

lution, lent great support to a monarchical, antirepublican, and politically conservative politics.⁸¹ The American contrast is nicely illustrated by a sermon that John Carroll, the first American bishop, preached upon the death of George Washington. To Carroll, the conceptual discourse of republicanism came easily. Washington had played the key role in "maintaining the liberty . . . of his country on the foundation of order and morality, and guarding it against the turbulence of faction, licentiousness, foreign hostility, and artifice." He deserved praise for his "virtue," for his emancipation of the country "from vassalage," and for his efforts at making the United States "the refuge of true liberty." Among Washington's greatest achievements, according to Carroll, was his guidance of the new governing system of the United States: "Wisdom and experience combined to blend in a republican form of government all the advantages, of which other forms are productive, without many of their evils."⁸² In Europe at the time that Carroll spoke these words the papacy was being humiliated by the armies of Revolutionary France and then of Napoleon. In those circumstances European Roman Catholicism was shying away from all species of republicanism, even the sort that Bishop Carroll was hailing in the new United States.⁸³

The even smaller community of Jews in Revolutionary America also took to itself the language of liberty. In December 1783 five members of the Philadelphia Synagogue, including the patriot financier Haym Salomon, petitioned the state of Pennsylvania for full civil rights under the new regime. Pennsylvania had decreed that belief in the New Testament, as well as the Old, should be a qualification for holding office. The memorialists responded with republican language to suggest that, "although the Jews in Pennsylvania are but few in number," yet they were "as fond of liberty as their religious societies can be." Moreover, Jews throughout the states had "always tallied with the great design of the Revolution," and the Jews of Pennsylvania especially could count as many "Whigs" as any other group "in proportion to the number of their members."⁸⁴ This Jewish use of the new nation's common political language to plead for full civil rights is yet another indication of how widely the intersection of religion and republican concepts had advanced.⁸⁵

The biographer of Jonathan Mayhew posed the question well: "Why was the radical Whig political philosophy of Milton, Sidney, and Locke that was so readably summarized in *Cato's Letters*, widely accepted in the colonies but scorned as a product of a lunatic fringe in the mother country?"⁸⁶ The answer does not lie in any intrinsic meaning of this whig philosophy but in the circumstances of American history. Intellectual commitments in the United States were different than in Europe because of the circumstances of American settlement, the absence of a vigorous church establishment, the contingencies of imperial conflict, and the particular circumstances of individual lives. Exceptional American circumstances not only joined together what elsewhere remained apart, they also set the stage for the appearance of a distinctly American theology.



Christian Republicanism

In the thirteen colonies that became the United States, republican and Protestant convictions merged as they did nowhere else in the world. That merger was not a random happenstance. Rather, from the mid-1740s Protestant believers actively embraced republican ideals, emphases, habits of thought, and linguistic conventions, and they did so by folding them into their traditional theologies. Patterns of thought that were almost inconceivable from European pulpits became commonplace because of American circumstances, particularly the circumstance of war. This chapter presents specific evidence to detail the progressive stages through which American "Christian republicanism" came into existence. The effect on theology of this new and, to the old world, almost unimaginable construct is a central theme in everything that follows.

By the early decades of the nineteenth century, it had become a matter of routine for American believers of many types to speak of Christian and republican values with a single voice. In 1816 the radical populist Elias Smith, whose movement, the Christian Connection, existed to protest the corruption of traditional denominations, published a manifesto. The Connection, Smith averred, stood for "One God—one Mediator—one lawgiver—one perfect law of Liberty—one name for the children of God, to the exclusion of all sectarian names—A Republican government, free from religious establishments and state clergy—free enquiry—life and immortality brought to light through the gospel."¹ In 1822 James Smith, a former Methodist minister who, on seeing the light of Unitarian faith, had abandoned the ministry, wrote on religious matters to Thomas Jefferson. Smith reported that he had given up on "priestly" religion but had found "shelter under the mild and peaceable Gospel of Jesus Christ, the most perfect model of Republicanism in the Universe."² Only a few years later, a well-educated, conservative Presbyterian clergyman, John

Breckinridge, who regarded Elias Smith's ecclesiastical democracy and James Smith's Unitarianism with equal disdain, nonetheless joined them in linking Christian truth and republican liberty. Breckinridge noted the way in which similar words hid contrasting realities: "What do the *rights of man* mean, at Vienna, or St. Petersburg? What does *sovereign* mean in America? . . . What does freedom, or liberty of the press, or Christianity mean at Rome, at this day? Our freedom is our peculiarity, as it is our glory."³

Because such statements uniting Christian and republican values had become so routine, it was difficult at the time to realize what a great reversal had taken place from less than a century before. The emergence of a republican Christian vocabulary requires, therefore, an explanation. That explanation is found in historical circumstances from the imperial wars of the 1740s through American reactions to the French Revolution of the 1790s. A rehearsal of events in these decades is important for the history of theology, since the rendering of Christian claims in a republican vocabulary contributed so directly to the American cast of theology written during the half century before the Civil War.

Before the 1740s connections between radical political discourse and the main Christian traditions did exist as a minor theme in colonial life. A number of historians have perceptively charted the general bond that linked dissenting Protestantism and colonial wariness of British power.⁴ By its nature, Protestant Nonconformity was sensitive to the exercise of any authority preferentially linked to the Anglican establishment. Edmund Burke featured this sensitivity in his famous appeal before Parliament for conciliation with the colonists on 22 March 1775: they were, Burke argued, "protestants; and of that kind, which is the most adverse to all implicit submission of mind and opinion." Moreover, "this averseness in the dissenting churches from all that looks like absolute government" was a fundamental reality of "their history."⁵

In that history, however, dissenting wariness about British power only occasionally drew on civic humanist, republican, or Real Whig thinking. Among all colonial religious traditions, concern for divine revelation, attention to eternal life, and a belief in God's direct control of quotidian existence ensured that the temporal concerns of republicanism enjoyed, at most, a secondary place. After Massachusetts lost its original charter in the mid-1680s, Puritan leaders like Cotton Mather did show that they were aware of commonwealth ideology. Mather's Massachusetts Election Sermon for 1692, as an example, illustrated the amalgamation of religious and political vocabularies. When, as he described ancient history, the Israelites turned from God, "they were punished with a *Slavery to men*; a cruel *Shishak* had got them under the Yokes of his Arbitrary Government." By contrast, when things were going well in Israel, "there was no *Law*, and no *Tax*, imposed upon them, except what their own Acts concurred unto." Mather's conclusion was to pose rhetorical questions of the sort that many others would also ask over the course of the next century: "Is it not *Well*, that all *Christian Liberties*, and all *English Liberties*, are by the Royal Charter effectually Secured unto us? . . . [and that] no *Judges*, or *Counsellors*, or *Justices* can ever hereafter be Arbitrarily Imposed upon us?"⁶

A similar familiarity with "country" rhetoric informed the writing of John Wise (1652–1725), the minister of Ipswich, Massachusetts, who otherwise shared almost nothing with Cotton Mather.⁷ Wise's protests against the Mathers and others whom he regarded as elite oppressors of the people, like *A Vindication of the Government of New England Churches* (1717), drew on English commonwealth and country authors. But Wise was a maverick; his writings have meant much more for modern students excavating the origins of American democracy than for his contemporaries; his opinions did not represent a groundswell of support for republican convictions.

