

Lesson 2

Colonial Period (mid-1600s-1765)

As was apparent in Lesson 1, Christianity was central to the planting of the first American colonies, including Virginia (1607), Plymouth Plantation (1620), Massachusetts Bay (1630), Maryland (1634), Rhode Island (1636), and Connecticut (1638). Christianity was also very evident in the founding charters and laws of the rest of the thirteen colonies.

Pennsylvania, 1682

In 1681, King Charles II gave Quaker minister William Penn the land between New York and Maryland to repay a debt Charles owed Penn's father. Penn accepted the land; but understanding that it was not actually the king's to give, Penn went to America and proceeded to purchase the land from the Indians, at the price they set.¹ In fact, he had to purchase some of the same land multiple times because several different tribes claimed it.² Of this land, he said, *"My God that has given it to me...will, I believe, bless and make it the seed of a nation."*³



William Penn

In 1682, Penn wrote the Great Law of Pennsylvania, establishing *"laws as shall best preserve true Christian and civil liberty, in opposition to all unChristian, licentious, and unjust practices, whereby God may have his due, Caesar his due, and the people their due."*⁴

Penn knew that good laws were necessary in order to have good government, but he also identified something even more important, explaining:

Governments, like clocks, go from the motion men give them....Wherefore governments rather depend upon men, than men upon governments. Let men be good and the government cannot be bad. If it be ill, they will cure it. But if men be bad, let the government be never so good, they will endeavor to warp and spoil it to their turn. I know some say, "Let us have good laws, and no matter for the men that execute them." But let them consider that though good laws do well, good men do better; for good laws may want [lack] good men and be abolished or invaded by ill men; but good men will never want [lack] good laws, nor suffer [allow] ill ones.⁵

Penn realized that to produce good government the quality of leaders was more important than the quality of laws, although both were necessary. He understood that rarely do bad people follow good laws, or good people enact bad laws; so while good civil laws are important, good character in a leader is even more important. Penn once told the Russian Czar, Peter the Great, “*If thou wouldst rule well, thou must rule for God—and to do that, thou must be ruled by Him.*”⁶ Penn was simply espousing the position set forth in the Bible in Proverbs 29:2, which declares: “*When the righteous rule, the people rejoice; when the wicked rule, the people groan.*”

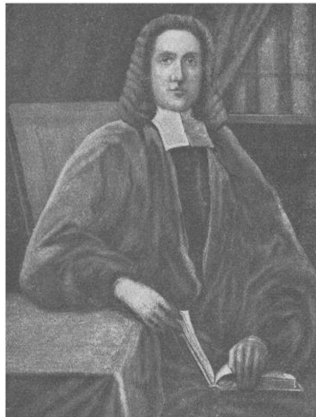
Consequently, the *Pennsylvania Charter of Privileges* (1701) contained qualifications for officials whereby:

[A]ll persons who also profess to believe in Jesus Christ, the Savior of the world, shall be capable...to serve this government in any capacity, both legislatively and executively.⁷

Penn was a wise lawgiver, and his great wisdom was “*derived from that book of Gospel statutes.*”⁸ Penn is honored in the US Capitol in the House of Representatives as one of the world’s greatest lawgivers.

Georgia

Fifty years after the founding of Pennsylvania, Georgia became the last of the original thirteen colonies to be established. (Several other colonies had been founded during those intervening fifty years.) Instrumental in Georgia’s founding was the Rev. Dr. Thomas Bray (the founder of England’s *Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts* and also of the *Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge*⁹). Bray founded an organization to send missionaries to America,¹⁰ and many of his associates¹¹ joined with General James Oglethorpe to found the colony of Georgia Colony in 1732.¹²



Rev. Dr. Thomas Bray

The original settlers to Georgia numbered 114 and were soon followed by Moravians (Protestant Christians from Czechoslovakia) and other persecuted Christians and Jews. When that original group touched shore in 1733, they knelt in thanks to God, declaring: “*Our end in leaving our native country was not to avoid want, God having given us plenty of temporal blessings; nor to gain the dung or dross of riches and honor; but singly this: to save our souls; to live wholly to the glory of God.*”¹³ The object of the devout Oglethorpe and others was “*to make Georgia a religious colony.*”¹⁴ Thus, when the city of Savannah (the first city in the colony) was laid out, it was done with numerous religious activities and ceremonies.¹⁵

Oglethorpe invited the Revs. John and Charles Wesley, and the Rev. George Whitefield from England to serve as chaplains in the colony, oversee Indian affairs, and build orphanages. Whitefield spent much time in Georgia, but his influence grew well beyond its borders. He eventually had a dramatic impact on all the colonies through his role in the national revival

known as the First Great Awakening, which was foundational in preparing Americans in the Biblical character and worldview necessary for independence.

Other Early Colonies

While not every American colony has been specifically mentioned thus far, the influence of Christianity was nevertheless evident in *all* of them. Here are a few more examples.

New York: Early Governor Richard Nicolls, in his February 1665 letter establishing a legislature for the colony, recommended the people choose rulers with Godly characteristics, the result of which would be “*the propagation of true religion amongst us.*”¹⁶ And the *New York Charter of Liberties and Privileges* (October 30, 1683) declared: “*No person or persons which profess faith in God by Jesus Christ shall at any time be any ways molested, punished, disquieted, or called in question for difference in opinion.*”¹⁷

New Jersey: *The Fundamentals of West New Jersey* (1681) declared: “[I]t hath pleased God to bring us into this Province...that we may be a people to the praise and honor of His name.”¹⁸

Carolina: *The Fundamental Constitution of Carolina* (1669) was written with the help of noted English philosopher and lay theologian John Locke, an outspoken Christian. That constitution required: “*No man shall be permitted to be a [citizen] of Carolina or to have any estate or habitation within it that doth not acknowledge a God, and that God is publicly and solemnly to be worshipped.*”¹⁹ Religious freedom was also acknowledged for others, including: “*Jews, [non-Christians], and other dissenters from the purity of Christian religion.*”²⁰

The Carolina colony was divided into North and South Carolina in 1710, and in South Carolina’s *An Act to Ascertain the Manner and Form of Electing Members to Represent the Province* (1721), one qualification for voting or holding public office was that of “*professing the Christian religion.*”²¹ Additionally, officials “*shall take the following oath on the Holy Evangelists [that is on the Bible, including the New Testament]: I _____, do sincerely swear that I am duly qualified to be chosen and serve...So help me God.*”²²

