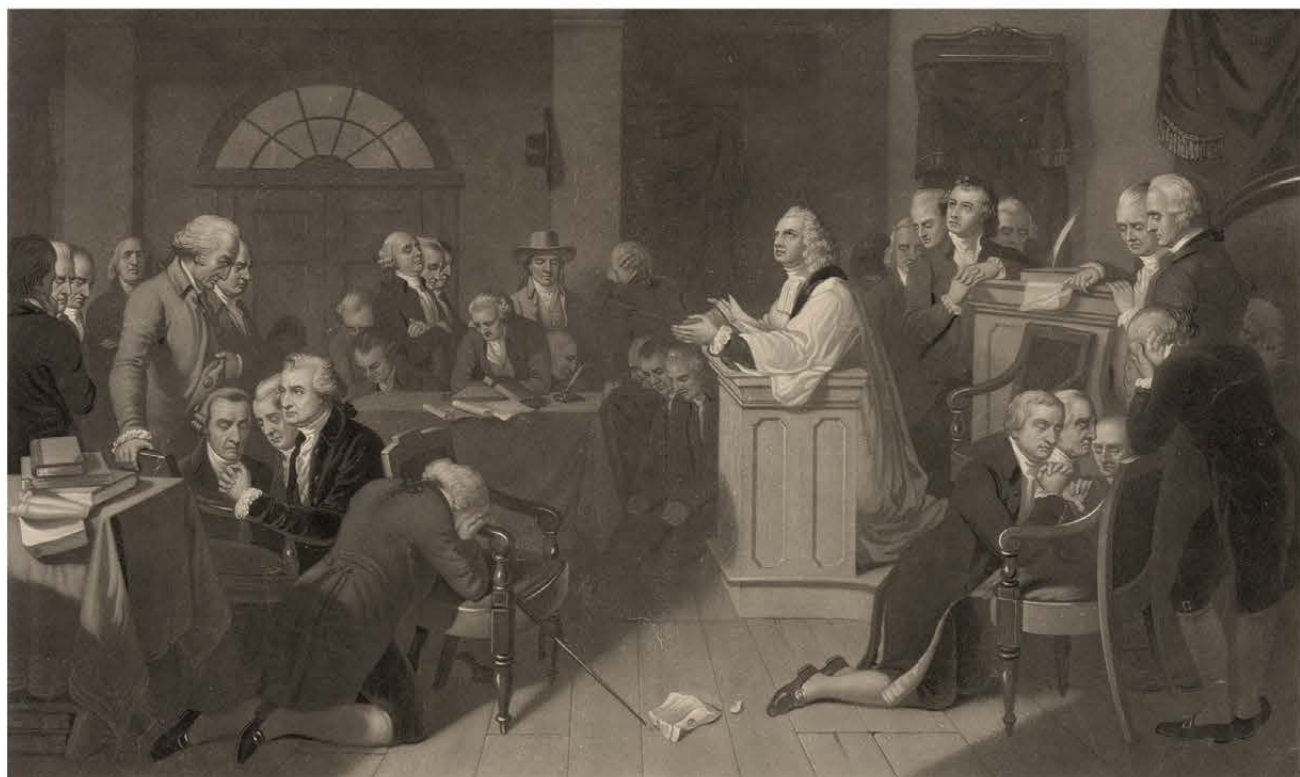


Strong-willed Baptists. In 1600s New England, Baptists were not simply taxed unfairly but sometimes were punished for their beliefs.

MARK COUVILLON is historical interpreter and researcher at the Colonial Williamsburg Foundation. He is co-author of *Patrick Henry Essays* (1994).

Holy Passion for Liberty

In their own words, patriots describe their sense that
God had ordained their cause.



T.H. Matteson. "The First Prayer in Congress."—Library of Congress.

Rebels at prayer. Episcopal priest Jacob Duche leads the opening prayer at the First Continental Congress, in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia. Ten months later, with hostility to Britain escalating, the Second Continental Congress gathered at Duche's church to observe a day of "humiliation, fasting, and prayer."

Prayer to melt a Quaker

At a safe distance of over 200 years, it's easy to intellectualize the Revolution, to debate the wisdom and folly of each political move, to discuss the various ideologies that influenced events. But for colonists, more than politics or philosophy was at stake.

These excerpts from contemporary speeches, diaries, and letters show Americans passionate for liberty and captivated by a movement they believed was blessed by God.

The political situation was more tense than ever when the Continental Congress met for the first time on September 5, 1774. In a letter to his wife, John Adams described the powerful religious sentiments that hung in the air as the 56 delegates gathered.

When the Congress met, Mr. Cushing made a motion that it should be opened with prayer. It was opposed by Mr. Jay of New York and Mr. Rutledge of South Carolina because we were so divided in religious sentiments—some Episcopalians, some Quakers, some Anabaptists,

some Presbyterians, and some Congregationalists—that we could not join in the same act of worship.

Mr. Samuel Adams arose and said that he was no bigot and could hear a prayer from any gentleman of piety and virtue who was at the same time a friend to his country. He was a stranger in Philadelphia but had heard that Dr. Duche deserved that character, and therefore he moved that Mr. Duche, an Episcopal clergyman, might be desired to read prayers to Congress tomorrow morning. The motion was seconded

and passed in the affirmative. . . .

Accordingly next morning he appeared with his clerk and his pontificals [vestments], and read the Psalter for the seventh day of September, which was the 85th Psalm. You must remember this was the next morning after we had heard the rumor of the horrible cannonade of Boston. I never saw a greater effect produced upon an audience. It seemed as if Heaven had ordained that Psalm to be read on that morning. After this, Mr. Duche, unexpectedly to everybody, struck out into extemporary prayer, which filled the bosom of every man present:

"Be Thou present, O God of Wisdom, and direct the counsel of this honorable assembly. Enable them to settle all things on the best and surest foundations, that the scene of blood may be speedily closed, that order, harmony, and peace may be effectually restored, and truth and justice, religion and piety, prevail and flourish among the people. Preserve the health of their bodies and the vigor of them in this world, and crown them with everlasting glory in the world to come. All this we ask in the name and through the merits of Jesus Christ, thy Son and our Savior, Amen."

Washington was kneeling there, and Henry, Randolph, Rutledge, Lee, and Jay, and by their side there stood, bowed in reverence, the Puritan patriots of New England, who at that moment had reason to believe that an armed soldiery was wasting their humble households. . . . They prayed fervently for America, for Congress, for the Province of Massachusetts Bay, and especially for the town of Boston [whose port had been closed and in which British troops were being quartered].

And who can realize the emotions with which they turned imploringly to Heaven for divine interposition. It was enough to melt a heart of stone. I saw the tears gush into the eyes of the old, grave, pacifist Quakers of Philadelphia. *

LIBERTY OR DEATH!

On March 23, 1775, before the Virginia Convention, in one of the most moving speeches in American history, Patrick Henry prodded colonists toward independence by appealing to their indignation and their passion for liberty. He concluded:

Sir, we have done everything that could be done to avert the storm

the fond hope of peace and reconciliation. There is no longer any room for hope.

If we wish to be free, if we mean to preserve inviolate those inestimable privileges for which we have been so long contending, if we mean not basely to abandon the noble struggle in which we have been so long engaged and which we have pledged ourselves never to abandon until the glorious object of our contest shall be obtained—we must fight! I repeat it, sir, we must fight! An appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts is all that is left us!

They tell us, sir, that we are weak, unable to cope with so formidable an adversary. But when shall we be stronger? Will it be the next week or the next year? Will it be when we are totally disarmed and when a British guard shall be stationed in every house? Shall we gather strength by irresolution and inaction? Shall we acquire the means of effectual resistance by lying supinely on our backs and hugging the delusive phantom of hope until our enemies shall have bound us hand and foot?

Sir, we are not weak if we make a proper use of those means which the God of nature hath placed in our power. Three millions of people, armed in the holy cause of liberty and in such a country as that which we possess, are invincible by any force which our enemy can send against us.

Besides, sir, we shall not fight our battles alone. There is a just God who presides over the destinies of nations, and who will raise up friends to fight our battles for us. The battle, sir, is not to the strong alone; it is to the vigilant, the active, the brave.