Despite these early indications of shared Protestant-republican perception, colonists until the middle of the eighteenth century were more likely to view radical Whig principles as opposed to religion than supporting it. The record of the *New-England Courant* is instructive. This newspaper was owned by James Franklin and was the first outlet for the published writings of James's younger brother, Benjamin. The *Courant* was famed, or notorious, as a forum for radical ideas in both politics and religion. It reprinted *Cato's Letters* by John Trenchard and Thomas Gordon, the clearest articulation in its day of Real Whig sentiments. It also ran Benjamin Franklin's *Silence Do-Good Papers*, with their biting satire on the traditions of New England Puritanism. For its combination of radical politics and heterodox religion, the paper was attacked as a licentious opponent of good order in church and state. As the *Boston News-Letter* charged in August 1721, the *Courant* was "full freighted with Nonesense, Unmannerliness, Railery, Prophaneness, Immorality, Arrogancy, Calumnies, Lyes, Contradictions, and what not, all tending to Quarrels and Divisions, and to Debauch and Corrupt the Minds and Manners of New England."⁸ The general situation, even in New England, where radical political views were best known, has been well summarized by Richard Bushman: "For fifty years after the issuance of the second charter [in 1691], Massachusetts Bay politicians kept the English radicals at a distance."⁹

The Politics of Revivalism

The situation during the colonial revivals of the period 1735–1745 was similar to the situation under the Puritans. If evangelists like George Whitefield, Gilbert Tennent, and Jonathan Edwards knew how to use the vocabulary of dissenting politics, they were nonetheless mostly interested in eternal matters. In 1737 Tennent could tell his Presbyterian congregation in New Brunswick, New Jersey, that nothing mattered more than coming to experience "everlasting Liberty" from "Bondage and Servitude." But this injunction served spiritual purposes as clarified by the full context of the exhortation: "Are ye in Bondage and Servitude? here is a spiritual, noble, and everlasting Liberty offered to you, in the Riches of CHRIST! Oh! if the Son of the Father's Love do but make you free, ye will be free indeed."¹⁰ Similarly, in New England a long train of private study and public exposition led Jonathan Edwards to call the summary work of his entire career *The Nature*

of *True Virtue*. But although Edwards doubtless knew by then about the crucial place of "virtue" in republican theory, his understanding of that critical term was thoroughly and exclusively religious.¹¹ When Edwards wrote at length in 1745 about the successful New England expedition against the French on Cape Breton, his response did not stress the preservation of Whig liberty. Instead, it was "the late wonderful work of God in America . . . a remarkable favor of providence."¹² Edwards, with Tennent and most other revivalists in the 1740s, was not unaware of the republican language of liberty, but that language remained superstructure over a foundation of traditional Protestant pietism.

Whitefield presents a more complicated case. As several have argued persuasively, Whitefield certainly plowed a cultural terrain in which republican Christianity would later flourish.¹³ Whitefield's preaching broke traditional rules; it called for direct, immediate response; it encouraged the laity to perform Christian services that were the historical preserve of the clergy. Whitefield and his imitators did not read their sermons like most of the colonies' settled ministers of the early eighteenth century but declaimed them extemporaneously in order to maximize their power. Whitefield's speech drove home the lesson that it was not formal education or a prestigious role in the community that ultimately mattered but the choice of an individual for or against God. Whitefield was the colonies' most visible symbol of changing conceptions of hierarchy; he represented a new confidence in the religious powers of the people and a sharp, if implicit, rebuke to the authority of tradition.

Yet what Whitefield said was another matter. While he was familiar with the newer language of liberty, he usually employed that language for limited purposes. Thus, in a sermon from 1746 commemorating the recent defeat in Scotland of Bonnie Prince Charles and the Jacobite challenge to the Hanoverian monarchy, Whitefield condemned Charles's grandfather King James II for his "arbitrary and tyrannical government, both in church and state."¹⁴ Yet when Whitefield described spiritual transactions in this sermon, he did so in spiritual terms; for the most part his religious language was innocent of political connotations.

Twenty years later Whitefield was making greater use of a republican framework. In 1766 he published a sermon originally preached in response to news that France was about to invade Britain. The sermon claimed that "our civil and religious Liberties are all, as it were, lying at Stake" and that "in respect to our civil and religious Liberties, we are undoubtedly the freest People under Heaven." What most threatened the nation, however, was not France but the ones who had "grown wanton with Liberty," that is, "Men of such corrupt Minds."¹⁵

On rare occasions Whitefield did employ the language of Whiggery at a deeper level to supply metaphors for his spiritual message. His journal for 16 March 1740, as an example, recorded a bit of doggerel—warning against the evil effects of lordly, unconverted ministers—that merged the political and the religious:

Must we submit to their commands,
Presumptuously they say?
No, let us break their slavish bands,
And cast their chains away.¹⁶

In sermons from the 1740s and 1750s he could also ask those who were "wedded to the world" whether "the poor slaves in the galleys" were not "as reasonably . . . wedded to their chains" as sinners were to their lusts. And he could say that Satan intended to make unwary people "his subjects, his servants, his slaves."¹⁷

All such Real Whig instincts duly noted, however, Whitefield's politics throughout his career were much more determined by anti-Catholicism than by republicanism. In 1746 he may have been bothered by the threat of political tyranny from the Jacobites, but the spiritual tyranny of Rome loomed much larger. If the Pretender had triumphed, he thundered, "How soon would our pulpits every where have been filled with these old antichristian doctrines, free-will, meriting by works, transubstantiation, purgatory, works of supererogation, passive-obedience, non-resistance, and all the other abominations of the whore of Babylon?"¹⁸

