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PATRICK HENRY:

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF HARMONIZED RELIGIOUS TENSIONS

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**Patrick Henry:**  
**The Significance of Harmonized Religious Tensions**

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This study explores the complex religious influences shaping Patrick Henry's belief system. It is common knowledge that he was an Anglican, yet friendly and cooperative with Virginia Presbyterians. However, historians have yet to go beyond those general categories to the specific strains of Presbyterianism and Anglicanism which Henry uniquely harmonized into a unified belief system. Henry displayed a moderate, Latitudinarian, type of Anglicanism. Unlike many other Founders, his experiences with a specific strain of Presbyterianism confirmed and cooperated with these Anglican commitments. His Presbyterian influences could also be described as moderate, and latitudinarian in a more general sense. These religious strains worked to build a distinct religious outlook characterized by a respect for legitimate authority, whether civil, social, or religious. This study goes further to show the relevance of this distinct religious outlook for understanding Henry's political stances. Henry's sometimes seemingly erratic political principles cannot be understood in isolation from the wider context of his religious background. Uniquely harmonized religious strains influenced a consistent set of political principles. Thus the specifics of Henry's religious commitments have significant ramifications for Virginia liberty.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction and Historiography

### Introduction

Eighteenth century America was an era marked by political upheaval. The transformation from colonies to states to one nation is a process historians are constantly re-examining. Yet this was also an age of great religious upheaval. The changing tides in religion and philosophy were just as momentous as the political revolutions happening concurrently. Although the Great Awakening garners a significant amount of scholarly research, the religious history of this era is generally compartmentalized and isolated from contemporary secular events.

This is a typical methodological weakness in religious and intellectual history today. Twenty-first century America is primarily a political culture. Even the avowedly religious sharply separate spiritual and secular matters. It is no surprise then that modern historians approach religious history in this way. It is no surprise, but it is a handicap. Eighteenth century America was an exceedingly religious culture. The line between spiritual and secular belief was vague and porous. Colonial historians attempting to study political change in isolation from a religious context will necessarily come to distorted and incomplete conclusions. The religious turmoil of the eighteenth century cannot be disregarded as a factor in early American liberty and governments.

Some attempts have been made in the last twenty years to bridge the gap between colonial American religious and political history. But even the best treatments examine religious history primarily in terms of abstract intellectual and spiritual “movements.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> For example, Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003); John Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North*

Indeed this was a great age for “movements”—from awakening religion, to the rise of dissenting denominations, to the pervading influence of the Scottish Common Sense Enlightenment. But movements do not make history; people make history. Religious and intellectual influences must be mediated through the worldviews of individuals.

The founders of America came to maturity in a shared context of converging and sometimes contradictory religious influences. Yet each resolved these competing religious tensions into different belief systems, which in turn affected their political principles. A more nuanced understanding of eighteenth century religious and intellectual trends can best be reached by examining the uniquely resolved worldviews of individuals which provided context for political action.

This methodology, helpful both for biography and religious history, is particularly relevant when studying the life and contributions of Patrick Henry. Henry holds the unique position of being both the best remembered and most forgotten Founding Father in American history. Although Henry remains a popular legend for his “Liberty or Death” speech, the academic record is scant compared to the historical work dedicated to his contemporaries, even those Founders with much less popular appeal, men like John Adams or James Monroe. Yet Henry was a pivotal, even necessary figure, for American liberty. He played a key role in the American Revolution, and his staunch opposition to the Constitution exerted a negative shaping influence, forcing the new government to secure a Bill of Rights.

Patrick Henry’s political principles and lifestyle have contributed to historians’ lack of scholarly interest in his life. Historians have had a difficult time knowing where to

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*America* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1984); Rhys Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia 1740-1790* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1982).

place Anti-Federalists in the historical record.<sup>2</sup> Today, it seems almost sacrilegious to oppose our federal union. As time has elapsed and the federal government grown and solidified, historians find it more and more difficult to understand and sympathize with the motivations and reasoning behind this select political group. Strengthening this predisposition is the fact that unlike many Anti-Federalists, Henry held no national office under the new federal government.<sup>3</sup> After the ratification debates, financial circumstances and a dedication to his large and still growing family compelled him to step down from all public service, local and national.

Henry's willingness to step out of the public spotlight at a time when he could have become a powerful national figure demonstrates his general ambivalence toward preserving a record of his achievements for posterity. Henry made few attempts to be remembered for his earlier contributions during the Revolution. He wrote no diaries or journals, authored no reminiscences, did not even keep his correspondence.<sup>4</sup> He seemed unconcerned with the remembrance of his name after death. Although this is one of his most intriguing and amiable qualities, it obviously creates difficulties for researchers. The paper record is sparse, forcing scholars to use alternative sources like sometimes unreliable contemporary accounts.

These combined factors help explain the lack of historical scholarship on Patrick Henry. There is a real need for more academic study on Henry's life generally. But more particularly, there is a need for a study of the contextual integration of Patrick Henry's

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<sup>2</sup> James H. Hutson, "Country, Court, and Constitution: Antifederalism and the Historians," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 38, no. 3 (Jul., 1981): 337-338; Richard Beeman, "The Democratic Faith of Patrick Henry," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95, no. 3 (Jul., 1987): 301-303.

<sup>3</sup> For example, James Monroe who went on to become the fifth president of the United States, or Richard Henry Lee who served two terms as a U. S. Senator for Virginia.

<sup>4</sup> James Elson, ed., *Patrick Henry in his Speeches and Writings and in the Words of His Contemporaries* (Lynchburg, VA: Warwick House Publishers, 2007), 5,6, 244.

religious background with his political principles. Like many of his fellow Virginians, Henry was a participant in several diverse religious movements. He lends himself to stereotypical labeling by routinely crossing over academia's preset religious and intellectual boundaries. Presbyterians and Anglicans both lay claim to Henry's legacy.<sup>5</sup> But there has been no study of how Henry specifically resolved these religious tensions into a cohesive worldview.

Moreover, there are seeming contradictions in Henry's political theory that historians have not convincingly explained. Henry was an ardent revolutionary who supported American union both during and after the war. Why then did he become the primary leader of the Anti-Federalists? Even more troubling to historians and his contemporaries, why did the fervent Anti-Federalist run for Congress on a Federalist platform at the close of his life? Historians have not provided satisfactory answers to these questions. Their various attempted explanations are insufficient in part because they neglect a fundamental spiritual orientation shared by many American founders. Henry voiced this common eighteenth century theme in a letter to his daughter.<sup>6</sup> "I think religion of infinitely higher importance than politics . . . ."<sup>7</sup> If the historian takes Henry at his word, politics came second to religious commitment.<sup>8</sup> A careful study of the connection

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<sup>5</sup> Thomas Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty in Colonial and Revolutionary Times* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1907), 46; William Meade, *Old Churches Ministers and Families of Virginia*, vol. 2 (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, 1906), 11, 12.

<sup>6</sup> Even those men who were not orthodox Christians carefully considered religious and theological questions. Men like Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, Benjamin Franklin, James Madison and others had well thought out religious principles. They shared a common assumption that religion was something fundamentally significant in both the personal and public arena. See Patricia Bonomi, "'Hippocrates Twins': Religion and Politics in the American Revolution," *The History Teacher* 29, no. 2 (Feb., 1996): 142.

<sup>7</sup> Patrick Henry to Betsey Aylett, Red Hill, August 20, 1796, in William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, (Harrisonburg, VA: Sprinkle Publications, 1993), 570.

<sup>8</sup> Although less interested in religious context, Lance Banning advocates the importance of recovering how the founders understood themselves. He employs this method in *The Sacred Fire of Liberty: James Madison and the Founding of the Federal Republic* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). Banning

between Henry's religious commitments and political actions confirms this orientation. Any attempt to make sense of Henry's politics without considering an integrated religious context will surely be incomplete. A historiographical survey of the existing scholarship demonstrates that historians have consistently repeated this fundamental mistake.

### Historiography

The first biography of Patrick Henry authored by William Wirt in 1817 demonstrates the weakness of early Henry scholarship. Wirt's *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* remained the standard Henry biography for most of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Wirt deserves credit, but his work is unsatisfactory on several levels.

Wirt's sources were often obviously biased and unreliable. Wirt was the first of many historians after him to express frustration at the lack of reliable sources relating to Patrick Henry. He exclaimed, "It was all speaking, speaking, speaking . . . All that is told me is, that on such and such an occasion, he made a distinguished speech. He was a blank military commander, a blank governor, and a blank politician . . . In short, it is verily as hopeless a subject as man could well desire."<sup>9</sup> Wirt turned from written sources to reminisces of friends, political contemporaries, and family members. This only increased ambiguities. Statements were often "diametrically opposed to each other; and were sometimes all contradicted by the public prints, or the records of the state . . ." <sup>10</sup> Wirt

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seeks to show the fundamental consistencies in Madison's political thought by examining the development and context of his political principles. Significantly, he also recognizes a well-considered consistency in Patrick Henry's life, particularly in his Anti-Federalist stance. Although he only touches on Henry's principles (which were quite different from Madison's), he credits him with fundamentally consistent political commitments (240ff, 245). This method of considering how an historical figure understood his own internal intellectual consistency is essential to intellectual and religious history.

<sup>9</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in his Speeches and Writings*, 244.

<sup>10</sup> William Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry* (Philadelphia: DeSilver, Thomas and Co., 1836), xii.



did the best he could to reconcile discrepancies, but he was too close to the time period to access sources more accurate than the reminiscences of aged contemporaries. Wirt's personal and political connections with Thomas Jefferson inclined him to depend heavily on Jefferson as a source.<sup>11</sup> Jefferson was notoriously biased against Henry, sometimes making patently false statements about his old political rival.<sup>12</sup>

Aside from the problem of these unhelpful sources, Wirt, no less than any other historian, was an ideological captive to his particular time and circumstances. The spirit of romantic patriotism pervading the new country greatly influenced Wirt's approach to Patrick Henry. His history was strongly anachronistic. Wirt ignored most intellectual and religious influences and motivations in Henry's life, not even mentioning the early and lasting significance of Presbyterianism on Henry let alone the content of his Anglican beliefs. Instead he provided a very nineteenth century romantic explanation for Henry's actions which surely must have been foreign to Henry himself. "The principle which he seems to have brought with him into the world, and which certainly formed the guide of

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<sup>11</sup> Wirt's first wife was the daughter of Jefferson's close friend and personal physician giving him his first introduction to the politics of the Tidewater elite. Wirt moved up the social and political ladder because of Jefferson's unofficial patronage. "William Wirt," *American National Biography*, <http://www.anb.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/articles/03/03-00543.html?a=1&n=Wirt%2C%20William&d=10&ss=0&q=2> (accessed June 26, 2009).

<sup>12</sup> For example, in his correspondence with Wirt, Jefferson at one point praises Henry for his eloquence, devotion to liberty, and influence on the Revolution, but then calls him "avaricious and rotten hearted." Jefferson's influence is particularly apparent in Wirt's final assessment of Henry's character as captive to the love of money and the love of fame. He also characterizes Henry as "indolent" in mind; a man who hated to read and who "could not bear the labour of writing; nor indeed of that long-continued, coherent and methodical thinking . . . ." Every biographer after Wirt emphasized Henry's open-handed generosity. William Wirt Henry and Kevin Hayes both establish Henry's education and intellectual life beyond question. Elson, *Patrick Henry in his Speeches and Writings*, 46; Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, 418-420, 55, 437; Kevin Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot: Patrick Henry and the World of Ideas* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008); Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1.

all his public actions, was, that the whole human race was one family, equal in their rights, and their birthright liberty.”<sup>13</sup>

Wirt also failed to provide a meaningful explanation to Henry’s complicated political theory. His analysis of this aspect was clouded by his own personal political commitments. Though he leaned toward a strong federal government by the end of his life, during the time he was writing Henry’s biography Wirt was a staunch Jeffersonian Republican, arguing in court against the Alien and Sedition Acts.<sup>14</sup> This is clearly evidenced in his treatment of Henry’s perceived defense of these acts. Wirt chalked this up to aging senility, and noted “Mr. Henry was guilty of a political aberration . . . .”<sup>15</sup> Wirt made no attempt to understand Henry’s political philosophy as a unified whole. As soon as Henry seemed to deviate from Wirt’s own beliefs, he was guilty of “aberration.”

It was not until the 1880’s that another scholarly work challenged Wirt’s first attempt. This second wave of Henry historiography around the turn of the century marked a great improvement. Moses Coit Tyler’s *Patrick Henry* (1887) and William Wirt Henry’s *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches* (1891) stand out as the two most important biographies in this period.

Moses Coit Tyler’s biography demonstrated a turn toward objective, scientific history in reaction to the romantic patriotism that had dominated earlier generations. In his preface, Tyler pointed out the amount of written sources pertaining to Patrick Henry which have become available to the researcher and which were not available in William Wirt’s time. Tyler hoped to write a new biography taking advantage of these sources

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 110.

<sup>14</sup> “William Wirt,” *American National Biography*, <http://www.anb.org.ezproxy.liberty.edu:2048/articles/03/03-00543.html?a=1&n=Wirt%2C%20William&d=10&ss=0&q=2> (accessed July 26, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Wirt, *Sketches of the Life and Character of Patrick Henry*, 412.

“being used now for the first time in any formal presentation of his life.”<sup>16</sup> Tyler put these sources to good use and in the process challenged many anachronistic misconceptions promoted by Wirt. Yet Tyler’s study was also weak in several areas. He devoted only five pages to Henry’s early life. While including the basic information, he did not go beyond this and gave the reader little sense of the cultural or religious background shaping Henry’s youth. Like Wirt, Tyler also had trouble identifying a unified political philosophy in Henry, particularly when dealing with his Anti-Federalism. Tyler painted Henry as a strong Federalist right up until the Constitutional Convention. A secret plot by the Northern states to wield power over the South supposedly turned Henry temporarily into an avid Anti-Federalist.<sup>17</sup> This forced explanation lacks sufficient supporting evidence.

Tyler’s most significant omission comes in his assessment of Henry’s religion. His treatment of Henry’s religious beliefs is vastly superior to Wirt’s version. He corrected Wirt’s assertion that Henry did not ever belong to an organized church with evidence demonstrating Henry’s life-long attachment to the Anglican Church.<sup>18</sup> He also included a list of devotional books influencing Henry and noted his missionary zeal against French rationalism.<sup>19</sup> He established Henry’s continuing attachment to Christianity and provided examples of Henry’s specific religious influences. Yet Tyler neglected the significance of Presbyterianism upon Henry’s religious convictions. Like Wirt, he did not mention Samuel Davies or Henry’s other on-going connections with Presbyterianism. This is an obvious gap in Tyler’s research. Moreover, Tyler treated Henry’s religious devotion in

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<sup>16</sup> Moses Coit Tyler, *Patrick Henry* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1899; reprint, New York: Chelsea House, 1980), v (page references are to reprint edition).

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*, 304-312.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 392.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 392-394.

isolation. He made no attempt to connect it to any other aspects of Henry's life or to show philosophical or political implications flowing from it—a common weakness in Patrick Henry historiography.

William Wirt Henry's biography followed Tyler's scholarly work by just four years. Both Tyler and Henry acknowledged an amiable collaboration in their respective biographies.<sup>20</sup> William Wirt Henry was the grandson of Patrick Henry, ironically named after the eminent biographer William Wirt. William Wirt Henry's three-volume biography *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches* was a personal campaign to 'de-Wirt' and 'de-Jefferson' the historical record on Patrick Henry. After reading excerpts of a letter Jefferson had written to Wirt about Patrick Henry, William Henry was incensed.<sup>21</sup> He began compiling sources for a new biography so that "the material . . . will enable the world to form a more just estimate of the character and genius of Patrick Henry . . . ."<sup>22</sup>

William Henry's collection of sources was impressive. He had access to the private papers of Patrick Henry, inherited from his father John Henry. He also spent years collecting Henry correspondence scattered amongst family members and descendants of Patrick Henry's contemporaries. He used the legislative and executive records of Virginia as well as Patrick Henry's correspondence and works.<sup>23</sup> He used his ready access to family collections of primary sources to publish the first compilation of Patrick Henry correspondence in a third volume. Throughout his work he quoted whole letters to and from Patrick Henry as well as lengthy sections of comments and memoirs from

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<sup>20</sup> William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, viii; Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, vii.

<sup>21</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 248.

<sup>22</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, ix.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, viii.

contemporaries. Tyler had access to most of these materials as well, but William Wirt Henry's in-text use of these documents made his work a valuable tool for later researchers.

William Henry's work followed Tyler's lead in many areas. However, in some areas he improved on Tyler. He was the first Henry biographer to mention the influence of Samuel Davies and Presbyterianism. He even made a cursory attempt to show the implications of this early religious influence on Henry's rhetorical style and stance on religious liberty.<sup>24</sup> He also did a much better job explaining Henry's political philosophy as a unitary whole. As a faithful Confederate William Wirt Henry had a more sympathetic understanding of the states' rights Anti-Federalist position.<sup>25</sup> He argued that Patrick Henry opposed the Constitution because it removed the locus of sovereignty from the states to the consolidated union. This was the government he understood to be adopted by ratification, unlike Jefferson who still maintained that the states were sovereign under the new Constitution. According to William Wirt Henry, this difference in belief led Henry to oppose the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions later on though he did not approve of the Alien and Sedition Acts.

The works of William Wirt Henry and Tyler shared similar weaknesses. Although his treatment of Henry's religion improved over Tyler, it was still only a cursory examination. William Henry made a few connections between religion and life, but did not do so consistently throughout his work. He treated religion as an assumed background subtly influencing Henry's life but not something requiring prolonged discussion, and

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 11, 16.

<sup>25</sup> "The Orator of the Day: Character and Tastes of William Wirt Henry of Virginia," *New York Times*, 19 September 1893, <http://query.nytimes.com/mem/archive-free/pdf?res=9403E3D9103BEF33A2575AC1A96F9C94629ED7CF> (accessed July 14, 2009).

certainly not something closely integrated with his political theory. In this way he expressed the cultural attitude of his own age. While this may reflect positively on nineteenth century culture, it is unhelpful for an academic biography.

Overall, the works of Tyler and William Wirt Henry went far in correcting the early mistakes in Patrick Henry scholarship. They broke down erroneous stereotypes and laid a foundation of well-documented information for later biographers. It was over seventy years before the historical record gained a biography of equal academic caliber. By the time Robert Douthat Meade's two-volume biography *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making* (1957) and *Patrick Henry: Practical Revolutionary* (1969) came out, new research techniques had come into use and new cultural attitudes had become popular. Building on the works of Tyler and Henry, Meade brought significant improvement to the literature

Meade's biography is helpful because of its carefully footnoted detail. Circumstances that Tyler and William Wirt Henry only mentioned, Meade elaborated with concrete specifics, drawing a clearer picture of Henry's life and times. Meade also spent extended time discussing the significance of Awakening religion to Henry's youth. He was the first biographer to mention George Whitefield's visit to Hanover and the subsequent tension between Awakening and established religion in Hanover County and in Henry's own family.

Although Meade's rich supporting detail makes his biography one of the best available even today, he fell into some of the same historiographical pitfalls as his predecessors. First, he failed to show how Henry's religion impacted his life and political action. He has more detail on Henry's religion than any other biographer before him and

even acknowledged that “the highest form of statesmanship is based on deep conviction.”<sup>26</sup> Yet he sometimes offered insufficient analysis of information. For example, the most significant effect he concluded from Samuel Davies’ long influence was a shared rhetorical style. The religious content of Davies’ sermons and their potential influence on Henry passed without comment.<sup>27</sup>

Another common historiographical problem Meade fell into was his failure to analyze Henry’s political philosophy as a unitary whole. This is apparent in his treatment of Henry’s Anti-Federalism. Meade found the Anti-Federalists, and Henry’s vehement support of their platform, incomprehensible. He described Henry’s objections to the Constitution in the ratification debates as “unrealistic criticism.” He explained Henry’s opposition as a result of his distance from the proceedings and “even his lack of adequate knowledge of them.”<sup>28</sup> Meade suggested that if Henry had been at the convention he would have been persuaded to adopt the proposed Constitution. Like his predecessors, Meade was an ideological captive of his era—an era of expanding centralized government and globalization coming off the heels of World War II into the Cold War. He revealed this bias at the end of the section noting that Henry’s fears about a centralized federal government were confirmed, but “it has long been conceded that our government needs to be strong enough to administer efficiently . . . and to cope with her domestic and foreign enemies.”<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Robert Douthat Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co, 1957), 60.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 71-74.

<sup>28</sup> Robert Douthat Meade, *Patrick Henry: Practical Revolutionary* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, Co. 1969), 356, 322, 366.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 366.

Despite these weaknesses, Meade's two-volume set remains one of the best and most complete biographies available. Only two Patrick Henry biographies have been published since Meade's last volume came out in 1969: Henry Mayer's *Son of Thunder* (1986) and Kevin Hayes' *Mind of A Patriot* (2008). Although valuable for their own unique contributions, these books did not supplant Meade's biography as the authoritative text. Neither did they fully address the gaps still persisting in Patrick Henry historiography.

Mayer's work *Son of Thunder* reflected academia's pre-occupation with class struggle and cultural tension rising in the 1980's. Mayer's book was published in 1986 near the bicentennial celebration of the Constitution. He sought to reconsider the political beliefs of Patrick Henry in light of the Constitution's history and the political situation of his day. As a graduate of Berkley and a long time teacher in San Francisco, Mayer demonstrated that like all historians, he too felt the influence of contemporary intellectual trends.<sup>30</sup> His stated goal in re-examining Patrick Henry's life was to "give us a new appreciation of the legitimacy, indeed the necessity, of political conflict in a free society."<sup>31</sup>

This new historiographical approach to Patrick Henry gave Mayer's biography unique strengths and weaknesses. Predictably, the strongest point of this book is Mayer's treatment of Henry's political beliefs. Mayer's emphasis on class struggle and political tension allowed him to address the Anti-Federalists in a new light. Because he questions aspects of his own political system, he had sympathy with the spirit of opposition shown by the Anti-Federalists, if not with the entirety of their political principles. He was the

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<sup>30</sup> "Henry Mayer; Writer, Historian," *Los Angeles Times*, 31 July 2000, <http://articles.latimes.com/2000/jul/31/local/me-62044> (accessed July 17th, 2009).

<sup>31</sup> Henry Mayer, *Son of Thunder* (New York: Grove Press, 1991), xvii.



first historian since William Wirt Henry to treat Henry's Anti-Federalist principles as something significant instead of merely tangential, anomalous, or reactionary.

However, the strengths arising from Mayer's approach also become weaknesses. Mayer's work had a very narrow scope. Because of his interest in political struggle he presented a limited perspective of Henry's life and times. Mayer imbued Henry with his own personal pre-occupation with class struggle and political tension to the exclusion of all other aspects of Henry's life and character. This was especially apparent in Mayer's treatment of Henry's religion. Throughout the book Mayer presented religion merely as a political tool. He included some wonderful details about Henry's early religious background. He also recognized the importance of Henry's split Presbyterian-Anglican background to his political style and success.<sup>32</sup> But he made few allowances for real spiritual conviction. Genuine spirituality only comes for Henry when he is old and senile.<sup>33</sup>

This is also true of Richard Beeman's article, "The Democratic Faith of Patrick Henry" (1987). Beeman coincided with Mayer in emphasizing Henry's religion as a rhetorical tool used for political ends. He focused almost exclusively on Henry's political philosophy as a classical republican.<sup>34</sup> Caught in similar historiographical constructs, Mayer's and Beeman's contributions to Henry research were limited to narrow aspects of Henry's life. They made no satisfactory attempt to correlate political conviction to a religious context.

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<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 467

<sup>34</sup> Richard Beeman, "The Democratic Faith of Patrick Henry," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 95, no. 3 (July, 1987): 306, 311, 315.

The most recent work on Patrick Henry by Kevin Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, is not a biography in the strictest sense, but a research project done on Henry's library and reading habits. This small book opens up new lines of research in Patrick Henry historiography. Hayes represents the new academic preference for cross-disciplinary cooperation. He is considered an expert on colonial libraries particularly after the publication of *The Road to Monticello*, a study of Jefferson's library.<sup>35</sup> Hayes is interested in what the colonial leaders read and how that influenced their beliefs and actions—the history of ideas. Hayes applies this new approach to Patrick Henry in order to see into “the life of his mind.”<sup>36</sup>

*Mind of a Patriot* is more exploratory than definitive. Hayes' primary contribution is to provide a complete and accessible record of Henry's library and reading habits. This in itself was no small task. Henry's library catalogue was previously an untapped resource because it was incomplete and cryptic.<sup>37</sup> Hayes' careful research establishes a reliable record of Henry's intellectual life for future researchers to explore in their interpretations of his beliefs and actions.