Besides, sir, we have no election [choice]. If we were base enough to desire it, it is now too late to retire from the contest. There is no retreat but in submission and slavery! Our



American first. *At the First Continental Congress, when the several colonies were struggling to act as one, Patrick Henry declared, "The distinctions between Virginians, Pennsylvanians, New Yorkers, and New Englanders are no more. I am not a Virginian, but an American."*

which is now coming on. We have petitioned; we have remonstrated; we have supplicated; we have prostrated ourselves before the throne and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and Parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded, and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne. In vain after these things may we indulge

Christianity and the American Revolution

* ROBERT M. CALHOON *

Christianity

First Hints 1740s & 1750s



1740s Great Awakening inspired by George Whitefield's preaching spreads through colonies

1747 Jonathan Edwards's *The Visible Union of God's People* envisions Americans bound together by shared conversion experience

1750 Jonathan Mayhew's *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance* announces Christian duty to resist tyranny

The Revolution

1740–1748 King George's War—French and British maneuver to dominate North America

1760 George III becomes king of England

1756–1763 Seven Years' War—British expel French from North America



Prelude 1760s

1768–1769 Northern Anglicans demand appointment of a colonial bishop

1768 John Witherspoon becomes president of the College of New Jersey; unites Presbyterians and introduces Scottish Common Sense philosophy



Turning Point 1770-1776

1772 Boston Committee of Correspondence indicts British policies, including prospect of a colonial Anglican bishop; John Allen preaches on *The Beauties of Liberty*

1763 Peace of Paris ends Seven Years' War; British government in financial straits

1764 Sugar Act—Britain tightens enforcement of the acts of trade, seeking more revenues from colonies

1765 Stamp Act—Americans complain of taxation without representation

1767 Townshend Acts—attempts to indirectly tax the colonies

1770 Boston Massacre—five protesting Bostonians killed

1773 Boston Tea Party protests Tea Act of 1773



1774 May Quebec Act condemned as extending "Papist Rule";
Sept. Baptist Isaac Backus demands that First Continental Congress, meeting in Carpenter's Hall, Philadelphia, protect Baptists' religious liberty

1775 July Continental Congress calls for day of prayer and fasting; preachers debate whether to submit to British authority

1776 July Declaration of Independence invokes "the laws of nature and of nature's God";

Sept. New Jersey Dutch Reformed split on political lines; **Dec.** North Carolina constitution restricts officeholding to Protestants; **Dec.** Virginia disestablishes the Anglican church

War & Aftermath 1777-1789

1777 Aug. Pennsylvania officials deport 40-plus Quakers for "disloyalty"; **Nov.** Lutheran patriarch Henry Muhlenburg defends his neutrality

1778-1780 Henry Alline, "Nova Scotia's Whitefield," ignites a Canadian revival that spreads to New England

1778 South Carolina permits Anglican-like churches that meet certain criteria

1779 Virginia considers public subsidies for churches

1780 Massachusetts decides to continue public funding of Congregational churches

1781 Presbyterian Samuel McCorkle preaches against looting and abusing of loyalists

1786 Virginia adopts Thomas Jefferson's Statute for Religious Liberty

1788 Presbyterians establish a national denomination

1789 George Washington takes presidential oath on the Bible, adding "So help me, God."

1774 Intolerable Acts: including quartering of troops in homes; First Continental Congress meets

1775 Apr. Battles of Lexington and Concord force a British retreat; **May** Second Continental Congress seeks repeal of British policies; **June** Congress creates Continental Army and names George Washington commander; Battle of Bunker Hill

1776 Jan. Thomas Paine's *Common Sense* ignites feelings for independence;

July Thomas Jefferson pens Declaration of Independence;

Dec. Washington crosses Delaware and defeats British at Trenton



1777 Battle of Saratoga: American victory prompts France to support United States

1777-1778 Washington's army suffers through winter at Valley Forge

1778 June Battle of Monmouth: longest action of the war a draw

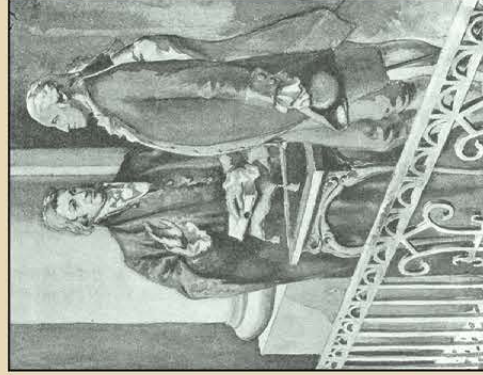
1781 Cornwallis surrenders at Yorktown, forcing peace negotiations



1783 Treaty of Paris—British recognize American independence

1787 U. S. Constitutional Convention

1789 Bill of Rights guarantees religious freedom



ROBERT CALHOON is professor of history at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. He is author of *Dominion and Liberty: Ideology in the Anglo-American World* (1994).



Creeping oppression?

A cartoon mocks Catholic bishops celebrating the 1774 Quebec Act, which gave Canadians freedom to practice Catholicism. Alarmed New Englanders believed any advance for Catholics (or Anglicans) would soon sabotage their religious freedom.

alphahistory.com

chains are forged. Their clanking may be heard on the plains of Boston! The war is inevitable—and let it come! I repeat it, sir, let it come!

It is in vain, sir, to extenuate the matter. Gentlemen may cry, "Peace! Peace!" but there is no peace. The war is actually begun! The next gale that sweeps from the north will bring to our ears the clash of resounding

arms! Our brethren are already in the field! Why stand we here idle? What is it that gentlemen wish? What would they have? Is life so dear or peace so sweet as to be purchased at the price of chains and slavery? Forbid it, Almighty God! I know not what course others may take, but as for me, give me liberty or give me death! *

vanced towards us in order to swallow us up, but they found a choky mouthful of us, tho' we could do nothing with our small arms as yet for distance, and had but two cannon and nary [a] gunner.

And they, from Boston and from the ships, a-firing and throwing bombs, [kept] us down till they got almost round us. But God in mercy to us fought our battle for us, and altho' we were but few and so were suffered to be defeated by them, we were preserved in a most wonderful manner far beyond expectation, to admiration, for out of our regiment there was about 37 killed, four or five taken captive, and about 47 wounded. . . .

If we should be called into action again, I hope to have courage and strength to act my part valiantly in defense of our liberties and our country, trusting in him who hath yet kept me and hath covered my head in the day of battle.

And tho' we have lost five of our company, and our Lieutenant's thigh broke and he taken captive by the cruel enemies of America, I was not suffered to be touched, altho' I was in the fort till the regulars came in—and I jumped over the walls and ran for about half a mile, where balls flew like hailstones and cannons roared like thunder. *

Balls flew like hailstones

The American Revolution was a war, entailing suffering, bloodshed, and much grief. But at the beginning, war seemed glorious, even in defeat. In a letter to his father, patriot Peter Brown described the Battle of Bunker Hill, June 17, 1775.

About half after five in the morn, we not having above half the fort done, they [the British] began to fire, I suppose as soon as they had orders, pretty briskly a few minutes, and then stopped, and then again to the number of about 20 or more. They killed one of us, and then they ceased till about eleven o'clock, and then they began pretty brisk again, and that caused some of our young country people to desert, apprehending the danger in a clearer manner than the rest, who were more diligent in digging and fortifying our-

selves against them. We began to be almost beat out, being tired by our labor and having no sleep the night before, but little victuals, no drink but rum. . . .

It being about three o'clock, there was a little cessation of the cannons roaring. Come to look, there was a matter of 40 barges full of regulars coming over to us; it is supposed there were about 3,000 of them and about 700 of us left . . . besides 500 reinforcements that could not get so [nigh] to us as to do any good hardly till they saw that we must all be cut off. . . .

But the enemy landed and fronted before us and formed themselves in an oblong square, so as to surround us, which they did in part. And after they were well formed, they ad-

OFFERINGS TO LIBERTY

The Reverend Samuel Langdon, president of Harvard and pastor of a Congregational church in Portsmouth, New Hampshire, helped defend Bunker Hill. Afterward he returned to his church to announce he was devoting himself full-time as chaplain to patriot troops. He recorded the scene in his diary entry for July 20, 1775.

This has been one of the most important and trying days of my life. I have taken leave of my people for the present and shall at once proceed to the American camp at Boston and offer my services as chaplain in the army. Ever since the battle of Bunker Hill, my mind has been turned to this subject. God's servants are needed in the army to pray with it and for it. This is God's work, and his ministers should set an example that will convince the people that they believe it to be such.

But the scene in the house of God today has tried me sorely. How silent, how solemn, was the congregation, and when they sang the 61st Psalm—commencing, "When overwhelm'd with grief, / My heart within me dies"—sobs were heard in every part of the building.

At the close, I was astonished to see Deacon S., now nearly 60 years of age, arise and address the congregation. "Brethren," said he, "our minister has acted right. This is God's cause, and as in days of old, the priests bore the ark into the midst of the battle, so much they do it now. We should be unworthy of the fathers and mothers who landed on Plymouth Rock if we do not cheerfully bear what Providence shall put upon us in the great conflict now before us. I had two sons at Bunker Hill, and one of them, you know, was slain. The other did his duty, and for the future, God must do with him what seemeth him best. I offer him to liberty. I had thought that I would stay here with the church. But



God's Cause. Many colonial regiments and naval batteries used religious mottoes on their standards.

my minister is going, and I will shoulder my musket and go, too."

In this strain, he continued for some time till the whole congregation was bathed in tears. Oh, God must be with this people in the unequal struggle, or else how could they enter upon it with such solemnity and prayer, with such strong reliance on his assistance, and such a profound sense of their need of it? *

Submitting to Providence

As the finishing touches were being put on the Declaration of Independence, John Adams reflected on the events of recent years. On July 3, 1776, he wrote to his wife, Abigail:

When I look back to the year 1761 . . . and run through the whole period from that time to this, and recollect the series of political events, the chain of causes and effects, I am surprised at the suddenness as well as greatness of this revolution. Britain has been filled with folly, and America with wisdom. At least, this is my judgment. Time must determine.

It is the will of Heaven that the two countries should be sundered forever. It may be the will of Heaven that America shall suffer calamities still more wasting and distress yet

Praising God with every chord

This solemn hymn, by William Billings, was one of the most popular Revolutionary songs. Three verses go:

Let tyrants shake their iron rod,
And slavery clank her galling
chains;
We fear them not, we trust in
God—
New England's God for ever
reigns.

