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# Religion and the Founding of the American Republic



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## I. America as a Religious Refuge: The Seventeenth Century

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Many of the British North American colonies that eventually formed the United States of America were settled in the seventeenth century by men and women, who, in the face of European persecution, refused to compromise passionately held religious convictions and fled Europe. The New England colonies, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland were conceived and established "as plantations of religion." Some settlers who arrived in these areas came for secular motives--"to catch fish" as one New Englander put it--but the great majority left Europe to worship God in the way they believed to be correct. They enthusiastically supported the efforts of their leaders to create "a city on a hill" or a "holy experiment," whose success would prove that God's plan for his churches could be successfully realized in the American wilderness. Even colonies like Virginia, which were planned as commercial ventures, were led by entrepreneurs who considered themselves "militant Protestants" and who worked diligently to promote the prosperity of the church.



### EUROPEAN PERSECUTION

#### Execution of Mennonites

This engraving depicts the execution of David van der Leyen and Levina Ghyselins, described variously as Dutch Anabaptists or Mennonites, by Catholic authorities in Ghent in 1554. Strangled and burned, van der Leyen was finally dispatched with an iron fork. Bracht's *Martyr's Mirror* is considered by modern Mennonites as second only in importance to the Bible in perpetuating their faith.



*[Murder of David van der Leyen and Levina Ghyselins](#)*,

The religious persecution that drove settlers from Europe to the British North American colonies sprang from the conviction, held by Protestants and Catholics alike, that uniformity of religion must exist in any given society. This conviction rested on the belief that there was one true religion and that it was the duty of the civil authorities to impose it, forcibly if necessary, in the interest of saving the souls of all citizens. Nonconformists could expect

Ghent, 1554

Engraving by J. Luyken, from T. J. V. Bracht (or Thieleman van Bracht), Het Bloedig Tooneel De Martelaers Spiegel. . . .

Amsterdam: J. van der Deyster, et al., 1685  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (1)

no mercy and might be executed as heretics. The dominance of the concept, denounced by Roger Williams as "inforced uniformity of religion," meant majority religious groups who controlled political power punished dissenters in their midst. In some areas Catholics persecuted Protestants, in others Protestants persecuted Catholics, and in still others Catholics and Protestants persecuted wayward coreligionists. Although England renounced religious persecution in 1689, it persisted on the European continent. Religious persecution, as observers in every century have commented, is often bloody and implacable and is remembered and resented for generations.



**A Jesuit Disemboweled**  
Jesuits like John Ogilvie (Ogilby) (1580-1615) were under constant surveillance and threat from the Protestant governments of England and Scotland. Ogilvie was sentenced to death by a Glasgow court and hanged and mutilated on March 10, 1615.

John Ogilvie (Ogilby), Societas Jesu, 1615

Engraving from Mathias Tanner, Societas Jesu usque ad sanguinis et vitae profusionem Militans. . . .  
Prague: Typis Universitatis Carolo-Ferdinandae, 1675  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (4)

**The Expulsion of the Salzburgers**

On October 31, 1731, the Catholic ruler of Salzburg, Austria, Archbishop Leopold von Firmian, issued an edict expelling as many as 20,000 Lutherans from his principality. Many propertyless Lutherans, given only eight days to leave their homes, froze to death as they drifted through the winter seeking sanctuary. The wealthier ones who were allowed three months to dispose of their property fared better. Some of these Salzburgers reached London, from whence they sailed to Georgia. Others found new homes in the Netherlands and East Prussia.



Lutherans leaving Salzburg, 1731

Engraving by David Böecklin from Die Freundliche Bewillkommung Leipzig: 1732  
Rare Books Division. The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (7)

**A Pair of Salzburgers, Fleeing Their Homes**

These religious refugees flee Salzburg carrying with them religious volumes. The man has under one arm a copy of the Augsburg Confession; under the other is a theological work by Johann Arndt (1555-1621). The woman is carrying the Bible. The legend between them says: "We are driven into exile for the Gospel's sake; we leave our homeland and are now in God's hands." At the top is a scriptural verse, Matthew 24:20. "but pray that your flight does not occur in the winter or on the Sabbath."



Salzburgische Emigranten [left page] [right page]

Engraving from [Christopher Sancke?], Ausführliche Historie derer Emigranten oder Vertriebenen Lutheraner aus dem Erz-Bistum Salzburg, Leipzig: 1732

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (8)

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### **Persecution of Huguenots by Catholics**

The slaughter of Huguenots (French Protestants) by Catholics at Sens, Burgundy in 1562 occurred at the beginning of more than thirty years of religious strife between French Protestants and Catholics. These wars produced numerous atrocities. The worst was the notorious St. Bartholomew's Day Massacre in Paris, August 24, 1572. Thousands of Huguenots were butchered by Roman Catholic mobs. Although an accommodation between the two sides was sealed in 1598 by the Edict of Nantes, religious privileges of Huguenots eroded during the seventeenth century and were extinguished in 1685 by the revocation of the Edict. Perhaps as many as 400,000 French Protestants emigrated to various parts of the world, including the British North American colonies.



#### Massacre Fait a Sens en Bourgogne par la Populace au Mois d'Avril 1562 . . .

Lithograph in A. Challe, Histoire des Guerres du Calvinisme et de la Ligue dans l'Auxerrois, le Sénonais et les autres contrées qui forment aujourd'hui le département de l'Yonne

Auxerre: Perriquet et Rouille, 1863

[General Collections](#), Library of Congress (2)

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### **Persecution of Catholics by Huguenots**

In the areas of France they controlled, Huguenots at least matched the harshness of the persecutions of their Catholic opponents. Atrocities A, B, and C, depictions that are possibly exaggerated for use as propaganda, are located by the author in St. Macaire, Gascony. In scene A, a priest is disemboweled, his entrails wound up on a stick until they are torn out. In illustration B a priest is buried alive, and in C Catholic children are hacked to pieces. Scene D, alleged to have occurred in the village of Mans, was "too loathsome" for one nineteenth-century commentator to translate from the French. It shows a priest whose genitalia were cut off and grilled. Forced to eat his roasted private parts, the priest was then dissected by his torturers so they can observe him digesting his meal.



#### Frightful Outrages perpetrated by the Huguenots in France

Engraving from Richard Verstegen, Théâtre des Cruautez des Hérétiques de notre temps

Antwerp: Adrien Hubert, 1607

Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington, D.C. (3)

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### **Drowning of Protestants**

Shown here is a depiction of the murder by Irish Catholics of approximately one hundred Protestants from Loughgall Parish, County Armagh, at the bridge over the River Bann near Portadown, Ulster. This atrocity occurred at the beginning of the Irish Rebellion of 1641. Having held the Protestants as prisoners and tortured them, the Catholics drove them "like hogs" to the bridge, where they were stripped naked and forced into the water below at swordpoint. Survivors of the plunge were shot.



#### Massacre of the Protestant Martyrs at the Bridge over the River Bann in Ireland, 1641

Engraving from Matthew Taylor, England's Bloody Tribunal: Or, Popish Cruelty Displayed . . .

London: J. Cooke, 1772

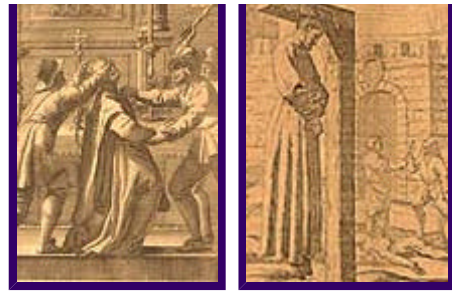
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (5)

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### **Persecution of Jesuits in England**



In the image on the left is Brian Cansfield (1581-1643), a Jesuit priest seized while at prayer by English Protestant authorities in Yorkshire. Cansfield was beaten and imprisoned under harsh conditions. He died on August 3, 1643 from the effects of his ordeal. At the right is another Jesuit priest, Ralph Corbington (Corby) (ca. 1599-1644), who was hanged by the English government in London, September 17, 1644, for professing his faith.



*Die Societas Jesu in Europa, 1643-1644 [left page] [right page]*  
from Mathias Tanner, *Die Gesellshafft Jesu biss zur vergiessung ihres Blutes wider den Gotzendienst Unglauben und Laster . . .*  
Prague: Carlo Ferdinandeischen Universitat Buchdruckeren, 1683  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (6)

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### **Martyrdom of John Rogers**

The execution in 1555 of John Rogers (1500-1555) is portrayed here in the 9th edition of the famous Protestant martyrology, *Fox's Book of Martyrs*. Rogers was a Catholic priest who converted to Protestantism in the 1530s under the influence of William Tyndale and assisted in the publication of Tyndale's English translations of the Bible. Burned alive at Smithfield on February 4, 1555, Rogers became the "first Protestant martyr" executed by England's Catholic Queen Mary. He was charged with heresy, including denial of the real presence of Christ in the sacrament of communion.



*The Burning of Master John Rogers*  
Engraving from John Fox, *The Third Volume of the Ecclesiastical History containing the Acts and Monuments of Martyrs. . . .*  
London: Company of Stationers, 9th edition, 1684  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (9)

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### **John Rogers Portrayed in New England**

Two centuries after John Rogers's execution, his ordeal, with depictions of his wife and ten children added to increase the pathos, became a staple of *The New England Primer*. *The Primer* supplemented the picture of Rogers' immolation with a long, versified speech, said to be the dying martyr's advice to his children, which urged them to "Keep always God before your Eyes" and to "Abhor the arrant Whore of Rome, and all her Blasphemies." This recommendation, read by generations of young New Englanders, doubtless helped to fuel the anti-Catholic prejudice that flourished in that region well into the nineteenth century.



*Mr. John Rogers*  
Woodblock print from *The New-England Primer Improved*  
Boston: A. Ellison, 1773  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (10)

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## **CROSSING THE OCEAN TO KEEP THE FAITH:**

## THE PURITANS

Puritans were English Protestants who wished to reform and purify the Church of England of what they considered to be unacceptable residues of Roman Catholicism. In the 1620s leaders of the English state and church grew increasingly unsympathetic to Puritan demands. They insisted that the Puritans conform to religious practices that they abhorred, removing their ministers from office and threatening them with "extirpation from the earth" if they did not fall in line. Zealous Puritan laymen received savage punishments. For example, in 1630 a man was sentenced to life imprisonment, had his property confiscated, his nose slit, an ear cut off, and his forehead branded "S.S." (sower of sedition).

Beginning in 1630 as many as 20,000 Puritans emigrated to America from England to gain the liberty to worship God as they chose. Most settled in New England, but some went as far as the West Indies. Theologically, the Puritans were "non-separating Congregationalists." Unlike the Pilgrims, who came to Massachusetts in 1620, the Puritans believed that the Church of England was a true church, though in need of major reforms. Every New England Congregational church was considered an independent entity, beholden to no hierarchy. The membership was composed, at least initially, of men and women who had undergone a conversion experience and could prove it to other members. Puritan leaders hoped (futilely, as it turned out) that, once their experiment was successful, England would imitate it by instituting a church order modeled after the New England Way.

### Richard Mather

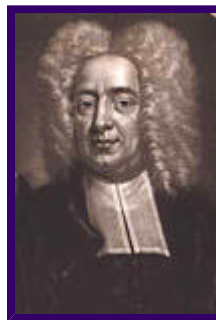
Richard Mather (1596-1669), minister at Dorchester, Massachusetts, 1636-1669, was a principal spokesman for and defender of the Congregational form of church government in New England. In 1648, he drafted the Cambridge Platform, the definitive description of the Congregational system. Mather's son, Increase (1639-1723), and grandson, Cotton (1663-1728), were leaders of New England Congregationalism in their generations.



### Richard Mather

Relief cut by John Foster. Copyprint c. 1670

Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (11)



### Cotton Mather

Cotton Mather (1663-1728), the best-known New England Puritan divine of his generation, was a controversial figure in his own time and remains so among scholars today. A formidable intellect and a prodigious writer, Mather published some 450 books and pamphlets. He was at the center of all of the major political, theological, and scientific controversies of his era.

Mather has been accused, unfairly, of instigating the Salem witchcraft trials.

### Cottonus Matherus S. theologiae doctor regia societas Londonensis. . . .

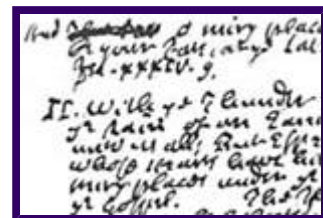
Mezzotint by Peter Pelham  
Boston: 1728, restrike 1860

[Prints & Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (12)

### Sermon by Cotton Mather

Holograph manuscript on paper

[Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (13)





## THE BIBLE COMMONWEALTHS

### The Geneva Bible

The Geneva Bible was published in English in Geneva in 1560 by English reformers who fled to the continent to escape persecutions by Queen Mary. Their leader was William Whittingham, who married a sister of John Calvin. The Geneva Bible was used by the Pilgrims and Puritans in New England until it was gradually replaced by the King James Bible. According to one twentieth-century scholar, "between 1560 . . . and 1630 no fewer than about two hundred editions of the Geneva Bible, either as a whole or of the New Testament separately, appeared. It was the Bible of Shakespeare and of John Bunyan and of Cromwell's Army and of the Pilgrim Fathers."



The New England colonies have often been called "Bible Commonwealths" because they sought the guidance of the scriptures in regulating all aspects of the lives of their citizens. Scripture was cited as authority for many criminal statutes. Shown here are the two Bibles used in seventeenth-century New England and a seventeenth-century law code from Massachusetts that cites scripture.

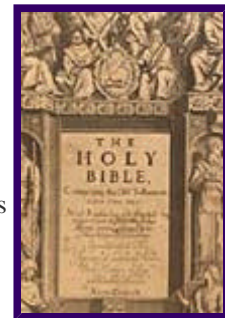
*The Bible and Holy Scriptures Conteyned in the Olde and Newe Testament.*

Geneva: 1560

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (14)

### The King James Bible

The first edition of the King James Bible, also called the "Authorized Version," was composed by a committee of English scholars between 1607 and 1611. The first copy of the King James Bible known to have been brought into the colonies was carried by John Winthrop to Massachusetts in 1630. Gradually the King James Bible supplanted the Geneva Bible and achieved such a monopoly of the affections of the English-speaking peoples that a scholar in 1936 complained that many "seemed to think that the King James Version is the original Bible which God handed down out of heaven, all done up in English by the Lord himself."



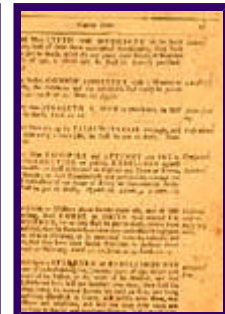
*The Holy Bible, conteyning the Old Testament and the New*

London: Robert Baker, 1611

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (15)

### Seventeenth-Century Laws of Massachusetts

Criminal laws in the early New England colonies were based on the scriptures, especially the Old Testament. Many civil laws and procedures were modelled after the English common law.



The General Laws and Liberties of the Massachusetts Colony:

Revised and Reprinted [right page] [left page]

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Samuel Green, 1672

[Law Library](#), Rare Book Collection, Library of Congress (16)

**The Bay Psalm Book**

The first book published in British North America, what has become known as the Bay Psalm Book, was the work of Richard Mather and two other ministers who transformed the Psalms into verse so they could be sung in the Massachusetts churches. Shown here is one of the eleven surviving copies.



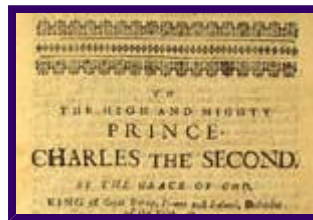
[The Whole Booke of Psalmes Faithfully Translated into English Metre.](#)

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Stephen Daye, 1640

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (17)

**Eliot's Algonquin Language Bible**

Obedient to the New Testament command to preach the Gospel to all nations, ministers in all of the first British North American colonies strove to convert the local native populations to Christianity, often with only modest results. One of the most successful proselytizers was John Eliot (1604-1690), Congregational minister at Roxbury, Massachusetts. His translation of the Bible into the Algonquin Indian language is seen here. At one time Eliot ministered to eleven hundred "Praying Indians," organized into fourteen New England style towns.



[The Holy Bible: Containing the Old Testament and the New, Translated into the Indian Language. . . .](#) [[left page](#)] [[right page](#)]

Cambridge, Massachusetts: Samuel Green and Marmaduke Johnson, 1663

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (18)

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## II. Religion in Eighteenth-Century America

Against a prevailing view that eighteenth-century Americans had not perpetuated the first settlers' passionate commitment to their faith, scholars now identify a high level of religious energy in colonies after 1700. According to one expert, religion was in the "ascension rather than the declension"; another sees a "rising vitality in religious life" from 1700 onward; a third finds religion in many parts of the colonies in a state of "feverish growth." Figures on church attendance and church formation support these opinions. Between 1700 and 1740, an estimated 75 to 80 percent of the population attended churches, which were being built at a headlong pace.

