

# Pandering from the Pulpit

Religion and the Pursuit of Happiness in the American Republic, 1789-1825

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### Abbreviations Used in Citations

- FO** *Founders Online*, National Archives, [founders.archives.gov](http://founders.archives.gov).
- GW** George Washington
- MON** Stanislaus Murray Hamilton , ed., *The Writings of James Monroe*, 7 vols. (New York, 1898-1903).
- MSG** James D. Richardson, ed., *A Compilation of the Messages and Papers of the Presidents*, 1789-1897, 10 vols (New York, 1897).
- PGW** W. W. Abbot, Philander D. Chase, Dorothy Twohig, eds., *The Papers of George Washington*, 63 vols. to date (Charlottesville, 1983-2017).
- PJM** William T. Hutchinson, William M. E. Rachal, Robert A. Rutland, J. C. A. Stagg, et al., eds., *The Papers of James Madison*, 39 vols. to date (Chicago and Charlottesville, 1962-2017).
- PTJ** Julian P. Boyd, Charles Cullen, John Catanzariti, et al., eds., *The Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, 53 vols. to date (Princeton, 1950-2017).
- TJ** Thomas Jefferson
- WJM** Jack N. Rakove, ed., *Madison: Writings* (New York, 1999).
- WTJ** Merrill D. Peterson, ed., *Jefferson: Writings* (New York, 1984).

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## Introduction

“I now make it my earnest prayer,” George Washington said in 1783 as he prepared his nation for life beyond his impending retirement, “that God would have you and the State over which you preside, in his holy protection.” As the great father and protector of the United States, it was only fitting that he invoked a more prodigious father to secure the happiness of the people, and—quite frankly—to keep them morally accountable. Decades-long experience in leading common folk taught Washington that only the Holy Father could truly “incline the hearts of the Citizens to cultivate a spirit of subordination & obedience to Government.” Human institutions, no matter how benevolent and just they were, could not corral a population of superstitious commoners into an orderly society. Washington thus looked to the Deity not only to inculcate a sense of filial piety in them, but also “to dispose us all to do Justice, to love mercy and to demean ourselves, with that Charity, humility & pacific temper of mind, which were the Characteristicks of the Divine Author of our blessed Religion & without an humble imitation of whose example in these things, we can never hope to be a happy Nation.”<sup>1</sup> Public displays of piety were important to the American people’s identity; for the leaders, however, religion was often used to inculcate morality in them, and morality, it was supposed, was indispensable to the happiness of the people.

In this study, I undertake a quantitative and qualitative analysis of religious rhetoric in presidential addresses in order to determine if there is a correlation between religion and happiness in the minds of the “Founding Fathers.”<sup>2</sup> By focusing on the public addresses (the sermons, if you will) of the first four presidents of the United States—George Washington, John

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<sup>1</sup> GW, “From George Washington to The States, 8 June 1783,” *FO*, accessed March 5, 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11404>.

<sup>2</sup> There is a general consensus among early American historians that the correct term is “Founders.” I use the colloquial term “Founding Fathers” here in accordance with my argument that the leaders of the Revolution were, to varying degrees, spiritual “fathers” as well as political.

Adams, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison—we can begin to see the ways in which religion was originally intended to be implemented nationwide in pursuit of happiness. For instance, Federalists (Washington and Adams) were most likely to use religion as a way to create a moral citizenry, from which happiness could be achieved. In contrast, the Republicans (Jefferson and Madison) shied away from using religious discourse in their addresses, unless when voicing opposition to encroachments on religious freedom. However, Republicans were also well aware of the conceptual utility of happiness, and thus offered enlightenment, usually in the form of education, which they believed had moralizing qualities, as a substitute for religion in pursuit of happiness. On the quantitative side, I count every instance in which religious language or imagery was used in their public addresses. Politicians who exceed the threshold number of 2 religious mentions per address seem to connect religion with happiness. With the data, which includes the fifth and sixth presidents and a handful of governors, I then test my theory: that Northern politicians and Federalists were more likely to use religion than Southern politicians and Republicans as the best way to promote happiness.<sup>3</sup>

For politicians, public professions of faith were exceedingly common in Revolutionary America; but arguing that religion was the way to achieve earthly happiness—that is, espousing the belief that to be happy in the here and now is to have religion—and not solely for eternal salvation, was rather unique to this era of American history. Prior to the Declaration of Independence—which postulates that humans are endowed with inalienable rights such as life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—the religious policy of temporal happiness was more or less non-existent in the Christian West. The historian Darrin McMahon in his extensive work,

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<sup>3</sup> See Methodology. For both the quantitative and qualitative portions I focus on what are known commonly as “Annual” or “State of the Union” addresses, in addition to “Thanksgiving Proclamations” and any other addresses that are relevant to this discussion.

*Happiness: A History*, argues to the contrary, saying that material happiness was in fact prevalent in, for example, the ideology of John Calvin, the most influential divine on New England theology. McMahon's approach is too liberal though: for example, the fact that "spiritual joy" and happiness are not the same is often taken for granted.<sup>4</sup> A compilation of essays titled *The Founders on God and Government* is perhaps the work that most closely relates to mine. The first four essays are on the first four presidents: Vincent Phillip Munoz's essay discusses Washington's utilitarian approach to religion and public good, including the president's active role in religious freedom; John Witte Jr.'s aptly named essay "One Public Religion, Many Private Religions" focuses on how Adams implemented a "mild establishment" of religion in Massachusetts, but does not address my argument that Adams brought these convictions into his presidency; Thomas Buckley's piece on Jefferson, like mine, examines religious rhetoric, but his is focused primarily on how Jefferson appears to be more religious than previously thought; and finally, Garrett Ward Sheldon's essay discusses what the author calls Madison's "Christian perspective" of all things political.<sup>5</sup> Although there is a plethora of scholarship available on the American Founders and religion, there are no studies that discuss the correlation between religion and happiness.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Darrin McMahon, *Happiness: A History* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), pp. 164-175.

<sup>5</sup> Vincent Phillip Munoz, "Religion and the Common Good: George Washington on Church and State," in *The Founders on God and Government*, eds. Daniel Driesbach, Mark Hall, and Jeffrey Morrison (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004), pp. 1-22; John Witte Jr., "One Public Religion, Many Private Religions: John Adams and the 1780 Massachusetts Constitution," in *ibid.*, pp. 23-52; Thomas Buckley, "The Religious Rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson," in *ibid.*, pp. 53-82; Garrett Ward Sheldon, "Religion and Politics in the Thought of James Madison," in *ibid.*, 83-116.

<sup>6</sup> Nathan Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) shows how religion became accessible to greater numbers of lay people in the eighteenth century, which led to the decrease in power of religious institutions. For the specific views of the Founders on religion, one must also consult *Religion and the New Republic: Faith in the Founding of America*, ed. James Hutson (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000). Recent studies such as Spencer W. McBride, *Pulpit & Nation: Clergymen and the Politics of Revolutionary America* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016) and Jonathan J. Den Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety: Federalist Politics and Religious Struggle*



There is, however, a correlation between enlightenment and happiness. For students of the eighteenth century Enlightenment, as Caroline Winterer's recent work points out, happiness was a real concept, supported by government for the sake of the people. It was the duty of the educated elites to protect the liberties of the people "by shielding the state from foreign enemies and internal threats. The opposite of public happiness was not sorrow but anarchy or tyranny."<sup>7</sup> Tyranny indeed came in many forms, but for the enlightened Americans it was most acutely depicted by "crowns, coronets and mitres,"<sup>8</sup> all of which resembled in varying degrees the yoke of religious tyranny—the "diabolical, hell-conceived principle of persecution."<sup>9</sup> Religious tyranny, moreover, was widely considered as a byproduct of having an establishment of religion, like the Church of England, whose power and influence was often despotic.<sup>10</sup> Thus to ensure happiness some of our enlightened statesmen, as we shall see, turned their energies towards pragmatic gains such as keeping religion out of government and educating more people to cherish rights of conscience.

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*in the New American Nation* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015) both discuss in great detail how religion influenced politics (and political parties) during the transition from the Revolution to the early republican period. Daniel Walker Howe, *What Hath God Wrought: The Transformation of America 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford UP, 2007) is the most thorough work in detailing how religion transformed America beginning in the nineteenth century, but most recently Sam Haselby, *The Origins of American Religious Nationalism* (New York: Oxford UP, 2015) has challenged the conventional wisdom by persuasively arguing that Protestantism—and not republicanism—shaped post-Revolutionary America. See also Jack P. Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness: The Social Development of Early Modern British Colonies and the Formation of American Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1988).

<sup>7</sup> Caroline Winterer, *American Enlightenments: Pursuing Happiness in the Age of Reason* (New Haven: Yale UP, 2016), p. 3. Any proper examination of Revolutionary America must reference Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, Mass.: The Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1967), the standard work on republicanism's role in the Founding. Gordon Wood, *The Radicalism of the American Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991) furthers Bailyn's work by emphasizing the Enlightenment's role in these events.

<sup>8</sup> TJ, To Thomas Paine, 19 Jun. 1792, in *PTJ*, 312-313.

<sup>9</sup> Madison, To William Bradford, 24 Jan. 1774, in *PJM*, pp. 104-108.

<sup>10</sup> For an example of an Enlightenment perspective on religious establishments see Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason: Part One*, in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 666: "All national institutions of churches, whether Jewish, Christian, or Turkish, appear to me no other than human inventions set up to terrify and enslave mankind, and monopolize power and profit."

The concept of earthly “happiness”<sup>11</sup> (or material happiness) was yet to be fully developed in colonial times. The reality of colonial life was that religious sects often dominated communal affairs and did not have to make concessions to the people. Where regional churches reigned supreme, as in New England and Virginia, the leaders of those communities inculcated a belief in their congregants that religious uniformity was essential to a cohesive and orderly society. Derived from 1 Corinthians: 12.26, “Ye are the body of Christ and members of their part,” the idea that one could enjoy temporal pleasures as long as those pleasures conformed to the faith of the community was certainly prevalent in even the strictest Puritan societies.<sup>12</sup> Because so much depended on the faith of the community as a whole, it was assumed that the only means to achieve uniformity was through coercion.<sup>13</sup>

The policy of religious conformity was not unique to colonial America; it has persisted in the West since at least 400 CE when it was expounded persuasively by the early church father, Augustine of Hippo.<sup>14</sup> Religious uniformity also had modern implications in Revolutionary America. Formative events in the lead-up to the Revolution changed or solidified the perception of church-state relations as the nascent Republic took shape.<sup>15</sup> Instead of focusing solely on

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<sup>11</sup> McMahon, *Happiness*, pp. 164-175. Although the term was not frequently, if ever, used by the clerical types in America pre-Declaration of Independence, the concept itself was relevant vis-à-vis Protestantism and its patriarchs, Martin Luther and John Calvin, of whom the latter had a profound effect on the religious in New England.

<sup>12</sup> John Winthrop, “A Model of Christianity,” in *Early American Writings*, ed. Carla Mulford (New York: Oxford UP, 2002), p. 241.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 238. From the New Testament Winthrop deduced that conforming to Christ’s works was fundamental to the community’s spiritual and temporal well-being. Notable dissenters such as Roger Williams and Anne Hutchinson were forced into exile.

<sup>14</sup> See Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, ed. R. W. Dyson (New York: Cambridge UP, 1998), pp. 962-964; see also Malcom Schofield, “Epilogue,” in *The Cambridge History of Greek and Roman Political Thought*, eds. Christopher Rowe and Malcolm Schofield (New York: Cambridge UP, 2000), pp. 661-671.

<sup>15</sup> Brendan McConville, *The King’s Three Faces: The Rise and Fall of Royal America, 1688-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), pp. 306-311. His discussion on the iconoclasm of

spiritual joy, as John Calvin suggested, religious leaders, whose power was beginning to wane, introduced the Enlightenment idea (derived from the classical idea) of material happiness in an effort to maintain their stranglehold on political as well as communal affairs. The idea of obtaining happiness through religion, and the way it evolved and how it was ultimately implemented by the “Founding Fathers,” as we shall see, differed according to geographical origins and party affiliation.

Conforming to Christianity in North America originated in the 1630s when the Puritans sailed across the Atlantic.<sup>16</sup> Since then church and state have been inextricably linked. The Puritans’ English counterparts, the Anglicans and Catholics, for whom early America also served as a land of opportunity, were likewise invested in the idea that religion should be supported by civil government. Doctrinal issues aside, they all agreed that coercive religious instruction was necessary to preserve communal cohesiveness and to ultimately secure heavenly salvation. The English Civil War of the 1640s only reaffirmed their notions of religious uniformity, and in 1662 an Act of Uniformity was passed in the homeland, consolidating the power of the Church of England by forbidding public worship by other sects. “The conviction that uniformity of religion was essential for political and social stability,” as one scholar has put it, “carried to America by the first English settlers, persisted in some places until the eve of the American Revolution.”<sup>17</sup> Although alienated in England, Puritans and Catholics went to America with the same zealous determination to implement their own uniform religion.

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the Revolutionaries is especially relevant in understanding why the Patriots went to great lengths to destroy all connections to Great Britain, including the severing of ties with the Church of England.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>17</sup> James H. Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge UP, 2008) pp. 1-3.

From these communities arose charismatic leaders who adopted, altered, then implemented on their flock the “nursing fathers” metaphor—a widely disseminated interpretation of Isaiah 49:23 that was published by John Calvin in 1551. In essence, his interpretation of Isaiah said that in order to achieve the rank of “father,” the pinnacle of earthly holiness—a distinction that was reserved to priests prior to the Protestant Reformation—leaders must propagate Protestantism by defending the Church. Additionally, Calvin’s interpretation was about “removing superstitions and putting an end to all wicked idolatry, about advancing the kingdom of Christ and maintaining purity of doctrine, about purging scandals and cleansing from the filth that corrupts piety and impairs the lustre of Divine majesty.”<sup>18</sup> In the seventeenth century the “nursing father of the Church” metaphor was so popular that not only did it become a cliché in England, but it was also adopted by every Protestant and Catholic monarch. The metaphor naturally made its way to America as English settlers were colonizing the Eastern seaboard. After years of dominating the spiritual affairs of their communities, leaders such as John Winthrop (of “City upon a hill” fame from the Massachusetts Bay Colony) hoped Protestantism in America would serve as an example for creating a uniform religious polity in the Christian West. Only when complete uniformity of religion was achieved, therefore, could eternal salvation be obtained.<sup>19</sup>

By the time of the American Revolution, wherever Congregationalists (Puritans) and Anglicans ruled—which was basically all of New England and south of the Potomac—nursing fathers “was the governing metaphor in church-state relations.”<sup>20</sup> This meant in theory that religion was an indispensable support of civil government, and in practice it was the

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<sup>18</sup> John Calvin as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-21.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

government's duty to promote established religion by any means necessary, including coercive tactics such as fines, imprisonment, and even execution. Policing religion was relatively easy for the "fathers" because their communities were generally confined to areas with access to the sea. But as economic and social opportunities increased with migration further inland, the monopoly that the religious leaders had over their congregations began to abate. This was due in large part to the passing of the Toleration Act of 1689 in England, allowing dissenters—in effect, only Quakers and Baptists in New England—to worship according to their customs. Religious leaders such as Cotton Mather protested on behalf of the dissenters, declaring that coercive tactics were officially dead in New England.<sup>21</sup> Instead of ruling with religious impunity, as the moral exemplar John Winthrop more or less did in the seventeenth century, religious leaders merely instigated a "behavioral revolution." This shift from communal interest to self-interest changed the perception of how best to achieve happiness. In sum: "Increasingly ignoring traditional ideological and social restraints," New Englanders "turned energies formerly devoted to religious and community endeavors to their own private pursuits of personal and individual happiness."<sup>22</sup>

In the South, until the mid-eighteenth century the Anglican monopoly on power in the Chesapeake went unchecked. Powerful slave-owning families increasingly dominated political and social life as they continually acquired land. In turn, their standard of living increased, their life expectancy rose because they moved to healthier areas—both of which were in large part a result of the colonists' efforts to refine their lives to resemble the English gentry—and their

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<sup>21</sup> Hutson, *Church and State*, pp. 70-1.

<sup>22</sup> Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, pp. 75-8. For a more liberal interpretation of the Puritan clergy, especially the Mathers, see Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), pp. 62-4.

stranglehold on religion and politics became more acute.<sup>23</sup> As prosperity found its way inland to the Virginia Piedmont, however, the less fortunate but free population found themselves to be beneficiaries of this newfound wealth. This allowed non-Anglicans, namely the evangelical Baptists and Presbyterians, to share in the success, albeit much more moderately, and partake in aspects of society that were hitherto off limits to them due to their lack of economic agency. Finally, as the wealth of the elite increased and it spread inland, they often turned insular, became self-indulgent, and cared less about policing public morality. “It is evident that Virginians,” as an examination into this period has shown, “whatever their rank, generally did not affect postures of grave piety and that on Sunday at church they took for granted the close proximity of the profane to the sacred.”<sup>24</sup> The evangelicals seized the opportunity to challenge Anglican hegemony by appealing to the middle and lower orders of society, for whom spiritual matters were very much connected to their happiness. Consequently, fierce sectarianism began in the 1740s and persisted at least until the eve of the Revolution, as a young James Madison observed in 1774.<sup>25</sup>

The disconnect between the spiritually-focused evangelicals and the lax Anglican elite actually became their saving grace. After repulsing repeated attempts to get religious toleration on behalf of the disaffected dissenters, the Anglican establishment, although not willing to acquiesce at this moment, was faced with a more pressing issue: how to deal with the impending conflict with Great Britain. The Baptists, one scholar puts it, “had sometimes been known as

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<sup>23</sup> McConville, *King's Three Faces*, p. 28. He says that by as early as 1660, Virginia's “institutional structure was already more or less fixed.”