When God inspired us for the
fight,
Their ranks were broke, their lines
were forced;
Their ships were shattered in our
sight,
Or swiftly driven from our coast.

What grateful offering shall we
bring?
What shall we render to the Lord?
Loud hallelujahs let us sing,
And praise his name on every
chord. *

more dreadful. If this is to be the case, it will have this good effect at least: It will inspire us with many virtues which we have not, and correct many errors, follies, and vices which threaten to disturb, dishonor and destroy us. The furnace of affliction produces refinement, in states as well as individuals.

And the new governments we are assuming in every part will require a purification from our vices and an augmentation of our virtues, or they will be no blessings. The people will have unbounded power, and the people are extremely addicted to corruption and venality, as [are] the great. But I must submit all my hopes and fears to an overruling Providence, in which, unfashionable as the faith may be, I firmly believe. **CH**

Disciples of Reason

What did the founding fathers really believe?

* EDWIN S. GAUSTAD *

In September of 1800, in the furries of Thomas Jefferson's initial presidential campaign, the *Federalist Gazette of the United States* editorially branded the 57-year-old Virginian as "an enemy to pure morals and religion, and consequently an enemy to his country and his God." This biting observation teaches us at least two things: (1) that in 1800, religion was a lively and passionate concern among Americans; and (2) that in a political campaign, not every word is to be swallowed whole!

In fact, Jefferson was a religious man, as were the other founding fathers—Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, John Adams, and James Madison. Though none could be considered orthodox Christians (all were products primarily of the Enlightenment), none of them was "an enemy to God."

Freethinking moralist

The Boston-born sage of Philadelphia, Benjamin Franklin (1706–1790), was the most lovable of the founders. Wise, witty, gregarious, curious, ingenuous, Franklin won admirers both at home and abroad. Though sometimes claimed by the Presbyterians or Episcopalians, Franklin can be rightly classified—with all our other founders—only as a deist or free-thinker. That is, he would construct a creed for himself, not recite one created by others. He would test all by



Friendly antagonist. *As a deist, Benjamin Franklin often mocked orthodox Christianity, but he still maintained friendships with Calvinists like Ezra Stiles, president of Yale University, and evangelist George Whitefield.*

the mark of common sense and find his revelation not in the Bible but in Reason and Nature (always capitalized by Enlightenment thinkers).

On these grounds, Franklin strongly affirmed the existence of God, the freedom of human beings to make their own choices, and the potential value of institutional religion as a teacher and enforcer of a high moral code. But churches that focused exclusively on dogma and ignored morals infuriated Franklin.

He denounced and satirized them and emphatically separated himself from them.

Faith was the proper path to virtue, not a diversion from being "a good parent, a good child, a good husband, or wife, a good neighbor or friend, a good subject or citizen, that is, in short, a good Christian." Faith was the instrument, not the end.

Puritan Ezra Stiles, president of Yale, knew of Franklin's deist leanings, but wanted, if possible, to pin down the nimble-footed free-thinker to some basics. In friendship Stiles asked for some kind of creedal confession, however limited. Franklin, who said that this was the first time he had ever been asked, on March 9, 1790, readily obliged:

"Here is my creed. I believe in one God, Creator of the universe: that he governs the world by his providence. That he ought to be worshipped. That the most acceptable service we can render to him is doing good to his other children. That the soul of man is immortal and will be treated with justice in another life respect[ing] its conduct in this. These I take to be the fundamental principles of all sound religion, and I regard them as you do, in whatever sect I meet with them."

In addition, Stiles wanted to know specifically what Franklin thought of Jesus: Was Franklin really a Christian or not? Franklin responded that Jesus had taught the best system of morals

and religion that "the world ever saw." But on the troublesome question of the divinity of Jesus, he had along with other deists "some doubts." It was an issue, he said, that he had never carefully studied and, writing only five weeks before his death, he thought it "needless to busy myself with it now, when I expect soon an opport[unity] of know[ing] the truth with less trouble." It would be difficult to burn a heretic like that.

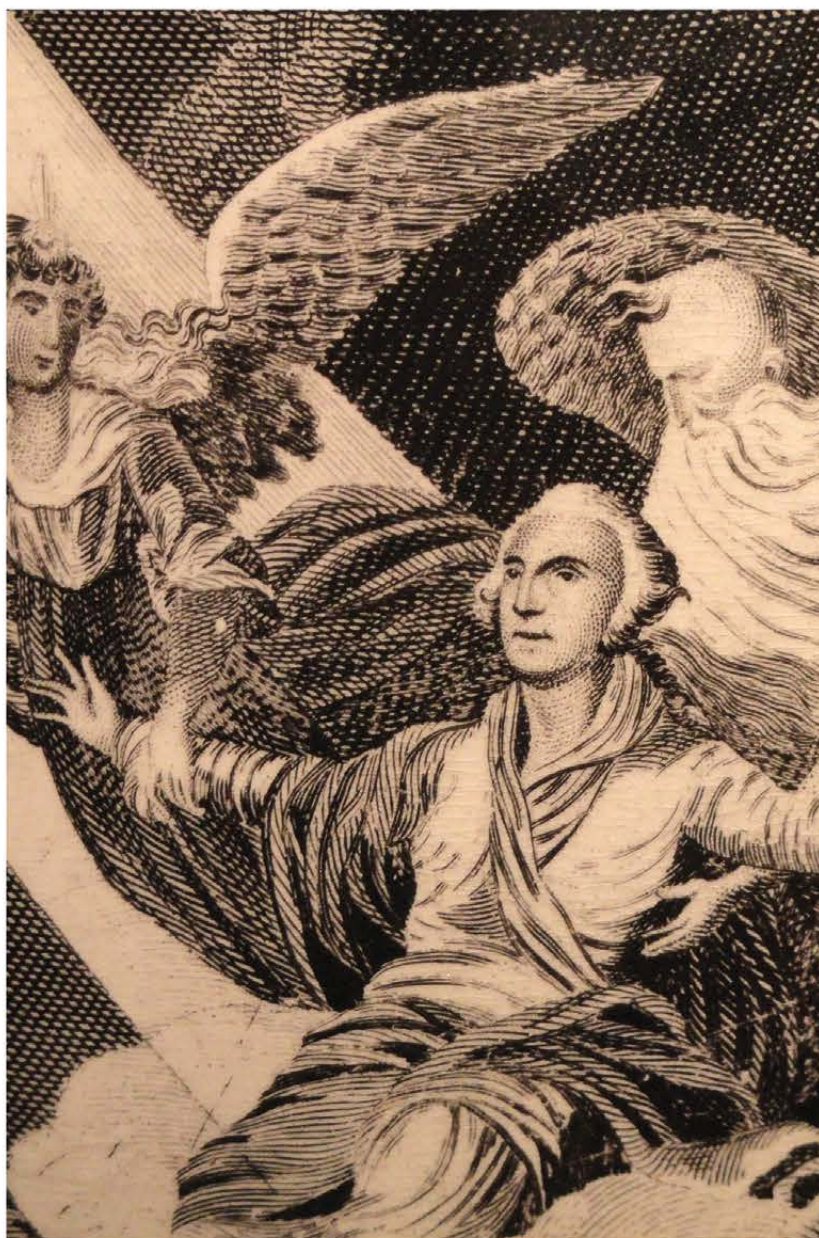
Simple religion— and mysterious

Of the five founders, George Washington (1732-1799) had the least to say about religion. Like most members of the Virginia gentry, he was baptized, married, and buried in the Anglican (Episcopal) church. But he wore his denominational labels lightly and kept his private religion strictly private. "In politics as in religion," he wrote in 1795, "my tenets are few and simple."

As president for two terms, he did not altogether avoid the language of religion, but it was a public or civil religion that he addressed, doing so in a language that demonstrated no great passion. When he chose to speak of God, it was in terms like "the Grand Architect," "the Governor of the Universe," "the Supreme Dispenser of all Good," "the Great Ruler of Events," and even "the Higher Cause." Nothing here suggested a warm or personal relationship.

Moreover, Washington studiously avoided referring to the person and ministry of Jesus. When in 1789 some Presbyterian leaders complained to Washington about the Constitution's absence of any reference to "the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom he hath sent," the nation's first president calmly replied, "The path of true piety is so plain as to require but little political direction."

Washington's aloofness and broad tolerance added to his enormous appeal as the nation's leader, but they leave us in the dark as to what he specifically believed about God.



President Paradox. *Though George Washington recorded in his personal prayer diary that God would accept him because of "the merits of thy Son Jesus Christ," he attended church inconsistently and never took Communion. Also, though he was not public about his religion, the public was religious about him, sometimes picturing him after his death as taken up to heaven, divinely exalted for his good deeds and character.*

Adoring the Wisdom that directs

Born in Braintree (Quincy), Massachusetts, John Adams (1735-1826) grew up in the sheltering fold of New England Congregationalism. But when many of those churches turned toward liberal Unitarianism, Adams turned with them. That movement, coupled with the En-

lightenment (to which Adams in France was fully exposed) ensured that he also would become a free-thinker.