Toward mid-century the country experienced its first major religious revival. The Great Awakening swept the English-speaking world, as religious energy vibrated between England, Wales, Scotland and the American colonies in the 1730s and 1740s. In America, the Awakening signaled the advent of an encompassing evangelicalism--the belief that the essence of religious experience was the "new birth," inspired by the preaching of the Word. It invigorated even as it divided churches. The supporters of the Awakening and its evangelical thrust--Presbyterians, Baptists and Methodists--became the largest American Protestant denominations by the first decades of the nineteenth century. Opponents of the Awakening or those split by it--Anglicans, Quakers, and Congregationalists--were left behind.

Another religious movement that was the antithesis of evangelicalism made its appearance in the eighteenth century. Deism, which emphasized morality and rejected the orthodox Christian view of the divinity of Christ, found advocates among upper-class Americans. Conspicuous among them were Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. Deists, never more than "a minority within a minority," were submerged by evangelicalism in the nineteenth century.



### THE APPEARANCE OF EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY CHURCHES



Churches in eighteenth-century America came in all sizes and shapes, from the plain, modest buildings in newly settled rural areas to elegant edifices in the prosperous cities on the



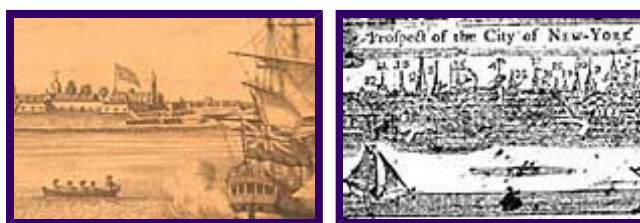
### An Early Episcopal Church

St. James Church, built in South Carolina's oldest Anglican parish outside of Charleston, is thought to have been constructed between 1711 and 1719 during the rectorate of the Reverend Francis le Jau, a missionary of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts.

[St. James Church, Goose Creek, Berkeley County, South Carolina, \[exterior view\] - \[interior view\]](#)

Photograph by Frances Benjamin Johnston (1864-1952), c. 1930  
[Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(50-51\)](#)

churches in the prosperous cities on the eastern seaboard. Churches reflected the customs and traditions as well as the wealth and social status of the denominations that built them. Hence, a new Anglican Church in rural Goose Creek, South Carolina, was fitted out with an impressive wood-carved pulpit, while a fledgling Baptist Church in rural Virginia had only the bare essentials. German churches contained features unknown in English ones.



### Growth of the Eighteenth-Century Church

The growth of the American church in the eighteenth century can be illustrated by changes in city skylines over the course of the century. These three views of New York City in 1690, 1730, and 1771 display the increased number of the city's churches. An empty vista in 1690 had become a forest of eighteen steeples by 1771. Clearly discernable in the 1730 engraving are (from left to right) the spires of Trinity Church (Anglican), the Lutheran Church, the "new" Dutch Reformed Church, the French Protestant Church (Huguenots), City Hall, the "old" Dutch Reformed Church, the Secretary's Office and the church in Fort George.

*Nieuw Amsterdam on the island of Manhattan*  
 Etching, c. 1690. Facsimile  
[Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress \(47\)](#)

*A View of Fort George with the City of New York*  
 Engraving by I. Carwithan, c. 1730  
[Geography & Map Division, Library of Congress \(48\)](#)

*Prospect of the City of New York*  
 Woodcut from Hugh Gainé, *New York Almanac*, 1771. Copyprint  
 The American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (49)

### Christ Church, Philadelphia

Christ Church of Philadelphia is an example of how colonial American congregations, once they became well established and prosperous, built magnificent churches to glorify God. Enlarged and remodelled, the Christ Church building was completed in 1744. A steeple was added ten years later. Contemporaries were in awe of the finished house of worship, one remarking that "it was the handsomest structure of the kind that I ever saw in any part of the world; uniting in the peculiar features of that species of architecture, the most elegant variety of forms, with the most chaste simplicity of combination."



*A South East view of Christ's Church*

Engraving in [Columbian Magazine](#), November 1787- December 1787 Philadelphia: 1787  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (52)

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**A Rural Baptist Church**

The South Quay Baptist Church (top) was founded in 1775, although it was not formally "organized" until ten years later. The difference between the interior of the rural Mount Shiloh Baptist Church and its Anglican counterpart, St. James Church, reveals much about the differences between the denominations that worshiped in each structure.



[Exterior of South Quay Baptist Church](#), Copyprint  
[Interior of Mt. Shiloh Baptist Church](#), Copyprint  
Virginia Baptist Historical Society (53-54)

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**Colonial Baptist Church**

Believed to be the first Baptist church in America, the Providence congregation, founded by Roger Williams, was organized in 1639. The meeting house, shown here, was constructed in 1774-1775 from plans by architect John Brown, after a design by James Gibbs. This church shows that some colonial Baptists had no compunctions about erecting imposing church buildings.



[A S.W. view of the Baptist Meeting House, Providence, R.I.](#)  
Engraving by S. Hill for [Massachusetts Magazine](#)  
or [Monthly Museum of Knowledge and Rational Entertainment](#), August 1789  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (55)

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**Lutheran Church Services**

This view of the interior of a Lutheran Church by Pennsylvania folk artist Lewis Miller (1796-1882) reveals features--wall paintings of great figures of the modern and early church--which would have been absent from English Protestant churches of the time. Notice the homey interruptions to worship in early America such as the sexton chasing a dog out of the sanctuary and a member stoking a stove.

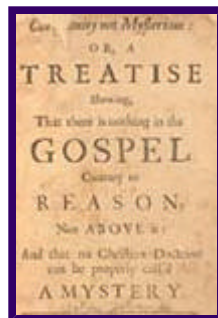


[In Side of the Old Lutheran Church in 1800, inYork, Pa.](#)  
Watercolor with pen and ink by Lewis Miller, c. 1800  
The Historical Society of York County, Pennsylvania (56)



## DEISM

"Deism" is a loosely used term that describes the views of certain English and continental thinkers. These views attracted a following in Europe toward the latter part of the seventeenth century and gained a small but influential number of adherents in America in the late eighteenth century. Deism stressed morality and rejected the orthodox Christian view of the divinity of Christ, often viewing him as nothing more than a "sublime" teacher of morality. Thomas Jefferson and John Adams are usually considered the leading American deists. There is no doubt that they subscribed to the deist credo that all religious claims were to be subjected to the scrutiny of reason. "Call to her tribunal every fact, every opinion," Jefferson advised. Other founders of the American republic, including George Washington, are frequently identified as deists, although the evidence supporting such judgments is often thin. Deists in the United States never amounted to more than a small percentage of an evangelical population.



### A Deist Tract

John Toland (1670-1722) was a leading English deist whose works, challenging the mysteries at the heart of orthodox Christian belief, found an audience in the American colonies.

*Christianity Not Mysterious: or, a Treatise shewing, That there is nothing in the Gospel Contrary to Reason, . . . .*

John Toland London: 1696

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#),  
Library of Congress (59)



### John Locke

A famous political philosopher to whose views on the formation of governments most Americans subscribed, [John Locke \(1632-1704\)](#) wrote profoundly important treatises on



religion. His letters on toleration became a bible to many in the eighteenth century, who were still contending against the old theories of religious uniformity. Locke also argued for the "reasonableness" of Christianity but rejected the efforts of Toland and other deists to claim him as their spiritual mentor.

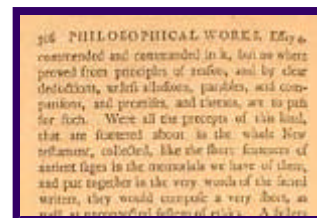
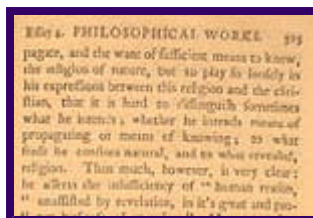
### [Letter Concerning Toleration](#)

John Locke London: A. Millar, H. Woodruff, et al., 1765

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#),  
Library of Congress (57-58)

### Bolingbroke's Influence on Thomas Jefferson

Lord Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), an English deist, was a lifelong favorite of Jefferson. In his Literary Commonplace Book, a volume compiled mostly in the 1760s, Jefferson copied extracts from various authors, transcribing from Bolingbroke some 10,000 words, six times as much as from any other author and forty percent of the whole volume. Young Jefferson was particularly partial to Bolingbroke's observations on religion and morality.

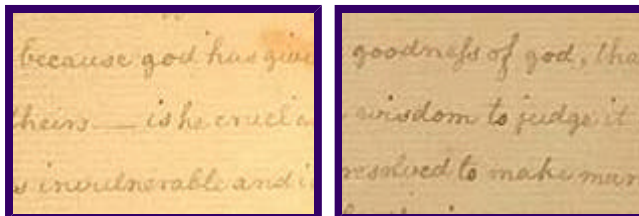


*The Philosophical Works of the late Right Honourable Henry St. John,  
Lord Viscount Bolingbroke [left page] - [right page]*  
Henry Saint-John, Viscount Bolingbroke, London: David Mallet, 1754  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (60)

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### Thomas Jefferson's Literary Commonplace Book

In this part of his Literary Commonplace Book, Thomas Jefferson copied from Bolingbroke's Works, a passage unfavorably comparing New Testament ethics to those of the "antient heathen moralists of Tully, of Seneca, of Epictetus [which] would be more full, more entire, more coherent, and more clearly deduced from unquestionable principles of knowledge."



*Literary Commonplace Book [left page] - [right page]*  
Thomas Jefferson, Holograph Manuscript  
[Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (61)



## THE EMERGENCE OF AMERICAN EVANGELICALISM: THE GREAT AWAKENING



### George Whitefield

One of the great evangelists of all time, George Whitefield (1714-1770) was ordained in the Church of England, with which he was constantly at odds. Whitefield became a sensation throughout England, preaching to huge audiences. In 1738 he made the first of seven visits to the America, where he gained such popular stature that he was compared to George Washington. Whitefield's preaching tour of the colonies, from 1739 to 1741, was the high-water mark of the Great Awakening there. A sermon in Boston attracted as many as 30,000 people. Whitefield's success has been attributed to his resonant voice, theatrical presentation, emotional stimulation, message simplification and clever exploitation of emerging advertising techniques. Some have compared him to modern televangelists.

### *George Whitefield*

Oil on canvas,  
attributed to Joseph Badger (1708-1765), c. 1743-65,  
Harvard University Portrait Collection,  
Gift of Mrs. H.P. (Sarah O.) Oliver  
to Harvard College, 1852 (62)

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Evangelicalism is difficult to date and to define. In 1531, at the beginning of the Reformation, Sir Thomas More referred to religious adversaries as "Evaungelicalles." Scholars have argued that, as a self-conscious movement, evangelicalism did not arise until the mid-seventeenth century, perhaps not until the Great Awakening itself. The fundamental premise of evangelicalism is the conversion of individuals from a state of sin to a "new birth" through preaching of the Word.

The first generation of New England Puritans required that church members undergo a conversion experience that they could describe publicly. Their successors were not as successful in reaping harvests of redeemed souls. During the first decades of the eighteenth century in the Connecticut River Valley a series of local "awakenings" began. By the 1730s they had spread into what was interpreted as a general outpouring of the Spirit that bathed the

### Preaching in the Field

George Whitefield used this collapsible field pulpit for open-air preaching because the doors of many churches were closed to him. The first recorded use of the pulpit was at Moorsfield, England, April 9, 1742, where Whitefield preached to a crowd estimated at "twenty or thirty thousand people." Members of the audience who had come to the park for more frivolous pursuits showered the evangelist with "stones, rotten eggs and pieces of dead cat" Nothing daunted, and he won many converts. It is estimated that Whitefield preached two thousand sermons from his field pulpit.



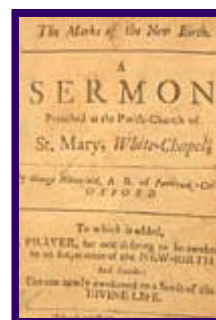
Portable field pulpit  
Oak, c. 1742-1770  
American Tract Society,  
Garland, Texas (63)

American colonies, England, Wales, and Scotland. In mass open-air revivals powerful preachers like George Whitefield brought thousands of souls to the new birth. The Great Awakening, which had spent its force in New England by the mid-1740s, split the Congregational and Presbyterian Churches into supporters--called "New Lights" and "New Side"--and opponents--the "Old Lights" and "Old Side." Many New England New Lights became Separate Baptists. Together with New Side Presbyterians (eventually reunited on their own terms with the Old Side) they carried the Great Awakening into the southern colonies, igniting a series of the revivals that lasted well into the nineteenth century.

### Whitefield on the New Birth

The "new birth," prescribed by Christ for Nicodemus (John 3:1-8), was the term evangelicalism used for the conversion experience. For George Whitefield and other evangelical preachers the new birth was essential to Christian life, even though, as Whitefield admitted, "how this glorious Change is wrought in the Soul cannot easily be explained."

The Marks of the New Birth. A Sermon. . . .  
George Whitefield  
New York: William Bradford, 1739  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division,  
Library of Congress (64)



The Reverend Mr. George Whitefield A.M.  
Mezzotint by John Greenwood, after Nathaniel Hone, 1769. Copyprint.  
National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution. (65)

### Whitefield Satirized

George Whitefield acquired many enemies, who assailed evangelicalism as a distortion of



the gospel and attacked him and his followers for alleged moral failings. The evangelist endured many jibes at his eye disease; hence the epithet "Dr. Squintum." This satire shows an imp pouring inspiration in Whitefield's ear while a grotesque Fame, listening on the other side through an ear trumpet, makes accusations on two counts that have dogged revivalists to the present day: sex and avarice. The Devil, raking in money below the podium, and the captives raise charges that Whitefield was enriching himself by his ministry. At the lower left, Whitefield's followers proposition a prostitute, reflecting the line in the caption that "their Hearts to lewd Whoring extend."



Dr. Squintum's Exaltation or the Reformation

Engraving, London: 1763

[Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress \(66\)](#)

**Whitefield's Death**

Whitefield's death and burial at Newburyport, Massachusetts, in 1770 made a deep impression on Americans from all walks of life. Among the eulogies composed for Whitefield was one from an unexpected source: a poem by a seventeen-year-old Boston slave, Phillis Wheatley (ca. 1753-1784), who had only been in the colonies for nine years. Freed by her owners, Phillis Wheatley continued her literary career and was acclaimed as the "African poetess."



George Whitefield's Burial

Woodcut from Phillis [Wheatley], *An Elegiac Poem on the Death of that celebrated Divine and eminent Servant of Jesus Christ, the Reverend and learned George Whitefield*

Boston: Ezekiel Russell, 1770

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress \(67\)](#)

**Jonathan Edwards**

Jonathan Edwards (1703-17) was the most important American preacher during the Great Awakening. A revival in his church in Northampton, Massachusetts, 1734-1735, was considered a harbinger of the Awakening which unfolded a few years later. Edwards was more than an effective evangelical preacher, however. He was the principal intellectual interpreter of, and apologist for, the Awakening. He wrote analytical descriptions of the revival, placing it in a larger theological context. Edwards was a world-class theologian, writing some of the most original and important treatises ever produced by an American. He died of smallpox in 1758, shortly after becoming president of Princeton.



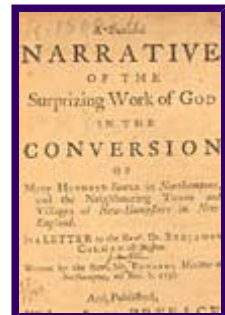
Jonathan Edwards

White pine tinted with oils, C. Keith Wilbur, M.D., 1982

Courtesy of the artist (68)

**The Revival of Northampton**

Jonathan Edwards's account of a revival in his own church at Northampton, Massachusetts, and in neighboring churches in the Connecticut Valley was considered a portent of major spiritual developments throughout the British Empire. Consequently, his Narrative was first published in London in 1737 with an introduction by two leading English evangelical ministers, Isaac Watts, the famous hymnist, and John Guyse. In their introduction the two divines said that "never did we hear or read, since the first Ages of Christianity, any Event of this Kind so surprising as the present Narrative hath set before us."



*A Faithful Narrative of the Surprising Work of God in the Conversion of Many Hundred Souls*

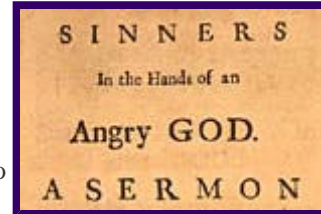
Jonathan Edwards, London: John Oswald, 1737

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (69)

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**Sinners Warned**

Perhaps Jonathan Edwards's only writing familiar to most modern audiences, Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God was not representative of his vast theological output, which contains some of the most learned and profound religious works ever written by an American. Like most evangelical preachers during the Great Awakening, Edwards employed the fear of divine punishment to bring his audiences to repentance. However, it is a distortion of his and his colleagues' messages and characters to dismiss them as mere "hellfire" preachers.



*Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*

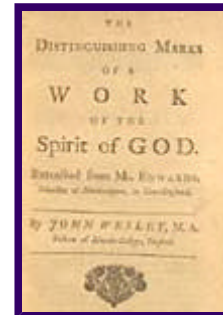
Jonathan Edwards, Boston: 1741

Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (70)

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**Trans-Atlantic Evangelicalism**

The publication by John Wesley, the founder of Methodism, of extracts from Jonathan Edwards's Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God illustrates the trans-Atlantic character of the Great Awakening. The leaders communicated with each other, profited from each others' publications and were in some cases personal acquaintances.