In sum, Whitefield throughout his career remained primarily a preacher of spiritual liberty. At its most characteristic, Whitefield's language soared above worldly calculation to an apolitical gospel. The sermon warning listeners of Satan's power to enslave was typical in the forthrightness of its appeal: "Come to Christ . . . he will . . . receive you . . . accept salvation . . . [God will] bring you home to his sheepfold . . . choose Christ for your Lord . . . Christ will manifest himself unto you . . . the Lord Jesus Christ will gather you with his elect . . . accept of mercy and grace while it is offered to you . . . come and accept of Jesus Christ in his own way."¹⁹

The contrast with Whitefield's own disciples was striking. When Whitefield died in 1770 during his seventh trip to the colonies, he was memorialized more intensely than any figure to that time in colonial history. One of the addresses published from that outpouring of grief came from Nathaniel Whitaker, who was serving as the Presbyterian minister in Salem, Massachusetts, but who had earlier been an assistant with Whitefield on a lengthy tour in Britain.²⁰ For Whitaker the discourses of politics and religion that Whitefield had mostly separated were now thoroughly mingled: "He was a warm friend to religious liberty," said Whitaker, but "he was no less a friend to the civil liberties of mankind. He was a patriot, not in shew, but reality, and an enemy to tyranny. He abhorred episcopal oppression." Whitaker could even stretch the truth to contend that "under God it was in no small measure owing to him that the Stamp-act, that first attack upon our liberties in these colonies, was repealed." The evangelist "had a quick sense of the liberties of his fellow subjects. . . . And thousands of happy souls here own him as the instrument in God's hand of their freedom from the insupportable tyranny of sin and satan."²¹ Whitefield had used the charged language of his day differently; for him liberation from terrestrial tyranny loomed much less prominently than it did for Nathaniel Whitaker.

The contrast between Whitefield's cautious and Whitaker's all-out use of republican language helps define a turning point.²² Revivalists in the first enthusiasm of the Great Awakening had begun to employ words like "liberty," "faction," and "virtue," but at least into the 1750s, their usages were still defined primarily by spiritual purposes. Until about midcentury Protestant theology and republican discourse remained mostly distinct. After that point the situation changed rapidly in response to a singularly American set of circumstances that included at least the following: religious interpretations of the midcentury Anglo-French wars, employment by religious figures of republican arguments for specifically religious purposes, the ready use of traditional religion by the political leaders of the Revolution, the multifaceted impact of the Revolution itself on religious believers, the reactions of religious Americans to the French Revolution, the importance of personal experiences for key religious leaders, and the flexibility of ideologies in America during the second half of the eighteenth century. Attention to these matters cannot adjudicate the much-debated issue of what religion contributed to the American Revolution, but it will cast considerable light on the question of what the American Revolution contributed to religion.

War with France

Suspicion of republican ideas as intrinsically antireligious did not fade easily. But when war with papist France broke out once again in the mid-1740s, the ideological situation underwent a dramatic change. King George's War (1744-1748), encompassing New England's assault in 1745 upon the French fortress at Louisbourg on Cape Breton Island, prompted the first hints of what rapidly became standard religious politics. In the crucible of imperial struggle, a number of colonial ministers from across the theological spectrum began to link the fate of genuine Christianity to hopes for the future of liberty. Most of these ministers were from New England, but significant voices from other colonies followed along as well. Gilbert Tennent in New Jersey, for instance, hailed the reduction of Louisbourg as the rescue "of our civil and religious Liberties" from an enemy "who unweariedly labours to rob us of our civil and religious Liberties, and bring us into the most wretched vassalage to arbitrary Power and Church Tyranny."²³ In Virginia, it was probably William Stith, the Anglican chaplain of the Virginia House of Burgesses, who published two articles showing how biblical precedents helped explain the struggle of freedom and tyranny being played out in conflict between Britain and France.²⁴

In New England, most religious commentary on the Louisbourg expedition echoed Jonathan Edwards by stressing traditional religious categories, especially concern for the spiritual character of the colonies and the prerogatives of God's providence.²⁵ But the liberal Charles Chauncy of Boston was starting to mix once-separated categories by referring to the "Salvation" that God had secured for the colonies in the defeat of the French.²⁶ The theological moderate Nathaniel Walter of Roxbury went even further by finding bib-

lical prototypes for the "good Commonwealth's Man" of New England, who had fought so valiantly at Louisbourg. As Walter saw it, Moses was "the brave Soldier, expiring in the Cause of Liberty and Virtue." Even more strikingly, Jesus was one who had carried "every Virtue to the highest Pitch," including "that Devotedness to the publick Service, and those other Virtues which render Antiquity venerable."²⁷ A promoter of revivals, Thomas Prince, chimed in with Chauncy and Walter to employ a full country vocabulary in describing the conflict with France. Prince preached a memorable sermon at Boston's South Church on 14 August 1746 as part of a dual celebration. While continuing to rejoice over the colonists' triumph at Louisbourg, he was also responding joyously to news of the destruction of Bonnie Prince Charles's Highland, Roman Catholic army at the Battle of Culloden in the far north of Scotland earlier that same year. The printed version of Prince's sermon contained a sharply contrasting pair of definitions that came right out of the republican bible: Tories, according to Prince, were "for the absolute, hereditary, and unalienable Right of Kings . . . tho' they are *Papists* and rule *arbitrarily*, illegally, tyrannically and cruelly; and they are also for the *Persecution* of Protestant Dissenters." Whigs, by contrast, "are only for the hereditary Right of Kings . . . as long as they are *Protestants* and rule according to the *Laws*; but when they are *Papists* or *Tyrants*, then to set up the next *Protestant* of the *Royal Line*, who is like to govern legally and preserve the Constitution; they are also against *persecuting* any Protestant."²⁸

Real Whig ideology had obviously arrived in America. Yet an older ideology was still more prominent in these sermons from the mid-1740s—hereditary, if now inflamed, anti-Catholicism. Phrases used by Massachusetts ministers Charles Chauncy and Joseph Sewall revived that spirit by referring to the pope as "Antichrist" and the "Man of Sin" as they rejoiced over the defeat of the French.²⁹ Several of their colleagues were only slightly less aggressively anti-Catholic.³⁰ The importance of such anti-Catholic convictions must be stressed.³¹ If the American colonists, especially orthodox and evangelical Protestants, were now innovating in beginning to rely on a republican picture of the world that their spiritual predecessors (as well as religious contemporaries outside the colonies) associated with heresy, the colonists' vigorous anti-Catholicism both maintained an older tradition and may have obscured innovations taking place in the use of a new political vocabulary.