Orthodoxy busied itself with theological and sectarian disputes, Adams observed, all of which weakened its impact and reduced its attractiveness. Modern priests, whether "popistical or Presbyterian,"

demonstrated little tolerance and less charity. It was simply not the case and never would be, Adams fervently declared, that only Calvinists would get to heaven. These days every church, every sect, thinks that it alone has the "Holy Ghost in a phial [vial]."

On the other hand, John Adams extolled the sovereignty of God in language of deepest feeling. Whenever he spent any time thinking of the enormity and grandeur of the universe, the Milky Way, and the "stupendous orbits of the suns," he said, "I feel an irresistible impulse to fall on my knees in adoration of the Power that moves, the Wisdom that directs, and the Benevolence that sanctifies this wonderful whole." In acclaiming God's greatness, Adams also recognized his—and humankind's—finiteness. "Worm! Confine thyself to thy dust. Do thy duty in thy own sphere."

That duty demanded adherence to high moral standards. One should not concentrate on metaphysical causes and effects but on attending to one's own duties. "Be good fathers, sons, brothers, neighbors, friends, patriots, and philanthropists, good subjects and citizens of the universe, and trust the Ruler with his skies." Religion must never allow itself to become an evasion of moral duty but only a compulsion to it.

For this reason, Adams impatiently dismissed the doctrine of original sin: "I am answerable enough for my own sins," he wrote in 1815, because "I know they were my own fault, and that is enough for me to know."

Regarding the age-old debate between free will and predestination, Adams hesitated not at all: "If there is no liberty, there is no responsibility. No virtue, no vice, no merit or demerit, no reward and no punishment." And that made a mockery of all justice, human or divine.

So Adams asserted the immortality of the soul, for the nature of rewards or punishments after death preserved the integrity and sanctity of the cosmic order. "A future state will set all right; without the suppo-

sition of a future state, I can make nothing of this universe but a chaos." Indeed, Adams concluded, "If I did not believe in a future state, I should believe in no God."

Separating religion and state

Greatly assisting Thomas Jefferson in the struggle for religious liberty, James Madison (1751–1836) made this crusade his lifelong concern. As a member of the Virginia legislature, of the House of Representatives, as secretary of state, and

as president, Madison never relaxed his guard concerning possible breaches in the wall of separation. Jefferson coined the phrase; Madison championed the cause. From his well-known "Memorial and Remonstrance" (a 1785 petition arguing against Patrick Henry's tax bill to support "the Christian religion") to his reflections set down in retirement, Madison strongly preferred to leave all laws pertaining to religion to the only truly qualified authority in this area: "the Supreme Lawgiver



Virtue comes first. John Adams didn't have as much use for theology as he did ethics: "I do not . . . attach much importance to creeds because I believe he cannot be wrong whose life is right."

Library of Congress

of the universe."

With respect to his own religious views, however, Madison's convictions are more cloudy. When he entered the College of New Jersey (Princeton) in 1769, he came under the influence of President John Witherspoon and other Presbyterian members of the faculty. He read theology with some care, even after his graduation. But once he was caught up in the Revolutionary whirl, his interest in deeper religion evaporated. When asked in 1825 to explain his own views of the being and attributes of God, he replied that he had essentially ceased thinking about those subjects fifty years earlier.

The basic essentials of the deist creed—a belief in God, freedom, and immortality—may well have been Madison's creed. He declined, however, to disclose his own beliefs. Religious truth was surely so important that no impediment should ever be placed in the path of anyone freely seeking to find and embrace that truth—but also so important that no one was obliged to allow others to invade the inner sanctum of the human soul.

A sect unto himself

Well before Thomas Jefferson (1743–1826) found himself in the midst of a mean-spirited presidential campaign in 1800, he had paid a great deal of attention to religion—primarily to its liberty. For seven years, 1779–1786, he fretted over the absence in his home state (Virginia) of a clear guarantee of religious freedom. Finally, his long-neglected bill became the Statute for Establishing Religious Freedom. Hearing of its passage while in France, he was delighted "to see the standard of reason at last erected, after so many ages during which the human mind has been held in vassalage by kings, priests, and nobles." He was proud of his authorship of this law (of his writings, he wanted only this and the Declaration of Independence noted on his tombstone), but he was also proud the Virginia legislature "had the courage to declare that the reason of man may be trusted with the for-



Respecters of religion. James Madison (left) drifted more and more toward deism in his life, but he rarely if ever made disparaging remarks about traditional Christianity, as did his friend Jefferson (right). For his part, Jefferson, for the last 50 years of his life, read the New Testament daily, often in Greek and Latin—although with the miraculous passages taken out.

mation of his own opinions."

Jefferson also pushed for a bill on the national level that would offer similar guarantees of religious freedom, which helped bring about the First Amendment in 1789. And as president he placed his own famous spin on that amendment by employing the phrase "a wall of separation between church and state."

Yet Jefferson also concerned himself with the content of religion in general, and of Christianity in particular. In his private correspondence, not in his public declarations, he argued for a Christian religion devoid of mystery and dogmatic absurdity, a religion that rallied around the Enlightenment standards of Reason and Nature.

For Jefferson, this meant primarily getting back to the simple ethical teachings of Jesus—those pure and primitive words before they were messed up by philosophers and theologians. The teachings of Jesus needed no priestly interpretation or subtle commentary. "Had there never been a commentator," Jefferson wrote in 1821, "there never would have been an infidel." Followers of Plato's philosophy injected into Christianity clouds of "whimsies, puerilities, and unintelligible

jargon." Calvin "introduced more new absurdities into the Christian religion" than can readily be imagined. In sum, Jefferson said, "Our savior did not come into the world to save metaphysicians only."

If Christianity could be cleansed of 17 centuries of corrupting tradition, the barnacles scraped off, the mysteries jettisoned, and the irrationalities tossed into a heap, then it would appeal again to an emancipated and enlightened world, even to Jefferson himself. With respect to the "genuine precepts of Jesus himself," Jefferson observed in 1803, "I am a real Christian . . . sincerely attached to his doctrines, in preference to all others."

But he rejected the divinity of Jesus (as he believed Jesus did) and denounced the idea of the Trinity as "mere abracadabra," the saddest example of what happens when one trades "morals for mysteries, Jesus for Plato." So perhaps he was more precise when he noted in 1819, "I am of a sect by myself, as far as I know." **CH**

Edwin Gaustad is professor emeritus, history and religious studies, University of California, Riverside. He is author of *Sworn on the Altar of God: A Religious Biography of Thomas Jefferson* (Eerdmans, 1996).

Battling Irreligion in the Ranks

Chaplains had one of the toughest jobs in the Continental Army.

* CHARLES ROYSTER *

Everyone agreed: profanity, drunkenness, neglect of the Sabbath, and disrespect for the clergy were widespread among Continental soldiers. This contrasted sharply with the high moral ground upon which the war was being fought, and Christian Revolutionaries deplored the contrast.

Devout soldiers and chaplains were also troubled by the false bravado toward death, which they interpreted as sinful hardening. At one New York prison camp where the mortality rate was particularly steep, a visitor found men "preparing to lay down for the night . . . most of them, laughing and bantering each other with apparent pleasantry about which of them would be dead the next morning. One would say, 'I am much stouter than you, and I will have your blanket.' 'No,' would be the reply, 'I am much heartier than you and stand the best chance of seeing you carried out feet foremost.'"

Historian Charles Royster has said, "To be a good chaplain was even more difficult than to be a good company grade officer." Royster, professor of history at Louisiana State University in Baton Rouge, is author of *A Revolutionary People at War: The Continental Army and American Character, 1775-1783* (University of North Carolina, 1979). In one chapter, from which this article is excerpted with permission, he talks about the challenging work of Revolutionary War chaplains.

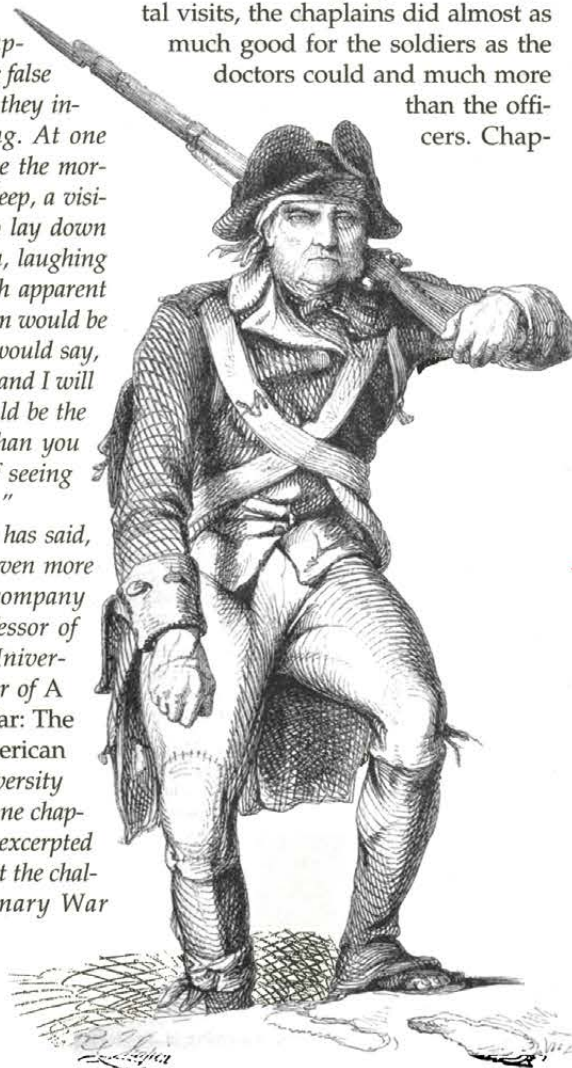
Visiting the dying

The conscientious chaplain had two main duties: "divine service"—two Sunday sermons, as well as prayers and addresses on special occasions—and private worship or consolation with soldiers, especially the sick and the dying. In their hospital visits, the chaplains did almost as much good for the soldiers as the doctors could and much more than the officers. Chap-

lain Ebenezer David said, "I have ever found the chaplains' visits taken well by the sick."