*The Distinguishing Marks of a Work of the Spirit of God. Extracted from Mr. Edwards*

John Wesley, London: William Strahan, 1744

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (71)

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**Gilbert Tennent**

Gilbert Tennent (1703-1764) was the Presbyterian leader of the Great Awakening in the Middle Colonies. Upon George Whitefield's departure from the colonies in 1741, he deputized his friend Tennent to come from New Jersey to New England to "blow up the divine fire lately kindled there." Despite being ridiculed as "an awkward and ridiculous Ape of Whitefield," Tennent managed to keep the revival going until 1742.



*Gilbert Tennent*

Oil on canvas, attributed to Gustavus Hesselius (1682-1755)

Princeton University (72)

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**Criticism of Other Ministers**

This famous sermon, which Gilbert Tennent preached at Nottingham, Pennsylvania, in 1740, was characteristic of the polemics in which both the friends and enemies of the





Great Awakening indulged. Tennent lashed ministerial opponents who had reservations about the theology of the new birth as "Pharisee-Shepherds" who "with the Craft of Foxes . . . did not forget to breathe the Cruelty of Wolves in a malicious Aspersion of the Person of Christ."



*The Danger of an Unconverted Ministry*

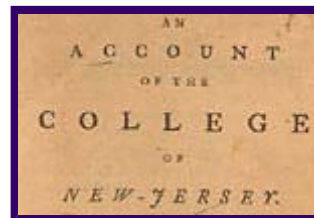
Gilbert Tennent, A.M.

Philadelphia: Benjamin Franklin, 1740

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (73)

**Fundraising for Princeton**

From the Great Awakening onward, evangelical Christians have founded colleges to train a ministry to deliver their message. The College of New Jersey (later Princeton University) was founded in 1746 by New Side Presbyterian sympathizers. This fundraising brochure for the infant college was prepared in 1764 by the New Side stalwart, Samuel Blair. "Aula Nassovica," the Latinized version of Nassau Hall, was the principal building of the College of New Jersey in 1764.



*An Account of the College of New Jersey [left page] - [right page]*

Samuel Blair

Woodbridge, New Jersey: James Parker, 1764

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (74)

**Samuel Davies**

Samuel Davies (1723-1761) was the spearhead of the efforts of New Side Presbyterians to evangelize Virginia and the South. Establishing himself in Hanover County, Virginia, in the 1740s, Davies was so successful in converting members of the Church of England to the new birth that he was soon embroiled in disputes with local officials about his right to preach the gospel where he chose.



*Samuel Davies*

Oil on canvas

Union Theological Seminary and

Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Richmond, Virginia (75)

**Presbyterian Communion Tokens**

The sacrament of Holy Communion was precious to colonial Presbyterians (and to members of other Christian churches). Presbyterians followed the Church of Scotland practice of "fencing the table"--of permitting members to take communion only after being examined by a minister who vouched for their spiritual soundness by issuing them a token that admitted them to the celebration of the sacrament. The custom continued in some Presbyterian churches until early in this century. The tokens shown here were used in the Beersheba



Presbyterian Church, near York, South Carolina.

Presbyterian communion tokens

Metal, c.1800

Courtesy of Martha Hopkins and Nancy Hopkins-Garriss (76)

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View on Jones's Falls, Baltimore, Sept. 13, 1818

Engraving and watercolor on paper by J. Hill

Robert C. Merrick Print Collection, Prints and Photographs Department,  
Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore. (77a)

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**The Baptists**

Although Baptists had existed in the American colonies since the seventeenth century, it was the Great Awakening that galvanized them into a powerful, proselytizing force. Along with the Methodists, the Baptists became by the early years of the nineteenth century the principal Protestant denomination in the southern and western United States. Baptists differed from other Protestant groups by offering baptism (by immersion) only to those who had undergone a conversion experience; infants were, therefore, excluded from the sacrament, an issue that generated enormous controversy with other Christians.



Baptism in Schuylkill River

Woodcut from Morgan Edwards, Materials Towards A History of the American Baptists.

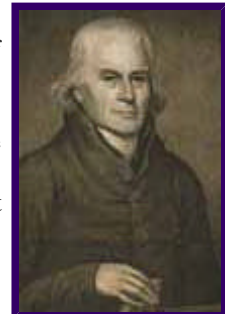
Copyprint, Philadelphia: 1770

Historical Society of Pennsylvania (77b)

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**Francis Asbury**

Methodism, begun by John Wesley and others as a reform movement within the Church of England, spread to the American colonies in the 1760s. Although handicapped by Wesley's opposition to the American Revolution, Methodists nevertheless made remarkable progress in the young American republic. Francis Asbury (1745-1816) was the dynamo who drove the spectacular growth of the church. He ordained 4,000 ministers, preached 16,000 sermons and traveled 270,000 miles on horseback, sometimes to the most inaccessible parts of the United States.



Francis Asbury

Oil on canvas by Charles Peale Polk, 1794

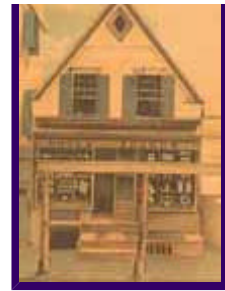
Lovely Lane Museum of United Methodist Historical Society, Baltimore (78)

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**Beginning of the Methodists**



The first Methodist meeting in New York City (one of the first in the American colonies) was held in the sail loft of this Manhattan rigging house in 1766. The five people who attended helped launch the Methodist Church on a "prosperous voyage" that by 1846, according to the statistics furnished in the caption, had gathered four million members.



*The Rigging House*

Color lithograph by A. R. Robinson, 1846  
[Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (79)

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**Organization of the Methodists**

The remarkable growth of the Methodists in the post-Revolutionary period has been attributed to a hierarchical organizational structure that permitted the maximum mobilization of resources. The "corporating genius" of the Methodists is depicted in this series of concentric circles.



*Methodist Itinerant System*

G. Stebbins and G. King, Broadside  
New York: John Totten, 1810-11 [?]  
Rare Books Division, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations (80)



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# Religion and the Founding of the American Republic



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## III. Religion and the American Revolution

Religion played a major role in the American Revolution by offering a moral sanction for opposition to the British--an assurance to the average American that revolution was justified in the sight of God. As a recent scholar has observed, "by turning colonial resistance into a righteous cause, and by crying the message to all ranks in all parts of the colonies, ministers did the work of secular radicalism and did it better."

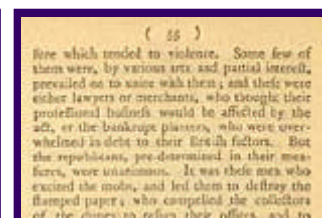
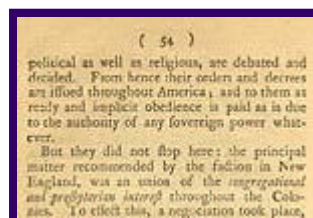
Ministers served the American cause in many capacities during the Revolution: as military chaplains, as penmen for committees of correspondence, and as members of state legislatures, constitutional conventions and the national Congress. Some even took up arms, leading Continental troops in battle.

The Revolution split some denominations, notably the Church of England, whose ministers were bound by oath to support the King, and the Quakers, who were traditionally pacifists. Religious practice suffered in certain places because of the absence of ministers and the destruction of churches, but in other areas, religion flourished.

The Revolution strengthened millennialist strains in American theology. At the beginning of the war some ministers were persuaded that, with God's help, America might become "the principal Seat of the glorious Kingdom which Christ shall erect upon Earth in the latter Days." Victory over the British was taken as a sign of God's partiality for America and stimulated an outpouring of millennialist expectations--the conviction that Christ would rule on earth for 1,000 years. This attitude combined with a groundswell of secular optimism about the future of America to create the buoyant mood of the new nation that became so evident after Jefferson assumed the presidency in 1801.

### Religion as Cause of the Revolution

Joseph Galloway (1731-1803), a former speaker of the Pennsylvania Assembly and close friend of Benjamin Franklin, opposed the Revolution and fled to England in 1778. Like many Tories he believed, as he asserted in this pamphlet, that the Revolution was, to a considerable extent, a religious quarrel, caused by Presbyterians and Congregationalists whose "principles of religion and polity [were] equally averse to those of the established



Church and Government."

*Historical and Political Reflections on the Rise and Progress  
of the American Rebellion [page 54] - [page 55]*

Joseph Galloway, London: G. Wilkie, 1780

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (81)

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**Jonathan Mayhew**

An eloquent proponent of the idea that civil and religious liberty was ordained by God, Jonathan Mayhew considered the Church of England as a dangerous, almost diabolical, enemy of the New England Way. The bishop's mitre with the snake emerging from it represented his view of the Anglican hierarchy.



*Jonathan Mayhew, D.D. Pastor of the West Church in Boston . . .*

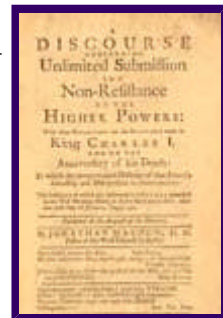
Etching by Giovanni Cipriani, London: 1767

The American Antiquarian Society, Worcester, Massachusetts (82)

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**Resistance to Tyranny as a Christian Duty**

Jonathan Mayhew delivered this sermon--one of the most influential in American history--on the anniversary of the execution of Charles I. In it, he explored the idea that Christians were obliged to suffer under an oppressive ruler, as some Anglicans argued. Mayhew asserted that resistance to a tyrant was a "glorious" Christian duty. In offering moral sanction for political and military resistance, Mayhew anticipated the position that most ministers took during the conflict with Britain.



*Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers*

Jonathan Mayhew, D.D.

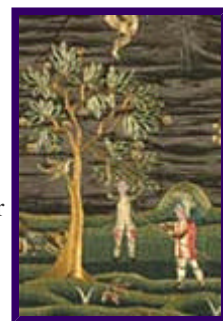
Boston: D. Fowle and D. Gookin, 1750

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (83)

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**Revolution Understood in Scriptural Terms**

Thought to have been created soon after the Boston Massacre of 1770, this needlework is an excellent example of how many colonists understood political events in terms of familiar Bible stories. The creator of the work saw Absalom as a patriot, rebelling against and suffering from the arbitrary rule of his father King David (symbolizing George III). The king, shown at the top left, is playing his harp, evidently oblivious to the anguish of his children in the American colonies. The figure executing Absalom--David's commander Joab in the Old Testament story--is dressed as a British red coat.



*The Hanging of Absalom*

Silk, Weft-silk fabric, foil wrapped threads, paper, watercolor,

attributed to Faith Robinson Trumbull (1718-1780) c. 1770  
Lyman Allyn Art Museum at Connecticut College, New London, Connecticut (84)

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### **The Plot to Land a Bishop**

The supposed British plot, to impose Anglican bishops in the colonies, aroused atavistic fears that Americans would be persecuted for their religious convictions and further poisoned relations between Britain and the colonies. In this cartoon an indignant New England mob pushes a bishop's boat back towards England, frightening the prelate into praying, "Lord, now lettest thou thy Servant depart in Peace." The mob flings a volume of Calvin's Works at the bishop, while brandishing copies of John Locke and Algernon Sydney on government. The crowd shouts slogans: "Liberty & Freedom of Conscience"; "No Lords Spiritual or Temporal in New England"; and "shall they be obliged to maintain bishops that cannot maintain themselves."



### *An Attempt to Land a Bishop in America*

Engraving from the Political Register

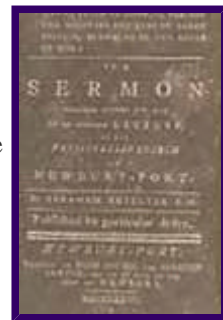
London: September, 1769

John Carter Brown Library at Brown University, Providence, RI (86)

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### **Revolution Justified by God**

Many Revolutionary War clergy argued that the war against Britain was approved by God. In this sermon Abraham Keteltas celebrated the American effort as "the cause of truth, against error and falsehood . . .the cause of pure and undefiled religion, against bigotry, superstition, and human invention . . .in short, it is the cause of heaven against hell--of the kind Parent of the Universe against the prince of darkness, and the destroyer of the human race."



### *God Arising And Pleading His People's Cause; Or The American War . . . Shewn To Be The Cause Of God*

Abraham Keteltas

Newbury-Port: John Mycall for Edmund Sawyer, 1777

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (87)

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### **A Minister in Arms**

This satire expresses the British view that the American Revolution was inspired by the same kind of religious fanaticism that had fueled Oliver Cromwell's establishment of the Commonwealth of England more than a century earlier. Among the ragtag American soldiers is a clergyman holding a flag with a Liberty Tree on it and claiming " 'Tis Old Olivers Cause no Monarchy nor Laws."



### *The Yankie Doodles Intrenchments Near Boston 1776*

Etching. Copyprint

British Museum, London, England (88)

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### **A Fighting Parson**



Peter Muhlenberg (1746-1807) was the prime example of a "fighting parson" during the Revolutionary War. The eldest son of the Lutheran patriarch Henry Melchoir Muhlenberg, young Muhlenberg at the conclusion of a sermon in January 1776 to his congregation in Woodstock, Virginia, threw off his clerical robes to reveal the uniform of a Virginia militia officer. Having served with distinction throughout the war, Muhlenberg commanded a brigade that successfully stormed the British lines at Yorktown. He retired from the army in 1783 as a brevetted major general.



*John Peter Gabriel Muhlenberg*

Oil on canvas, by an unidentified American artist  
Nineteenth century

Martin Art Gallery, Muhlenberg College, Allentown, Pennsylvania (89)

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**A Revolutionary Chaplain**

James Caldwell (1734-1781), a Presbyterian minister at Elizabeth, New Jersey, was one of the many clergymen who served as chaplains during the Revolutionary War. At the battle of Springfield, New Jersey, on June 23, 1780, when his company ran out of wadding, Caldwell was said to have dashed into a nearby Presbyterian Church, scooped up as many Watts hymnals as he could carry, and distributed them to the troops, shouting "put Watts into them, boys." Caldwell and his wife were both killed before the war ended.



*Reverend James Caldwell at the Battle of Springfield*

Watercolor by Henry Alexander Ogden  
Presbyterian Historical Society, Philadelphia (90)

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**Revolutionary Battle Flag**

Like this one, many battle flags of the American Revolution carried religious inscriptions.



*Gostelowe Standard No. 10, c. 1776*

Watercolor once in possession of Edward W. Richardson. Copyprint  
Courtesy of the Pennsylvania Society of Sons of the Revolution  
and Its Color Guard (91)

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**John Witherspoon**

John Witherspoon (1723-1794) was the most important "political parson" of the Revolutionary period. He represented New Jersey in the Continental Congress from 1776 to 1782, in which capacity he signed the Declaration of Independence and served on more than one hundred committees. As president of Princeton, Witherspoon was accused of turning the institution into a "seminary of sedition."



*John Witherspoon*

Oil on canvas, by Rembrandt Peale after Charles Wilson Peale, 1794

National Portrait Gallery, Washington, D.C. (92)

### A Quaker Schism

Some Quakers were conscientiously convinced that they could, despite the Friends' peace testimony, take up arms against the British. Calling themselves "Free Quakers," they organized in Philadelphia. The majority of Quakers adhered to the denomination's traditional position of pacifism and disowned their belligerent brethren. This Free Quaker broadside declares that although the "regular" Quakers have "separated yourselves from us, and declared that you have no unity with us," the schism does not compromise the Free Quakers' rights to common property.



*To those of our Brethren who have disowned us.*

Broadside, July 9, 1781

[Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (93)

### Free Quaker Meeting House

The Free Quakers built their own Meeting House in Philadelphia.



*Free Quaker Meeting House.*

SW corner 5th and Arch St., Philadelphia, Pa.

Photograph

[Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (94)



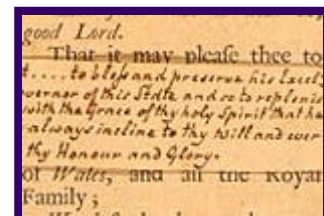
## THE PROBLEMS OF THE AMERICAN ANGLICANS

The American Revolution inflicted deeper wounds on the Church of England in America than on any other denomination because the King of England was the head of the church. Anglican priests, at their ordination, swore allegiance to the King. The Book of Common Prayer offered prayers for the monarch, beseeching God "to be his defender and keeper, giving him victory over all his enemies," who in 1776 were American soldiers as well as friends and neighbors of American Anglicans. Loyalty to the church and to its head could be construed as treason to the American cause. Patriotic American Anglicans, loathe to discard so fundamental a component of their faith as The Book of

### Maryland's Revised Book of Common Prayer

The Maryland Convention voted on May 25, 1776, "that every Prayer and Petition for the King's

Majesty, in the book of Common Prayer . . . be henceforth omitted in all Churches and Chapels in this Province." The rector of Christ Church (then called Chaptico Church) in St. Mary's County, Maryland, placed over the offending passages strips of paper showing prayers composed for the Continental Congress. The petition that God "keep and strengthen in the true worshipping of thee, in righteousness and holiness of life, thy servant GEORGE, our most gracious King and Governour" was changed to a plea that "it might please thee to bless the honorable





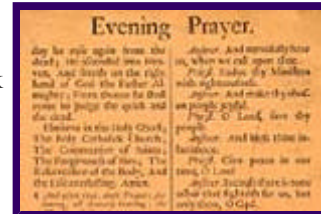
Common Prayer, revised it to conform to the political realities.