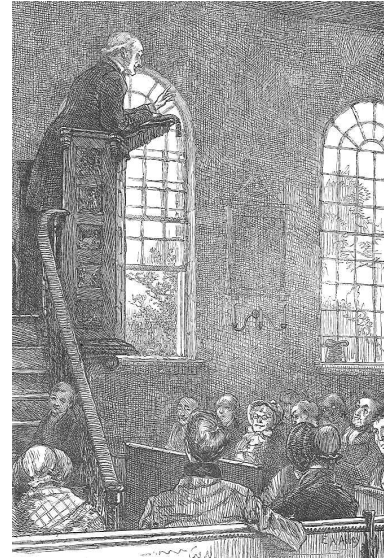
This same pattern of open acknowledgment of God and Christianity was apparent in each of the colonies. In fact, during the colonization period of America, at least 128 different covenants, compacts, charters, and constitutions were written. Of these, eighty-six were written in the American colonies, and forty-two were written in England for the colonists,²³ but the Christian element was readily apparent throughout. These were the foundational civil documents of the original colonies, and subsequently of the thirteen states that comprised the United States of America.

Pastors in Public Affairs in the 1600s

Clergymen in the early colonies had a significant positive impact on both the personal lives of citizens and the public affairs of the day. For example:

- 1619: The Rev. William Wickham served in Virginia’s original General Assembly—the first elected governing body in America.²⁴

- 1620: The Rev. John Robinson shaped the *Mayflower Compact*—the first governing document written in America.²⁵
- 1636: Harvard—six ministers helped found the first successful college in America.²⁶
- 1636: The Rev. Roger Williams and Rev. John Clarke founded the colony of Rhode Island.²⁷
- 1639: The Rev. Thomas Hooker and the Rev. John Davenport founded the colony of Connecticut and helped produce the *Fundamental Orders of Connecticut*—the first constitution ever written in America.²⁸
- 1641: The Rev. Nathaniel Ward wrote the *Massachusetts Body of Liberties*—the first bill of rights in America.²⁹
- 1681: Quaker minister William Penn founded Pennsylvania and wrote its *Frame of Government*.³⁰



Ministers were the primary educators in early America.

These are only a few examples of the scores of ministers who had a beneficial public impact on policy in the seventeenth century (the 1600s).

The Role of the Church and Clergy in the Cultivation of Liberty

Early author David Gregg correctly observed of the early American republic: “*The people made the laws, and the churches made the people.*”³¹ Although the church as an official ecclesiastical body did not directly hold political power or specifically make civil law, the power of Bible teachings in the lives of citizens and the community indisputably had a wholesome influence. As affirmed by French political philosopher Alexis de Tocqueville in his famous book *Democracy in America*:



Alexis de Tocqueville

The Americans combine the notions of Christianity and of liberty so intimately in their minds that it is impossible to make them conceive the one without the other. . . . Upon my arrival in the United States, the religious aspect of the country was the first thing that struck my attention; and the longer I stayed there, the more did I perceive the great political consequences resulting from this state of things, to which I was unaccustomed. In France I had almost always seen the spirit of religion and the spirit of freedom pursuing courses diametrically opposed to each other; but in America I found that they were intimately united, and that they reigned in common over the same country.³²

Another early French visitor to America was Achille Murat, who penned *A Moral and Political Sketch of the United States of North America* (1833). Unlike De Tocqueville, Murat was openly hostile to Christianity, declaring that “its [America’s] religion is the only feature which disgusts a foreigner.”³³ Nonetheless, he saw the influence of Christianity and the Bible throughout every aspect of America’s culture, reporting:

[T]here is no country in which the people are so religious as in the United States...The great number of religious societies existing in the United States is truly surprising: there are some of them for everything. For instance, societies to distribute the Bible; to distribute tracts; to encourage religious journals; to convert, civilize, educate the savages; to marry the preachers; to take care of their widows and orphans; to preach, extend, purify, preserve, reform the faith; to build chapels, endow congregations, support seminaries; catechize and convert sailors, Negroes, and loose women; to secure the observance of Sunday and prevent blasphemy by prosecuting the violators; to establish Sunday schools where young ladies teach reading and the catechism to little rogues, male and female; to prevent drunkenness, and so forth.³⁴

Despite his personal dislike for religion, Murat nevertheless conceded that:

While a death-struggle is waging in Europe...it is curious to observe the tranquility which prevails in the United States.³⁵

So even those who disliked Christianity and the Bible openly acknowledged its powerful positive influence on America.

Thus, early American clergy, by their teaching of the Bible and its principles, were the primary shapers of thinking during the colonial period. As explained by Yale professor Harry Stout: “The average weekly church-goer in New England (and there were far more church-goers than church members) listened to something like seven thousand sermons in a lifetime, totaling somewhere around fifteen thousand hours of concentrated listening.”³⁶ The sermons and writings of the clergy had a definite impact on the thinking of both leaders and the people.

The influence of clergy was also felt with their training of the rising generations. For example, many noted Founding Fathers (including Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, George Mason, Patrick Henry, Benjamin Rush, Noah Webster, and scores of others) were personally tutored by ministers. And other youth who attended college without the aid of such tutors were also directly influenced by the clergy, for clergy were frequently the president of the colleges as well as their professors.

The Rev. John Wise

Many ministers could be singled out to show their significant impact, but the Rev. John Wise, (a clergyman in Massachusetts in the late 1600s and early 1700s) is worthy of special notice. He has been identified as one of the six most influential persons in shaping the American thinking that led to independence.³⁷

As early as 1687, the Rev. Wise was teaching that “*taxation without representation is tyranny,*”³⁸ the “*consent of the people*” was the foundation of government,³⁹ and that “*every man must be acknowledged equal to every man.*”⁴⁰ If this language sounds strikingly similar to that later found in the Declaration of Independence, there is a good reason.