The journals and memoirs of doctors, officers, and enlisted men record few visits by junior officers to their sick men. Captain Alexander Graydon probably spoke for many of them when he explained why he had avoided the imprisoned Continentals in New York City, who faced a choice between pestilence and enlistment in the British army: "I once, and once only, ventured to penetrate into these abodes of human misery and despair. But to what purpose [should I] repeat my visit when I had neither relief to administer nor comfort to bestow? What could I say to the unhappy victims who appealed to me for assistance or sought my advice as to the alternative of death or apostasy? . . . I rather chose to turn my eye from a scene I could not meliorate, to put from me a calamity which mocked my power of alleviation."

Many chaplains probably followed a similar course, but others visited the sick daily, joked or prayed with them, and listened to monologues like that of a "very sick youth from Massachusetts," who asked Ammi Robbins "to save him if possible, said he was not fit to die, says, 'I cannot die. Do, sir, pray for me. Will you not send for my mother? If she were here to nurse me, I could get well. O my mother! How I wish I could see her! She was opposed to my enlisting, I am now





For times like these. *George Washington and the Continental Army suffer through winter at Valley Forge. Knowing the need for sustaining troop morale through the ordeals of war, Washington was the army's strongest advocate for chaplains, demanding raises in their pay and often insisting his troops attend their services.*

very sorry. Do let her know I am sorry.' " Robbins said he "endeavored to point him to the only source of peace, prayed, and left him," and then commented, "he cannot live long."

Demanding preaching

Chaplains also helped do generals' work in sermons and addresses. Commanders required soldiers to attend divine service; one punishment for absence was digging up stumps. State militia Colonel Benjamin Cleaveland, a former Continental Army officer, wanted prisoners of war as well as soldiers to attend services; so the loyalist Lieutenant Anthony Allaire heard "a Presbyterian sermon, truly adapted to their principles and the times—or rather, stuffed as full of republicanism as their camp is of horse thieves."

A commander might suggest the

text for a sermon and urge a chaplain to "dwell a little more on politics" if he was one of the few who failed to do so. After Chaplain Benjamin Boardman had preached on Jehoshaphat's prayer for God's help against invaders, Colonel Samuel Wyllys thanked him and "said it was the best sermon he had ever heard upon the occasion and troubles of the day."

The surviving sermons strive to attain a very demanding ideal: to nourish and justify the hopes for America's future that made soldiers fight the British, to foster individual courage in the face of both suffering and combat, to celebrate the unity of courageous men in a just cause, to awaken soldiers' watchfulness for the signs of their own salvation, and to encourage the orderly conduct of a disciplined soldier and an upright Christian.

When Chaplain Ammi Robbins preached on the escape of Lot from Sodom, one listener said that his preaching "was all life and engagedness." Chaplain Israel Evans, preaching to the New York Line and Lafayette's Light Infantry, said, "Could my influence reach as far as my wishes are extended—could I appear before the inhabitants of the United States in all the irresistible majesty of ancient elocution; could I wield the thunder of Demosthenes, and arrest the lightning of Pericles—how should the nerves of opposition to our country be withered, and every American be fired into a patriot or a soldier."

The most difficult task

For the most part, Evans's goals as a chaplain, like those of other chaplains, were the kinds of inspiration Americans expected their generals to



Trusting in Providence. For many soldiers, the heartache and danger of war strengthened their religious resolve. On October 4, 1779, Major John Jones wrote his wife, Mary, about a planned assault: "If it is my fate to survive this action, I shall; if otherwise, the Lord's will must be done. Every soldier and soldier's wife should religiously believe in predestination." Five days later, he was killed in battle.

achieve. And just as Revolutionaries at home felt dissatisfied with generals, so commanders and soldiers found chaplains wanting. Although Washington kept his own religious views private and rarely referred to God or to Christ, he set great store by religious exercises and able chaplains for the army. He too complained of chaplains' neglect of their duties and was rumored to have a low opinion of many of them.

When we compare the demands made on chaplains with those made on other officers, and when we study the recorded services of individual chaplains, we can hardly conclude that they were singularly derelict. We can suspect that chaplains bore a large part of the Continental Army's displeasure when soldiers and officers found that war life was not as consistently inspiring, orderly, or tolerable as they wished.

Despite the most blatant contradictory facts, ministers had to remain

spokesmen for the promise. On Thanksgiving Day, 1777, private Joseph Martin's unit, which had not been paid since August, heard a sermon they could not properly attend to because they wanted a "fine Thanksgiving dinner" but had received "half a gill [about two ounces] of rice and a tablespoonful of vinegar!!"

The preacher's text "upon the happy occasion" was John the Baptist's advice to soldiers, which ministers treated as an injunction to discipline—"Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely" [Luke 3:14]. For some reason, the preacher left out the next clause; it would have been, Martin later said, "too apropos." But as soon as the service ended, a hundred soldiers shouted, "And be content with your wages!"

Many chaplains, like many officers, responded to this stress by neglecting their duty. Others, by word and example, led the Revolutionar-

ies' efforts to reconcile deeds with dreams.

"I pray," Chaplain Hezekiah Smith wrote to his wife, "that my preaching may be attended with power." The new recruits of 1780 were coming into "Continental Village" at Peekskill, New York. General John Nixon's brigade had been so scattered during the summer that religious services had stopped. Now they would resume. Like his eloquent sermons against profanity and on Arnold's treason, Smith's prayer represented the renewed hope for the army's achievement of ideal conduct following yet another failure.

This was the conscientious chaplain's most important and difficult task: making an ideal seem attainable to men who were failing short of its demands. After hearing a sermon by Smith in 1775, Lieutenant Benjamin Craft said, "He preached exceedingly well, and I wish I had a heart to profit by what I heard." **CH**

Jesus vs. the Watchmaker

Which ideas energized the American Revolution:
those of evangelical Christianity or enlightened deism?

* DEREK H. DAVIS *

Some argue that the American Revolution was motivated by Christian ideals—the love of political and religious liberty, and the passion to create a society built on biblical values. Many scholars say the Revolution was merely the product of Enlightenment deists—rationalists who believed God, like a watchmaker, set the universe running and let people manage it by reason. They wanted to found a just and free society on rational, scientific principles.

How we resolve this disagreement depends upon how we pose the question. If the question is, Was there unambiguous biblical justification for the Revolution? we probably have to say no. While many Christians supported independence, many others (Tories) argued for submis-

sion to Great Britain—and many pacifists argued biblically that war under any circumstances was wrong.

If we ask instead whether the Revolution was sustained by Christian ideals (versus Enlightenment rationalism) the answer is tangled. In fact, both of these ideologies embraced the ideals and rhetoric of liberty and together were the driving forces behind the Revolution. Despite their pronounced differences, each supported the other and, in the words of historian Patricia Bonomi, “did not cause separate channels but flowed as one stream toward the crisis of 1776.”

Kingdom of Heaven

The responses of both Christians and rationalists to British rule followed similar lines, but their visions

and arguments for independence were clearly different.

As talk of revolution increased, colonial clergymen preached the justness of the colonists’ cause. Samuel Langdon from Massachusetts, for example, preached in 1775: “If God be for us, who can be against us. . . . May we not be confident that the Most High . . . will plead our righteous cause?”

They also regularly preached on the theme of liberty. If God’s people had been “called to liberty,” as Galatians 5:13 promised, meaning liberty in Christ, then it did not seem much of a stretch to believe that this also meant freedom from political tyranny.

So many patriotic preachers joined in a chorus of dissent against the British attack on American liberties,

A Declaration by the Representatives of the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, in General Congress assembled.

When in the course of human events it becomes necessary for ^{one} people to dissolve the political bands which have connected them with another, and to assume among the powers of the earth the ^{separate and equal} station to which the laws of nature and of nature’s God entitle them, a decent respect to the opinions of mankind requires that they should declare the causes which impel them to ~~the~~ ^{separation}.

We hold these truths to be ^{self-evident}, that all men are created equal, that they are ^{endowed by their Creator with} certain unalienable rights, that among ^{these} are ~~life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness~~ ^{life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness}; that to secure these ^{rights}, governments are instituted among men, deriving their just powers from the consent of the governed; that whenever any form of government becomes destructive of these ends, it is the right of the people to alter or to abolish it, and to institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles and organizing its powers in such form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness.

Inserting God.

The committee that edited Thomas Jefferson’s draft of the Declaration of Independence altered Jefferson’s vague “from that equal creation” to the more direct “endowed by their Creator.”