<sup>24</sup> Rhys Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia, 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982), pp. 60-1.

<sup>25</sup> For a complete discussion on religion in Chesapeake see Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, pp. 58-87; and also Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, pp. 81-100; for Madison's observation see Madison, To William Bradford, 24 Jan. 1774, in *PJM*, pp. 104-108.

pacifists and, after 1774, rumors were being spread from New England that the Baptists maintained a ‘Coolness,’ if not hostility, to the patriot movement.” The Virginia delegation to the Continental Congress was fully aware of the prospects of winning the conflict with Great Britain without the aid of the dissenters. In short, the dissenters used their supposed passivity as leverage by essentially claiming neutrality until Virginia’s Revolutionary government met their demands for greater religious toleration. Although not fully realized until 1786, when Thomas Jefferson’s Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom was finally passed, the new Virginia Declaration of Rights stipulated that religious freedom was a natural right.<sup>26</sup> This was enough of an incentive for the dissenters to join the cause of independence.

At the root of these struggles was an underlying conflict between classes—the elite “fathers” versus the lowly commoners. These conflicts would contribute to how party lines were drawn. In New England, the Congregationalists made minor concessions to middle and lower class non-conformists but retained a religious establishment, and thus their grip on power remained strong. This remained so throughout the colonial period until at least 1800 when the first transfer of power from one political party to another occurred at the federal level. The Federalists, who lost the presidential election to the Democratic-Republicans (Republicans hereafter), were known colloquially as the “party of God.”<sup>27</sup> The Federalists had deep roots in pious New England. President Timothy Dwight of Yale College, for example, was one of those “fathers” who perceived a precipitous change in sentiment from the republican zeal of the Revolution to a decline in piety after the Constitution was ratified in 1788. During and immediately after the American Revolution, it was presumed by many New England leaders that

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<sup>26</sup> John A. Ragosta, *Wellspring of Liberty: How Virginia’s Religious Dissenters Helped Win the American Revolution & Secured Religious Liberty* (New York: Oxford UP, 2010), pp. 47-54.

<sup>27</sup> See John Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson: The Tumultuous Election of 1800* (New York: Oxford UP, 2004), pp. 153-155.

Christianity would play a central role in politics, and thus there was no need for a national establishment of religion. Moreover, the states retained a certain degree of autonomy which allowed them to keep their establishments. But as party conflicts arose in the 1790s, the Federalist Party became the de facto protector of religion. Simply put, “Religion was essential to the identity and ideology of the Federalist party.”<sup>28</sup> Alarmed by the turn of events, pious politicians actively displayed their faith in an effort to gain support politically. In doing so, the Federalists, whose calls for more religion in public life, for many Republicans echoed too closely the rallying cry of “Church and King.”<sup>29</sup> These monarchical tendencies that were supposed to be shed in the previous decade had seemingly come full circle, resulting in class conflicts.

In Virginia, the middling evangelicals bartered for rights of conscience which they eventually won. This opened the door for greater religious pluralism, leading to a decline in religious indoctrination among many of the elites. Not only is this evident as early as 1779, when the College of William and Mary abolished professorships of religion, but also during the decade-long struggle to separate church and state. The Republican Party, whose platform was based on state and individual rights, namely rights of conscience, derived their credo from these experiences in Virginia. To protect their republic from what they perceived as usurpation of rights writ large, the Republicans (who in fact were no less elite) turned towards the people disaffected by Federalist policies. Most notably, they espoused virtue—obtained through enlightenment—as the protector of individual liberties and the most effective stalwart against encroachments on democracy. The Republicans sought to achieve this end through education. In

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<sup>28</sup> Hartog, *Patriotism & Piety*, pp. 5-15.

<sup>29</sup> See for example, “To John Adams from Joseph Priestley, 23 February 1793,” *FO*, accessed 30 Mar. 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-1428>. Priestley, a dissenter, had to flee England after his Birmingham laboratory was burned down in an act of violence by “Church and King.” Ironically, John Adams, the person Priestley was writing, would be accused of being a Tory sympathizer and a monarchist.



the Republican vanguard was Thomas Jefferson—throughout his “life there runs this humane concern for ‘the pursuit of happiness,’ for the development of the individual without regard to limitations of class.”<sup>30</sup> Both movements—in New England and Virginia—began at the bottom but had reverberating effects at the top. In essence, it is what E. P. Thompson called “the old debate continued”—the challenging of the aristocracy’s monopoly on wealth and power by common people.<sup>31</sup>

Due in large part to the American Revolution, the way in which religion was connected to happiness by future leaders changed dramatically. Before the Revolution community fathers could forcefully implement their religious agendas; afterwards they had to rely mostly on their cunning. With the democratization of religion came a shift in focus from eternal to temporal happiness. Because leaders could not create a uniform religion, they turned their attention almost exclusively to inculcating religious morality in the common people. Religion, in other words, became increasingly utilitarian. Take, for example, the cosmopolitan scientist, Benjamin Franklin: he was a Puritan by lineage, a *philosophe* by association, and a deist by his own admission. By the age of fifteen, despite his trajectory towards the clergy, he could not comprehend the incontrovertibly true doctrines of Revelation. His skeptical mind may have prevented him from finding personal happiness in orthodox religion, but it did not prevent him from seeing the public utility of religion. “You yourself may find it easy to live a virtuous Life without the assistance afforded by Religion,” Franklin wrote in 1757, “But think how great a

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<sup>30</sup> Hofstadter, *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1948), pp. 35-36.

<sup>31</sup> E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 23-25.

Proportion of Mankind consists of weak and ignorant Men and Women.”<sup>32</sup> He assumed that by giving the “weak and ignorant” moral instruction ordinary people would be more productive citizens. Consequently, they would attain happiness because of their improved station in life.<sup>33</sup>

For the exceptional Dr. Franklin separating moral principles from theology, or fact from fiction, was easy enough. But this was not the case for the lot of people who more often than not found themselves down on their luck. During the War of Independence, for instance, religion was by no means an afterthought. For the elites who were in charge of everything from military organization to governing the people, religion was the one tool that not only bound the common people together (at this time under the banner of religious liberty), but also kept unruly commoners from participating in immoral behavior. These “superstitious commoners” were constantly being fed “orthodox Christianity and reason” by the enlightened elites in an attempt to strengthen their patriotism, to dissuade them from their natural inclination towards monarchy, and most importantly to keep them happy.<sup>34</sup>

Happiness has been a hallmark of American civilization since its enshrinement in arguably the most recognizable clause of the Declaration of Independence (1776): “Life, Liberty,

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<sup>32</sup> Benjamin Franklin, To unknown, 13 Dec. 1757, in *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations*, ed. James Hutson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), p. 21.

<sup>33</sup> Franklin’s close relationship with the evangelical preacher George Whitefield in the mid-eighteenth century is also telling for how useful religion was. Franklin was so captivated with Whitefield that he would attend his sermons merely to witness a master rhetorician at work. He was well-attuned to the audience’s reaction to Whitefield’s great charisma, and often saw how the preacher could lift the people’s spirits. Whitefield was so persuasive that he could even get the poorer citizens to donate money to charitable causes, a fact that Franklin appreciated. Although Franklin certainly did not take his sermons on eternal perdition at face value, he thought his methods were appropriate for the superstitious masses. For Franklin and relationship with Whitefield see Jerry Weinberger, *Benjamin Franklin Unmasked: On the Unity of His Moral, Religious, and Political Thought* (Lawrence, Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2005), pp. 32-3, 37-8, 43, 45-6, and 281; for a brief biography of Franklin and religion see Brooke Allen, *Moral Minority: Our Skeptical Founding Fathers* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2006), pp. 3-25; for Franklin and scientific fame see Joyce Chaplin, *The First Scientific American: Benjamin Franklin and the Pursuit of Genius* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), pp. 1-9.

<sup>34</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 27-88.

and the Pursuit of Happiness.” Yet, how to achieve happiness has been a subject of debate since the Founders immortalized those words. Was happiness to be found in religion, as the “nursing fathers” believed? Perhaps the attainment of happiness was “self-evident,” as subtly suggested by Benjamin Franklin’s substitution in the Declaration?<sup>35</sup> Or both?

### **Part I. ‘Pillars of Happiness,’ 1789-1801**

*The policy of the emperors and the senate, as far as it concerned religion, was happily seconded by the reflections of the enlightened, and by the habits of the superstitious, part of their subjects. The various modes of worship which prevailed in the Roman world were all considered by the*

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<sup>35</sup> See editorial note of TJ, III. Original Rough Draught, Jun.-Jul. 1776, in *PTJ*, 423–428.

*people as equally true; by the philosopher as equally false; and by the magistrate as equally useful. And thus toleration produced not only mutual indulgence, but even religious concord.*<sup>36</sup>

—Edward Gibbon, *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, 1776

“In the eighteenth to be enlightened was to be interested in antiquity, and to be interested in antiquity was to be interested in republicanism,” and, to complete Gordon Wood’s syllogism, to be interested in republicanism was to be interested in the idea that virtue brought self-happiness.<sup>37</sup> George Washington, president of the United States from 1789 to 1797, not only espoused republicanism but he also went to great lengths to embody Gibbon’s enlightened Roman magistrate.<sup>38</sup> Washington was enlightened in the sense that he disparaged revealed religion’s worth for the elites who could afford education; but as a magistrate he was also aware of the need for the commensurate increase in religious worship among the people, who lacked the moral refinements of their leaders.

The dichotomy between religion and enlightenment that Gibbon presents also provides a good framework for understanding why Washington seems split between his Southern religious reticence and his Federalist pretensions in determining the best way to achieve happiness. His upbringing in colonial Virginia, for instance, was not spiritually strict like his New England counterparts, which his nominal role in the Church of England in part reflects.<sup>39</sup> Additionally, provincial life was anything but an intellectual backwater for a gentleman. Far from the bustling

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<sup>36</sup> Edward Gibbon, *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (New York: George Macy Companies, 1946), ed. J. B. Bury, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 100-101.

<sup>38</sup> See Livy, *History of Rome*, 3.26-9. Washington was considered to be a paragon of virtue, modeled on the likes of Cincinnatus, the benevolent dictator who laid down his arms for the good of the Roman Republic. At the conclusion of the War in 1783, Washington himself laid down his arms to go peacefully into retirement, a symbolic gesture which not lost on the people. For comparison to Cincinnatus see editorial note of GW, To Chastellux, 1 Feb. 1784, in *PGW*, pp. 85–86; see also Robert Middlekauf, *Washington’s Revolution: The Making of America’s First Leader* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2015), p. 307.

<sup>39</sup> Paul F. Boller, *Washington and Religion* (Dallas: Southern Methodist University Press, 1963), pp. 26-27. GW served as vestryman “from 1763 until 1774 and a nominal member until 1784, when he submitted his resignation.”

mercantile cities of Philadelphia, Boston, and New York, Washington cultivated his mind in ways that tended to break with tradition.<sup>40</sup> The pecuniary advantages of high society gave him plenty of access to literature, and his provinciality gave him plenty of time for the free enjoyment of it. The advantageous intellectual setting seems to have fostered his ideas of happiness as well. The following stanza from one of his favorite plays, *Cato* by Joseph Addison, sheds light on this point:

Here will I hold—If there is a Pow’r above us  
 (And that there is, all Nature cries aloud,  
 Thro’ all her Works), He must delight in Virtue  
 And that which he delights in must be Happy.<sup>41</sup>

This play would have only reinforced Washington’s preconceived notions on the relevance of living the good life—that is, trying to emulate the lives promoted by his favorite authors from antiquity, such as Seneca, Cicero, and Lucretius.<sup>42</sup> For other elites, such as a friend’s son, he advised similar methods of enlightenment, most notably “a sedentary studious Life; in following of which he may not only promote his own happiness, but the future welfare of others.”<sup>43</sup> This top-down approach—that an educated gentleman could spread happiness by inculcating morality in the masses—was consistently promulgated by Washington throughout his life. But the reality of eighteenth and nineteenth century life was that the vast majority of people could not afford

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<sup>40</sup> John Clive and Bernard Bailyn, “England’s Cultural Provinces: Scotland and America” in *The William and Mary Quarterly* Vol. 11, No. 2, Scotland and America (Apr., 1954), pp. 200-213. As they show, being an elite provincial such as Washington “tended to shake the mind from the roots of habit and tradition. It led men to the interstices of common thought where were found new views and new approaches to the old.”

<sup>41</sup> Joseph Addison, *Cato, A Tragedy*, v, i, pp. 15-18, in *The Papers of Benjamin Franklin*, vol. 1, January 6, 1706 through December 31, 1734, ed. Leonard W. Labaree (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1959), pp. 101–109. For Addison’s impact on colonial America see Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, p. 44.

<sup>42</sup> See GW, List of Books at Mount Vernon, 1764, in *PGW*, pp. 343–350.

<sup>43</sup> GW, To William Ramsay, 29 Jan. 1769, in *PGW*, pp. 167–168.

education. In theory, enlightenment was universally desirable, but in practice it was esoteric because only elites could afford books, let alone formal education.<sup>44</sup>

In contrast to his elitist approach to obtaining happiness, Colonel Washington thought it prudent to implement a religious routine in his division of irregular Redcoats. “Common decency in a camp calls for the services of a Divine; and which ought not to be dispensed with, altho’ the world should be so uncharitable as to think us void of Religion, & incapable of good Instructions.”<sup>45</sup> This letter highlights the fact that there were varying moral expectations depending on class. Washington admits to this by soliciting a chaplain, whose services were not for his own edification, but rather to keep up appearances. Washington spent an entire career leading the common man, and was well aware of the different strategies that one could implement to prevent immorality. In Washington’s mind compulsory religious instruction played a crucial role in moralizing his regimental ranks while promoting happiness. This paternalism was of the same kind that he would implement as leader of the Continental Army and later as president.<sup>46</sup> The intangible traits that he acquired over a two-decade period of military service played a large part in the utilitarian approach Washington took to “religion and the common good.”<sup>47</sup>

His view that ordinary people needed religion to supplement their shaky morality persisted throughout his political career. In his Inaugural Address of 1789, Washington cemented his overarching agenda with a religious tone that would foreshadow his eight years in office. In

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<sup>44</sup> See Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: The Rise of Modern Paganism* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1966), p. 20. This paradox is in part why Immanuel Kant called this era the “Age of Enlightenment” and not an “Enlightened Age,” and it is also why Washington often used religion to supplement the morality of common people.

<sup>45</sup> GW, To John Blair, 17 Apr. 1758, in *PGW*, pp. 129–131.

<sup>46</sup> Boller, *Washington and Religion*, pp. 49-50.

<sup>47</sup> Munoz, “Religion and the Common Good,” pp. 1-3.

addition to supplications to the Creator for blessings of liberty, he prayed God would establish a moral foundation from which happiness could be achieved.

Such being the impressions under which I have, in obedience to the public summons, repaired to the present station; it would be peculiarly improper to omit in this first official Act, my fervent supplications to that Almighty Being who rules over the Universe, who presides in the Councils of Nations, and whose *providential aids can supply every human defect*, that his benediction may consecrate to the liberties and happiness of the People of the United States, a Government instituted by themselves for these essential purposes.<sup>48</sup> (emphasis added)

With a general infusion of morality, Washington proclaims, the freedom and liberties of the people could be secured.<sup>49</sup> One of the liberties to which Washington was referring was freedom of conscience—the right to profess a religion of your choosing or, in theory, profess none at all.<sup>50</sup> Not only did he believe that religious liberty allows for greater numbers of people to worship their deity—in turn, diffusing morality—but also that having the freedom to choose in itself promotes happiness. He was steadfast in this conviction, and as early as 1783 he claimed that “the establishment of Civil and Religious liberty was the Motive which induced me to the field” of battle in the War for Independence.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> GW, Inaugural Address, 30 Apr. 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 173–177; and GW, To the Citizens of Baltimore, 17 Apr. 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 62-5.

<sup>49</sup> See also GW, Inaugural Address, 30 Apr. 1789, in *PGW*, p. 175. GW says, “In these honorable qualifications, I behold the surest pledges, that as on one side, no local prejudices, or attachments; no separate views, nor party animosities, will misdirect the comprehensive and equal eye which ought to watch over this great Assemblage of communities and interests; so, on another, that the foundations of our national policy, will be laid in the pure and immutable principles of private morality; and the pre-eminence of free Government, be exemplified by all the attributes which can win the affections of its Citizens, and command the respect of the world.”