In 1772, with the American War for Independence looming on the horizon, leading patriots reprinted two of Wise’s works (which were distributed by Sons of Liberty, along with others) to reintroduce core Biblical principles of government to the thinking citizens of that day.⁴¹ The first printing sold so fast that a second reprint was quickly issued,⁴² and many of the points made by Wise in that work subsequently appeared four years later in the language of the Declaration of Independence. As historian Benjamin Franklin Morris affirmed in 1864:

[S]ome of the most glittering sentences in the immortal Declaration of Independence are almost literal quotations from this [1772 reprinted] essay of John Wise....It was used as a political text-book in the great struggle for freedom.⁴³

Decades later in 1926 when President Calvin Coolidge delivered a speech on the 150th anniversary of the Declaration of Independence, he similarly acknowledged:

[T]hese thoughts [in the Declaration] can very largely be traced back to what John Wise was writing in 1710. He said, “Every man must be acknowledged equal to every man.” Again, “The end of all good government is to cultivate humanity and promote the happiness of all and the good of every man in all his rights, his life, liberty, estate, honor, and so forth”...His works were reprinted in 1772 and have been declared to have been nothing less than a textbook of liberty for our Revolutionary fathers.⁴⁴



Calvin Coolidge

But Wise not only advocated the Biblical principles of civil liberty, he also stood boldly in their defense. For example, when British-appointed Governor Edmund Andros tried to seize the charters of Rhode Island, Connecticut, and Massachusetts, revoke their representative governments, and force the establishment of the British Anglican Church upon them, Wise was a key leader against Andros’ plan.⁴⁵ He was imprisoned for his resistance but remained an unflinching voice for freedom, forcefully asserting that representative government was God’s ordained plan in both Church and State.⁴⁶

It was Christian ministers such as John Wise (and scores like him) who, through their writings, countless sermons, and bold leadership not only helped found free governments in America but also laid the intellectual basis for American independence.

The First Great Awakening

America was originally founded on the teachings of the Bible, but it is a sad truth of both history and human nature that just because something begins in a good manner does not mean it will remain that way.

The early colonists truly were, by and large, sincerely pious and devout, relying on the Bible, and guided by wholesome motives. But having been so in the past does not guarantee it will continue into the future. Each generation must always decide for itself whether to obey and keep lit the internal flame of God’s Word; and by the time Georgia (the last colony) was established (well over a century after the founding of the first colonies), America was experiencing a marked lull in religion.

Famous minister Jonathan Edwards described Massachusetts (originally the land of the Pilgrims and Puritans) as experiencing a “*degenerate time*” with “*dullness of religion.*”⁴⁷ And in Pennsylvania (founded by Quaker minister William Penn), the Rev. Samuel Blair (who later became a chaplain of Congress) likewise affirmed that “*religion lay, as it were, dying and ready to expire its last breath of life in this part of the visible church.*”⁴⁸ By the 1720s and 1730s, the



George Whitefield preached to large crowds throughout the colonies.

excitement and enthusiasm of Christian life had departed from many people and their churches.

A great American spiritual awakening was needed—and it occurred, impacting not only America but other nations as well. This revival, known as the First Great Awakening, lasted from 1730-1770. It occurred through the hard work and leadership of ministers such as the Revs. George Whitefield, Jonathan Edwards, William Tennant, Samuel Davies, and many others who helped set the colonies aflame spiritually.

Benjamin Franklin (who later became a prominent Founding Father) developed a close friendship with the Rev. George Whitefield and often heard him preach. Franklin appreciated the great impact the revival had:

It was wonderful to see the change soon made in the manners of our inhabitants. From being thoughtless or indifferent about religion, it seemed as if all the world were growing religious so [that] one could not walk through the town in an evening without hearing psalms sung in different families of every street.⁴⁹

For thirty-four years, Whitefield traveled up and down the colonies, preaching some 18,000 times, drawing huge crowds in churches, streets, and open fields.⁵⁰ In fact, it is estimated that an amazing eighty percent of all Americans actually heard him speak.⁵¹ Thousands of people were converted, and churches were filled. Godliness swept the colonies, and a love for the Bible and its teachings was renewed among citizens and families.

Here are others of the many ministers who played important roles that contributed to the rekindling of practical Biblical faith in America.

The Rev. Elisha Williams

The Rev. Williams of Connecticut was a schoolteacher, state representative, judge, ambassador, and president of Yale. Greatly influenced by the Rev. George Whitefield, he was not only a chaplain of New England's military forces during the French and Indian War but also became a colonel and led troops in the field. In 1744, he wrote *The Essential Rights and Liberties of Protestants*, which contained a clear and full explanation of the Biblical principles of equality, liberty, and property. The ideas that he preached during the revival were key in preparing people for the War for Independence a few decades later.

The Rev. Samuel Davies

The Rev. Davies was an influential pastor in Virginia who also served as a lawyer, ambassador to England, and president of Princeton College. He is considered the greatest pulpit orator in American history.⁵²

When Patrick Henry was a young boy, his mother joined the church where Davies pastored. She always took Patrick to church with her, and each Sunday as they rode home in their buggy, Mrs. Henry and Patrick would review the sermon. Significantly, hearing the great Davies preach week after week greatly influenced the development of Patrick Henry's own oratorical skills. As affirmed by an early biographer, Henry's "early example of eloquence...was Mr. Davies, and the effect of his teaching upon [Henry's] after life may be plainly traced."⁵³



Rev. Samuel Davies

Henry, who became one of the most noted orators among the Founding Fathers, affirmed that Davies was "the greatest orator he ever heard";⁵⁴ but Thomas Jefferson later called Henry "the greatest orator that ever lived."⁵⁵ Clearly, Henry had learned from the best.

Jonathan Mayhew, "Father of Civil Liberty"

The Rev. Mayhew of Massachusetts was the first clergyman to begin preaching resistance to England's tyranny. In fact, his 1750 sermon *Discourse Concerning Unlimited Submission*⁵⁶ helped form the basis of an early motto of the American Revolution: "Rebellion to Tyrants is Obedience to God."⁵⁷

In 1765, the British passed the onerous Stamp Act. Resistance in the colonies to that measure was organized and widespread. Under unified pressure from both civil and religious leaders, the Stamp Act was eventually repealed.