Hayes draws a few significant conclusions from his reconstruction of Henry's library. He proves Henry's real and continuing interest in religion and religious books.<sup>38</sup> Unlike most of Henry's biographers, Hayes does not treat spirituality as a side issue in Henry's intellectual life. Although he does not explore the content of these religious books in-depth, Hayes pointedly asserts their significance and opens the door to new research in this area. Probably the most narrow and least detailed of any recent work on

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<sup>35</sup>University of Central Oklahoma, “Faculty and Staff,” <http://www.uco.edu/faculty.asp>, (accessed July 17, 2009).

<sup>36</sup> Kevin Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 15.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 16,17.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 104-105.

Henry, Hayes' work may be the most significant step for Henry historiography since Moses Coit Tyler's biography because it acknowledges the importance of intellectual and religious influences.

Although all of these works have merit and some do touch on the issues of religion and unified political theory, none contain an in-depth examination of the integration of Henry's religious outlook with his political actions. The historical record they represent includes helpful facts about Henry's diverse religious background. What is missing is a study of how these elements merged to form a unique worldview. Historians portray Henry as a passive member of these various "movements." They do not present him as an active participant shaping aspects of each into a harmonized, cohesive belief system with significant contextual relevance for his political actions. Because historians have not invested in a careful study of Henry's religious commitments, their analyses of his political theory are shallow and disconnected. Moreover, this gap in the historical record contributes to an incomplete view of the significance of Presbyterianism, Anglicanism, and the Awakening movement to American liberty. A careful analysis of Patrick Henry's uniquely harmonized worldview as a context for his political actions will enable historians to better understand the man, but also will suggest more concrete, realistic conclusions about the movements which touched all of the American Founders.

## Chapter 2: Harmonized Religious Tensions

In 1805 Samuel Meredith, Patrick Henry's brother-in-law and friend, described Henry's religious convictions: "He was through life a warm friend of the Christian religion. He was an Episcopalian, but very friendly to all other sects, particularly the Presbyterian."<sup>1</sup> This is the accepted reading of Henry's religion and true as far as it goes. But historians have not moved beyond these categories to actual content. The impression of Henry's cousin Edmund Winston is less precise, but a more helpful starting point showing the typicality of Henry's complex belief system. He asserted that Henry was "a sincere Christian after a form of his own . . . ."<sup>2</sup>

How to accurately describe that unique form is a challenge for the Patrick Henry historian. His convictions are less obvious and less available than most founding fathers. He did not write a diary, keep his letters, or record his speeches.<sup>3</sup> Enough evidence exists to construct a context of belief for Henry's actions, although this is an imperfect and potentially fallible methodology. Short of Henry himself explaining it in detail, the historian can never have absolute certainty about Henry's worldview. Yet a creative and careful use of alternative sources suggests overlapping patterns of belief between Henry's Anglican and Presbyterian influences which correspond consistently with Henry's life choices and actions. As an eminent historian once said, "in academic history . . . it is better to do what can be done than to declare what cannot."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "Samuel Meredith's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," Samuel Meredith, James Elson ed., *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 211.

<sup>2</sup> "Edmund Winston's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," Edmund Winston, *Ibid.*, 208.

<sup>3</sup> James Elson, *Ibid.* 5,6; For a discussion of the textual reliability of Henry's major speeches, particularly his Liberty or Death speech, see Charles Cohen's article "The "Liberty or Death" Speech: A Note on Religion and Revolutionary Rhetoric," *The William and Mary Quarterly* 38, no. 4 Third Series (October 1981): 702-717.

<sup>4</sup> Greg Denning, *Performances* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 62.

Contemporary accounts from friends, family, and colleagues are primary sources which establish Henry's life-long personal interaction first with Anglicanism and then Presbyterianism. From this historical groundwork, an examination of the books he read is a helpful way to evaluate Henry's belief system. Along with supplemental evidence proving the personal importance of particular books, Henry's religious reading is a valuable window into the mind.<sup>5</sup> Common themes emerging from these specific influences echo in Henry's life. Henry's integrated worldview begins to emerge after examining the historical background and specific content of belief. In a later section an examination of contextually grounded political actions flowing from these diverse religious impulses further suggests the unitary cohesiveness of Henry's worldview.

### **Anglicanism**

Patrick Henry was a faithful Anglican. One of his descendents described his commitment to the Anglican Church: "He was baptized and made a member of it in early life; he lived and died an exemplary member of it. . . ."<sup>6</sup> Henry had strong Anglican

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<sup>5</sup> Trevor Colbourn argues for the effectiveness of this unique approach to historical evidence, especially in the colonial and revolutionary periods of American history. Trevor Colbourn, *The Lamp of Experience: Whig History and the Intellectual Origins of the American Revolution* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 1998), xxi-xxii. John Woolverton also argues for the legitimacy of using colonial libraries as a valuable and accurate historical source. Books in the colonial period were expensive and rare. Unlike our modern habits, they were bought to be read and were carefully selected. This is especially true of a smaller personal library like Patrick Henry's collection. John Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> Edward Fontaine, *Patrick Henry: Corrections of Biographical Mistakes, and Popular Errors in Regard to His Character*, ed. Mark Couvillon (Brookneal, VA: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, 2008), 6. The "Fontaine Manuscript" was written by Edward Fontaine in 1872 as a response to inaccuracies in William Wirt's biography. Although the great-grandson of Patrick Henry, Edward Fontaine was the son of Henry's oldest grandson Patrick Henry Fontaine who lived with Patrick Henry and studied law with him as a young man. The time elapsed between Fontaine's short biography and Henry's death calls its accuracy into question. However, in a few particular sections Fontaine's account rises above family legend and reports direct conversations between Patrick Henry Fontaine and his grandfather. Lending further credibility to the account, Edward Fontaine did not reply solely on his own memory of family stories. He kept a journal from the age of seventeen in which he "carefully wrote down" any anecdotes or descriptions told by his aunts or father. The details of Fontaine's account almost always coincide with William Wirt Henry's biography and most of his statements have been proved true by other primary sources. Thus, despite its somewhat hagiographic tone, Fontaine's account is a valuable if not conclusive source for Henry scholarship. See

influences in his youth. He was named after his uncle the Reverend Patrick Henry, a Scottish minister in the Anglican Church.<sup>7</sup> Both his father and uncle studied at Aberdeen University before coming to Virginia.<sup>8</sup> Both were active leaders of the local Anglican Church.<sup>9</sup> Henry grew up under the spiritual and academic tutelage of these learned Anglicans.<sup>10</sup> Reverend Henry was a zealous defender of Anglicanism in Hanover during the intense denominational struggles of the 1740's.<sup>11</sup> These became family struggles for the Henrys as well. The young Patrick Henry, walking the line between Presbyterianism and Anglicanism, certainly must have engaged in discussion and debate. In later life he spoke respectfully about the convictions passed down from his uncle.<sup>12</sup>

These convictions continued with him throughout his life. Henry remained Anglican out of more than mere convenience. According to contemporary accounts Henry's devotional reading came primarily from Anglican Divines.<sup>13</sup> He also employed Anglican defenses of Christianity against skeptical rationalism. Henry demonstrated a lifelong concern over the deistic infidelity of his peers. He subsidized a printing of Soame Jenyn's *A View of The Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion* to distribute to skeptical friends.<sup>14</sup> He also valued Butler's *Analogy* as an apologetic tool.<sup>15</sup> He turned to established Anglican leaders to inform his devotional and apologetic beliefs.

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Mark Couvillon's Introduction to the "Fontaine Manuscript" as published by the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation in 2008.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 3.

<sup>8</sup> Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making*, 15.

<sup>9</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 8.

<sup>10</sup> Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot in the Making*, 61.

<sup>11</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 430, 433.

<sup>12</sup> "Fontaine Manuscript," 3.

<sup>13</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 519; James Waddel Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander* (New York: Charles Scribner, 1854), 193; Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, 20.

<sup>14</sup> "Edmund Winston's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 208; "Samuel Meredith's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 219.

<sup>15</sup> Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, 394.

Henry carefully observed the sacraments and duties of the church. His widow, Dorothea Dandridge Henry asserted that he “received the Communion as often as an opportunity was offered, and on such occasions always fasted until after he had communicated and spent the day in the greatest retirement.”<sup>16</sup> She emphasized that this was a consistent habit from the time they were married until his death.<sup>17</sup> While demonstrating devout respect for the sacrament of Communion, this practice also testifies to Henry’s strict Sabbath observance. Perhaps the most compelling evidence for Henry’s commitment to Anglicanism is found in the legacy of his children. Though he valued a Presbyterian education for his sons at Hampden Sydney, Henry chose to bring his children up in the Anglican Church.<sup>18</sup> Over seventy years later, Henry’s great-grandson Edmund Fontaine highlighted this Anglican legacy, asserting that “most of his descendents continue in it to this day.”<sup>19</sup>

Historians do not dispute Henry’s sincere Anglicanism, but none have moved beyond the general label “Anglican” to the specific content of Henry’s belief. A careful examination of Henry’s library with reference to contemporary accounts concerning his reading habits indicates that he was influenced by a particular strain of Anglicanism emerging in the mid-seventeenth century—Latitudinarianism. Aside from a history of Christian martyrs, and Soame Jenyns’ *Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*, all of

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<sup>16</sup> Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*, vol. 2, 12. This was Henry’s second wife. He remarried after the death of his first wife in 1775. Dorothea Dandridge Henry Winston related this sometime between 1828 and 1830 to Rev. Dresser, an Anglican minister in Antrim Parish from 1828-1838. Although made almost thirty years after Henry’s death, Dorothea’s statement is more than a vague hagiographic comment. It contains particular details about Henry’s personal religious habits which she observed and participated in for almost twenty-five years. Other accounts made by family members and friends during Henry’s life or shortly after his death confirm his sincere religious commitments and lend credibility to Dorothea’s statement.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 221-222; “Fontaine Manuscript,” 6.

<sup>19</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 6.

Henry's religious books had a direct connection with this particular line of thought.<sup>20</sup> His favorite devotionals were the sermons of John Tillotson and William Sherlock, noted Latitudinarian divines of the seventeenth century.<sup>21</sup> His copy of William Sherlock's sermons had copious margin notes, and he used it frequently for family worship.<sup>22</sup> He also greatly admired *Analogy of Religion* by Joseph Butler, the eighteenth century intellectual heir of the Latitudinarians.<sup>23</sup> Although lacking firsthand accounts confirming Henry's evaluation of these books, his library also included a collection of sermons by Hugh Blair, and an apologetic defense by Samuel Clarke—two more eighteenth century Latitudinarians.<sup>24</sup> His widow testified that he read and approved of Bishop Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible*.<sup>25</sup> Watson also is considered an eighteenth century Latitudinarian.<sup>26</sup> It would be an oversimplification to classify Henry as a strict Latitudinarian. But, there is a significant consistency in the books informing his worldview and the church he chose to support.

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<sup>20</sup> See Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, "Appendix," 107-146. I am also excepting the several Bibles and biblical study tools present in Henry's library, as well as an unidentified collection of "Discourses on Religion," 120.

<sup>21</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 519; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason: A Study of Changes in Religious Thought Within the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1966), 12, 181; W. M. Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1993), 23, 86; Martin I. J. Giffin, Jr., annotated by Richard Popkin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), 4, 18.

<sup>22</sup> Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 140. Unfortunately, this copy of Sherlock's sermons is lost. If available it would no doubt reveal much about Henry's personal beliefs. Most of Henry's library is scattered or lost today although the catalogue taken at Henry's death does exist. Kevin J. Hayes has provided a valuable service by studying Henry's library catalogue. He researched each title name extensively using his knowledge of Virginia Colonial libraries. Hayes also cleared up confusion in the older secondary sources by demonstrating that Henry was reading sermons by William Sherlock and not those written by his father Bishop Thomas Sherlock. Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 519.

<sup>23</sup> Moses Coit Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, 20; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 113, 116; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 47.

<sup>25</sup> Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families in Virginia*, vol. 2, 12; "Fontaine Manuscript", 6.

<sup>26</sup> Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 47.



Although the specific beliefs of the ‘Latitude-men’ are not often emphasized in historical studies, their principles were readily apparent in Southern colonial Anglicanism.<sup>27</sup> Archbishop Tillotson was by far the most popular writer of sermons in the Colonial South.<sup>28</sup> When addressed at all, historians often portray Latitudinarian beliefs as a moralistic precursor to the Enlightenment, bordering on a works-based system of salvation and a rationalist epistemology.<sup>29</sup> Part of the blame for this lies with George Whitfield. He once said that Tillotson “knew no more of religion than Mahomet” and also that his sermons were “husks, fit only for carnal, unawakened, unbelieving Reasoners to eat.”<sup>30</sup> The influence of this hyperbolic evaluation coming from such a significant religious figure continues to this day. But many evangelical colonists disagreed with Whitfield’s assessment. Both moderate dissenters and Anglicans read and approved of Tillotson’s sermons.<sup>31</sup> Whitfield was highly criticized for his negative comments on Tillotson. The fact that Increase Mather regarded Tillotson as “the great and good Archbishop” was used publicly to rebuke Whitfield for his unguarded statements.<sup>32</sup>

Another reason for this common perception of Latitudinarian thought comes from ambiguity over the term itself. The word ‘Latitudinarian’ has been used to describe a

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<sup>27</sup> Emory Evans, *‘A Topping People’: The Rise and Decline of Virginia’s Old Political Elite, 1680-1790* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009), 165-167; John Nelson, *A Blessed Company: Parishes, Parsons, and Parishioners In Anglican Virginia, 1690-1776* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2001), 203-207; Patricia Bonomi, *Under the Cope of Heaven: Religion, Society, and Politics in Colonial America*, 58, 219; John Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America*, 176, 184.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 79.

<sup>29</sup> Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America*, 184, 207-208; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 106, 134-135; Norman Fiering, “The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett and Philosophical Anglicanism,” *New England Quarterly* 54, no. 3 (Sept., 1981): 341-344; Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700*, 1, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Fiering, “The First American Enlightenment,” 314, 309.

<sup>31</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1658-1763*, vol. 2 (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 715.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 314.

general religious frame of mind as well as the distinctive beliefs of a specific set of Anglican divines in the late seventeenth century.<sup>33</sup> Scholars have also failed to separate seventeenth century Latitudinarians and their eighteenth century heirs. In many cases, later Anglican divines influenced by this school of thought were heavily influenced by Enlightenment themes as well, often to the detriment of traditional orthodoxy.<sup>34</sup> Without carefully examining the beliefs of the seventeenth century Latitudinarians, historians have stumbled into the fallacy *post hoc ergo propter hoc*, assuming that the sometimes quite liberal and rationalist beliefs of later Anglicans were inherited from their seventeenth century predecessors.

New scholarship challenges previous categorizations of seventeenth century Latitudinarians as moralistic rationalists. This new interpretation is particularly relevant to a study of Patrick Henry's belief system because two of his primary Anglican influences, Tillotson and Sherlock, belonged to the seventeenth century Latitudinarians. James E. Bradley of Fuller Seminary noted the beginnings of a revisionist interpretation of Latitudinarianism in the early 1990's. Historians like Gordon Rupp, John Spurr, and William Spellman have challenged previous Whiggish descriptions of British Anglicanism as an "uninterrupted movement toward Deism."<sup>35</sup> Spellman argues that a modern pro-Enlightenment bias has distorted the historical interpretation of Latitudinarianism. He says "that the strength of their commitment to a theology of grace

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<sup>33</sup> Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 11.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 46.

<sup>35</sup> James E. Bradley, "Review," *Albion: A Quarterly Journal Concerned with British Studies* 26, no. 1 (Spring, 1994): 153.

has long been disputed is certainly one measure of how much the Deist interpretation of events has come to influence our own.”<sup>36</sup>

These common misconceptions necessitate a fresh examination of the Latitudinarians’ historical background and core beliefs. The result of this survey suggests interesting similarities between Henry’s own belief system and that of the seventeenth century Latitude-men. The Latitudinarians were a group of seventeenth century divines trying to rebuild the church in the aftermath of the English Civil War and the Restoration. They were moderate low-churchmen opposing enthusiastic fanatics, popish high-church Tories, and liberal atheists.<sup>37</sup> They had the unenviable task of healing bitter divisions in the church while maintaining orthodoxy against the inroads of philosophical deism emerging in the late seventeenth century. They emphasized the essentials of the faith and a practical piety while downplaying technical theological disputes. These divines are best known for their attempts to accommodate like-minded dissenters on non-essential matters in order to bring them into the state church. They did not support unlimited toleration. The Latitudinarians specifically worked for the comprehension of moderate Presbyterians alienated by the conformity laws passed after the Restoration.<sup>38</sup>

Although a fairly small group during the Interregnum, the Latitudinarians came to dominate the Anglican Church after the Glorious Revolution. They were the most forward of all Anglicans to support the Revolution of 1688. Tillotson and other Latitude-men helped organize and stiffen resistance to the repressive laws of James II. Many were early privy to William and Mary’s planned coup.<sup>39</sup> They were the first Anglicans to

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<sup>36</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700*, 111.

<sup>37</sup> Martin Griffin, Jr. *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 44, 46.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 152-155.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

articulate a justification for lawful resistance to tyranny on legal, scriptural, and constitutional grounds. Although seldom acknowledged, the Latitudinarians deserve significant credit for the success of the Glorious Revolution.<sup>40</sup> William of Orange secured Latitude-men for many positions of leadership in the church. This established the eighteenth century dominance of low-church, Whig, moderates in the Anglican church.<sup>41</sup>

The seventeenth century Latitudinarians both then and now have faced charges of heterodoxy on two counts—teaching a moralistic salvation which downplays Christ’s atonement and a rationalist elevation of reason over revelation.<sup>42</sup> Yet, they were anxious to dispute these charges.<sup>43</sup> Their carefully crafted defenses against accusations of heresy are convincing proofs of their orthodoxy. While it is true that the Latitude-men were wary of the extreme forms of Calvinism, they were neither Pelagians, Arminians, or Rationalists.<sup>44</sup> They held an Augustinian view of man’s sinful nature after the Fall. Tillotson’s sermons nowhere deny, and everywhere support a traditional view of man’s post-Fall condition.<sup>45</sup> This foundational belief necessitated a high view of grace and a limited role for human reason, both of which the Latitude-men affirmed.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 32.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>42</sup> Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America*, 184, 207-208; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 106, 134-135; Fiering, “The First American Enlightenment,” 341-344; Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700*, 1, 3; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 29, 86. For an excellent historiography of Latitudinarian theology see Spellman’s Introduction to *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England, 1660-1700*.

<sup>43</sup> Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 68; Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 99.

<sup>44</sup> Spellman, *ibid.*, 56, 59, 99; James Moffat, *The Golden Book of Tillotson; Selections from the Writings of the Rev. John Tillotson* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1971), 30.

<sup>45</sup> Moffat, 60; Tillotson, *Works*, 10 vols. ed. Thomas Birch (London: J.F. Dove, 1820), “Objections Against the True Religion Answered,” 2:477, 481, “The Necessity of Supernatural Grace,” 8: 492, “The Goodness of God,” 7:31, “The Reasonableness of Fearing God More than Men,” 10:82, “The Excellency and Universality of the Christian Religion,” 8: 575, “Of the Ordinary Influence of the Holy Ghost,” 8:444.

Tillotson preached and published a special sermon series on the necessity of Christ's atonement in response to charges of moralism.<sup>46</sup> A leading divine strongly protested "that we can, of ourselves, turn our own wills from the ways of sin to the ways of God, is peremptorily denied by us."<sup>47</sup> Even the Latitudinarian emphasis on a "working faith" was tempered by a reliance on the grace of God. Tillotson affirmed this in a sermon, "and this supernatural grace of Christ is that alone, which can enable us to perform what he requires of us."<sup>48</sup> Sanctification as well as justification was a work of God's grace. Tillotson further clarified his dependence on Christ's grace for salvation in a sermon preached at St. Lawrence Jewery in 1680. He said of Christ, "He hath rescued us from the bondage of sin, and from the slavery of Satan," since all the services man could possibly perform "are infinitely beneath those infinite obligations which the Son of God hath laid upon the sons of men."<sup>49</sup>

The Latitudinarians were just as orthodox in their epistemology. They recognized reason as a God-given tool, particularly in the fight against enthusiastic fideists.<sup>50</sup> They also used it in conjunction with natural revelation to combat skeptical Deists.<sup>51</sup> But they always affirmed the limitations of reason and the primacy of Scripture. William Sherlock specifically cautioned his congregation on the fickleness of reason as a means to spiritual

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<sup>46</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 101, 102.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 99.

<sup>48</sup> Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 129.

<sup>49</sup> Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 3, "Concerning the Incarnation of Christ," 3:379-380. See also, Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 8, "The Uncertainty of the Day of Judgment," 8:116, and Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 6, "The Wisdom of God in the Redemption of Mankind," 6:468.

<sup>50</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 73,77. A 'fideist' in this context was one who considered religion beyond reason, as something apart from rationality. Adherents to this belief dispensed with traditional church structure and the significance of the sacraments. They disparaged an intellectual approach to the Scriptures in favor of subjective inward experience. See Spellman, 77-78.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

truth.<sup>52</sup> One historian summarized the Latitudinarian position on reason and revelation: “Reason is incomplete without revelation, and revelation is agreeable to reason.”<sup>53</sup>

Tillotson affirmed the same concept but added that no man would assent to the truths of Special Revelation “without the special operation of the Holy Ghost.”<sup>54</sup> This position does not lend itself to the rational Deism supposedly flowing from Latitudinarianism in the eighteenth century.<sup>55</sup>

A survey of historical context and a re-affirmation of Latitudinarian orthodoxy prepares the historian to analyze several core principles shared by the three Latitudinarian leaders who influenced Henry the most—John Tillotson, William Sherlock, and Joseph Butler.<sup>56</sup> There are two fundamental concepts used as axioms in the works of these divines. Flowing from these general orientations are several more specific injunctions for concrete, practical application. Patrick Henry’s commitments and outlook suggest a relevant coordination with the concepts expressed by his favorite devotional writers.

First, these writings demonstrate a concern for the spiritual over the temporal. This orientation ran throughout the devotional works of Sherlock and Tillotson. While acknowledging the appropriateness of enjoying earthly comforts, Sherlock focused on the spiritual. “We must neither call this life nor any enjoyments of it our own, because they

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>53</sup> Henry McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism: A Survey of Anglican Theological Method in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century* (London: Adam and Charles Black Limited, 1965), 221.

<sup>54</sup> Moffat, *The Golden Book of Tillotson*, 98.

<sup>55</sup> Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 106, 134-135; Norman Fiering, “The First American Enlightenment: Tillotson, Leverett and Philosophical Anglicanism,” *New England Quarterly* 54, No. 3 (Sept., 1981): 341-344; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 29, 86.

<sup>56</sup> Contemporary accounts indicate the specific works of Butler that Henry studied. Other than noting that he read and studied Tillotson’s and Sherlock’s devotional sermons, neither contemporaries nor Henry’s library catalogue indicate a specific edition of these sermons. The historian must draw common themes from a sampling of these authors’ devotional sermons to form an approximate representation of Henry’s own reading. Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 519; Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 104, 140.

are short and perishing.”<sup>57</sup> One of Tillotson’s well-known sermons addressed this, “The Folly of Hazarding Eternal Life for Temporal Enjoyment.”<sup>58</sup> They both advised spiritual preparations for death through self-reflection and increased private devotions.<sup>59</sup> Tillotson urged in another sermon, “we do all things for eternity, and every action of this life will have a good or bad influence on our everlasting fate.”<sup>60</sup> Butler’s entire defense of Christianity in *Analogy of Religion* was based on the assumption that spiritual considerations are of primary importance.<sup>61</sup> He begins his whole treatise by addressing the importance of knowing the truth about the afterlife.<sup>62</sup> These divines understood life in the very real context of death and eternity. Earthly matters were re-evaluated in terms of their spiritual significance. Tillotson summed up their overriding concern: “Look beyond things present and sensible, unto things which are not seen and eternal . . . and refer all the things of this short and dying life to that state which will shortly begin, but never have an end.”<sup>63</sup>

This foundational orientation toward the spiritual shared by these three divines led them to emphasize two specific themes in their writings—practical piety and a distrust of utopian schemes. Most historians identify an emphasis on individual, practical piety as a

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<sup>57</sup> William Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 27<sup>th</sup> ed. (London: R. Ware, J. Walthoe, J. and P. Knapton etc., 1751), 15.