The ideological transformation of colonial religious discourse in 1745 and 1746 provides the necessary context for interpreting the phenomenon of Jonathan Mayhew.³² Mayhew's famous sermon from 30 January 1750, *A Discourse concerning Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers*, has been widely cited as a key document in the colonial appropriation of "country" principles.³³ Historians are entirely correct in regarding this sermon, an exposition of Romans 13:4 ("For he [the ruler] is a minister of God for thee to good"), as an important statement about when it was appropriate to resist the tyranny of arbitrary rule. On such questions, Mayhew well illustrates the mingling of Christian and republican values: it would be, he claimed, "more rational to suppose, that they that did NOT *resist*, than they

who did, would *receive to themselves damnation*.”³⁴ The discourse closed with scornful fury at the Anglican practice of honoring 30 January in memory of Charles I, the so-called martyr executed in 1649, whom Mayhew thought had received only the just deserts of his tyranny.

Mayhew's full articulation of republican ideology might seem to support the interpretation of Jonathan Clark that progressive politics grew from heterodox theology, since his contribution to political debate in early 1750 did follow the earlier publication of sermons marking him as a daringly radical theologian.³⁵ Mayhew's earlier *Seven Sermons* revealed, in fact, everything that Clark has argued could be expected from the promoters of Real Whig politics. They show Mayhew opposing traditional Protestant notions of original sin and de-emphasizing salvation by divine grace through faith, while contending for the sort of universal religious sensibility that had been a staple of English deism.³⁶

By putting Mayhew's discourse in the context of colonial agitation over war with France, however, a slightly different picture emerges. Mayhew actually supported the radical politics of his *Discourse* at least in part with a traditionally Protestant appeal against Rome. As he put it, “The hereditary, indefeasible, divine right of kings, and the doctrine of non-resistance, which is built upon the supposition of such a right, are altogether as fabulous and chimerical, as transubstantiation.”³⁷ On this score, Mayhew the political innovator was also repeating time-worn conventions of standard anti-Catholic ideology.

In addition, when the religious politics of war with France are in view, it is evident that Mayhew, however advanced in his theology, represented only one more political voice in what was rapidly becoming a chorus. Mayhew's *Discourse*, in other words, followed a path of religious republicanism that others had opened up during King George's War, and the religious republicanism he promoted in the *Discourse* was just one of many such statements to appear in this period. Considered in the fuller context of North Atlantic religious history, Mayhew was most important for the religious and political convictions he shared with a wide variety of other Americans from many points on the theological spectrum. Regarded in American terms, Mayhew's own linkage of radical politics and heterodox theology was more eccentric than typical.

The way in which Mayhew's religious republicanism was typical became apparent once orthodox and evangelical clergymen began to weigh in with religious commentary after the renewal of hostilities against France in 1754.³⁸ During this new imperial crisis, the Real Whig vocabulary spread everywhere. It was, for example, already integral to the Connecticut Election Sermon of 1753—“Without Vice suppress, Vertue encouraged, and Learning promoted, a civil Government can't subsist long, the Foundations will sap, and the whole Frame of Government must fall.”³⁹ In 1755 Samuel Davies of Virginia preached the first of his several stirring war sermons that dressed orthodox theology in the garments of Whig liberty. The ostensible purpose of the sermon was to exploit the calamities of war as an appeal for repentance and the new birth, but Davies's analysis of the war was thoroughly republican: “Our

religion, our liberty, our property, our lives, and everything sacred to us are in danger,” especially of being “enslaved” by “an arbitrary, absolute monarch” enforcing conformity to “the superstition and idolatries of the church of Rome.”⁴⁰ Although historians have focused mostly on New England as a center of religious republicanism in this period, the same conjunction was present elsewhere in the colonies as well.⁴¹

Several circumstances explain why evangelical and orthodox clergymen throughout the colonies deviated so readily from earlier Protestant patterns in embracing a republican analysis of the imperial wars with France. The sense of apocalyptic struggle between the forces of godly liberty and satanic slavery, which was a major theme in the revivalistic preaching of the 1740s, certainly played a role.⁴² Almost as certainly, the unfolding of the French war revived hereditary Protestant fear of Catholicism and also linked that fear with a rising spirit of nationalism.⁴³ In addition, republicanism itself may have been losing its tinge of radicalism by the 1750s. Blair Worden has speculated that the influence of Montesquieu was moving some influential Englishmen to regard monarchy as compatible with republican government.⁴⁴ Students of the New Englanders' Louisbourg campaign of 1745 have also described its course as promoting secularization in a situation where increasing concern for the wider worlds of commerce, diplomacy, and war was edging out concerns for providence.⁴⁵ And because notions of virtue in the colonies had always been defined by religious standards, as opposed to the secular norms of English radicals, it was less of a step for colonists to unite secular and religious meanings of the term than was in the case in Great Britain.⁴⁶

Whatever the exact cause, by the end of active fighting against the French in 1760, an unusually strong bond had emerged in the American colonies between republican political ideology and traditional religious convictions. The crisis over the Stamp Act that followed immediately—and then the spiraling process of alienation from Britain—deepened, expanded, and sharpened American Christian republicanism. In particular, that process turned a rhetoric with British origins into a powerful protest against the British king and Parliament. But in ideological terms, the turn against Britain as villain represented only an extrapolation of what was already in place by 1760. The importance of the religious-republican synthesis was its usefulness for explaining so much of how the world seemed to be working for so many Americans—whether Protestant, deist, or nonreligious—over the last third of the eighteenth century. Specifically religious events, like protests over plans for a colonial Anglican bishop, which increased throughout the 1760s, or over the Quebec Act of 1774, reinforced the validity of the republican categories. It was not, however, conflict with Britain over specifically religious matters that encouraged colonial Protestants to accept Real Whig republicanism; rather, the mingling of what had been previously antagonistic concepts took place in the traumas of war with France well before overt hostility flamed against the mother country.

In at least one case, a colonial minister seems to have been dimly aware of the novelty of the American situation. During a trip to Britain to raise money

for the College of New Jersey in the mid-1750s, the Presbyterian revivalist Samuel Davies enjoyed many opportunities to sample the political as well as the religious opinions of his hosts. On one occasion, Davies expressed chagrin at discovering that "the dissenting Ministers," though they were "Friends of the Liberty of Mankind," also "generally imbued Arminian or Socinian Sentiments." The conjunction of opposition politics and heterodox theology so natural to many in Britain was also apparent to Davies: "It is Matter of Complaint, that the Deists generally, if not universally, are of the Whigg-Party, and join the low-Churchmen. Alas! how are the Principles of Liberty abused!"⁴⁷ After he returned to Virginia, Davies took time to read a three-volume set of the philosophical works of Henry St. John, Lord Bolingbroke (1678-1751), whom contemporaries recognized as one of the sharpest exponents of Real Whig opposition to the regime of court manager Robert Walpole. Davies roundly criticized Bolingbroke for presenting "a horrendous Deity" and for trivializing the ancient truths of Christianity.⁴⁸ Yet he made no reference to the harmony that Bolingbroke's British contemporaries saw between Bolingbroke's heterodox religious views, which Davies rejected, and their political opinions, which paralleled so closely Davies's own reading of the public sphere.