Mayhew, having witnessed the power of that unified stand, wrote to James Otis (mentor of Sam Adams, John Hancock, and other leading patriots), telling him: "You have heard of communion [i.e., unity] of the churches....[W]hile I was thinking of this, ...[the] importance of a communion [unity] of the colonies appeared to me in a strong light."⁵⁸ Mayhew thus proposed "to send circulars to all the rest [of the colonies]"⁵⁹ on key issues. This suggestion later became reality through what became known as the Committees of Correspondence, which distributed

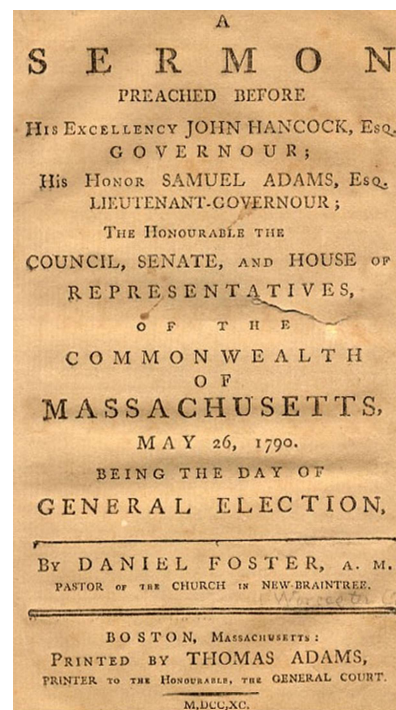
news flashes and educational materials among the various colonies in an effort to achieve unity in both thinking and action.

Jonathan Mayhew's impact in numerous areas was substantial. In fact, John Adams affirmed that he was one of the individuals "most conspicuous, the most ardent, and influential" in the "awakening and revival of American principles and feelings" that led to our independence.⁶⁰

Some Great Awakening Sermon Titles

Sermons preached and printed during the First Great Awakening helped bring about Biblical thinking on numerous issues, including civil liberties, the proper use of the military, limited government, equal rights, the wrongs of slavery, and much else. The titles of sermons from that era affirm that Biblical truth was shown to be relevant to all areas of life, including not only a personal but also political issues. A few of those sermons addressing civil topics included:

- *Civil Magistrates Must Be Just, Ruling in the Fear of God* (1747), by Charles Chauncey⁶¹
- *Unlimited Submission and Non-Resistance to the Higher Powers* (1750), by Jonathan Mayhew⁶²
- *Religion and Patriotism, the Constituents of a Good Soldier* (1755), by Samuel Davies⁶³
- *The Advice of Joab to the Host of Israel Going Forth to War* (1759), by Thaddeus Maccarty⁶⁴
- *Good News from a Far Country* (sermon on the repeal of the Stamp Act) (1766), by Charles Chauncey⁶⁵
- *An Oration upon the Beauties of Liberty* (1773), by John Allen⁶⁶
- *Scriptural Instructions to Civil Rulers* (1774), by Samuel Sherwood⁶⁷
- *Jesus Christ the True King* (1778), by Peter Powers⁶⁸
(This sermon resulted in the political cry "No King but King Jesus!"⁶⁹)



An Election Sermon preached in 1790 before the government leaders in Massachusetts

These sermon topics (and countless others) demonstrate that church leaders truly believed (and taught the nation) that there was nothing in life that the Bible did not address, directly or indirectly. Early pastors were indispensable in shaping America and our unique view of government and liberty. As early historian Alice Baldwin affirmed:

There is not a right asserted in the Declaration of Independence which had not been discussed by the New England clergy before 1763.⁷⁰

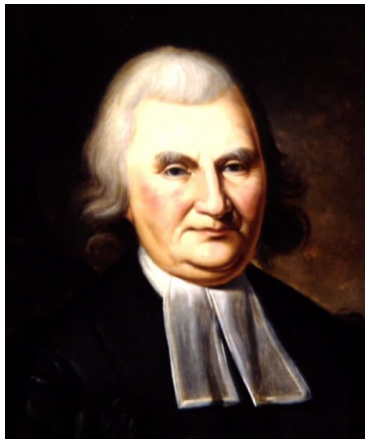
Baldwin further affirmed, “*The Constitutional Convention and the written Constitution were the children of the pulpit.*”⁷¹ No wonder Founding Father John Adams openly rejoiced that the “*pulpits have thundered,*”⁷² further affirming that:

The general principles on which the fathers achieved independence were....the general principles of Christianity....I will avow that I then believed, and now believe, that those general principles of Christianity are as eternal and immutable as the existence and attributes of God; and that those principles of liberty are as unalterable as human nature.⁷³

There would have been no American War for Independence without the ideas and thoughts preached across America during the First Great Awakening. Significantly, the Founding Fathers who gave us our remarkable governing documents grew up during that revival—it molded their faith, character, and worldview, preparing them to give birth to an exceptional nation—the first truly Christian constitutional republic in history. But not only were our Founders shaped by the Bible and its teachings, many of them were even ministers of the Gospel.

Founding Fathers Who Were Ministers

The Rev. Dr. John Witherspoon was a signer of the Declaration of Independence. He had been a pastor in Scotland and came to America in 1768 to become president of the College of New Jersey (now called Princeton). He was elected to the Continental Congress and served on over



Rev. John Witherspoon trained many of the men who established America as an independent nation.

100 congressional committees.⁷⁴ He is said to have had more influence on the monetary policies found in the Constitution than any other individual.⁷⁵

Witherspoon was not only directly involved in government as a member of Congress, but through his role as an educator he shaped many of the men who shaped America. During his tenure as president of the College of New Jersey (i.e., Princeton), there were 478 graduates. Of these, at least 86 became active in civil government and included one US president, one vice-president, 10 cabinet members, 21 senators, 39 congressmen, 12 governors, a Supreme Court justice, and one Attorney General of the United States (and these are only those who served at the national level; many others held local and state offices). In fact, nearly one-fifth of the signers of the Declaration of Independence, one-sixth of the delegates of the Constitutional Convention, and one-fifth of the members of the first federal Congress that framed the Bill of Rights were graduates of the College of New Jersey.⁷⁶

Another signer of the Declaration who was a minister was Robert Treat Paine, a chaplain in the War for Independence who later became the attorney general of Massachusetts and a justice on the state supreme court. And signer William Williams was a licensed Baptist minister who filled various pulpits, and signer Lyman Hall was an ordained Congregationalist minister who later became governor of Georgia.