<sup>50</sup> Boller, *Washington and Religion*, pp. 117-118, quotes GW telling a friend while trying to attain the services of craftsmen, that as long as someone is a good worker they can be of any religious persuasion, listing “Mohometans [Muslims], Jews or Christians of any Sect, or they may be Atheists.” GW also hoped that America would become a safe haven for political and religious refugees.

<sup>51</sup> As quoted in Munoz, “Religion and the Common Good,” pp. 1-2.

Soon after his inaugural address in 1789, Washington received many congratulatory letters from concerned ecclesiastical organizations about their civil and religious liberties. At the root of his correspondence was that happiness depended on free worship. Within one month of his inauguration he responded to at least three letters—in addition to replies to Quakers, Catholics, and Jews especially—in which he specifically addressed freedom of religion while avoiding any sectarian language that was invoked by the petitioners themselves. To the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, Washington promises to “manifest, by overt acts, the purity of my inclinations for promoting the happiness of mankind, as well as the sincerity of my desires to contribute whatever may be in my power towards the preservation of the civil and religious liberties of the American people.”<sup>52</sup> To the Presbyterian Church, Washington insists that free worship according to the dictates of one’s own conscience is a protected liberty, but, as he makes clear, the preservation of morality vis-à-vis piety is also essential to the wellbeing of the Republic: “While I reiterate the possession of my dependence upon Heaven as the source of all public and private blessings; I will observe that the general prevalence of piety, philanthropy, honesty, industry and œconomy seems, in the ordinary course of human affairs are particularly necessary for advancing and confirming the happiness of our country.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> GW, To the Bishops of the Methodist Episcopal Church, 29 May 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 411–412.

<sup>53</sup> GW, To the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church, May 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 420–421; see also GW, To the United Baptist Churches of Virginia, May 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 423–424. Washington may have fancied himself a protector of free worship, but in reality it was Congressman James Madison’s ideas that were the frame and basis of the First Amendment to the Constitution—the barrier against spiritual tyranny that was only effectual in the Federal government and its territories; see Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1990), pp. 290–292. If Madison had had his way the First Amendment, along with the other portions of his amendments that were ultimately rejected, would extend to every state, guaranteeing freedom of religion across the entire nation while promoting the “happiness and safety of the people.” In mid-August of 1789, however, New England and other Congressional obstructionists bent on keeping their state-established churches and financial support of religion killed Madison’s hopes. Yet a concession to the proponents of “effectual barriers” was made on September 24, 1789, when the House of Representatives moved to pass the First Amendment as we know it today, which stipulates that Congress shall make no law respecting a religious



A few months later, after being persuaded by the Congress' request for a day of public fasting and prayer, Washington issued his Thanksgiving Proclamation on October 3, 1789. His proclamation did not go without protest in Congress.<sup>54</sup> Irrespective of the dissenting opinion, however, the resolution was passed by both the House and Senate, and issued by President Washington to much acclaim across the nation.<sup>55</sup> He began his proclamation by thanking the deity for the ratification of the Constitution, the guiding document of the national government that ensures "safety and happiness," and protects the people's civil and religious liberties. Washington also thanks God for "the means we have of acquiring and diffusing useful knowledge."<sup>56</sup> The last point he makes introduces the concept of obtaining happiness through modes of enlightenment. As we shall see, this point becomes important because Washington gradually shifts his attention in his following addresses from religion to education as the primary conduit to happiness. In the meantime, however, proclaiming religious freedom and the acquisition of knowledge during a religious proclamation that was issued on behalf of a people

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establishment. Ironically enough, most of the gentlemen in the House, and subsequently the Senate too, thought that resolutions were exempt from this prohibition, for the next day the House passed a resolution to issue a religious proclamation; see *Annals of Congress*, 1st Cong., 1st sess., pp. 949–950.

<sup>54</sup> For Burke and Tucker quotations see editorial note of GW, Circular to the Governors of the States, 3 Oct. 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 129–130. See Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, pp. 155–159. See editorial note of GW, Circular to the Governors of the States, 3 Oct. 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 129–130. The two most prominent and vocal opinions in opposition to the proclamation were from Aedanus Burke and Thomas Tudor Tucker, both of whom were members of the House representing South Carolina. In essence, Tucker thought it wrong to issue a nationwide religious proclamation for a Constitution the people "may not be inclined to return thanks . . . until they have experienced that it promotes their safety and happiness." For Tucker, the people's opinion on this matter was ultimately irrelevant when it came to Constitutional principles: "but whether [the people agree or not], it is a business with which Congress have nothing to do; it is a religious matter, and, as such, is proscribed to us."

<sup>55</sup> See editorial note of GW, Circular to the Governors of the States, 3 Oct. 1789, in *PGW*, p. 129.

<sup>56</sup> GW, Thanksgiving Proclamation, 3 Oct. 1789, in *PGW*, pp. 131–132.

who were not unanimously religious, let alone Christian, was not uncommon for Washington's generation—they were comfortable mixing religious ideology with enlightenment principles.<sup>57</sup>

The era commonly known as the Enlightenment was by no means uniform, but there was a general consensus of opinion that religious dogmatism was counterintuitive to obtaining happiness.<sup>58</sup> Washington, for his part, carries on this tradition as early as 1783, claiming that “the foundation of our Empire was not laid in the gloomy Age of ignorance and superstition, but at an Epocha when the rights of Mankind were better understood and more clearly defined, than at any former period.” Removing the shackles of superstition was, however, merely the first step in ameliorating the condition of ignorant people in pursuit of happiness. For Washington and other like-minded elites from the Age of Revolutions, it was the acquisition of knowledge that emancipated people from religious tyranny: “The researches of the human Mind after social happiness have been carried to a great extent, the treasures of knowledge acquired by the labours of Philosophers, Sages and Legislators, through a long succession of years, are laid open for our use and their collected wisdom may be happily applied in the establishment of our forms of Government.”<sup>59</sup> His outright rejection of dogmatism while complying with Congress' request for

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<sup>57</sup> See Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, pp. 224-225; see also Henry F. May, *The Enlightenment in America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1976), p. 163. May, for example, concludes that all of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence were men of at least moderate Enlightenment persuasion, which he bases on the fact that they struck out an anti-slavery clause while adding in “a firm reliance on the protection of divine providence.”

<sup>58</sup> Gay, *Enlightenment*, pp. 3-19.

<sup>59</sup> GW, “From George Washington to The States, 8 June 1783,” *FO*, accessed 25 Nov. 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Washington/99-01-02-11404>. For a contemporary account of the effects of suppressing knowledge as related to the “Age of ignorance”—the period that modern historians call the Middle Ages or the Medieval period—see Gibbon, *Decline and Fall*, pp. 1292-96. Referring to Justinian proscribing antique philosophy, he says, “The gothic arms were less fatal to the school of Athens than the establishment of a new religion [Christianity], whose ministers superseded the exercise of reason, resolved every question by an article of faith, and condemned the infidel or sceptic to eternal flames.” For the explicit connection between the fall of Rome and Christianity, see Thomas Paine, *Age of Reason*, in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), p. 699: “Latter times have laid all the blame upon the Goths and Vandals, but, however unwilling the partizans of

a Thanksgiving Proclamation represents a consistent balancing act that Washington plays between enlightenment and religion. On one hand he recognizes the necessity of showing gratitude to the Almighty for his divine blessings of good government and morals, but on the other hand he implies that only the elites—“Philosophers, Sages, and Legislatures”—can teach people how to be moral. Accordingly, he thought that enlightening people by acquiring knowledge was on par with the moral components of religion as a means to achieve social happiness.

Instead of focusing on religious principles as a conduit to happiness, he began to emphasize the wider diffusion of knowledge by promoting education. In his Annual Message to Congress on January 8, 1790, he was “persuaded, that you [Congress] will agree with me in opinion, that there is nothing, which can better deserve your patronage, than the promotion of Science and Literature. Knowledge”, he goes on to say, “is in every Country the surest basis of public happiness.” If religion was previously the basis for public happiness, his opinion on this matter evidently changed. Perhaps it was out of personal experience or a general observation from his dealings with many different religious organizations as chief magistrate that Washington responded to a friend in Ireland deploring sectarianism: “Of all the animosities which have existed among mankind those which are caused by a difference of sentiment in Religion appear to be the most inveterate and distressing and ought most to be deprecated.” He ends this part of the letter with the same language he uses when promoting education: “I was in hopes that the enlightened & liberal policy which has marked the present age would at least have reconciled *Christians* of every denomination so far that we should never again see their religious

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the Christian system may be to believe or to acknowledge it, it is nevertheless true, that the age of ignorance commenced with the Christian system. There was more knowledge in the world before that period than for many centuries afterwards.”

disputes carried to such a pitch as to endanger the peace of Society.”<sup>60</sup> Washington’s rather naïve conception of religious tyranny is a testament to how out of touch he really was with common people. The shift in his policy for obtaining happiness was only temporary.

He returned to emphasizing religion’s role in moralizing ordinary people on a more frequent basis after 1793,<sup>61</sup> when the French Revolution took an especially bloody turn in the summer of that year as the Jacobins usurped power from the more moderate provisional government. The Jacobins, moreover, were widely considered as infidels and atheists,<sup>62</sup> many of whom were suspected of having close ties with the rising political faction in America known as the Republicans—an opposition party nominally led by Thomas Jefferson. Since the Federalists were generally pro-British while the Republicans were still in support of the French Revolution, calumnious rumors spread in the United States about the Republicans as the immoral party of infidels.

A few years later, Washington issued the most important address of his career. His “Farewell Address” of September 19, 1796, is in essence the defining document of the Federalist Party. It is a plea for faith in both government and God in order to secure American happiness. Washington begins by thanking the people of the United States for the office they bestowed on him and for their consistent support throughout his two terms as president. After going on at

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<sup>60</sup> GW, To Edward Newenham, 20 Oct. 1792, in *PGW*, pp. 246–247.

<sup>61</sup> See for example GW, Sixth Annual Message to Congress, 19 Nov. 1794, in *George Washington: Writings*, ed. John Rhodehamel (New York: Library of America, 1997), p. 887.

<sup>62</sup> For the so-called “dechristianization” of France under Jacobin control see Timothy Tackett, “The French Revolution and religion to 1794,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815*, eds. Steward Brown and Timothy Tackett (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), p. 553; see also Simon Schama, *Citizens: A Chronicle of the French Revolution* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989), pp. 774-779. As they point out, the Jacobins were not unanimously in favor of riding France of Christianity, let alone religion. In effect, they merely substituted revealed religion for the religion of “Reason”—worshipping rational inquiry to the point of irrationality, including committing the very offences of which the Catholics were accused, such as heresy hunts, executions, and their own distorted versions of miracles.

some length, he looks to Heaven in hopes that it will continually bless the American people with happiness upon his retirement.<sup>63</sup> Thereafter he begins to enumerate a long list of concerns, especially “the baneful effects of the Spirit of Party.” Party affiliation, he adds, is based on “Geographical discriminations”—Northerners tend to be Federalists and Southerners tend to be Republicans.<sup>64</sup>

Washington then turns his attention to cementing the Federalist Party’s line with his plea for religion as the surest way to procure happiness. “Of all the dispositions and habits which lead to political prosperity, Religion and morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labour to subvert these great Pillars of human happiness.” Only religion and morality, therefore, can prevent the United States from “running the course” of history. With these supports, the government has the necessary power to maintain this era of happiness. He emphasizes his point by making religion a matter of patriotism, claiming that it is the patriot’s duty to “cherish” the so-called “Pillars of human happiness.” Having pointedly made his case for religion’s role in obtaining happiness, Washington then ties it all together by drawing on both his Federalist tendencies and his Southern origins:

And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect that National morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.<sup>65</sup>

In effect, he is saying that although education works for the wealthy, the vast majority of people do need religion to keep them morally sound. This entire paragraph of his Farewell Address is the summa of the Federalist Party’s claim that religion is the greatest conduit to happiness.

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<sup>63</sup> GW, “Farewell Address,” 19 Sep. 1796, in *Writings*, pp. 962-4.

<sup>64</sup> GW, “Farewell Address,” 19 Sep. 1796, in *ibid.*, pp. 976.

<sup>65</sup> GW, Farewell Address, in *ibid.*, p. 971.

Although Washington's beliefs about the pillars of happiness for the common people are solidified in the paragraph just discussed, the rest of his valedictory speech seems to be addressed to his fellow elites. For example, in the following two paragraphs he claims that "virtue or morality is a necessary spring of popular government." What he is essentially saying is that *virtue* is for the elites—in effect, the only people who meet the property requirements to vote—and *morality* is for them to inculcate in the rest. And a free government, as Washington establishes, is necessary to maintain happiness: "Promote then as an object of primary importance, Institutions for the general diffusion of knowledge. In proportion as the structure of a government gives force to public opinion, it is essential that public opinion should be enlightened."<sup>66</sup> Washington knows full well that it would be impossible for his generation of politicians to agree on the reforms necessary to effectively enlighten the general public. However, if more wealthy people have better access to education, they could learn how to be virtuous citizens. In turn, the elites will inculcate morality in ordinary people, extending the "virtue and happiness of the People" in perpetuity.<sup>67</sup> In his final address to Congress he reiterates the need for education, this time cajoling Congress personally by claiming they are "too enlightened not to be fully sensible how much a flourishing state of the Arts and Sciences contributes to National prosperity and reputation."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> GW, Farewell Address, in *ibid.*, p. 971.

<sup>67</sup> GW, Eighth Annual Address, in *ibid.*, p. 985.

<sup>68</sup> GW, Eighth Annual Address, in *ibid.*, p. 982. There was some debate over the authenticity of Washington's Farewell by his contemporaries. Apparently there were various pens at work, including GW's, James Madison's, and Alexander Hamilton's. See for example TJ to Madison, 13 Jun. 1823, and "Enclosure [TJ to William Johnson]," in *The Republic of Letters: The Correspondence between Thomas Jefferson and James Madison 1776-1826*, vols. 3, 1804-1836, ed. James Morton Smith (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), pp. 1861-1866; for Madison corroborating Jefferson's claim, see Madison to Jefferson, 27 Jun. 1823, in *ibid.*, pp. 1867-1870; for originals see Hamilton, Abstract of Points to Form an Address, 16 May–5 Jul. 1796, in *The Papers of Alexander Hamilton*, vol. 20, *January 1796–March 1797*, ed. Harold C. Syrett (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), pp. 178–183; and also Madison, Enclosure: Madison's Draft of the Farewell Address, 20 Jun. 1792, in *PGW*, pp. 478–480.

Overall, the promotion of public happiness was a prominent goal of Washington's during his eight years as president. However, the way in which he sought to achieve this quixotic goal—by promoting religion or education, or both—remains elusive. If anything, it seems that he generally tried to split the difference by appealing to those who thought religion had a role in government and those who did not. When he did promote religion as a conduit to happiness Washington tended to connect religion to morality. Morality, moreover, was something that common people generally lacked, thus religion served as a supplement. For the elites he insisted time and again to become virtuous through modes of enlightenment such as education. In total, Washington uses religious language on average of 2.11 mentions per address, placing him third in terms of using the most religious words or phrases in presidential addresses.<sup>69</sup> This data and the elucidation thereof, as I will further demonstrate with each politician in this study, can help clarify any ambiguities about the prevalence and purpose of promoting religion in public addresses. In the case of Washington, a Federalist from Virginia, he fits nicely within the parameters I have set: his Southern origins balances out his strong Federalist appeal to religion.

In 1797, Washington's successor, the New England Federalist John Adams, brought with him into office the religious zeal that defined his Puritan ancestry. Born and raised in Braintree, Massachusetts, Adams typified his fellow Congregationalists who had middling amounts of success. His father, "The Deacon" of a local church, sent young John to Harvard College with hopes that he would eventually be a man of the cloth himself. Although Adams never became a clergyman, he did fall in love with law—a profession that The Deacon looked upon with contempt. Nevertheless, Adams was not cut out for the clergy, and decided, after being

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<sup>69</sup> See Appendix 1.

persuaded by his fellow students at Harvard, that a career in law was most suitable to his personality.<sup>70</sup>

Even at a young age it appears that Adams was destined to a career other than the clergy after witnessing the dogmatic and bigoted “ecclesiastical councils” that were hosted by his father in their family home. Then, at Harvard, he only solidified his decision to practice law after a brief but relentless engagement with the classics and writers such as Milton, Bolingbroke, and Voltaire. As Adams recalled many years later, he read incessantly, and naturally gravitated to the republican ideology of antiquity and modernity. Nevertheless, he retained a particular fondness for the attributes that he associated with his Puritan origins: piety, penitence, diligence, and temperance.<sup>71</sup> Furthermore, the connection between Christianity and public happiness would never be sundered throughout his career. In varying degrees, Adams would display these traits and prioritize his piety during his decades-long career as a public servant. After all, it was his experience living in New England that Christianity was at the root of social harmony.