<sup>58</sup> John Tillotson, *Several Discourses on the Following Subjects* (London: Ri. Chiswell at the Rose and Crown, 1704), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 120; Tillotson, *Several Discourses of Death and Judgment and a Future State* (London: Ralph Barker, 1701), 229, 327, 467; Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 8, “Of the Happiness of Good Men in the Future State,” 8:149, “The Usefulness of Considering Our Latter End,” 8: 210; Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 3, “The Care of our Souls the One Thing Needful,” 3:55, “That God is the Only Happiness of Man,” 3:198.

<sup>60</sup> Tillotson, *Several Discourses of Death and Judgment and a Future State*, 229.

<sup>61</sup> Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion* (New York: Frederick Ungar Publishing Co., 1961), 327.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*, 81.

<sup>63</sup> Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 1, “The Wisdom of Being Religious,” 388.

defining characteristic of Latitudinarianism.<sup>64</sup> Sherlock admonished, “we should not consult our ease, and softness, and pleasures here; for this is a place of labor and diligence, not of rest . . . .”<sup>65</sup> In *A Discourse on the Divine Providence* he concluded with a long section titled “Duties We Owe To Providence.”<sup>66</sup> Tillotson taught the fear of God as a proper motivation to holiness and the importance of a faithful, obedient life to demonstrate true conversion.<sup>67</sup> Even Butler in his more philosophical and apologetic work exhorted, “it is the very scheme of the Gospel, that each Christian should, in his degree, contribute toward continuing and carrying it on.”<sup>68</sup> In another section he asserts, “it is intuitively manifest, that creatures ought to live under a dutiful sense of their Maker; and that justice and charity must be his laws . . . .”<sup>69</sup> When an individual lives life in light of eternity emphasizing the spiritual over the temporal, practical holiness takes on an increased significance.

Likewise, temporal ambitions and earthly affairs take on a decreased significance. An emphasis on a spiritual heaven discourages attempts to build heaven on earth. The Latitudinarians took a distinctly anti-utopian tone in their writings. Tillotson recognized that even the most ideal earthly societies were subject to insecurity and strife because of man’s fallen condition and warned against unreasonable expectations for earthly content.<sup>70</sup> Sherlock admonished, “would men but confine their cares and projects within

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<sup>64</sup> McAdoo, *The Spirit of Anglicanism*, 70, 160; Moffat, *The Golden Book of Tillotson*, 31; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 79; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 43; Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 113.

<sup>65</sup> Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 34.

<sup>66</sup> William Sherlock, *A Discourse on the Divine Providence*, 2<sup>nd</sup> American Ed. (Pittsburgh, PA: J. L. Read, 1851), 296-323.

<sup>67</sup> Tillotson, *Several Discourses on the Following Subjects*, 64; Tillotson, *Several Discourses of Death, and Judgment, and a Future State*, 326.

<sup>68</sup> Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, 201.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 320, 321.

<sup>70</sup> Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 4, “Good Men Strangers and Sojourners Upon Earth,” 263-265.



the bounds of their own lives, and mind what concerns themselves and their own times... they would live more at ease, and the world enjoy more peace and quiet, then it is ever likely to do . . . .”<sup>71</sup> Butler also warned of “that idle and not very innocent employment of forming imaginary models of a world, and schemes of governing it . . . .”<sup>72</sup> This rejection of idealistic schemes flowed from an emphasis on the spiritual over the temporal. While not opposing lawful efforts to better one’s situation, Sherlock recognized the necessary uncertainty of happiness or justice on this earth despite man’s best efforts. He argued that sometimes submission to an imperfect situation as an expression of God’s providential will is the best available option for the Christian.<sup>73</sup> This realistic perspective was a middle way between passive obedience and radical utopianism. It legitimized a lawful resistance to tyranny without endorsing radical revolution.

Corresponding to these Anglican influences, Henry’s moral code included a commitment to the spiritual over the temporal. While a passionate patriot under obligation to his country in its time of need, he was not an overly ambitious politician. In Henry’s words, “I think religion of infinitely higher importance than politics...this is a character I prize far above all this world has or can boast.”<sup>74</sup> He retired from public life after his fight against the Constitution and subsequently refused a Senate seat, an ambassadorship to Spain, an ambassadorship to France, and appointments to become Chief Justice and Secretary of State.<sup>75</sup> He followed the admonitions of Tillotson and Sherlock to prepare himself spiritually for death, devoting himself to Scripture reading in

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<sup>71</sup> Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 123.

<sup>72</sup> Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, 7.

<sup>73</sup> Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence*, 310, 311, 334, 335,

<sup>74</sup> Mark Couvillon, “The Religious Faith of Patrick Henry,” *A Patrick Henry Essay* no. 1-95 (Brookneal, VA: Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation, 1995), 1.

<sup>75</sup> “Patrick Henry Timeline,” <http://www.redhill.org/timeline.html> (accessed April, 2009).

his retirement.<sup>76</sup> Henry shared the divines' eternal perspective. In 1787 he commented to his daughter in a letter, "providence has ordered to all a portion of suffering & uneasiness in this world, that we may think of preparing for a better."<sup>77</sup> Perhaps this spiritual other-worldliness and humility helps explain Henry's seeming indifference to preserving a record of his achievements for posterity. Other factors, like his growing family and financial concerns, surely contributed to Henry's decision to leave public service in later life. Yet his general attitude toward politics bears striking similarities to the words of John Tillotson. "Nothing but necessity, or the hope of doing more good than a man is capable of doing in a private station, can recompense the trouble and uneasiness of a more public and busy life."<sup>78</sup> A view of earthly affairs in terms of the spiritual provides a helpful context behind Henry's willingness to risk historical anonymity.

Henry was well known for his consistent practical piety. It appears constantly in the letters he wrote to his children, exhorting them to good works and a cheerful submission to Providence.<sup>79</sup> In 1774 Roger Atkinson described him as "moderate and mild, and in religious matters a saint."<sup>80</sup> His cousin and friend George Dabney said, "his morals were exemplary and he had a great respect for the Christian religion . . . ."<sup>81</sup> His private papers show abundant provision to the poor with supplies from his plantation and

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<sup>76</sup> "George Dabney's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," George Dabney, James Elson ed., *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 224.

<sup>77</sup> Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, Richmond, Oct 28, 1787, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 329-330. In another letter to Betsy Aylett he made a similar observation. "Experience will teach you that this world is not made for complete happiness." Henry to Betsy Aylett, Richmond, December 12, 1787, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 330.

<sup>78</sup> Moffat, *The Golden Book of Tillotson*, 223.

<sup>79</sup> See for example, Patrick Henry to Betsey Aylett, Red Hill, August 20, 1796, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 568-571.

<sup>80</sup> Meade, *Old Churches and Families of Virginia*, vol 1, 220-221; Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, 102.

<sup>81</sup> "George Dabney's Memorandum to William Wirt (1805)," Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 223.

generous loans of money.<sup>82</sup> Evidence points to Henry as a faithful and obedient Christian in his daily life.

He also shared a similar distrust of utopian projects and a more realistic approach to social and governmental issues. This will be demonstrated in another section through a careful examination of his political writings and actions. Yet this brief example suggests in advance Henry's general lack of faith in ambitious governmental schemes as a means to real social improvement. In a letter to Archibald Blair in 1799 Henry comments on the political turmoil between the Republicans and the Federalists concerning the Alien and Sedition Acts. He notes,

. . . there is cause for lamentation over the present state of things in Virginia . . .  
But it is more than probable that certain leaders meditate a change in government.  
To effect this, I see no way so practicable as dissolving the confederacy. And I am  
free to own, that in my judgment most of the measures, lately pursued by the  
opposition party, directly and certainly lead to that end.

But instead of giving his political recommendations or even taking a side in the debate, Henry addressed what he considered the real issues of importance for American liberty and happiness: "I mean virtue, morality, and religion. This is the armor, my friend, and this alone, that renders us invincible . . . ." He closed his letter with another prayer for the peace of his nation, a peace that comes not from political machinations but from piety:

I live much retired, amidst a multiplicity of blessings from that Gracious Ruler of all things, to whom I owe unceasing acknowledgments for his unmerited goodness to me; and if I was permitted to add to this catalogue one other blessing, it would be that my countrymen should learn wisdom and virtue, and in this their day know the things that pertain to their peace . . . .<sup>83</sup>

A second foundational principle evident in the writings of Tillotson, Sherlock, and Butler was a respect for legitimate earthly authority. This willingness to submit to earthly

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<sup>82</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 516.

<sup>83</sup> Patrick Henry to Archibald Blair, Red Hill, Charlotte, January 8, 1799, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 591-594.

jurisdictions flowed out of their fundamental respect for heavenly authority. Butler explains this concept: “For men have no right to either life or property, but what arises solely from the grant of God: When this grant is revoked, they cease to have any right at all in either . . . .”<sup>84</sup> This sets the standard for legitimate authority while maintaining the right to oppose illegitimate authority, a theme readily apparent in the Latitudinarian approach to the authority of both Church and State.<sup>85</sup>

The Latitude-men had a high respect for the institutional church. Historians sometimes misconstrue their moderate stance toward dissenters as general toleration, but Tillotson and Sherlock were not interested in having many churches of different sects. They worked toward one unified institutional church under the protection of the state.<sup>86</sup> Their notion of a sinful man with real limitations inclined them to uphold what they considered Scripture-ordained authority and hierarchy.<sup>87</sup> Whether an inner light enthusiast or a rational Deist, the Latitudinarians opposed anyone who set individual judgment above submission to the institutional church.<sup>88</sup>

This comes across clearly in their writings. Butler’s entire project in *Analogy of Religion* was an attempt to convince the rationalist of the necessity of submitting to revealed religion. Tillotson’s works are filled with warnings about embracing enthusiasm

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<sup>84</sup> Joseph Butler, *Analogy of Religion, Natural and Revealed, to the Constitution and Course of Nature, To Which are Added Two Brief Dissertations: On Personal Identity and on the Nature of Virtue; and Fifteen Sermons* (London: Bell and Daldy, 1864), 230.

<sup>85</sup> This theme shares some similarities with Country Ideology and even the writings of John Locke. The connection between Latitudinarianism as a religious context for Country Ideology needs further research. One suggestive connection is that most leading Latitudinarians took a Whiggish view of the English Constitution. Also, John Locke was close friends with Archbishop Tillotson. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 44; Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 151.

<sup>86</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 43; Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 155, 148.

<sup>87</sup> Spellman, 69.

<sup>88</sup> Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 58, 53; Spellman, 69.

and emotionalism.<sup>89</sup> Disregard for the God-ordained authority of Church and Scripture whether based on spiritual or rational “enlightenment” led to the same end—practical atheism: “For vice, and superstition, and enthusiasm, which are the reigning diseases of Christendom, when they have run their course, and finished their circle, do all naturally end and meet in atheism.”<sup>90</sup> Sherlock too warned against an unbalanced dependence on human reason and private judgment as a means to spiritual truth.<sup>91</sup> He emphasized the importance of communion and fellowship in the body of the Church.<sup>92</sup>

This respect for legitimate God-ordained authority also extended to the authority of the state. This sounds odd upon first review considering the important role the Latitudinarians played in the Glorious Revolution. But, the Latitude-men were not radical revolutionaries. They were extremely hesitant to participate in the overthrow of their king. Before 1688, both Tillotson and Sherlock preached sermons supporting passive obedience and expounding on the sinfulness of resistance to state authority.<sup>93</sup> What caused the preachers of passive obedience to become the most vocal supporters of resistance to tyranny in the Anglican Church? Nothing less than a concern for legitimate, lawful authority. They recognized that King James II was bent on overthrowing the established authority of church and state. He showed a consistent disregard for the law and in doing so lost his claim to legitimate authority. By remaining passive, they would

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<sup>89</sup> Moffat, *The Golden Book of Tillotson*, 32, 36; See for example, Tillotson, *Works*, vol. 4, “The Danger of Zeal without Knowledge,” 498 ff.

<sup>90</sup> John Tillotson, *Sermons*, G.W. Welden, ed., (London: Ward and Downey, 1886), “The Prejudices Against Jesus and His Religion Considered,” 365.

<sup>91</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 86.

<sup>92</sup> Sherlock, *A Practical Discourse Concerning Death*, 268.

<sup>93</sup> Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 162, 181.

have been endorsing an unlawful and arbitrary authority. Sherlock and Tillotson recognized this dilemma and verbalized a justification for lawful resistance to tyranny.<sup>94</sup>

The Latitudinarian justification for resistance to tyranny was probably not a major part of the devotional sermons that Patrick Henry was reading. Yet Henry was keenly interested in history and no doubt was aware of the role his spiritual mentors played in supporting the Glorious Revolution.<sup>95</sup> During the ratification debates in Virginia he even referenced the significance of the Glorious Revolution and particularly the defeat of the doctrine of passive obedience:

In 1688, the British nation expelled their monarch for attempting to trample on their liberties. The doctrine of divine right and passive obedience was said to be commanded by Heaven—it was inculcated by his minions and adherents. He wanted to possess, without control, the sword and purse. The attempt cost him his crown. This government demands the same powers. I see reason to be more and more alarmed. I fear it will terminate in despotism . . . .<sup>96</sup>

And, although not central topics in the devotional sermons of Tillotson and Sherlock, the themes of respect for legitimate authority and lawful resistance to tyranny are present.

Tillotson argued that man will be held accountable for obedience to both church and state. “We must likewise give an account of all our civil as well as religious actions . . . .”<sup>97</sup>

Sherlock preached an eloquent passage on submission to divine providence as mediated through earthly authorities. But he carefully reserved the right to oppose illegitimate authority.

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<sup>94</sup> For an excellent summary of the arguments used by the Latitudinarians to justify their resistance to tyranny see Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 26-31.

<sup>95</sup> Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 24, 25.

<sup>96</sup> Jonathan Elliot, *The Debates in the Several State Conventions on the Adoption of the Federal Constitution*, vol. 4, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia, PA: J.B. Lippincott, Co., 1891), 396.

<sup>97</sup> Tillotson, *Several Discourses of Death and Judgment and a Future State*, 265.

. . . Yet submission to providence requires no more of us than what the laws of God and men require in such circumstances, and therefore allows us to right ourselves, as far as the laws of God and the laws of men, if they be just and equal, will allow us . . . we may resist unjust and usurping powers, as long as we can resist . . . .<sup>98</sup>

Even Butler, removed from the Glorious Revolution by a century, maintained these typical Latitudinarian principles regarding the importance of legitimate civil authority. He was a committed Whig in politics.<sup>99</sup>

Henry shared a similar respect for legitimate earthly authority, both of church and state. He was committed to upholding the role of the institutional church in society. This is obvious in his private life. He was a member of the Anglican Church his entire life, raised his children in the Anglican Church, and took a very serious attitude toward the sacraments of that church.<sup>100</sup> Likewise, he invested a significant portion of his legal and political career to the support of the institutional church. Henry was jealous of encroachments by the state on Christian churches. When several Baptist preachers were imprisoned for preaching without a license, Henry came to their defense with a stirring speech. “Did I hear an expression as of crime, that these men . . . are charged with—with—with what? Preaching the Gospel of the Son of God! Great God! . . . Heaven decreed that man should be free—free to worship God according to the Bible.”<sup>101</sup> The men were discharged. But while Henry upheld the right of Christian churches to operate unmolested by state authority, he did not extend this right to those outside the pale of

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<sup>98</sup> Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning the Divine Providence*, 310-311.

<sup>99</sup> Woolverton, *Colonial Anglicanism in North America*, 225.

<sup>100</sup> Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*, vol. 2, 12, vol. 1, 221-222. This was Henry’s second wife. He remarried after the death of his first wife in 1775. “Fontaine Manuscript,” 6.

<sup>101</sup> Forrest Church, *The Separation of Church and State: Writings on a Fundamental Freedom by America’s Founders* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 5-6. According to a Virginia Baptist legend, Henry helped gain an order of liberation for another Baptist minister who had been imprisoned for five months. Despite the acquittal, he was refused release because he could not afford to pay the jail fees associated with his long imprisonment. Patrick Henry anonymously paid the man’s fees. Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 118.

Christianity. Moreover, he took active steps to insure state support of the church as an institution. This is apparent in his support of a General Assessment or general establishment of religion. Henry's political stance on this issue will be considered later, but a quote from a political contemporary shows his commitment to the institutional Christian church. ". . . [Patrick Henry] advocated with his usual Art, the Establishment of the Christian Religion in Exclusion of all other denominations. By this I mean that Turks Jews & Infidels were to contribute to the support of a Religion whose truth they did not acknowledge . . . ." <sup>102</sup>

Henry applied this respect for legitimate authority to the role of the state as well as the church. A telling practical indication of this comes to light during Henry's three terms as Governor of Virginia during the Revolutionary War. Despite the chaos caused by the war and the lack of precedent for the new Virginia state government, Henry showed a scrupulous concern for proper jurisdictional authority and law. This comes through particularly in his dealings between the state and Continental Congress and between his own powers and that of the General Assembly. <sup>103</sup> He also stressed the importance of maintaining a just rule of law on the frontier, particularly in the treatment of hostile Indians and Loyalists. <sup>104</sup> The careful respect Henry showed for the technicalities of law

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<sup>102</sup> Beverley Randolph to James Monroe, Chatsworth, November 26, 1784, *Papers of James Monroe: Selected Correspondence and Speeches, 1776-1794*, vol. 2., ed. Daniel Preston (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2006), 137.

<sup>103</sup> H.R. McIlwaine ed., *Official Letters of the Governors of the State of Virginia: Letters of Governor Henry*, vol. 1, (Richmond, VA: Virginia State Library, 1926), Governor Henry to the Virginia Delegates In Congress, Wmsburg, Aug. 8, 1777, 173-174; Gov. Henry to the President of Congress, Henry Laurens, Williamsburg, July 8, 1778, 297-298.; Fragment of a Communication From Patrick Henry to the General Assembly, October 14, 1778, 315; Letter of Gov. Henry to the President of Congress, Henry Laurens, Williamsburg, Nov. 9, 1778, 321; Letter of Gov. Henry to President of Congress, Henry Laurens, Williamsburg, Nov. 23, 1778, 329.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid.*, Governor Henry to George Morgan and Colonel John Neville, Williamsburg, March 12, 1777, 120; Gov. Henry to George Rogers Clark, In Council Williamsburg, Jan. 2, 1778, 223; Gov. Henry to Col. William Fleming, Williamsburg, Feb. 19, 1778, 244; Gov. Henry to Col. William Fleming and Col.



and jurisdiction while Governor is typical of his entire political career. As further examinations will prove, Henry's justification for American Independence, his vigorous Anti-Federalism, and even his last puzzling stand against the Virginia Resolutions all make sense when interpreted within the context of a respect for legitimate authority and a corresponding hesitancy to overthrow existing authority structures.

Patrick Henry's commitment to the Anglican Church is a generally accepted fact. But moving beyond this label to an examination of Patrick Henry's particular Anglican spiritual mentors demonstrates a uniquely consistent influence of a moderate, Latitudinarian type of Anglicanism. While it would be too simplistic to label Henry an eighteenth century Latitudinarian, the major themes of this belief system suggestively correspond to belief commitments and actions in Henry's life. Tillotson, Sherlock, and Butler evidenced a general orientation toward the spiritual over the temporal which translated into an emphasis on practical piety and a distrust of idealistic utopian schemes. Likewise, they emphasized a respect for legitimate earthly authority through their support of the institutional church and their hesitancy to resist state authority until obviously arbitrary and unlawful.

### **Presbyterianism**

The consistency of Henry's belief system with these general principles is even more apparent when examined in light of the Presbyterian influences in his life. Henry's experiences with Presbyterianism did not conflict with his Anglican belief system. The specific Presbyterian influence in Henry's life strongly reinforced the core principles

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Preston, Williamsburg, March 27, 1778, 257; Letter of Gov. Henry to Col. John Todd, December 12, 1778, 343.

inherited from his Anglican background, particularly with regard to a respect for lawful authority. It also added unique balancing elements to Henry's worldview—a concern for the Christian's individual responsibility in this earth and a stabilizing, Christo-centric orthodoxy.

Presbyterianism was a lasting influence on Patrick Henry from his youth. Hanover County, Henry's home as a youth, was central to the rise of Presbyterianism in Virginia.<sup>105</sup> In 1743, a small local group dissatisfied with the established church began holding meetings in their homes. Uncertainly calling themselves 'Lutherans,' they soon fell in with Awakening Presbyterians.<sup>106</sup> Henry's maternal grandfather Isaac Winston was one of these early dissenters. He was indicted in October 1745 for holding services without a license.<sup>107</sup> That same month George Whitefield preached in Hanover County at St. Paul's where Henry's uncle was the rector and his father a vestryman.<sup>108</sup> Although Patrick Henry was only nine years old at the time, Whitefield's visit left a lasting impression on Hanover Presbyterianism and on Henry's own family. Henry's uncle, the Reverend Patrick Henry did his best to prevent Whitefield from preaching, or at least to minimize its effect, even though Henry's grandfather and mother were enthusiastic New-Siders.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Isaac, *The Transformation of Virginia*, 148; William Foote, *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical*, 120.

<sup>106</sup> Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 148.

<sup>107</sup> Meade, *Patrick Henry: Patriot In The Making*, 67.

<sup>108</sup> *Virginia Gazette*, October 10, 1745, Rockefeller Library, "Browse *Virginia Gazette* by Date," <http://research.history.org/digitallibrary/VirginiaGazette/VGImagePopup.cfm?ID=771&Res=HI> (accessed Feb. 25, 2009); William Wirt Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 8.

<sup>109</sup> Meade, *Patriot in the Making*, 67, 68; Rev. Patrick Henry to Rev. William Dawson, St. Paul's Parish, Hanover, October 14, 1745 in "Letters of Patrick Henry, Sr., Samuel Davies, James Maury, Edwin Conway, and George Trask," *William and Mary Quarterly*, second series, 1, no. 4 (Oct. 1921): 263-267.

Dissenting Presbyterianism, though still enduring some persecution, stabilized through formal organization after the arrival of Samuel Davies in 1747.<sup>110</sup> Despite opposition, he secured a license to preach and established a growing Presbyterian community in Hanover and the surrounding counties.<sup>111</sup> Davies was the strongest Presbyterian influence on Henry. He came to Hanover when Henry was eleven and preached until Henry turned twenty-three, afterwards leaving to become President of Princeton. Henry's mother and sisters became members of Davies' Fork Church.<sup>112</sup> Mrs. Henry would take Patrick with her to church and make him recite back the text and sermon on the ride home.<sup>113</sup> During his most formative teenage years Patrick Henry heard many Presbyterian sermons.

Awakening Presbyterianism remained a significant influence in Henry's life. Although a committed Anglican, he continued to attend Presbyterian services on occasion.<sup>114</sup> Another indication of Henry's regard for Presbyterianism was his relationship with Hampden-Sydney College. This institution had close connections with the Hanover Presbytery.<sup>115</sup> Henry was a trustee until his death and was active in founding the college, actually helping to write the charter of incorporation in 1783.<sup>116</sup> He moved closer to the college in 1786 after his last term as governor so that his younger sons and older grandsons could attend.<sup>117</sup> Henry remained friendly with elders from Davies'

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<sup>110</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 157, 159.

<sup>111</sup> Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers and Families of Virginia*, vol. 1, 432-435.

<sup>112</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 15.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>114</sup> Mark Couvillon, "The Religious Faith of Patrick Henry," 1.

<sup>115</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 396; Hampden Sydney College, "History of Hampden Sydney," [www.hsc.edu/hschistory/](http://www.hsc.edu/hschistory/) (accessed March 4, 2009).

<sup>116</sup> Meade, *Old Churches, Ministers, and Families of Virginia*, vol. 2, 270; "Fontaine Manuscript," 11.

<sup>117</sup> "Fontaine Manuscript," 3; Kevin Hayes, *The Mind of a Patriot*, 93.

church into later life.<sup>118</sup> He was so amenable to Presbyterians that contemporaries sometimes assumed he was a member of that sect. Charles Thomson remembered his first encounter with Patrick Henry while taking the minutes of the First Continental Congress in 1774. “He was dressed in a suit of parson’s gray, and from his appearance, I took him for a Presbyterian clergyman, used to haranguing the people.”<sup>119</sup> Edmund Randolph had the same impression. “If he was not a constant hearer and admirer of that stupendous master of the human passions, George Whitfield, he was a follower, a devotee of some of his most powerful disciples at least.”<sup>120</sup>

As Henry’s most formative influence, the beliefs of Samuel Davies deserve a careful examination. Most historians emphasize his impact on Henry’s rhetorical style. Few move beyond this to the actual content of Davies’ belief system. An examination of the specific type of Presbyterianism taught by Samuel Davies suggests striking similarities with the major themes of Henry’s moderate Latitudinarian influences. Although Davies was part of the New Light Presbyterian movement in Hanover, he was essentially a moderate.<sup>121</sup> In many ways, Davies was more reminiscent of a Latitudinarian Anglican than a New Light revivalist. In an open letter to the Virginia Anglican clergy he denied he was preaching “the raw innovations of ‘New Lights’” and advocated “the generous truths of catholic Christianity . . . the good old doctrines of the Church of England.”<sup>122</sup> Like Henry, he read and approved of several eighteenth century

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<sup>118</sup> Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 190.