Congress with Wisdom to discern and Integrity to pursue the true Interest of the United States."

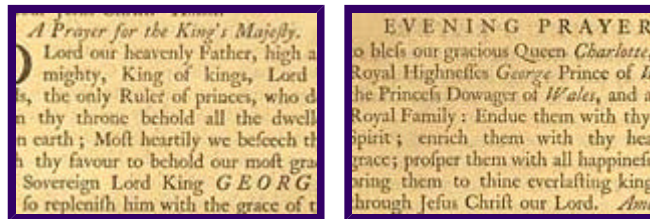
Book of Common Prayer  
 England: John Baskerville, c. 1762  
 Washington National Cathedral Rare Books Library  
 (95)

**Christ Church, Philadelphia's Revised Book of Common Prayer**

The problem was handled differently by Christ Church, Philadelphia. The rector, the Reverend Jacob Duché, called a special vestry meeting on July 4, 1776, to ask whether it was advisable "for the peace and welfare of the congregation, to shut up the churches or to continue the service, without using the prayers for the Royal Family." The vestry decided to keep the church open but replace the prayers for the King with a prayer for Congress: "That is may please thee to endue the Congress of the United States & all others in Authority, legislative, executive, & judicial with grace, wisdom & understanding, to execute Justice and to maintain Truth."



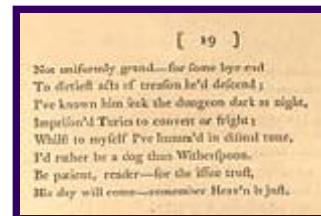
Book of Common Prayer  
 London: Mark Basket, 1766  
 Courtesy of the Rector, Church Wardens, and Vestrymen of Christ Church, Philadelphia (96)



Book of Common Prayer [left page] - [right page]  
 Here is a facsimile of the page from the Book of Common Prayer, containing the prayers for the king, that were altered in various ways.  
 Oxford: Printed by Mark Basket, printer to the University, 1763  
 Copyprint  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (95a)

**A Tory Preacher on the Attack**

More than half of the Anglican priests in America, unable to reconcile their oaths of allegiance to George III with the independence of the United States, relinquished their pulpits during the Revolutionary War. Some of the more intrepid priests put their loyalty to the Crown at the service of British forces in America. One of these, Jonathan Odell (1737-1818), rector at Burlington, New Jersey, became a confidant of Benedict Arnold and scourged the Patriots with a sharp, satirical pen. This long, rhymed attack on John Witherspoon contains the clumsy couplet, "Whilst to myself I've humm'd in dismal tune, I'd rather be a dog than Witherspoon." Odell blasted his fellow Anglican ministers, who supported the American cause, for apostasy.

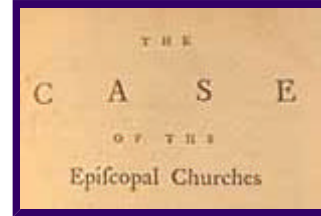


The American Times: A Satire in Three Parts in which are delineated . . . the Leaders of the American Rebellion  
 Jonathan Odell, London: 1780

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (97)

**An Argument for an American Episcopal Church**

In the years following American independence, Anglican ministers who had remained in the colonies began planning for an independent American church. One of the publications that focused discussion on the issue was this volume by William White. A series of conferences in the 1780s failed to bridge the differences between two parties that emerged but, at a convention in 1789, the two groups formed the Protestant Episcopal Church of the United States. A church government and revised Book of Common Prayer believed to be compatible with a rising democratic nation were adopted.



[The Case of the Episcopal Churches in the United States Considered](#)

William White

Philadelphia: David Claypoole, 1782

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (98)

**The Establishment of the Methodist Episcopal Church**

The independence of the United States stimulated American Methodists, as it did their brethren in the Church of England, with whom the Methodists had considered themselves "in communion," to organize themselves as an independent, American church. This happened at the Christmas Conference in Baltimore in 1784, where Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke were elected as superintendents of the new Methodist Episcopal Church. Asbury was ordained as deacon, elder, and superintendent. American Methodists adopted the title of bishop for their leaders three years later.



[The Ordination of Bishop Asbury, and the Organization of the Methodist Episcopal Church.](#)

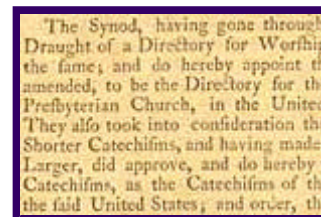
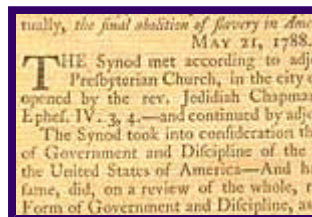
Engraving by A. Gilchrist Campbell, 1882, after a painting by Thomas Coke Ruckle

[Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress.

Gift of the Lovely Lane Museum, Baltimore (99)

**Reforms in the Presbyterian Church**

Like the Anglicans and Methodists, Presbyterians reorganized their church as a distinctly American entity, thereby reducing some of the influence of the Church of Scotland. From debates at the synods of 1787 and 1788 emerged a new Plan of Government and Discipline, a Directory of Public Worship, and a revised version of the Westminster Confession, which was made "a part of the constitution." In the proceedings of the 1787 and 1788 synods, shown here, the Presbyterian Church, along with other contemporary American churches, took a stand against slavery, recommending that Presbyterians work to "procure, eventually, the final abolition of slavery in America."



[Acts and Proceedings of the Synod of New-York and Philadelphia, A.D. 1787, & 1788 \[left page\] - \[right page\]](#)

Philadelphia: Francis Bailey, 1788

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (100)



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# Religion and the Founding of the American Republic



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## IV. Religion and the Congress of the Confederation, 1774-89

The Continental-Confederation Congress, a legislative body that governed the United States from 1774 to 1789, contained an extraordinary number of deeply religious men. The amount of energy that Congress invested in encouraging the practice of religion in the new nation exceeded that expended by any subsequent American national government. Although the Articles of Confederation did not officially authorize Congress to concern itself with religion, the citizenry did not object to such activities. This lack of objection suggests that both the legislators and the public considered it appropriate for the national government to promote a nondenominational, nonpolemical Christianity.

Congress appointed chaplains for itself and the armed forces, sponsored the publication of a Bible, imposed Christian morality on the armed forces, and granted public lands to promote Christianity among the Indians. National days of thanksgiving and of "humiliation, fasting, and prayer" were proclaimed by Congress at least twice a year throughout the war. Congress was guided by "covenant theology," a Reformation doctrine especially dear to New England Puritans, which held that God bound himself in an agreement with a nation and its people. This agreement stipulated that they "should be prosperous or afflicted, according as their general Obedience or Disobedience thereto appears." Wars and revolutions were, accordingly, considered afflictions, as divine punishments for sin, from which a nation could rescue itself by repentance and reformation.

The first national government of the United States, was convinced that the "public prosperity" of a society depended on the vitality of its religion. Nothing less than a "spirit of universal reformation among all ranks and degrees of our citizens," Congress declared to the American people, would "make us a holy, that so we may be a happy people."

### The Liberty Window

At its initial meeting in September 1774 Congress invited the Reverend Jacob Duché (1738-1798), rector of Christ Church, Philadelphia, to open its sessions with prayer. Duché ministered to Congress in an unofficial capacity until he was elected the body's first chaplain on July 9, 1776. He defected to the British the next year. Pictured here in the bottom stained-glass panel is the first prayer in Congress, delivered by Duché. The top part of this extraordinary stained glass window depicts the role of churchmen in compelling King John to sign the Magna Carta in 1215.



*The Prayer in the First Congress, A.D. 1774*

Stained glass and lead, from The Liberty Window, Christ Church, Philadelphia, after a painting by Harrison Tompkins Matteson, c. 1848  
 Courtesy of the Rector, Church Wardens and Vestrymen of Christ Church, Philadelphia (101)

**George Duffield, Congressional Chaplain**

On October 1, 1777, after Jacob Duché, Congress's first chaplain, defected to the British, Congress appointed joint chaplains: William White (1748-1836), Duché's successor at Christ Church, Philadelphia, and George Duffield (1732-1790), pastor of the Third Presbyterian Church of Philadelphia. By appointing chaplains of different denominations, Congress expressed a revolutionary egalitarianism in religion and its desire to prevent any single denomination from monopolizing government patronage. This policy was followed by the first Congress under the Constitution which on April 15, 1789, adopted a joint resolution requiring that the practice be continued.



*George Duffield*

Oil on canvas by Charles Peale Polk, 1790  
 Independence National Historical Park Collection, Philadelphia (103)

**Military Chaplains Pay**

This resolution directed that military chaplains, appointed in abundance by Congress during the Revolutionary War, were paid at the rate of a major in the Continental Army.

A Major-General,	3 rations per day,	3
Brigadier-General	4	4
Colonel,	5	5
Lieut. Col. Commandant,	6	6
Lieut. Colonel,	1 1/4	1 1/4
Major,	1 1/4	1 1/4
Chaplain,	1 1/4 rations per day	1 1/4

12. **W**HEN a regiment, independent of the Mates, or some other provision returns, leaving forth in cold days to be drawn for, the commanding officer shall be counterfiged by the Contractors shall bear the provisions, during his duty, by the commanding officer not under the rank of a Sergeant, this sufficient teacher for the Contractors.

*Congressional resolution, paying military personnel [left page] - [right page]*

Broadside, April 22, 1782

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (102)

**Proposed Seal for the United States**

On July 4, 1776, Congress appointed Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and John Adams "to bring in a device for a seal for the United States of America." Franklin's proposal adapted the biblical story of the parting of the Red Sea (left). Jefferson first recommended the "Children of Israel in the Wilderness, led by a Cloud by Day, and a Pillar of Fire by night. . . ." He then embraced Franklin's proposal and rewrote it (right). Jefferson's revision of Franklin's proposal was presented by the committee to Congress on August 20. Although not accepted these drafts reveal the religious temper of the Revolutionary period. Franklin and Jefferson were among the most theologically liberal of the Founders, yet they used biblical imagery for this important task.

... of the Israelites: very expressive of the divine presence. Moses who stands on the sea, causes it to overwhelm the tyrants in Red Sea.

... standing on the shore of the Red Sea, thereby causing the sea to overwhelm the tyrants in a open plain. Rays from a Pillar of Fire, that heark by the command of

*Legend for the Seal of the United States, August 1776 [left side] - [right side]*

Holograph notes, Benjamin Franklin (left) and Thomas Jefferson (right)

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (104-105)

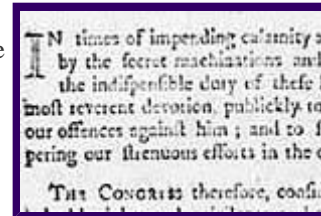


Proposed Great Seal of the United States:  
"Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God." Drawing  
by Benson Lossing, for Harper's New Monthly Magazine, July 1856.  
General Collections, Library of Congress. (106)

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### **Congressional Fast Day Proclamation**

Congress proclaimed days of fasting and of thanksgiving annually throughout the Revolutionary War. This proclamation by Congress set May 17, 1776, as a "day of Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer" throughout the colonies. Congress urges its fellow citizens to "confess and bewail our manifold sins and transgressions, and by a sincere repentance and amendment of life, appease his [God's] righteous displeasure, and through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, obtain his pardon and forgiveness." Massachusetts ordered a "suitable Number" of these proclamations be printed so "that each of the religious Assemblies in this Colony, may be furnished with a Copy of the same" and added the motto "God Save This People" as a substitute for "God Save the King."



### Congressional Fast Day Proclamation, March 16, 1776

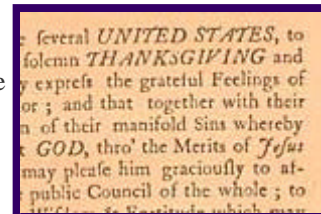
Broadside

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (107)

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### **Congressional Thanksgiving Day Proclamation**

Congress set December 18, 1777, as a day of thanksgiving on which the American people "may express the grateful feelings of their hearts and consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor" and on which they might "join the penitent confession of their manifold sins . . . that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance." Congress also recommends that Americans petition God "to prosper the means of religion for the promotion and enlargement of that kingdom which consisteth in righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Ghost."



### Congressional Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, November 1, 1777

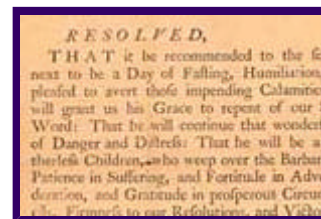
Broadside

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (108)

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### **The 1779 Fast Day Proclamation**

Here is the most eloquent of the Fast and Thanksgiving Day Proclamations.



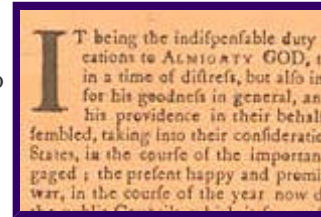
### Congressional Fast Day Proclamation, March 20, 1779

Broadside

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (109)

**Another Thanksgiving Day Proclamation**

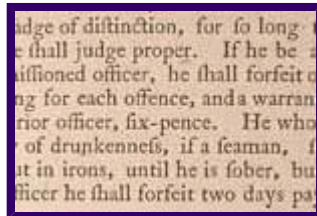
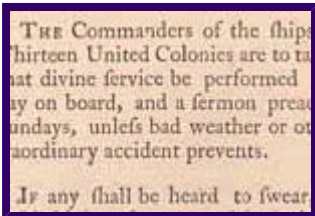
Congress set November 28, 1782, as a day of thanksgiving on which Americans were "to testify their gratitude to God for his goodness, by a cheerful obedience to his laws, and by promoting, each in his station, and by his influence, the practice of true and undefiled religion, which is the great foundation of public prosperity and national happiness."



Congressional Thanksgiving Day Proclamation, October 11, 1782

Broadside

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (110)



**Morality in the Army**

Congress was apprehensive about the moral condition of the American army and navy and took steps to see that Christian morality prevailed in both organizations. In the Articles of War, seen below, governing the conduct of the Continental Army (seen above) (adopted, June 30, 1775; revised, September 20, 1776), Congress devoted three of the four articles in the first section to the religious nurture of the troops. Article 2 "earnestly recommended to all officers and soldiers to attend divine services." Punishment was prescribed for those who behaved "indecently or irreverently" in churches, including courts-martial, fines and imprisonments. Chaplains who deserted their troops were to be court-martialed.

Rules and Articles, for the better Government of the  
Troops . . . of the Twelve united English Colonies of  
North America [page 4] - [page 5]

Philadelphia: William and Thomas Bradford, 1775

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#),

Library of Congress (111)

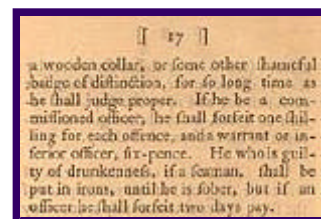
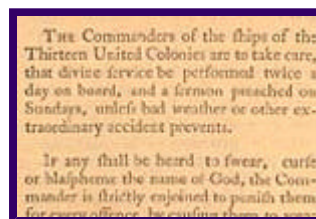
To all brave, healthy, able bodied  
well disposed young men. . . .

Recruiting poster for the Continental Army.

Historical Society of Pennsylvania (112)

**Morality in the Navy**

Congress particularly feared the navy as a source of moral corruption and demanded that skippers of American ships make their men behave. The first article in Rules and Regulations of the Navy (below), adopted on November 28, 1775, ordered all commanders "to be very vigilant . . . to discountenance and suppress all dissolute, immoral and disorderly practices." The second article required those same commanders "to take care, that divine services be performed twice a day on board, and a sermon preached on Sundays." Article 3 prescribed punishments for swearers and blasphemers: officers were to be fined and common sailors were to be forced "to wear a wooden collar or some other shameful badge of distinction."



*Extracts from the Journals of Congress, relative to the Capture and Condemnation of Prizes, and filling out Privateers, together with the Rules and Regulations of the Navy, and Instructions to Private Ships of War [page 16] - [page 17]*

Philadelphia: John Dunlap, 1776

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (113)

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#### **Commander-in-Chief of the American Navy**

Etched on this horn beaker is Esek Hopkins (1718-1802), a Rhode Islander, appointed by Congress, December 22, 1775, as the first commander-in-chief of the American Navy. Hopkins was dismissed, January 2, 1778, after a stormy tenure in which he achieved some notable successes in spite of almost insuperable problems in manning the tiny American fleet.