Republicanism in Service to Religious Reform

One of the reasons that republican reasoning became so solidly fixed among a certain class of American revivalists was its utility for advancing religious reform.⁴⁹ Isaac Backus, spokesman for New England Baptists, who pursued a mostly apolitical course in prodigious efforts on behalf of his coreligionists, nonetheless was himself adept at using the language of civic humanism for distinctly religious purposes. In 1770 Backus enlisted Whig rhetoric against a Massachusetts legislature that was continuing to enforce legal restrictions against the Baptists. Particularly obvious to him was the incongruity that "many who are filling the nation with the cry of LIBERTY and against oppressors are at the same time themselves violating the dearest of all rights, LIBERTY OF CONSCIENCE."⁵⁰ Three years later Backus published a more comprehensive argument for freedom of conscience, a case he presented in person at Philadelphia several months later to the slightly incredulous Samuel Adams and John Adams. This *Appeal* of 1773 showed how arguments of the Whig patriots against Britain could easily be transformed into weapons of religious reform.⁵¹

Another example of the same process took place in New Jersey, where an independent-minded Presbyterian, Jacob Green, put republican language to use in order to attack slavery. This former colleague of George Whitefield was an enthusiastic supporter of the war, but he was also a determined opponent of chattel bondage. To Green, republican discourse was ideal for promoting what was at root a Christian reform: "It is demonstrable that . . . slave holders are friends to slavery, ergo are enemies to liberty, ergo are enemies

to our present struggle for liberty, ergo are enemies to these United States. . . . These slavish slave holders will watch for an opportunity to establish slavery and bondage in the United States: ergo they will, as they have the opportunity, join with our enemies who are attempting this same thing. . . . [Slaveholders are] Tories of the worst sort."⁵²

With specific reference to Isaac Backus, Bernard Bailyn has accounted for such religious use of republican language as "the contagion of liberty."⁵³ This is a plausible metaphor, though it is also possible that the ideological osmosis moved the other way as well. Rather than a rhetoric of republican civic humanism spreading out into the religious backwaters of colonial society, the religious backwaters may have been rising to carry republicanism where its leading theorists had not intended it to go. Whatever metaphor is more appropriate, the sectarian use of republican concepts not only enabled these Protestants to prosecute their reforms but also made these concepts habitual for themselves.

Christian Language as Republican Disinfectant

Traditional religious believers who might still have worried about the corrupting effects of republican principles could only have been reassured when leading patriots went out of their way to employ traditional religious language in supporting their Whig policies. From the time of the Stamp Act crisis to at least the end of the War for Independence, for example, patriot publicists skillfully and repeatedly linked Parliamentary actions to the devil.⁵⁴ But patriot appropriation of traditional religion to support a republican rebellion went much further and had wider-ranging consequences.

Tom Paine's *Common Sense*, the dramatic tract from 1776 that did so much to mobilize colonial opinion against the British crown, was a particularly clever example of such appropriation. When in the pamphlet Paine urged Pennsylvania's Quakers to live up to their religious principles and forsake conservative allegiance to the king, he presented himself as "one of those few, who never dishonours religion either by ridiculing, or cavilling at any denomination whatsoever." In fact, it is likely that when Paine published *Common Sense*, he had already come to the conclusion, as he put it later in *The Age of Reason*, that most of the Old Testament, with "a few phrases excepted . . . deserves either our abhorrence or our contempt." Yet this private opinion did not prevent him from citing the Hebrew scriptures at great length as part of his attack on monarchy and the hereditary succession of rulers.⁵⁵

Paine's skill at marshaling biblical narratives for republican ends was masterful, as in the following précis of ancient Jewish history:

Near three thousand years passed away from the Mosaic account of the creation, till the Jews under a national delusion requested a king. Till then their form of government (except in extraordinary cases, where the Almighty interposed) was a kind of republic administered by a judge and the elders of the tribes. Kings they had none and it was held sinful to acknowledge any being

under that title but the Lord of Hosts. And when a man seriously reflects on the idolatrous homage which is paid to the persons of kings, he need not wonder that the Almighty, ever jealous of his honor, should disapprove of a form of government which so impiously invades the prerogative of heaven.⁵⁶

The end to which Paine's biblically flavored reasoning led, however, was a long ways from traditional Protestant faith. Paine's disregard of classic Christian doctrines on the universality of sin, on God's control over human affairs, and on God's equally firm control over the timing of the millennium fairly blazed out from his most memorable assertions: "We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand."⁵⁷ Yet because the reasoning leading to this conclusion was so artfully decorated with a traditional Protestant deference to Scripture, Paine's pamphlet worked as effectively upon traditional religious communities as on other colonists.

If Paine's *Age of Reason* (with its dismissive attitude toward the Old Testament) had been published before *Common Sense* (with its full deployment of Scripture in support of republican freedom), the quarrel with Britain may have taken a different course. It is also likely that the allegiance of traditional Christian believers to republican liberty might not have been so thoroughly cemented. And it is possible that the intimate relation between republican reasoning and trust in a traditional Scripture, which became so important after the turn of the new century, would not have occurred as it did.

In the actual unfolding of events, however, the usage provided by Paine was perfected by other patriot leaders. The Continental Congress showed it had taken Paine's rhetorical lessons to heart, for example, when on 1 November 1777 it proclaimed a day of public thanks for the recent victory at Saratoga. Samuel Adams, who composed the resolution, was a more traditional believer than Tom Paine, which probably made it easier for him to use a fully orthodox theology in calling the patriots to prayer. The resolution began by reminding the colonists that it was "the indispensable duty of all men to adore the superintending providence of Almighty God; to acknowledge with gratitude their obligation to him for benefits received, and to implore such further blessings as they stand in need of." But it went on to say that similar adoration was due to God for his providential aid "in the prosecution of a just and necessary war, for the defense and establishment of our unalienable rights and liberties." Congress was calling the people to prayer on the eighteenth of December so that they might "consecrate themselves to the service of their divine benefactor; and . . . join the penitent confession of their manifold sins, whereby they had forfeited every favour, and their humble and earnest supplication that it may please God, through the merits of Jesus Christ, mercifully to forgive and blot them out of remembrance." Congress also asked the people to pray for material prosperity but ended by stressing the need to cultivate "the principles of true liberty, virtue and piety, under his nurturing hand, and 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."⁵⁸ Whatever the degree of religious sincerity in such statements, they could only have reassured traditional Protestants that in the new United States republican allegiance did not subvert true religion.