<sup>119</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol.1, 220.

<sup>120</sup> Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1970), 178.

<sup>121</sup> Craig Gilborn, “The Reverend Samuel Davies in Great Britain,” *Winterthur Portfolio* 8 (1973): 46, 47, 58, 62.

<sup>122</sup> George Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1971), 58.

Latitudinarian type Anglicans like Hugh Blair, Samuel Clarke, and Joseph Butler.<sup>123</sup> His sermons were filled with a Latitudinarian-like concern for practical righteousness over doctrinal disputes.<sup>124</sup> He even exclaimed, “I care but little whether Men go to Heaven from the Church of England, or Presbyterian; if they do but go there . . . .”<sup>125</sup>

Davies genuine respect for the established authority of church and state is the most obvious way that his belief system corresponded to Henry’s Anglican influences. This put him in marked opposition to some of his fellow Presbyterians. Early Presbyterians in Hanover were fairly radical, flouting ecclesiastical and political restraints. They taught that a true Christian would recognize the stirrings and workings of the Spirit as obviously as a physical sensation. This emphasis on inner spiritual enlightenment led them to openly oppose more conservative established clergy. They not only preached against the methods of the established clergy, they declared them unconverted and graceless.<sup>126</sup> Davies had no sympathy with these men and preached against their “enthusiastical extravagancies.”<sup>127</sup> Like the Latitudinarians, Davies recognized the danger of supplanting ordained ecclesiastical authority with personal judgment or inner light. He supported the Anglican clergy, preaching a whole sermon against schism, denominational pride, and active proselytizing from other sects.<sup>128</sup> In his efforts to secure toleration for the Presbyterian dissenters, Davies refused to undermine the position of the state established church. He was scrupulously careful also to follow the laws of the state regarding

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<sup>123</sup> Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf*, 77, 78, 117.

<sup>124</sup> Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent*, 67.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 56

<sup>126</sup> Rev. Patrick Henry to Rev. William Dawson, Commissary of the Bishop of London, St. Paul’s Parish, Hanover, Feb. 13, 1745, in “Letters of Reverend Patrick Henry Sr., Samuel Davies, etc.,” 263.

<sup>127</sup> Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent in Colonial Virginia*, 48, 62; Gilborn in “The Reverend Samuel Davies in Great Britain” explains that Davies even had reservations about the aggressive, enthusiastic techniques sometimes used by George Whitfield. On his visit to Britain he avoided too much public contact with Whitfield in order to differentiate himself from Whitfield’s approach, 49.

<sup>128</sup> Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent*, 62; Gilborn, 54.

dissenters.<sup>129</sup> He used the legal means provided by the Toleration Act of 1689 to work within the existing ecclesiastical and political system.<sup>130</sup> Davies “looked to written law for relief and rejected the currently fashionable notions about natural law and the inherent rights of man.”<sup>131</sup> He exhorted his congregation to submit to authority.<sup>132</sup> Indeed, the very form of Presbyterian church government necessitated obedience to the legitimate authority vested in the institutional church by God.

Members of Davies’ congregation were responsive to this moderate approach. The Hanover congregations developed in isolation from mainstream Presbyterianism.<sup>133</sup> Unlike the Scotch-Irish emigrants in the Shenandoah Valley, the Hanoverians did not have a long tradition of Presbyterian history. Instead, they were former Anglicans searching for a warmer, more heart focused Christianity.<sup>134</sup> They were significantly less inclined toward emotional enthusiasm than many of their fellow New Lights.<sup>135</sup> Under Davies’ leadership they developed into an exceptionally moderate and ecumenical branch of Presbyterianism which operated seamlessly within the existing authority structures after an initial conflict in the 1740’s.<sup>136</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> For an example of Davies’ painstaking attempts to operate within the bounds of the law see Rev. Samuel Davies to an Unnamed Hanover Justice, February, 3, 1759, in “Letters of Reverend Patrick Henry Sr., Samuel Davies, etc.,” 273-274. In this case he writes to get clarification on his authority to marry members of his own congregation.

<sup>130</sup> Jewel Spangler, *Virginians Reborn: Anglican Monopoly, Evangelical Dissent, and the Rise of the Baptists in the Late Eighteenth Century* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 2008), 67.

<sup>131</sup> Gilborn, “The Reverend Samuel Davies in Great Britain,” 54.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

<sup>133</sup> Pilcher, *Samuel Davies: Apostle of Dissent*, 54.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 27, 54.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.* Pilcher discusses the Hanover Presbyterians’ respect for a dignified, orderly worship and ties this to their Anglican background. Other more extreme New Light characteristics were also missing from Davies’ congregations. All these elements were missing from Davies’ ministry: active proselytizing from other sects, particularly the Anglican; accusing Old Light Presbyterian and Anglican ministers of being unconverted; and an emphasis on the emotional experience of re-birth beyond the stress put on constant repentance and righteousness in daily Christian living.

<sup>136</sup> Mark Beliles confirms this by acknowledging that by the mid-eighteenth century in the Virginia Piedmont, distinctions between Presbyterians and Anglicans were not that important. Interdenominational cooperation was common. See Beliles, “The Christian Communities, Religious Revivals, and Political

Like Henry's Anglican influences, the Hanover Presbyterians were not enthusiastic proponents of enlightenment concepts. Due in large part to Davies' leadership, early Hanover Presbyterianism was removed from the philosophical orientation of its contemporary British and Scottish counterparts. A preoccupation with Common Sense Realism and Enlightenment Moral Philosophy marked dissenting churches in England and Scotland during this period.<sup>137</sup> And while some Presbyterians used these new philosophies as tools to promote orthodoxy, many strayed into Deism.<sup>138</sup> Samuel Davies, on a visit to England and Scotland in 1753, repeatedly mentions the heterodoxy and liberalism of dissenting Presbyterians.<sup>139</sup> Davies was relatively uninterested in the new philosophy. During his extended stay in Britain Davies did not write about the Scottish Enlightenment nor did he attempt to meet scholars or sit in on lectures. Davies was very well read, and while certainly aware of the intellectual trends of his day, he had much more sympathy with men like Jonathan Edwards who regarded the influence of the rationalistic Enlightenment on religion as a malignant force.<sup>140</sup> Davies' shared with the

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Culture of the Central Virginia Piedmont, 1737-1813" in *Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia*, Garret Ward Sheldon and Daniel Dreisbach eds. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2000), 4; Jewel Spangler also emphasizes the cooperation between Anglicans and Presbyterians in eighteenth century Virginia, describing a "religious supply and demand" between the denominations. Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, 45-46. The life of Reverend Devereaux Jarratt serves as an interesting case study of this cooperation between Presbyterians and Anglicans in eighteenth century Virginia. Jarratt was converted by New Light Presbyterian preaching, but chose to become an Anglican minister in Virginia. With reference to the Anglican Church he noted "I do not know that I thought it better than the Presbyterians, but equally as good. The doctrinal articles I considered the same in substance, in both churches; and the different modes of worship, I thought not at all essential." He became an Anglican rather than a Presbyterian minister for mainly practical reasons because of the dissenter bias in Virginia at that time. See *The Life of Reverend Devereux Jarratt*, ed. John Coleman (Baltimore, MD: Warner & Hanna, 1806), 58-59.

<sup>137</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24, vol. 3 (September 1955): 258-260; Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal* (New York: Columbia University, Teacher's College Press, 1971), 13, 14.

<sup>138</sup> Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, 12-14; Gilborn, "The Reverend Samuel Davies in Great Britain", 49, 50.

<sup>139</sup> Samuel Davies, George Pilcher ed., *The Reverend Samuel Davies Abroad: The Diary of a Journey to England and Scotland, 1753-55* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1967), 54, 62, 72, 84, 111, 113.

<sup>140</sup> Pilcher, *Apostle of Dissent*, 104, 95; Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century*, 77,78, 86, 116, 117; Mark Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians

Latitudinarians a common distrust of individual judgment whether emerging from rational Deism or inner light enthusiasm.

Samuel Davies' support of the legitimate authority of church and state easily integrated with the stance taken by the Anglican divines toward earthly jurisdictions. Several other major themes found in his sermons also correspond with Henry's Anglican influences. At the same time, Davies' unique emphases in some areas may have contributed to balance out Henry's worldview.

The first example of this simultaneous coordination and balance arising from Davies' sermons is his emphasis on piety. Although often remembered for his war sermons during the French and Indian War, Davies' sermons were full of admonitions to pious living.<sup>141</sup> Like the Latitudinarians, at one point he even had to defend his orthodoxy against charges of moralism.<sup>142</sup> He shared with Tillotson and Sherlock a tendency to stress "otherworldliness," spiritual realities, and zealous Christian living in the face of death.<sup>143</sup> However, he also placed a healthy emphasis on the importance of pious works for this earthly life. The sermons of the Latitude-men generally discuss good works as a

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in the Early Republic," *Journal of the Early Republic* 5, no. 2 (Summer, 1985): 152; Jeffry Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame, 2005), 63; Donald Meyer, *The Democratic Enlightenment* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1976), xx; Meyer presents Jonathan Edwards as a staunch opponent of the American Enlightenment who was heavily influenced by the thought of the Anglican Latitudinarians. Davies and Edwards had a high mutual respect. This helps further corroborate the seamless cooperation between Henry's Presbyterian and Anglican influences. Modern Edwardsian scholars generally uphold his reputation as an opponent of Enlightenment thought. See George Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Life* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003). Some less evangelical modern historians present a more nuanced interpretation of Edwards, recognizing that he used Enlightenment methods to promote an anti-Enlightenment message. They also note that Edwards was blind to the malignant force of Neo-Platonism on his own theology. For an excellent summary of modern Edwardsian scholarship particularly relating to the issue of the Enlightenment see Douglas Winiarski, "Review: Seeking Synthesis in Edwards Scholarship," *William and Mary Quarterly* 61, Third Series, no. 1 (Jan., 2004): 135-151. Winiarski also addressed the issue of Edward's participation in more radical aspects of the New Light movement in "Souls Filled with Ravishing Transport: Heavenly Visions and the Radical Awakening in New England," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 61, no. 1 (Jan., 2004): 3-46.

<sup>141</sup> Pilcher, 76.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>143</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.



duty owed to God with a view toward heavenly reward. While not denying this, Davies was more interested in calling the Christian to do good works as his responsibility for matters on earth. He promoted a Christian's duty to involve himself in earthly affairs as part of practical piety.

This led him to promote a form of patriotic piety as every Christian's individual responsibility. He emphasized the importance of patriotism to Christian manhood, in places almost equating the two: "Christians should be patriots."<sup>144</sup> Piety and patriotism were not interchangeable, but closely connected. "Therefore, if you would serve your country, repent and be converted."<sup>145</sup> Davies stopped short of preaching civic religion, but imparted a sacred aura to patriotism which was lacking in the Anglican divines' more otherworldly focused sermons.<sup>146</sup> Davies' sermons were full of calls for individual repentance, active piety, and patriotic duty.<sup>147</sup> In one sermon delivered in the context of the French and Indian War he exhorted, "Repent! O my countrymen, Repent!" and called for fasting and prayer.<sup>148</sup> In the very same breath he urged individuals to take immediate practical action. "Let me earnestly recommend it to you to furnish yourselves with arms, and to put yourself in a posture of defense."<sup>149</sup> In another sermon he called out, "Something must be done! Must be done by you! . . . prove your protestations sincere."<sup>150</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid., 321.

<sup>145</sup> Ibid., 325.

<sup>146</sup> Barbara A. Larson, *Prologue to Revolution: The War Sermons of the Reverend Samuel Davies, A Rhetorical Study* (Speech Communications Association, 1978), 31.

<sup>147</sup> Samuel Davies, Albert Barnes and Thomas Gibbons, eds. *Sermons, III* (Philadelphia: Presbyterian Board of Publications, 1864), 95, 109, 149, 152, 160, 321, 325.

<sup>148</sup> Davies, "On the Defeat of General Braddock, going to Fort Duquesne," Ibid., 319, 320.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 320.

<sup>150</sup> Davies, "The Curse of Cowardice," Ibid., 160.

Davies' emphasis on the patriotic community and the significance of the individual provided a powerful impetus to political action.<sup>151</sup>

Henry's sacrifices as a Virginia patriot reflect the Presbyterian roots of his moral code—a patriotic piety with an emphasis on individual responsibility. Although many non-Presbyterian patriots sacrificed for liberty, their actions did not necessarily flow from such a distinct biblical framework. The foundation laid by Davies provided Henry with a context of belief uniquely fitted for a life of public service. Edmund Randolph recognized this in his analysis of the Revolution noting that Henry's enthusiasm for liberty “was nourished by his partiality for the dissenters from the Established Church.”<sup>152</sup>

Henry began his term of service in the House of Burgesses in the year 1765 and continued to serve in an elected capacity until 1790.<sup>153</sup> He was an active revolutionary leader in the years leading up to war. He served as a Virginia delegate to the First Continental Congress in 1774, even as his first wife was fatally ill. Also in 1775, Lord Dunmore issued a proclamation naming Henry a “desperate” traitor “in open Defiance of Law and Government . . . .”<sup>154</sup> His very life was at risk in the struggle for independence.<sup>155</sup> During and after the Revolution, Henry continued in the Virginia legislature, completed five terms as governor despite bouts with life-threatening illness, and served a brief stint as colonel of the First Virginia Regiment and commander-in-chief

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<sup>151</sup> Davies was a strong advocate of British liberties during the French and Indian War. During Davies' brief tenure as president of the College of New Jersey he encouraged a spirit of patriotism and political involvement. Mark Noll, *Princeton and the Republic. 1768-1822: The Search for a Christian Enlightenment in the Era of Samuel Stanhope Smith*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1989), 48.

<sup>152</sup> Randolph, *History of Virginia*, 178.

<sup>153</sup> Red Hill: Patrick Henry National Memorial, “Patrick Henry Timeline,” <http://www.redhill.org/timeline.html> (accessed March 10th, 2009).

<sup>154</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 285-286.

<sup>155</sup> Meade, *Patriot in the Making*, 339.

of the Virginia militia.<sup>156</sup> He retired from public service to pay off the debts accumulated in his long professional absence and to care for the concerns of his large family. Henry endangered life, health, and wealth to fulfill his patriotic duty.<sup>157</sup>

The individual patriotic piety of Davies also echoes in one of the few primary sources Henry left behind—a sealed letter included with his will. Enclosed with this letter was a copy of Henry’s resolutions against the Stamp Act which sparked colony wide opposition to the Crown in 1765. This is the only one of Henry’s historical contributions that he ever took pains to preserve for posterity.<sup>158</sup> His commentary on this action thus takes on special significance. Henry emphasized the importance of individual action.

All the colonies, either through fear or from influence of some kind or other, had remained silent . . . Finding . . . that no person was likely to step forth, I determined to venture, and alone, unadvised, and unassisted on a blank leaf of an old law book wrote the [Virginia Stamp Act Resolutions] within.”<sup>159</sup>

This action stirred up colonial resistance, resulting ultimately in American independence. In a passage strikingly similar to Davies, Henry then connected this individual action with the importance of both individual and national piety.

Whether this [American Independence] will prove a blessing or a curse will depend upon the use our people make of the blessings which a gracious God hath bestowed upon us. If they be wise, they will be great and happy. If they are of a contrary nature, they will be miserable. Righteousness alone can exalt them as a nation. Reader! Whoever thou art, remember this, and in thy sphere practice virtue thyself and encourage it in others.<sup>160</sup>

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<sup>156</sup> Henry Mayer, *A Son of Thunder: Patrick Henry and the American Republic*, 307-308; “Patrick Henry Timeline,” <http://www.redhill.org/timeline.html> (accessed April, 2009).

<sup>157</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 151.

<sup>158</sup> Tyler, *Patrick Henry*, 78.

<sup>159</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in his Speeches and Writings*, 192.

<sup>160</sup> *Ibid.*, 193.

The weight Henry placed on individual righteousness and patriotic duty suggests a relevant contextual connection with the particular principles of Davies' belief system.

A second example of cooperative balance found in Davies' sermons is an emphasis on Christo-centric religion with a strong distrust of human nature. The Latitude-men have already been exonerated of heterodox moralism and rationalism. Yet it is true that their devotional sermons tend to devote more time to practical piety than to Christ's death.<sup>161</sup> Without endorsing rationalism, they do emphasize a right use of reason. Also, several eighteenth century heirs of Latitudinarian thought tended toward a weaker orthodoxy than their seventeenth century predecessors. Men like Hugh Blair and Samuel Clarke reflected the intellectual trends of their day and were periphery figures in the Scottish Enlightenment as well as influential Anglican clergymen.<sup>162</sup>

Like others in his day, Henry was influenced to a degree by the Scottish Common Sense Enlightenment.<sup>163</sup> This philosophy originating in the Scottish universities in the early eighteenth century was a moderate form of Enlightenment thinking more

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<sup>161</sup> Patrick Henry reflected this tendency in a comment he made on a sermon preached by the noted Presbyterian Archibald Alexander. Alexander described the brief conversation held with Henry, himself, and a mutual friend, "After the sermon he asked Capt. Craighead what we meant by talking so much about grace . . ." Alexander, *The Life of Archibald Alexander*, 193. Plenty of primary sources prove that Henry firmly understood and believed in an orthodox formulation of grace. Alexander himself affirmed Henry's orthodox religious beliefs. Rather, this short exchange suggests that Henry's standards for a good sermon were influenced by Latitudinarian themes.

<sup>162</sup> Samuel Clarke was an important philosopher in the early eighteenth century. He argued against Naturalism and Deism, providing a theological and philosophical framework for Newtonian science. Hugh Blair was a Scottish clergyman and professor at the University of Edinburgh in the later eighteenth century. See Alexander Broadie, "Scottish Philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century," *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, published 2009. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/scottish-18th/#BlaChrSto> (accessed March 29, 2010); Ezio Vailati and Timothy Yenter, "Samuel Clarke," *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, 2009, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/clarke/> (accessed March 29, 2010).

<sup>163</sup> Mark Noll emphasizes the widespread influence of this philosophy on Anglicans and Presbyterians during this period, particularly in the South. See "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," *American Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (Summer, 1985): 219.

compatible with traditional orthodoxy than other forms of Enlightenment thought.<sup>164</sup> An emphasis on discovering truths about the world and religion through empirical evidence and the facts of experience characterizes American Common Sense Realism.<sup>165</sup> Noted historians Mark Noll and George Marsden both argue that this philosophy became an enduring plank of the American evangelical tradition as an apologetic tool and a framework for reconciling science and faith.<sup>166</sup> Yet even as it was often used to establish Christianity on more sure footing, it subtly opened the door to a more rationalist epistemology within orthodox American Christianity.<sup>167</sup>

Henry owned several books written by Scottish Enlightenment authors including Samuel Clarke and Hugh Blair. One of his favorite authors Bishop Joseph Butler, while an orthodox divine heavily influenced by Latitudinarian thought, was also a significant figure in the Common Sense movement interacting with Frances Hutcheson and Thomas Reid.<sup>168</sup> His *Analogy of Religion* was a prime example of applied Common Sense Realism as an apologetic tool against Deism.<sup>169</sup> At times Henry's language even seemed to echo the epistemological concern of Scottish Common Sense Realism for concrete historic experience as an indicator of truth. In his 'Liberty or Death' speech urging Virginia to arm for war Henry employed this language. "I have but one lamp by which my feet are guided; and that is the lamp of experience. I know of no way of judging the future but by

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<sup>164</sup> Sydney Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," 259, 267.

<sup>165</sup> Noll, "Common Sense Traditions and American Evangelical Thought," 222-223; George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 16.

<sup>166</sup> Noll, 219.

<sup>167</sup> Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," 268-269.

<sup>168</sup> Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," 259; R. G. Frey, "Butler, Joseph," *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, ed. Alan Charles Kors (Oxford University Press, 2003), Liberty University, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t173.e097> (accessed February 12, 2009).

<sup>169</sup> Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture*, 16.

the past.”<sup>170</sup> His arguments during the ratification debates also regularly used concrete experiential language.<sup>171</sup>

Henry was not isolated from the intellectual trends of his day. However, Common Sense Realism, while an identifiable theme in Henry’s intellectual life, does not seem to be the dominant influence on his system of belief. Henry was no philosopher. His son-in-law Spencer Roane said that Henry “detested the projects of theorists and bookworms.”<sup>172</sup> Henry’s library and his remaining letters demonstrate that he was much more interested in religious truths than philosophical theories. The few books in his library written by Scottish Enlightenment figures were collections of sermons and arguments supporting traditional theology and not their most influential works on the new philosophy.<sup>173</sup>

Like any educated Virginian, Henry could not escape the intellectual influences of his age. Yet unlike many of his peers, he seemed to have been passively impacted by Enlightenment thought. Men like George Mason, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison took a more active interest in the new philosophy, making them sympathetic to a more rationalist epistemology and inclining them towards less orthodox religious beliefs.

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<sup>170</sup> Patrick Henry, ‘Liberty or Death’ speech, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 74.

<sup>171</sup> Ketcham, *The Anti-Federalist Papers*, 214.

<sup>172</sup> M. E. Bradford, ‘*A Better Guide Than Reason’: Federalists and Anti-Federalists* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 1994), 100.

<sup>173</sup> Henry owned Samuel Clarke’s “Letter to Mr. Dodwell.” This was a treatise using mainly philosophical arguments in response to Henry Dodwell’s thesis on the natural mortality of the soul. Clarke believed this view encouraged libertinism by providing the wicked an excuse not to fear the eternal punishment of God. Henry also owned a two volume copy of Hugh Blair’s sermons. Two common themes in Blair’s sermons were the importance of submission to the will of God and the insignificance of worldly pleasure in light of eternity. These themes corresponded well with the more traditional Latitudinarian sermons in Henry’s library. Vatali, “Samuel Clarke;” Broadie, “Scottish Philosophy in the 18<sup>th</sup> Century;” Kevin Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 116, 117.

Part of Henry's lack of interest in these new philosophical currents might be due to his own personality. Henry was a practical man, not a systematic intellectual. Both the religious and philosophical books in his library dealt with practical issues. He did not own treatises on systematic theology but collections of sermons on practical subjects. Likewise, the most overtly philosophical books in his library were not abstract dissertations but pointed philosophic arguments addressing specific problems. Samuel Clarke's "Letter to Mr. Dodwell" defended the immortality of the soul in order to guard an orthodox view of God's eternal punishment for sinners. Soame Jenyns' *A View of the Internal Evidence of the Christian Religion* used reason and experience to prove the supernatural origins of Christianity.<sup>174</sup>

Another possible explanation is found in Henry's religious background. The Latitudinarian divines of the seventeenth century emphasized practical piety and a heavenly focus over philosophical investigations. Their emphasis on the reasonableness of Christianity was primarily a defense against enthusiastic fideists,

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<sup>174</sup> Jenyns was not a clergyman or a significant philosopher. He was a literary man and a politician. However, he did write several short philosophical and theological treatises in addition to light poetry and many political essays. The most famous of these was *A Free Inquiry into the Nature and Origins of Evil* (1757). Although not an original thinker, Jenyns' works represented typical modes of thinking among eighteenth century rational Anglicans, epistemologically dependent on moderate Enlightenment concepts like reason, experience, and common sense. This comes across clearly in his *A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*. He argued for the supernatural origins of Christianity based on reason and human experience, but then asserted the insufficiency of reason to lead to divine, perfect religion. He also claimed that without "divine interposition" a skeptic would never be convinced of the truth of Christianity, despite its inherent reasonableness. Soame Jenyns, *A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*, (London: J. Dodsley, 1776), 100, 117, 182; Milton Myers, *The Soul of Modern Economic Man: Ideas of Self-Interest, Thomas Hobbes to Adam Smith* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 71. Bishop Richard Watson used a similar approach in *Apology for the Bible*, his response to Thomas Paine's *Age of Reason*. He systematically attacked the major planks of Paine's argument concluding that the gospel was the path "most conformable to right reason." But even as he supported Christianity using reason and experience he emphasized the limits of reason saying, "The chief utility of such disquisitions consists in this—that they bring us acquainted with the weakness of our intellectual faculties . . ." Richard Watson, *Apology for the Bible* (Cambridge, MA: Hilliard and Brown, 1828), 169, 63.

not an attempt to make Christianity more palatable to Enlightenment rationalists.<sup>175</sup> Henry's Presbyterian background also may have contributed to his relative lack of interest in Enlightenment philosophy. Perhaps the balance provided by Davies' sermons which obviously articulated a biblo-centric, Christo-centric outlook helped shield Henry from some of the Enlightenment themes found even in the eighteenth century heirs of Latitudinarianism in his library.