[Horn beaker with scrimshaw portrait of Esek Hopkins](#)

Horn, c. 1876

Mariner's Museum, Newport News, Virginia (114)

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#### **Aitken's Bible Endorsed by Congress**

The war with Britain cut off the supply of Bibles to the United States with the result that on Sept. 11, 1777, Congress instructed its Committee of Commerce to import 20,000 Bibles from "Scotland, Holland or elsewhere." On January 21, 1781, Philadelphia printer Robert Aitken (1734-1802) petitioned Congress to officially sanction a

" Philadelphia  
Reverend gentlemen,  
Our knowledge of your piety  
without apology to recommend  
on the edition of the holy scrip  
Aitkin. He undertook this ex  
when from the circumstances of  
on of the bible could not be imp  
formed how long the obstruction  
account particularly he deserves

" Gentlemen,  
Agreeably to your desire  
Robert Aitkin's impression  
old and new testament. F  
a variety of passages throug  
nion that it is executed wit  
and with as few grammatic  
could be expected in an un

publication of the Old and New Testament which he was preparing at his own expense. Congress "highly approve the pious and laudable undertaking of Mr. Aitken, as subservient to the interest of religion . . . in this country, and . . . they recommend this edition of the bible to the inhabitants of the United States." This resolution was a result of Aitken's successful accomplishment of his project.

*Congressional resolution, September 12, 1782, endorsing Robert Aitken's Bible [page 468] -- [page 469]*

Philadelphia: David C. Claypoole, 1782 from the [Journals of Congress](#)

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (115)

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#### **Aitken's Bible**

Aitken published Congress's recommendation of September 1782 and related documents (Item 115) as an imprimatur on the two pages following his title page. Aitken's Bible, published under Congressional patronage, was the first English language Bible published on the North American continent.



*The Holy Bible, Containing the Old and New Testaments: Newly translated out of the Original Tongues. . . .*

Philadelphia: printed and sold by R. Aitken, 1782

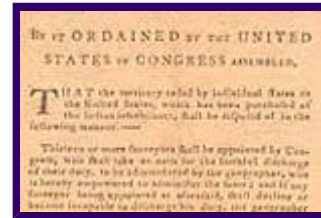
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (116)

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**Settling the West**

In the spring of 1785 Congress debated regulations for settling the new western lands--stretching from the Alleghenies to the Mississippi--acquired from Great Britain in the Peace Treaty of 1783. It was proposed that the central section in each newly laid out township be reserved for the support of schools and "the Section immediately adjoining the same to the northward, for the support of religion. The profits arising there from in both instances, to be applied for ever according to the will of the majority." The proposal to establish religion in the traditional sense of granting state financial support to a church to be controlled by one denomination attracted support but was ultimately voted down.

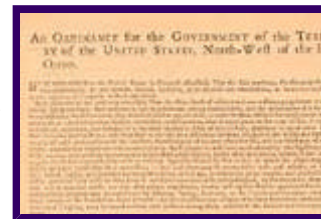


*An Ordinance for ascertaining the Mode of disposing of Lands in the Western Territory, 1785.*

Broadside, Continental Congress, 1785  
 Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (117)

**Northwest Ordinance**

In the summer of 1787 Congress revisited the issue of religion in the new western territories and passed, July 13, 1787, the famous Northwest Ordinance. Article 3 of the Ordinance contained the following language: "Religion, Morality and knowledge being necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, Schools and the means of education shall be forever encouraged." Scholars have been puzzled that, having declared religion and morality indispensable to good government, Congress did not, like some of the state governments that had written similar declarations into their constitutions, give financial assistance to the churches in the West.

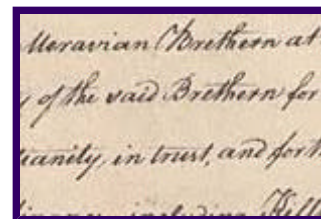
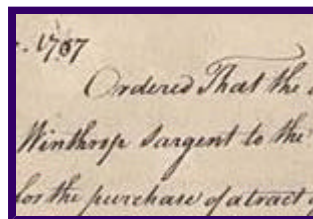


*An Ordinance for the Government of the Territory of the United States, North-West of the River Ohio, 1787*

Broadside, Continental Congress, 1787  
 Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (118)

**Christianizing the Delawares**

In this resolution, Congress makes public lands available to a group for religious purposes. Responding to a plea from Bishop John Ettwein (1721-1802), Congress voted that 10,000 acres on the Muskingum River in the present state of Ohio "be set apart and the property thereof be vested in the Moravian Brethren . . . or a society of the said Brethren for civilizing the Indians and promoting Christianity." The Delaware Indians were the intended beneficiaries of this Congressional resolution.

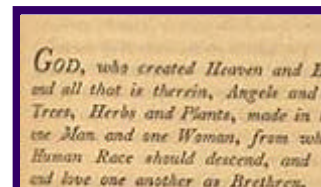
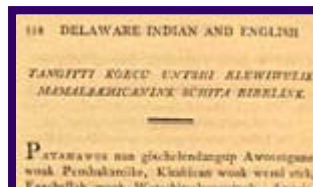


*Resolution granting lands to Moravian Brethren. [left page] - [right page]*

Records of the Continental Congress in the Constitutional Convention, July 27, 1787  
 National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, D.C. (119)

**A Delaware-English Spelling Book**

David Zeisberger (1721-1802) was a famous Moravian missionary who spent much of his life working with the Delaware Indians. His Spelling Book contains a "Short History of the Bible," in the English and Delaware languages, on facing



pages.

ak, Hupok, Angiyali wani wani gogiyaki...

*Delaware Indian and English Spelling Book for the Schools of the Mission  
of the United Brethren [left page] - [right page]*

David Zeisberger

Philadelphia: Mary Cist, 1806

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (120)



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## V. Religion and the State Governments

Many states were as explicit about the need for a thriving religion as Congress was in its thanksgiving and fast day proclamations. The Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 declared, for example, that "the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend on piety, religion and morality." The states were in a stronger position to act upon this conviction because they were considered to possess "general" powers as opposed to the limited, specifically enumerated powers of Congress.

Congregationalists and Anglicans who, before 1776, had received public financial support, called their state benefactors "nursing fathers" (Isaiah 49:23). After independence they urged the state governments, as "nursing fathers," to continue succoring them. Knowing that in the egalitarian, post-independence era, the public would no longer permit single denominations to monopolize state support, legislators devised "general assessment schemes." Religious taxes were laid on all citizens, each of whom was given the option of designating his share to the church of his choice. Such laws took effect in Massachusetts, Connecticut, and New Hampshire and were passed but not implemented in Maryland and Georgia.

After a general assessment scheme was defeated in Virginia, an incongruous coalition of Baptists and theological liberals united to sunder state from church. However, the outcome in Virginia of the state-church debate did not, it should be remembered, represent the views of the majority of American states that wrestled with this issue in the 1780s.



### "NURSING FATHERS" OF THE CHURCH

#### Queen Elizabeth I as Nursing Mother to the Church

John Jewel, Bishop of Salisbury (1522-1571), has been called the "father of the Church of England," because his tract, The Apologie of the Church of England (London, 1562), was "the

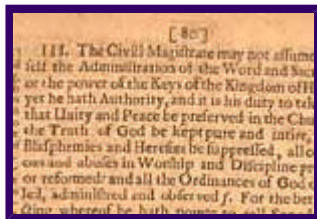


During the debates in the 1780s about the propriety of providing financial support to the churches, those who favored state patronage of religion urged their legislators, in the words of petitioners from Amherst County, Virginia, in 1783,

first methodical statement of the position of the Church of England against the Church of Rome." Jewel's *Apologie* was attacked by Catholic spokesmen, eliciting from him the *Defense* of his original publication, seen here, in which he saluted Queen Elizabeth, using Isaiah's metaphor, as the "Nource" of the church.

*A Defense of the Apologie of the Churche of Englande*

John Jewel , London: Henry Wykes, 1570  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division,  
 Library of Congress (121)



**The Westminster Confession of Faith**

The Westminster Confession of Faith, the "creed" of the Presbyterian Church in Scotland and the American colonies, was drafted by a convention of ministers summoned by the Long

Parliament in 1643. In the revised creed, adopted by the Presbyterian Church in the United States in 1788, "nursing fathers" was elevated from an explanatory footnote--(note f), as it appears here, to the body of the text in the section on the duties of the civil magistrate. The concept of the state as a nursing father provided the theological justification for some American Presbyterians to approve the idea of state financial support for religion.

*The Humble Advice of the Assembly of Divines by Authority of Parliament sitting at Westminster;*

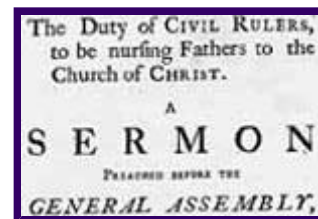
*Concerning a Confession of Faith*

London: S. Griffin, 1658  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division,  
 Library of Congress (122)

not "to think it beneath your Dignity to become Nursing Fathers of the Church." This idea was an old one, stretching back to the dawn of the Reformation. The term itself was drawn from Isaiah 49:23, in which the prophet commanded that "kings shall be thy nursing fathers, and their queens thy nursing mothers." The responsibilities of the state were understood in an early work like Bishop John Jewel's *Apologie of the Church of England* (1562) to be comprehensive, including imposing the church's doctrine on society. The term "nursing father" was used in all American colonies with established churches. It appeared in the Cambridge Platform of 1648, the "creed" of New England Congregationalism; in numerous Anglican writings; and in the Presbyterian Westminister Confession. By the time of the American Revolution, the state was no longer expected to maintain religious uniformity in its jurisdiction, but it was expected to use its resources for the churches' benefit.

**Civil Rulers as Nursing Fathers**

This is one of the many public statements in New England of the "nursing fathers" concept. After independence the phrase was sometimes modified to "political fathers."



*The Duty of Civil Rulers, to be nursing Fathers to the Church of Christ. A Sermon. . . .*

Edward Dorr, Hartford: Thomas Green, 1765  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (123)

**British Government as Nursing Fathers**

In this proclamation, the British government was reproved for not supporting the church in Massachusetts: "those who should be Nursing Fathers become its Persecutors."



[Fast Day Proclamation, April 15, 1775](#)

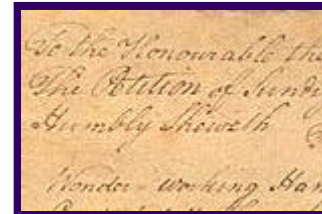
Massachusetts Provincial Congress, Broadside  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (124)



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**The Virginia Assembly as Nursing Fathers**

This petition asks that members of the Virginia Assembly play their traditional role as "Nursing Fathers" of the church.



[Petition to the Virginia Assembly from Amherst County, Virginia, November 27, 1783 \[page one\] - \[page two\] - \[page three\] - \[page four\]](#)  
The Library of Virginia (125)



## THE CHURCH-STATE DEBATE: MASSACHUSETTS

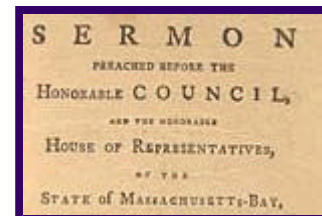
After independence the American states were obliged to write constitutions establishing how each would be governed. In no place was the process more difficult than in Massachusetts. For three years, from 1778 to 1780, the political energies of the state were absorbed in drafting a charter of government that the voters would accept. A constitution prepared in 1778 was decisively defeated in a public referendum. A new convention convened in 1779 to make another attempt at writing an acceptable draft.

One of the most contentious issues was whether the state would support religion financially. Advocating such a policy--on the grounds that religion was necessary for public happiness, prosperity, and order--were the ministers and most members of the Congregational Church, which had been established, and hence had received public financial support,

**For Tax-Supported Religion**

Phillips Payson (1736-1801), Congregational minister at Chelsea, was a pillar of the established church in Massachusetts.

Payson was widely admired for leading an armed group of parishioners into battle at Lexington in 1775. In this Election Sermon, Payson used an argument that was a staple of the Massachusetts advocates of state support of religion, insisting that "the importance of religion to civil society and government is great indeed . . . the fear and reverence of God and the terrors of eternity, are the most powerful restraints on the minds of men . . . let the restraints of religion once be broken down . . . and one might well defy all human wisdom and power to support and preserve order and government in the state."



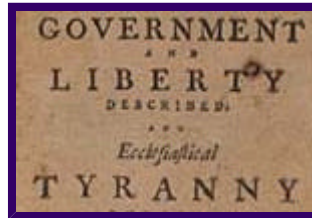
[A sermon preached before the honorable Council, and the honorable House of Representatives, of the State of Massachusetts-Bay, in New-England, at Boston, May 27, 1778](#)

Phillips Payson, Boston: John Gill, 1778  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress \(126\)](#)

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during the colonial period. The Baptists, who had grown strong since the Great Awakening, tenaciously adhered to their ancient conviction that churches should receive no support from the state. They believed that the Divine Truth, having been freely received, should be freely given by Gospel ministers.

The Constitutional Convention chose to act as nursing fathers of the church and included in the draft constitution submitted to the voters the famous Article Three, which authorized a general religious tax to be directed to the church of a taxpayers' choice. Despite substantial doubt that Article Three had been approved by the required two thirds of the voters, in 1780 Massachusetts authorities declared it and the rest of the state constitution to have been duly adopted.



### Against Tax-Supported Religion

Isaac Backus (1724-1806) was the leader of the New England Baptists. In this response to Payson's Election Sermon, Backus forcefully states the

Baptists' opposition to state support of the churches. This opposition was grounded in the Baptists' reading of the New Testament and also of ecclesiastical history which demonstrated, that state support of religion inevitably corrupted the churches. Backus and other Baptist leaders agreed with their clerical adversaries in believing that religion was necessary for social prosperity and happiness but they believed that the best way for the state to assure the health of religion was to leave it alone and let it take its own course, which, the Baptists were convinced, would result in vital, evangelical religion covering the land.

#### *Government and Liberty Described and Ecclesiastical Tyranny Exposed*

Isaac Backus, Boston: Powars and Willis, 1778  
Courtesy of the John Carter Brown Library, Brown University (127)



*Rev. Isaac Backus, AM.*

Trask Library, Andover Theological Seminary,  
Newton Centre, Massachusetts (128)

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### Another Advocate of Tax-Supported Religion

In Massachusetts, a newspaper war raged for years over state support of religion. One of the most indefatigable combatants on the side of state support was Samuel West (1730-1807), Congregational minister at Dartmouth, Massachusetts, who performed valuable code-breaking services for the American Army during the Revolutionary War. Here West, writing as "Irenaeus," uses the familiar argument that religion with its "doctrine of a future state of reward and punishment" provides a greater inducement to obedience to the law than civil punishments. It is, as a result, so indispensable for the maintenance of social order that its support must be assured by the state, not left to private initiative.



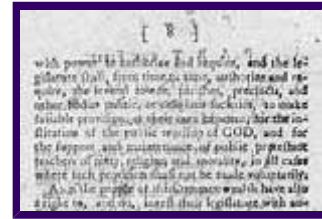
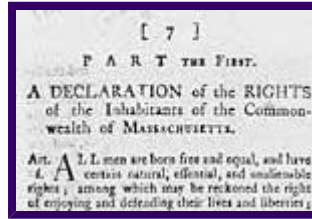
*The Boston Gazette and the Country Journal, November 27, 1780.*

"Irenaeus"

[Serial and Government Publications Division](#), Library of Congress (129)

**Massachusetts Constitution of 1780**

Article Three of the Bill of Rights of the Massachusetts Constitution of 1780 asserted that "the happiness of a people, and the good order and preservation of civil government, essentially depend on piety, religion and morality."



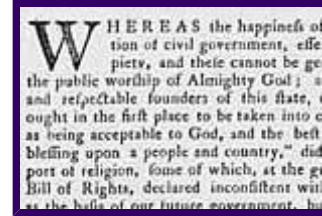
*[A Declaration of the Rights of the Inhabitants of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts from Account of Frame of Government agreed upon by the Delegates of the People. . . \[left page\] - \[right page\]](#)*

Boston: Benjamin Edes & Sons, 1780. Copyprints

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (130-130a )

**An Appeal for Tax-Supported Religion in Maryland**

An example of the influence of Article Three of the Massachusetts Constitution is this broadside issued by the Maryland House of Delegates in 1785 as part of a campaign to win public support for a general religious tax. The first sentence of this broadside paraphrases Article Three.



Broadside, January 12, 1785

Broadside Collection, [Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (131)



**THE CHURCH-STATE DEBATE: VIRGINIA**



**A Proposal for Tax-Supported Religion for Virginia**

This broadside contains (at the bottom) the opening sections of Patrick Henry's general assessment bill, one similar to those passed in the

New England states. The bill levied a tax for the support of religion but permitted individuals to earmark their taxes for the church of their choice. At the top of the broadside are the results of a vote in the Virginia General Assembly to postpone consideration of the bill until the fall 1785 session of the legislature. Postponing the bill allowed opponents to mobilize and defeat it. Leading the forces for postponement was James Madison. Voting against postponement and, therefore, in support of a general tax for religion was the future Chief Justice of the United States, John Marshall.

In 1779 the Virginia Assembly deprived Church of England ministers of tax support. Patrick Henry sponsored a bill for a general religious assessment in 1784. He appeared to be on the verge of securing its passage when his opponents neutralized his political influence by electing him governor. As a result, legislative consideration of Henry's bill was postponed until the fall of 1785, giving its adversaries an opportunity to mobilize public opposition to it.