As Tom Paine and the leaders of the Continental Congress deployed a vocabulary of traditional religion in support of the war, they were joined by many religious leaders who also described the struggle for independence as an intensely religious cause. Religious use of the republican vocabulary may, in fact, have been more important than any other factor in drawing believers from throughout the new nation's various regions into support of the war effort. Many religious patriots from the middle colonies, for instance, were not as ready to embrace the notion commonly held in New England that the Americans constituted a "new Israel" with their own special covenant with God.⁵⁹ Yet in putting to use just-war arguments, especially against Quaker or Anabaptist pacifism, republican concepts worked as powerfully for the religiously plural middle colonies as for Congregational New England. Thus, when the Presbyterian minister John Carmichael from Forks of Brandywine, Pennsylvania, preached a sermon on 4 June 1775 in order to prove, as his title put it, "A Self-Defensive War Lawful," he proceeded to the task with a fully republican arsenal. Carmichael echoed the Congregational patriots of New England by expressing his fear of "the galling yoke of *perpetual slavery*" and in the conviction that there was "nothing that can befall you, so ruinous to yourselves and posterity in this life, as *slavery*."⁶⁰ Anti-Catholic and chosen-nation vocabularies were absent from this sermon, but Carmichael's Christian republicanism was more than enough to link him with other believers who supported the patriot cause.

In their shared efforts, both political and religious figures were tailoring the project of republican independence to fit the language of traditional Protestant religion. After only a few years, America's religious population, with Protestant evangelicals in the forefront, began in similar fashion to tailor their religious projects to fit the language of republicanism. The implications for both politics and religion from this tailoring were momentous. In the immediate context, the argument against Parliament acquired the emotive force of revival. In the longer term, religious values migrated along with religious terms into the political speech and so changed political values. But the migration also moved the other way: a religious language put to political use took on political values that altered the substance of religion.⁶¹

The Multifaceted Impact of the Revolution

The events of the war itself did much to cement the Christian-republican alliance. In an important instance, Real Whig concepts offered a vocabulary that could be shared by Protestant sectarians and heterodox founding fathers like Thomas Jefferson and James Madison in their Revolutionary struggle for the separation of church and state.⁶² The Revolution also forced patriots to change their minds about the identity of the colonies' primary enemy. To-

gether they made a move from fearing Continental, papal tyranny to fearing British, perhaps cryptically, papal tyranny,⁶³ and finally to fearing a negative abstraction of tyranny compounded of all the worst that Americans could imagine about the decrepit authorities of the old world. In this transformation the constant remained a republican conception of power and its effects.

In addition, the war also seemed to make Christian republicanism the only possible option for linking the religious and the political spheres. The success of the patriots led to the literal banishment of traditional divine-right establishmentarians like the Anglican Jonathan Boucher; it also pushed out of sight the pacifists who had considered both warring sides guilty of great sin.⁶⁴ More important, it silenced the considerable number who shared the patriots' republican outlook but who did so in a moderate form joined with loyalty to the British crown. William Smith, provost of the College of Philadelphia, preached a sermon on 23 June 1775 in the wake of Lexington and Concord that showed he had mastered the republican calculus: "Illiberal or mistaken plans of policy may distress us for a while, and perhaps sorely check our growth; but if we maintain our own virtue; if we cultivate the spirit of Liberty among our children; if we guard against the snares of luxury, vanity and corruption; the Genius of America will still rise triumphant, and that with a power at last too might for opposition. This country *will be free*—nay for ages to come, a chosen seat of *Freedom, Arts, and heavenly Knowledge*: which are now either drooping or dead in most countries of the old world."⁶⁵ Smith, however, continued to value his attachment to the king, which meant that his tempered appropriation of republicanism would have no hearing in the wake of the war.

It was the same with Charles Inglis, who, in preaching to Loyalist troops in September 1777, showed that he had also mastered the republican catechism. As Inglis saw the American situation, "popular Tyranny" had turned America into a "bleeding Country, through which Destruction and Ruin are driving in full career, from which Peace, order, Commerce, and useful Industry are banished." Loyalists should offer their all to defend "your Families, your liberty, and Property . . . against the Violence of usurped Power." It was obvious that Inglis remembered the rhetoric of the French and Indian War, for he was willing to contend that if the patriots won the conflict, his auditors would be torn "from the Protection of your parent State, and eventually . . . [come] under the despotic Rule of our inveterate Popish Enemies [i.e., the French], the inveterate Enemies of our Religion, our Country and Liberties."⁶⁶ Yet though he knew the language of Whig republican resistance, loyalty to the inherited constitution of king-in-Parliament was stronger.

Outside of the new United States, moderate Whig Loyalism would become the main political resting place for many evangelical, liberal, and traditionalist Protestants, as well as for many Roman Catholics and members of minority faiths. What it meant for that stance to be excised from the religious and political history of the United States could only be ascertained by a full evaluative comparison of the United States on one side with Canada and the vari-

ous kingdoms of Great Britain on the other.⁶⁷ The Revolutionary War not only solidified, but also perpetuated, a singularly American union of religion and political principles.

Far Enough Away from France

The American confluence of Christian and republican reasoning also involved an event that did not happen. For most traditional believers in Britain—Anglicans, Old Dissenters, Methodists, and others—political crises in the 1790s drove a wedge between republican and Christian convictions.⁶⁸ The two-part publication of Tom Paine's *Rights of Man* in February 1791 and February 1792 worried British Christians, not just for Paine's arguments against orthodox Christianity, but also because the work promoted an even more radical assault on traditions of all kinds than had Paine's celebrated *Common Sense* of 1776. For most British Christians, the rising carnage of the French Revolution and the outbreak of war between Britain and France in February 1793 underscored the link between infidelity, radical assaults on inherited order, and revolutionary disruption.