Davies' sermons were saturated with biblical references and exposition. Even his topical sermons preached on special occasions began with a biblical text which he briefly exposted before applying to his audience.<sup>176</sup> Davies used Scripture in two ways throughout his sermons. He used it as historical example, experiential illustration, or proof. For example in his sermon "The Curse of Cowardice" Davies used the Babylonians as an example of a nation under God's curse for not zealously carrying out divine vengeance.<sup>177</sup> But he appealed to it primarily as the Word of God, the final authority in spiritual matters. This admonition was typical for one of Davies' sermons and demonstrated his straightforward biblocentric orthodoxy: "If you are anxious and perplexed, I need only point you to my text for relief."<sup>178</sup>

Davies' sermons were Christo-centric, emphasizing Christ's atonement in light of man's utterly corrupted position. He preached the doctrine of total depravity and described a soul "dead in trespasses and sin," unable to respond to grace apart from God's sovereign quickening. "You did not breath and pant like a living soul after God

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<sup>175</sup> Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 73, 76,77.

<sup>176</sup> For example, "On the Defeat of General Braddock, going to Fort Duquesne," Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 307.

<sup>177</sup> Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 148.

<sup>178</sup> Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 28.



and holiness; you had little more sense of the burden of sin than a corpse of the pressure of the mountain . . . .”<sup>179</sup> In Davies’ narrative of salvation, awakening came from God’s sovereign work. “When all these applications had been unsuccessful, the all quickening Spirit of God had determined to exert more of his energy and work more effectually upon you.”<sup>180</sup> Despite an emphasis on patriotism and civic duty, Davies always brought his sermons back to Christ’s atonement.<sup>181</sup> Even his most practical and political sermons were tinged with an awakening appeal to the religion of the heart. For example, in a political sermon delivered to independent volunteers he exhorted, “Then away to Jesus, away to Jesus, ye whose consciences are loaded with guilt . . . fly to Jesus on the wings of faith.”<sup>182</sup> This is just one example of many where Davies directed his audience back to Christ as the merciful sovereign directing worldly affairs and bringing salvation to men.<sup>183</sup>

Henry’s life demonstrated a similar commitment to scriptural authority, a distrust of human nature, and a stress on the significance of Christ’s atonement, all suggestive of Davies’ influence. Henry was biblocentric in his private and public life. He personally ascribed to the authority of Scripture. He testified to a friend his regard for the Bible, “That book is worth all the books that ever were printed . . . .”<sup>184</sup> This statement expressed more than common cultural respect for the Bible. Henry’s life of active piety and submission to the Church indicated his belief in scriptural authority. He began every

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<sup>179</sup> Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 195.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>181</sup> Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 3, 319, 103, 163.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 103.

<sup>183</sup> Davies, *Sermons*, vol. 1, 111, 125, 153, 237, 621, 644.

<sup>184</sup> “Charles Dabney’s Memorandum to William Wirt (1805),” Charles Dabney, James Elson ed., *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 224.

morning with the Scriptures and spent an hour in prayer and Bible study every night.<sup>185</sup> Henry also employed the Bible frequently in his public speeches. Randolph confirmed this experiential, illustrative use of Scripture. “His figures of speech, when borrowed, were often borrowed from the Scriptures.”<sup>186</sup> One of Henry’s most famous sayings from his ‘Liberty or Death’ speech came directly from Jeremiah 6:14, “Gentlemen may cry peace, peace—but there is no peace.”<sup>187</sup> Henry used Scripture both authoritatively and illustratively pointing to a context of belief at least partially shaped by Presbyterian influences.

His view of man’s depraved nature aligned with Davies’ formulation. “Man is a fallen creature, a fallible being, and cannot be depended on without self-love.”<sup>188</sup> This realization became a key motivating factor for Henry’s political principles. Flowing out of this conviction, Henry’s Christ-centered orthodoxy was also reminiscent of Davies’ core beliefs. In a letter to his daughter he wrote that being a Christian is “a character I prize far above all this world has or can boast.”<sup>189</sup> Though many non-orthodox Founders used similar language in public, Henry’s lifelong piety and devotion to the Church invests this statement with a more concrete meaning.

Henry turned to Christ in times of trial. Upon the loss of a dear brother-in-law, Henry wrote a letter of passionate grief to his bereaved sister:

My heart is full—perhaps I may never see you in this world—oh, may we meet in that heaven to which the merits of Jesus will carry those who love and serve him. Heaven will, I trust, give you its choicest comforts and preserve your family. Such

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<sup>185</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 519-520.; “Fontaine Manuscript,” 5.

<sup>186</sup> Randolph, *History of Virginia*, 180.

<sup>187</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 76; Cohen, “The ‘Liberty or Death’ Speech: A Note on Religion and Revolutionary Rhetoric,” 706-707.

<sup>188</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 388.

<sup>189</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2., 570.

is the prayer of him who thinks it his honor and pride to be your affectionate brother . . . .<sup>190</sup>

Henry turned to Christ in his hour of death. His widow described his death scene to their daughter Elizabeth Aylett. “But oh that I may be enabled to imitate the virtues of your Dr. and Hond, Father; and that my latter end may be like his—He met death with firmness, and in full confidence that through the merrits of a Bleeding Saviour that his sins would be pardoned.”<sup>191</sup> In his will Henry authoritatively testified to the value of Christianity. “This is all the inheritance I can give to my dear family. The religion of Christ can give them one which will make them rich indeed.”<sup>192</sup> Henry was more than a mere cultural Christian. He lived in the reality of Christ’s death and resurrection, desiring that lifestyle for his children as well.

Patrick Henry’s contextual experiences with specific strains of Presbyterianism and Anglicanism were remarkably cooperative. They mutually reinforced a respect for lawful earthly authority, which manifested itself in support for the institutional church and in a willing submission to legitimate state power. Hanover Presbyterians and Anglican Latitudinarians both upheld scriptural revelation and the institutional church as the basic determiners of truth. They undercut the absolute authority of individual judgment, whether based on reason or on a mystical inner inspiration. Henry was not isolated from Enlightenment ideas. He even used aspects of the Scottish Common Sense Enlightenment as political and apologetic tools. Yet his experiences with the moderate Scottish Enlightenment were mediated through institutional churches which were not

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<sup>190</sup> Patrick Henry to Anne Henry Christian, Richmond, May 15, 1786, *Ibid.*, 287.

<sup>191</sup> Dorothea Dandridge Henry to Elizabeth Aylett, King William, June, 1799, in “Two Unpublished Henry Letters,” Hugh Buckner Johnston, ed. *William and Mary Quarterly* 21, no. 1 (Jan, 1941): 33-34. The original letter is owned by the Patrick Henry Memorial Foundation and is on display at their museum “Red Hill” in Brookneal, Virginia.

<sup>192</sup> Elson, *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 221.

enthusiastic proponents of the new philosophy. Moreover his own practical personality inclined him away from an active interest in philosophical theories. Tillotson, Sherlock, and Butler contributed a concern for the spiritual over the temporal to Henry's religious context. This translated into an emphasis on practical piety and a suspicion of idealistic utopian schemes. Davies' helped balance this otherworldly perspective with a concern for the Christian's earthly responsibilities. He provided an impetus for political activity by linking patriotism and piety and providing a model of Christian citizenship. Davies' more heart focused religion that stressed the atonement of Christ added a stabilizing orthodoxy and evangelical flavor to Henry's Anglican background. The Latitudinarian divines and Reverend Davies both evidenced a distrust of human nature—providing context for a central component of Henry's political philosophy.

### **Chapter 3: Religious Context Applied to Political Action**

Patrick Henry was politically active for most of his adult life. As Governor and an Assemblyman he performed many tedious political tasks which kept Virginia stable in the first perilous years of independent statehood. But he participated in four political issues which would be defining for Virginia as a state in the new American Union. These issues included the push for independence during the Revolutionary War, an attempt to secure a general establishment of religion for Virginia, a fight against the Constitution as a leading Anti-Federalist, and finally a public stand against the Virginia Resolutions. These issues all had lasting effects on Virginia and on America as a whole. An examination of Henry's role in each with reference to his religious context further suggests a harmonized, integrated belief system. It also reveals valuable lessons about the intellectual and religious currents shaping American liberty at its inception.

#### **Push for Independence**

Many of Henry's contemporaries considered him among the first and most influential to push for American liberty, particularly in his bold Stamp Act Resolutions. Edmund Randolph in his *History of Virginia* wrote, "On May 29, 1765, Mr. Henry plucked the veil from the shrine of parliamentary omnipotence."<sup>1</sup> John Adams called him the "author of the first Virginia resolutions against the Stamp Act, who will have the glory with posterity of beginning and concluding this great revolution."<sup>2</sup> Even Thomas Jefferson, Henry's political enemy, classed him as "primi inter pares"—"the first among

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<sup>1</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 100.

<sup>2</sup> John Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 9 (Boston: Little, Brown, and Rowman, 1854), 386.

equals”—in the initial struggle for liberty.<sup>3</sup> Common perception credits Henry with stirring up the people to active opposition against England with his impassioned speeches, contributing to his popular reputation as a radical revolutionary demagogue.<sup>4</sup> But what was Henry’s rationale behind his support for independence? An examination of Henry’s motive and justification for revolution that takes into account his religious context reveals an emphasis on vigorous practical action flowing from surprisingly moderate impulses.

At least part of Henry’s popular image is true. He firmly advocated direct action against Britain well before most of his contemporaries accepted the inevitability of American independence. He did so in impassioned language reminiscent of an Awakening preacher. Edmund Randolph testified that Henry’s enthusiasm for liberty “was nourished by his partiality for the dissenters from the Established Church.” Randolph even drew a connection between Henry’s political rhetoric and the Presbyterian sermons he sat under. “From a repetition of his sympathy with the history of their sufferings . . . he transferred into civil discussions many of the bold licenses which prevailed in the religious . . . .”<sup>5</sup> This makes sense given Henry’s religious context. Samuel Davies’ recruitment sermons for the French and Indian War served as excellent rhetorical examples of a call to patriotic action. Indeed, Henry’s famous ‘Liberty or Death’ speech bears striking similarities to Davies’ well known sermon “The Curse of

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<sup>3</sup> Jefferson, Thomas, “A Memorandum by Thomas Jefferson,” *Historical Magazine*, vol. 2 (August, 1867): 91.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Ellis, *Founding Brothers: The Revolutionary Generation* (New York: Random House Inc., 2002), 52-53; Paul Johnson, *A History of the American People* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 148.

<sup>5</sup> Edmund Randolph, *History of Virginia*, 178.

Cowardice” delivered for the purpose of raising a militia company for Captain Samuel Meredith, Patrick Henry’s friend and brother-in-law.<sup>6</sup>

Although surely not discounting less spiritual, more practical considerations, evidence suggests that at least part of Henry’s motivation for early political involvement in the Revolution came from a conviction of his duty as a Christian citizen. Henry consistently framed his support of the Revolution in terms similar to Davies’ call to patriotic piety. In 1795 reflecting on his part in the Revolution to Henry Lee, Henry wrote,

The American Revolution was the grand operation, which seemed to be assigned by the deity to the men of this age in our country, over and above the common duties of life. I ever prized at a high rate the superior privilege of being one in that chosen age, to which providence entrusted its favorite work . . . .<sup>7</sup>

Henry frequently used the concept of patriotic piety and Christian duty as a way to motivate his audience to action. For example, in 1775 after Lord Dunmore confiscated Virginia gunpowder, Henry gathered a band of militia volunteers from Hanover County to either retrieve the gunpowder or receive payment. He motivated his volunteers with a speech comparing them to the Israelites, a “chosen people,” who must demonstrate the glory of God’s powerful redemption through their opposition to tyranny.<sup>8</sup> Likewise, in his most famous ‘Liberty or Death’ speech, Henry again asserted the Christian responsibility to engage in the conflict owed both to God and man. After apologizing for his heated words he said,

. . . It was only in this way that they could hope to arrive at truth, and fulfil the great responsibility which they held to God and their country. Should he keep back his opinions at such a time . . . he should consider himself guilty of treason

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<sup>6</sup> Larson, *Prologue to Revolution*, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Henry to Governor Henry Lee, Red Hill, June 27, 1795, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2, 550-552.

<sup>8</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 280-281.

towards his country, and of an act of disloyalty toward the majesty of Heaven, which he revered above all earthly kings.<sup>9</sup>

Evidence suggests that Henry's early 'radical' support of American independence was at least partly motivated by a conviction of Christian citizenship and patriotic piety.

Despite his fiery rhetoric, Henry's justification for a war with England surprisingly demonstrated moderate political principles. These political themes corresponded well with Henry's Anglican background, particularly the divines' emphasis on respect for lawful authority. Henry's later commentary on the Revolutionary War during the ratification debates provides a helpful supplemental source for his political convictions. He made it clear in these debates that he considered the Revolutionary War a return to the traditional form of British government corrupted by arbitrary laws and tyrannical ministers. Henry consistently objected that the new Constitution departed from the historical form of government inherited from Great Britain.<sup>10</sup> As he tersely put it, "There is not an English feature in it."<sup>11</sup> This implies that Henry considered the American Revolution to be, not the creation of a new system, but the return to an old that preceded the current British corruption. He described the actions of the British government leading up to the war as "radical."<sup>12</sup> The British government had introduced innovations beyond its jurisdiction which threatened to subvert the rule of law in the colonies.

This justification for American Independence was similar to the Country Ideology formulation ubiquitous in the colonies. Like his peers, Henry was undoubtedly influenced by Country Ideology and Opposition language. He considered himself a "Whiggish

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 262.

<sup>10</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 164-165, 325, 388.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 170.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 44.



American.”<sup>13</sup> His library contained a work by Lord Bolingbroke and a collection of writings by Trenchard and Gordon.<sup>14</sup> But unlike some of his contemporaries, Henry’s interest in Country Ideology flowed more naturally from a religious context of traditional, Latitudinarian Anglicanism. Henry often used the same political language and formulations as his peers. For example, his descriptions of British tyranny sounded like those voiced by Thomas Jefferson in the Declaration of Independence.<sup>15</sup> But Henry brought a very different religious context to his understanding of Country Ideology than someone like Thomas Jefferson or John Adams, influencing his application of this political theory in later life. This further demonstrates the consistency between Henry’s religious context and political convictions. It also suggests the possibility of considerable ideological complexity within Whig Opposition thought.

A brief examination of the works in his library connected to Country Ideology demonstrates a cohesiveness with Henry’s religious background. Bolingbroke’s *Letters on the Spirit of Patriotism* emphasized the responsibility of a man to promote liberty in his country. This was a central theme in Country Ideology which must have resonated with Henry considering his Presbyterian religious background emphasizing patriotic

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<sup>13</sup> Patrick Henry to Richard Henry Lee, Richmond, November 15, 1788, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2., 430. Country Ideology encompassed both Whigs and Tories. Lord Bolingbroke is an example of a Country Tory who was influential in convincing other Tories to join with Whigs in unified opposition to court corruption. However, some of the most influential proponents of Country Ideology in the colonies were radical Whigs or Commonwealthmen like John Trenchard or Thomas Gordon. It was natural for an American influenced by Country Ideology to identify himself as a Whig. For an excellent history of British political parties and ideologies in the eighteenth century see H. T. Dickinson’s *Liberty and Property: Political Ideology in Eighteenth Century Britain* (New York: Holmes and Meier Publishers, 1977).

<sup>14</sup> Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 114, 131. For a history of the transmission of Whig Country Ideology to American political thought see Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992).

<sup>15</sup> Compare Henry’s ‘Liberty or Death’ speech to the Declaration of Independence, specifically where he describes the colonies’ repeated attempts to legally redress wrongs and reconcile with Britain. Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 1, 263-264.

piety.<sup>16</sup> Even more suggestive, Henry did not own the classic Country Whig political treatise by Trenchard and Gordon, *Cato's Letters*. Rather, he owned *The Independent Whig*, a collection of essays dealing primarily with religion. Although it certainly had political themes, this collection analyzed the religious situation in England in the early eighteenth century. In contrast to Country Tories like Bolingbroke, Trenchard and Gordon attacked the dogmatism and popish tendencies of the high-church clergy.<sup>17</sup> They argued for religious toleration and political policies which would severely weaken the monopoly of the Established Church.<sup>18</sup> Although more radical than that held by the seventeenth century Latitudinarians, the positions of the Latitude-men and these pamphleteers coincided in their general goal. They both sought a comprehensive civil establishment of Protestantism. Trenchard was a veteran of the pamphlet wars surrounding the Glorious Revolution and certainly cooperated with the low-church Latitude-men to justify the overthrow of James II.<sup>19</sup> It is no surprise then that he shared with them a similar position on church and state.<sup>20</sup> Given Henry's interest in Latitudinarian thought, it should also come as no surprise that he was sympathetic to a Country political theory. The historical context of these political theorists coordinated well with Henry's religious background. His interest in the religious side of Country

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<sup>16</sup> Hayes, *Mind of a Patriot*, 74; Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 103, 110.

<sup>17</sup> "Reasons Why the High Church Are the Most Wicked of All Men," Trenchard and Gordon, *The Independent Whig: Or, A Defense of Primitive Christianity and of Our Ecclesiastical Establishment, Against the Exorbitant Claims and Encroachments of Fanatical and Disaffected Clergymen*, 2 vols. (Hartford: William S. Marsh, 1816), 1:48-50; Dickinson points this out as a key distinction between Country Tories and Country Whigs. Country Tories supported a strong high-church Anglican establishment in opposition to the more general, comprehensive, Protestant establishment supported by Country Whigs. See Dickinson, *Liberty and Property*, 167.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, "Dedication", 1:iii-iv; "Mutual Bitterness and Persecution Amongst Christians, How Repugnant To the Gospel, and How Shocking to the Rational Pagan," 2:36-39.

<sup>19</sup> Bailyn, *Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*, 35.

<sup>20</sup> Henry shared a similar view of church and state, urging toleration for all Christian sects while maintaining a place for state supported religion.

Ideology as well as the political suggests a cohesiveness between his own religious and political thought.

Henry's theory of resistance to tyranny influenced by Country Ideology was fairly consistent throughout his career. In 1763 he demonstrated the basics of this distinctive political theory as a young lawyer in the Parson's Cause. In this case he argued against the Anglican clergy's appeals to the Crown to overthrow a statute regulating clergy salaries enacted by the Virginia General Assembly. In language indicative of his youthful zeal, Henry strongly asserted that the Crown and Council had no authority to overthrow legitimate laws enacted by the General Assembly.

. . . The disallowance by the King of this salutary act was an instance of misrule, and neglect of the interests of the colony . . . and that by this conduct the King, from being the father of his people, had degenerated into a tyrant, and forfeited all right to his subject's obedience to his order regarding it . . . .<sup>21</sup>

Henry would maintain these political principles leading up to the Revolutionary War. He asserted the same basic position during his speech against the Stamp Acts in 1765.

Henry's actual response to what he considered ministerial tyranny was more moderate in practice than what he expressed in this stirring speech. It took a decade of British abuses of power before Henry would seriously advocate Virginia independence.

In a proposed resolution for Virginia Independence from Britain in the Spring of 1776, Henry outlined a catalogue of what he considered arbitrary and unlawful innovations:

. . . the parliament of G. B. . . . have lately passed an act approving of the ravages that have been committed upon our coasts, and obliging the unhappy men who shall be made captives to bear arms against their families, kindred, friends, and country; and after being plundered themselves, to become accomplices in plundering their brethren, a compulsion not practiced on prisoners of war except

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<sup>21</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 40.

among pirates, the outlaws and enemies of human society. . . they are not only making every preparation to crush us, which the internal strength of the nation and its alliances with foreign powers afford them, but are using every art to draw the savage Indians upon our frontiers, and are even encouraging insurrection among our slaves, many of whom are now actually in arms against us. . . .<sup>22</sup>

He compared the government of Great Britain to pirates operating outside of law.

Concurrent with a Latitudinarian religious context and Whig political philosophy, Henry found that a respect for lawful authority compelled him to oppose an arbitrary use of it.

He goes on in his resolution to state this very concept.

. . . the King of G. B. by a long series of oppressive acts has proved himself the tyrant instead of the protector of his people. We, the representatives of the colony of Virginia do declare, that we hold ourselves absolved of our allegiance to the crown of G. B. and obliged by the eternal laws . . . to pursue such measures as may conduce to the good and happiness of the united colonies . . . .<sup>23</sup>

Henry resorted to political revolution only as a last resort. In his call to arms in 1775 he argued that war was the only option left open to Virginians who had exhausted legal redress of wrongs for over ten years.

Sir, we have done everything that could be done, to avert the storm which is now coming on. We have petitioned—we have remonstrated—we have supplicated—we have prostrated ourselves before the throne, and have implored its interposition to arrest the tyrannical hands of the ministry and parliament. Our petitions have been slighted; our remonstrances have produced additional violence and insult; our supplications have been disregarded; and we have been spurned, with contempt, from the foot of the throne. In vain, after these things, may we indulge the fond hope of peace and reconciliation . . . an appeal to arms and to the God of Hosts, is all that is left us!<sup>24</sup>

Henry's commitment to legitimate authority eventually led him to oppose the government he revered more than any other in the world.<sup>25</sup> In an effort to preserve eternal law, he willingly transgressed the laws of men. Moreover, he saw this as a moral duty

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 394-395.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 263-264.

<sup>25</sup> Eliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 325, 164.

owed both to God and to his country. His obvious sense of Christian responsibility was reminiscent of Samuel Davies' patriotic piety. And, although Henry was among the first of his peers to advocate open war with Britain, he did so only after he was personally satisfied that all other options had been exhausted. Indeed, during the ten-year interim between the Stamp Act and Henry's call to arms in 1775, he was actively pursuing those legal means of redress. In light of Henry's own assertions and religious context, the stereotype of radical demagogue gives way to reveal a careful moderate committed to upholding law.

### **General Establishment of Religion**

Henry's motive for involvement in the Revolutionary War and his justification for independence demonstrate the beginnings of a cohesive political and religious perspective. A similar examination of his later political conflicts confirms this essential unity between religious context and political principles. Henry's involvement in a scheme promoting a general establishment of religion in post-Revolutionary Virginia is especially helpful in bringing out this connection. The very nature of the issue necessitates a historical method which utilizes both a political and religious perspective.

This episode also demonstrates the uniqueness of Henry's harmonized worldview. It brought him into direct conflict with James Madison—a man with an outwardly similar religious background but a very different religious orientation. Both Madison and Henry grew up in the Anglican Church. Patrick Henry's father and James Madison Sr. were

each vestrymen in their local congregations.<sup>26</sup> They both reacted positively to strong Presbyterian influences during their formative years without becoming full members of that denomination. Yet they consistently found themselves on opposite sides of major political issues. In fact, the Revolutionary War was one of the few causes these men pursued in unity. Their post-Revolutionary careers were marked by intense political clashes over disestablishment, the ratification of the Constitution, and the Virginia Resolutions.

While each man experienced similar religious beginnings, Henry and Madison resolved their similar underlying religious tensions into unique worldviews. A closer examination reveals that Madison and Henry had very different concrete experiences with their inherited Anglican traditions. They also participated in two distinct strains of Presbyterian thought which must be carefully distinguished from each other. An examination of the specific content of belief and contextual experiences informing Madison's worldview provides a helpful comparison with Henry's perspective. Their unique belief systems become even more apparent when applied to the issue of a general establishment of religion.

This comparison has further relevance for the broader historical issue of religious liberty in Virginia. In 1786 The Virginia Bill for Religious Liberty passed into law, setting a precedent for separation of church and state in America. It passed after years of tedious debate over a proposed general establishment of religion through a tax assessment for the support of Christianity. This significant historical episode is remarkable for its historiographic uniformity. Historians from the 1850's to the 1990's have reviewed this

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<sup>26</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 8; Madison, James, Merrill D. Peterson ed., *James Madison, A Biography in His Own Words* (New York: Newsweek, 1974), 15.

event as a panegyric on the triumph of liberty and free worship.<sup>27</sup> Whiggish history is a scintillating temptation for any historian, particularly when the outcome of the event so closely aligns with universally lauded modern ideals of democracy and freedom. Yet in presenting the debates over general assessment as an inevitable march toward freedom, historians have missed an opportunity to analyze significant trends of change in colonial Virginia. They also have ignored the inherent religiosity of this issue, viewing it almost primarily as a political progression.