Arguments used in Virginia were similar to those that had been employed in

*A Bill Establishing a Provision for Teachers of the Christian Religion*, Patrick Henry, Virginia House of Delegates, December 24, 1784. Broadside Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (133)

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*Patrick Henry*

Stipple engraving by Leney, after Thomas Sully  
Published by J. Webster, 1817, Copyprint  
Prints and Photographs Division  
(LC-USZ62-4907)  
Library of Congress (134)



*James Madison*

Miniature portrait by Charles Willson Peale, 1783  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division  
(USZ62-5310)  
Library of Congress (135)

*John Marshall*

Engraving with ink and ink wash, by Charles-Balthazar-Julien Fevret de Saint-Mémin, 1808  
Prints and Photographs Division  
(LC-USZ62-54940)  
Library of Congress (136)

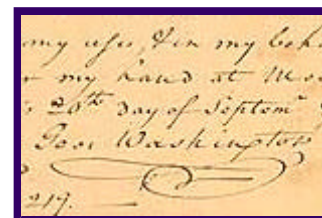


Massachusetts a few years earlier. Proponents of a general religious tax, principally Anglicans, urged that it should be supported on "Principles of Public Utility" because Christianity offered the "best means of promoting Virtue, Peace, and Prosperity." Opponents were led by Baptists, supported by Presbyterians (some of whom vacillated on the issue), and theological liberals. As in Massachusetts, they argued that government support of religion corrupted it. Virginians also made a strong libertarian case that government involvement in religion violated a people's civil and natural rights.

James Madison, the leading opponent of government-supported religion, combined both arguments in his celebrated Memorial and Remonstrance. In the fall of 1785, Madison marshaled sufficient legislative support to administer a decisive defeat to the effort to levy religious taxes. In place of Henry's bill, Madison and his allies passed in January 1786 Thomas Jefferson's famous Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, which brought the debate in Virginia to a close by severing, once and for all, the links between government and religion.

**George Washington in Support of Tax-Supported Religion**

In this letter George Washington informs his friend and neighbor, George Mason, in the midst of the public agitation over Patrick Henry's general assessment bill, that he does not, in principle, oppose "making people pay towards the support of that which they profess," although he considers it "impolitic" to pass a measure that will disturb public tranquility.



*George Washington to George Mason, October 3, 1785*

Manuscript copy, Letterbook 1785-1786  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (137)

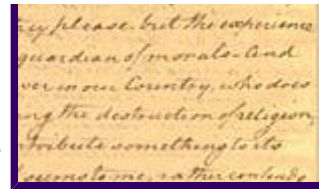
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**Another Supporter of Tax-Supported Religion**





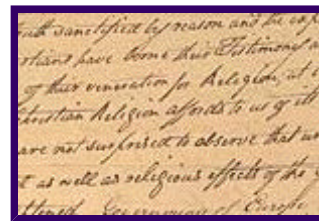
Richard Henry Lee, who moved in the Continental Congress, June 7, 1776, that the United States declare its independence from Britain, supported Patrick Henry's bill because he believed that the influence of religion was the surest means of creating the virtuous citizens needed to make a republican government work. His remark that "refiners may weave as fine a web of reason as they please, but the experience of all times shows religion to be the guardian of morals" appears to be aimed at Thomas Jefferson who, at this point in his career, was thought by other Virginians to believe that sufficient republican morality could be instilled in the citizenry by instructing it solely in history and the classics.



Richard Henry Lee to James Madison, November 26, 1784  
[page one] - [page two] - [page three] - [page four]  
 Manuscript letter  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (143)

**An Appeal for Tax-Supported Religion**

The debate in Virginia in 1785 over religious taxation produced an unprecedented outpouring of petitions to the General Assembly. This petition from supporters of Patrick Henry's bill in Surry County declares that "the Christian Religion is conducive to the happiness of Societies." They assert that "True Religion is most friendly to social and political Happiness--That a conscientious Regard to the approbation of Almighty God lays the most effectual restraint on the vicious passions of Mankind affords the most powerful incentive to the faithful discharge of every social Duty and is consequently the most solid Basis of private and public Virtue is a truth which has in some measure been acknowledged at every Period of Time and in every Corner of the Globe."



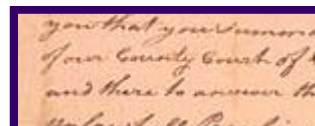
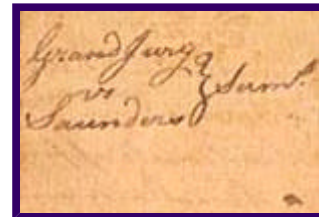
Petition to the Virginia General Assembly, from Surry County, Virginia, November 14, 1785  
[page one] - [page two] - [page three] - [page four] - [page five]  
 Manuscript  
 The Library of Virginia (138)



**PERSECUTION IN VIRGINIA**

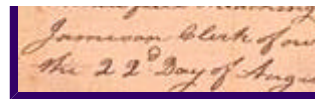
In Virginia, religious persecution, directed at Baptists and, to a lesser degree, at Presbyterians, continued after the Declaration of Independence. The perpetrators were members of the Church of England, sometimes acting as vigilantes but often operating in tandem with local authorities. Physical violence was usually reserved for Baptists, against whom there was social as well as theological animosity. A notorious instance of abuse in 1771 of a well-known Baptist preacher, "Swearin Jack" Waller, was described by the victim: "The Parson of the Parish [accompanied by the local sheriff] would keep running

**Unlawful Preaching**  
 Many Baptist ministers refused on principle to apply to local authorities for a license to preach, as Virginia law required, for they considered it intolerable to ask another man's permission to preach the Gospel. As a result, they exposed themselves to arrest for "unlawfull Preaching," as Nathaniel Saunders (1735-1808) allegedly had done. Saunders, at this time, was the minister of the Mountain Run Baptist Church in Orange County, Virginia.



Summons to Nathaniel Saunders, August 22, 1772  
[cover] - [summons]  
 Manuscript

the end of his horsewhip in [Waller's] mouth, laying his whip across the hymn book, etc. When done singing [Waller] proceeded to prayer. In it he was violently jerked off the stage; they caught him by the back part of his neck, beat his head against the ground, sometimes up and sometimes down, they carried him through the gate . . . where a gentleman [the sheriff] gave him . . . twenty lashes with his horsewhip."



Virginia Baptist Historical Society (140)



The persecution of Baptists made a strong, negative impression on many patriot leaders, whose loyalty to principles of civil liberty exceeded their loyalty to the Church of England in which they were raised. James Madison was not the only patriot to despair, as he did in 1774, that the "diabolical Hell conceived principle of persecution rages" in his native colony. Accordingly, civil libertarians like James Madison and Thomas Jefferson joined Baptists and Presbyterians to defeat the campaign for state financial involvement in religion in Virginia.

**Dunking of Baptist Ministers**

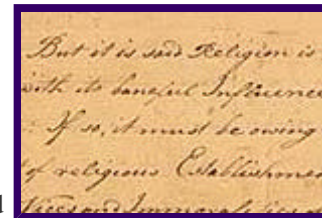
David Barrow was pastor of the Mill Swamp Baptist Church in the Portsmouth, Virginia, area. He and a "ministering brother," Edward Mintz, were conducting a service in 1778, when they were attacked. "As soon as the hymn was given out, a gang of well-dressed men came up to the stage . . . and sang one of their obscene songs. Then they took to plunge both of the preachers. They plunged Mr. Barrow twice, pressing him into the mud, holding him down, nearly succeeding in drowning him . . . His companion was plunged but once . . . Before these persecuted men could change their clothes they were dragged from the house, and driven off by these enraged churchmen."

*The Dunking of David Barrow and Edward Mintz in the Nansemond River, 1778*

Oil on canvas by Sidney King, 1990  
Virginia Baptist Historical Society (141)

**Petition Against Religious Taxation**

This anti-religious tax petition (below), composed, scholars have assumed, by a Baptist and clearly stating the Baptist point of view, was printed in large numbers and circulated throughout central and southern Virginia. It was signed by more citizens than any other document opposing Patrick Henry's bill, including James Madison's more famous Memorial and Remonstrance. What distinguished this petition from others was its strong evangelical flavor. It argued that deism, which many of the temporary allies of the Baptists espoused, could be "put to open shame" by the exertions of preachers who were "inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost." It also presented the Baptist reading of history, namely, that the state ruined, rather than helped, religion by supporting it.

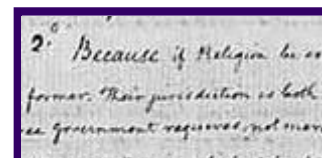


*Petition to the Virginia General Assembly, Westmoreland County, Virginia, November 27, 1785 [left page] - [right page]*

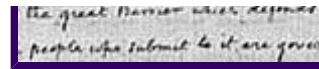
The Library of Virginia (139)

**Madison's Memorial and Remonstrance**

Madison's principal written contribution to the contest over Henry's general assessment bill was his Memorial and Remonstrance. Madison's petition has grown in stature over time and is now regarded as one of the most significant American statements on the issue of the relationship of government to religion.



Madison grounded his objection to Henry's bill on the civil libertarian argument that it violated the citizen's "unalienable" natural right to freedom of religion and on the practical argument that government's embrace of religion had inevitably harmed it. Thus, he combined and integrated the two principal arguments used by opponents of Henry's bill.



To the Honorable the General Assembly of the Commonwealth of Virginia:

A Memorial and Remonstrance

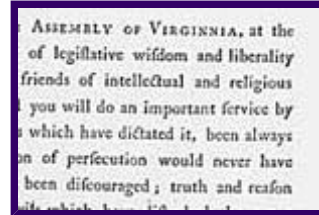
Holograph manuscript, June 1785

James Madison

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (142)

**Jefferson's Act for Establishing Religious Freedom**

This act, the title of which Jefferson directed to be inscribed on his tombstone as comparable in importance to the Declaration of Independence, does not exist in a handwritten copy. The version shown here was printed as a broadside in London in 1786 by the great civil libertarian and friend of America, Dr. Richard Price, who wrote the introduction and made changes in the text. Jefferson evidently wrote the Bill for Establishing Religious Freedom in 1777 as a part of his project to revise the laws of his state. The Bill was debated in the General Assembly in 1779 and was postponed after passing a second reading. Madison revived it as an alternative to Henry's general assessment bill and guided it to passage in the Virginia Assembly in January 1786.



An Act for Establishing Religious Freedom, January 1786.

Thomas Jefferson, Laidler, July 1786.

Broadside

Rare Book and Special Collections Division,

Library of Congress (144)



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# Religion and the Founding of the American Republic



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## VI. Religion and the Federal Government

[ [PART 1](#) ] [ [PART 2](#) ]

In response to widespread sentiment that to survive the United States needed a stronger federal government, a convention met in Philadelphia in the summer of 1787 and on September 17 adopted the Constitution of the United States. Aside from Article VI, which stated that "no religious Test shall ever be required as Qualification" for federal office holders, the Constitution said little about religion. Its reserve troubled two groups of Americans--those who wanted the new instrument of government to give faith a larger role and those who feared that it would do so. This latter group, worried that the Constitution did not prohibit the kind of state-supported religion that had flourished in some colonies, exerted pressure on the members of the First Federal Congress. In September 1789 the Congress adopted the First Amendment to the Constitution, which, when ratified by the required number of states in December 1791, forbade Congress to make any law "respecting an establishment of religion."

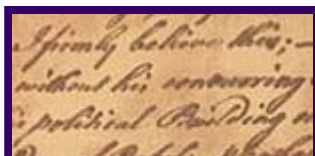
The first two Presidents of the United States were patrons of religion--George Washington was an Episcopal vestryman, and John Adams described himself as "a church going animal." Both offered strong rhetorical support for religion. In his Farewell Address of September 1796, Washington called religion, as the source of morality, "a necessary spring of popular government," while Adams claimed that statesmen "may plan and speculate for Liberty, but it is Religion and Morality alone, which can establish the Principles upon which Freedom can securely stand." Thomas Jefferson and James Madison, the third and fourth Presidents, are generally considered less hospitable to religion than their predecessors, but evidence presented in this section shows that, while in office, both offered religion powerful symbolic support.



### RELIGION AND THE CONSTITUTION

#### Franklin Requests Prayers in the Constitutional Convention

Benjamin Franklin delivered this famous speech, asking that

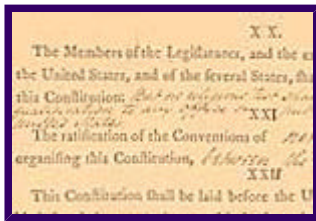


When the Constitution was submitted to the American public, "many pious people" complained that the document had slighted God, for it contained "no

the Convention begin each day's session with prayers, at a particularly contentious period, when it appeared that the Convention might break up over its failure to resolve the dispute between the large and small states over representation in the new government. The eighty one year old Franklin asserted that "the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this Truth--that God governs in the Affairs of Men." "I also believe," Franklin continued, that "without his concurring Aid, we shall succeed in this political Building no better than the Builders of Babel." Franklin's motion failed, ostensibly because the Convention had no funds to pay local clergymen to act as chaplains.



[Speech to the Constitutional Convention, June 28, 1787](#)  
Benjamin Franklin, Holograph manuscript  
[Manuscript Division](#), Library of Congress (145)



**Prohibition of Religious Tests**  
The language prohibiting religious tests as a qualification for federal office holders, ultimately incorporated into Article Six of the Constitution, was proposed by Charles Pinckney of South Carolina on

August 20, 1787, and adopted by the full Convention on August 30. Here we see the language as it was added to the first working draft of the Constitution, the so-called Committee of Detail report of August 6, 1787, by the Convention secretary, William Jackson.

[Constitution of the United States \(William Jackson Copy\)](#),  
[Committee of Detail report](#)  
[Broadside](#), August 6, 1787  
[Manuscript Division](#), [Library of Congress](#) (146)

recognition of his mercies to us . . . or even of his existence." The Constitution was reticent about religion for two reasons: first, many delegates were committed federalists, who believed that the power to legislate on religion, if it existed at all, lay within the domain of the state, not the national, governments; second, the delegates believed that it would be a tactical mistake to introduce such a politically controversial issue as religion into the Constitution. The only "religious clause" in the document--the proscription of religious tests as qualifications for federal office in Article Six--was intended to defuse controversy by disarming potential critics who might claim religious discrimination in eligibility for public office.

That religion was not otherwise addressed in the Constitution did not make it an "irreligious" document any more than the Articles of Confederation was an "irreligious" document. The Constitution dealt with the church precisely as the Articles had, thereby maintaining, at the national level, the religious status quo. In neither document did the people yield any explicit power to act in the field of religion. But the absence of expressed powers did not prevent either the Continental-Confederation Congress or the Congress under the Constitution from sponsoring a program to support general, nonsectarian religion.



## RELIGION AND THE BILL OF RIGHTS

Many Americans were disappointed that the Constitution did not contain a bill of rights that would explicitly

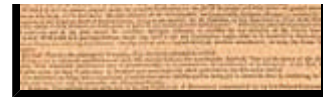
**Proposed Constitutional Amendments**  
The Virginia Ratifying Convention approved the



enumerate the rights of American citizens and enable courts and public opinion to protect these rights from an oppressive government. Supporters of a bill of rights permitted the Constitution to be adopted with the understanding that the first Congress under the new government would attempt to add a bill of rights.

James Madison took the lead in steering such a bill through the First Federal Congress, which convened in the spring of 1789. The Virginia Ratifying Convention and Madison's constituents, among whom were large numbers of Baptists who wanted freedom of religion secured, expected him to push for a bill of rights. On September 28, 1789, both houses of Congress voted to send twelve amendments to the states. In December 1791, those ratified by the requisite three fourths of the states became the first ten amendments to the Constitution. Religion was addressed in the First Amendment in the following familiar words: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." In notes for his June 8, 1789, speech introducing the Bill of Rights, Madison indicated his opposition to a "national" religion. Most Americans agreed that the federal government must not pick out one religion and give it exclusive financial and legal support.

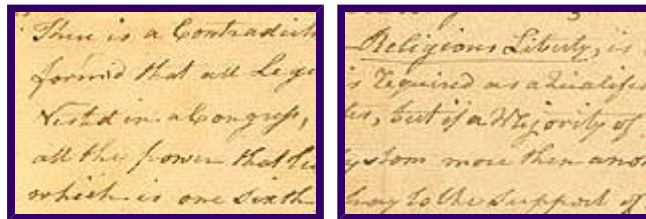
Constitution with the understanding that the state's representatives in the First Federal Congress would try to procure amendments that the Convention recommended. The twentieth proposed amendment deals with religion; it is an adaptation of the final article in the Virginia Declaration of Rights of 1776 with this additional phrase: "that no particular religious sect or society ought to be favored or established by Law in preference to others."



Proposed amendments to the Constitution of the United States

[page one] - [page two] - [page three] - [page four]  
Virginia Ratifying Convention, Broadside, June 25, 1788

Rare Book and Special Collections Division,  
Library of Congress (147)



**Baptist Preacher's Objections to the Constitution**

The influential Baptist preacher, John Leland, wrote a letter, containing ten objections to the Federal Constitution, and sent it to Colonel Thomas Barbour, an opponent of the Constitution in James Madison's Orange County district. Leland's objections were copied by Captain Joseph Spencer, one of Madison's Baptist friends, and sent to Madison so that he could refute the arguments. Leland's final objection was that the new constitution did not sufficiently secure "What is dearest of all---Religious Liberty." His chief worry was "if a Majority of Congress with the President favour one System more than another, they may oblige all others to pay to the support of their System as much as they please."