It was no wonder, then, that in his first message to the American people as president he put forth a decidedly religious agenda that promulgated Christianity as the ultimate conduit to happiness. In his Inaugural Address of March 4, 1797, Adams emphasizes this point when he makes Christianity the central theme in a 600-word plus sentence, beginning with some reservations on issuing the very statement he is about to make: “On this subject it might become me better to be silent or to speak with diffidence; but as something may be expected, the occasion, I hope, will be admitted as an apology if I venture to say that if a preference, upon principle, of a free republican government, formed upon long and serious reflection, after a

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<sup>70</sup> John Ferling, *Adams: A life* (New York: Oxford UP, 1992), pp. 16-19; and John Witte Jr., “One Public Religion, Many Private Religions,” pp. 24-25.

<sup>71</sup> For his education see Ferling, *Adams*, pp. 10-19.



diligent and impartial inquiry after truth.”<sup>72</sup> This passage sets up the rest of his extended sentence by implying that his administration—“if” after “long and serious reflection” by Congress—is duty-bound<sup>73</sup> to sign into law any piece of legislation or resolution that is presented to him. After listing a series of “ifs,” such as “if” a law supporting institutions of learning that propagate religion’s “benign Influence on the happiness of life” pass through Congress, Adams concludes with the following: “and, with humble reverence, I feel it to be my duty to add, if a veneration for the religion of a people who profess and call themselves Christians, and a fixed resolution to consider a decent respect for Christianity among the best recommendations for the public service, can enable me in any degree to comply with your wishes, it shall be my strenuous endeavor that this sagacious injunction of the two Houses shall not be without effect.”<sup>74</sup> Adams, unlike his presidential predecessor, is declaring his support for public days of prayer and fasting designed specifically with Christians in mind. He is essentially telling Congress that if they pass a resolution in both houses, for example, suggesting that a day of thanksgiving be proclaimed by the president, then he would gladly comply. In effect, he is soliciting a religious day for Christians, and implying that he would be in favor of a religious establishment.<sup>75</sup> Although he is not specific in detailing how far he would go concerning Christianity, he is putting Congress in an awkward position that could result in the legislative branch being in contravention of the religious establishment clause of the First Amendment to the Constitution.

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<sup>72</sup> Adams, Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1797, in *MSG*, pp. 218-222.

<sup>73</sup> He had the Constitutional authority to veto any piece of legislation that came across his desk, but he never once vetoed a bill; see “Presidential Vetoes,” *History, Art, Archives: United States House of Representatives*, accessed 4 Apr. 2017, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Presidential-Vetoes/Presidential-Vetoes/>.

<sup>74</sup> Adams, Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1797, in *ibid.*, p. 222.

<sup>75</sup> For Adams’ history of support for a religious establishment, see Witte Jr., “One Public Religion, Many Private Religions,” pp. 27-33. The second president had a history of supporting a religious establishment dating back to at least 1779 when he drafted the Massachusetts Constitution. Witte shows that Adams was in favor of Christian oaths for public office, tithes for the support of religious corporations, and mandatory days of worship.

Without mentioning Christianity in his First Annual Address a few months later, Adams nevertheless gives thanks to “Providence.” On this occasion, according to Adams, his gratitude is, above all, “for a rational spirit of civil and religious liberty and a calm but steady determination to support our sovereignty, as well as our moral and our religious principles, against all open and secret attacks.”<sup>76</sup> By “rational spirit” he means temperate in expression, a point Adams clarifies in a letter written roughly two weeks prior to his Address. He believed that “misrepresentation, aided by a too Sanguine and intemperate ardor for Liberty,” is the cause for the “Voice of Faction” and the rise in “foreign Influence,” which gave reason to believe that “Religious Morality and Patriotism” were facing an existential crisis.<sup>77</sup> Faced with internal and external dissent, Adams believed the lack of religious uniformity was directly linked to the decay in morality.<sup>78</sup> This was a time of great unrest in America; the fallout from the intriguing French agents known as “XYZ” exacerbated the already tumultuous relationship between America’s two political parties, resulting in Adams’ Federalist administration condemning the Republican Party by identifying them “with the murderous Jacobins of France.”<sup>79</sup> For pious New England Federalists such as Adams, being a Jacobin sympathizer was synonymous with infidelity and immorality.

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<sup>76</sup> Adams, First Annual Address, 22 Nov. 1797, in *MSG*, p. 240.

<sup>77</sup> Adams, “From John Adams to John Neilson, 8 November 1797,” *FO*, accessed 22 Nov. 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-2216>.

<sup>78</sup> For his disdain of French influence on American morality see Adams, “From John Adams to Elbridge Gerry, 3 May 1797,” *FO*, accessed 25 Nov. 2016, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-1957>. For example: “I am a little surprized at your sorrow that Monroe was recalled.—His House was a battery playing incessantly under the Engineer T. Paine upon the Religion the Government the Policy of this Country.—I would as soon appoint Tom Paine to be Ambassador in France.—He will not tell you the Cause of his recall.—I would rather fill all foreign Places with Antigallicans sooner than with servile fawning base intriguing flatterers of french Jacobins, and worthless Speculators in French funds and Confiscations.”

<sup>79</sup> TJ, *Anas*, 4 Feb. 1818, in *WTJ*, pp. 672-673. He is recounting events that transpired by disputing a biography written about GW.

He makes this connection apparent in his first Thanksgiving Proclamation issued on March 23, 1798. Beginning with praise to “Almighty God,” Adams issues a moral mandate to the people of the United States to worship and thank “Him” because it is “a duty whose natural influence is favorable to the promotion of that morality and piety without which social happiness can not exist nor the blessings of a free government be enjoyed.”<sup>80</sup> Recalling his Puritan penitence with calls of repentance for past sins and transgressions, Adams asks God to unite the American people as they were in the days of yore—during the American Revolution when ideological divides were less acute due to a common cause.<sup>81</sup> Adams finds a common cause by claiming that the precipitous decline of morality in France occurred concomitantly with the religious prohibitions during the Terror.<sup>82</sup> In lieu of the enemy that the Patriots united to fight against, therefore, Adams builds up the “immoral” French strawman. In the end, he juxtaposes the unhappy French with Americans, whose nation abounds with religion. Accordingly, Adams thanks the deity “for conferring on them many and great Favours conducive to the Happiness and Prosperity of a Nation.”<sup>83</sup>

Almost a year later, on March 6, 1799, Adams proclaims another day of thanksgiving and prayer in which he reiterates supplications to the “Supreme Being” and the acknowledgement of his divine retribution, which is “conducive equally to the happiness and rectitude of individuals and to the well-being of communities.”<sup>84</sup> Again he connects religion to morality, and ultimately to the happiness of the people as individuals and as greater communities, the staple of his Puritan

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<sup>80</sup> Adams, Proclamation, 23 Mar. 1798, in *MSG*, pp. 258-9.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 259.

<sup>82</sup> For possible decrease in religiosity after Napoleon’s 1801 Concordat with Catholic Church, which reinstated most if not all of the privileges of the French clergy, see Suzanne Desan, “The French Revolution and religion, 1795-1815,” in *The Cambridge History of Christianity: Enlightenment, Reawakening and Revolution 1660-1815*, eds. Stewart Brown and Timothy Tackett (New York: Cambridge UP, 2006), pp. 568-569.

<sup>83</sup> Adams, Proclamation, 23 Mar. 1798, in *MSG*, pp. 258-259.

<sup>84</sup> Adams, Proclamation, 6 Mar. 1799, in *ibid.*, p. 275.

forbearers. Unity, in other words, was essential in Adams' religious rhetoric because it was a critical time in the nation's history as repercussions from political infighting only aggravated the "hostile designs" of France, a nation with a people whose principles are "subversive of the foundations of all religious, moral, and social obligations, that have produced incalculable mischief and misery in other countries."<sup>85</sup> Adams was adamant not only that a lack of religion in American politics was dividing the country further, creating distinct party lines on moral and religious grounds, but also that the irreligious French were the impetus behind the disunity. He tries to account for these issues at the end of his proclamation by calling for unification in order to give thanks to the Almighty for making Americans the happiest lot of people.<sup>86</sup>

In his last Annual Address, which also happened to be the first ever in the new congressional building in Washington City, Adams reaffirms the so-called "pillars of happiness" that his predecessor originally erected. First on his agenda was to consecrate the "solemn temple" in which Congress was assembled by praising the "Supreme Ruler of the Universe." The next item he addresses summarizes his views on religion's role in public and private life. Echoing his Puritan ancestors' so-called "city on a hill," a xenophobic religious community from New England's not so distant past,<sup>87</sup> Adams emphatically proclaims that similar ideals are the foundation of the nation's capital: "May this territory be the residence of virtue and happiness! In this city may that piety and virtue, that wisdom and magnanimity, that constancy and self-government, which adorned the great character whose name it bears be forever held in veneration! Here and throughout our country may simple manners, pure morals, and true religion

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid., p. 275.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., p. 276.

<sup>87</sup> See Greene, *Pursuits of Happiness*, pp. 19-23.

flourish forever!”<sup>88</sup> By connecting “true religion” with Washington City’s namesake, Adams is telling the nation that the recently deceased General Washington was and is the moral exemplar who the American people should emulate. Patriotism and piety, to borrow the title of a recently published book on this subject, were, for Adams, the essential components of unity in the Federalist Party and the nation.<sup>89</sup> This fact is self-evident in Adams’ use of religious language, which he mentions at a rate of 4.13 per address, the most of the first five presidents.<sup>90</sup> As a Northerner and a Federalist, he falls precisely within the predicted category, meaning that he was very likely to promote religion as a conduit to happiness.

## **Part II. ‘Crusade Against Ignorance,’ 1801 to 1817**

*I think by far the most important bill in our whole code is that for the diffusion of knowlege among the people. No other sure foundation can be devised, for the preservation of freedom and happiness. If anybody thinks that kings, nobles, or priests are good conservators of the public happiness send them here [to France].*<sup>91</sup> Thomas Jefferson, 1786

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<sup>88</sup> Adams, Fourth Annual Address, 22 Nov. 1800, in *MSG*, p. 295.

<sup>89</sup> See Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, pp. 125-29. As Hartog concludes, Adams used “religious sensibilities to strengthen the connection felt between himself and the populace. The political end would be to cement the people’s connection to the Federalist administration, for the continued prevalence (to his mind) of order, good government, and public religiosity.”

<sup>90</sup> See Appendix 1.

<sup>91</sup> TJ, To George Wythe, 13 Aug. 1786, in *PTJ*, pp. 243-245.

Writing in 1786 to George Wythe, a fellow member of the Virginia bar and one of his most important mentors,<sup>92</sup> Jefferson expressed grave concerns about the future of American happiness. He was drawing on his experiences not only from his time as a young legislator and as one of Virginia's leading men, but also from his time spent as American minister to France (1784-89). His "Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge" (1778), to which he was referring, postulated that education was the surest way to guard against infringements on our natural rights, the basis of happiness according to Jefferson. "It is believed that the most effectual means of preventing" tyranny, the bill stipulates, "would be, to illuminate, as far as practicable, the minds of the people at large, and more especially to give them knowledge of those facts, which history exhibiteth. . . ." <sup>93</sup> Education was not the only ailment of the mind that concerned Jefferson: to the contrary of disseminating knowledge, was withholding it. This assertion is most apparent in the bill that he authored and put forth concerning religious freedom. He witnessed firsthand in both Virginia and France the limits of religious toleration, the failed ideology of a bygone era when Church and King "monopolized power and profit,"<sup>94</sup> and decided early on that acquiring knowledge and freedom of conscience are virtually two sides of the same coin. That is, the two were inextricably linked, but in a way that their respective vitality depended on their non-entanglement. The fact that in 1779 he followed up his education bill with a successful bid to

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<sup>92</sup> See TJ, Autobiography, 6 Jan. 1821, in *WTJ*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>93</sup> TJ, A Bill for the More General Diffusion of Knowledge, in *PTJ*, pp. 526-535.

<sup>94</sup> For a contemporary critique of religious toleration, see Paine, *Rights of Man Part One*, in *Paine: Collected Writings*, ed. Eric Foner (New York: Library of America, 1995), pp. 482-483: "Toleration is not the *opposite* of Intoleration, but is the *counterfeit* of it. Both are despotisms. The one assumes to itself the right of with-holding Liberty of Conscience, and the other of granting it. The one is the pope, armed with fire and faggot, and the other is the pope selling or granting indulgences. The former is church and state, and the latter is church and traffic."

abolish the two professorships of religion at his alma mater, the College of William and Mary, is a good case in point.<sup>95</sup>

Additionally, throughout his adulthood—from at least 1776 when he first conceived of the Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom until his death in 1826—the free exercise of religion was a natural right always revered by Jefferson.<sup>96</sup> Withholding this right was tyrannical, oppressive, and, most importantly, contrary to education’s primacy as a protector of natural rights, which of course included the pursuit of happiness. So concerned was Jefferson with religion adulterating education that instead of “putting the Bible and Testament into the hands of the children, at an age when their judgments are not sufficiently matured for religious enquiries,” he suggested, give them “the most useful facts from Grecian, Roman, European and American history.”<sup>97</sup> Learning useful facts about history should also be supplemented with basic moral and ethical questions. Among Jefferson’s favorite writers on morality were Socrates, Cicero, and Lucretius of antiquity, and also modern philosophers such as John Locke and Helvétius. Even the writers he recommended on religion were remarkably secular, and, ironically, were widely considered to be irreligious; for instance, David Hume, Viscount Bolingbroke, and Voltaire all faced intense scrutiny for their critiques of religion during their lifetimes.<sup>98</sup> In stark contrast to

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<sup>95</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 30.

<sup>96</sup> See for example TJ’s obelisk at *Monticello.org*. In 1826 he proposed only three lapidary phrases to be commemorated on his headstone: Declaration of Independence, Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom, and University of Virginia.

<sup>97</sup> TJ, *Notes on the State of Virginia, Query XIV*, in *WTJ*, pp. 273-274.

<sup>98</sup> See for example TJ, To Francis Eppes, 19 Jan. 1821, in *WTJ*, pp. 1450-1451. He says that Bolingbroke and Paine made “bitter enemies of the priests and Pharisees of their day.”

Jefferson, for example, John Adams thought that Bolingbroke's religion was "pompous folly" and that his critique of Christianity "is as superficial as it is impious."<sup>99</sup>

These were formative events for Jefferson. Throughout the rest of his life his views on keeping religion out of government while advocating public education would remain remarkably consistent. Once the connection between church and state was completely severed, Jefferson believed, then we could fully enjoy our natural rights. Consequently, we would be free to think for ourselves, to pursue a secular education, and, as a result, to inculcate virtue and happiness within ourselves. Thus in order to understand how Jefferson thought happiness was best achieved, we have to look beyond his extremely limited use of religious language.

Writing to an Episcopal priest in 1801, he clearly lays out his path to happiness: "I believe firmly with you in the [strict] connection between virtue & happiness: that the latter can never exist where the for[mer is] not: and that virtuous habits are produced by exercising the mind in [reading] and contemplating good moral writings."<sup>100</sup> For those who were naturally inclined to pursue knowledge, the expansion of rights of conscience was conducive to happiness; for those individuals who were not autodidacts, formal education—unadulterated by religion<sup>101</sup>—could provide the necessary tools to obtain happiness. In either case, Jefferson

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<sup>99</sup> For an example of the authors TJ recommended see TJ, To Peter Carr, 10 Aug. 1787, in *PTJ*, pp. 14-19; for Adams' remarks on Bolingbroke see Adams, *Diary*, 1782-1804, in *The Adams Papers*, *Diary and Autobiography of John Adams*, vol. 3, *Diary, 1782-1804; Autobiography, Part One to October 1776*, ed. L. H. Butterfield. Cambridge (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1961), pp. 262-267.

<sup>100</sup> TJ, To Mason Locke Weems, 12 Jun. 1801, in *PTJ*, pp. 321-22.

<sup>101</sup> For TJ's interest in Hume's works, especially his essays on religion, which have been catalogued in three of TJ's libraries, see *Jefferson's Literary Commonplace Book*, ed. D. L. Wilson (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1989), pp. 167-169. Because religion was a matter of belief, which is not based on reason and experience, Jefferson cautioned against the use of mandatory religious instruction as part of an educational curriculum. He may have derived this idea from David Hume, who warned that education merely perpetuates false ideas. Accordingly, Jefferson amended Hume's ideas on education by focusing on exercises that promote the use of reason, which both men believed was a natural phenomenon. See



believed that inculcating religion had a contrary effect on happiness because it preyed on “the fears & servile prejudices under which weak minds are servilely crouched.” Only the exercise of reason—sharpened by education—can displace credulity and ignorance. If for Adams religion was the conduit to morality and happiness, Jefferson evidently disparaged revealed religion’s worth.<sup>102</sup>

In offering a lesson in didacticism to make his point, Jefferson urged his nephew to “Read the bible then, as you would read Livy or Tacitus. The facts which are within the ordinary course of nature you will believe on the authority of the writer . . . .” Applying Occam’s razor to what seems to be David Hume’s natural philosophy on probability of causes, Jefferson continues with his lesson: “Here you must recur to the pretensions of the writer to inspiration from god. Examine upon what evidence his pretensions are founded, and whether that evidence is so strong as that its falsehood would be more improbable than a change in the laws of nature in the case he relates.” In short, if a religious inquiry “ends in a belief that there is no god, you will find incitements to virtue in the comfort & pleasantness you feel in it’s exercise, and the love of others which it will procure you.”<sup>103</sup> On the other hand, if your inquiry ends in the belief of a god, then happiness can still be attained because you have come to this conclusion through the use of the discerning faculties bestowed on you by nature. The protection of natural rights, in

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Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, eds. David Fate Norton and Mary J. Norton (New York: Oxford UP, 2000), pp. 80-1.