The defeat of the general assessment scheme signified a major break from the historical and theological traditions of almost every denomination involved in the debates.<sup>28</sup> The Separate Baptists were the only sect who pursued complete separation of church and state with any historical consistency. Historians have not focused enough on the reasons for this shift. What made Presbyterians and Anglicans abandon their long history of state supported religion? This radical break suggests important changes in the religious and intellectual currents of colonial Virginia.

The unique worldviews of Madison and Henry contribute to a more complete understanding of these religious changes because they were largely representative of the two sides in the issue. They were publicly recognized as the figureheads for each side.<sup>29</sup> Moreover, they shared a similar religious background not only with each other but with

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<sup>27</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia, Historical and Biographical*, 1; Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism in Colonial and Revolutionary Times*, 7; Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia: 1740-1790*, 10; John Ragosta, "Fighting for Freedom: Virginia Dissenters' Struggle for Religious Liberty During the American Revolution," *Virginia Magazine of History and Biography* 116, Issue 3 (2008): 226-261; Merrill Peterson and Robert Vaughan ed., *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Douglas Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, 10-12; James Hutson, *Church and State in America: The First Two Centuries* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 130.

<sup>29</sup> Irving Brant, "Madison: On the Separation of Church and State," *William and Mary Quarterly*, third series, 8, no.1 (Jan. 1951): 8; Johnson, *Virginia Presbyterianism and Religious Liberty*, 80, 105; Joseph Jones to James Monroe, Richmond, 13 November, 1784, *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 2, 132-133.

many participants in the debates. An examination of Madison's unique religious context and a comparison of how both Henry and Madison applied their distinct worldviews to the issue of disestablishment suggests relevant, if tentative, conclusions about the religious and intellectual trends moving in post-colonial Virginia.

Previous examinations of Henry's religious context revealed a tendency toward a respect for the lawful authority of the institutional church and state, as well as a firm distrust of human nature. In contrast, Madison's early contacts both with Anglicanism and Presbyterianism pushed him toward a general anti-clericalism and a confidence in individual judgment. Madison's father was a vestryman in the local Anglican Church.<sup>30</sup> Yet the Madison family was only nominally Anglican, not noted for zealotry in orthodoxy or support of the established church.<sup>31</sup> Although he grew up attending Anglican services, James Madison never became a member of any institutional church and is not known to have participated in communion.<sup>32</sup> Unlike Henry, he was not trained by zealous Anglicans, but by dissenting Presbyterians straight from the College of New Jersey.<sup>33</sup> And unlike Henry, Madison's early experiences with Anglicanism were primarily negative. Madison was coming of age in the Virginia Piedmont in the 1760's. This decade marked a drastic and violent increase in Anglican persecution of Baptist ministers and congregants.<sup>34</sup> This left a deep negative impression on the young Madison. More than one biographer suggests it was a motivating factor for both his choice of the

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<sup>30</sup> Peterson, *James Madison, A Biography in His Own Words*, 16.

<sup>31</sup> Ralph Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1971, 1990), 24.

<sup>32</sup> Lance Banning, "James Madison, The Statute for Religious Freedom, and the Crisis of Republican Convictions," in *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, 109.

<sup>33</sup> Peterson, *James Madison: A Biography in His Own Words*, 16.

<sup>34</sup> Isaac, *Transformation of Virginia*, 162-163.



Presbyterian College of New Jersey, over the Anglican William and Mary.<sup>35</sup> In a letter to a friend in 1774, Madison summed up his long-standing valuation of the Anglican Church in Virginia: “Pride Ignorance and Knavery among the Priesthood and Vice and Wickedness among the laity.”<sup>36</sup>

This early distaste for the established church only increased as Madison immersed himself in Presbyterianism at the College of New Jersey. As with Henry, the specific type of Presbyterianism influencing Madison is essential to understanding his developing worldview. Although both Henry and Madison grew up in the Piedmont region, there is little evidence that Madison’s family interacted with the moderate Presbyterian groups founded by Samuel Davies. One of Madison’s first significant Presbyterian contacts came in 1767 through his tutor, Thomas Martin, a recent graduate of the College of New Jersey.<sup>37</sup> No doubt influenced by Martin, Madison attended the College of New Jersey from 1769 to 1771 under the direct tutelage of John Witherspoon. Witherspoon represented a very different strain of Presbyterianism from the Hanoverians in the 1740’s and 1750’s.

The College of New Jersey was founded in 1746 as a training college for prospective New Light Presbyterian ministers. Early faculty members participated in the New Light Awakening, but the college always tended toward a moderate stance.<sup>38</sup> For example, although both served only briefly as presidents, Samuel Davies and Jonathan

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<sup>35</sup> Banning, “James Madison, The Statute for Religious Freedom, and the Crisis of Republican Convictions,” 110; Brant, “Madison: On the Separation of Church and State,” 4. Another factor was certainly the influence of his tutor Thomas Martin, a graduate of the College of New Jersey. Madison’s father was impressed by Martin and his enthusiastic recommendation of his alma mater. Mary-Elaine Swanson “James Madison and the Presbyterian Idea of Man and Government,” in *Religion and Political Culture*, ed. Sheldon and Dreisbach, 121.

<sup>36</sup> Madison to Bradford, Jan. 24, 1774, in Peterson, *James Madison: A Biography in His Own Words*, 29.

<sup>37</sup> Peterson, *James Madison: A Biography in His Own Words*, 16.

<sup>38</sup> Frances Broderick, “Pulpit, Physics, and Politics: The Curriculum of the College of New Jersey, 1746-1794,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 6, no. 1 (Jan. 1949): 43.

Edwards both were considered moderate Awakening ministers and emphasized high moral and academic standards over New Light enthusiasm.<sup>39</sup> But the college became increasingly secularized with each new administration.<sup>40</sup> By the 1760's it was headed decisively down a path of secularization, emphasizing philosophy and science as much as theology and preaching. For example, a promotional engraving in 1760 depicted a sunbeam shining down not on the Bible or the Westminster Confession, but on various tools of knowledge and science.<sup>41</sup> This indicates a subtle yet significant shift in focus and motivation. The College of New Jersey in no way intended to depart from its orthodox roots. It was not overtly influenced by liberal theology as other American schools like Yale and Harvard.<sup>42</sup> Yet its consistent stress on philosophy and science as legitimate, independent means to truth began to color its fundamental assumptions in all areas.

This trend accelerated in 1768 as Dr. John Witherspoon came from Scotland to serve as the new President of the college. During his presidency from 1768-1794, the College of New Jersey became the central institution of the Scottish Enlightenment in America.<sup>43</sup> As the only full professor on campus in 1769, Witherspoon had a direct shaping influence on James Madison.<sup>44</sup> His lectures on Moral Philosophy became the main text for most classes.<sup>45</sup> Witherspoon and Madison remained close friends and political allies throughout their respective careers. Evidence suggests that Witherspoon's

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 55.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid., 57.

<sup>42</sup> See J. David Hoeveler's intellectual comparison of American colonial colleges in *Creating the American Mind: Intellect and Politics in the Colonial Colleges* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2002).

<sup>43</sup> Broderick, "Pulpit, Physics, and Politics," 59; Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic," 151-152.

<sup>44</sup> Dennis Thompson, "Bibliography: The Education of a Founding Father, The Reading List for John Witherspoon's Course in Political Theory, as Taken by James Madison," *Political Theory* 4, no. 4 (November 1976): 523.

<sup>45</sup> Broderick, "Pulpit, Physics, and Politics," 62.

recommended reading lists continued to guide Madison's library purchases and reading habits well after his time at the College of New Jersey.<sup>46</sup> The particular intellectual and religious orientation of John Witherspoon is vitally important for understanding James Madison's worldview.<sup>47</sup> Although concrete historical evidences of an intellectual influence are difficult to produce for any individual, the conceptual similarities between Witherspoon's and Madison's worldviews are unmistakable.<sup>48</sup> A review of Witherspoon's lectures and writings demonstrates an emphasis on reason and human ability which implicitly undermined the exclusive authority of Scripture and the institutional church.

Witherspoon was a devout and orthodox Calvinist Presbyterian. Yet he seemed not to have understood the implications of the Enlightenment ideas he lived and taught.<sup>49</sup> He took his degree at the University of Edinburgh, the center of the Scottish Enlightenment.<sup>50</sup> As a young pastor Witherspoon was concerned about the liberal theology of the Moderates in the Scottish Kirk.<sup>51</sup> He emerged as a leader in the Evangelical party and engaged in written confrontations with Moderate leaders, men like Francis Hutcheson and William Robertson—all significant contributors to the developing philosophy of Common Sense Realism.<sup>52</sup> Similar to other theologically conservative

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<sup>46</sup> Thompson, "Bibliography," 524.

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 5; Garrett Ward Sheldon, *The Political Philosophy of James Madison* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>48</sup> Sheldon, 13, 14.

<sup>49</sup> Broderick, "Pulpit, Physics, and Politics," 68.

<sup>50</sup> Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 2; Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 23.

<sup>51</sup> "Moderates" in this sense denotes a group of men in the Presbyterian Church in Scotland with specific theological leanings towards liberalism, as opposed to 'Evangelicals.' See Ahlstrom, "The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology," *Church History* 24, No. 3 (Sept. 1955): 258; Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Morrison, *John Witherspoon and the Founding of the American Republic*, 49; John Witherspoon, Thomas Miller ed., "Lectures on Moral Philosophy," *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon* (Chicago: Southern Illinois University Press, 1990), 12; Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 23.

Evangelicals, while rejecting the heterodox theology of the Moderates, Witherspoon adopted their philosophy without serious alteration.<sup>53</sup> He never departed from a belief that true philosophy would coincide perfectly with the teachings of Scripture. Yet he sharply divided truths learned by philosophy and those learned from Scripture.<sup>54</sup> For example, Witherspoon began his lectures with a definition of moral philosophy. “It is called philosophy, because it is an inquiry into the nature and grounds of moral obligation by reason, as distinct from revelation.”<sup>55</sup> He implied that through reason and ‘moral sense’ man could come to the truths of revelation apart from God’s gracious testimony in Scripture.<sup>56</sup> He sought to demonstrate the truths of revelation through reason and science instead of making revelation foundational to those pursuits.<sup>57</sup> Whether consciously aware or not, this method practically undermined the necessity of Scripture for both epistemology and ethics.

Witherspoon also at times seemed to question the sufficiency of Scripture. In his opening lecture on moral philosophy he said, “I am of the opinion that the whole Scripture is perfectly agreeable to sound philosophy, yet it was never intended to teach us everything.”<sup>58</sup> As an example of this he noted that the political law of the Old Testament

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<sup>53</sup> Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, 119; Noll, *Princeton and the Republic*, 40.

<sup>54</sup> Noll, “The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic,” 157.

<sup>55</sup> Witherspoon, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” in *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, 152.

<sup>56</sup> ‘Moral Sense’ was a concept first explained by Francis Hutcheson and was a foundational idea for the Scottish Common Sense Enlightenment. He argued that every man had an inherent ‘moral sense’ which reliably informed him of the knowledge of good and evil, completely independent of God’s Holy Spirit or special revelation. See Ahlstrom, “The Scottish Philosophy and American Theology,” 260.

<sup>57</sup> Noll, “The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic,” 157-158.

<sup>58</sup> Witherspoon, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, 153. A traditional Reformed Presbyterian would agree with Witherspoon in part. No one would use the Scriptures as a foundational scientific textbook. However, in this context Witherspoon asserted that the Scriptures do not teach the Christian everything about philosophy and ethics. Philosophy is concerned with the fundamental questions of human life and the world. A disconnect between this knowledge and scriptural knowledge would not be endorsed by a traditional Reformed Presbyterian. Chapter 1, section 6 of the Westminster Confession reads, “The whole counsel of God concerning all things necessary for His own

“was so local and peculiar that certainly it was never intended to be immutable and universal.”<sup>59</sup> In this blithe statement, Witherspoon denigrated the significance and authority of most of the Old Testament—a radical departure from traditional Presbyterianism. Witherspoon believed theoretically in a traditionally orthodox view of Scripture, ascribing to its necessity and sufficiency. Yet, the importance he placed on philosophy and the specific content of his philosophy tended to weaken the authority of Scripture.

This contradiction is also apparent in Witherspoon’s view of human nature. He theoretically believed in an Augustinian anthropology endorsing a fallen man so tainted by original sin that he could not be virtuous without God’s special grace. Yet he practically denied the absolutely corrupting effects of original sin, teaching that education and reason could make men virtuous because of a benevolent ‘moral sense’ within each individual.<sup>60</sup>

From reason, contemplation, sentiment, and tradition, the Being and infinite perfection and excellence of God may be deduced . . . The result of the whole is that we ought to take the rule of duty from conscience enlightened by reason, experience, and every way . . . .<sup>61</sup>

This implies a confidence in human nature apart from grace. Augustine and his theological heirs would surely have rejected this notion as a departure from scriptural orthodoxy. Yet Witherspoon saw no contradiction between this philosophical orientation and his theological commitments.

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glory, man’s salvation, faith, and life, is either expressly set down in Scripture, or by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture: unto which nothing at any time is to be added, whether by new revelations of the Spirit, or traditions of men.” Philosophy and ethics certainly concerns issues relating to God’s “own glory” and “man’s salvation . . . and life.” *Westminster Confession of Faith*, original 1646; reprinted (Glasgow: Free Presbyterian Publications, 2001), 22.

<sup>59</sup> Witherspoon, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, 153.

<sup>60</sup> Noll, “The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic,” 151, 155.

<sup>61</sup> Witherspoon, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, 167-168.

Witherspoon's implicit confidence in human nature and undermining of scriptural authority made him sympathetic toward those questioning existing authority structures, whether state or ecclesiastical. While it would be an exaggeration to label Witherspoon anti-clerical, his philosophical presuppositions implied the legitimacy of such a position. He even styled himself "an opposer of lordly domination and sacerdotal tyranny."<sup>62</sup> This no doubt appealed to a young Madison, already disillusioned with the institutional church. Like Henry, Madison's specific Anglican and Presbyterian experiences combined to form a harmonized, consistent worldview. But instead of inclining him toward the institutional church as a foundational authority in society, these early influences mutually reinforced a practical anti-clericalism in Madison. The subtle confidence in human reason and virtue he inherited from Witherspoon translated into a corresponding willingness to overthrow institutional authority.

In all fairness to Witherspoon, he was more obviously evangelical than even the seventeenth century Latitudinarians influencing Henry, let alone the later rational Anglicans like Clarke, Blair, and Jenyns. Tillotson and Sherlock would agree with Witherspoon in asserting the reasonableness of Christianity as well as its connection to natural religion and human experience. Yet for all his evangelical orthodoxy, Witherspoon's belief system contained a dangerous orientation toward philosophy as an end in itself. Seventeenth century Latitudinarians interacted with reason and philosophy with the specific purpose of combating fideism and atheistic speculation. Even their less orthodox heirs applied common sense, reason, and experience as a tool against atheism. Witherspoon seemed interested in moral philosophy not primarily as a means of supporting scriptural revelation, but as a separate path to truth.

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<sup>62</sup> Broderick, "Pulpit, Physics, and Politics," 64.

This is apparent in the orientations of Henry and Madison as well. The books in Henry's library employing moderate Enlightenment methods had the specific purpose of combating atheism and defending orthodoxy.<sup>63</sup> Madison displayed an interest in philosophy throughout his life that was much more abstract and speculative. Lacking Witherspoon's explicit commitment to theological orthodoxy, Madison resolved his belief system towards the Enlightenment and away from traditional Christianity. Henry and Madison's outwardly similar backgrounds belied fundamental religious commitments that oriented their belief systems in nearly opposite directions. An excellent example is found in the application of these distinct worldviews during the general assessment debates in 1784.

Madison and Henry both hated the oppressive persecution of dissenting sects by the established church. Henry, like Madison, was also a resident of the Piedmont in the 1760's, and witnessed with concern the struggles of the Baptists. In the late 1760's and early 1770's Henry defended Baptist ministers brought up on charges for preaching without a license. Henry and Madison both compared Virginia unfavorably to the North on the subject of religious liberty.<sup>64</sup> Madison and Henry cooperated in 1776 to secure freedom and toleration for all sects in the Virginia Declaration of Rights. Henry even sponsored a bill for Madison amending the language of George Mason's original draft to provide more complete freedom for dissenters.<sup>65</sup> Yet, the conflicting orientations of their worldviews evidenced themselves even in this early stage of cooperation. When members

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<sup>63</sup> For example, Bulter's *Analogy of Religion*, Jenyns' *A View of the Internal Evidences of the Christian Religion*, and Clarke's "Letter to Mr. Dodwell."

<sup>64</sup> Madison to Bradford, April 1, 1774, *James Madison: A Biography in His Own Words*, 30; Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, A fragment of a document written in Henry's hand in the 1760's, 112-116.

<sup>65</sup> Thomas E. Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia, 1776-1787* (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1977), 19; Robert Meade, *Patrick Henry: Practical Revolutionary*, 117.

of the General Assembly asked Henry if the bill was a prelude to the complete disestablishment of the Anglican Church, Henry sharply denied this intent. Madison would have had a different answer. He was pushing for disestablishment even as early as 1776.<sup>66</sup>

The Anglican Church held an ambiguous position on establishment in 1776. But by 1779, it was essentially disestablished as religious taxes supporting the Anglican Church were repealed.<sup>67</sup> This move led some Anglicans and Dissenters alike to consider a plural establishment of religion through a general assessment tax.<sup>68</sup> The hazards of war put off further serious discussion until the fall of 1784 when Henry introduced the “Bill for the Support of Teachers of The Christian Religion.”<sup>69</sup> This bill appropriated a certain amount of every citizen’s taxes to go toward a religious denomination of their choice. The money would be given to the elders or governors of the denomination to support appropriate ministers and Christian teachers.<sup>70</sup> Henry’s bill brought the lingering issue of church and state to the fore and also forced a confrontation between Madison and Henry. They surely engaged in some fascinating debate over this long-standing personal disagreement before the General Assembly. Unfortunately, we have no record of those exchanges.<sup>71</sup> Two surviving sources supplement the historical record: the general assessment bill itself,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Brant, “Madison: On the Separation of Church and State,” 7.

<sup>68</sup> Hutson, *Church and State in America*, 116.

<sup>69</sup> Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia*, 95.

<sup>70</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 340.

<sup>71</sup> Although Henry sponsored the bill and was chairman of the committee which drafted it, within two months he left the legislature to serve as Governor of Virginia for a fourth term. A circumstance Madison described as “very inauspicious to his offspring.” Some believe that Madison helped orchestrate Henry’s election as governor to remove him from the legislature. See James Madison to James Monroe Nov. 27, 1784, ed. Robert Rutland, *The Papers of James Madison.*, vol. 8. 10 March 1784-28 March 1786, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), 158. This helps account for the lack of direct exchanges between Madison and Henry in the General Assembly, but these speeches were often not officially recorded. There is a sketch of a speech Madison gave against the assessment plan in December of 1784, but it is only a rough outline preserved in Madison’s papers. See Madison, “Notes on the Debates On The General Assessment Bill, December 23-24, 1784,” *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, 195-199.



drafted by a committee Henry chaired, and Madison's public rebuttal entitled "Memorial and Remonstrance."<sup>72</sup> These documents represent the public arguments on each side of the debate. A comparison further demonstrates the fundamentally different orientations of Henry's and Madison's respective worldviews.

Henry's "Bill for the Support of Teachers of the Christian Religion" is straightforward and practical. Most of the document is taken up with the legal provisions and logistical considerations of the new tax. But the preamble contains a justification of the scheme:

Whereas the general diffusion of Christian knowledge hath a natural tendency to correct the morals of men, restrain their vices, and preserve the peace of society; which cannot be effected without a competent provision for learned teachers, who may be thereby enabled to devote their time and attention to the duty of instructing such citizens . . . .

The next section states explicitly that the general assessment was not intended to abolish previous legislation protecting all Christian sects on the same legal footing.<sup>73</sup>

Several principles reminiscent of Henry's cooperative Latitudinarian and moderate Presbyterian backgrounds present themselves in this short preamble. First, there was an obvious attempt to downplay theological differences in favor of a unified Christian spirit. And while this did not apply to one established communion as historic Latitudinarians worked toward, it did promote something very similar—a unified Christian body politic given special support and protection by the state. Second, the emphasis on Christian teachers is significant. It falls in line with the Latitudinarian dual stress on the right use of the mind within the boundaries of Scripture. Joseph Jones, reporting his observations of the debates to James Monroe, confirmed this point.

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<sup>72</sup> Meade, *Patrick Henry: Practical Revolutionary*, 278.

<sup>73</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 340.

The other Gen.[Patrick Henry] Displayed the advantages that woud result to the society from the establishment and support of religions . . . He also . . . endeavoured to shew that Jews Mahometans Deists and pagans professed and practiced such abominations as rendered their persuasions unworthy the sanction of legal support.<sup>74</sup>

Henry subjected individual judgment and rationality to scriptural bounds.

Lastly, it is important to recognize that the purpose of the General Assessment was not to secure freedom for religion in Virginia. Religious liberty was already a *fait accompli*.<sup>75</sup> It did secure support for the institutional church as the foundation of society. The funds gathered did not go to promote religion generally through pious organizations or unaffiliated charities. Rather the money went to the governors of the respective institutional churches within each Christian sect.<sup>76</sup> This bill was based on an assumption of respect for the legitimate authority of the institutional church.

Madison's 'Memorial and Remonstrance' demonstrates very different assumptions about the basic authority in society reflecting the unique religious influences in his background. The 'Memorial' is a much longer document arguing eclectically with theoretic justifications, historical examples, and pragmatic appeals. Madison did not downplay the importance of religion in his argument. Rather he asserted its preeminence by arguing for its self-sufficient character and independence of state jurisdiction.<sup>77</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Joseph Jones to James Monroe, Richmond, November 13, 1784, *The Papers of James Monroe*, vol. 2, 132-133.

<sup>75</sup> Although all Christian sects enjoyed freedom for religion by 1784, it still remained in the jurisdiction of the General Assembly to re-instate the Anglican Church to a protected, established position. This fear was a factor in the debates over religious liberty and a formal general establishment. Although not the focus of this study, this historical context and cultural mindset is important when considering the memorials and petitions of the various sects concerning religious liberty during this period.

<sup>76</sup> This would vary depending on the form of church government within each sect but generally meant elders and ministers in a leadership role within the denomination, whether presbyteries, committee members, etc.

<sup>77</sup> Madison, "Memorial and Remonstrance," *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, 299, 301.

But, true to his roots, Madison emphasized the fundamental nature of individual judgment in a way that weakened the role of the institutional church. He emphasized the equality of all men repeatedly throughout the document.<sup>78</sup> He opened and closed his argument by asserting the “fundamental” and “unalienable” right that “The Religion then of every man must be left to the conviction and conscience of every man; and it is the right of every man to exercise it as these may dictate.”<sup>79</sup> This right finds its origin not in Scripture or even the Supreme Being, but “it is equally the gift of nature . . . .”<sup>80</sup> Many commentators have noted conceptual similarities between Madison’s ‘Memorial’ and Locke’s *A Letter Concerning Toleration*.<sup>81</sup> Yet, the language and ideas are equally reminiscent of John Witherspoon’s *Lectures on Moral Philosophy* when he argues for “the rule of duty from conscience enlightened by reason . . . .”<sup>82</sup> Perhaps this testifies to the easy cooperation between Madison’s Presbyterian and Enlightenment influences. But Madison went beyond Locke or Witherspoon in his emphasis on individual judgment as the fundamental authority in society.<sup>83</sup> He extended that right of choice even to the atheist or pagan. “We cannot deny an equal freedom to those whose minds have not yet yielded to the evidence which has convinced us.”<sup>84</sup> Madison considered religion important. Despite lingering questions about his orthodoxy, he was neither an atheist nor a secular

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 300, 303, 304.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 299, 304.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>81</sup> Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia*, 131; Banning, “James Madison, The Statute for Religious Freedom, and the Crisis of Republican Conviction,” *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, 118.

<sup>82</sup> Witherspoon, “Lectures on Moral Philosophy,” *The Selected Writings of John Witherspoon*, 168.

<sup>83</sup> Banning, “James Madison, the Statute for Religious Freedom, and the Crisis of Republican Conviction,” *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, 118; Cragg, *From Puritanism to the Age of Reason*, 217. Interestingly enough, Locke was also connected to Latitudinarian thought. He was close personal friends with John Tillotson even though the later had doubts about his orthodoxy. Henry’s stance on religious liberty corresponds almost perfectly with Locke’s view. See Spellman, *The Latitudinarians and the Church of England*, 151.