★ CURIOUS MIX ★ IN THE CONTINENTAL CONGRESS

*How Christians and deists
worked together in the war effort.*

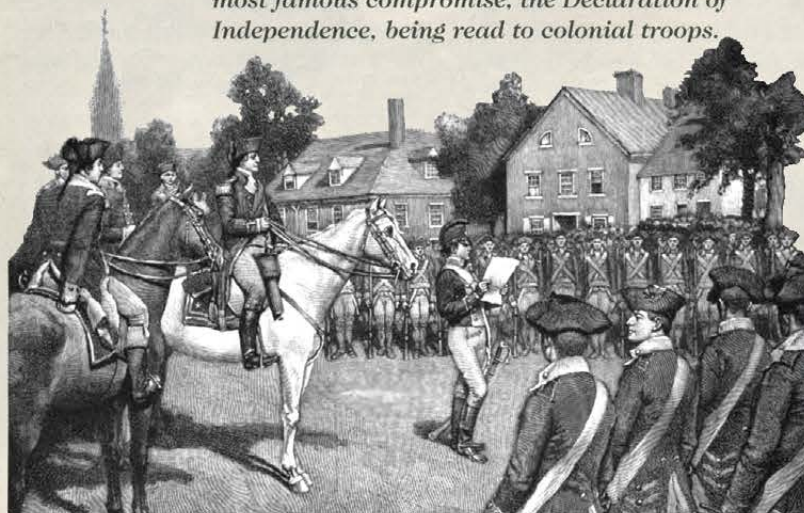
Many supporters of the Revolution were deists. With leadership from Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Jefferson (and arguably John Adams and George Washington), they maintained a dominant presence in the Continental Congress, the body that governed American affairs from 1774 to 1789. At the same time, the Continental Congress was populated with traditional Christians like John Jay.

Congress, however, sought to model the kind of cooperation between Christians and rationalists that it hoped would be observed across the colonies. For example, the Declaration of Independence, in its four references to God—"Nature's God," the "Creator," the "Supreme Judge of the World," and "Divine Providence"—were essentially deist terms that Christian congressmen consented to because they in no way denied Christian truth.

Yet during the eight-year Revolutionary War, the annual thanksgiving and fast-day proclamations issued by Congress and observed throughout the colonies were written with the awareness that the overwhelming majority of religious Americans were Christian. The proclamations therefore regularly invoked the name of Jesus Christ and asked for his blessings upon the war effort.

—Derek H. Davis

*HEAR YE! HEAR YE! The Continental Congress's
most famous compromise, the Declaration of
Independence, being read to colonial troops.*



John Adams was led to say, in the months before the signing of the Declaration of Independence, "They [the clergy] engage with a fervor that will produce wonderful effects. Those . . . of every denomination . . . thunder and lighten every Sabbath."

This religious zeal was to some extent an outgrowth of the Great Awakening, the great evangelical revival that spread through the colonies from roughly 1735 to 1755. Thousands of conversions took place, and many observers, including

the Awakening's greatest theologian, Jonathan Edwards, saw America becoming the center of God's kingdom on earth. The conversions were proof that world history was culminating. The creation of new, converted men, especially political leaders, would make possible the realization of God's promised kingdom. Edwards believed change was good for man and society, and this new evangelical emphasis helped focus American discontent. In particular, it offered a new vision that allowed for a breaking with the past.

The new vision corresponded with New England Puritans' vision of themselves as God's "New Israel." Puritans and their various denominational descendants—Congregationalists, Presbyterians, Baptists, and German and Dutch Reformed—supported independence because they believed in this vision. In the frantic days preceding the Continental Congress's Declaration of Independence, Ebenezer Baldwin of Connecticut was only one of many contemplating the possibility that America might become "the principal seat of the glorious kingdom, which Christ shall erect upon Earth in the latter days."

Earthly utopia

Enlightenment rationalists approached these same themes from a significantly different direction.

The Enlightenment was a 1700s movement that elevated reason over revelation as the chief source and test of humankind's knowledge. The achievements of Sir Isaac Newton and other astronomers and mathematicians gave to people a new confidence in the power of human reason, without the assistance of divine revelation, to grasp more fully God's government of the universe. The Enlightenment promised to reveal the mysteries of God's created handiwork because, as religious historian Sidney Ahlstrom put it, "Reason and scientific knowledge could supply all the necessary elements of religion and ethics, though many might concede that revelation was still needed by the masses."

Howard Pyle "Reading the Declaration before Washington's Army, July 9, 1776" (Harper's July 1892)



God and the founding documents. *The Declaration of Independence, being signed here, contains four references to God; the United States Constitution, endorsed only 12 years later by many of the same men, contains none—thus ensuring ongoing debate as to whether the U. S. is grounded on religious or rationalist values.*

For example, Enlightenment thinking about liberty began not in the Bible but in the social contract and natural right theories of such philosophers as John Milton, Algernon Sydney, and especially John Locke. Locke held that all people possessed the natural rights of life, liberty, and property, and if the enjoyment of these rights were interfered with by the civil sovereign, the people had the right to revolt and form a new government.

Outside of the Bible, the writings of Locke were the most frequently cited source for justifying the Revolution. Not coincidentally, Thomas Jefferson's Declaration of Independence was grounded in Locke's philosophy, especially as it enumerated the various colonial liberties that the British government had violated.

More importantly, the Enlightenment had its own take on the future. Enlightenment colonists saw the Revolution as promising an imminent and radical transformation of

the world and the universal establishment of peace, freedom, and morality. This utopian vision was a secular version of the millennial goals, and even the spirit, of more biblically oriented Christians.

Its key terms, however, were not those of Scripture but of political ideals: liberty, reason, progress, and the rights of man. Newspapers of the era were full of columns upholding visions of a future era of liberty and peace that were not dependent upon Scripture. The *Boston Gazette*, for example, described America rising to that "happy period" when "virtue and liberty [shall] reign here without a foe, until rolling years shall measure time no more." And the *New York Journal* urged perseverance in the Revolutionary cause until "true freedom and liberty shall reign triumphant over the whole globe."

Framing the Revolution

So, was the American Revolution motivated primarily by Christian or

deist ideas? Though the answer is complex, we can probably answer primarily Christian. Much of the Revolution's ideological underpinnings were theological arguments advanced by Christians. And even when rationalists fueled the independence movement, they often employed if not the exact words certainly the prevailing tone of orthodox Christianity.

It is safe to say that the Revolution would neither have been commenced nor sustained on the strength of one of these groups alone. Both Christians and rationalists argued for the Revolution in a compelling religious framework, assuring devotees of both camps, especially those who would fight and even die for the cause of independence, that their efforts were looked upon with favor from heaven. **CH**

DEREK H. DAVIS is director of the J. M. Dawson Institute of Church-State Studies at Baylor University in Waco, Texas.

★ THE PRICE OF DISSENT ★

*Christians who argued against independence
suffered for it.*

Loyalists, especially strong in New York and among many Anglicans in the South, opposed armed resistance for two reasons. First, many were monarchists, who believed that society must have a central sovereign, else it lapse into anarchy, where every person was a law unto himself.

Second, they were traditional Christians who believed that scriptural injunctions to obey government were absolute. Was England any worse than Rome at the time of Christ? Of course not. Yet neither Christ nor his disciples counseled revolution. Indeed, they counseled just the opposite: "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's."

For their loyalty to England, these "royalists" suffered every form of insult and humiliation. The freedom of expression desired by patriots was not a freedom they extended to their antagonists. Loyalist presses were smashed, and loyalists often tarred and feathered (an extremely painful and even life-threatening form of humiliation). Their civil rights were suspended and their properties seized. Most of them fled to Canada or to England. A few (most notoriously, Benedict Arnold) served in the British army. In hardly any cases did they recover what was lost in the Revolution.

Pacifist opposition to the war was concentrated in Pennsylvania. Quakers, Mennonites, and Amish refused to fight, and for their refusal were suppressed and humiliated like the royalists. Still, they stubbornly held their ground. In one graphic account, Quakers met in the midst of the battle of Monmouth and refused to leave their meeting even as the battle raged all about.

Often the pacifists served in hospitals, tending to



PUNISHING DISSENT. As British-American tensions heightened, patriots became less tolerant of loyalists. Here a supporter of the 1765 Stamp Act is tarred and feathered—only one of the severe measures employed to defend the "cause of liberty."

both British and American wounded. This infuriated the patriots, but they could do little about it if they wanted their own tended to. In fact, the hospital in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, became a medical center in the Revolution.

—Harry S. Stout

Selfish, Ungrateful Rebels

Many devout Christians were deeply troubled
by the drive for independence.

As the rhetoric for independence heated up, so did the anxieties of many Christians, who were not convinced that independence, let alone armed rebellion, was justified biblically.

One such person was John Wesley, whose Methodist movement was taking root in America. He was concerned about what he believed were unchristian attitudes of Americans. In *A Calm Address to Our American Colonies* (1775) he tried to push Americans toward a different course.

One writer asserts twenty times, "He that is taxed without his own consent, that is, without being represented, is a slave."

I answer, no. I have no representative in Parliament, but I am taxed, yet I am no slave. Yea, nine in ten throughout England have no representative, no vote, yet they are no slaves; they enjoy both civil and religious liberty to the utmost extent.