There were also several ministers among the signers of the Constitution. They included the Rev. Abraham Baldwin, who was a chaplain in the War for Independence and taught divinity at Yale. He founded the University of Georgia as a school to train Gospel ministers. He also served in the first US House of Representatives (where he helped frame the Bill of Rights) and then the US Senate. And Hugh Williamson was a licensed preacher of the Presbyterian Church who likewise served in the first US Congress, where he, too, helped frame the Bill of Rights. Roger Sherman (the only Founding Father to sign all four founding documents: the Articles of Association, 1774; the Declaration of Independence, 1776; the Articles of Confederation, 1781; and the US Constitution, 1787; and he also helped frame the Bill of Rights), was a noted lay theologian, penning multiple pieces on theological issues.

And there were numerous ministers in the first federal Congress that framed the Bill of Rights. In addition to those just mentioned were the Revs. Frederick A. C. Muhlenberg, Abiel Foster, Benjamin Contee, John Peter Muhlenberg, and Paine Wingate. In fact, the Rev. Frederick A. C. Muhlenberg was elected the first Speaker of the United States House of Representatives, where he became one of only two individuals to sign the Bill of Rights.

Other Ministers

Clergy also contributed much to America's freedoms and civil liberties in a variety of other arenas. On the military side, many clergymen experienced active combat and led soldiers in battle, even becoming military generals.⁷⁷ On the political side, in addition to the ministers already named among the signers, Baptist ministers Isaac Backus and John Leland were lobbyists for religious freedom in the 1780s, working with George Washington, Thomas Jefferson, and James Madison. They became significant influences in helping provide the religious freedom protections of the First Amendment in the Bill of Rights. And the Rev. Manassas Cutler was an author of the Northwest Ordinance (written in 1787), under which thirty-two territories eventually became states in the United States.⁷⁸ And forty-four clergymen were elected as delegates to ratify the US Constitution.⁷⁹ There are many more that could also be named, making clear that the number of clergy who held public office or directly influenced public policy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries was large.⁸⁰

Other significant clergy-statesmen

Ministers continued to be engaged in civil affairs throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. For example, the Rev. Charles Finney led the fight against slavery. US President James Garfield was a preacher, college president, military general, and then a Member of Congress, where he helped end slavery and pass numerous civil rights laws. And the Revs. Lyman Beecher, D.L. Moody, and Billy Sunday stood against alcohol abuse and for women's rights. Others built hospitals and provided leadership for various charitable organizations such as the Salvation Army and the Red Cross. In more recent times, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. worked to end racial discrimination, the Rev. Jerry Falwell fought against abortion and pornography, the Rev. Franklin Graham led benevolence efforts in America and across the world, and the Rev. James Robison provided wells and clean drinking water in villages across

Africa. And still today, numerous ministers serve in civil government, including a number of current Members of Congress who are pastors.

Teaching the Principles of Liberty

Returning to the influence of clergy in the 150 years leading up to the American War for Independence, pastors used every opportunity possible to educate the people in the principles of liberty. Some of the more common means included:

1. The Election Sermon. Of the many types of sermons on government and liberty, probably the most popular and recognizable one was called the Election Sermon—the longest traditional form of annual sermon in America. The first documented election sermon was preached in 1634 in Massachusetts,⁸¹ and it became an annual practice for centuries thereafter. Many states began each year’s legislative session by inviting a minister to preach a sermon to civil leaders addressing Biblical principles regarding government, lawmaking, and the civil issues of the day.

Significantly, many of these sermons involved notable Founding Fathers such as John Hancock⁸² and Samuel Adams⁸³ (each was a governor of Massachusetts and a signer of the Declaration of Independence); Samuel Huntington⁸⁴ (a governor of Connecticut and a signer of the Declaration of Independence); Caleb Strong⁸⁵ (a governor of Massachusetts and a framer of the Constitution); Oliver Wolcott⁸⁶ (a governor of Connecticut and a signer of the Declaration of Independence); and many others. These Election Sermons were often printed and distributed at state expense,⁸⁷ being widely read across the state and even throughout other colonies.

Of these Election Sermons, eighteenth-century historian John Wingate Thornton says that:

[T]he clergy were generally consulted by the civil authorities; and not infrequently the suggestions from the pulpit on election days (and other special occasions) were enacted into laws. The statute-book—the reflex of the age—shows this influence. The State was developed out of the Church. The annual “Election Sermon” (a perpetual memorial continued down through the generations from century to century) still bears witness that our fathers ever began their civil year and its responsibilities with an appeal to Heaven, and recognized Christian morality as the only basis of good laws.... The sermon is styled the Election Sermon, and is printed. Every representative has a copy for himself, and generally one or more for the minister or ministers of his town.⁸⁸

The practice of Election Sermons continued until the twentieth-century.

2. The Weekday Lecture. Many churches offered regular training on applying Biblical principles to pressing problems of the day. One way of doing this was the community-wide weekly lecture. This tradition began in Boston in 1633 when the Rev. John Cotton provided Thursday lectures discussing the current social and political issues. The practice spread to other communities and colonies, and continued for centuries,⁸⁹ with ministers directly applying the Bible to the questions of the day, thus showing citizens that the Bible and its principles were applicable and relevant to everything in daily life. Founding historian Benjamin Trumbull wrote

that not only were the clergy “*the principal instructors*” of those who would become the political leaders but that...

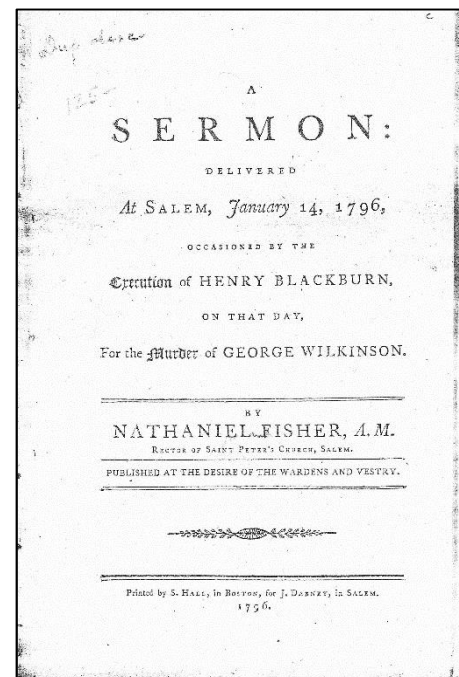
For many years, they [the clergy] were consulted by the legislature in all affairs of importance, civil or religious. They were appointed on committees with the Governor and magistrates to advise, make drafts, and assist them in the most delicate and interesting concerns of the Commonwealth.⁹⁰

3. The Artillery Sermon. These were sermons delivered to the military on the annual election of their officers. As can be expected, such sermons addressed issues relevant to the military, covering such topics as what constitutes a just war,⁹¹ the sin of cowardice,⁹² the character and courage of a soldier,⁹³ the necessity of a militia,⁹⁴ and many other relevant military topics.