<sup>102</sup> See TJ, To Thomas Law, 13 Jun. 1814, in *Jefferson’s Extracts from the Gospels: The Philosophy of Jesus and the Life and Morals of Jesus*, ed. Dickinson W. Adams (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1983), pp. 355-358. Questioning the reasoning behind religion’s claim on morality, he observes that atheists such as “Diderot, Dalembert, D’Holbach, and Condorcet, are known to have been among the most virtuous of men. Their virtue then must have had some other foundation than the love of god.”

<sup>103</sup> TJ, To Peter Carr, 10 Aug. 1787, in *PTJ*, pp. 14-19.

other words, was the driving force behind Jefferson's unceasing efforts to fortify the "wall of separation between church and state"<sup>104</sup> throughout his political career.

Religion nevertheless played a critical role in Jefferson's presidency. Relative to the other politicians in this study, he refrains from using religious language in his public addresses, but the subject itself comes up frequently, predominately in two forms: when he is espousing the "wholsome & happy effects of religious freedom"<sup>105</sup> or when repudiating accusations of heresy. In the fierce political battles of the 1790s, for example, his religious views would be highly scrutinized. Events came to a head in the presidential election of 1800, when the incumbent Adams squared off against Jefferson and his Republicans. This momentous event, for it marked the nascent Republic's first real test in the peaceful transfer of power from one political party to another, quickly degenerated into a hotly contested affair, with both sides slandering the other through their proxy newspapers in an attempt to gain a competitive edge. Jefferson's religion, or

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<sup>104</sup> On January 1 1802, replying to the Danbury Baptist Association in Connecticut, TJ issued what has since become his most famous public statement on religion and government during his presidency. It was an extremely important and delicate for TJ. For first draft see TJ, Draft Reply to the Danbury Baptist Association, 31 Dec. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 254-5; for response concerning draft from TJ's political allies see TJ, From Gideon Granger, 31 Dec. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 256; and TJ, From Levi Lincoln, 1 Jan. 1802, in *PTJ*, p. 257. Jefferson was very concerned with the situation at hand, in part because he did not have Constitutional authority over the states. After a three month delay in receiving the grievance by the Danbury Baptists, Jefferson began drafting a response immediately. This situation, delicate as it seems to have been, was obviously made a priority by Jefferson for he sought council from Levi Lincoln and Gideon Granger during the drafting process. Granger thought the draft should not be altered, that it would cause "great Offence to the established Clergy of New England" but would be celebrated amongst dissenters. Lincoln was more cautious, however; citing states' rights, he warned TJ that his stricture on his objections to issuing religious proclamations despite an executive's legal right to do so would be "be construed into an implied censure of the usages of any of the States." In the end, Jefferson cautiously avoided alienating any single sect by removing the passage that mentioned fast days. For the letter he actual sent see TJ, To the Danbury Baptist Association, 1 Jan. 1802, in *PTJ*, p. 258.

<sup>105</sup> TJ, To Nicolas G. Dufief, 19 Apr. 1814, in *PTJ*, pp. 303-305.

lack thereof, became a main talking point for the Federalist press, resulting in serious accusations of atheism.<sup>106</sup>

The Federalists, however, overestimated the strength of their hand, and lost the election to the Jeffersonian Republicans, in part because they were overzealous in playing the religion card.<sup>107</sup> In New England, for example, the collusion between the Federalists and the Congregational establishment ended up backfiring when the Republican press cunningly implicated them in the very same offences of “tyranny and oppression” that the New Englanders used against the British during the Revolution.<sup>108</sup>

For his political allies, friends, and like-minded citizens, Jefferson’s election to the presidency was an auspicious day. Arthur Campbell, a veteran of the Revolutionary War and a former member of the Virginia House of Delegates, wrote with supreme confidence to the newly elected president expressing gratitude for the sanguine prospects of the nation being restored “to the original principles of the Revolution: to the dignity of the Rights of Man.”<sup>109</sup> Whether or not the author of this letter was referring specifically to Thomas Paine’s 1791 sensational pamphlet of the same name or the French Declaration of the Rights of Man & Citizen is irrelevant; citing the ubiquitous phrase was nonetheless an evocation of religious freedom.<sup>110</sup> James Warren, an elder statesman and political associate of Jefferson’s, wrote to him from Massachusetts, a

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<sup>106</sup> See Ferling, *Adams vs. Jefferson*, pp. 153-155. Federalist newspapers labelled him a “howling atheist” and “infidel,” and also “advised its readers to vote for ‘GOD—AND A RELIGIOUS PRESIDENT or impiously declare for JEFFERSON—AND NO GOD.’”

<sup>107</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 208. Historians generally credit the three-fifths clause of the Constitution for the Republican victory; Federalists at the time believed this as well, with one such Jefferson detractor calling him the “Negro President.”

<sup>108</sup> Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity*, p. 59.

<sup>109</sup> TJ, From Arthur Campbell, 4 Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 152.

<sup>110</sup> For immediate impact of the phrase “Rights of Man” after Paine published his pamphlet, and the phrase’s connection to religious freedom, see Harvey J. Kaye, *Thomas Paine and the Promise of America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2005), pp. 73-4.

Federalist stronghold and a state with a religious establishment, congratulating him on the “triumph of Virtue over the most malignant, virulent, and slanderous party, that perhaps ever existed in any Country.”<sup>111</sup> In an advertisement vindicating Jefferson’s character, John James Beckley, writing under his nom de guerre of *Americanus*, similarly addressed “the base insinuations against the religion, the morality, the public integrity and private honor of Mr. Jefferson, which had been industriously propagated for the purpose of preventing his election to the elevated office which he now sustains.”<sup>112</sup> Though adulatory, these letters bring to light the fact that religion had a prominent role not only in the election of 1800, but also in American society at large.

In hindsight, the letters also anticipate a Jefferson presidency that would be quick to reproach the religious tactics of his Federalist adversaries.<sup>113</sup> In a forthright manner, Jefferson warns: “And let us reflect that having banished from our land that religious intolerance under which mankind so long bled and suffered, we have yet gained little if we countenance a political intolerance, as despotic, as wicked, and capable of as bitter and bloody persecutions.”<sup>114</sup> Repudiating Federalists policies is a common theme throughout his presidency. Whereas Federalists would use religion in an attempt to strengthen their claims to uniformity, the Republicans would use it to advocate the freedom thereof—in short, it was a form of what we today might call reverse psychology.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> TJ, From James Warren, 4. Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 167.

<sup>112</sup> John James Beckley, “Address to the people of the United States; with an epitome and vindication of the public life and character of Thomas Jefferson,” (Worcester, Mass.: Sewall Goodridge, 1802), cover letter.

<sup>113</sup> See Leonard W. Levy, *Jefferson & Civil Liberties: The Darker Side* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 1963).

<sup>114</sup> TJ, First Inaugural Address, 4. Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 150.

<sup>115</sup> TJ, *Notes on the State of Virginia*, in *WTJ*, p. 286. Jefferson thought religious uniformity was a pernicious policy: “Is uniformity attainable? Millions of innocent men, women and children, since the

Indeed, Machiavellian politics was not beneath Jefferson. In his Inaugural Address, for example, he unscrupulously employs religion to further natural rights. He does so by speaking to the people in plain and unassuming confessional terms, a strategy used most effectively on this side of the Atlantic by Thomas Paine in his pamphlet from early 1776, *Common Sense*, which arguably was the galvanizing factor that won the hearts and minds of the people in support of independence.<sup>116</sup> Jefferson claims that America is a “chosen country” with a people “enlightened by a benign religion, professed indeed and practised in various forms, yet all of them inculcating honesty, truth, temperance, gratitude and the love of man, acknowledging and adoring an overruling providence. . . .”<sup>117</sup> First, he recognizes how important religion is to the people, but he uses the qualifier “enlightened,” an affirmation of natural rights. Second, he further qualifies this statement with the use of “benign” to describe religion, which effectively disqualifies the “gross defects”<sup>118</sup> of the Old Testament and the puritanical beliefs of, most notably, his New England enemies. Third, he acknowledges the fact that people practice various forms of worship, another affirmation of natural rights—specifically freedom of religion. Finally, what he offers instead are general moral principles that are not a precondition of religious belief, or vice versa. The exact religious tenets, in other words, were considered trivial as long as they “inculcate” these

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introduction of Christianity, have been burnt, tortured, fined, imprisoned: yet we have not advanced one inch towards uniformity. What has been the effect of coercion? To make one half the world fools, and the other half hypocrites. To support roguery and error all over the earth.” In fact, he thought the opposite: “Difference of opinion is advantageous in religion. The several sects perform the office of a Censor morum over each other.”

<sup>116</sup> See Paine, *Common Sense*, in *Collected Writings*, pp. 5-59; for Paine’s writing style and its impact on the common man see Eric Foner, *Tom Paine and Revolutionary America* (New York: Oxford UP, 1976), pp. 74-80; see also Bailyn, *Ideological Origins*, pp. 17-19; for a contemporary view of his writing style and impact see TJ, To Francis Eppes, 19 Jan. 1821, in *WTJ*, pp. 1450-1451; and also Adams, To Benjamin Waterhouse, 29 Oct. 1805, *FO*, accessed 17 Feb. 2017, <http://founders.archives.gov/documents/Adams/99-02-02-5107>. Although Adams hated Paine, he admits: “I know not whether any Man in the World has had more influence on its inhabitants or affairs for the last thirty years than Tom Paine.”

<sup>117</sup> TJ, First Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 150.

<sup>118</sup> See Eugene Sheridan, introduction to *Jefferson’s Extracts*, p. 6-7.

overarching moral principles. In reality, religion was irrelevant to Jefferson; it was your duty to acknowledge the “equal right to the use of our own faculties” that he cared most deeply about. In fact, he deemed liberty in matters of opinion as a foundational component of the government, proclaiming “Equal and exact justice to all men, of whatever state or persuasion, religious or political.”<sup>119</sup> Jefferson’s First Inaugural Address is in essence a reaffirmation of natural rights, namely rights of conscience, which he believes is a prerequisite for pursuing happiness.<sup>120</sup>

Jefferson’s obstinate determination to implement his agenda, despite the resistance by his Federalist counterparts, is manifested in his following three addresses. Accordingly, he shifts his attention to the rapidly changing American landscape after the purchase of the Louisiana Territory, yet he remains steadfast in promulgating a political agenda that protects natural rights for the sake of public happiness. With the newly acquired territory that literally doubled the landholdings of the United States overnight, many Indian tribes, who on a technicality fell into American territory, were now geopolitically significant for the president. For Jefferson, the “ignorance” of the Indians was the most dangerous aspect of their character. What he saw as their willful disregard of reason was at the foundation of their hostilities towards Americans. Just as the American people themselves had been duped by the Federalists, Jefferson equally put forth the idea that the Indians were being beguiled by a few “crafty individuals,” for whom inculcating a state of ignorance was a “sanctimonious reverence for the customs of their ancestors.” This attack on Indian customs and religion, in other words, was a rather obvious metaphor for Jefferson’s political enemies who frequently used the pulpit against him.<sup>121</sup> Under

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<sup>119</sup> TJ, First Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, p. 150.

<sup>120</sup> TJ, To Providence Citizens, 27 Mar. 1801, in *PTJ*, pp. 475-476. He says that it is the government’s duty to promote happiness.

<sup>121</sup> See for example TJ, To John Wayles Eppes, 1 Jan. 1802, in *PTJ*, pp. 261-262. TJ says in a private letter, “there is a speedy prospect of seeing all the New England states come round to their antient

the guise of falsehoods and misapprehensions, he went on with his metaphor, the leaders of the Indian nations preyed on the credulity of their people by inciting, in Jefferson's experience, religious tyranny. Being led by false teachers was at the root of their misfortunes and a hindrance to their happiness. In short, Jefferson thought that because of their traditions, "their duty is to remain as their Creator made them, ignorance being safety and knowledge full of danger."<sup>122</sup>

Removing artificial barriers of ignorance by inducing Indians "to exercise their reason" would make the American people less susceptible to Indian attacks, thus ineluctably leading to peace, prosperity, and of course, happiness. Although extremely difficult, as Jefferson acknowledges, a reformation of customs among the "aboriginal inhabitants" was not impossible. Jefferson was at this time experiencing his own version of a religious reformation,<sup>123</sup> and he may have believed, rather naively, that Native religions, as well as Christianity, could exorcise superstition from true and universal religious principles, such as our moral duty to do right by our fellow humans. Without artificial obstacles implemented by a privileged few, humans were naturally inclined to do good. Furthermore, humans could reinforce their morality through enlightenment, which is a counterpoise to that of religious coercion. Jefferson, in this regard, believed there was no difference between the natural state of the Indians, or euphemistically, the Federalists, and the rest of Americans. Like the Americans, he promulgated the idea that the Indians are "endowed with the faculties of the rights of men," while also sharing "an ardent love of liberty and independence. . . ." To make this dream come to fruition, the Americans, along with the Indians, would need, "as of Israel of old," a Moses figure under the direction of that

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principles; always excepting the real Monarchists & the Priests, who never can lose sight of the natural alliance between the crown & mitre."

<sup>122</sup> TJ, Second Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1805, in *PTJ*, pp. 366-370.

<sup>123</sup> See Sheridan, introduction to *Jefferson's Extracts*, pp. 3-4.

“Being” to guide them to the promised land. Ever the triangulator, Jefferson was without scruples when invoking religious language suited his cause.<sup>124</sup>

But compared to both his predecessors and successors, Jefferson uses religious language significantly less. He mentions religion less than once per address (0.75 times), the lowest average of every president in this study.<sup>125</sup> On the rare occasion he does use religion to further a political agenda, he tends to use it when guaranteeing its free expression, or when he calls on the Supreme Being, for example, to “enlighten the minds of your servants.” These instances are, at any rate, in contrast to what he proclaimed his pious political adversaries were promulgating. Accordingly, his personal and political objections to religious rhetoric were based on the fact that matters of conscience fit into the category of natural rights. These rights, as he claims in his Sixth Annual Address, extend to the most degraded of denizens of the United States: enslaved Africans. Although guarded in his choice of words, Jefferson congratulates his fellow citizens for withdrawing the people of the “United States from all further participation in those violations of human rights [the slave trade] which have been so long continued on the unoffending inhabitants of Africa, and which the morality, the reputation, and the best interests of our country have long been eager to proscribe.”<sup>126</sup> There is plenty of scholarship that condemns Jefferson’s vast dealings in slavery,<sup>127</sup> but historians have overlooked the fact that he was the first president to

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<sup>124</sup> TJ, Second Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1805, in *PTJ*, pp. 366-370; see also TJ, Fourth Annual Message, 8 Nov. 1804, in *PTJ*, pp. 359-360; and for TJ and religious conciliation in his addresses, see Buckley, “Religious Rhetoric of Thomas Jefferson,” pp. 72-3.

<sup>125</sup> See Appendix 1 and Figure 1.

<sup>126</sup> TJ, Sixth Annual Message, 2 Dec. 1806, in *PTJ*, p. 396.

<sup>127</sup> See, for instance, Paul Finkelman, “Jefferson and Slavery: ‘Treason Against the Hopes of the World,’” in *Jeffersonian Legacies*, ed. Peter S. Onuf (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1993), pp. 181-212; for the most thorough account of TJ and slavery see Annette Gordon-Reed, *The Hemingses of Monticello: An American Family* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2008); see also David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), p. 174. Davis says that if TJ “had died in 1784, at the age of forty-one, it could be said without further qualification that



announce his disdain for any facet of slavery while holding office. Additionally, Jefferson sees slavery to be the antithesis of natural rights, which he connects to morality and ultimately to happiness. To promote happiness, he often harks back to the principles of the Revolution, a strategy that has been more or less consistent throughout American history. “Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness,” the immortalized phrase that is in essence what James Madison told Jefferson encapsulates the “fundamental principles” of the American republic,<sup>128</sup> was not, therefore, just a pithy catchphrase used to galvanize a disaffected population to support independence. It evidently had further implications throughout Jefferson’s long political career.