He replies, "But they may have votes if they will; they may purchase freeholds." What! Can every man in England purchase a freehold [property that entitled one to vote]? No, not one in an hundred. But be that as it may, they have no vote now; yet they are no slaves, they are the freest men in the whole world.

Who then is a slave? Look into America, and you may easily see. See that Negro, fainting under the load, bleeding under the lash! He is a slave. And is there no difference between him and his master? Yes. The one is screaming, "Murder! Slavery!" the other silently bleeds and dies!

But wherein then consists the difference between liberty and slavery? Herein: You and I, and the English in

general, go where we will and enjoy the fruit of our labors: this is liberty. The Negro does not: this is slavery.

Is not then all this outcry about



The most famous critic of Americans who were "in an uproar" about liberty, John Wesley.

liberty and slavery mere rant, and playing upon words? . . .

But whence then is all this hurry and tumult? Why is America all in an uproar? If you can yet give yourselves time to think, you will see the plain case is this:

A few years ago, you were assaulted by enemies [in the French and Indian War], whom you were not well able to resist. You represented this to your mother-country and desired her assistance. You [were] largely assisted, and by that means wholly delivered from all your enemies.

After a time, your mother country, desiring to be reimbursed for some part of the large expense she

had been at, laid a small tax (which she had always a right to do) on one of her colonies.

But how is it possible that the taking of this reasonable and legal step should have set all America in a flame? . . .

Can you hope for a more desirable form of government, either in England or America, than that which you now enjoy? After all the vehement cry for liberty, what more liberty can you have? What more religious liberty can you desire than that which you enjoy already?

May not every one among you worship God according to his own conscience? What civil liberty can you desire which you are not already possessed of? Do not you sit without restraint "every man under his own vine?" Do you not, every one high or low, enjoy the fruit of your labor? This is real, rational liberty such as is enjoyed by Englishmen alone and not by any other people in the habitable world.

Conflict of loyalties

Emotions ran perhaps highest in Anglican churches. In their ordination vows, Church of England clergy had promised to not only pray for England's king but to acknowledge him head of their church. After independence was declared, many American Anglican clergy remained faithful to their vows, which led to some heart-rending consequences. An excerpt from Philip Reading's letter to his superiors (1776):

Ever since I entered into the ministry, I had made it a constant rule to read over at proper intervals



Act like Christians. A Quaker meeting. Quakers, along with other pacifists (like the Mennonites), refused to countenance rebellion. Instead they asked angry Americans, "Have integrity and godly simplicity been maintained and religiously regarded? Hath a religious care to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly, been evident? Hath the precept of Christ, to do unto others as we would they should do unto us, been the governing rule of our conduct? . . . Or have pride, wantonness, luxury, profaneness, a partial spirit, and forgetfulness of the goodness and mercies of God become lamentably prevalent?"

Library of Congress (LC-USZ62-5808)

my ordination vows, the Articles of Religion and canons [regulations] of our church, but on the present occasion I read them more attentively than ever. The more I considered them, the more I was confirmed in my opinion of the strict obligation I was under to adhere inviolably to what they enjoined . . . to maintain the King's supremacy in Church and State. . . .

Such being my sentiments on this subject, I determined for the sake of keeping up the church in its full visibility, agreeably to my obligations, to continue reading the public service entire as usual—notwithstanding independence had been declared by the Congress. And for one or two Sundays, [I] prosecuted my purpose without interruption.

But on the 21st day of July, immediately after the first [Scripture] lesson, our senior church warden (out of pure kindness to and friendship for me), [came] up to the reading desk, [and] earnestly advised me to omit the prayers for the king and royal family, as the temper of the

prevailing party was such that they would no longer bear the reading if those prayers should be continued.

I told him that the present was not a fit season nor the place a proper one for discussing so interesting a subject: that I should for that day at least proceed with the service as usual because whenever I was compelled to desist from using the prayers for the king and the royal family I should desist likewise from using any other part of the public service—and that consequently the church would be shut up [closed].

Being now assured on all hands of the danger with which I was threatened if I persisted in complying with my oaths, vows, and subscriptions, I thought it high time to consult my own and my family's safety. And therefore on the Sunday following (July 28), when the people were assembled for public worship, before I began the service, I explained to them the obligations the clergy of the Church of England are under to assert the king's supremacy in their public ministrations, and [I] ac-

quainted them that as I could not read the liturgy agreeably to the prescribed form without offending against our government and incurring the resentment of the people, I should on that day declare the church shut up for six weeks.

Accordingly, after [the] Nicene Creed, I declared . . . that as I had no design to resist the authority of the new government on one hand, and as I was determined on the other not to incur the heavy guilt of perjury by a breach of the most solemn promises, I should decline attending on the public worship for a short time from that day. . . .

I proposed to say more on the subject, but the scene became too affecting for me to bear a farther part in it. Many of the people present were overwhelmed with deep distress and the cheeks of some began to be bathed with tears. My own tongue faltered, and my firmness forsook me. Beckoning therefore to the clerk to sing the Psalm, I went up into the pulpit and having exhorted the members of the church to hold

fast the profession of their faith without wavering, and to depend upon the promises of a faithful God for their present comfort and future relief, I finished this irksome business, and Apoquinimick Church [Delaware] from that day has continued shut up.

The great contradiction

John Allen, an obscure Baptist minister recently arrived in Boston from England, preached at Second Baptist Church in 1772 on "An Oration on the Beauties of Liberty." Even though Allen spoke eloquently for liberty, he did not flinch from addressing the great contradiction he saw in America.

Every tie of nature, every sensation of humanity, every bowel of pity, every compassion as a Christian, engages me to speak for the personal liberty and freedom of those who are the most distressed of all human beings, the natives of Africa. Were they thus distressed by Indians, Mahometans [Muslims], or Turks with respect to their liberty, they would have a right to be redressed and set free. But for mankind to be distressed and kept in slavery by Christians, by those who love the gospel of Christ, for such to buy their brethren . . . and bind them to be slaves to them and their heirs for life!—be astonished, ye Christians, at this!

And what is more shocking even to the tenderness of nature is to export them for filthy lucre into the hands of men-tyrants. But what is more alarming yet, and exceeds all bounds, is for one Christian and member of a church to export another and banish her to be a slave when in full communion in the church. Was ever such a thing heard of in the house of God before!

Tell it not in Gath! Publish it not in the streets of Boston! Shall no plea be heard? Shall no argument prevail to let these oppressed ones go free? Have Christians lost all the tenderness of nature, the feelings of humanity, or the more refined sensations of Christianity? Or have the ministers in silence forgot to

Charlestown, July 24th, 1769.

TO BE SOLD,
On THURSDAY the third Day
of AUGUST next,
A CARGO
OF
NINETY-FOUR
PRIME, HEALTHY
NEGROES,
CONSISTING OF
Thirty-nine MEN, Fifteen BOYS,
Twenty-four WOMEN, and
Sixteen GIRLS.
JUST ARRIVED,
In the Brigantine DEMBIA, Francis Bare, Master, from SIERRA-
LEON, by
DAVID & JOHN DEAS.

Blind spot. A 1769 advertisement from South Carolina. Many Americans argued for their own liberty by night—and bought and sold human beings by day.

shew their people this iniquity? O could they bear to see—to see, did I say?—nay to feel their children rent from their arms and see them bound in irons and banished to be slaves! O killing thought! . . .

This unlawful, inhuman practice is a sure way for mankind to ruin America and for Christians to bring their children, and their children's children, to a morsel of bread. Much has been wrote, and well wrote, to

dissuade the Americans from the practice of so great an evil. Many begin to listen to the laws of humanity and the force of the argument. But surely what the prophet Isaiah says will be sufficient with every true minister of the gospel, and with every Christian and Son of Liberty in America—Isa. 58:6: "Loose the bands of wickedness, undo the heavy burdens, let the oppressed go free, that ye break every yoke." CH

A Revolution in Religion, Too

The Revolutionary War changed American Christianity,
and it still sparks debate today.

* A conversation with MARK NOLL *

In this issue, we've looked at how Christianity influenced the Revolutionary War. Now we turn to the next question, How did the war influence the American church? And where do we see its impact still today? To help us think about these questions, Christian History spoke with Mark Noll, professor of history at Wheaton College (Illinois). He is the author of many books, including A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada (Eerdmans, 1992) and Christians in the American Revolution (Eerdmans, 1977).

CHRISTIAN HISTORY: In the 1760s and 1770s, Christian faith infused the cause of independence with religious meaning and helped justify war with Britain. Did this religious atmosphere boost people's devotion? For example, did more people start going to church after July 4, 1776?

MARK NOLL: In general, the war hurt religious practice even though prominent patriot Christians lent moral and religious support for the war. Believers' energy went toward the war effort, not toward building up the local church. In some areas, like New York, Boston, and some places in the South, arguments between loyalists and patriots split congregations.

Where fighting took place, of course, congregations were disrupted and some people killed. New Jersey, South Carolina, New York, and Philadelphia suffered most from warfare. (New England, surprisingly, did not; after the Battle of Bunker Hill, it was pretty much spared.)

One possible exception to religious decline was found on the frontier, in non-established churches. For example, Henry Alline, "the George Whitefield of Nova Scotia," sparked a revival among colonists in that province who remained neutral in the war. But overall church membership probably declined throughout the 1770s and 1780s.