4. Special Fast, Thanksgiving, and Anniversary Sermons. Those sermons were commonly associated with governmental calls to prayer issued by the governor or US president (by 1815, there had been some 1,400 government-issued calls to prayer⁹⁵). In regions like New England, there was usually an annual day of fasting in the spring (and an accompanying sermon), and an annual day of thanksgiving in the fall (with an accompanying sermon). And there were also sermons related to national days of prayer, such as those surrounding President George Washington’s calls for national times of thanksgiving, President John Adams’ calls for national times of fasting, President James Madison’s numerous calls to prayer, and similar calls by other presidents.

5. Execution Sermons. Ministers would often address the community before public executions were carried out for capital crimes.⁹⁶ In these Execution Sermons, the guilty party would be called to repentance and citizens publicly warned of the consequences for criminal behavior. (It was also common practices for judges in the courtroom to deliver a Gospel message to defendants if they had been found guilty of a capital crime and sentenced to death by the jury.⁹⁷)

6. Occasional Sermons. These sermons related to some significant occasion, and might be preached in observance of military victories, calamities and natural disasters, or societal events and trends—such as immigration issues, the sin of dueling, or the rise of alcohol use. Anything in the news might be covered from the pulpit, including sermons on earthquakes, fires, solar eclipses, sighting of comets, the discovery of a new planet, a particular naval disaster, the death of a president or statesman, and countless other topics.⁹⁸ Breaking news stories were often the subject of sermons in order to provide a Biblical perspective on issues arising in and pertaining to daily life.



An Execution Sermon

7. Anniversary, Historical, and Holiday Sermons. These included things such as Century Sermons (preached in the year 1701, 1801, or 1901, to review significant events of the previous century from a providential viewpoint—looking at what God had done in that century) and Decade Sermons (similarly reviewing the previous decade). And there were sermons commemorating the anniversary of events such as the Pilgrims’ Landing, the construction of the Bunker Hill Monument, or the 100th anniversary of a major battle or event. And there were countless Fourth of July sermons looking back at that important holiday. In short, sermons were preached about significant events from the past, viewing them from a Biblical perspective.



All of these (and other) types of sermons had a direct positive impact in shaping early America’s thinking. In fact, modern political scientists have documented that an amazing ten percent of all published pamphlets in the Founding Era were sermons.⁹⁹ And significantly, those published sermons represented only a fraction of the tens of thousands of additional unpublished sermons that were also preached. From an historical viewpoint, it is clear that colonial clergymen may properly be considered part of our American Founding Fathers.

Higher Education

Ministers colonized states, wrote laws and constitutions, served as judges and legislators and military leaders, helped shape the thinking of citizens, and were also key figures in the establishment and development of higher education. In fact, until the twentieth century nearly every university was started by a minister or Christian denomination.

Reflective of this pattern, in 1636 Harvard was founded by and for CONGREGATIONALISTS (so, too, with Yale in 1701 and Dartmouth in 1769). In 1692 the College of William and Mary was founded by and for ANGLICANS (as was the University of Pennsylvania in 1740, Kings College in 1754, and the College of Charleston in 1770). In 1746 Princeton was founded by and for PRESBYTERIANS (as was Dickinson in 1773 and Hampden-Sydney in 1775). In 1764 the College of Rhode Island (now Brown University) was founded by and for the BAPTISTS. In 1766 Queens College (now Rutgers) was founded by and for the DUTCH REFORMED. In 1780 Transylvania University was founded by and for the DISCIPLES OF CHRIST, and so on.



This is the Wren Building at the College of William and Mary—America’s second college. It was started primarily by the efforts of Rev. James Blair.

With few exceptions, America's earliest universities were closely associated with particular denominations and were typically run by ministers from that denomination. In fact, by 1860, 262 out of 288 college presidents were ministers of the Gospel—as were more than a third of all university faculty members,¹⁰⁰ and only seventeen colleges and universities at that time were state institutions.¹⁰¹ But even the state schools were not secular, for the University of Michigan, the University of Pennsylvania, the University of Georgia, and others had self-declared purposes of Christian education and the inculcation of Christian character. In fact, in 1890, James Angell, President of the University of Vermont and the University of Michigan, reported that even at state universities, over 90 percent conducted chapel services; at half of them, chapel attendance was compulsory; and a quarter of them even required regular *church* attendance *in addition* to chapel attendance.¹⁰² Well into the 20th century, this remained the practice of *state* universities.

These universities were the principal educators of leaders in every sphere of life, including law, medicine, government, religion, economics, education, literature, science, and all other areas. Here is a closer look at the beliefs and practices of some of the more notable early universities. (Since Harvard and William and Mary were covered in Lesson 1, some of the other famous colleges will be covered here.)