In the new United States, by contrast, while many Christian believers were soon alienated from Revolutionary France, that alienation actually strengthened attachment to republican principles, at least of the right sort.⁶⁹ The ability to disentangle abhorrence of French excesses from ongoing loyalty to republican values is nicely illustrated by speeches from New Jersey's William Paterson, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, who by the 1790s had become both an active Presbyterian layman and a justice of the United States Supreme Court. To a jury in 1795, Paterson offered a primer in republicanism to explain why American law was so much superior to the British. American citizens were "surrounded . . . with a blaze of political illumination," they enjoyed "republican governments, and written contributions, by which protection and enjoyment of property are rendered inviolable."⁷⁰ Only a few years later in a Fourth of July address, Paterson celebrated again the "Freedom and independence our fathers fought for and obtained." But this time he reminded his hearers that there was "no virtue so sublime . . . as to escape the malignant breath of faction." And he praised "schools and seminaries of learning" as one of the best means for preserving "social order . . . national liberty . . . [and] genuine republicanism." Paterson's worry in this address grew out of his reading of Europe, where "the demon of false philosophy, vain and proud, and covered with the spoils and blood of the fairest part of Europe," was reaching out to threaten America.⁷¹ Paterson was as appalled by events in France as any British traditional Christian, but his reaction to those events was not the British tendency to link infidel religion and republication aspirations.

Even more directly relevant for theological history was the reaction of Samuel Miller, a New York City Presbyterian minister who later occupied

an influential position at Princeton Theological Seminary. Miller, unlike many formalist evangelicals of the early 1790s, was a Jeffersonian and an enthusiast for the first phases of the French Revolution. But as the French turned violent and Miller turned against the Revolution, his loyalty to republican institutions and republican political vision grew rather than diminished. Thus, in 1795, he instructed a Jeffersonian audience in "all those genuine republican principles" that American independence had brought, like equality of rights and obligations, civil and religious freedom, and the reign of law, "which are calculated to call forth the best energies of man . . . and to build up the fabric of national happiness."⁷² Within three years, Miller's Jeffersonianism was rapidly vanishing, but not his republican loyalties. On the occasion of a fast day proclaimed by President John Adams, Miller recoiled from what he described as "the awful derangement of the old world," with "the growing atheism, the profaneness . . . the progress of luxury . . . the dissolution of social ties . . . the rapid strides which all these evils are making." As an antidote for these horrors, Miller offered the religion of Christ. Yet when Miller described "the native tendency of this divine system," it was a religion defined by republican instincts: "to check the insolence of power; to restrain the encroachments of oppression; to give energy to the wise prescriptions of government; to secure liberty with order."⁷³

Paterson and Miller did not speak for all Americans, but they were nonetheless typical in combining abhorrence of French infidelity with allegiance to Real Whig political principle. That combination ensured that American Christianity would continue to use, and to be shaped by, a moral language of liberty, an interpretation of virtue as proper public-spiritedness, and an innate suspicion of power. The French trauma that solidified the British disjunction between traditional Christian faith and advanced republican politics worked differently across the Atlantic.

Personal Contingencies

The shape of political-religious connections was also often related to personal experience. To observe the many such connections that were shaped by personal experience also moves the ideological story from the abstract to the concrete: American religious leaders with different theological convictions were pushed together by their support for the American Revolution toward a Christian-republican synthesis; religious leaders in other parts of the North Atlantic region were just as regularly pushed in the opposite direction by negative experiences of revolution.

It was especially significant that a number of individuals who became important Protestant leaders in the early decades of the United States experienced life-shaping conversions in the midst of revolutionary tumult. Without claiming too much for these experiences, the catalog is still impressive. Timothy Dwight, who would later preside over a phalanx of ardently patriotic, establishmentarian Calvinists in New England, professed personal faith

and joined the college church in New Haven, Connecticut, in January 1774. The step was taken in extraordinary political times, for it occurred when all New England was ablaze with the news of the Boston Tea Party and when Yale students were forming themselves into a troop to defend their homeland against British invaders. Dwight's own father became a Loyalist, but for Dwight a second conversion (to the patriot cause) followed naturally from his first conversion (to Christ).⁷⁴ Only a few months later in 1774, the six-year-old Elias Smith was jolted by the "terrifying report" of the Battle of Bunker Hill and began to pray "with weeping, hoping that by this my sins which were committed against my parents, and others, might be forgiven."⁷⁵ Although Smith later became one of Dwight's great nemeses as a promoter of dissenting, antiestablishment evangelicalism, he like Dwight was thoroughly converted to the union of revivalist religion and American republicanism. Barton W. Stone, who became a powerful advocate in the Upper South of an antitraditional evangelicalism similar to Elias Smith's, was not converted until after the Revolution. But firmly lodged in his memory was a life-shaping conjunction of experiences related to the war. These included the bloody battle of Guilford Courthouse, North Carolina, in March 1781 (with its "profane swearing, debauchery, drunkenness, gambling, quarreling and fighting"); his own baptism "into the spirit of liberty," which made it impossible for Stone to "hear the name of British, or Tories, without feeling a rush of blood through the whole system"; and his first introduction to the itinerations of Baptists and Methodists that he would later imitate.⁷⁶ Ashbel Green, who became a moving spirit among Presbyterians at Princeton College and Princeton Seminary, was permanently marked by his teenage experience as "a flaming whig," his militia duty during the war, and his personal contact with fifteen or sixteen signers of the Declaration of Independence.⁷⁷ The earliest memories of Green's Presbyterian colleague Samuel Miller were of public celebrations for the signing of the Declaration and the death of his brother, a physician with the patriot troops.⁷⁸ Because the Revolutionary experience of these American Protestant leaders coincided with critical events in their religious formation, it was almost second nature for the significance of these experiences, as well as the language in which they were expressed, to converge in one language made up of both religious and political themes.⁷⁹

Similar conjunctions of formative religious and political experiences outside the United States often had the opposite effect. Henry Alline, whose evangelistic message blazed brightly in the Canadian Maritimes and the New England back country, experienced a traumatic conversion in Nova Scotia on 26 March 1775, three days after Patrick Henry had proclaimed in Virginia, "Give me liberty, or give me death"; less than one month before American patriots captured Fort Ticonderoga; and, more to the point, while Nova Scotia was rife with rumors about an invasion led by George Washington and the possibility of an indigenous rebellion against British rule.⁸⁰ Although Alline used a republican language to describe his turn toward God ("whom I saw I had rebelled against and been deserting from all my days"), his conversion eventually led him to conclude that politics of any sort subverted the purity

of Christian faith.⁸¹ The same kind of life-transforming experiences in the context of revolutionary agitation—and leading to the rejection of republican values—also took place in other regions. Robert and James Haldane, whose careers were nearly synonymous with the rise of evangelical Dissent as a powerful force in Scotland, were both won to evangelical faith in early 1793 at the very time that Scotland awoke to the perils of the French Revolution. For the Haldanes, this conjunction of events weaned them from politics and set them on a course of determinedly apolitical pietism.⁸² The Haldanes' establishmentarian counterpart in the Church of Scotland, Thomas Chalmers, was drawn back to a communal Christian ideal embracing evangelical piety and parish virtues as a direct result of Scotland's mobilization in 1803 to ward off an anticipated invasion by Napoleon.⁸³ A few years earlier, in 1798, Henry Cooke, who would become the great spokesman for Northern Ireland's public evangelicalism in the middle decades of the century, was won over to his life's antirepublican Christian outlook by witnessing the march of Ulster rebels against the British king.⁸⁴ A few years later, Egerton Ryerson, who helped Upper Canadian Methodists create a Loyalist evangelical society in mid-Victorian Ontario, was movingly converted immediately after his family had been traumatized and the property of friends had been destroyed by invading American troops in the War of 1812.⁸⁵