<sup>84</sup> Madison, “Memorial and Remonstrance,” *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, 300.

humanist. Yet, he did not consider public religious commitment as fundamental as the right of autonomous judgment. The Statute for Religious Freedom pushed by Madison and Jefferson was not religiously neutral. Perhaps unknowingly, Madison too was arguing for a general establishment of religion—a religion of Unitarian Universalism which enthroned free inquiry as the word of God.<sup>85</sup>

The distinct worldviews of Madison and Henry provide vital context for their stances on the general assessment issue in 1784. Their opposing views reflect different personal experiences with Anglicanism interacting with unique strains of Presbyterian thought. While Madison's and Henry's concrete experiences with these sects remains personal to themselves, the specific content of their religious influences sheds light on larger intellectual trends moving in Virginia in the late eighteenth century. They might even suggest an answer to that troubling question of why Presbyterian dissenters were willing to break with their own history and theological tradition in eventually supporting Madison's separation of church and state.

The unified support and influence of Virginia Presbyterians was important for the fate of the general assessment scheme. Madison was not courting the Separate Baptists or Enlightenment Free-thinkers with his "Memorial." Both were already strongly against the

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<sup>85</sup> Mary-Elaine Swanson argues that Madison's primary motivation for opposing a general establishment of religion was a fundamental belief in God's sovereignty which he inherited from John Witherspoon during his time at the College of New Jersey. According to Swanson, Madison believed that it denied God's sovereign purpose in religion to subject it to state regulation of any kind. See "James Madison and the Presbyterian Idea of Man and Government," in *Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia*, 123, 127, 129. This view stems from an incomplete understanding of Madison's own religious commitments and a glossing over of the Enlightenment influences working at the College of New Jersey during this time. See Mark Noll, "The Irony of the Enlightenment for Presbyterians in the Early Republic." Other historians have argued more satisfactorily that Madison's primary motivation for opposing a general establishment of religion was not concern for God's glory or even the maintenance of Christianity in the Republic, but came from a commitment to the political right of individual judgment. See J. G. A. Pocock, "Religious Freedom and The Desacralization of Politics: From the English Civil Wars to the Virginia Statute," Chapter Three in *The Virginia Statute for Religious Freedom: Its Evolution and Consequences in American History*, 67, 68, 69; also, Donald Drakeman, "Religion and the Republic: James Madison and the First Amendment," *Journal of Church and State* 25 (1983): 437, 445.

assessment scheme. Although seemingly strange bedfellows, they shared a mutual anti-clericalism and dependence on individual judgment—whether that be individual spirituality or the dictates of reason.<sup>86</sup> Proponents on both sides of the general assessment scheme were wondering where the Presbyterians would come down on the issue. Would they side with the more radical dissenters and freethinkers or would they hold to the more traditional, more Anglican system of state supported religion?

Since the beginning of the debates in 1779, the Presbyterians, particularly the influential Hanover Presbyterians, had been unpredictable and conflicted. A cursory review of the numerous memorials sent by Presbyterian bodies to the General Assembly during these years demonstrates serious indecision.<sup>87</sup> Although generally opposing the scheme at first, early memorials left the door slightly open for a general establishment of religion.<sup>88</sup> In October of 1784 they endorsed a specific plan for a general assessment and gave a limited support of the idea as long as it was done “on the most liberal plan.”<sup>89</sup>

Madison expressed shock and disgust at this supposed turnabout.

The Presbyterians . . . seem as ready to set up an establishment, which is to take them in as they were to pull down that which shut them out. I do not know a more shameful contrast than might be formed between their memorials on the latter and former occasion.<sup>90</sup>

Yet by the following spring the Hanover Presbytery voted unanimously against a general assessment. They prepared a final memorial using contract language and historical examples to argue against state support of even a general religious establishment.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia*, 179-181; Pocock, “Religious Freedom and the Desacralization of Politics,” 64, 68; Hutson, *Church and State in America*, 120.

<sup>87</sup> Fred Hood, “Revolution and Religious Liberty: The Conservation of the Theocratic Concept in Virginia,” *Church History* 40, no. 2 (June 1971): 176.

<sup>88</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 324, 326.

<sup>89</sup> “October, 1784 Hanover Presbytery Memorial,” in Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 337.

<sup>90</sup> Madison to Monroe, April 12, 1785, *The Papers of James Madison*, vol. 8, 261.

<sup>91</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 341-343.

Why this indecision? Once again a review of religious context and content of belief gives insight into political action. The distinct strains of Presbyterianism endorsed by Madison and Henry were writ large in this internal denominational debate. The Presbyterian group most active in the debates was the familiar Hanover Presbytery. As already noted, these influential Piedmont Presbyterians were moderates and ex-Anglicans, relatively removed from the radicalism of the New Lights and isolated from the influence of the Scottish Enlightenment. They had a long history of peaceful ecumenicity within a state supported religious establishment.<sup>92</sup> From its inception in the 1740's this Presbyterian body remained fairly isolated from outside religious and intellectual trends. But by the 1770's, a new branch of Presbyterian thought spread its influence from the College of New Jersey southward toward Virginia. Local academies and mentoring relationships gave way to the new college ideal as the best way to further education and train for the ministry.

In 1769, James Madison was part of the first wave of Virginia youths to attend the College of New Jersey.<sup>93</sup> By the 1770's these men were flowing back home as the new up and coming leaders of Presbyterian congregations and sessions in Virginia. John Todd, John Blair Smith, David Rice, Caleb Wallace, William Graham and Samuel Stanhope Smith were leaders of the assessment debates in the Hanover Presbytery. They shared the responsibility of drafting many of the assessment memorials for the General

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<sup>92</sup> Their backgrounds both in Virginia and with the moderate Presbyterians of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century in England encouraged an ecumenical state supported church. Griffin, *Latitudinarianism in the Seventeenth Century Church of England*, 155; Spangler, *Virginians Reborn*, 65,67; Beliles, "The Christian Communities, Religious Revivals, and Political Culture of the Central Virginia Piedmont, 1737-1813," in *Religion and Political Culture in Jefferson's Virginia*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> Peterson, *James Madison: A Biography in His Own Words*, 19.

Assembly.<sup>94</sup> They all were graduates from the College of New Jersey under Witherspoon's mentoring.<sup>95</sup> Wallace and Samuel Stanhope Smith were Madison's college friends.<sup>96</sup> These men and others brought the teachings of Witherspoon back to their home denominational bodies. They infused the moderate Hanover Presbytery with Enlightenment thought. Some, like Madison and Samuel Stanhope Smith, went beyond the limits of Witherspoon's orthodoxy in their old age.<sup>97</sup>

This relatively new mixing of distinct Presbyterian traditions in colonial Virginia helps explain the real confusion and seeming arbitrariness of the Presbyterian stance on a general assessment scheme. But, Virginia Presbyterians in the 1770's and 1780's were not just debating the merits of a general establishment of religion. They were coming to terms with a new type of Presbyterianism altogether—one significantly more influenced by modern philosophy. The decision of Virginia Presbyterians to oppose a general assessment set the precedent for an absolute separation of church from state in America.<sup>98</sup>

This brief comparison of the worldviews of Madison and Henry shows the importance of carefully navigating the currents of intellectual and religious history. The

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<sup>94</sup> Foote, *Sketches of Virginia*, 324, 327, 335, 341, 345. Foote's *Sketches of Virginia* contains transcripts of the Presbyterian Memorials against the General Assessment together the dates and names of the Assemblymen who wrote them.

<sup>95</sup> Douglas Sloan shows the connection between Witherspoon's teachings and Virginia Presbyterianism by listing prominent Virginia Presbyterians who directly sat under the teaching of John Witherspoon at the College of New Jersey. This in combination with the primary sources found in Foote's *Sketches of Virginia* shows that all the men helping to draft memorials against the General Assessment were at one time students of John Witherspoon. This shows the singular shaping influence of the College of New Jersey on older forms of Presbyterianism in Virginia. Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, 55, 50 ff; Foote, 324, 327, 335, 341, 345.

<sup>96</sup> Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography*, 34.

<sup>97</sup> Samuel Stanhope Smith was forced to retire as President of the College of New Jersey in 1812 because of his suspect orthodoxy, Sloan, *The Scottish Enlightenment and the American College Ideal*, 171; Madison's later religious beliefs are shrouded in mystery. But several of his prominent biographers suggest that he ascribed to a general Unitarianism towards the end of his life. See Irving Brant, *James Madison, The Virginia Revolutionist*, vol. 1 (New York: Bobs Merrill Company, 1971), 118; Ketcham, *James Madison: A Biography*, 667.

<sup>98</sup> Buckley, *Church and State in Revolutionary Virginia*, 6,7.

complexities and subtle inclinations of each individual's worldview can have concrete and measurable effects for future generations. Historians recognize this connection between belief and action when they come to men who engage more obviously in common intellectual trends. Men like Thomas Jefferson represent the stereotypical Enlightenment influence on America. But the majority of the Founders, including Henry and Madison, struggled to sort out a consistent worldview which integrated elements of many different theological and intellectual strains.<sup>99</sup> In one sense, Madison's emphasis on private judgment highlighted Henry's more traditional view of human nature and the role of the Church in society. The conflict of these subtle orientations within their worldviews had the concrete outcome of separating Church and State in Virginia. But perhaps more significantly, it indicated the defeat of a moderate, traditional religious spirit emphasizing the institutional church as a fundamental societal authority. In another sense, Henry's religious orientation gave way to Madison's worldview. In the process, the individual supplanted the institutional church as the basic authority unit in the American social and theological order.

### **Anti-Federalism and the Fight Against Ratification**

Henry's fight against the ratification of the Constitution further demonstrates the significance of his distinct worldview for later generations. Once again Henry engaged on the losing side of an issue. But in this instance, his opposition exerted a negative shaping

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<sup>99</sup> The religious and intellectual journeys of Benjamin Rush and John Adams would also make fascinating studies. Adams struggled to reconcile his Puritan background with Enlightenment thought. Rush moved from a strongly Calvinistic Presbyterian background to a type of Universalism. A lesser known figure with more relevant similarities to Patrick Henry was Rev. Devereaux Jarratt. Jarratt was a Virginian contemporary of Henry's converted by New Light Presbyterian preaching who became an Episcopalian minister. He shared Henry's respect for civil and ecclesiastical authority even as he embraced an awakening religion of the heart. See his autobiography *The Life of Devereaux Jarratt*, 15, 38ff.



influence on the new federal government which resulted in more secure positive liberties for future Americans. As a leading Anti-Federalist, Henry's zealous opposition to the Constitution was a significant obstacle for Madison, Pendleton and others promoting the new consolidated union.<sup>100</sup> Bowing in part to Henry's powerful influence, Madison and the Federalists promised support for subsequent amendments forming a bill of rights.

Reference to Henry's religious context also helps explain his firm Anti-Federalist stance. Henry was not a radical isolationist opposed to American union. During the War he supported lasting union. He even compromised his position on proportionate representation, noting, "I am not a Virginian, but an American."<sup>101</sup> As late as 1784 he was taking active steps to strengthen the American Union. Reporting this in a letter to Thomas Jefferson, Madison wrote "Mr. Henry arrived yesterday, and from a short conversation I find him strenuous for invigorating the federal government . . . ."<sup>102</sup> He gathered Madison and a few other Assemblymen in a coffeehouse before the start of the legislative session to discuss possible measures.<sup>103</sup> What then accounts for his unwavering opposition to the proposed federal government just three years later? An examination of Henry's arguments against the Constitution with reference to his cohesive belief system helps explain this seeming contradiction.

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<sup>100</sup>Meade, *Practical Revolutionary*, 344,346.

<sup>101</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 221-222. See also, Adams, *The Works of John Adams*, vol. 2, 356. This quotation is one of the most over used and little understood of all of Henry's public expressions. Historians use it as an example of an early patriotic move towards American union and identity. While it certainly expresses a solidarity with the American cause, this phrase comes in the context of a heated debate over the importance of maintaining state identities and representation in the proposed Articles of Confederation. Henry was not merely uttering a panegyric on patriotic zeal. He was compromising on the issue of proportionate representation for the states in the new Congress. See Jane Carson, *Patrick Henry, Prophet of the Revolution* (Williamsburg, VA: Virginia Independence Bicentennial Commission, 1979), 39-40.

<sup>102</sup> Madison to Jefferson, May 15, 1784, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 227.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*, 225-226.

Henry's speeches during the Virginia Ratification Debates are the largest body of his spoken words preserved for the historical record. Three familiar themes ran through Henry's arguments against the proposed Constitution: a respect for legitimate authority, a fear of man's fallen nature, and a realistic anti-utopianism. He formed concrete objections out of these theoretical principles.

Henry's initial objections to the Constitution suggest a consistency with the Anglican divines' concern for legitimate authority and hesitancy to overthrow established power until absolutely necessary. Henry recognized from the beginning that the proposed Constitution was not a modification of the existing system, but a complete exchange of one authority structure for another. He suspected this unstated purpose before the convention even began and refused to have anything to do with it. Although elected to attend as a delegate for Virginia, Henry declined, supposedly saying he "smelt a rat."<sup>104</sup> He pointed out in the debates that this was a "revolution" which required the relinquishment of the authority of the states.<sup>105</sup> Throughout the debates he emphasized that a national government would replace the confederate nature of the old government, utterly supplanting the previous foundational authority of the states.<sup>106</sup> His most

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<sup>104</sup> Hugh Blair Grigsby, *The History of the Virginia Federal Convention of 1788* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1969), 36, note 32. James Elson casts doubt on the authenticity of this statement in *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings and in the Words of his Contemporaries*, 240.

<sup>105</sup> Ralph Ketcham, ed. *The Anti-Federalist Papers and the Constitutional Convention Debates* (New York: New American Library, 1986), 199, 200-201.

<sup>106</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 395-396, 171; Robin Einhorn acknowledges this in her article, "Patrick Henry's Case against the Constitution: The Structural Problem with Slavery," *Journal of the Early Republic* 22, no. 4 (Winter, 2002): 549-573. Neglecting the broader context of Henry's political and religious convictions, Einhorn argues that Henry's main reason for opposing the Constitution was out of fear that it would lead to the abolition of slavery in the South (550). However, she does note that Henry recognized a fundamental shift in the basic authority structure of the American union, from the states to a national government (554ff). Henry personally believed slavery was a sinful and degrading institution that needed to be eliminated gradually. See Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 1, 152-153 for a reprint of a letter Henry wrote on the subject. In the ratification debates he used slavery as a drastic example of the transfer of power from state governments to a centralized national government. See also,

fundamental objection to the Constitution was that the delegates had no authority to propose an overthrow of existing authority structures.

. . . The people gave them no power to use their name. That they exceeded their power is perfectly clear. It is not mere curiosity that actuates me: I wish to hear the real, actual, existing danger, which should lead us to take those steps, so dangerous in my conception. . . The federal Convention ought to have amended the old system; for this purpose they were solely delegated; the object of their mission extended to no other consideration. . . .<sup>107</sup>

Henry was quick to re-assert his commitment to American Union.

. . . Sir, the dissolution of the Union is most abhorrent to my mind: The first thing I have at heart is American *liberty*: the second thing is American Union; and I hope the people of Virginia will endeavor to preserve that Union . . . .<sup>108</sup>

As in other political measures, Henry took a moderate stance, acting as neither a reactionary conservative nor a hasty radical. He supported necessary measures to preserve American union. But Henry questioned whether or not an overthrow of state governments was a necessary measure.<sup>109</sup> He constantly urged caution, hesitancy, and careful consideration before taking such a drastic step.<sup>110</sup>

I see great jeopardy in this new Government. I see none from our present one . . . I have thought, and still think, that a full investigation of the actual situation of America, ought to precede any decision on this great and important question.<sup>111</sup>

Unlike the English government, the Articles of Confederation did not threaten basic rights and liberties of the people. Henry could see no reason to destroy it for another. “At present we have our liberties and privileges in our own hands. Let us not relinquish them. Let us not adopt this system till we see them secure . . . .”<sup>112</sup> Henry’s inclination to work

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Kevin R.C. Gutzman, *Virginia’s American Revolution: From Dominion to Republic, 1776-1840* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007), 99.

<sup>107</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 23.

<sup>108</sup> Ketcham, *Anti-Federalist Papers*, 212.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid.*, 201-208.

<sup>110</sup> Ketcham, 209, 201, 210; Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 138-139.

<sup>111</sup> Ketcham, 208-209.

<sup>112</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, 138.

within existing authority structures until absolutely necessary corresponds with William Sherlock's hesitant endorsement of open opposition to civil government.<sup>113</sup>

From objecting to the whole concept of the proposed consolidated government, Henry moved to a critique of the actual provisions within it. His first objections flowed from a strong distrust of human nature. He argued that the proposed government naively depended on the goodness of its officers.

. . . It is on a supposition that our American Governors shall be honest, that all the good qualities of this Government are founded; But its defective, and imperfect construction, puts it in their power to perpetrate the worst of mischief's, should they be bad men . . . Shew me that age and country where the rights and liberties of the people were placed on the sole chance of their rulers being good men, without a consequent loss of liberty?<sup>114</sup>

Henry objected that there were no adequate provisions for checking the power of any branch of government.<sup>115</sup> He painted terrifying pictures of presidential and congressional tyranny, demonstrating all the time how easy such scenarios would be to enact.<sup>116</sup> The checks and balances written in the Constitution were too weak and theoretical to satisfy Henry.

Tell me not of checks on paper; but tell me of checks founded on self-love . . . there is no real check to prevent their ruining us. There is no actual responsibility. The only semblance of a check is the negative power of not reelecting them. This, sir, is but a feeble barrier, when their personal interest, their ambition and avarice, come to be put in contrast with the happiness of the people. All checks founded on any thing but self-love will not avail . . . it presupposes that the chosen few who go to Congress will have more upright hearts, and more enlightened minds, than those who are members of the individual legislatures.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> “ We may defend ourselves against private injuries, as far as law and justice will defend us; we may resist unjust and usurping powers, as long as we can resist; but the providence of God, which governs the world, makes it lawful to submit when we cannot resist.” Sherlock, *A Discourse Concerning Divine Providence*, 310-311.

<sup>114</sup> Ketcham, *Anti-Federalist Papers*, 214.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

<sup>116</sup> Ketcham, 214 ff; Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 322 ff.

<sup>117</sup> Elliot, 164, 167.

The amendment process so lauded by the new government's supporters depended on the willingness of the legislators to deprive themselves of power, a situation utterly improbable given man's inclinations.<sup>118</sup> Henry also objected that the new Constitution gave people from other regions, power to legislate for Virginians.

But sure I am that the dangers of this system are real, when those who have no similar interests with the people of this country are to legislate for us—when our dearest interests are left in the power of those whose advantage it may be to infringe them.<sup>119</sup>

Even Virginia's own representatives could not be depended on to preserve their liberty because they operated so far removed from the people. Henry had no illusions about the relative virtue of state governments compared to a national government. But he recognized that civil officers operating distant from accountability to the people would find it easy to exercise self-love without fear of restraint.<sup>120</sup>

Henry's fears about the efficacy of checks and balances in the Constitution may or may not have been well founded. But the fact remains that he objected to the new government in large part because he believed it did not adequately account for man's sinful nature. He summed up his fears in this statement:

I dread the depravity of human nature. I wish to guard against it by proper checks, and trust nothing to accident or chance. I will never depend on so slender a protection as the possibility of being represented by virtuous men.<sup>121</sup>

This demonstrates an obvious connection in Henry's life between a theological concept affirmed in his religious background and a political action. Henry asserted in consistency with the Anglican Divines and the Presbyterianism of Samuel Davies, "Man is a fallen

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<sup>118</sup> Ketcham, *Anti-Federalist Papers*, 204, 206, 207.

<sup>119</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 313.

<sup>120</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 322, 327.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

creature, a fallible being, and cannot be depended on without self-love.”<sup>122</sup> His theological understanding of human nature translated into a political principle.

A final theme running through Henry’s objections to the Constitution was a firm anti-utopianism. Henry described the ideal end of government. “What do we require? Not preeminence, but safety—that our citizens may be able to sit down in peace and security under their own fig-trees . . . .”<sup>123</sup> This humble, concrete purpose for government severely limited its sphere of operation. Henry contrasted a limited government with the schemes of other nations. “[They] have gone in search of grandeur, power and splendor, have also fallen a sacrifice, and been the victims of their own folly: While they acquired those visionary blessings, they lost their freedom.”<sup>124</sup>

Henry repeatedly emphasized this contrast between “visionary blessings” and concrete personal liberties. In another passage he elaborated on this concept.

Shall we imitate the example of those nations who have gone from a simple to a splendid Government? Are those nations more worthy of our imitation? What can make an adequate satisfaction to them for the loss they suffered in attaining such a Government for the loss of their liberty? If we admit this Consolidated Government it will be because we like a great splendid one. Some way or other we must be a great and mighty empire.<sup>125</sup>

He compared his “old fashioned” ideas to the “illuminated imaginations” and “political speculations” of those living in “these refined enlightened days.”<sup>126</sup> Henry even implied that such grand schemes and political speculations were presumptuous attempts to build a heaven on earth.

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 388

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 596.

<sup>124</sup> Ketcham, *Anti-Federalist Papers*, 202.

<sup>125</sup> Ibid., 207.

<sup>126</sup> Ketcham, 200; Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 140.

It is impiously irritating the avenging hand of Heaven, when a people, who are in the full enjoyment of freedom, launch out into the wide ocean of human affairs, and desert those maxims which alone can preserve liberty . . . .<sup>127</sup>

This distrust of idealistic goals for civil government sounds like Butler's suspicion of "that idle and not very innocent employment of forming imaginary models of a world, and schemes of governing it . . . ." <sup>128</sup>

### **Opposition to Virginia Resolutions**

Henry's Anti-Federalist principles cooperated well with the themes of respect for legitimate authority, distrust of human nature, and anti-utopianism identified in his religious influences. This is consistent with his opposition to British tyranny in the Revolution. Concern for lawful authority was Henry's primary reason for opposing Great Britain. Henry's arguments as a revolutionary patriot and an Anti-Federalist share a corresponding suspicion of idealistic utopianism. Henry never supported outside tampering with established local liberties to build a "great society," no matter if the master puppeteer were British or American. These principles appear again in Henry's final political action—his public opposition to the Virginia Resolutions in 1799.

A contextual understanding of Henry's politics proves to be especially helpful when examining this puzzling episode. Historians and contemporaries alike have been unable to provide adequate explanations of why at Washington's request, Henry stood for the House of Delegates in opposition to the Kentucky and Virginia Resolutions. Jefferson called this action "apostasy."<sup>129</sup> Indeed, the Alien and Sedition Acts seem to be just the

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<sup>127</sup> Elliot, 137.

<sup>128</sup> Butler, *Analogy of Religion*, 7.

<sup>129</sup> George Washington to Patrick Henry from Mount Vernon, January 15, 1799, in *Patrick Henry in His Speeches and Writings*, 178-181; Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 616.

kind of tyranny Henry warned against in 1788.<sup>130</sup> Henry's willingness to stand against the Resolutions at the request of a Federalist appears to contradict the principles of limited government and states' rights he defended so vigorously in the ratification debates. Yet Henry himself saw no such contradiction. In a letter to his daughter as late as 1796 he explicitly maintained his previous principles expressed in the ratification debates: "I am too old to exchange my former opinions, which have grown up into fixed habits of thinking."<sup>131</sup> An examination which takes into account the religious themes of respect for lawful authority and anti-utopianism confirms the essential unity of Henry's political principles in the last years of his life.

Henry's stance on the Virginia Resolutions cannot be understood in isolation from his consistent response to the ratification of the Constitution. Although a zealous Anti-Federalist, Henry willingly recognized the authority of the new government and pledged his support. He asserted this in his final speech during the ratification debates.

Yet I will be a peaceable citizen. My head, my hand, and my heart, shall be at liberty to retrieve the loss of liberty, and remove the defects of that system in a constitutional way. I wish not to go to violence, but will wait with hopes that the spirit which predominated in the revolution is not yet gone, nor the cause of those who are attached to the revolution yet lost. I shall therefore patiently wait in expectation of seeing that government changed, so as to be compatible with the safety, liberty, and happiness, of the people.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> Bruce Frohnen provides a helpful summary of the provisions of the Alien and Sedition Acts, "The Alien Act authorized the president to deport aliens, in time of peace, whom he found to be 'dangerous to the peace and safety of the United States.' The Sedition Act made it a high misdemeanor, punishable by fine and imprisonment, to commit any treasonable activity, which was defined to include publishing false, scandalous, and malicious writing concerning the government of the United States." Frohnen, *The American Republic Primary Sources* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2002), 396.