The fundamental principles of the Revolution that Jefferson espoused would also be foundational to James Madison’s presidency (1809 to 1817). Madison was baptized in 1751 at the Hanover Parish Church, an Anglican establishment in the colony of Virginia. Madison, as an aspiring gentleman from a well-to-do family, received a typical education. This included rigorous training in Latin and Greek, with particular emphasis on the latter for it was often a prerequisite for colleges to be able to read the New Testament in its original language. Unlike most young Virginian men, though, Madison would forgo the College of William and Mary in favor of the College of New Jersey (hereafter Princeton), a Presbyterian institution. In 1769, the year of his matriculation, Princeton was a lively and unorthodox environment. Though religious instruction was mandatory, Princeton prided itself on providing “free and equal Liberty and Advantage of Education [to] any Person of any religious Denomination whatsoever.”<sup>129</sup>

Madison had formative experiences with religion throughout his adolescence. Most notably, he witnessed the persecutions of Baptists in his county. Then, at Princeton under John

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he was one of the first statesmen in any part of the world to advocate concrete measures for restricting and eradicating Negro slavery.”

<sup>128</sup> Madison to TJ, 8 Feb. 1825, in *Republic of Letters*, pp. 1924-1925.

<sup>129</sup> Ketcham, *James Madison*, pp. 8-24.

Witherspoon, who was a Presbyterian from Scotland—a dissenter, in Virginia terms—and was apparently as liberal as they came as far as religious instruction was concerned,<sup>130</sup> Madison was taught to respect individual rights of conscience, especially religious opinions. The impressionable young Madison took Witherspoon’s teachings to heart and would carry these convictions with him throughout the rest of his life. In the meantime, the notoriously poor health Madison had experienced as a youth persisted, which may have been cause for his somewhat pessimistic outlook on life. Writing to his best friend in 1772, he reflected wryly on their correspondence, suggesting that his friend resembled an “old Philosopher that had experienced the emptiness of Earthly Happiness.” He warned his friend to disregard earthly pleasures lest “we neglect to have our names enrolled in the Annals of Heaven.” Though his remarks could be construed as facetious, Madison did advocate religious instruction as a necessary supplement to classical education.<sup>131</sup> Nevertheless, by 1774 there is an ostensible shift in Madison’s views on religious instruction, from his inclination towards lessons in divinity to the growing sense of hostility towards the established clergy that his fellow Revolutionaries were espousing. In short, Madison adopted the Revolutionary ideology that was sweeping the colonies, while at the same time his own experiences led him to express discontent for the current state of affairs among the clergy and their role in the decay of morality in society.<sup>132</sup>

The object of Madison’s presidency, as he laid out in his Inaugural Address, was to further the fundamental principles espoused by “my immediate predecessor,” who was “zealously devoted, thro’ a long career, to the advancement of [the United States’] highest

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<sup>130</sup> Jeffry H. Morrison, “John Witherspoon’s Revolutionary Religion,” in *Founders on God and Government*, pp. 117-146.

<sup>131</sup> Madison, To William Bradford, 9 Nov. 1772, in *PJM*, pp. 74-77.

<sup>132</sup> Ketcham, “James Madison and Religion—A New Hypothesis” in *Journal of the Presbyterian Historical Society (1943-1961)* Vol. 38, No. 2 (June 1960), pp. 65-90.

interest and happiness.”<sup>133</sup> Madison wholeheartedly adopted Jefferson’s approach to obtaining happiness—that is, happiness derived from virtue, which is based primarily on freedom of conscience and the unfettered pursuit of knowledge.<sup>134</sup> He was explicit in this regard, mincing no words when laying out his agenda to, no less, the Mother Superior of a convent: “however inferior to my predecessor in other merits, my dispositions are equally friendly to the task of training youth in the paths of Virtue, and useful knowledge, and that with my thanks for the prayers for which I am indebted, to the piety of your religious community, I offer mine, for the happiness of the members composing it.”<sup>135</sup> Madison, however, was not always as rigid as Jefferson in opposition to promoting religion as a conduit to happiness. His religious opportunism made him the most enigmatic of all of the presidents in question.

In his public addresses, for instance, he averaged 1.5 religious mentions.<sup>136</sup> Although this figure places him in the category we have come to expect for a Virginia Republican, Madison made many public professions of faith during his time in office. In fact, he issued four religious proclamations in consecutive years beginning in 1812. These four proclamations, however, are arguably a tepid response to Congress’ insistence on the United States gaining favor with the Almighty during the War of 1812 against the British.<sup>137</sup> Moreover, Madison does not claim that religion is a conduit to happiness—rather, he claims that it is the Constitution, the guarantor of

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<sup>133</sup> Madison, First Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1809, in *PJM*, p. 17

<sup>134</sup> Madison, First Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1809, in *PJM*, p. 17

<sup>135</sup> Madison, To the Mother Superior of the Ursuline Convent, 24 Apr. 1809, in *PJM*, p. 136.

<sup>136</sup> See Appendix 1 and Figure 1.

<sup>137</sup> Madison, “Proclamation,” 9 Jul. 1812, in *MSG*, pp. 581-582; see also, “Proclamation,” 23 Jul. 1813, in *ibid.*, pp. 517-518; and, “Proclamation,” 16 Nov. 1814, in *ibid.*, p. 543. In all three instances, Madison opens with the acknowledgement that the two houses of Congress have requested the religious proclamations. For his bland proclamations compared to GW see Munoz, “Religion and the Public Good,” p. 5.

“those sacred rights of conscience, so essential to his present happiness, and so dear to his future hopes,” which is humankind’s ultimate conduit to happiness.<sup>138</sup>

Like Jefferson, therefore, he frequently espouses natural rights as the ultimate conduit to happiness instead of his Federalist counterparts’ largely religious modus operandi. The fact that he was the only president<sup>139</sup> who contributed to the drafting of the Constitution and who wrote at length in his retirement on the myriad ways religion could entangle itself in government makes Madison an important case study.<sup>140</sup> During the drafting process of the Constitution, for example, he tried to insert a provision, albeit to no avail, that granted power “to establish an University, in which no preferences or distinctions should be allowed on account of Religion.”<sup>141</sup> If anything, religion was a private matter that should be constitutionally protected as such. In his First Inaugural Address in 1809 as tensions were rising between his government and those of England and France, he evoked the “spirit of independence” and the liberal laws of the United States as the basis of the American people’s peace and happiness; he attempts to restore confidence in the Constitution’s mandates that protect, among other things, “personal rights” such as those of conscience, and freedom of the press, and, “to favor, in like manner, the advancement of science and the diffusion of information as the best aliment to true liberty. . . .”<sup>142</sup>

If education was the “best aliment to true liberty” then religious indoctrination was tantamount to getting food poisoning. Madison made this point perfectly clear long before his presidency, when in 1785 he wrote a “Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious

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<sup>138</sup> Madison, Presidential Proclamation, 23 Jul. 1813, in *PJM*, pp. 458-460.

<sup>139</sup> GW presided over the Convention but did not contribute to writing the Constitution.

<sup>140</sup> See Madison, Detached Memoranda, in *WJM*, pp. 756-766.

<sup>141</sup> Irving Brant, *The Fourth President: A Life of James Madison* (Norwalk, Conn.: Easton Press, 1970), p. 193.

<sup>142</sup> Madison, First Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1809, in *PJM*, p. 17. For rising tensions with the “Belligerent powers,” as they often were referred to, see also Annual Message to Congress, 29 Nov. 1809, in *PJM*, pp. 90-4.

Assessments.” The bill in the Virginia legislature against which Madison was writing would effectively create a religious establishment by providing resources for “Teachers of the Christian Religion.” Among the fifteen enumerated concerns that he and the signatories of his remonstrance had was the following: “What influence in fact have ecclesiastical establishments had on Civil Society? In some instances they have been seen to erect a spiritual tyranny on the ruins of the Civil authority; in many instances they have been seen upholding the thrones of political tyranny: in no instance have they been seen the guardians of liberties of the people.”<sup>143</sup>

Although President Madison was a less vocal opponent of religion than Jefferson, his record in office does indicate that he pushed back against infringements on natural rights. These rights included, as quoted above, the breaking down of artificial barriers that hindered the mind, such as compulsory religious indoctrination. It was Madison’s supposition that having the freedom to think for yourself—an emancipated mind unadulterated by the fear of oppression—would naturally set you on a path to scientific discoveries in search for truths. Consequently, this would lead to advancements in knowledge about humanity, and ultimately towards an enlightened and happy citizenry. In this case, religion was an obstruction to human progress.<sup>144</sup> In a letter to Jefferson on the efficacy of mandatory religious oaths for public office, for example, Madison explains that individuals in accordance with their religious tenets tend to act in “sympathy” with “the multitudes,” which is likely in opposition to their conscience “if [that same issue was presented] to them separately in their closets.” This intellectual impediment to progress was due in part to the enthusiastic religious movements that had swept the nation. Religious movements and the happiness they might evoke are only temporary, said Madison, “and whilst it

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<sup>143</sup> Madison, Memorial and Remonstrance Against Religious Assessments, 20 Jun. 1785, in *WJM*, pp. 29-36.

<sup>144</sup> For conflict between human nature and religion, and how the former could be a conduit to happiness for enlightened individuals, see Winterer, *American Enlightenments*, pp. 176-177.

lasts will hardly be seen with pleasure at the helm.” “Even in its coolest state,” he concludes his thoughts on religion, “it has been much oftener a motive to oppression than a restraint from it.”<sup>145</sup>

Human progress, moreover, was one of the defining characteristics of the Enlightenment, and was a pervasive idea in the minds of all the Founders in more or less varying degrees. For most, however, intellectual progress was not solely a matter of self-realization; autodidacts such as Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Paine, both of whom had their fair share of religious controversies, were few and far between. To create a more enlightened populace, therefore, many of the Founders turned to education as a means to achieving this end. For Madison, as well as the other Virginian presidents, inculcating enlightenment principles in the form of education was a conduit to happiness.

On more than one occasion did Madison ask Congress to create legislation that would provide funding for a national university in Washington City. He ultimately hoped that the federally funded “seminary of learning” would be a success, leading to the creation of similar institutions at the state level. The curriculum he intended to create was to focus primarily on the sciences, which were generally believed to be at the core of enlightenment principles. “By enlightening the opinions” of young people “who might resort to this Temple of Science,” he surmised, “sources of jealousy and prejudice would be diminished, the features of national character would be multiplied, and greater extent given to Social harmony.” Most importantly, however, a national university would, in Madison’s opinion, strengthen the beloved republican

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<sup>145</sup> Madison to TJ, 24 Oct. 1787 and 1 Nov. 1787, in *Republic of Letters*, pp. 495-507. See also McBride, *Pulpit & Nation*, pp. 120-126.

system—and the Republican agenda—while promoting happiness across the nation—in the people and government.<sup>146</sup>

Although Madison’s national university never materialized, a few years into retirement, beginning in the early 1820s, he cofounded the University of Virginia with Jefferson. “Our University,” as they often referred to their public institution, was founded on the principle of separating civil and ecclesiastical organizations. It was Madison’s experience “that a legal establishment of religion without a toleration could not be thought of, and with a toleration, is no security for public quiet & harmony, but rather a source itself of discord & animosity.”<sup>147</sup> Madison, in essence, uses the same language here in opposition to religious entanglement as he does when promulgating the happy effects of education.<sup>148</sup>

During Madison’s presidency, in 1810, a clash between religion and education occurred when a piece of legislation that would effectively establish a religion passed through both houses of Congress. According to the president’s note, Congress’ bill, if signed into law, would incorporate a particular church,<sup>149</sup> giving them unprecedented access to public funds (and land) that were apparently already earmarked for alleviating poverty and educating poor children. Not only was this superfluous, because support was already being given to the needy, but it was also based on a false premise. By Madison’s estimation, a civil law of “pious charity” that mandated almsgiving was a contradiction to the presumption that charity is, in essence, meant to be an act of altruism. In other words, “pious charity” is not piety at all if mandated by any other law than the holy kind. This was at a time when the “paternalistic gentry” of the 1780s and 1790s, the

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<sup>146</sup> Madison, Second Annual Message, 5 Dec. 1810, in *PJM*, p. 52.

<sup>147</sup> Madison, To Edward Everett, 19 Mar. 1823, in *WJM*, pp. 795-796; For Madison’s view on this subject, which is in accordance with Paine’s, see Madison, Detached Memoranda, in *WJM*, pp. 761.

<sup>148</sup> See Madison, Second Annual Message, 5 Dec. 1810, in *PJM*, p. 52.

<sup>149</sup> For Madison’s views on the dangers of religious corporations, see Madison, Detached Memoranda, in *WJM*, pp. 761-762.

primary caregivers of the needy, were being replaced by pious “middling reformers” whose goal it was to change behavior instead of alleviating the condition of the hapless.<sup>150</sup> In any case, Madison ultimately vetoed the proposed bill because it was in contravention of the First Amendment’s clause that “Congress shall make no law respecting a Religious establishment.” This was one of Madison’s seven total vetoes during his two terms as chief executive, and an important one at that for its now self-evident repercussions: he clearly preferred secular education over religious instruction, despite the laudable aims behind a church’s desire to do good.<sup>151</sup>

If happiness derived from pursuits of the mind, then why did Madison issue four religious proclamations during his presidency? His first proclamation came at the outset of the War of 1812, which he claimed was a war to defend against the usurpation of liberty and rights by a foreign power.<sup>152</sup> As all of his proclamations explicitly state, a joint resolution by both houses of the legislature requested a day for public prayer and fasting to gain favor with “Almighty God” during those extraordinary times of conflict.<sup>153</sup> At the time, he obviously felt that it was the right thing to do, but in retirement he would repudiate religious proclamations altogether, asserting

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<sup>150</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 334-335.

<sup>151</sup> Madison, To the House of Representatives, 21 Feb. 1811, in *PJM*, pp. 176-7; for total number and type of vetoes see Presidential Vetoes, U.S. House of Representatives, accessed 10 Jan. 2017, <http://history.house.gov/Institution/Presidential-Vetoes/Presidential-Vetoes>; I surmised that his veto was regular (as opposed to “pocket,” which kills a bill in its place with no chance of reintroducing it) because, according to the editorial note, following Madison’s veto, the House debated on the constitutionality of the proposed bill. For Madison’s views on religious establishments, see for example his opinion on military and congressional chaplains in Madison, Detached Memoranda, in *PJM*, pp. 762-764: “The object of *this establishment* is seducing; the motive to it is laudable. But is it not safer to adhere to a right principle, & trust to its consequences, than confide in the reasoning however specious in favor of a wrong one. Look thro the armies & navies of the world, and say whether in the appointment of their ministers of religion, the spiritual interest of the flocks or the temporal interest of the Shepherds, be most in view: whether here, as elsewhere the political care of religion, is not a nominal more than a real aid.”

<sup>152</sup> See for example Fourth Annual Message to Congress, 4 Nov. 1812, in *PJM*, p. 433, and also Second Inaugural Address, 5 Mar. 1813, in *PJM*, p. 87.

<sup>153</sup> Madison, Presidential Proclamation, 9 Jul. 1812, in *PJM*, pp. 581-582.



that although “recommendations only, they imply a religious agency. . . .” Madison justified his proclamations by claiming that they did not use sectarian language, only “general terms” common to all religious sects.<sup>154</sup>

Despite his four religious proclamations, Madison managed to put forth an agenda in his annual messages to Congress that promoted education, the wider diffusion of knowledge, and, “above all. . . the protection of every man’s conscience in the enjoyment of it.”<sup>155</sup> Having greater freedom to access information along with the right to think for yourself, especially in matters of religion, was a recipe for happiness in Madison’s opinion. He frequently uses universally recognized terms such as “liberty” and “happiness” when describing the American people. He contrasts the happiness of American constituents, which he refers to as “enlightened patriotism,”<sup>156</sup> with, for instance, the struggle against the tyrannical British invaders.

When the war with Great Britain was over, Madison focused his attention on promoting liberty as foundational to strength of the American Union. The only bulwark against infringements on liberty was to enlighten as many elites as possible through institutions of higher learning, such as the “national seminary of learning” he proposed once again to be created by

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<sup>154</sup> For his four religious proclamations see *ibid.*, and “Proclamation,” 23 Jul. 1813, pp. 517-518, in *MSG* and “Proclamation,” 16 Nov. 1814, in *MSG*, p. 543, and “Proclamation,” 4 Mar. 1815, in *MSG*, pp. 545-546; for his views on religious proclamations see Madison, To Edward Livingston, 10 Jul. 1822, in *WJM*, p. 788, and Madison, Detached Memoranda, ca. 31 Jan. 1820, in *WJM*, pp. 760-765: “Religious proclamations by the Executive recommending thanksgivings & fasts are shoots from the same root with the legislative acts reviewed. Altho’ recommendations only, they imply a religious agency, making no part of the trust delegated to political rulers. . . . The 1st. Proclamation of Genl. Washington dated Jany. 1. 1795.61 recommending a day of thanksgiving, embraced all who believed in a supreme ruler of the Universe. That of Mr. Adams called for a Xn wors(hip.) Many private letters reproached the Proclamations issued by J.M. for usin(g) (the) general terms, used in that of Presidt. W—n; and some of them for not inserting particular(s) according with the faith of certain Xn sects. . . . During the administration of Mr. Jefferson no religious proclama(tion) issued. It being understood that his successor was disinclined to such interpo(sitions) of the Executive, and by some supposed moreover that they might originate with more propri(e)ty with the Legislative Body, a resolution was passed requesting him to issue a (p)roclamation (See the resolution in the Journals of Congress[]).”