Outside the United States, in other words, personal engagement with Christianity often meant disengagement from republican political principles. Geography is not always destiny. But for religion in the North Atlantic region, the places where Protestants experienced radical political events meant a very great deal indeed.

The Flexibility of American Ideologies

Finally, the Christian republicanism of the early United States was possible only because of considerable ideological flexibility. Two critical ambiguities were of supreme importance: one concerning the "virtue" without which republican polity could not succeed, and the other concerning the role of "the people" in the proper functioning of republican institutions.

The willingness of Americans to include several not altogether compatible ideals under the notion of virtue was essential for the flourishing of religious republicanism.⁸⁶ Almost all Americans came to agree that the health of a republic required the exercise of virtue by its citizens. Most of the founding fathers thought of that virtue in classical, Machiavellian terms as disinterested service to the common good. Most American practitioners of traditional religion, however, defined virtue in biblical terms as life guided by God's will and cultivated in personal and domestic devotion. By the end of the eighteenth century, a gendered meaning of virtue—as the ethics of female, domestic, private morality—was added to the Roman and theological usages.⁸⁷ The result was common use of a single term that masked varied understandings. The political conflict created by this situation lasted until at least the Civil War,

when Northern armies enforced the meaning of virtue as defined by latter-day Whigs and the Republican Party on a South, where classical, Roman, honor-driven ideals remained much stronger.

For religious history, the amalgamation of meanings into a single term folded public life into the drama of redemption. Three examples, from multitudes, illustrate this Christian appropriation of republican habits of thought. In 1755, after the defeat of General Braddock, Samuel Davies exhorted Virginians to keep their courage. The slipperiness of the notion of virtue was the key to his logic: "I would rather fly to the utmost end of the earth, than submit to French tyranny and Popish superstition. . . . Shall slavery here clank her chain, or tyranny rage with lawless fury? . . . Therefore, if you would save your country, repent and be converted."⁸⁸ In 1780 the New Jersey Presbyterian Jacob Green used the same amalgam of classical and Christian concepts to explain the dynamics of the Revolutionary situation: "Vice," he averred, "is the general, radical cause of this loss [of liberty]." Vice had a double tendency to undermine liberty: "It provokes God to withhold his protection, and punish a sinning people by permitting usurpers and tyrants to seize on their natural rights, and reduce them to a state of bondage. . . . Vice has a *natural* tendency to the loss of freedom. . . . Vice enfeebles the mind, unmans human creatures, and many ways puts them into the power of those who watch for an opportunity to subjugate them."⁸⁹ Eighteen years later in a fast-day sermon, Green's son, Ashbel, carried out the same intellectual maneuver. First came the republican calculus: "The established connexion between virtue and prosperity, vice and ruin, . . . is much closer, and more powerful, in relation to communities than to individuals. . . . It is, indeed, the grand tendency of virtue to produce happiness, and of vice to beget misery. . . . When a nation *as such* becomes abandoned to vice, there is no longer any suitable tie by which it can be holden together." With that basis established, Green then reverted to the form of the jeremiad by enumerating a number of religious duties—repentance, prayer, the pursuit of holiness—that had to be practiced if God was to spare the land.⁹⁰ In these cases, and many more like them, ambiguity about the meaning of virtue provided just the flexibility necessary for religious believers to become full participants in the American national drama and for the American national drama to be incorporated into the history of redemption.

A similar ambiguity attended conceptions of "the people." The ability of flexible republican categories to accommodate varying attitudes toward democratic politics was matched by a similar ability of flexible Protestant loyalties to empower contrasting religious attitudes. As historians like Nathan Hatch, Curtis Johnson, and Richard Carwardine have shown, the intrareligious debates of antebellum America were severe in large part because both the more populist, democratic churches and the more traditional, hierarchical churches sought the republican high ground for advocating their particular visions.⁹¹

For clarity of thought, it was not necessarily beneficial that American religious republicanism rested on such ambiguities. But rest on them it did, and with a power that remained a marvel to foreign visitors like Alexis de

Tocqueville. The character of the country that de Tocqueville visited in the 1830s seemed compounded of what he called "two perfectly distinct elements that elsewhere have often made war with each other, but which, in America, . . . they have succeeded in incorporating somehow into another and combining marvelously. I mean to speak of the *spirit of religion* and the *spirit of freedom*."⁹² De Tocqueville's observation succinctly summarized the product of a complex history. For theology in the new United States, the shaping power of that complex history was enormous.



Theistic Common Sense

The startling reversal in which America's religious leaders took up the language of republicanism was the most important ideological development for the future of theology in the United States. That reversal, however, was not the only intellectual surprise of the period. The turn by Protestants to the language of the eighteenth century's new moral philosophy represented as much a break from historic associations as did the turn to republicanism. Moreover, the two turnings took place in similar fashion. Where once the commonalities between Protestantism and either republicanism or the new moral philosophy were incidental and far less prominent than the differences, during the second half of the eighteenth century the commonalities loomed ever larger, while points of tension rapidly faded away. A theological Rip Van Winkle falling asleep in the early 1740s and waking up half a century later would have found Americans speaking his language with such a decidedly strange inflection as to constitute a new dialect; yet those Americans would have been hard-pressed to tell him why and how their speech had grown so different from his own. Just as combat with Roman Catholic France and the political firestorm of Revolution may be said to have created American Christian republicanism, so also the course of events in the wider world of late eighteenth-century American history is the key to explaining the rise of theistic common sense. In turn, theistic common sense would exert a tremendous influence on theology in the nineteenth century. The force of what simply had to be taken for granted was precisely the force that changed how Americans thought about human character, the nature of salvation, and the relationship of God to the world.

Terms and Definitions

The form of ethical reasoning that became nearly universal in the new United States, which was promoted with special vigor by Protestant evangelicals, is