<sup>131</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2. 569; Some historians attribute Henry's stance against the Virginia Resolutions to a renewed friendship with George Washington. See for example Don Higgenbotham, "Virginia's Trinity of Immortals: Washington, Jefferson, and Henry, and the Story of Their Fractured Relationship," *Journal of the Early Republic* 23, no. 4 (Winter, 2003): 521-543. Although Henry certainly respected Washington, this does not seem a reason sufficient to draw him out of a ten-year retirement on a platform seemingly contradictory to his previous convictions. Particularly because he rejected so many other offers of political position from Washington in previous years.

<sup>132</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 652.



The very night after ratification, Henry practically demonstrated this commitment. He was invited to attend a meeting of disgruntled Anti-Federalists to discuss a plan of resistance to the new federal government. A contemporary at the meeting described Henry's response.

. . . He addressed the meeting with his accustomed animation upon important occasions, observing 'he had done his duty strenuously in opposing the constitution, in the proper place, and with all the powers he possessed. The question had been fully discussed, and settled, and that, as true and faithful republicans, they had all better go home; they should cherish it and give it fair play, support it too, in order that the Federal administration might be left to the untrammelled and free exercise of its functions,' reproving moreover, the half suppressed factious spirit which he perceived had well-nigh broken out. The impressive arguments of Mr. Henry produced the gratifying effect he had hoped for.<sup>133</sup>

Henry consistently maintained this respect for the lawful authority of the new government. In a letter to James Monroe in 1791 he summed up his political philosophy.

. . . Altho' The Form of Government in to which my Countrymen determined to place themselves, had my Enmity, yet as we are one & all embarked, it is natural to care for the crazy Machine, at least so long as we are out of sight of a Port to refit . . . .<sup>134</sup>

Despite Henry's willingness to submit to the new government, he had significant concerns for the course of the nation. He feared it would degenerate into a tyrannical system. As a practical response to this concern he purchased land on the Georgia frontier as a potential refuge for himself and his family should the government become oppressive. His account of this in a letter to Richard Henry Lee in 1790 gives an interesting picture into Henry's thought process during this uncertain time.

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<sup>133</sup> David Meade Randolph described this event. Richard Venable was also present and substantiated Randolph's account. Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 412-413.

<sup>134</sup> Henry to Monroe, Prince Edward, January 24, 1791, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 460.

. . . No doubt you will hear of me or my doings in the Georgia purchase. . . I own to you that some late occurrences in politics first suggested the thought. For if our present system grows into tyranny is not a frontier possession most eligible? . . . I do indeed suppose that these speculations of mine relate to times when you and I shall be gone off the stage; but it is natural for us both to feel anxiety for our numerous family's, besides the concern common to every citizen. I am refining perhaps too much, & looking to a period too distant in my estimate of things . . . A comfortable prospect of the issue of the new system would fix me here for life. A contrary one sends me southwestard . . . .<sup>135</sup>

It is interesting that Henry's first response to what he considered a potentially tyrannical system was to wait.<sup>136</sup> He carefully reserved judgment on the new system while taking practical precautionary measures. Moreover, even should events confirm his worst fears, Henry's first response was a quiet attempt to secure freedom for his family elsewhere. This goes far in demonstrating Henry's non-revolutionary tendencies and extreme hesitancy to directly oppose established authority.

Political strife and faction became more heated in the late 1790's as a war loomed with France and the Democratic Republicans and Federalists vied with each other for control of the government. Henry took no sides but maintained a commitment to the Constitutional government. He expressed this in a letter to Henry Lee in 1795.

Since the adoption of the present constitution I have generally moved in a narrow circle. But in that I have never omitted to inculcate a strict adherence to the principles of it. And I have the satisfaction to think that in no part of the union

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<sup>135</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 3, 412-415. It is not certain what, if any, particular political event prompted Henry to purchase lands in Georgia. Henry was a land speculator and held many large tracts of land. It is possible that this business deal came up as he was generally considering the ramifications of the newly adopted federal government. His fears about the new government at this time seem heightened. Perhaps he was concerned that the Bill of Rights had not yet been officially added to the Constitution? The first ten amendments were not officially ratified until 1791. By the end of this decade, Henry's concern over the immediate effects of tyrannical oppression seem to have calmed.

<sup>136</sup> See also Theodorick Bland to Patrick Henry, New York, March 9, 1790, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 3, 417-420. Bland congratulates Henry on securing a haven from tyranny if that should become necessary. He also confirms Henry's commitment to support the new government as far as possible, working for change from within the system.

have the laws been more pointedly obeyed, than in that where I have resided and spent my time.<sup>137</sup>

Yet Henry held strong opinions on the attempts of the Democratic Republicans to foment unrest and on the heavy handed responses of the Federalists. He disapproved of both.

“Although a democrat myself, I like not the late Democratic Societies. As little do I like their suppression by law.”<sup>138</sup> In a letter to his daughter in 1796 he disapproved of the foreign policy pursued by the Federalists but recognized that the centralized national government adopted in 1788 put them within the bounds of legitimate authority.

The treaty is, in my opinion, a very bad one indeed. But what must I think of those men, whom I myself warned of the danger of giving the power of making laws by means of treaty, to the president and senate, when I see these same men denying the existence of that power, which they insisted, in our convention, ought properly to be exercised by the president and senate and by none other? The policy of these men, both then and now, appears to me quite void of wisdom and foresight . . . .<sup>139</sup>

Henry saw with regret that the government was falling prey to some of the weaknesses he anticipated in the convention. But he had no sympathy with those he considered political agitators who were trying to deny the power they once argued for now that it placed them at a political disadvantage.

Henry’s distrust of the Democrats may have been motivated in part by his experiences with Jefferson, the unofficial leader of the faction. The two founders’ relationship fractured beyond repair after Henry criticized Jefferson’s performance as

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<sup>137</sup> Henry to Governor Henry Lee, Red Hill, June 27, 1795, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 550-552.

<sup>138</sup> Ibid.; See Matthew Schoenbachler’s “Republicanism in the Age of Democratic Revolution: The Democratic-Republican Societies of the 1790’s,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 18, no. 2, (Summer, 1998): 237-261 for a description of the “Democratic Societies” Henry references. Schoenbachler argues that these societies were tied to French Radicalism. Federalists, middle-class conservatives, and even some Republicans viewed the societies as anarchistic and potentially revolutionary. They were seen as promoting, “opposition to all regular and well-balanced authority.” (258, 254).

<sup>139</sup> Henry to Daughter Betsy Aylett, Red Hill, August 20, 1796, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2, 568-571.

Governor during the Revolutionary War. Jefferson never forgave Henry this public humiliation. Henry's continuing dislike of Jefferson in later life was connected to Jefferson's religious skepticism and sympathy for French Enlightenment philosophy and French "Red Republicanism."<sup>140</sup> In 1799 he voiced these fears in a letter to Archibald Blair.

. . . infidelity in its broadest sense, under the name of philosophy, is fast spreading, and that under the patronage of French manners and principles, everything that ought to be dear to man is covertly but successfully assailed . . . .<sup>141</sup>

Likewise, though he did not consider himself a Federalist, Henry had great personal respect for George Washington. This is understandable given their similar religious contexts. Peter Lillback argues that Washington participated in a low-church Anglicanism with specific ties to Latitudinarian thought.<sup>142</sup> Henry's suspicion of Jefferson and his trust of Washington played a significant role in how he perceived the political situation in the 1790's. These personal assessments were fundamentally tied to his religious convictions.

As tension increased, rumors spread that faction would turn to civil war. Well before the Alien and Sedition Acts, Washington wrote Henry of his concerns. "A crisis is approaching, that must, if it cannot be arrested, soon decide whether order and good government shall be preserved, or anarchy and confusion ensue . . . ."<sup>143</sup> The passage of the Alien and Sedition Acts in 1798 prompted the Democratic Republicans to respond with the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. Although only calling for nullification of

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<sup>140</sup> Fontaine Manuscript, 8.

<sup>141</sup> Patrick Henry to Archibald Blair, Red Hill, January 8, 1799, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 593.

<sup>142</sup> Peter Lillback, *George Washington's Sacred Fire* (Bryn Mawr, PA: Providence Forum Press, 2006), "Appendix Nine", 907-918.

<sup>143</sup> Washington to Henry, Mount Vernon, October 9, 1795, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2, 556-557.

the federal laws, many feared civil war would result.<sup>144</sup> In the last twenty years the colonists had overthrown a foreign state and exchanged their domestic government for a completely new system. In light of this historical context, a third major governmental upheaval seemed not only possible, but probable. The inevitability of the union was not assumed by early Americans as it often is by modern historians. Archibald Blair expressed his concern to Patrick Henry in 1799.

The present assembly has gone further than any other to loosen the bonds of union—their resolves declaring certain laws of congress unconstitutional I make no doubt you have seen. It is thought they will go still further . . . I cannot believe that the good sense of the people will suffer a dissolution of the confederacy, but I apprehend, if the opposition party are permitted to go much further, a civil war with all its fatal consequences must ensue . . . .<sup>145</sup>

Just a few days after receiving this letter from Archibald Blair, Washington wrote Henry stressing the crisis caused by the “policy of those among us, who, by all the means in their power, are driving matters to extremity . . . .”<sup>146</sup> Moved by his trust in Washington’s assessment of the situation, Henry agreed to run for the House of Delegates in opposition to the Virginia Resolutions.

Fortunately, John Miller, a Hampden Sydney student listening in the crowd, preserved the substance of Henry’s last public speech on this issue delivered March 4,

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<sup>144</sup>See Douglas Bradburn, “A Clamor in the Public Mind: Opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts,” *The William and Mary Quarterly* 65, no. 3, (July, 2008): 1-54. Bradburn asserts that Americans participated in two competing perspectives on dissent to the Alien and Sedition Acts. Some considered nullification and political agitation as a legitimate means to secure a strict construction of the Constitution and to uphold state’s rights. Others, including Federalists and more moderate conservatives considered these methods nothing more than revolutionary attempts to overthrow established law. “It was understood as a contest that pitted law and order, tradition and precedent, against the visionary rights of man” (55). Henry obviously fell into the latter category. Once again, this is in keeping with his distrust of visionary idealism and his support of established authority.

<sup>145</sup> Archibald Blair to Patrick Henry, Richmond, January 13, 1799, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 3, 427-428.

<sup>146</sup> Washington to Henry, Mount Vernon, January 15, 1799, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 603.

1799.<sup>147</sup> In this speech Henry maintained the same political stance that he had continuously held since the adoption of the Constitution. Although not enthusiastic about the new government, Henry determined to submit to its legitimate authority and work within the system to change it gradually. He had no sympathy with those agitating for extreme and sudden change, willing even to overthrow existing authority structures if necessary. Rather than being a puzzling aberration, this speech confirms Henry's unified political stance and summarizes two contextual themes of his political theory— submission to legitimate authority and distrust of idealism.

Henry began his speech by emphasizing the concept of legitimate authority. He had always maintained that the Constitution removed the locus of power from the states to the national government.<sup>148</sup> Ambiguity concerning the basis of power in the Constitutional union caused continual strife in American politics until the issue was finally decided by force during the Civil War. In Henry's mind, there was no ambiguity. Without amendment he believed that the Constitution effectively removed state sovereignty. Many of his contemporaries, including men like Jefferson and Madison, pointed to the Tenth Amendment as a reservation of essential sovereignty to the states. Henry disagreed. After reading the newly adopted Bill of Rights he disgustedly called the Tenth Amendment "this equivocal thing." He went on to explain his objections to his grandson and nephew who were studying law with him at Red Hill.

. . . They have tacked to it the objectionable and dangerous clause: 'or to the

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<sup>147</sup> "Fontaine Manuscript," 8; Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 606. Both of these documents report the speech as John Miller of South Carolina remembered it. They agree in almost every respect. However, Fontaine's version of the speech emphasized Henry's opposition to the Alien and Sedition Acts. William Wirt Henry confirmed this opposition with personal testimony from many of Henry's associates and other eye-witnesses of the speech in pages 611-614 of volume 2 of his biography.

<sup>148</sup> Elliot, *Debates*, vol. 4, 395-396.

people.’ . . . Why did they add: ‘or to the people’? They determined from the first that it should be a strong consolidated government. They inserted this amendment guilefully as something guarding the reserved rights of the States . . . It would guard them effectively if it ended with the word ‘respectively.’ But the words, ‘or to the people,’ are added insidiously . . . .<sup>149</sup>

In Henry’s view, Constitutional government did not include state sovereignty. And although he disapproved of such a system he recognized that it possessed legitimate authority. He objected to the Virginia Resolutions on these grounds.

. . . The State had quitted the sphere in which she had been placed by the Constitution; and in daring to pronounce upon the validity of Federal laws, had gone out of her jurisdiction in a manner not warranted by any authority, and in the highest degree alarming to every considerate man . . . .<sup>150</sup>

He feared that what he considered radical opposition to legitimate constitutional authority could only end in civil war and anarchy.<sup>151</sup> John Miller reported that Henry continued this stress on submission to lawful authority even as he confirmed adherence to his Anti-Federalist principles.

He had seen with regret the unlimited power over the purse and sword consigned to the General government, but . . . he had been overruled, and it was now necessary to submit to the constitutional exercise of that Power.<sup>152</sup>

Henry went on to criticize the radical, idealistic course of action pursued by Jefferson and Madison and their fellow Republicans.

He then exposed the inconsistency of Jefferson, Madison & others who after inducing the people to adopt such a government in spite of his strenuous opposition, & solemn warnings, were now urging Virginia to destroy it suddenly at the risk of immediate Civil War & foreign invasion.<sup>153</sup>

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<sup>149</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 8.

<sup>150</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 607-608.

<sup>151</sup> *Ibid.*, 608.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid.*, 609.

<sup>153</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 8. It is important to remember here that Henry’s evaluation of Madison and Jefferson’s political arguments is precisely that—Henry’s personal evaluation. No doubt Madison and Jefferson would have very different explanations of the motives and justification for the Virginia and Kentucky Resolutions. The constitutionality of nullification and secession is beyond the scope of this study.

He severely condemned both the Alien and Sedition Acts and “the designs of the agrarians and red republicans of France which had caused their enactment.”<sup>154</sup> But Henry did not believe that state nullification of a law was a legitimate means of legal redress since the states had given up their essential sovereignty. According to his understanding of the Constitution, state nullification and secession became revolutionary acts. In light of this, he considered Jefferson’s and Madison’s arguments for nullification as just another hasty utopian revolution.<sup>155</sup> In some ways this was analogous to his views on the Constitutional Convention. In Henry’s mind, Madison once again was trying to fix problems by re-writing the governmental system instead of working within the existing situation. Henry explicitly tied this idealistic revolutionary tendency to the philosophies of the Enlightenment.

He uttered a solemn warning against the doctrines & principles of the infidel philosophers of that country, who were at war with the Majesty of Heaven, & the welfare of Earth; & which were poisoning the minds, & infecting the morals of the most talented youths of Virginia.<sup>156</sup>

Henry did reserve a place for revolution. “I am asked what is to be done when a people feel themselves intolerably oppressed, my answer is ready: Overturn the

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But regardless, Henry considered them both to be revolutionary acts, only turned to as a measure of last resort.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> While Jefferson and Madison hoped to preserve the union through the doctrine of nullification, they also hinted at secession if legislation similar to the Alien and Sedition Acts followed. Jefferson stated “That these and successive acts of the same character, unless arrested on the threshold, may tend to drive these states into revolution and blood . . . .” This implication caused anxieties about war, prompting several states to respond with strongly worded counter-resolutions. Bruce Frohnen, *The American Republic Primary Sources*, 402, 396, 403-407; “Fontaine Manuscript,” 9.

<sup>156</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 8.



government.”<sup>157</sup> But repeating a consistent theme, he argued that revolution, “the last argument of the oppressed,” should be avoided if at all possible.<sup>158</sup>

But do not I beseech you, carry matters to this length without provocation. Wait at least until some infringement is made upon your rights which cannot be otherwise redressed.<sup>159</sup>

Instead of scrapping the existing system for a new political scheme, Henry advocated exhausting all available legal means. He urged petition and a use of elected representatives to repeal the “odious and tyrannical laws.”<sup>160</sup> His willingness to stand as one of those representatives in the last months of his life exemplified his heartfelt belief in this principle.

There is no doubt that Henry strongly disapproved of the Alien and Sedition Acts. He shared Jefferson’s and Madison’s evaluation of them as unconstitutional.<sup>161</sup> But his distrust of both their perceived political utopianism and willingness to use sudden, radical methods, together with his negative construction of state sovereignty led him to stand against nullification. As he wrote to a close friend after this final speech, “Men might differ in ways and means, and not in principles.”<sup>162</sup> Henry affirmed with Jefferson and Madison the principle of free speech even as he sharply differed with them on the ways and means of protecting that freedom. Perhaps uniquely developed systems of belief help account for the differences between Henry and his two regular political opponents over post-Revolution “ways and means.”

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<sup>157</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 609.

<sup>158</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 9.

<sup>159</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 609.

<sup>160</sup> “Fontaine Manuscript,” 9; Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence and Speeches*, vol. 2, 609.

<sup>161</sup> Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 612.

<sup>162</sup> Patrick Henry to Judge Tyler, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 622.

In the last public speech of his life, Henry exemplified the moderate position of a political realist. His unwavering support of submission to lawful authority and hesitant endorsement of revolution as a measure of last resort demonstrated internal consistency with both his previous political principles as well as his religious background. Henry's contextual religious experiences pre-disposed him to disapprove of revolutionary idealists. He recognized real limitations for human reason and human government. These philosophical orientations set him on a very different course of political action than many of his peers, men like James Madison or Thomas Jefferson. This comes out nowhere more obviously than in his opposition to the Virginia Resolutions.

## Chapter 4: Conclusion

On a surface level, Patrick Henry stands as a typical example of most well-educated Virginians in the eighteenth century. Like his peers, he matured in an atmosphere of religious struggle and intellectual tension. Henry's religious influences were common to eighteenth century colonial America. Tillotson, Sherlock and Butler appear ubiquitously in colonial southern libraries, as did collections of sermons by Presbyterian preachers.<sup>1</sup> However, Henry resolved these common religious and intellectual influences into a belief which had concrete effects on his political principles and actions. Even a brief comparison with James Madison demonstrated that two individuals' unique integration of religious and intellectual themes can orient them in fundamentally different directions.

An examination of Henry's cohesive worldview showed a cooperation between his Anglican and Presbyterian religious influences. Both were exceptionally moderate, mutually reinforcing a respect for legitimate authority. The awakening zeal of Samuel Davies together with his Christo-centric orthodoxy balanced the spiritual otherworldliness and emphasis on practical piety found in the Latitudinarian divines.

This harmonized religious context implied Henry's commitment to a consistent political philosophy. Henry asserted the constancy of his political principles throughout his life.<sup>2</sup> A review of Henry's political logic in light of his fundamental religious and intellectual commitments confirmed this personal self-assessment. Henry acted on a political theory driven by a respect for authority and a political realism flowing from a

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Beale Davis, *A Colonial Southern Bookshelf: Reading in the Eighteenth Century* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1979), 87, 127; Richard Beale Davis, *Intellectual Life in the Colonial South, 1658-1763*, vol. 2 (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1978), 537, 553, 714, 715.

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Henry to Betsey Aylett, Red Hill, August 20, 1796, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 2, 568.

distrust of human nature. His arguments for the American Revolution, his support of a general establishment of religion, his opposition to the Constitution, and his final stand against the Virginia Resolutions all reflect these fundamental principles. Despite his fiery oratory, Henry was a moderate political realist. He opposed both a tendency towards radical revolution and the “Moderation, falsely so called” of reactionary conservatives.<sup>3</sup> This orientation allowed Henry to be both consistently principled and adaptable. Unlike a radical revolutionary he was willing to work within the existing system for change. Likewise, unlike the status quo conservative, he recognized the Christian patriot’s obligation to labor for liberty.

The moderate realism of Henry’s political theory contributed to lasting American liberty. It motivated him to take an early stand for American independence, bringing many others along in his wake. After independence, Henry’s moderate realism and distrust of human nature contributed a stabilizing balance to the impulse toward radical change generated by the success of the Revolution and the influence of the Enlightenment. His stubborn insistence on amendments to the Constitution resulted in the Bill of Rights, the keystone of modern American liberty. Henry’s example of respect for the Constitution after ratification quieted murmurs of dissent and rebellion to the new federal system in Virginia. Finally, in the 1790’s his public opposition to the radical rhetoric of the Democratic Republicans set a healthy precedent in the new republic for gradual redress of wrongs through legal avenues in opposition to more drastic, revolutionary means.

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<sup>3</sup> Patrick Henry to Richard Henry Lee, May 20, 1776, in Henry, *Patrick Henry: Life, Correspondence, and Speeches*, vol. 1, 410-411.

This microcosm study of Patrick Henry's belief system also suggests new perspectives concerning the broader religious and intellectual movements in eighteenth century Virginia and their implications for American liberty. First, it provides a helpful balance on the role of colonial Anglicanism as a contributing factor for American Independence. John K. Nelson points out a "pernicious dissenter bias" by most historians in the current treatment of Anglicanism.<sup>4</sup> Colonial Anglicanism with all its liturgy and hierarchy is foreign to our modern religious experience. This contributes to an implicit assumption that the only religious groups interested in political liberty were non-traditional Anglicans or Awakening dissenters. The example of Patrick Henry, a traditional moderate Anglican, casts doubt on this mindset. It also challenges historians to reconsider the origins of the colonists' formulation for resistance to tyranny. Bernard Bailyn and others masterfully demonstrated a connection to Country Ideology.<sup>5</sup> Yet by the time Trenchard and Gordon were writing, the Latitudinarian justification for resistance to tyranny was already fifty years old. Moreover, as a young pamphleteer during the Glorious Revolution, Trenchard certainly encountered a Latitudinarian formulation for resistance to tyranny. How much was his distinctive political philosophy influenced by Latitudinarian thought? Historians need to pursue a possible connection between Latitudinarian seventeenth century thought and eighteenth century Country Ideology, both in England and the American Colonies.

Second, this study highlights the complexity of the religious and intellectual influences operating in Colonial Virginia. Historians sometimes paint in such broad strokes that only three religious influences are distinguishable: Established Anglicanism,

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<sup>4</sup> Nelson, *A Blessed Company*, 9.

<sup>5</sup> Bernard Bailyn, *The Ideological Origins of the American Revolution*.

Awakening dissent, and Enlightenment rationalism. These categories are not helpful unless joined with a study of the various distinct thought patterns moving in each. For example, Presbyterians cannot be equated with Baptists under the generalization “dissenter.” The two groups have a radically different history and orientation which only merged quite unexpectedly at the end of the eighteenth century during the struggle for a general establishment of religion.

This study also indicates the importance of differentiating unique strains of Presbyterianism in American religious history. Samuel Davies’ Presbyterianism was obviously distinct from the more “enthusiastic” New Lights of the early eighteenth century.<sup>6</sup> In fact, a careful examination of the churches founded by Samuel Davies suggests a remarkable consistency and cooperation between Virginia Anglicans and Presbyterians. The breakdown of this cooperation in the late eighteenth century came partially as a result of increased interaction with Presbyterian groups outside of Virginia. The type of Presbyterianism coming from the College of New Jersey in the 1760’s and 1770’s was decidedly different from the moderate, traditional Presbyterianism of Samuel Davies. While not drastically altering essential points of doctrine, Witherspoon’s Presbyterianism contributed to the spread of the Scottish Enlightenment among even the most orthodox Virginia Presbyterians. The defeat of a general establishment of religion in the 1780’s is a concrete indication of this shift from traditional Christianity to a more modern, secularized, and enlightened formulation. For better or for worse, it emerges as a significant aspect of the American religious experience after the eighteenth century.

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<sup>6</sup> Although tangential to this study, it is just as important to examine the layers of complexity within the New Light movement itself. See Thomas Kidd, *The Great Awakening: The Roots of Evangelical Christianity in Colonial America* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007).

Finally, Patrick Henry's uniquely resolved system of belief has implications for how historians consider political theory in the early republic. It sheds light on the ongoing debate over whether the American founding was an essentially conservative or radical movement. Although perceived as a radical for his early support of the Revolution, Henry justified independence on moderate and even conservative grounds. He considered British innovations on the traditional rights of Englishmen as the truly radical action. His Anti-Federalist principles flowed from this same moderately conservative orientation. He considered Madison's proposed Constitution a radical innovation which endangered historical Virginia liberties. Henry's consistent commitment to moderate conservatism, intimate knowledge of the political landscape, and personal relationships with the Framers lend credibility to his evaluation of the new federal system as a radical departure from traditional formulations. From a modern perspective, it is easy to consider the Constitution as a foregone conclusion, flowing logically from the principles of the American Revolution. Patrick Henry's political theory challenges historians to think of the American founding as an event in some ways more revolutionary than the war itself.

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