Objections to the Federal Constitution, [February 1788]

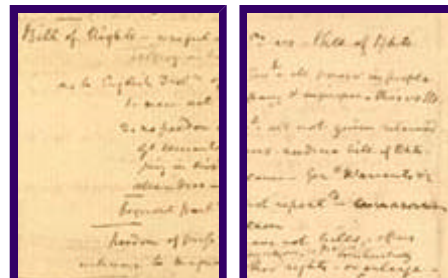
[page one] - [page two]

John Leland

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (148)

**Madison's Notes for the Bill of Rights**

Madison used this outline to guide him in delivering his speech introducing the Bill of Rights into the First Congress on June 8, 1789. Madison proposed an amendment to assuage the anxieties of those who feared that religious freedom would be endangered by the unamended Constitution. According to The Congressional Register Madison, on June 8, moved that "the civil rights of none shall be abridged on account of religious belief or worship, nor shall any national religion be established, nor shall the full and equal rights of



conscience be in any manner, or on any pretext infringed."



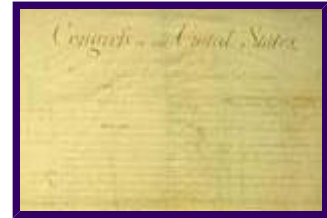
*Notes for a speech introducing the Bill of Rights, [June 8, 1789] [page one] - [page two]*

James Madison, Holograph notes

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (149)

### **The Bill of Rights**

The necessary two thirds majority in each house of Congress ratified the Bill of Rights on September 28, 1789. As sent to the states for approval, the Bill of Rights contained twelve proposed amendments to the Constitution. Amendments One and Two did not receive the required approval of three fourths of the states. As a result, Article Three in the original Bill of Rights became the First Amendment to the Constitution. This copy on vellum was signed by Speaker of the House Frederick Muhlenberg, Vice President John Adams, and Secretary of State Samuel Otis.



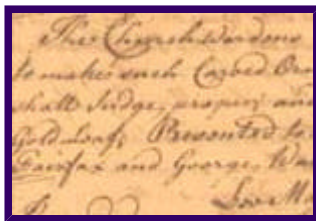
*The Bill of Rights (the John Beckley copy) September 28, 1789.*

Holograph manuscript on vellum

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (150)



## **THE RHETORICAL SUPPORT OF RELIGION: WASHINGTON AND ADAMS**



### **George Washington, Episcopal Vestryman**

Washington was for many years a vestryman at Truro Parish, his local Episcopal Church. The entry of June 5, 1772, shows Washington and his neighbor, George

Mason, the author of the Virginia Declaration of Rights, engaged in parish business, including making arrangements for replacing the front steps of the church, painting its roof and selling church pews to the members as a means of obtaining revenue. The minutes of the meeting also reveal that Washington and George William Fairfax presented the parish with gold leaf to be used to gild letters on "Carved Ornaments" on the altar.

*The Vestry Book of Truro Parish, Virginia, 1732-1802*

Manuscript volume

Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (152)

The country's first two presidents, George Washington and John Adams, were firm believers in the importance of religion for republican government. As citizens of Virginia and Massachusetts, both were sympathetic to general religious taxes being paid by the citizens of their respective states to the churches of their choice. However both statesmen would have discouraged such a measure at the national level because of its divisiveness. They confined themselves to promoting religion rhetorically, offering frequent testimonials to its importance in building the moral character of American citizens, that, they believed, undergirded public order and successful popular government.



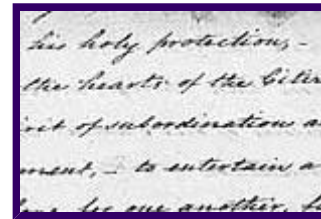
George Washington

Chalk drawing on paper, ca. 1800, by St. Memin  
Prints and Photograph Division, Library of Congress. (151)

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**Washington's Prayer**

The draft of the circular letter is in the hand of a secretary, although the signature is Washington's. Some have called this concluding paragraph "Washington's Prayer." In it, he asked God to: "dispose us all, to do Justice, to love mercy, and to demean ourselves with that Charity, humility and pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion, and without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation."



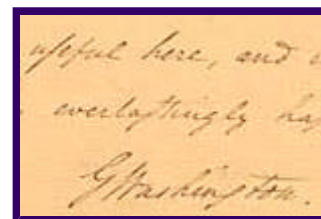
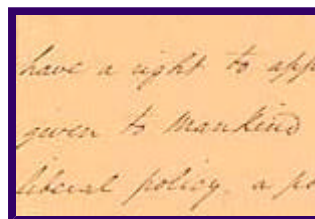
Circular to the chief executives of the states, June 11, 1783

George Washington, Manuscript  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (153)

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**"To Bigotry no Sanction"**

President George Washington and a group of public officials, including Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson, left New York City, the temporary capital of the United States, on August 15, 1790, for a brief tour of Rhode Island. At Newport, Washington received an address of congratulations from the congregation of the Touro Synagogue. His famous answer, assuring his fellow citizens "of the Stock of Abraham" that the new American republic would give "to bigotry no sanction, to persecution not assistance," is seen here in the copy from Washington's letterbook.



George Washington to the Hebrew Congregation in New Port, Rhode Island [page one] - [page two]

Manuscript copy, Letterbook 1790-1794  
Manuscript Division. Library of Congress (154)

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**WASHINGTON'S FAREWELL ADDRESS**

George Washington's Farewell Address is

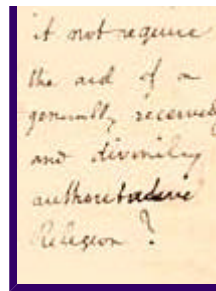


Hamilton's Draft of



one of the most important documents in American history. Recommendations made in it by the first president, particularly in the field of foreign affairs, have exerted a strong and continuing influence on American statesmen and politicians. The address, in which Washington informed the American people that he would not seek a third term and offered advice on the country's future policies, was published on September 19, 1796, in David Claypoole's American Daily Advertiser. It was immediately reprinted in newspapers and as a pamphlet throughout the United States. The address was drafted in July 1796 by Alexander Hamilton and revised for publication by the president himself. Washington also had at his disposal an earlier draft by James Madison.

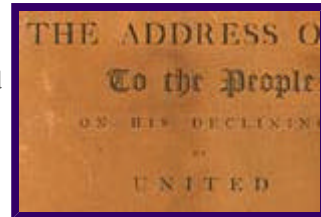
The "religion section" of the address was for many years as familiar to Americans as was Washington's warning that the United States should avoid entangling alliances with foreign nations. Washington's observations on the relation of religion to government were commonplace, and similar statements abound in documents from the founding period. Washington's prestige, however, gave his views a special authority with his fellow citizens and caused them to be repeated in political discourse well into the nineteenth century.



**Washington's Farewell Address**  
George Washington's Farewell Address was drafted by Alexander Hamilton who made a stronger case for the necessity of religious faith as a prop for popular government than Washington was willing to accept. Washington incorporated Hamilton's assertion that it was unreasonable to suppose that "national morality can be maintained in exclusion of religious principle," but declined to add Hamilton's next sentence, written in the left margin of this page: "does it [national morality] not require the aid of a generally received and divinely authoritative Religion?"

*Draft of Washington's Farewell Address, [July] 1796*  
Alexander Hamilton  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (155)

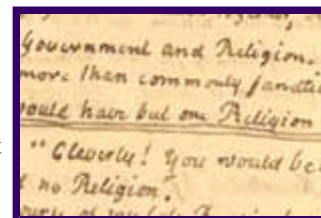
**The Farewell Address**  
In his Farewell Address, the first president advised his fellow citizens that "Religion and morality" were the "great Pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and citizens." "National morality," he added, could not exist "in exclusion of religious principle." "Virtue or morality," he concluded, as the products of religion, were "a necessary spring of popular government." The "religion section" is located in the lower right portion of page one and continues to the upper right portion of page two.



*The Farewell Address [page one] - [page two] - [page three]*  
George Washington, Broadside  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (156)

**Adams on Religion**

John Adams, a self-confessed "church going animal," grew up in the Congregational Church in Braintree, Massachusetts. By the time he wrote this letter his theological position can best be described as Unitarian. In this letter Adams tells Jefferson that "Without Religion this World would be Something not fit to be mentioned in polite Company, I mean Hell."

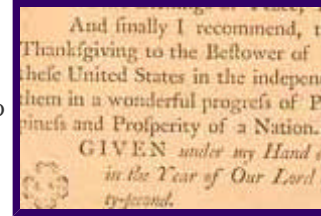


*John Adams to Thomas Jefferson, April 19, 1817*  
[page one] - [page two] - [page three] - [page four]  
Holograph letter  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (157)

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### Adams's Fast Day Proclamation

John Adams continued the practice, begun in 1775 and adopted under the new federal government by Washington, of issuing fast and thanksgiving day proclamations. In this proclamation, issued at a time when the nation appeared to be on the brink of a war with France, Adams urged the citizens to "acknowledge before God the manifold sins and transgressions with which we are justly chargeable as individuals and as a nation; beseeching him at the same time, of His infinite grace, through the Redeemer of the World, freely to remit all our offences, and to incline us, by His Holy Spirit, to that sincere repentance and reformation which may afford us reason to hope for his inestimable favor and heavenly benediction."



*Fast Day Proclamation, March 23, 1798.*

John Adams. Broadside

Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (158)

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# Religion and the Founding of the American Republic



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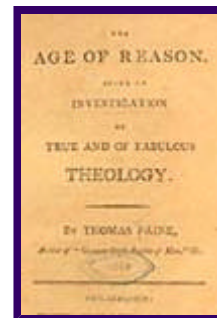
**SECTIONS:** I. [America as Refuge](#) - II. [18th Century America](#)  
 III. [American Revolution](#) - IV. [Congress of the Confederation](#) - V. [State Governments](#)  
 VI. [Federal Government](#) - VII. **New Republic**

## VII. Religion and the New Republic

The religion of the new American republic was evangelicalism, which, between 1800 and the Civil War, was the "grand absorbing theme" of American religious life. During some years in the first half of the nineteenth century, revivals (through which evangelicalism found expression) occurred so often that religious publications that specialized in tracking them lost count. In 1827, for example, one journal exulted that "revivals, we rejoice to say, are becoming too numerous in our country to admit of being generally mentioned in our Record." During the years between the inaugurations of Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, historians see "evangelicalism emerging as a kind of national church or national religion." The leaders and ordinary members of the "evangelical empire" of the nineteenth century were American patriots who subscribed to the views of the Founders that religion was a "necessary spring" for republican government; they believed, as a preacher in 1826 asserted, that there was "an association between Religion and Patriotism." Converting their fellow citizens to Christianity was, for them, an act that simultaneously saved souls and saved the republic. The American Home Missionary Society assured its supporters in 1826 that "we are doing the work of patriotism no less than Christianity." With the disappearance of efforts by government to create morality in the body politic (symbolized by the termination in 1833 of Massachusetts's tax support for churches) evangelical, benevolent societies assumed that role, bringing about what today might be called the privatization of the responsibility for forming a virtuous citizenry.

### The Atheist's Bible

Pious Americans were shocked by Thomas Paine's [The Age of Reason](#), part of which was written during the great pamphleteer's imprisonment in Paris during the French Revolution. Although denounced as the "atheist's bible," Paine's work was actually an exposition of a radical kind of deism and made an attempt at critical biblical scholarship that anticipated modern efforts. Paine created a scandal by his sardonic and irreverent tone. Assertions that the virgin birth was "blasphemously obscene" and other similarly provocative observations convinced many readers that the treatise was the entering wedge in the United States of French revolutionary "infidelity."

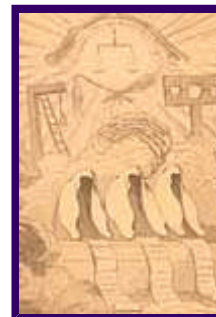


[\*The Age of Reason. Being an Investigation of True and Fabulous Theology.\*](#)

Thomas Paine. Philadelphia: Printed and sold by the Booksellers, 1794  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (181)

### **Paine Rebuked**

Even before the publication of the *Age of Reason*, Thomas Paine was hated and feared for his political and religious radicalism by conservatives in England, where he had periodically lived since 1787. Paine fled to France in December 1792 to avoid trial for treason. In this cartoon, Paine sleeps on a straw pillow wrapped in an American flag, inscribed "Vive L' America." In his pocket is a copy of *Common Sense*. On the headboard are his two "Guardian Angels": Charles James Fox and Joseph Priestley. An imp drops a French Revolutionary song as he flees through a window, draped in curtains decorated with the fleur-de-lis. Confronting Paine are the spirits of three judges who will try him. The presiding judge declares that Paine will die like a dog on the gallows.



#### *Tom Paine's Nightly Pest.*

Engraving by James Gillray. London: published by H. Humphrey, 1792  
[Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (182)

### **The Tree of Life**

The evangelical spirit was embodied in men like John Hagerty (b. 1747), a Methodist preacher who established himself as a Baltimore printer-publisher specializing in evangelical works. Hagerty in 1791 published prints depicting a *Tree of Life*, a *Tree of Virtues* and a *Tree of Vices*, motifs used in religious art for centuries. The *Tree of Life* brings forth, under the redemptive rays of God as Father, Spirit and Word, twelve fruits of salvation for those seeking entry into the New Jerusalem. A large crowd strolls by the narrow gate of salvation along the Broad Way to the Devil and "babylon Mother of Harlots" beckon. The secure sinners are stigmatized with labels indicating: "pride," "chambering & wantonness," "quack," "usury," and "extortion."



#### *The Tree of Life*

Hand-colored engraving. Baltimore: printed for John Hagerty, 1791  
 Maryland Historical Society Library, Baltimore, Maryland (183)



## **THE CAMP MEETING**

In 1800 major revivals that eventually reached into almost every corner of the land began at opposite ends of the country: the decorous Second Great Awakening in New England and the exuberant Great Revival in Kentucky. The principal religious innovation produced by the Kentucky revivals was the camp meeting. The revivals were organized by Presbyterian ministers, who modeled them after the extended outdoor "communion seasons," used by the Presbyterian Church in Scotland, which frequently produced emotional, demonstrative displays of religious

### **Outdoor Communion**

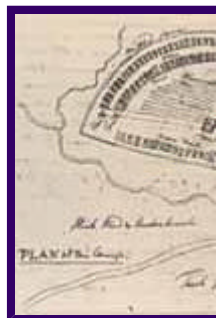
The Kentucky revivals originated with Presbyterians and emerged from marathon outdoor "communion seasons," which were a feature of Presbyterian practice in Scotland.



#### *Sacramental Scene in a Western Forest*

Lithograph by P.S. Duval, ca. 1801, from Joseph Smith, *Old Redstone*. Copyprint. Philadelphia: 1854.  
 General Collections, Library of Congress (184)

conviction. In Kentucky the pioneers loaded their families and provisions into their wagons and drove to the Presbyterian meetings, where they pitched tents and settled in for several days. When assembled in a field or at the edge of a forest for a prolonged religious meeting, the participants transformed the site into a camp meeting. The religious revivals that swept the Kentucky camp meetings were so intense and created such gusts of emotion that their original sponsors, the Presbyterians, as well the Baptists, soon repudiated them. The Methodists, however, adopted and eventually domesticated camp meetings and introduced them into the eastern United States, where for decades they were one of the evangelical signatures of the denomination.



#### **Camp Meeting Plan**

This sketch, by Benjamin Latrobe, shows the layout of an 1809 Methodist camp meeting in Fairfax County, Virginia. Note that the men's seats were separated from the women's and the "negro tents" from the whites.' This is an example of the racial segregation that prompted black Methodists to withdraw from the denomination a

few years later and form their own independent Methodist church. To accommodate the powerful, at times uncontrollable, emotions generated at a camp meeting, Latrobe indicated that, at the right of the main camp, the organizers had erected "a boarded enclosure filled with straw, into which the converted were thrown that they might kick about without injuring themselves."

#### *Plan of the Camp, August 8, 1809*

Journal of Benjamin Latrobe,

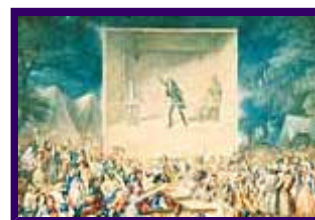
August 23, 1806- August 8, 1809

Sketch by Benjamin Henry Latrobe

Latrobe Papers, Manuscript Department, Maryland Historical Society, Baltimore (185)

#### **Religious Revival in America**

In 1839 J. Maze Burbank exhibited at the Royal Society in London this watercolor of "a camp meeting, or religious revival in America, from a sketch taken on the spot." It is not known where, when, or under whose auspices the revival painted by Burbank occurred.



#### *Religious Camp Meeting.*

Watercolor by J. Maze Burbank, c. 1839

Old Dartmouth Historical Society-New Bedford Whaling Museum,

New Bedford, Massachusetts.