Which denominations were particularly hard hit?

The Anglican Church, which became the Protestant Episcopal Church, was devastated. On the eve of the Revolution, along with the Congregationalists and Presbyterians, it was one of the three most important denominations in America. It was the established church in New York City and several southern colonies. Because of its association with England, the new Episcopal Church struggled and survived only as a small, relatively insignificant denomination.

More surprisingly, the Congregationalists of New England suffered.

1776-1976



WHERE THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS, THERE IS LIBERTY.

SECOND CORINTHIANS 3:17

Billy Graham Center Museum

God and country. As this bi-centennial banner shows, many Americans still believe faith and patriotism go hand in hand, and that spiritual and political liberties are intimately connected. The still-popular hymn "My Country, 'Tis of Thee" (written 1832), concludes, "Our fathers' God to Thee, / Author of liberty, / To Thee we sing; / Long may our land be bright, / with freedom's holy light; / Protect us by Thy might, / Great God, our King."

In 1775 they were the largest denomination in North America, and given their support for the war, you would have thought they would have taken off.

That did not happen. Congregationalists, because of their Puritan roots, were more comfortable with social harmony and unity, and even insisted upon some degree of religious conformity. This did not suit them well in the new hurly-burly individualism of American life after the Revolution.

Which denominations did well after the war?

Two groups did spectacularly. First, the Baptists: They had existed in relatively small, out-of-the-way groups in the colonial period. After the war, particularly in the mid-South, the South, and on the frontier of the Middle Colonies, the fiercely independent Baptists exploded.

Second, the Methodists, who grew even faster: Methodists were a movement within Anglicanism before the war and had only a handful of mem-

bers when the war started. Most Methodist ministers, like Francis Asbury, were, in effect, sequestered during the war. Afterwards, the Methodist combination of firm leadership and pioneering attention to ordinary life led to spectacular growth. By 1830 they were the largest denomination in the U. S.

A millenarian passion—the belief that in America God was creating a new order in which his principles would rule—helped justify independence. How long did that passion last?

There were spikes and valleys during the war. During the enthusiastic early years, especially after victories over the British, it was high. But as the war dragged on into the 1780s, confidence in the coming kingdom declined.

After the Constitution was approved, a few important public voices still spoke in such terms. Elias Boudinot, the first president of Congress (under the Articles of Confederation) and an ardent Christian layman, preached a sermon in the early 1790s in which he said that what had happened in the U. S. was probably leading to the glorious end when the rule of Christ would sweep from shore to shore.

That sentiment, however, declined rapidly when the Democratic Republicans under Jefferson replaced Federalists Washington and Adams. Then we see the opposite—a kind of apocalypticism, in which evangelicals especially feared that Jefferson would lead the nation into another godless and bloody French Revolution. To these Christians, the end of the age would come not as freedom spread out from shore to shore but first as a torrent of evil, in a kind of premillennial judgment.

By the time of the Constitutional Convention, were religious concerns still vital?

Only minimally. Some Christians were concerned that God was not

mentioned in the Constitution, but others rejoiced over that fact! Some insisted upon a Bill of Rights that would protect religious freedom; some orthodox, evangelical Christians were not worried about this at all. Overall, explicitly Christian matters were not a concern in 1787–89 as they had been in 1775.

Today many people hotly debate our nation's philosophical origins, whether they were Christian or rationalist, communal or individualistic. Why the near-religious passion about a historical question?

The American Revolution remains a signpost, even a foundation, for contemporary discussion about the American experiment, the American way of life. So there is almost always contemporary political interest in historical discussions about what ideas influenced the American Revolution. Modern Christians want to find a specifically Christian root; modern communitarians want to find a communitarian root; modern liberals want to see an individualistic orientation, and on it goes. The historical question is intimately bound up with the contemporary search for a better American way of life.

Where do you stand in these debates?

I find myself troubled by them because the modern discussion is almost always simpler than the historical reality of the 1770s. My own feeling is that almost all of these ideologies contributed to the American Revolution—with different weight, different effects, and in different regions—and most historians agree. It is the historian's job to sort out the relative importance of these influences.

The historical task and the contemporary task are related but separate. Modern debates are concerned about what America should be like today. The historian tries to discover what beliefs energized independence



*Political
loyalties can
never be as deep
or as broad
as the bond that
unites believers
in Christ.*

—Mark Noll

back then. The American Revolution at best can only advise us about modern questions. We are under no moral or historical obligation to continue the American experiment based on the founding fathers' vision, whatever it might have been. On the other hand, as we debate today, we would be foolish to shut our ears to the voice of history.

Another discussion among Christians has to do with the justness of the American Revolution. By traditional just-war standards, set out first by Augustine, was the American Revolution a just war?

I thought this through at some length during the bicentennial years, 1975–76, when many Christians were asking that question. I came to the conclusion that on classic just-war standards, the American Revolution

did not qualify. The British did indeed clamp down economically and politically in the 1770s, but it's also pretty clear that Americans were not sufficiently oppressed to justify taking up arms. In fact, despite the many restrictions placed upon them by the British, they were still one of the freest people on the face of the earth.

But this modern discussion is a bit academic because at the time only a few believers spoke about the war in just-war terms. Furthermore, despite my belief now that the war was not just, had I lived then, my American context and evangelical convictions would have swept me up into the patriotic cause.

How has studying the Revolution for some 25 years made a difference in your personal faith?

First, it has reminded me of how powerful, for good and for ill, religious motives can be in certain political circumstances. There's no doubt that Christian reasoning and emotion added tremendously to the drive for American independence. I believe that Christian energy was for the most part understandable, and Christian support for the war gave the churches an opening with Americans that their counterparts in Europe soon lost.

Second and more sobering, I've seen the damage done to Christian faith when there is a confusion between loyalties. In some instances, on both the British and American sides, loyalty to the political cause was equated with loyalty to Christ. That type of political foundation can never be as deep, as broad, or as important as the bond that unites believers in Christ. Today it is still all too easy to subordinate my faith in Christ to political or social convictions. Studying the Revolution has helped me remember that I should be loyal to different things in different ways, and that my deepest loyalty should always belong to Christ. **CH**

Michael Hudson

CHRISTIANITY AND THE AMERICAN REVOLUTION

★ DAVID W. KLING ★

The following books will be especially rewarding to the diligent reader.

Revival background

Arguing for an explicit relationship between the Great Awakening and the Revolution are:

- Alan E. Heimert, *Religion and the American Mind from the Great Awakening to the Revolution* (Harvard, 1966);
- Patricia U. Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (Oxford, 1986); and
- Harry S. Stout, *The New England Soul: Preaching and Religious Culture in Colonial New England* (Oxford, 1986).

A religious revolution

Penetrating essays linking religious thought to the Revolution are found in:

- Sidney E. Mead, *The Lively Experiment: The Shaping of Christianity in America* (Harper and Row, 1963) and
- Jerald C. Brauer, ed., *Religion and the American Revolution* (Fortress, 1976).
- Mark A. Noll, *Christians in the American Revolution* (Eerdmans, 1977) surveys the varied Christian responses to the Revolution.
- Edwin S. Gaustad, *Faith of Our Fathers: Religion and the New Nation* (Harper & Row, 1987) surveys these men's religious beliefs in general, and in particular in *Thomas Jefferson: A Religious Biography* (Eerdmans, 1996).

For the interaction between republicanism and religious thought, see:



SPONTANEOUS GEORGE. After Washington took the presidential oath in 1792, before he took his hand off the Bible, he suddenly added, "So help me God." At the time, the phrase was not in the oath, but it has been a regular part of it since.

- Nathan O. Hatch, *The Sacred Cause of Liberty: Republican Thought and the Millennium in Revolutionary New England* (Yale, 1977) and
- Ruth Bloch, *Visionary Republic: Millennial Themes in American Thought, 1756-1800* (Cambridge, 1985).

• Russell E. Richey and Donald G. Jones, eds., *American Civil Religion* (Harper & Row, 1974) feature essays that consider how the revolutionary experience shaped America's civil religion.

Out of the mainstream

- Rosemary Radford Ruether and Rosemary Skinner Keller, eds., *Women and Religion in America*, vol. 2, *The Colonial and Revolutionary Periods* (Harper & Row, 1983); see especially Keller's chapter.

especially Keller's chapter.

- Ronald Hoffman and Peter J. Albert, eds., *Religion in a Revolutionary Age* (Virginia, 1994) contains chapters on the religious experiences of women, blacks, workers, and evangelicals in Revolutionary America.
- Charles H. Metzger, *Catholics and the American Revolution* (Loyola, 1962).
- Stephen A. Marini, *The Radical Sects of Revolutionary New England* (Harvard, 1982).
- Peter Brock, *Pacifism in the United States: From the Colonial Era to the First World War* (Princeton, 1968).

DAVID W. KLING is assistant professor of religious studies at the University of Miami and author of *A Field of Divine Wonders: The New Divinity and Village Revivals in Northwestern Connecticut, 1792-1822* (Penn State, 1993).



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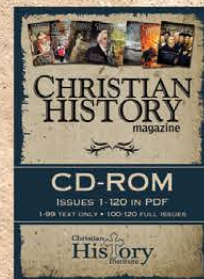
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