Yale University, 1701

Yale University in Connecticut was started by colonists whose purpose was “*to plant and, under the Divine Blessing, to propagate in this wilderness the blessed reformed Protestant religion in the purity of its order and worship.*”¹⁰³ Some famous graduates of this school included Constitution signers Jared Ingersoll, William Samuel Johnson, William Livingston, early educator Noah Webster, and other notables such as Nathan Hale, Eli Whitney, and Samuel F.B. Morse.¹⁰⁴



Yale College

Princeton, 1746

One of the early presidents of the college was noted signer of the Declaration John Witherspoon, and his educational philosophy was clear: “*Cursed be all that learning that is contrary to the cross of Christ.*”¹⁰⁵ Significantly:

[T]he two principal objects the trustees had in view [when founding Princeton] were science and religion. Their first concern was to cultivate the minds of the pupils in all those branches of erudition [knowledge] which are generally taught in the universities abroad. And to perfect their design, their next care was to rectify the heart by inculcating the great precepts of Christianity in order to make them good men.¹⁰⁶

Famous graduates of Princeton included signer of the Declaration Benjamin Rush, signers of the Constitution James Madison, William Paterson, Jonathan Dayton, and Constitutional Convention delegate William Houston (who was also a professor at Princeton).¹⁰⁷

University of Pennsylvania, 1751

Benjamin Franklin was instrumental in founding the University of Pennsylvania. While this school was not started by a specific denomination, its policies nevertheless openly reflected its Christian character. For example, its *Laws Relating to the Moral Conduct and Orderly Behaviour of the Students and Scholars of the University of Pennsylvania* required:

1. None of the students or scholars belonging to this seminary [i.e., university] shall make use of any indecent or immoral language, whether it consist in immodest expressions, in cursing and swearing, or in exclamations which introduce the name of God without reverence and without necessity.
2. None of them shall without a good and sufficient reason be absent from school or late in his attendance—more particularly at the time of prayers and of the reading of the Holy Scriptures.¹⁰⁸

Some famous graduates of the University of Pennsylvania included signers of the Declaration Francis Hopkinson and William Paca, and signers of the Constitution Thomas Mifflin and Hugh Williamson.¹⁰⁹ Trustees of the university included Declaration signer Thomas McKean and Constitution signers George Clymer, John Dickinson, Thomas Fitzsimons, Jared Ingersoll, and Robert Morris.¹¹⁰ And Declaration signer Benjamin Rush and Constitution signer James Wilson both taught classes at the University of Pennsylvania.¹¹¹

Columbia, 1754

In 1754, an Anglican minister, the Rev. Samuel Johnson, became the first president of what is now called Columbia. (It was known as King's College from its founding until 1784, but with America's independence, it no longer seemed appropriate to honor a king, so its name was changed.) At that time, William Samuel Johnson (a signer of the Constitution, and the son of the school's founder, the Rev. Samuel Johnson) became president.¹¹² Originally founded as an Anglican school, it became a non-denominational Christian college. An advertisement for the college affirmed its purpose and objective:

The chief thing that is aimed at in this college is to teach and engage the children to know God in Jesus Christ, and to love and serve him in all sobriety, godliness, and righteousness of life, with a perfect heart and a willing mind, and to train them up in all virtuous habits and all such useful knowledge as may render them creditable to their families and friends.¹¹³

Some of the school's students included signer of the Constitution Alexander Hamilton, original US Supreme Court Chief Justice John Jay, and Robert Livingston (the highest judicial

official in New York, and one of the five assigned by Congress to draft the Declaration of Independence).¹¹⁴

Others

Most other colleges reflected the same pattern, and in addition to the influential graduates mentioned above, tens of thousands more were produced by these Christian, Bible-based schools. Sadly, many of these once Christian universities have now abandoned their heritage and today have become completely secularized, even hostile to Christianity. But that does not alter the fact that genuinely Christian education shaped the leaders that shaped early America.

Early Textbooks of American Common Education

In addition to the strong Christian influence in higher education, that same influence was present in the general common school classrooms that students attended before entering college. This was particularly evident in the sequence of textbooks used in early American education.

John Locke (a political philosopher who penned the constitution for America's Carolina colony and whose writings had a significant influence upon the Founding Fathers¹¹⁵) described the typical educational path for children. According to Locke, students learned to read by following "*the ordinary road of Hornbook, Primer, Psalter, Testament, and Bible.*"¹¹⁶ Consider each of these five texts.

A *Hornbook* was a flat piece of wood with a handle, upon which a sheet of printed paper was attached, covered with transparent animal horn to protect it. A typical hornbook had the alphabet, the vowels, a list of syllables, the acknowledgement of the Christian Trinity, and the Lord's Prayer.

Next on the "*ordinary road*" of education were *Primers*. They contained catechisms that taught the fundamentals of the Christian faith through a system of questions and answers. Hundreds of different catechisms were used. At first, William Perkins' *The Foundation of Christian Religion Gathered into Six Principles* was a highly popular one, but it was eventually passed by the *Westminster Catechism*, and later the *New England Primer*.

The *Psalter*, next in the sequence of educational texts, was a songbook whose text was composed solely from the book of Psalms in the Bible.

Next came the *Testament*—that is, the New Testament, a part of the Bible.

Finally, came the full *Bible*.

All five of the texts mentioned by Locke, and used to teach reading in America, were clearly Bible-centered.

The New England Primer

Of the primers mentioned above, *The New England Primer* was the most widely used textbook of the eighteenth century. Interestingly, it was the first textbook ever published in America,¹¹⁷ originally printed in Boston around 1690 and reprinted frequently over the next two centuries. Well into the 20th century, *The New England Primer* remained a common text from which American students learned to read.¹¹⁸

The *Primer* was the equivalent of a first-grade textbook. (There were no grade levels in early American education at that time, but the *Primer* was the beginning reader—it was where students began their reading lessons; so today it would be called a first-grade textbook.)

Significantly, Founding Father Samuel Adams (called the “Father of American Independence”) had advocated that students be instructed in Christian principles¹¹⁹ and he himself helped accomplish this goal by reprinting the *New England Primer* for students in Massachusetts.¹²⁰ The *Primer* was also reprinted by Noah Webster for students in Connecticut, and by Benjamin Franklin for students in Pennsylvania.¹²¹

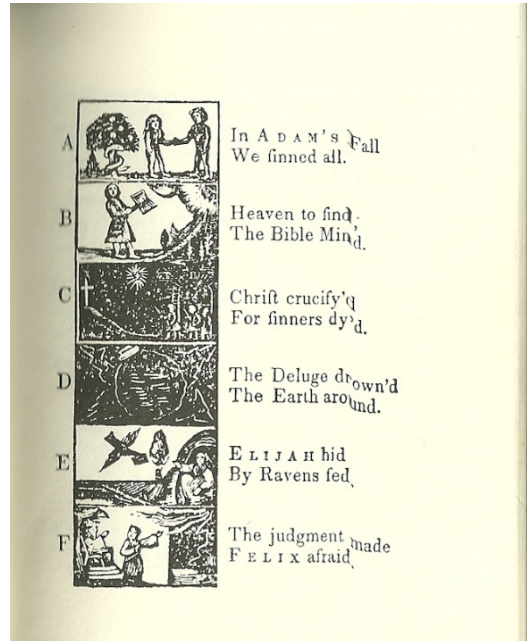
The fact that Franklin was directly involved with personally distributing such an overtly Christian schoolbook might surprise many today, for Franklin is considered one of the least religious of our Founding Fathers. However, “least” is a comparative term, and certainly does not mean he was anti-religious, for he definitely was not. In fact, he was more openly religious than many so-called devoutly religious individuals today.