Gift of William F. Havemeyer (187)



#### *Methodist camp meeting, March 1, 1819*

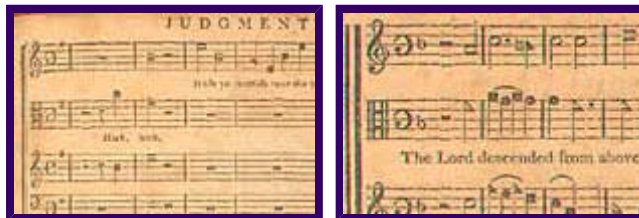
Engraving

Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress. (186)

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### Revival Hymnals

Both of these books contain hymns that would have been sung at nineteenth century revivals.



*Samuel Wakefield, The Christian's Harp . . . suited to the various Metres now in use among the different Religious Denominations . . . in the United States*

Pittsburgh: Johnston and Stockton, 1837

*The Easy Instructor; or, A New Method of Teaching Sacred Harmony.*

William Little and William Smith.

Albany: Websters & Skinner and Daniel Steele, c. 1798

Music Division, Library of Congress (188-189)



## THE EMERGENCE OF THE AFRICAN AMERICAN CHURCH

### Bishops of the African Methodist Episcopal Church

In the center is Richard Allen, founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, surrounded by ten bishops of the church. At the upper left and right corners are pictures of Wilberforce University and Payne Institute; other scenes in the life of the church are depicted, including the sending of missionaries to Haiti in 1824.



*Bishops of the A.M.E. Church.*  
Engraving by John H. W. Burley,  
Washington, D. C., 1876.  
Boston: J. H. Daniels, 1876  
Prints and Photographs Division,  
Library of Congress (190)



### Woman Preacher of the A.M.E. Church

The black churches were graced by eloquent female preachers from their earliest days, although there was, as in the white churches, resistance in many quarters to the idea of women preaching the Gospel.

Scholars disagree about the extent of the native African content of black Christianity as it emerged in eighteenth-century America, but there is no dispute that the Christianity of the black population was grounded in evangelicalism. The Second Great Awakening has been called the "central and defining event in the development of Afro-Christianity." During these revivals Baptists and Methodists converted large numbers of blacks. However, many were disappointed at the treatment they received from their fellow believers and at the backsliding in the commitment to abolish slavery that many white Baptists and Methodists had advocated immediately after the American Revolution. When their discontent could not be contained, forceful black leaders followed what was becoming an American habit--forming new denominations. In 1787 Richard Allen (1760-1831) and his colleagues in Philadelphia broke away from the Methodist Church and in 1815 founded the African Methodist Episcopal (A. M. E.) Church, which, along with independent black Baptist congregations, flourished as the century progressed. By 1846, the A. M. E. Church, which began with 8 clergy and 5

churches, had grown to 176 clergy, 296 churches, and 17,375 members.

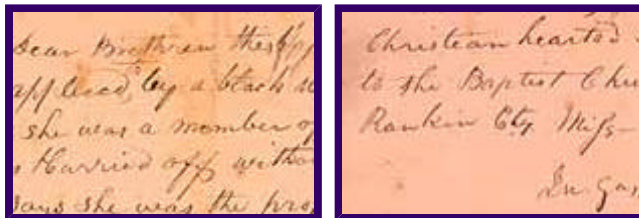
Mrs. Juliann Jane Tillman,  
Preacher of the A.M.E. Church.

Engraving by P. S. Duval,  
after a painting by Alfred Hoffy, Philadelphia, 1844

Prints and Photographs Division,  
Library of Congress (191)

### Christian Charity

In the letter below, a Mississippi Baptist church informs a Virginia Baptist church that it has been approached by a slave, Charity, who has been sold from Virginia to Mississippi, but nevertheless wishes to let her old fellow church members in Virginia know that she is praying for them and especially for "all her old Mistress family." Charity also wants it known that "her most pious affections and prayers" are that her old mistress, Mary S. Garret (Garnett), "become prepared to meet her in heaven."



Mt. Pisgah Baptist Church, Rankin City, Mississippi,  
to Upper King and Queen Baptist Church, Newtown, Virginia [left page] - [right page]

Manuscript letter, June 1837.  
Virginia Baptist Historical Society (192)

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### Absalom Jones

Born a slave in Delaware, Absalom Jones (1746-1818), was a founding member of the African Episcopal Church of St. Thomas in Philadelphia, dedicated on July 17, 1794. A year later Jones was ordained as the first black Episcopal priest in the United States.



Absalom Jones

Oil on canvas on board by Raphaelle Peale, 1810  
Delaware Art Museum, Wilmington. Gift of the Absalom Jones School (193)

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### Congressional Assistance to Absalom Jones

In this receipt, Absalom Jones acknowledges receiving from Samuel Wetherill, a leader of the Free Quakers of Philadelphia, a donation of \$186, collected from members of the House and Senate, to assist in promoting the mission of Jones's "St. Thomases African Church in Philadelphia."

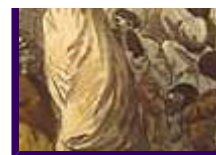
Receipt, signed by Absalom Jones, December 26, 1801  
Manuscript Division, Library of Congress (193a)

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### Religious Exuberance

Emotional exuberance was characteristic of evangelical religion in both the white and black communities in the first half of the nineteenth century.





*Negro Methodists Holding a Meeting in a Philadelphia Alley.*  
Watercolor by John Lewis Krimmel  
The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Rogers Fund, 1942 (194)

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### **Jerking Exercise**

Lorenzo Dow (1777-1834) was a spellbinding but eccentric traveling Methodist evangelist who could still a turbulent camp meeting with "the sound of his voice or at the sight of his fragile but awe-inspiring presence." Dow's audiences often exhibited unusual physical manifestations under the influence of his impassioned preaching.



*Lorenzo Dow and the Jerking Exercise.*  
Engraving by Lossing-Barrett, from  
Samuel G. Goodrich, *Recollections of a Lifetime.*  
Copyprint. New York: 1856  
[General Collections](#), Library of Congress (195)

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### **The Shakers**

The Shakers, or the United Society of Believers in Christ's Second Coming, were founded by "Mother Ann Lee, a stalwart in the "Shaking Quakers" who migrated to America from England in 1774. American Shakers shared with the Quakers a devotion to simplicity in conduct and demeanor and to spiritual equality. They "acquired their nickname from their practice of whirling, trembling or shaking during religious services." The Shakers used dancing as a worship practice. They often danced in concentric circles and sometimes in the style shown here. Shaker emissaries from New York visited Kentucky in the early years of the nineteenth century to assess the revivals under way there and made a modest number of converts.



*Shakers near Lebanon state of N York, their mode of worship.*  
Stipple and line engraving, drawn from life.  
[Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (196)

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### **Nineteenth Century Religious Leaders**

Two of these pioneers, Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell, were Presbyterian ministers who, for different reasons, left the denomination and formed, in 1832, the Disciples of Christ. While an active Presbyterian minister, Stone organized the powerful Cane Ridge revival, near Lexington, Kentucky in the summer of 1800.



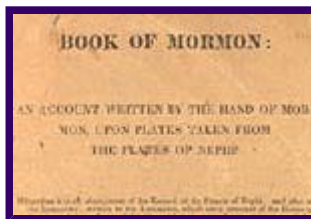
*Pioneers in the Great Religious Reformation of the Nineteenth Century.*  
Steel engraving by J. C. Buttre,  
after a drawing by J. D. C. McFarland, c. 1885  
[Prints and Photographs Division](#), Library of Congress (197)





## THE MORMONS

Another distinctive religious group, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints or the Mormons, arose in the 1820s during the "Golden Day of Democratic Evangelicalism." The founder, Joseph Smith (1805-1844), and many of his earliest followers grew up in an area of western New York called the "Burned Over District," because it had been "scorched" by so many revivals. Smith had been "seared but not consumed" by the exuberant evangelicalism of the era. However the Mormon Church cannot be considered as the product of revivalism or as a splintering off from an existing Protestant denomination. It was sui generis, inspired by what Smith described as revelations on a series of gold plates, which he translated and published as the Book of Mormon in 1830. The new church conceived itself to be a restoration of primitive Christianity, which other existing churches were considered to have deserted. The Mormons subscribed to many orthodox Christian beliefs but professed distinctive doctrines based on post-biblical revelation. Persecuted from its inception, the Mormon Church moved from New York to Ohio to Missouri to Illinois, where it put down strong roots at Nauvoo. In 1844 the Nauvoo settlement was devastated by its neighbors, and Smith and his brother were murdered. This attack prompted the Mormons, under the leadership of Brigham Young, to migrate to Utah, where the first parties arrived in July 1847. The church today is a flourishing, worldwide denomination.



**The Book of Mormon**  
The Book of Mormon, the fundamental testament of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, was published by Joseph Smith in 1830. According to a standard reference work,

Smith translated it from "golden plates engraved in a language referred to as reformed Egyptian." The plates, which were seen and handled by 11 witnesses, deal chiefly with the inhabitants of the American continents spanning the period 600 B.C. to A.D. 421. The plates relate the sacred history of Israelites who, led by a divinely directed righteous man named Lehi, emigrated from Jerusalem to the New World, where Christ appeared and gave them his teachings. The record of their experiences, kept by various prophets, was compiled and abridged by the 5th century prophet Mormon. . . ."

### *Book of Mormon:*

*An Account written by the Hand of Mormon, upon plates taken from the Plates of Nephi*

Joseph Smith, Junior. Palmyra, N.Y.: E.B. Grandin, 1830

[Rare Book and Special Collections Division,](#)

Library of Congress (198)

### **The Murder of Joseph and Hiram Smith**

The murder of Joseph Smith and his brother, Hiram, by a mob in Carthage, Illinois, prompted the Mormons, under the leadership of



Brigham Young, to migrate in 1846-1847 to Utah, where they found a permanent home. Although accounts differ, Joseph Smith was apparently shot to death by a mob, one of whose members approached him with the intention, which was thwarted, of beheading him.

### *Martyrdom of Joseph and Hiram Smith in Carthage Jail, June 27, 1844*

Tinted lithograph by Nagel & Weingaertner, after C. G. Crehen. New York: 1851

[Prints and Photographs Division,](#)

Library of Congress (199)

### Migration to Utah

This map shows the route of the migration of the Mormons from Illinois to Utah.



*Route of the Mormon Pioneers from Nauvoo to Great Salt Lake, Feb'y 1846-July 1847 [left] - [right]*

Map, copyright by Millroy and Bates, 1899. Facsimile  
Geography and Map Division, Library of Congress (200)



## BENEVOLENT SOCIETIES

### The Distribution of Religious Literature

The American Tract Society, founded in 1825, was one of the most influential of the scores of benevolent societies that flourished in the United States in the first decades of the nineteenth century. The Tract Society, through the efforts of thousands of families like the one shown here, flooded the nation with evangelical pamphlets, aimed at converting their recipients and eradicating social vices like alcoholism and gambling that impeded conversion. In the first decade of its existence the American Tract Society is estimated to have distributed 35 million evangelical books and tracts.



*Family handing out tracts*

Woodcut by Anderson from  
the American Tract Magazine, August 1825.  
American Tract Society, Garland, Texas (205)



### Mission to Sailors

Missionary societies in nineteenth-century America left no stone unturned or no place unattended to convert their fellow Americans. This church was built by the Young Men's Church Missionary Society of New York to minister to visiting seamen. A floating church, built to a similar design, was moored on the Philadelphia waterfront.

*The Floating Church of Our Saviour...For Seamen (Built New York Feb.15th, 1844. . . )*

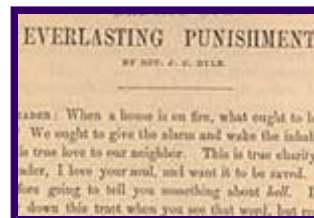
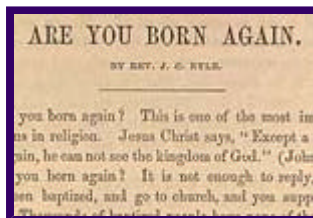
Steel engraving. Copyprint  
Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (206)

Benevolent societies were a new and conspicuous feature of the American landscape during the first half of the nineteenth century. Originally devoted to the salvation of souls, although eventually to the eradication of every kind of social ill, benevolent societies were the direct result of the extraordinary energies generated by the evangelical movement--specifically, by the "activism" resulting from conversion. "The evidence of God's grace," the Presbyterian evangelist, Charles G. Finney insisted, "was a person's benevolence toward others." The evangelical establishment used this powerful network of voluntary, ecumenical benevolent societies to Christianize the nation. The earliest and most important of these organizations focused their efforts on the conversion of sinners to the new birth or to the creation of conditions (such as sobriety sought by temperance societies) in which conversions could occur. The six largest societies in 1826-1827 were all directly concerned with conversion: the American Education Society, the American Board of Foreign Missions, the American Bible Society, the American Sunday-School Union, the American Tract Society, and the

AMERICAN TRACT SOCIETY, and the  
American Home Missionary Society.

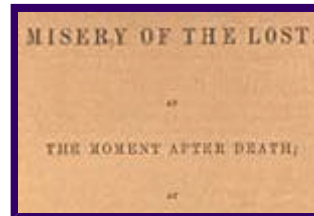
*Evangelical tracts,  
American Tract Society*

*[top left] -- [top right]*



*[bottom left] -- [bottom right]*

YA Pamphlet Collection  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division,  
Library of Congress. (201-4)



**Missions to the Old Northwest**

The evangelical community was extremely anxious about the supposedly deleterious moral impact of westward expansion. Consequently, strenuous efforts were made to send ministers to serve the mobile western populations. In this issue of the Home Missionary, the journal of the American Home Missionary Society, a map of the surveyed parts of Wisconsin was published with a letter from a "correspondent at Green Bay," who asserted, like the man from Macedonia, "that an immediate supply [of ministers] is demanded." The executive Committee of the Society decided "to make immediate and energetic efforts to supply Wisconsin with the preaching of the Gospel.



*The surveyed part of Wisconsin.*

Map from The Home Missionary, volume XII, November 1839  
New York: N. Currier, c. 1839  
General Collections, Library of Congress (208)

**Missionaries' Reports**

This table, compiled from data from the missionaries of the American Home Mission Society, reports on revivals in progress and other missionary activities under their auspices in 1841-1842.

653. Rev. Edwin J. Sherrill,	Faton,
CAN. H. M. S.	
654. Rev. John C. Sherwin,	Cong.
	O.
655. Rev. James H. Shields,	Green
Do.	Brittan
656. Rev. Oren Sikes,	Mercer
H. M. S.	Co., N.
657. Rev. C. D. Simpson,	Ray Co.

*Missionary Table from The Seventeenth Report of the American Home Missionary Society*

New York: William Osborn, 1842  
American Home Missionary Society Papers, Amistad Research Center,  
Tulane University, New Orleans (207)

**Circuit Preaching**

The Methodist Circuit rider, ministering to the most remote, inhospitable parts of the



nation, was one of the most familiar symbols of the "evangelical empire" in the United States. The saddle bags, seen here, belonged to the Reverend Samuel E. Alford, who rode circuits in northwestern Virginia, eastern West Virginia, and western Maryland.



*The Circuit Preacher*

Engraving of a drawing by A. R. Waud,  
from Harper's Weekly, October 12, 1867. Copyprint  
Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress (209)

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*Saddle bags*

Leather, used c. 1872-1889  
Lovely Lane Museum of United Methodist Historical Society, Baltimore (210)

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**Religion Indispensable to Republican Government**

Tocqueville's impression of American attitudes toward the relation of government and religion was formed on his tour of the United States in the early 1830s during the high tide of evangelicalism:

*I do not know whether all Americans have a sincere faith in their religion; for who can read the human heart? but I am certain that they hold it to be indispensable to the maintenance of republican institutions. This opinion is not peculiar to a class of citizens or to a party, but it belongs to the whole nation and to every rank of society.*

Religion in America take government of society, but regarded as the foremost of that country; for if it d for freedom, it facilitates the Indeed, it is in this same j

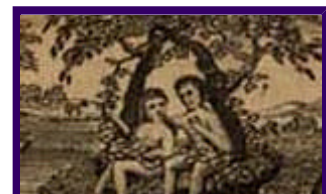
*Democracy in America*

Alexis de Tocqueville, Translated by Henry Reeve  
London: Saunders and Otley, 1835  
Rare Book and Special Collections Division, Library of Congress (211)

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**A Thousand Years of Happiness**

Time lines that traced sacred history from Adam and Eve to contemporary times were a popular form of religious art in earlier periods of American history. The one seen here, prepared by the well-known engraver, Amos Doolittle, states that in 1800 Americans entered a "fourth period" in which Satan would be bound for "1000 years" and the church would be in a "happy state."





*The Epitome of Ecclesiastical History*  
Engraving by Amos Doolittle. New Haven: 1806  
[Rare Book and Special Collections Division](#), Library of Congress (212)

Due to the size of this object, it has been divided into four sections, each one being in excess of 150 kilobytes

[\[upper left quadrant\]](#) - [\[upper right quadrant\]](#)

[\[lower left quadrant\]](#) - [\[lower right quadrant\]](#)



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