<sup>155</sup> Madison, Fifth Annual Message, 7 Dec. 1813, in *MSG*, p. 524.

<sup>156</sup> Madison, Sixth Annual Message, 20 Sep. 1814, in *MSG*, p. 532.

Congress in the District of Columbia; in turn, the elites would lead and disseminate information to the masses. Without support from the government, he warned, “the blessings of liberty can not be fully enjoyed or long preserved,” and without liberty, the fabric of government would rapidly decay, leading ineluctably to an unhappy American people.<sup>157</sup> At the foundation of happiness, therefore, was the idea that people had a right to choose for themselves, and should take that opportunity to further their education in order to make good decisions. Equally, however, the government was duty-bound by the Constitution to “interdict against encroachments and compacts between religion and the state.” By furthering the wall of separation between church and state, the people would have a better chance at obtaining happiness through education. This was the essence of the “enlightened age” that Madison frequently refers to; it is also the basis on which liberty, government, and ultimately happiness were founded.<sup>158</sup>

### **Part III. What the numbers say**

My hypothesis, as stated above, is relatively straightforward: the Federalist Party and Northerners were more likely to promulgate religion than the Republican Party and Southerners as a conduit to happiness. The purpose of the numbers (the rate of religious mentions per address) is to clarify this position: the higher the rate of religious mentions the more likely they are to promote religion as a conduit to happiness. Furthermore, I have established a threshold number of 2, meaning that if an individual exceeds 2 religious mentions per address then he is

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<sup>157</sup> Madison, Seventh Annual Message, 12 Dec. 1815, in *MSG*, p. 553.

<sup>158</sup> Madison, Eighth Annual Message, 3 Dec. 1816, *MSG*, p. 565.

very likely to promote religion as a conduit to happiness.<sup>159</sup> This is especially true the further north our politicians come from, with New Englanders using by far the most religious language in their public addresses. Geography also tends to trump party affiliation. Additionally, the politicians who used less religious language tended to offer education and other modes of enlightenment as an alternative conduit to happiness. By looking at the rate of religious mentions per address, then, we can accurately predict which conduit to happiness our individual politicians preferred—education or religion.

I will begin testing my hypothesis with the previously discussed presidents in addition to James Monroe and John Quincy Adams, the fifth and sixth presidents of the United States. Washington (Federalist, Virginia) used religious language 2.15 times per address; Adams (Federalist, Massachusetts) averaged 4.13 mentions; Jefferson (Republican, Virginia) averaged 0.75 mentions; Madison (Republican, Virginia) averaged 1.94 mentions; Monroe (Republican, Virginia) averaged 1.20 mentions; and Quincy Adams (Republican, Massachusetts) averaged 5.30 mentions. If we break these figures down based on party, the Federalist presidents averaged 3.14 mentions per address whereas their Republican counterparts averaged 2.30 mentions per address. Based on geographical lines, the two Adamses averaged 4.71 mentions, and the four Virginians averaged 1.51 mentions per address.<sup>160</sup>

The following governors also fall within the predicted categories. George Clinton (Republican, New York, 1789 to 1795) averaged 1.20 mentions. When Washington seemingly shifted his policy towards education as a conduit to happiness, it coincided with what was going on at the state level in early-1790s New York City. Clinton used religious language at a rate of

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<sup>159</sup> Although this number is arbitrary, it nevertheless holds true for every politician in this study.

<sup>160</sup> See Appendix 2.

1.2 mentions per address.<sup>161</sup> In terms of furthering an educational agenda, Clinton was on par with Washington. In 1792, while proclaiming that the “diffusion of knowledge is essential to the promotion of virtue and the preservation of liberty,” Clinton signed a law that appropriated state funds to Columbia College.<sup>162</sup> Not satisfied with the limited scope of education that was “principally confined to the children of the opulent,” three years later, in his final act as governor, he signed into law a bill that would promote liberty and happiness in the lower ranks of society; “common schools,” as Clinton called public education, were now to be funded by the State of New York.<sup>163</sup>

John Jay (Federalist, New York, 1795 to 1801) averaged 2.42 mentions. “Whether or not the governor of this state is vested with the authority to appoint a day for these purposes,” Jay proclaimed when publicly calling for a religious day of “Thanksgiving” in the State of New York in 1795, “and to require and enjoin the observance of it, is a question which circumstanced as it is, I consider more proper for the legislature than for me to decide. But as the people of the state have constituted me as their chief magistrate,” he goes on asserting his *ex officio* status, “and being perfectly convinced that national prosperity depends, and ought to depend, on national gratitude and obedience to the supreme ruler of all nations.” Moreover, offering supplications to “Almighty God” will promote “the happiness of his subjects.”<sup>164</sup>

Samuel Adams (no party, Massachusetts, 1793 to 1797) averaged 7.45 mentions. During Washington’s second term as president, Governor Adams, an anti-Federalist but not an avowed Republican by any means, who gained fame for his prominent role in the events leading up to the

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<sup>161</sup> See Appendix 2.

<sup>162</sup> Clinton, Fifteenth Legislature Session, 5 Jan. 1792, in *State of New York: Message from the Governors Volume 2 1777-1822*, ed. Charles Z. Lincoln (Albany: J. B. Lyon Company, State Printers, 1909), pp. 319-321.

<sup>163</sup> Clinton, Eighteenth Legislature Session, 6 Jan. 1795, in *ibid.*, pp. 348-50.

<sup>164</sup> John Jay, “A Proclamation,” *American Minerva and the New-York Advertiser*, Nov. 12, 1795.

War of Independence, had a uniquely religious agenda during his time in office. He issued four religious proclamations—equaling the most of any of the governors or presidents in question—all of which were explicitly for a Christian audience. For instance, calling by name “Jesus Christ” when “supplicating His divine aid.”<sup>165</sup> In order to obtain happiness, the support of “Public Worship” was essential. Adams believed, and professed with great vigor, that “Piety, Religion and Morality”—the so-called “pillars of happiness”—were first and foremost the basis of all other good things. To get his religious agenda implemented he turned to the very institutions that Washington and subsequent presidents and governors used to enlighten: universities.<sup>166</sup> Harvard College, the state’s premier institution of higher learning, was known for producing clergy as much as it was for its attorneys. But ever since the Enlightenment reached the shores of the New World, the students and a good number of faculty in American institutions were quick to adopt rational and liberal religious views.<sup>167</sup> Adams, however, evidently had a traditional approach when it came to education and religion, one that included strengthening the bond between pious teachers and students.<sup>168</sup>

Charles Pinckney (Republican, South Carolina, 1789 to 1792 and 1796 to 1798 and 1806 to 1808) had no religious mentions at all. Pinckney, who served as governor on three separate occasions, represents a fascinating case study. Pinckney did mention religion or use religious language in any of the messages to the South Carolina legislative branches that I examined

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<sup>165</sup> See Samuel Adams, Proclamation, 19 Feb. 1794, in *The Writings of Samuel Adams, Vol. IV 1778-1802*, ed. Harry Alonzo Cushing (New York: G. P. Putnam’s Sons, 1908), pp. 361-363; Samuel Adams, Proclamation, 14 Oct. 1795, in *ibid.*, pp. 383-386; Samuel Adams, Proclamation, 6 Oct. 1796, in *ibid.*, pp. 393-396; and Samuel Adams, Proclamation, 20 Mar. 1797, in *ibid.*, pp. 405-7.

<sup>166</sup> See Samuel Adams, To the Legislature of Massachusetts, 3 Jun. 1795, in *ibid.*, pp. 376-82; and also Samuel Adams, To the Legislature of Massachusetts, 27 Jan. 1797, in *ibid.*, pp.399-404.

<sup>167</sup> Frederick Rudolph, *American College and University: A History* (Athens, Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 1991), p. 30. Williams College and Bowdoin College were founded in 1793 and 1794, respectively, and would not gain reputation equal to Harvard during Adams’ governorship.

<sup>168</sup> See Appendix 2 [forthcoming].

between 1789 and 1792.<sup>169</sup> Admittedly, these messages were not your typical “state of the state” addresses, wherein religious language was typically found when laying out a theoretical framework for the Union or state. These addresses contain day-to-day operational information, such as appointing judges and appropriating money, which tend to be terse and to the point. However, there is no indication that governors from South Carolina issued the type of addresses in which religious language might be found. Additionally, there is nothing in his messages that suggest he had a framework in mind for obtaining happiness. What we can surmise from his time in office is that he and a significant amount of his Federalist counterparts in South Carolina were generally in favor of separation of church and state.<sup>170</sup>

Just with reference to the governors, based on party, Jay, the only Federalist, averaged 2.42 mentions as compared to the Republicans who averaged 0.60 mentions per address. Based on geography, it is clear that Adams made far more religious references than his southerly counterparts; in fact, more than all three of them combined.

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<sup>169</sup> See for instance Pinckney, To South Carolina House of Representatives, 4 Jan. 1790, accessed 9 Feb. 2017, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/PNKY-01-01-02-7401>; Pinckney, To South Carolina Senate, 10 Jan. 1791, accessed 9 Feb. 2017, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/PNKY-01-01-02-7417>; Pinckney, To South Carolina Senate, 18 Jan. 1791, accessed 9 Feb. 2017, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/PNKY-01-01-02-7424>; Pinkney, To South Carolina Senate, 1 Feb. 1791, accessed 9 Feb. 2017, <http://rotunda.upress.virginia.edu/founders/PNKY-01-01-02-7117>.

<sup>170</sup> See Hartog, *Patriotism and Piety*, pp. 155-159.

### **Conclusion: Happiness—Fulfillment of Prophecy or Epicureanism?**

*The atmosphere of our country is unquestionably charged with a threatening cloud of fanaticism, lighter in some parts, denser in others, but too heavy in all.*<sup>171</sup> Thomas Jefferson, 1822

*Tantum religio potuit suadere malorum [To such heights of evil are men driven by religion].*<sup>172</sup>  
Lucretius, *De rerum natura*

As we have seen, religion had a large role to play in the early American Republic. Federalists were generally under the impression that they could strengthen their grip on power by upholding religion and morality, the so-called “pillars of human happiness.” Their idea of happiness was mostly a Northern phenomenon. Southerners, on the other hand, tended to be weary of promoting religion as a conduit to happiness, especially because their experiences under the

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<sup>171</sup> TJ, To Dr. Thomas Cooper, 2 Nov. 1822, in *WTJ*, pp. 1463-1464.

<sup>172</sup> Lucretius, *On the Nature of Things*, trans. by W. H. D. Rouse and ed. Jeffrey Henderson (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1992), p. 11; and also Gay, *Enlightenment*, p. 101. I have altered this translation.

colonial rule of the Church of England was anything but happy. In fact, religious disputes were the impetus behind the formation of the Republican Party, a predominantly Southern establishment, whose platform was founded on intellectual rights, namely rights of conscience. By looking at the distribution of religious language, which is highly skewed to the North, we now have a sense, beyond mere speculation, of how pervasive religion really was. With further examination we have also seen how religion was very much tied to the happiness of Revolutionary Americans. The difference between our diametrically opposed groups, then, is perception—do we obtain happiness by espousing religion or by our natural right, if we so choose, to be free from it?

Thomas Jefferson had been retired for well over a decade when he commented to a friend on the rising religious fanaticism in America. As an astute observer perched on his mountaintop home, he could see Charlottesville in the distance. It was, however, from his vantage point on the shoulders of giants, as his hero Sir Isaac Newton had once said, that allowed Jefferson to make such keen observations on the world around him. One of those giants was the ancient philosopher Lucretius, whose defense of Epicureanism had a profound effect on Jefferson. In 1821, a year before he commented on the changing religious landscape, he wrote John Adams expressing his nostalgic hope “that the human mind will some day get back to the freedom it enjoyed 2000 years ago.” It is not by coincidence that Jefferson nominated the era around 100 BCE as the intellectual zenith of history, for it marked the period of the Roman Republic that generated Lucretius himself, not to mention other favorites such as Polybius, Virgil, Sallust, and Cicero.<sup>173</sup>

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<sup>173</sup> For an example of the works on Rome he recommended see Enclosure in TJ, To Peter Carr, 10 Aug. 1787, in *WTJ*, pp. 905-906. I credit Christopher Hitchens for the observation on TJ and Lucretius.



In Epicureanism, a philosophy that Jefferson espoused, happiness derives most of all from the avoidance of intellectual pain and the pursuit of knowledge. In fact, learning about the natural world and how it operates had a liberating quality. Through reason and calculated observations, the mysteries of the world could be explained, and in doing so happiness could be attained. “The purpose of this study is not to acquire scientific knowledge for its own sake,” as one scholar has put it, “but solely to free oneself from the unnecessary fears and suspicions which disturb the mind and preclude the attainment of happiness, especially fear of the gods and fear of death.”<sup>174</sup> Happiness was thus a material construction. Immaterial things, to the contrary, could not be studied because they did not exist, or as Jefferson put it, “to talk of *immaterial* existences is to talk of *nothings*.”<sup>175</sup> For the immaterialist, then, what is the source of happiness? Since faith cannot be measured or observed there is no point in engaging in something that could not be dispelled by reason. Although logical fallacies were at the root of Jefferson’s distaste for theological debates,<sup>176</sup> he believed that by inculcating these Epicurean principles we could rid ourselves of human error. Consequently, he focused his attention on education as a conduit to happiness.

For the Epicurean-statesman obtaining happiness is equivalent to fighting a two-front intellectual war. On one front, as discussed, the Epicurean, as much as she or he reaps the happy rewards, faces the bitter reality of what seems to be insurmountable pragmatic and intellectual barriers, such as getting passed into law educational reforms that effect real change. On the other front, the one that Lucretius spent the duration of his poem soldiering on, lies the forces of

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<sup>174</sup> Martin Ferguson Smith, introduction to *On the Nature of Things*, pp. xxix-xxx.

<sup>175</sup> TJ, To John Adams, 15 Aug. 1820, in *Jefferson’s Extracts*, pp. 399-401.

<sup>176</sup> See Adrienne Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson* (New York: Columbia UP, 1943), pp. 100-102.

religion—the perennial manifestation of anti-intellectualism.<sup>177</sup> Vergil, another one of our American literati’s favorite giants, summarizes this Epicurean metaphor quite nicely: “Happy the man who can know the causes of things, and has trampled underfoot all fears, inexorable fate, and the clamor of greedy hell.”<sup>178</sup> It is true that even Jefferson the philosopher,<sup>179</sup> for all his great contributions to the American ethos, did not fully reject religion, and thus did not fully adopt *De rerum natura* either.<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, all of Jefferson’s actions (and to a slightly lesser degree Madison’s as well) as a statesman—disestablishment in Virginia, his determined efforts to keep religion out of his presidency and the national government, and his lifelong devotion to disseminating knowledge—only beg the question: from whom or what was this luminary protecting his Epicurean Empire?

For similar reasons Madison was in favor of promoting education. But whereas Jefferson was more philosophical in his ruminations, Madison focused his efforts on pragmatic gains. This is evident in his career-long opposition to religious establishments and his equal devotion to creating universities. Throughout Madison’s career we have seen the repudiation of the former while at the same time he pushes for the latter. Thus, there is a correlation between Jefferson and Madison’s lifelong hostilities towards a religious establishment and their longing for an enlightened republic. This came to fruition as they laid the foundation for the University of Virginia in 1817. Not only was education “the backbone of Jefferson’s republic,” as Merrill D. Peterson put it, but also the “state of civilization being one of organization and power, of progress and improvement, it demanded commensurate means of enlightenment.”<sup>181</sup> In

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<sup>177</sup> See Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*.

<sup>178</sup> As quoted in Gay, *The Enlightenment*, p. 99.

<sup>179</sup> See Koch, *The Philosophy of Thomas Jefferson*, pp. xi-xii.

<sup>180</sup> TJ also did not adopt Lucretius’ atomism and hedonism.

<sup>181</sup> Merrill D. Peterson, *Thomas Jefferson and the New Nation* (New York: Oxford UP, 1970), p. 145.

Jefferson's own words, the realization of the University of Virginia would lead to the betterment of society—everything from the student learning how to conduct business transactions to “improve, by reading, his morals and faculties . . . to know his rights . . . to instruct the mass of our citizens . . . to develop the reasoning faculties of our youth . . . to enlighten them with mathematical and physical sciences” and “to form them to habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others, and happiness within themselves.”<sup>182</sup>

However, the enlightened republic envisioned by Jefferson and Madison was never realized. And though they tried harder than anyone to make their dreams into reality, their efforts were arguably lost as early as the 1820s. When our statesmen of the Enlightenment were contemplating the future of the republic that they were instrumental in bringing to fruition, while also looking back at all of their accomplishments, the enthusiastic revivalists of the so-called “Second Great Awakening” were well on their way to reestablishing religious hegemony. Jefferson and Madison were well aware of this fact, yet there was little that they could do. Popular sentiment in America had shifted from the republican ideology of the Revolutionary generation to the evangelical movements that were sweeping the nation.<sup>183</sup> Seemingly overnight Jefferson and Madison became relics of the past as the light of these great luminaries began to fade.