For example, in the 1760s he helped found schools in which African American students were taught not only academics but also the principles of Christianity.¹²² Before that he had helped found the University of Pennsylvania for the explicitly declared purpose of instructing youth in the knowledge of the Christian religion,¹²³ and in his *Proposals Relating to the Education of Youth in Pennsylvania* he discussed the content of the academic curriculum of the state’s new university, noting that in its history classes:

History will...afford frequent opportunities of showing the necessity of a public religion from its usefulness to the public [and] the advantage of a religious character among private persons...and the excellency of the Christian religion above all others, ancient or modern.¹²⁴

But returning to the content of *The New England Primer* as used in classrooms over the centuries (and reprinted by leading Founding Fathers), perhaps its most characteristic feature is what was called the rhyming alphabet. It taught the alphabet by using a rhyme based on Bible facts and teachings:

A—In Adam’s Fall
We sinned all. [Romans3:23]



The *New England Primer* taught the alphabet with a clear Biblical message.

B—Heaven to find
The Bible Mind. [Deuteronomy 13:4 & Matthew 7:21]

C—Christ crucified
For sinners died. [Romans 5:8]

D—The Deluge drowned
The Earth around. [Genesis 7]

E—Elijah hid
By Ravens fed. [1 Kings 17:2-16]

F—The judgment made
Felix afraid. [Acts 24]

G—As runs the Glass,
Our Life doth pass [James 4:14]

H—My Book and Heart
Must never part.... [Joshua 1:8]

And so forth.¹²⁵

Conclusion

It is clear that Christians were a direct influence in founding and shaping the early American colonies as well as many of the great institutions and admirable features of America, including elective governments, written constitutions, bill of rights, public schools, universities, textbooks, and much else. There is no doubt that Christianity and the Bible was a substantial positive force in helping America become the greatest and freest nation in the world. ■

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² Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of William Penn: With Selections from His Correspondence and Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Friends Book Association, 1852), p. 442.

³ John Fanning Watson, *Annals of Philadelphia and Pennsylvania* (Philadelphia: John Pennington and Uriah Hunt, 1844), Vol. I, p. 82, from William Penn to Robert Turner on January 5, 1681.

⁴ *Charter to William Penn, and Laws of the Province of Pennsylvania, Passed Between the Years 1682 and 1700* (Harrisburg: L.S. Hart, 1879), p. 107, "The Great Law or The Body of Laws, of the Province of Pennsylvania & Territories Thereunto Belonging," December 1682.

⁵ Thomas Clarkson, *Memoirs of the Private and Public Life of William Penn* (London: Longman, 1813), Vol. I, p. 303.

⁶ Samuel M. Janney, *The Life of William Penn: With Selections from His Correspondence and Autobiography* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, Grambo & Co., 1852), p. 407, letter from William Penn to the Czar of Muscovy.

⁷ "Charter of Privileges Granted by William Penn, to the Inhabitants of Pennsylvania and Territories," *The Avalon Project*, October 28, 1701 (at: http://avalon.law.yale.edu/18th_century/pa07.asp).

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⁹ George Gresley Perry, *A History of the English Church: From the Accession of Henry VIII to the Silencing of Convocation in the Eighteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1880), p. 561.

¹⁰ Charles McLean Andrews and Frances Gardiner Davenport, *Guide to the Manuscript Materials for the History of the United States to 1783 in the British Museum, in Minor London Archives, and in the Libraries of Oxford and Cambridge* (Washington DC: Carnegie Institution of Washington, 1908), p. 331; and George Gresley Perry, *A History of the English Church: From the Accession of Henry VIII to the Silencing of Convocation in the Eighteenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1880), p. 561.

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¹⁴ Benson Lossing, *A Pictorial History of the United States* (New York: Mason Brothers, 1857), p. 130.

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⁸² See Massachusetts election sermons “preached before His Excellency, John Hancock, Governor” in 1781, 1784, 1788, 1789, 1790, 1791, and 1792. (See these and many other election sermons from WallBuilders: <https://wallbuilders.com/library-2/historical-sermons/>.)

⁸³ See Massachusetts elections sermons “preached before...His Honor Samuel Adams, Lieutenant-Governor” from 1790, 1792, and 1794; and a Massachusetts election sermon “preached before His Excellency Samuel Adams, Governor” in 1796. (See these and many other election sermons from WallBuilders: <https://wallbuilders.com/library-2/historical-sermons/>.)

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⁸⁶ John Marsh, *A Sermon Preached before His Honor Oliver Wolcott, Esq. L. L. D. Lieutenant-Governor and Commander in Chief, and the Honorable the General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, Convened at Hartford, on the Day of the Anniversary Election, May 12th, 1796* (Hartford: Hudson and Goodwin, 1796). Evans #30738.

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⁹⁸ For examples of these sermons, see WallBuilders' Historical Sermons section: <https://wallbuilders.com/library-2/historical-sermons/>.

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¹¹⁴ For Robert Livingston, see “History,” *Columbia University* (at: <https://www.columbia.edu/content/history>) (accessed on October 23, 2018); see information about Alexander Hamilton and John Jay from the *Biographical Directory of the United States Congress* (at: <http://bioguide.congress.gov/biosearch/biosearch.asp>).

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¹¹⁹ *Four Letters: Being an Interesting Correspondence Between Those Eminently Distinguished Characters, John Adams, Late President of the United States, and Samuel Adams, Late Governor of Massachusetts, on the Important Subject of Government* (Boston: 1801), pp. 9-10, letter from Samuel Adams to John Adams on October 4, 1790; pp. 25-27, letter from Samuel Adams to John Adams on November 20, 1790.

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