Despite his tepid efforts to continue the Republican platform, President James Monroe was preoccupied with a rapidly changing American landscape. Frankly, he was more concerned with the expansion of United States territory than with expansion of the mind. Monroe's political motivations were to strengthen the bond of the growing Union. Reminding Congress of this, he

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<sup>182</sup> TJ, Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, in *WTJ*, pp. 457-473.

<sup>183</sup> Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, pp. 282-283.

describes religious liberty in his Inaugural Address as foundational to the happiness of the people.<sup>184</sup> The strength of the Union, he surmises, has been a result of just laws and the plethora of liberties that its citizens enjoy, including religious and intellectual rights of conscience. “Let us, by all wise and constitutional measures,” Monroe emphatically states, “promote intelligence among the People, as the best means of preserving our liberties.”<sup>185</sup> He believes, therefore, that education is at the root of happiness, preserving the Union, and patriotism.<sup>186</sup> Although not contradictory, it is worth noting that he, like all of his predecessors, occasionally venerated the “Supreme Author of All Good” and asked for fervent supplications that He might continue to bless the United States. Among the things that Monroe listed as being a result of divine blessings were “liberty, prosperity, and happiness.” More than the Supreme Author though, Monroe repeatedly lauded human institutions as the basis for American happiness. Most notably, it was the provisions in the Constitution, “and its happy effect in elevating the character” of the nation and people, that were chiefly responsible for the preservation of liberties. Consequently, as happiness spread throughout the newly acquired (or conquered) lands, the bond of Union would proliferate.

In any event, by the time he retired in 1825 there was an ostensible change within the Republican Party itself.<sup>187</sup> Monroe’s successor, John Quincy Adams, though a Republican by affiliation, carried into office the elitist New England convictions of his father and former president John Adams. As president, Quincy Adams came full circle by adopting the “nursing

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<sup>184</sup> Monroe, Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1817, in *MON*, p. 7.

<sup>185</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>186</sup> Monroe, First Annual Message, 2 Dec. 1817, in *MON*, p. 43. See also Monroe, Fourth Annual Message, 14 Nov. 1820, in *Monroe*, p. 155-156. He says: “A free, virtuous and enlightened people know well the great principles and causes on which their happiness depends,” which derive from inalienable rights.

<sup>187</sup> Haselby, *Origins of American Religious Nationalism*, p. 307. Haselby shows that John Quincy Adams in 1828 ran a religious campaign against Andrew Jackson, depicting the latter as murderous thug who, if elected, would “cause destruction of biblical proportions.”

fathers” metaphor that was widely used by his Puritan ancestors. Although the Christianity of the Second Great Awakening was “more widespread and diverse than the First,” which made it far it far more democratic as well, as the historian Daniel Walker Howe observed, Quincy Adams nevertheless “saw himself as working for the establishment of the messianic age foretold by the second Isaiah (‘the sublimest of prophets’).”<sup>188</sup> This appeal to prophecy in an age when Christian leaders had far less authority over their congregants than in the colonial and even the Revolutionary Era speaks volumes about the profound change at hand. Oddly enough, as Howe explains, the antebellum period of American history was in essence an amalgam of fifty years of United States history under the enlightened hand of the “Founding Fathers” and the reemphasis on faith in the ultimate father: “The spread of literacy, discoveries in science and technology, even a rising standard of living, could all be interpreted—and were—as evidences of the approach of Christ’s Second Coming and the messianic age foretold by the prophets, near at hand.”<sup>189</sup>

The old guard that John Quincy Adams represented was moribund, if not already dead. He tried in vain to square the circle by sharing his Republican predecessors’ vision of expanding rights of conscience, while at the same time following in his New England ancestors’ footsteps by espousing a Christian republic. Although claiming that “religious opinion should be inviolate”<sup>190</sup> and, citing all of his presidential predecessors, that seminaries of learning are “essential” to the wellbeing of the republic,<sup>191</sup> his addresses are rife with religious references.<sup>192</sup>

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<sup>188</sup> Howe, *What Hath God Wrought*, pp. 286-287.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 469.

<sup>190</sup> Quincy Adams, Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1825, in *MSG*, p. 862.

<sup>191</sup> Quincy Adams, First Annual Message, 6 Dec. 1825, in *MSG*, pp. 877-878.

<sup>192</sup> For his explicit references to Christianity, see Quincy Adams, Inaugural Address, 4 Mar. 1825, in *MSG*, p. 863; Quincy Adams, First Annual Message, 6 Dec. 1825, in *MSG*, p. 875; and Quincy Adams, Fourth Annual Message, 2 Dec. 1828, pp. 985-986.

This includes the general supplications to God that were frequently invoked by his predecessors, but at 5.2 religious references per address, Quincy Adams was one of the greatest promoters of religion. Perhaps an even better example of this dichotomy between religion and enlightenment in the country at large is the fact that Quincy Adams, despite all his religious rhetoric, vigorously promoted “light houses of the sky,” his terminology for astronomical observatories, and he created an important report on standardized weights and measurements; these two programs did more immediately to further the Enlightenment cause than any of his predecessor’s efforts.<sup>193</sup>

Yet no matter what Quincy Adams did, including pandering to the people’s religious instincts, there was never a shortage of superstition and ignorance. Although these traits have been more or less prevalent in people since the dawn of civilization, what made post-Revolutionary America different from before was that people were “asserting their evangelical Christianity in ways that gentry leaders could no longer ignore.” Enlightened elites were, in a word, terrified. The people had gained so much power that even a “radical skeptic like Joel Barlow” abandoned his freethinking comrades for the safety of Christianity, which he claimed to have never really renounced in the first place.<sup>194</sup> When Quincy Adams became president the democratic “disease” was so widespread that he tried to apply a Band-Aid to a gaping wound. This was in essence the paradox that Lucretius discusses in book five of *De rerum natura*: “Rather grimly, Lucretius concedes that he is offering bitter medicine to a patient as unreasonable as grievously sick men often are. The resistance of his patient, however, only demonstrated the need for Lucretius’s prescription: it was a function of ignorance.”<sup>195</sup> In a democratic system even an enlightened leader must pay attention to the sentiments of the

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<sup>193</sup> Quincy Adams, First Annual Message, in *MSG*, pp. 877-888.

<sup>194</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 329-32.

<sup>195</sup> Gay, *Enlightenment*, p. 102.

constituents or risk political suicide. Quincy Adams tried to have it both ways by appealing to the entrenched politicians, the majority of whom were holdovers from previous administrations, and the new democratically-minded young Federalists. In the end he probably lost his reelection bid because the enthusiastic revivalists and frontiersmen who were riding the democratic wave could not look past his elitist pretensions. Instead, the new generation of politically active individuals of humbler origins fomented the Jacksonian revolution.<sup>196</sup>

In an ironic twist of fate, it was Thomas Jefferson, the original champion of American democracy and the fierce protector of religious freedom, who created the foundation for populists and religious zealots to thrive. As Gordon Wood has shown,

Ordinary people, in whom Jefferson had placed so much confidence, more than had his friend Madison, were not becoming more enlightened after all. Superstition and bigotry, with which Jefferson identified organized religion, were reviving, released by the democratic revolution he had led. He was incapable of understanding the deep popular strength of the evangelical forces, of the real moral majorities, that were seizing control of much of American culture in these years.<sup>197</sup>

With the Revolutionary ethos all but destroyed, the fate of American happiness seemed to have come full circle—the spiritual leaders once again regained control over the people’s religious lives. This time, however, it was not through coercive tactics used most pervasively by the nursing fathers; rather, it was through sheer cunning that the enthusiastic revivalists were able create the environment and platform necessary to persuasively pander from the pulpit.

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<sup>196</sup> Wood, *Radicalism*, pp. 299-305.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 367.

## **Methodology**

My main source and inspiration for the quantitative portion of this essay is David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became A Political Weapon in America* (Oxford, 2008)—a study of how religious language was used by presidents of the twentieth century. Contrary to what their subtitle suggests, however, I show that religious discourse by the presidents has been more or less prevalent since the Founding.

For the two appendices I have created, the use of particular words and phrases that are undoubtedly religious, such as “God” or “Creator” or “Heaven,” or other any reference to Christianity and the Bible, and phrases such as “divine blessings” or “providential favors” are given a numerical value of 1. In other words, every religious reference has the same numerical value.

## **Appendix 1**



<b>Categories of religious phrases/words</b>	<i>George Washington</i>	<i>John Adams</i>	<i>Thomas Jefferson</i>	<i>James Madison</i>	<i>James Monroe</i>	<b>Total</b>
Non-sectarian name for a deity <sup>198</sup>	17	23	7	25	12	84
References to Christians/Christianity <sup>199</sup>	3	7	N/A	1	N/A	11
Heaven	4	1	1	4	N/A	10
Supplications <sup>200</sup>	4	2	1	3	N/A	10
<b>Total</b>	28	33	9	33	12	115
<b>Addresses and Messages</b>	13	8	12	17	11	61
<b>Average mentions per address/message</b>	2.15	4.13	0.75	1.94	1.20	1.84

## Appendix 2

<b>Categories of religious phrases/words</b>	<i>John Quincy Adams</i>	<i>George Clinton</i>	<i>John Jay</i>	<i>Samuel Adams</i>	<i>Charles Pinckney</i>	<b>Total</b>
Non-sectarian name for a deity <sup>201</sup>	14	5	13	49	N/A	81
References to Christians/Christianity <sup>202</sup>	5	N/A	1	14	N/A	20

<sup>198</sup> Almighty; Being; Author of All Good; Supreme Being; Great Author; benign Parent; Almighty God; Providence; Supreme Ruler of the Universe; Sovereign Arbiter of Nations; Patron of Order; God; benevolent Deity; Supreme Dispenser of National Blessings; Him; Bestower of Every Good Gift; common Father and Creator of man; All Merciful Creator; revered authority; Great Sovereign of the Universe; Beneficent Parent of the Human Race; Great Disposer of Events and of the Destiny of Nations; Divine Author of Every Good and Perfect Gift; Heavenly Benefactor.

<sup>199</sup> True religion to flourish forever; His Holy Spirit; Volume of Inspiration; righteous distributor of rewards and punishments; the Great Mediator and Redeemer; Lord; confessing their sins and transgressions, and of strengthening their vows of repentance and amendment.

<sup>200</sup> divine blessings; providential blessings; providential favors; providential agency; holy protection; Providential care;

<sup>201</sup> Almighty; Being; Benefactor; Divine Benefactor; Author of All Good; Judge of All; Supreme Being; Great Author; benign Parent; Almighty God; Providence; God of Armies; Supreme Ruler of the Universe; Sovereign Arbiter of Nations; Good Providence; God; benevolent Deity; Author of Our Existence; Him; Bestower of Every Good Gift; common Father and Creator of man; Omnipotent Disposer of All Good; revered authority; Great Sovereign of the Universe; Giver of All Good; Beneficent Parent of the Human Race; Great Disposer of Events; Divine Author of Every Good and Perfect Gift; Heavenly Benefactor.

Heaven	5	1	1	1	N/A	8
Supplications <sup>203</sup>	2	1	2	5	N/A	10
<b>Total</b>	26	7	17	69	N/A	119
<b>Addresses and Messages</b>	5	6	7	10	N/A	28
<b>Average mentions per address/message</b>	5.2	1.2	2.42	6.9	N/A	4.25

Figure 1

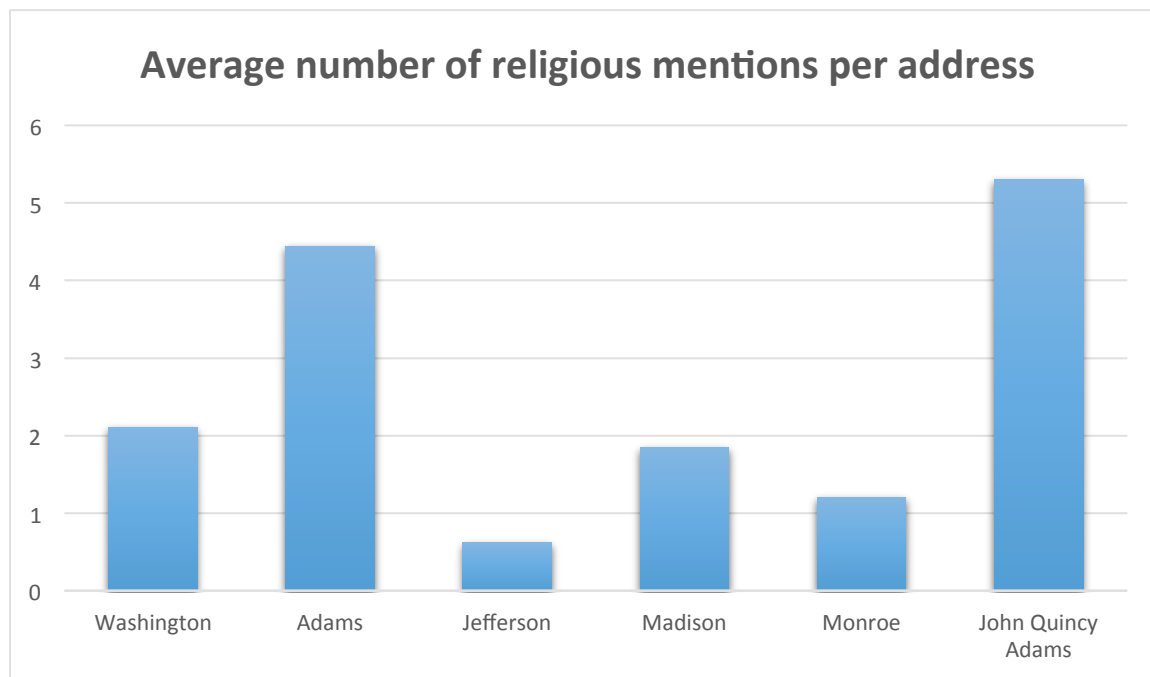
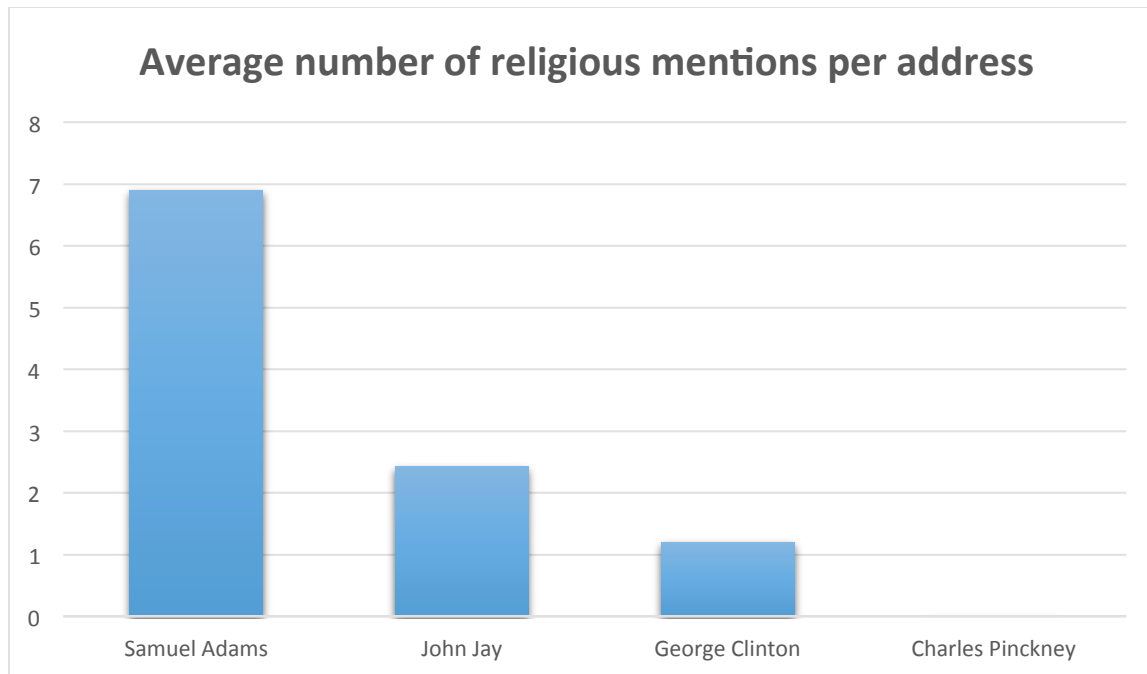


Figure 2

<sup>202</sup> Except the Lord keep the city the watchman waketh but in vain; Christian nations; freemen and Christians; our policy and our duty to use our influence in converting to Christianity; doctrines of Christianity; Divine Revelation; written revelation; Christian Religion; Jesus Christ; Ministers of the Gospel; Divine Redeemer; Lord; Christian spirit of piety; Prince of Peace; Light of Divine Revelation.

<sup>203</sup> Supplicating his divine aid; divine blessings; His almighty aid; providential blessings; providential favors; divine favors; his holy providence; kind providence.



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